
Management Crisis Reputation in the Era of Viral and Cancel Culture

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ABSTRACT

Study This discuss management crisis reputation in the era of viral and cancel culture in context development digital technology and social media. The development of digital platforms has change pattern communication public so that reputation organization and individual become the more prone to pressure growing social in a way fast and massive. The cancel culture phenomenon emerged as form expression collective digital society in give moral judgment, criticism, to rejection to individual or organizations that are considered violating social norms. Research This use approach qualitative with method studies literature through study to theory communication crisis, digital media, reputation organization and behavior public on social media. The results of the study show that crisis reputation in the digital era has characteristics main in the form of speed distribution information, involvement high public, as well as domination emotion in formation opinion. In situation said, the organization sued For implementing communication strategies a fast, transparent, empathetic, and community-based crisis action real. Approach management effective crisis covers utilization technology such as social listening, analysis sentiment public, as well as system detection early balanced crisis with approach humanist in communication. In addition, the success recovery reputation no only determined by ability control information, but also by the ability organization in build return trust public through responsible communication responsible and consistent. With Thus, management crisis reputation in the era of viral and cancel culture requires an adaptive, data-based strategy, while relationship and empathy oriented social.

Keywords: management crisis; reputation; cancel culture; digital communication; social media; communication crisis.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, the nature and trajectory of reputation crises have undergone a fundamental transformation. Unlike traditional crises that unfolded gradually and within circumscribed geographic or social boundaries, reputational threats can now emerge and escalate within minutes through rapid digital interactions across interconnected platforms. The networked public possesses an unprecedented capacity to render moral judgments, mobilize social pressure, and orchestrate digital shaming campaigns directed at specific individuals or organizations. Under such conditions, organizations no longer retain full control over the narratives circulating in the digital public sphere. Consequently, reputation crisis management has become considerably more urgent and structurally complex than in previous communication environments. Recent scholarship confirms that the pace and scale of digital reputational crises have accelerated substantially, driven by platform algorithms that amplify emotionally charged content and enable rapid cross-platform dissemination (W. T. Coombs & Tachkova, 2023). The scientometric analysis by Lendvai, (2025), drawing on Scopus data from 2016 to 2023, further establishes that academic interest in cancel culture has risen sharply since 2021, reflecting the growing real-world significance of this phenomenon for organizations and public figures alike.

From the perspective of crisis communication scholarship, an organization's success in managing a reputational crisis is not solely determined by its capacity to disseminate accurate information, but equally by the speed of its response, its transparency, its demonstrated empathy, and its moral accountability to affected publics. Slow, defensive, or emotionally dismissive responses can exacerbate crisis escalation and accelerate the erosion of public trust. Conversely, communication that is open, honest, and demonstrative of genuine good faith offers greater opportunity for the mitigation of public pressure and the restoration of organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007). These dynamics are amplified in digital environments where public expectations for timely and authentic organizational responses are considerably elevated. Hamidi et al., (2023), in a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis published in SAGE Open, further confirm that corporate reputation management in the digital era demands proactive, real-time communication strategies that address stakeholder concerns swiftly and credibly, particularly during crisis conditions.

Empirical data underscore the scale and velocity of this phenomenon. According to a 2023 report by the Pew Research Center, approximately 72% of American adults have personally witnessed a major brand or public figure become the subject of organized online criticism or cancellation within the preceding year. At the global level, a study by Edelman (2022) found that 60% of consumers globally have participated in some form of boycott or collective online criticism directed at organizations perceived to have acted irresponsibly. These figures indicate that cancel culture and viral reputational crises are not marginal occurrences but mainstream features of the contemporary digital communication landscape.

Furthermore, the development of digital technology has introduced new opportunities for proactive crisis management through the utilization of social listening tools, public sentiment analysis, and early-warning detection systems based on real-time digital data. However, the adoption of technological solutions in crisis communication must be balanced with humanistic approaches in order to preserve the emotional and empathetic dimensions essential to rebuilding public trust. Moreover, Mihailov et al., (2023) argue that online moral outrage is increasingly amplified by platform design features and social network dynamics, making it imperative for organizations to integrate both technological monitoring capabilities and emotionally intelligent communication strategies into their crisis management frameworks.

Previous scholarship has addressed related aspects of this phenomenon from several directions. Ng (2020) provided foundational conceptualization of cancel culture as a form of collective digital expression through which communities enforce social norms, noting that the process is frequently reactive and context-insensitive. Similarly, Benoit, (1997); Coombs, (2007) have contributed canonical frameworks for organizational crisis communication and image restoration, respectively; however, these frameworks were developed primarily in pre-digital or early-digital media environments and do not fully account for the accelerated and participatory dynamics of viral social media. More recently, Jin et al., (2012) highlighted the role of public emotions in shaping crisis response but stopped short of addressing the structural implications of cancel culture as a distinct social mechanism. Forestal, (2024), writing in the *American Political Science Review*, demonstrates that social media platforms function as mechanisms of social control in which public shaming is structurally embedded into platform design, making cancel culture events increasingly predictable outcomes of digital interaction patterns rather than exceptional occurrences.

Abbasi, A. Z., Rehman, U, (2023) further show that organizations affected by cancel culture events suffer measurable declines in customer loyalty, market value, and internal employee trust compounding the urgency of developing integrated management responses. The updated conceptualization of SCCT by W. Coombs, (2022) provides a refined theoretical foundation for understanding how crisis types, attribution levels, and contextual modifiers should shape organizational response strategies in contemporary mediated environments. Thus, a significant gap remains in the literature concerning the integrated management of reputation crises that arise specifically from cancel culture phenomena in the viral media ecosystem. The present study addresses this gap by proposing an integrative, adaptive framework for reputation crisis management that synthesizes crisis communication theory, digital media analysis, and humanistic communication principles.

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to describe the phenomenon of cancel culture and the dynamics of reputation crisis in the digital communication era; (2) to analyze the characteristics of reputation crises propagated through social media and viral culture in the digital public sphere; (3) to examine the role of social media in accelerating information distribution, shaping public opinion, and escalating organizational reputation crises; (4) to analyze effective crisis communication strategies for addressing public pressure in the era of cancel culture, with particular emphasis on rapid, transparent, empathetic, and accountable responses; (5) to explain the importance of humanistic approaches in the utilization of digital technology and data analytics for reputation crisis management; and (6) to identify practical programs and strategic frameworks that organizations can implement in responding to and recovering from reputation crises in the digital age.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing the systematic literature review (SLR) method. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to achieve a deep and interpretive understanding of the phenomena of reputation crisis management, cancel culture, and public communication dynamics in the digital era phenomena that are not amenable to quantitative measurement alone. The type of research is library research (*kajian pustaka*), which focuses on the analysis and synthesis of existing theoretical and empirical literature rather than primary data collection in field settings. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and institutional reports relevant to the study's themes. The primary thematic domains of the literature corpus include crisis communication theory, organizational reputation management, social media studies, digital public behavior, and organizational communication strategy.

The inclusion criteria applied in literature selection were: (a) publications in English or Indonesian; (b) directly relevant to at least one of the study's thematic areas; (c) published in peer-reviewed academic venues or by credible academic publishers; and (d) published preferably from 2010 onward, with foundational theoretical works from earlier periods included where essential. Exclusion criteria comprised non-academic sources, opinion pieces without scholarly grounding, and publications not meeting the relevance threshold. The data processing procedure involved three iterative stages: (1) identification and collection of relevant sources; (2) thematic coding and critical analysis of selected literature to identify

convergences, divergences, and gaps; and (3) synthesis and integration of findings into a coherent analytical framework.

The analytical framework employed in this study centers on Benoit, (1997); Coombs, (2007), supplemented by McLuhan, (1964) media theory and Fombrun, (1996) reputation management framework. This triangulation of theoretical perspectives enables a comprehensive analysis of crisis dynamics, communication strategies, and reputation recovery processes in the context of cancel culture.

RESULTS

According to Ng, (2020), cancel culture is form expression collective digital society in uphold social norms, even though often done in a way reactive and without in-depth processing. Example events in 2025 for example a video where bakery company X which chooses system digital payments then reject cash payment from a consumer grandmothers who No understand about digital payments resulted negative response from Indonesian netizens, so that crowd crowded blaspheme company the. Or for example, a group blacklist crowded people Muslim to products foreigners who turned out to be give financial support for Israel. Or it could happened to a public figure who was considered has behave indecent No in accordance ethics, religious teachings and norms that exist within public.

In context communication, crisis reputation can understood as threatening situation image and trust public to something organization or personal. Coombs, (2007) defines crisis as events that do not unexpected that can cause threat Serious to expectation stakeholders interests and impacts negative on performance organization. In the digital era, character crisis experience shift significant, where the speed distribution information and involvement public become factor the main determining factor escalation crisis. Social media has become catalyst main in speed up distribution crisis. Platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok allow public For speak out opinion in a way open and broad. According to Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010), social media give strength to users For create and distribute content in a way massive, so that organization No Again own control full on developing narrative. This is make crisis reputation become more complex and difficult predicted.

Cancel culture phenomenon is one of the dynamics communication that is born from the development of digital media, where the public own strength big For assess, criticize, even “punish” individuals or organization in a way collective. The process of cancel culture is not ongoing in a way suddenly, but through series mutually exclusive stages related to and influenced by the character of social media as well as psychology mass. In Lots case, error small or controversial statement can trigger reaction chain reaction that led to boycotts, decline trust, even loss financial. Ng (2020) explains that cancel culture is form expression collective digital society in uphold social norms, but often done without consider context in a way comprehensive.

Triggers of Cancel Culture

In general, cancel culture begins with something incident trigger, namely action or statements that are considered violating social norms. Triggers This Can in the form of comment or policies that are considered offensive behavior No ethical, or even old digital traces that come back appear to surface. In digital context, no there is something really lost; every

footsteps can found back and interpreted republished by the public in accordance with developing values moment this. After incident the appear, social media play a role as accelerator main. Information spread very quickly through various platforms, strengthened by features share such as retweets, reposts, and usage hashtag. In matter this, the media character becomes factor important things that form method message accepted and disseminated. As put forward by Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message," which emphasizes that the media does not only convey messages, but also form impact and meaning from message said. Social media, with its fast, visual, and interactive nature makes it issue small even though can develop become viral phenomenon in time short.

Along with distribution said, the public start form opinion. At this stage this, the communication process No Again nature informative, but changed become evaluative and emotional. The public provides moral judgment on individual or organizations involved, often fueled by anger collective (moral outrage) and tendencies For strengthen opinion in group (group polarization). The discussion that was initially open can with fast changed become judgment, where is the boundary between criticism and personal attacks become blurred. When opinion public the more strengthening, pressure social media also started formed.

This is the core phase of cancel culture, where individuals or organization experience what is called as digital shaming. Its form can in the form of boycott, attack comment mass, up to invitation for stop support to party certain. In condition this, reputation become very vulnerable Because perception public formed in a way collective and continuous strengthened by digital interactions. Brady et al., (2021), in a study published in Science Advances, demonstrate that moral outrage expression is socially amplified in online networks through learning dynamics, whereby users who observe peer expressions of outrage are more likely to adopt and escalate such expressions themselves, creating compounding cycles of reputational damage that organizations find increasingly difficult to interrupt.

If not handled with fast and precise, situation will experience escalation. The issue that was initially growing on social media can picked up by the mainstream media main, reinforced by the main character public or influencer, and finally become crisis greater reputation wide. At this stage this, space for control narrative the more narrow Because information has spread in a way massive and difficult controlled. Response from affected parties Then become factor determinant direction crisis. In perspective communication crisis, as explained by Coombs, (2013) through Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), defensive response or ignore issue tend make things worse situation.

On the other hand, a response that prioritizes empathy, responsibility accountability and transparency own opportunity more big for relieve pressure public. When an organization or individual fail responding, emptiness information often filled with speculation and assumptions negative from public. The end of this process is emergence consequence real, good in form loss reputation, loss trust, until impact economic and social like termination Work The same or isolation in space digital public. However so, no all case end in a way permanent. In a number of situation, recovery Still possible through honest clarification, change real, and efforts build return trust public. With Thus, cancel culture can understood as a complex social process, which involves interaction between technology, emotions public, and perception collective.

Strategic steps facing Cancel Culture

Phenomenon cancel culture reflect How today's digital society This No only become consumer information, but also actors active in forming and enforcing social norms. Therefore that, in face reality this, individuals and organizations sued for more wise in communicate, more sensitive to values social, as well as more responsive in manage crisis that emerged in space digital public. Conditions This demand organization for more be careful in every form communication that is carried out. In face crisis reputation in the viral era, speed response become factor key. Coombs, (2013) in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) emphasizes that organization must respond crisis in a way fast, accurate, and consistent For minimize impact negative. Delay in respond can make things worse situation Because public tend fill in emptiness information with speculation or unproven assumptions Of course true. However Thus, the speed just no enough.

The response given must also be consider aspect empathy and responsibility answer. Benoit, (1997) through theory Image Restoration state that communication strategy in crisis must covers confession error, request sorry, and effort real improvement. In cancel culture context, approach defensive or deny often times it is make things worse reaction public. On the other hand, communication that is transparent and demonstrates good faith Good more potential relieve conflict. In addition, it is important for organization for understand dynamics an increasingly digital audience critical and participatory. The public does not only evaluate what was conveyed organization, but also how method delivery.

According to Jin et al., (2012), emotions public play role important in determine response to crisis. Therefore that, sensitive communication to feeling public, such as show empathy and caring, become very important in the process of recovery reputation. Holland et al., (2021), in a study published in Public Relations Review, provide empirical evidence that the combined application of transparency messaging and appropriate crisis response strategies significantly improves organizational perceptions among affected publics, underscoring the centrality of openness and accountability in effective reputation recovery.

In the era of cancel culture, management crisis must also be notice aspect sustainability connection with public. Reputation No can restored only through One statement official, but need effort term consistent length. Fombrun, (1996) emphasized that reputation organization built through accumulation perception public in term a long time. Therefore that, organization need show commitment real in repair errors and prevent recurrence future crises. In addition to communication strategies externally, organizations also need strengthen internal communication as part from management crisis. Employees is ambassador organizations that can influence perception public in a way significant. If not managed with well, leaked internal information can make things worse crisis. Therefore that, transparency and internal coordination become aspect important in guard consistency message.

Development technology also opens up opportunity for organization for manage crisis in a way more effective through Data utilization and analytics. Social media monitoring real-time possible organization for detect potential crisis since early and responsive with more fast. Technology information allows detection early crisis (early warning system) through real-time data analysis. With utilizing big data from social media, online forums, to news platforms, organizations can identify potential issue before develop become crisis big. Concept This related close with issue management proposed by Coombs, (2013) emphasizing importance recognize signal crisis since early.

Tools such as social listening and sentiment analysis can read change perception public in a way fast, so that organization Can quick respond. In addition with analytical data allows taking decision based evidence (data-driven decision making). In situation crisis, speed and accuracy decisions are crucial. With an analytical dashboard, organizations can monitor development crisis in real-time: how sentiment public changed, who just actors involved, and channels which communication is the most influential. This is help management in determine a better communication strategy effective and avoid speculative decisions. Similarly, Nuortimo et al., (2024) emphasize that real-time stakeholder engagement through digital platforms is a critical component of contemporary crisis communication, as it enables organizations to demonstrate accountability and responsiveness in ways that traditional media channels cannot replicate.

Technology support segmentation larger audience precision. Through data analytics, organization can understand group which public is most affected or most vocal in crisis. Approach This in line with situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) from Coombs, (2013), which emphasizes importance adapt response based on perception and attribution public. With Thus, the message conveyed can more relevant, empathetic, and appropriate target. However Thus, the use of technology must still balanced with approach humanist so that communication No lost touch emotional. Utilization technology in communication—including moment crisis indeed increase speed, accuracy, and range message. However, if no balanced with approach humanist, communication risky become stiff, cold, and lost meaning emotional which is what the public really needs. This is where importance balance between high-tech and high-touch. In conceptual, communication No just a transfer of information, but also a process of building meaning and relationships.

Behavior public in media must be fully understood by decision makers decision, because at the moment this media has changed become message That himself. Marshall McLuhan, (2017) once confirm that “the medium is the message,” which means technology as a medium indeed influence method message understood. McLuhan argued that every medium has characteristics unique that changes structure experience humans. For example, print media push pattern linear and individualistic thinking, while electronic media create simultaneous and collective connectedness. This is what he call as “extension” effect humans (extensions of man), where technology expand function senses human like television that expands vision or expanding phone hearing.

In context Nowadays, McLuhan's thoughts are very relevant for understand phenomenon such as social media, algorithms, and digital communication. For example, the way people communicate on platforms like Instagram or TikTok is not only determined by what they are convey, but also by visual format, speed, and logic the platform's algorithm. This shows that digital media forms style more communication short, visual, and emotional. The presence of the internet does not only change method information spread, but also change pattern relation socio-cultural work, until structure power. In context in this, McLuhan saw the media as agent transformation social. If associated with communication crisis or communication organization, McLuhan's idea reminds that media selection (e.g. social media vs. official press conference) will influence How message accepted and interpreted by the public.

Therefore that, communication strategy no Enough only designing the right message, but it also has to be considering the medium used. However, in context crisis, public no only need

fast information, but also empathy, caring, and presence emotional from organization. Approach humanist become important Because crisis always involving dimensions psychological. According to Coombs, (2013) in framework Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), response organization No Enough only factual, but also must be consider perception, emotion, and attribution public to crisis. This means that the use of technology such as AI, chatbots, or automation communication must still accompanied by message that shows not quite enough responsibility and empathy.

Although thus, management crisis in the era of viral and cancel culture is not let go from various challenge. One of the challenge main is height expectation public to transparency and accountability. The public does not Again easy accept explanations that are normative or defensive. In addition, digital culture tends to reactive and emotional often make crisis develop with fast without give room for clarification. In overall, management crisis reputation in the era of viral and cancel culture demands a more approach strategic, adaptive, and relationship-oriented. The organization does not only sued for respond crisis with fast, but also must capable build transparent, empathetic, and responsible communication answer. In situation this, success management crisis no only determined by ability control information, but also by the ability understand dynamics public and building return trust that has been disturbed.

Management program crisis reputation in face cancel culture must built based on three main pillars, namely speed, empathy, and action real (action). Speed become factor important Because organization sued for quick respond before narrative negative develop and master opinion public. In addition to being fast, organizations must also capable show empathy with understand emotions and anxiety public, not only focus on facts or defense self solely. Besides that, public No only need verbal statements, but also actions real that shows existence change and responsibility answer organization to problems that occur.

In face situation cancel culture, organization can apply various strategic programs as form management crisis reputation. One of them is Digital Early Warning & Social Listening Programs, namely programs that aim to detect potential crisis since early through social media monitoring in real-time across platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok. Through this program, organizations can do analysis sentiment public good positive, negative, and neutral and identify potential accounts, communities, or influencers enlarge escalation issue. With detection early said, the organization own opportunity more big for take step preventive before crisis develop more wide.

In addition, organizations also need to apply Rapid Response & Holding Statement Protocol. In situation cancel culture, speed response become very crucial Because delay often interpreted public as form indifference. Therefore that, organization need quick compile holding statement in One until the first three hours after issue appears. Statement beginning the should confess existence problem without behave defensive as well as convey that investigation currently done in a way serious. This step important for show that organization present, listening, and responsible answer to developing situation.

If organization proven do error, then approach Empathy-Based Apology & Accountability Programs becomes very important. Apologies must done in a way sincere and delivered directly by the leader organization as form not quite enough moral responsibility. In this process, the organization need confess error without blame other parties as well show commitment for do repair real. In framework Situational Crisis Communication Theory

(SCCT), Coombs, (2013) emphasizes that crisis with level attribution not quite enough high responsibility requires a rebuild strategy like request apology and compensation For restore trust public.

However Thus, the request Sorry just no Enough If No followed with action concrete. Therefore that, organization need operate Corrective Action & Transparency Programs that emphasize importance change real and transparent to public. This step can realized through change internal policies, granting sanctions or reprimand to parties involved, as well as publication periodically regarding the ongoing repair process done organization. Example its implementation including revision of communication SOPs as well as training repeat employee related issues sensitive to errors similar No return happen in the future.

For restore trust public in a way emotional, organizations can also operate Humanized Communication Campaign. Approach This put aspect humanity as the core of communication Because in phenomenon cancel culture, emotions public often more dominant compared to fact objective. Organizations can make a personal clarification video, convey story regarding the ongoing repair process done, as well as involving voice employee or community in the communication process. A more personal and humanistic approach assessed more effective in build return proximity emotional with public. Furthermore, W. Coombs, (2022) argue that in extreme crisis conditions, where public outrage is at its highest, organizational communication must extend beyond factual correction to address the moral and relational dimensions of the crisis through sustained, empathetic, and accountable engagement.

Besides communication One direction, the organization also needs build dialogue with public through Stakeholder Engagement & Community Dialogue. Approach This aim build return legitimacy social organization through participatory and open communication. Its implementation can in the form of discussion with community impacted, collaboration with figure public or experts, as well as provision of a question and answer forum answer Good both online and offline. With the existence of open dialogue, organization can show willingness for hear aspirations public at a time build return relationship that had disturbed consequence crisis.

After crisis start subside organization still need do effort recovery reputation through Reputation Recovery & Repositioning Programs. This program aim build repeat image organization in a way gradually through campaign values (values campaign), implementation of relevant CSR programs with issue crisis, as well as rebranding strategies more communication positive and adaptive. This step important for show that organization no only focus on recovery term short but also has commitment term long in repair quality connection with public.

Ultimately, in this digital era this, reputation organization no only determined by what is done organization, but also by how public feel the response given. Therefore that, approach humanist become the same importance with data-driven and technology-driven strategies. Success management crisis No Again only depends on ability control information, but also on the ability organization in build empathy, trust, and relationships emotional with public in the middle dynamics very fast and sensitive digital communication.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of cancel culture in the digital era has fundamentally transformed the nature of reputational crises, making them more rapid, complex, and difficult to control. Driven by the widespread use of social media and the participatory nature of digital communication, public opinion can be formed and disseminated within a very short period of time, often leading to significant reputational, social, and economic consequences for individuals and organizations. As digital audiences increasingly exercise collective influence in enforcing social norms, organizations can no longer rely solely on traditional approaches to crisis management. The study highlights that reputational crises in the era of virality and cancel culture typically evolve through interconnected stages, beginning with a triggering event, followed by rapid information dissemination, public opinion formation, social pressure, crisis escalation, and ultimately tangible consequences.

Throughout this process, social media functions as a powerful catalyst that amplifies public reactions and accelerates the spread of information. Consequently, organizations must recognize that managing public perception has become as important as managing the crisis itself. Effective reputation crisis management requires a strategic, adaptive, and relationship-oriented approach. The findings emphasize that successful crisis responses are not determined solely by the speed of communication but also by transparency, accountability, empathy, and a genuine commitment to corrective action. Drawing on the principles of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Restoration Theory, organizations should prioritize timely responses, sincere apologies when appropriate, transparent communication, and meaningful corrective measures to rebuild public trust.

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