Managing Social Media Activists as a Crisis Management Strategy

Dyah Ayu Setyorini¹
Irwansyah²

¹Communication Department, Universitas Indonesia; ibo.dyahsetyorini@gmail.com
²Communication Department, Universitas Indonesia; dr.irwansyah.ma@gmail.com

Abstract

Social media has fundamentally shaped and influenced the organization's communication landscape in social movements. Social media activists where the issues they carry with collective identities in social media, bring opposing interests to corporate, and bring corporates in crisis management conditions. It is important for corporate to be able to manage relationships with social media activists so that issues and protests brought by social media activists can be muffled or even assist the corporation in shaping positive public opinion. This article is a conceptual article undertaken through literature studies by finding reference theories that relevant to the case or problems found. Social media activism becomes very powerful because as the nature of social media is able to reach a very wide geographical in becoming viral in a short time. Gonzales-Herrero & Smith explains how the internet can trigger and facilitate crises, with significant implications for crisis management. In order to adapt to the online environment, organizations must also adapt their own problem management strategies.

Keywords: management crisis; organization; social media; social media activists

Introduction

The Internet has changed the way we interact and work together, revolutionizing the way relationships are created and maintained and how groups of people connect and interact. The online social network (Online Social Network) is supported by various applications, referred to as social media. Social networks are defined as "links from person to person, group, or information object. Such objects can be messages, photos, videos, wall posts, notifications, current events, events, widgets, etc. Such links may be created by smart agents or by users " (Katherine M White, 2009). Social media, in particular, has captured and supported user populations who and have replaced some
of their traditional social networks and transferred them to the online environment. The transformation of communication replaced by alternative Internet solutions is an evolving trend where new applications are everyday events (White, 2012).

Social media these days has also reshaped the organizational structure, communication flow, frame diffusion and action repertoire (Earl, 2011), social media also facilitates transnational coordination (Anna-Liisa Aunio, 2011), and is able to surpass traditional media (Z. Tufekci, 2012). Social media has also shaped and can fundamentally affect the organization's communication landscape in social movements (Treré, 2015). For example, Twitter has become a dominant organizing mechanism that is fundamentally aligned to form the organizational structure of the social movement from which it was originally only a mode of communication (Bennett, 2011). Social media often creates a wave effect that touches many aspects, which differ from the process of movement from resource mobilization to actual intervention. They may also consider social media more democratic, breaking down traditional hierarchies between activist actions, other stakeholders, and social movement leadership (Murthy, 2018).

In 2017, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have 3.48 billion users. If Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Tumblr are included, that number reaches 5.9 billion users. Taking into account that social media users have an average of five different accounts, more than 15% of the world's population has at least one social media account. This shows that the new power lies in the hands of connected stakeholders, whether ordinary customers or potential customers (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed the rapid roar of information channels, from satellite television, blogs, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, and increased capacity of cheap mobile technology. Social media applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, and even text messaging services, enhance the position of activists, documenting the need for social change and organizing for real purposes. Howard and Parks (Philip N Howard, 2012) offer a broad definition of social media that consists of (a) information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values; (b) content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, cultural products and (c) persons, organizations and industries that produce and consume both tools and content (Peuchaud, 2014).

Furthermore, many social movements are slowly looking at social media as a means to collaborate with various stakeholders (Kristen Lovejoy, 2012). In large organizations, social media is often supported because technology can help foster a sense of "digital village" (Berghel, 1995), where individuals can "see" the lives of others within their organizations and feel closer (Michael J. Brzozowski, 2009).

Social media activists as the issues they carry with collective identities in social media, bring opposing interests to corporations, and bring corporates in crisis management conditions. It is important for corporations to be able to manage relationships with social media activists so that issues and protests brought by social
media activists can be muffled or even assist the corporation in shaping positive public opinion.

**Literature Review**

*MEDIA SOCIAL ACTIVIST*

As a low-cost communications resource, the Internet and Web capabilities have become a boon to activists. (Robert L. Heath, 2009) Activists can join a movement without leaving their computers and share only negative information about the target organization and then can damage legitimacy organization and tarnish its reputation. By the ease of retweeting or liking a message, activists have led to the emergence of online activism and "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2009), when a social movement is organized, even "slacktivists" can wreak havoc on the organization's reputation (Veil. SR., 2012).

Social media activity or sometimes referred to as cloud protesting, in this context can be interpreted as social media material into a vehicle of meaning, side by side and to some extent replace other traditional media such as alternative and mainstream media and face-to-face interaction. In this new scenario, identity politics becomes inevitable with visibility politics, which depends on the availability of datafied images, terms and concepts, within cloud activists. Milan stressed to take into account social media as an active agent that shaped the symbolic process and the organization of social actors that led to negotiations and conflicts (Treré, 2015).

Maria Bakardjieva (Bakardjieva, 2012) points out that the value of the issues championed by social media activists lies in the search for common goals and identifies "us" in contemporary activism within the framework of new social media. The contribution of each activist to this particular issue fought demonstrates that collective identity is a valid category in the emergence of online group activities in conjunction with protest campaigns launched by social media activists.

According to Gladwell (Gladwell, 2010) confidence in social media activism has the possibility of replacing the protests that have been done in real life such as boycotts, street demonstrations, and replaced with virtual click, like and sharing in cyberspace. However, the same reality with the real world where every different person has they own interests as real-world activists, is happening in cyberspace. Every social media activist has different awareness to engage in protest activism over important issues. But this does not prevent social media activists from continuing to share, and spreading the content of the important issues they want to strive for. Social media activism is effective as a tool in garnering support but not strong enough to replace the real protests (Shirky, 2011). In other words, the activism of social media becomes very powerful because as one nature of social media that is able to reach a very wide geographical in a short time, and becomes a major force in mobilizing the support of many people in cyberspace to agree with them (Peuchaud, 2014).
In fact, social media often leads to a growing number of collective "we" that allow each of these online groups to make claims to recognition in the political process. Therefore, the restoration of the notion of collective identity is intended to move beyond the techno-determinist impulse that merely seeks political legitimacy and reaffirms the social activist's early goals in protest (Treré, 2015).

The collective identity constructed by the social media activists still needs to be further explored through deeper studies to empirically verify the dynamic nature of social media activists in their emergence in society on a digital platform. Collective identity is shaped by the interactivity of social media, as seen in the dissemination of various interactive social media features, from profile pictures to status messages, and metrics as like and customized comments as collective identification mechanisms. Furthermore, the identity process is strongly influenced by the cultural values of openness and participation that have dominated the hacker and internet culture (Jenkins, 2006), as seen in the emphasis on inclusivity, multiplicity and protest identity forged by contemporary movements. As a result, the identity of the protest is characterized by flexibility and omission, which has been recognized as a characteristic of digital communication and postmodern culture more generally, raises questions that encourage activists and community leaders to initiate social movements (Treré, 2015).

The use of social media and the context of social movement is not only diverse and very broad but complex or controversial (Murthy, 2018). Social media activists use social media to voice their opinions in social media conversations, demonstrators find comfort zones that help them lower the cost of activism and strengthen their internal solidarity (Treré, 2015). In particular, social media is often perceived to make the activist movement more transparent (Murthy, 2018).

Activism is also defined as a process in which a group of people puts pressure on other organizations or institutions to change the policies, practices or conditions found by troubled activists (Smith, 2005). Jones and Chase (1979) argue that the existence of activists is to create "the need for reform". Activists must establish the legitimacy of the issues they support while also undermining the legitimacy of their target organization. This is the gap of legitimacy that drives the urgency of solutions, creating motivation for activism (Heath & Waymer, 2009).

Taylor and Sen Das (2010) explain that the aim of the activists is to create an advocacy network as an effort to generate support from various interrelated issues in a social movement. Sommerfeldt (2013) argues that how activists participate in public dialogue is influenced by the resources that make up the organization's strategic communication capacity. Larger, more organized, and resource-rich activist groups will use strategies similar to those used by their targeted entities, while grassroots, resource-poor activists have to rely heavily on media attention and social movement networks to gain greater attention (Veil. SR., 2012).
Social media can "empower" individuals to have a voice (Murthy, 2018), but this can also lead to high levels of noise, which impede "decision-making, innovation, and productivity" (Hemp, 2009), and this can have an impact on decisions an organization. But on the other hand, social media is also increasingly integral to the communication process of an organization as an effort to socialize and share knowledge and decision making process of an organization (Paul M. Leonardi, 2012).

Corporate Governance and Crisis Management

Corporate governance is a broad term that describes the processes, customs, policies, laws and institutions that direct organizations and companies in the way they act, manage and control their operations. It works to achieve organizational goals and manage relationships among stakeholders including the board of directors and shareholders. It also deals with individual accountability through mechanisms that reduce the principal-agent problem in the organization. Good corporate governance is an important standard for building the striking investment environment required by corporate competition to gain a strong position in efficient financial markets (Khan, 2011). Good corporate governance is fundamental to economics with a broad business background and also facilitates success for entrepreneurship. Corporate governance in narrow terms can be interpreted as the relationship between the company and its shareholders while in a wider relationship the relationship between the company and society (Khan, 2011).

Crisis management is the name given to the process by which an organization deals with out of control issues. It’s more about coping with crises (Smith R. D., 2013). Smith said the strategic approach to crisis management might be encompassed in six principles (Smith R. D., 2013), which are; (1) Maintain the existing relationship such as employees, volunteers, stockholders, donors, community leaders, customers, government and professional authorities and colleagues. (2) Media as ally which means treating the news media as allies that provide opportunities to communicate with key publics. (3) Reputational priorities, organization’s reputation as top priority and use the crisis as an opportunity to enhance the organization reputation for social responsibility with various publics of the organization. (4) Quick response, within an hour of learning about a crisis, the organization should have its first message available to its publics, particularly the media. (5) Full disclosure, it means the organization should provide as much information as possible. Silence is not an acceptable response during a crisis. (6) One voice, the principle of one voice calls for a single, trained spokesperson to represent the organization.

The relationship between social media and corporate crises is an increasingly popular topic among researchers. In 2008, Gonzales-Herrero & Smith explains how the internet can trigger and facilitate crises, with significant implications for crisis management. Furthermore, various studies have explored the relationship between
social media and corporate reputation (J. Pfeffer, 2013); this paved the way for a new study centered on how to integrate social media into crisis planning (J. Brummette, 2015).

Other studies have focused on online crisis communication and initially suggested the relevance of conducting cognitive and emotional analyzes of online behavior of stakeholders (Friederike Schultz S. U., 2011). Finally, some authors sought to propose new analytical frameworks and response strategies to social media crises (Yan Jin B. F., 2014). Literature offers a variety of approaches to studying social and corporate media interactions and how this impacts on the way organizations handle crisis management (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Research Methodology

This article is a conceptual article undertaken through literature studies by finding reference to theories relevant to the case or problems found. The study of literature is the way used to collect data or sources related to the topics raised in this study which obtained from various sources, journals, documentary books, internet and libraries. The data have been obtained then analyzed by descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis method is done by describing the facts which then followed by the analysis, not merely deciphering, but also provide sufficient understanding and explanation.

Result

Social media is used as an alternative way for emergency managers to communicate with the public and with each other. Many organizations, institutions, and individuals in various fields in the emergency domain are pioneering efforts, exploring strategies, and paving the way to help develop a set of best practices. Social media provides a free and easy way to disseminate large amounts of information to large groups of people very quickly and efficiently. With today's budget deficit affecting all levels of government ability to meet its goals and objectives, social media and Web technologies are transformed into alternative solutions to many of the existing problems and prove to be a better form of crisis communication in some circumstances (White, 2012).

With the advent of online activism and mistrust perpetuated online, organizations need to wisely sort out the protests of social media activists who can be perceived as a threat to the organization. Veil, Petrun, and Roberts (2012) explain, organizations that respond to unnecessary online threats can make the situation worse. According to Waldron, Navis, and Fisher (2013), organizations respond to activist demands based on whether they consider the campaign to generate an economic identity or threat. If reform does not call for questioning the defining attributes of an organization, the organization is unlikely to change until economic threats materialize. This case proves that some activists will not be ignored unless the reforms are substantial. Thus, it is imperative that the organization is ready and willing to engage the public and activists
in a manner that meets their demands if economic identity or threat is realized (Veil. SR., 2012).

Some studies offer insight into how the units in the organization Public Relations should respond to social media activists. Just as traditional activist strategies have adapted to the online environment, organizations must also adapt their own problem management strategies (Veil. SR., 2012). Having a strong reputation before may not be enough to protect the organization; in fact, strong resistance can make the organization a more attractive target for activists (Debora L Spar, 2003). Research has shown that a poor response to the reputation of online threats can have dire consequences for an organization (Veil. SR., 2012).

The existence of social media creates an opportunity for the emergence of a corporate crisis because by "disseminating information to as many people" (Shari R Veil, 2011), they help make the crisis visible and scattered (Libaert, 2015). In 2013, Deloitte published a global survey revealing that new technologies, and especially social media, are now at the core of organizational fears.

The nature of online content that is public may automatically affect the organization's reputation because the voice of others adds "the voice of the organization to communicate" (Holladay, 2014). In addition, these new "voices" are filled with emotions that might impact the amplitude and seriousness of the online crisis, and there is a need to better understand how organizations should react to their stakeholder emotions (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Several previous studies have begun to study this interaction, and analyzing how the crisis in organizations due to issues that develop online pose a financial and reputational threat (Yan Jin A. P., 2012). Among other conclusions, they argue that the greater the media attention the greater the threat to the reputation of the organization (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017), and that "when reputational threats increase, should it be possible that threatened organizations will be forced to respond defensively" (Mary-Hunter McDonnell, 2013).

However, Gonzales-Herrero and Smith (2008) argue that the audience has gradually begun to mature in addressing issues that develop in social media, it is given the opportunity to voice many opinions (Smith A. G.-H., 2008). In the new "many-to-many" dynamics, social media can speed up the crisis (eg, offline crises delivered in social media, where it can gain momentum, which exacerbates the offline crisis) or create it (eg, tweets trigger an online crisis with potential consequences offline). Social media has become the voice box by "breaking the boundaries of space and time that characterize traditional media" (Libaert, 2015). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content." Social media creates many "public places," where diverse stakeholders can and have added their voices to the organization, especially during the crisis (Holladay, 2014). Thus, social media crises can arise online from issues that are
oftentimes highly subjective, uncertain, or blurred (Bloch, 2012) such as the perception of corporate behavior (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Social media has become an important source of information during an organizational crisis. On the other hand, social media can immediately disseminate negative information and comments about the crisis. Thus, organizations need to effectively use social media to deal with crisis and communicate with their public during and after the crisis. Crisis communication is one area that is heavily influenced by the development of social media. Organizational crises have traditionally been conceptualized as the perception of unexpected events that threaten important stakeholder expectations related to health, safety, environmental and economic issues, and can have a serious impact on organizational performance and produce negative outcomes. In the specific context of social media, crisis is an event that appears or is reinforced by social media, which largely damages the reputation of the organization (Yuan Wang, 2017).

Crisis management in social media today is very challenging because the crisis that appears online is somewhat unpredictable and can increase rapidly. Given the various characteristics of social media communications, the public, not the organizations or news media, are at the center of producing and distributing information. As the public gets increasingly involved with social media during the crisis, they also hold high expectations of the communicative behavior of organizations in social media before, during, and after the crisis (Yuan Wang, 2017).

As a result, the development of the Internet (and with extension, social media) has made the risks faced by corporations and the types of crises they can experience more complex and threatening, as if anyone can directly own a megaphone and access to millions of people (Shelley Wigley, 2011). This unpredictable and worldwide exposure can lead to negative mainstream media coverage, changes in business processes, or financial loss (Owyang, 2011).

Thus, crisis management in the context of social media can not only focus on predicting the development of a crisis, such as social media crisis, naturally, unpredictable (Bloch, 2012). This requires new tools that add and exceed the classic prevention plan. However, the existing literature consists primarily of a set of general guidelines such as the need to improve objectives and responsiveness (Libaert, 2014) or principles (do not remove negative customer reviews from corporate Facebook pages) that are not tied to specific contexts (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Wigley and Zhang (2011), Aggergaard (2015), and Austin, Liu, and Jin (2012) analyzed how people can use social media to form the "public narrative" of the crisis and meet the information and emotional needs associated with the crisis. Furthermore, some researchers have highlighted the increasing role played by social media users in shaping the organization's reputation suggests that reputation is a collective interpretation of stakeholders from the organization, and Pfeffer et al. (2014) coined the
term online firestorms to define an instant wave of criticism that emerges without warning and which is dominated by opinion so that it has a high affective nature with a major impact on the company’s reputation (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Social media impact on the efficiency of crisis communications, as demonstrated by Eriksson’s findings (Eriksson, 2012) which look at how and what the organization communicates and what impact these communications are generated by the stakeholders. In addition to the strategies identified by Diers and Donohue (Audra R. Diers, 2013) have developed a more recent taxonomy of crisis response tactics to be used by organizations. It is a possible future-oriented messaging strategy (eg, self-development and excellence), aggressive (eg, crisis framing and anti-social), Defensive (mixed defensive and accommodative responses), or Enforcing Amplification (positive messages).

Organizations that are sensitive to change and use of technology and the internet always use Twitter, blogs, cell phones and other social networking tools to spread the word about the crisis (Augustine Pang, 2014). On the other hand, Schultz, Utz and Goritz (Friederike Schultz S. U., 2011) identify that blogs are an effective tool for improving image and reputation organizations while preventing boycotts in crisis situations. To do so, Jin and Liu (Liu, 2010) have proposed a blog-mediated crisis communication model to help crisis organizations or communicators to monitor the blogosphere and respond appropriately to influential bloggers during the crisis. It aims to avoid inaccurate information from the public especially bloggers spreading bad news, which can lead to blemishes of reputation and image of the organization (Nor Emmy Shuhada Derani, 2016).

Liu states (Liu, 2010) that during the crisis period, people searched in-depth and in-depth crisis information differently from Stephens & Malone (Keri K. Stephens, 2009) who claimed that people usually tended to rely on word of mouth by using social media rather than searching for information directly from the site web or corporate blog. They argue that this is because blogs only tend to allow people to engage in knowledge sharing, reflection and exchange of views, which usually push the public to the reader’s purpose and build confidence after the crisis (Boulos et al., As quoted by Valentini & Romenti (Chiara Valentini, 2011)). Thus, during a crisis, people tend to seek and use different types of social media to gather as much additional information about risk and crisis responsibilities (Chiara Valentini, 2011).

According to Coombs (2007), organizations experiencing crisis can bring an accommodative or defensive response to stakeholders. An accommodative strategy aims to generate, improve (rebuild approaches), or develop (reinforce approaches) of reputation assets by offering symbolic or material assistance to stakeholders. The defense strategy, however, aims to release the organization from crisis (refuse approach) or to minimize organizational responsibility in crisis (reducing approach) (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).
Lambret's research confirms the relevance of a new theory of crisis management that calls for a flexible and centered approach to stakeholders. It also shows how stakeholders can consider the development and resolution of the crisis. Corporate should be able to better prevent and quickly navigate the opinion movement, however irrational, if they want to minimize the threat of social media. Social media is governed by strong and polarized emotions that can become snowballs and spread around the world instantaneously. The Lambret study showed that companies offering responses tailored to their stakeholder emotions (J. Pfeffer, 2013), suffered less corporate reputation damage than those who adopted traditional defense strategies (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Conclusion and Discussion

From the explanation of what social media and social media activists can say, activists can join in a movement without leaving their computers and only sharing negative information about the target organization, then can undermine the organization's legitimacy and tarnish its reputation. With the ease of retweeting or liking a message, activists have led to the emergence of online activism and "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2009), when a social movement is organized, even "slacktivists" capable of wreaking havoc on the organization's reputation (Shari R Veil, 2011).

Sommerfeldt argues that how activists participate in public dialogue is influenced by the resources that make up the organization's strategic communication capacity (Sommerfeldt, 2013). Activism is a process in which a group of people puts pressure on
other organizations or institutions to change the policies, practices or conditions found by troubled activists (Smith J., 2005), and Jones and Chase (1979) argue that activists are to create "felt for reform". And activists should establish the legitimacy of the problems they support while also undermining the legitimacy of their target organization (Shari R Veil, 2011). This "legitimacy loophole," which results in the urgency of solutions, creates motivation for activism (Robert L Heath, 2009).

It is also an opportunity for organizations to manage relationships with social media activists and make them part of the solution in the management crisis that occurs due to online media activism that can threaten the organization's reputation (Murthy, 2018). Social media is also increasingly integral to the communication process of an organization as an effort to socialize and share knowledge and decision-making processes of an organization (Paul M. Leonardi, 2012).

While corporate governance which in narrow terms can be interpreted as the relationship between the company and its shareholders while in a wider relationship the relationship between the company and society (Khan, 2011). This public relations can be realized by exploiting the opportunity to engage with its public actively using various official media companies such as official sites and social media (Moonhee Cho, 2017).

Some studies offer insight into how the units in the organization Public Relations should respond to social media activists. Just as traditional activist strategies have adapted to the online environment, organizations must also adapt their own problem management strategies. Having a strong reputation before may not be enough to protect the organization; in fact, strong resistance can make the organization a more attractive target for activists (Debora L Spar, 2003).

Social media changes the way in which organizations and stakeholders can communicate, and there is a widespread literature on the incorporation of social media into crisis management and communications. Some authors (J. Brummette, 2015), (Libaert, 2014), (Larissa Ott, 2015), have implied that social media should be built into crisis planning. Weiner (2006) calls for the need to meet the current demands of information and media dynamics. Booz Allen Hamilton issued a report (2009) which concluded that the new challenges posed by social media require them to be embedded in corporate communications strategies, while Veil et al. (Shari R Veil, 2011) emphasizes that best practice is to optimize the integration of social media into communication strategies (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017).

Therefore, companies need to respond tailored to their stakeholder emotions to reduce corporate losses including reputation by not using defensive strategies but rather on a flexible and centered stakeholder approach (Clemence Vignal Lambret, 2017) and which include including managing good relationships with social media activists.

The author realizes that this article has many shortcomings because it only uses literature studies, the authors hope to continue this article into a study with more comprehensive data retrieval. It is acknowledged that many studies are currently
discussing the use of social media in a management crisis, but research on its relationship with social media activists who play a role in the possibility of downgrading corporate reputation on issues that have been disseminated has not been widely practiced.

References


Yan Jin, A. P. (2012). Toward a Publics-Driven, Emotion-Based Conceptualization in Crisis Communication: Unearthing Dominant Emotions in Multi-Staged Testing of the

