

Crisis Communication in Indonesia Football Club : Image Restoration Strategy by PSS Sleman

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ABSTRACT

No organizations can avoid the crisis, include the football club. This paper aims to analysis the image restoration strategies by PSS Sleman, an Indonesian Football Club. On 2021, PSS experienced a crisis due to the conflict between club management and fans. PSS fans demanded resignation of club CEO, headcoach, and one player because fans think they were causing the bad results (win-less streak). The CEO than respondend by threaten to move PSS out of Sleman. The crisis ended after all the parties stepped down and/or fired from PSS and changing in the management and coaching staff. After the crisis, organizations should do the post crisis activities to image repair. For the research method author use qualitative, with data use interview with PSS communication team (PR and media team) and fans. Data also use digital archive from PSS official media. Results PSS use two main strategies in image repair: visiting the fans directly and using social media to share official statements. The obstacles in conducting strategy : the lack of manpower in PR, no clear job description for PR, and lack of knowledge and support from the top management.

Keywords: *crisis communication, image repair, football club, sport public relations*

INTRODUCTION

Crisis will hit any organization, no matter how great an organization is, a crisis risk can suddenly escalate into a crisis. It means, every organization are vulnerable toward crisis (Coombs, 2016). One of the organization that vulnerable towards crisis is sports organizations. In general, sport organizations will hit the crisis such as financial fraud like corruption (Ibrahim, 2017), cheats or break the rules of the game (Armfield et al., 2019), conflict between club owners/investors with star players (Koa, 2022), conflict between club owners/investors with the fans (Koerber & Zabara, 2017), the doping usage, the club unfair strategy/tactics in playing, and personal life scandal (Benoit, 2018).

Image and reputation become the important things for organizations because it affects the organization credibility and public's trust to the organization (Benoit, 2014, 2018). This paper aims to descripts and analyses the image reputation strategies conducted by PSS Sleman after the crisis. PSS Sleman is Indonesian football club contested in the Liga 1 (higher tier on Indonesia football league) since 2019. The crisis happened on September-October 2021, when the PSS fans launch protest to the management due to the consecutive defeats and the team performance was low quality. Fans thinks one player : Arthur Irawan, did not play well but on the other side the head coach, Dejan Antonic, always plays Arthur. Fans shows their complaints through social

media, with the hashtag #ArthurOut and #DejanOut. Marco Garcia Paulo, the PSS CEO, then react and challenge the fans to be objective and see the performance data for each player, especially Arthur Irawan (Arsianto, 2024).

Marco's reactions had lead bigger protests. PSS fans launch protests by visiting the club office and the team training ground. PSS fans think there was a "collusion" between Arthur, Dejan, and Marco. As time goes by, PSS fans got the information that one of the PSS shareholders is the mother of Arthur Irawan. PSS fans protest increase significantly. They raise the hashtag #ArthurOut, #DejanOut, and #MarcoOut, crate murals on the walls and put small posters on the traffic light pole, with the content condemning Marco, Arthur, and Dejan.

Marco replied the fans demand by threaten if Arthur and he out, he will move PSS to another city/region. After that, the PSS team never goes back in Sleman, and they held the training on another city such as Jakarta or Solo. The CEO threaten lead the anger of PSS fans. They always came to the city when PSS played such as on Bali or Bandung, and launch protest. The management conduct a meeting with the fans on Bandung, but it ended in chaos. Marco (the CEO) who also attended the meeting, suffer heart attack and forced to be hospitalized (Arsianto, 2024).

In crisis situation, there will be rumours spread. In this PSS crisis, PSS fans claimed get the information there was violence towards several players who try to criticize the management. The fans pressure to the club getting higher, after the PSS fans meets another share holders and also the head of Sleman Regency. The local government "intervene" this case, because PSS club is the regional asset (owned by local government). This case ended after PSS can going back home to Sleman and they terminate contract of Arthur, Dejan, and fired Marco. This also ended the "regime" of old management by PT Palladium Pratama Cemerlang (Arsianto, 2024). Research has shown fan communities in action during crises. Fan come to save their favoured coaches, players, and teams. The strong bond between fans, teams, and players, could lead complexity in the crisis in sport oragnization (Koerber & Zabara, 2017).

Although the crisis has ended, but the new PSS management have to conduct several activities in order to re-bulid the PSS reputation, image, and getting the trust from the fans. So that this paper will focus on what and how the PSS management held their image restoration strategies. For added information, what PSS experienced shows that sport clubs should consider their fans as important stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

People and organizations including companies, governments, and non-profit organizations frequently face accusations or suspicions of wrong-doing. These attacks on our reputation are serious matters, for our image or reputation is extremely vital to us. A damaged reputation can hurt our persuasiveness because credibility generally and trustworthiness in particular are important to persuasion and credibility can be impaired by fallout from actual or perceived wrong-doing (Benoit, 2014)

Image means the perceptions and impression of others have about the organization. Perceptions are shaped by our direct experience with the organization, information that we get about the organization, and how organization act toward it. Image repairs strategies in crisis communication consist of messages purposed to restore images disgraced by criticism and suspicion. The purpose is creating or changing the audience's perception and attitude toward the organization that accused's responsibility in crisis situation and/or creating or changing values about the offensiveness of those acts. (Benoit, 2014). The theory of image restoration discourse focuses on what kind of messages used by organization in crisis situation. Image restoration theory offers five broad categories : denial ; evasion of responsibility; reducing offenseiveness of event; corrective action; and mortification (Benoit, 2018).

The image repair strategies aim to enhance a tarnished reputation; they can be comprehended by examining the type of assaults, criticisms, or grievances. At its core, an assault on an individual's (or an organization's, or a group's) image, identity, or reputation consists of two elements: (1) An event took place that is viewed as unfavourable; (2) The accused bears responsibility for that event. Observe the significance of perceptions at two levels: from the organization's perspective (as persuader) and from the audience's viewpoint (as the public). The viewpoints of the persuader and the audience hold significance for various reasons. The perceptions of the organization are important because they drive the persuader to initiate image repair and can influence the crafting of image repair messages. The views of the audience matter since they affect how convinced the audience is by the image repair message. Keep in mind that audiences consist of individuals, and different members may perceive the rhetor and the offensive act in various ways, complicating the process of persuasion (Benoit, 2018).

Benoit (2018) stated research about image restoration strategies in sport context grows since 2008, with the crisis case on individual athlete or team. The cases started from the scandal on personal life (e.g love affair, violence), personal matters related to sport (e.g : the doping issue), and organizational misconduct (e.g: the technical problem, the unfair strategies conducted by a team). Another litearture, Harker (2022), stated most of the research of crisis communication in sport in United States of America (USA) focused on the crisis experienced by individual athlete; and only a few studies discuss about crisis experienced by organization. Crisis strategies were denial, ingratiation, bolstering, shifting blame, and mortification. Most of the works did not applied theory, and followed by image repair theory. Most of the researches focused on episodic case studies or singular incident investigations (Harker, 2022).

Several research on crisis communication in sport context tend to use textual analysis method toward the official statement or press statement realeased by sport organization, without an interview of the PR officer. In USA, qualitative methods was the dominant methods in the crisis communication in sport context, with the data dominate by textual analysis. Meanwhile, interviews was still rare (Harker, 2022). Ibrahim (2017) studies about the communication strategies practiced by international

football federation, FIFA, after the corruption scandals. This works analyze quotation of media stories, press releases, and reports that were issued on FIFA official website. The results found that FIFA depended both on press releases and public speeches. Denial strategy become the most FIFA message theme. This research also criticized FIFA because the message delivery only dominated by press conferences and FIFA did not maximize other official channel that they have.

Armfield et al. (2019) discusses about the image restoration by New England Patriots (American National Football League contestants) after the “Deflategate” scandals. Crisis started after several media outlets (e.g ESPN, CNN) were published news that the Patriots were being investigated for using underinflated balls after Patriots defeat Indianapolis 45-to-7 to advance to the Super Bowl. Patriot accused that the purpose of using under-inflated balls was to make the Patriot player easier in handle the ball. This research using analysis toward full transcripts of all the New England Patriots press conferences published on the team websites related to Deflategate. The findings there were two figures always appeared to represent Patriots : Bill Belichick (head coach) and Robert Kraft (club owners). Both of them use message strategy such as evade responsibility, using transcendence , shifting blame to another party, and attack the accuser. The appearance of both figures was an effort to protect the Patriot’s players from the spotlight.

Koa (2022) research about Real Madrid Football Club image restoration after the leaked of audio recording of Florentino Perez (club’s president) whose criticize several star player such as Iker Casillas, Raul Gonzales, and Cristiano Ronaldo with the “strong” (read : harsh) words. Koa’s analyse the Perez statement towards the issue published on Real Madrid official website, with qualitative content analysis methods. This study has shown that Pérez successfully employed some reducing offensiveness strategies. Pérez primarily engaged in minimization, transcendence, and attacking the accuser.

The identical works with our article was Arsianto (2024) research, which conclude that PSS management use denial strategy with claimed there were no intervention from shareholder related to the Arthur Irawan appearance, and scapegoating by saying critics to Arthur was baseless. Another conclusion PSS management nor responded the crisis in time and with inappropriate way, because at first management thinks the crisis will decrease as time goes by.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses descriptive-qualitative methods. The research type was single case study. Case study research develops an in depth, contextual understanding of the case, relying on multiple data sources. In a single instrumental case study, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue (Creswell et al., 2007).

The case is on PSS crisis on 2021 (as mentioned on the Background section). Author used interviews, digital archives, and social media text (Creswell & Creswell J. D., 2022) as the data. Authors conducted interview with the public relations officer and media

team of PSS. It is worth noting that not all of the informants involved on managing 2021 crisis, several of them joined PSS on after the crisis.

The steps for interview, authors sent letter of permission to the club, and after the organizer gave permission, author made an appointment with the informants. Author conducted semi-structured interviews using open questions that require answers from informants in their own words and thoughts. Interview conducted on March 2023 and August 2023. The digital archive and social media text used in this research is statements published on PSS official media such as website and/or social media. To get information about PSS fans response to the PSS strategy, author interviewed with 8 PSS Fans that chosen by random sampling. Detail of the informants, see Table 1

Table 1: Informants Profile

Informant Code	Informant Role / Profile	Relevance in Study
Y1	PSS Public Relations officer	Provides insights on crisis communication strategies
Y2, Y3	PSS media team	Provides informations on the information publication via club official channnels
Y4, Y5, Y6, Y7, Y8, Y9, Y10, Y11	PSS fans	Provides a brief about fans responses toward club crisis communication

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PSS Communication Team's Opinion on Conflict with Fans

Fans are the most important support system and partner of PSS because indirectly fans are the main owners of a football club. Informant 1, who said fans as an *"assets for the club"*, and due to the fans fanaticism, fans *"have high expectations to the club"* (interview, March 18, 2023). Informant 2 describe fans are : *"the biological fathers of the clubs"*, so that fans *"become the main support system for the club"* (interview, March 29. 2023).

Problems with fans have a big impact on the club's image/reputation. PSS experienced boycotted by their fans and the stadium attendance drop into more than 90 percents. Informant 1 said PSS fans are very critical, so the club management should maintain them well and zero mistakes, because *"once we have a slip of the tongue –may not be realized – will have a bad impact later and a backfire to management"* (Interview, March 18, 2023).

There are two departments in PSS that have responsibilities in communication activities : PRand media team. Both of them have the different tasks. PR duties is tasked with conveying messages from the community to management and vice versa. This is because the community is the target audience of the football club. In addition to being

an audience, the community is also PSS's market share so that PSS management should understand what the community really wants (Y1, interview, March 18 2023)

Meanwhile the the role of the media team is as a facilitator of the policy program that has been created by PR like handling events social media management like content creating and bulid interactivity with the fans (Y2, interview, March 29, 2023 and Y3, interview, August 2, 2023). Informant 2 added the example of their activities:

“So we have had an activity called 'Ngobrol Bareng' since a long time ago, at most 2-3 times a year. It's also live on YouTube, some are live, some aren't. Usually, to get aspirations from fans, this is what the club has to do. The company does have a policy, but it also has to listen to the fans” (Y2, March 29, 2023).

Pubic Relations Strategies and Tactics: “Blusukan” Visiting Fans Directly

One way to respond to negative issues or rumors from fans is to find the source of the opinion, find the common thread of the opinion and resolve the problem with the person concerned. After identify the fans demand, PSS PR and representatives of the fans planned to hold a gathering, although until now (at least until the end of data gathering for this research on August 2023), the plan has not been realized, because the Informant 1 as the PR admit he needs time to learn and managing it. Otherwise, the fans did not really need the formal event created by the management. Fans communities just want one-two person of management representatives came to them, joining the communities event or program.

I even got help from the Key Opinion Leaders in the community themselves, they said that there was no need to create any kind of event. They said to me “*if you have time, just come to the our events, we (fans) would be happy if you can join in our events*”. Finally I did it. I was surprised when they said. it had never been like that before. No one had come to them” (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023).

The concept of PSS PR is “blusukan” approach a Javanese cultural communication concept, namely based on the concept of 'sitting and talking'. This was expressed by Informant 1 (I1) in the following description:

“I can conclude maybe it's called cultural communication. That's actually what's fun, what's interesting there. I'm much more comfortable using the Javanese cultural pattern, sir. We (as the representative of PSS mangement - note), came to them (fans) , then sit together, discuss the problem. Because what's much more expensive is emotional closeness. Who we have to meet, who we have to act with, we have to really be able to connect each other's dots. Likewise, maybe when I'm not at PSS but at

another club, I also have to adjust to the cultural communication there" (Y1, PSS Sleman Public Relations, March 18, 2023).

When fans protest, the task of public relations is to approach and maintain communication with them and must always remember that fans are assets. The community's distrust of PSS backfires, so the task of public relations is to maintain the community through communication.

"Approaching them. Maintaining the flow of communication. We still have give them the same treatment, either when the team get positive results, negative results, or where the amount of fans who criticize us are huge numbers, or just a minority, we still have to accommodate them. How we accommodate them? By opening communication (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023)

Using Social Media to Clarify Negative Issues

One of the considerations of PSS management in using social media as a medium to clarify negative issues is because social media is easily accessible to the public considering that almost all levels of Indonesian society use smartphones and have social media. When a crisis of trust occurs that results in conflict between management and the community, PSS's public relations and media teams try to restore public trust through good communication by conveying management decisions during chat activities.

"So coincidentally it was dejavu for me. I was also in the media until now, so what was actually done, but at that time the PR was different, only the policy was definitely the same from them, which was definitely the communication between PSS and fans. It's like Dejan out, so actually that was a policy taken by management to outcome or continue it legally (against management decisions). Yes, from us, it was more like bridging through conversation activities and so on" (Y2, March 29, 2023).

The media team ruled by standard operational procedure (SOP) in uploading content on the social media. In the crisis situation, they simply waiting the direction from the top management until the decision was made. If there is still no decision, the media team simply uploaded content about the first team activities.

"In times of crisis, the media rola as a bridge to convey updates. What if, for example, PSS experience a consecutive defeats, and fans keep mention our social media questioning about the improvement, or demands about change in coaching staff, we still wait the decision from

management and board of directors. We keep upload information about first team activities” (Y3, interview, August 2, 2023)

The media team try to build two-way communication and interactivity The media team establishes two-way communication with fans through interactive content through social media. Informant 2 and informant 3 said this activities purpose is to build good relationships, but the media team could not reply to all comments because *“it depends on the situation and conditions”* – and both informant did not giving more detail answer about *“situation and conditions”* they mentioned.

Informant 1 give different answers, that team PR domain is not on the social media management. Once he get domain to manage Tiktok account, but only for the shorts time. Informant 1 stated he tried to give responses to mentions or answers from fans, but he only answer when he had the valid and confirmed information.

“Yes, yes, maybe many people ask me why I’m rarely active and so on. My answer is simple, I don’t want to convey a biased message. Replying to comments, that’s one of PSS’s public relations activities, but actually I didn’t handle it. I wasn’t given access to it. I was on TikTok for a while, I replied to them, not all of them. But their (fans) reaction was “wow”. Maybe they were happy to be replied, weren’t they?” (Y1, March 18, 2023).

PSS Message Strategies and The Official Media Usage

Author also make observations towards responds on the PSS official statement posted on social media (YouTube and Instagram). The first example was the PSS official statement posted on Instagram @psleman, as the response #Dejanout hashtag that being up by fans (see Figure 1). The clarification was made in September 2021 and received 35,703 likes and various comments from fans. PSS said they still evaluate coach Dejan performance, have made meeting with the players, coaching staff, and officials and all of them said their commitment to PSS





Figure 1 . Clarification regarding #Dejanout Hashtags (source : Instagram @pssleman, 2023)

When fans stormed the PSS home base, the management team gave a shocking answer that if Dejan was fired, the PSS home base would move from Sleman. This emotional answer certainly sparked public anger. Finally, on October 1, 2021, the PSS management team clarified the issue through the post (See Figure 2). The clarification was communicated via Instagram on October 1, 2021. The clarification received 38,307 likes and several comments that stated that fans welcome the decision. The details of the official statement uploaded on PSS official website (<https://pssleman.id/pss-akan-tetap-ada-di-sleman/>), contains of regret, claimed that the statement was made on emotional and under pressure situation, and ask sympathy and supports from the fans.



Figure 2. Clarification about CEO's statement on plan to move PSS homebase out of Sleman

On October 14, 2021, the management held a meeting with fans at Omah PSS. This meeting was attended by the PSS management team, media and several representatives of fans. This meeting was also broadcast live on PSS Youtube, as shown in the following image:

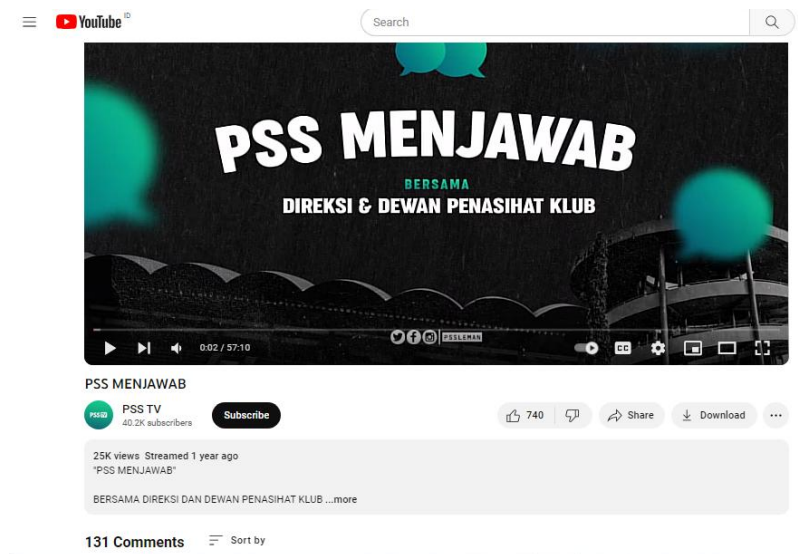


Figure 3. Screen capture of PSS Menjawab on official YouTube of PSS Sleman, PSS TV

The number of subscribers to the official PSS Youtube account is 40,200 people while the number of live Youtube viewers reached 25,000 people. The meeting received 720 likes and 131 comments calling for #Dejanout. Some of the core results of the meeting include the management team understanding the fans' disappointment with the PSS team's achievements that did not meet expectations. For this reason, input from fans will be accommodated and used as consideration in efforts to improve team performance



Figure 4. Screen capture of PSS official Instagram related to the current situation

The lack of fans agreement with the management's decision made their social media flooded by fans with the same theme, namely #dejanout, making PSS management decide to close the comment column. This was done to control the destructive efforts of fans who out of controlled

This problem did not end immediately, where the fans continued to demand the management to fire Dejan, even the situation became increasingly heated, finally on

December 19, 2021, Dejan and his assistant agreed to end their cooperation with PSS. This clarification was uploaded via an Instagram post on December 19, 2021 and received 42,499 likes, and various happy comments from the fans. The following is a post from PSS management regarding the problem:



Figure 5. Screen capture of PSS official Instagram, informed the contract termination of Dejan Antonic as the club headcoach

PSS Fans Responses

Authors conducted the interview with fans to know their responses toward PSS image repair strategies. The fans was chosen by random sampling. There were 8 fans, with range of age 17-29 years old. Several of them are school students, college students, and entrepreneur. These are their response (in general) :

- They access the PSS official media (website, Instagram, YouTube) to get official information related to the current situation.
- They think the PSS official media contains accountable information, comparing to the information in mass media. Informants think information on mass media have been framed, so they (informants) feel confused when read on it.
- The PSS effort to open communication was good enough, but informants stated “there were several things to be fixed and improved”, but they did not mention details about it

The Obstacles

There was only 1 person in PR position. The role of PR was still unclear because it was not given clarity from management. Somehow PR also have the tasks to the marketing and sponsorships. Informant 1 said, due to on his “single fighter” role, several of PR plans could not be executed well. For examples in replying comments or mentions, informant 1 said he did it on Tiktok and got good response from fans. But in the end he stopped it, because :

"but in the end it seemed like I was the only one who had the enthusiasm. So, in the end, I didn't do it anymore" (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023).

PSS have separated units/divisions related to the communication tasks : PR itself, media officer, and media teams. Informant 2 from the media team stated the workflow as follows : *So everything is according to the wishes of the PR. When PR wants to make programs, events, whatever, we facilitate it. The PR can collaborate with our division.* (interview, March 29, 2023). But according to Informant 1, the separation on each division make him found difficulties on doing his job , as follows:

In PSS itself, we already have a media officer. Ideally, the media officer is included in one division, right? We are talking about one unit. But the situation here did not like that, so I stand alone. Maybe if I could say what the ideal conditions are like, the ideal conditions are that the media officer is with me (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023).

Informant 1 claimed tried to carry out the PR jobs by independently identifying the duties and responsibilities of public relations in general. However, it was not easy regarding that there is no direction from anyone about what to do as public relations when at that time PSS experienced a crisis of trust.

"So, this is what's interesting, actually, when I joined, there was no handover at all, I didn't receive a job description, I only received a job description 4 months after I was here. But I couldn't possibly wait for the job description itself. Of course I also needed direction, guidance, what should PR do. In my imagination, before I came to PSS I read that oh okay, PR in a football club was really very important to maintain the image from the existing media population. Then also how to see the rhythm, especially maybe the turmoil in the community, which was in the realm of fans to maintain and preserve them, of course what is the goal actually? The goal is to add more public who initially didn't know PSS to know. That was actually the biggest homework" (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023).

The absence of PRs job description means that almost all activities are carried out on the initiative of the public relations themselves. Although there were a few problem in implementation, informant 1 said this situation can make him maximize his idea.

"The absence of SOPs creates a freedom for me to explore, which will be something that really supports my initiative. And of course, it is also possible that good direction will also develop my potential, for where was

the direction to PSS too, right? I need that. And a clear communication pattern from top to bottom related to the mission and vision of PT PSS itself" (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023).

But on the other side, sometimes Informant 1 found difficulties in executing the idea, due to different perceptions between him and the top management. For example, informant 1 thinks the PR program is building good relationships with PR and communities. But informant 1 claimed the management support was not meet his expectations.

"I advise to support a fans community event, because it's important. The club should not look at fans for the money, because when the fans not here, we'll get a headache. But when I advise activities to maintain relationship with fans, the response I got was the exact opposite" (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023)

Another obstacle was the perception of the top management related to the PR itself. Informant 1 compared between current management (which he work for) and previous PSS management whose the CEO brought his own PR team and the CEO knows the importance of PR and media team.

"If I could compare it, yes, in the previous PR, even though I didn't meet them directly, because from the beginning no one gave me a job description, it was just that at that time the PR at PSS Sleman certainly had a collective nature with the CEO at that time. The previous CEO brought his own PR team, and then of course from the mindset of the CEO, he knew how important the role of the media was" (Y1, interview, March 18, 2023).

Discussion

Crisis experienced by PSS categorized as smoldering crisis and organizational misdeed. Smoldering crisis started from minor issue, but the management did not pay much attention to anticipate it and leads to a bigger crisis (Usman et al., 2022). The PSS crisis started by the negative results such as winless streak and bad performance of one player, then the PSS fans criticize the coach and forced the management to terminate the head coach's contract. Because of PSS management not aware of this issue, and they think this fans demand will fade away as time goes by (Arsianto, 2024), the issue grows up to the wider crisis.

Organization misdeed crisis caused by management action or decision that will harm or place stakeholders at risk for harm without adequate precautions (Usman et al., 2022). In PSS crisis, this happened when the CEO threaten to move PSS homebase

out from Sleman to respond the fans' demand. This situation added pressure to the PSS management and lead a conflict between PSS fans and management.

Research into sports crisis communication has shown such fan communities in action during crises, coming to the rescue of favoured coaches, players, and teams. Fans became the pressure group for the club, although fans' demand could not be fulfilled 100 percents because fans did not have share or investment on the club. Despite fans do not have formal ties to the club, PR still should consider them as the important stakeholders, not simply as customers in a business transaction. In organized sports, a strong bond between the team and the fans—and among the fans themselves—develops from communal spectatorship and identification. The level of engagement fans have with these actors means that sports crises have the potential to strike deeply at the heart of the relationship between fans, teams, and players (Koerber & Zabara, 2017).

Aside from PSS, the same case happened to—for example—in United States of America (USA). In 2014 there were several investors looked at purchasing the Buffalo Bills team (the contestant of National Football League competition). One of the candidate investors was rockstar, singer, Jon Bon Jovi. He planned (if he success buy the Buffalo) to move the Buffalo to another city (Toronto). This plan led fans protest, because the fans have the deep feeling to the team. Not only just a business or sports club, it was their personal and civic identities. Finally, the new investor, Terry Pagula, committed to keep the team on the Buffalo (Koerber & Zabara, 2017).

Organization should apply a fit crisis response strategy, in order to reduce negative impact of a crisis for stakeholder affected and for the organization. These include the words and actions managers employ in response to a crisis (Coombs, 2016). Crisis situation would threaten organizational image and reputation. The absence of good image and reputation, would lead public's distrust to the organization. Crisis communication consists of messages intended to improve images damaged by criticism and accusation (Benoit, 2014). PSS image restoration strategies were corrective action and mortification. This method may involve returning the situation to how it was prior to the objectionable act taking place, and/or a commitment to implement changes that will avert the repetition of the undesirable action. Mortification refers to the accused acknowledging the wrongful act and seeking forgiveness (Benoit, 2018).

It showed by PSS appeal forgiveness for the "CEO's slip of tongue" about the threaten to move PSS out of Sleman, and corrective action by showing PSS efforts to evaluate the coaching staff, give guarantee that PSS homebase would still in Sleman, and finally the terminated contract toward the coaching staff. Our finding have differences with previous works by Arsianto (2024) that shows PSS statement use simple denial by claiming there was no intervention to the coaching staff to played Arthur Irawan, and blaming others by claiming critics to the team was baseless.

Our findings shows PSS use two main tactics : visit the fans community directly and using social media. Visit the supporter community conducted by the PSS PR as his own initiative. He claimed that he came to several supporter community event, in an informal context, get the information, listening to the fans demand, and PSS PR claimed fans felt

happy because the club shows attention to them. Our findings supported by Koerber and Zabara (2017) conclusion said the clubs should encourage the development of relationships between fans, face-to-face (perhaps through fan meetups on non-game days). The differences was Koerber and Zabara (2017) works did not give details information about the fan meetups on non-game days, our research shows this is one of the “cultural approach” (in this context Javanese cultural) that we have to “sit, meet, and chat” in order to resolve the problem.

PSS use official website and official social media to published official statement related to the crisis. We interview fans, and majority were welcome and appreciate on how PSS use its official media statement during the crisis situation. According to Benoit (2018), if the audience perceives the apology as genuine, they may forgive the erroneous behaviour. But it is too simply to said the PSS strategy are 100 percent works. Previous studies shows PSS fans tend to have critical view and protesting the club management works [e.g : Arianto (2022); Madani and Masduki (2023)]. It is worth noting, we only gain information from only a few of PSS fans. As Benoit (2018) noted that members of the public can have different perceptions to the organization and different point of view to the crisis.

The obstacles for PR image repair strategies was the absence of formal job description, so the PR officer forced to arrange the job by his own initiative. Sadly, his plan to maintain relations with community fans did not get a response from the top management. The social media usage was not maximized because lack of two-way communication. The PR said he only given access on Tiktok as social media. Then he tries to replayed mentions or comments by the fans on Tiktok, and gain good responses. But he chose to stop because only he did that. From the media team said, there was standard operational procedure in social media content in crisis situation : only can wait the management decision. If there was no management decision yet, so the social media content is about the first team activities. Author did not get details about the social media workflow in PSS crisis, but research by Arsianto (2024) found PSS collaborate with external party (Digisport Asia) to branding club via social media content.

Our findings have differences with Ibrahim (2017), Armfield et al. (2019) and Koa (2022) that focused only on the official statement by sport organization in order to image repair with the method was textual analysis. Our works actually did not focus on the textual analysis, but we have the data on how the club manage their strategies and the obstacles. Arsianto (2024) works have similarity on the object and issue, the differences are (Arsianto, 2024) works dominated by the information about the chronological of the PSS crisis, fans/ fans point of view about the crisis, and only less information about the kind of strategies and explanation from the media team. Meanwhile our results was about the team media point of view, the strategy managed, and the obstacles. We also offered fans point of view as the data triangulation, although the fans point of view can not be generalized.

On a broader PR context, our findings confirmed the knowledge of dominant coalition (such as top management) in organizations will decide the PR jobs, including in

sport organization (Prastya, 2019). The top management tend to understand that PR jobs related to the media relations/press relations and message delivery. Top management often have lack of knowledge about PR function that “rare” to do like environmental scanning and monitoring activities (Mat Tazin & Kaur, 2017; Wilson, 2016), so there will be a different perception between PR practitioners with the top management. Related to this situation, Knight and Sweetser (2021) works offer the interesting statement that the different perception may cause by “the dominant coalition underestimate the PR role and function” or “the PR practitioners over confidence / exaggerated their knowledge and skills”.

CONCLUSION

PSS use message strategies mortification and corrective action as the image repair strategies after the spat between club management and fans in 2021. As the tactics, PSS PR were visit the fans communities program and using social media to share official statements. The PSS have obstacle such as the lack of personnel in PR team (only 1 person), the divide role of PR, no formal role for PR, and the separated division in communication between PR, media team, and media officer. On the broader context, the lack of knowledge and support from the top management towards PR role and function also become the obstacle.

Limitations : (1) the information dominated by the PR person, while he did not involve in the crisis situation. It is worth noting there was a change in PSS management from CEO into several staff include the PR person, after the crisis, so the information only for after the crisis/post crisis context; (2) the fans’ point of view toward PSS activities can not be generalized, because author only interviewed a few number of fans.

Advise(s) for Further research : (1) make a survey toward fans to know their perceptions about PSS communication activities to know fans response; (2) interview the journalist / media response to the information subsidies and access provided by PSS – or another sport club or sport organization-- in crisis situation

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