

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF PT AIRMAS PERKASAIN IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Article history

Received : January, 28
2022

Revised : September, 25
2022

Accepted : September, 30
2022

Keywords

Keyword_1 :

Communication Strategy

Keyword_2 :

Communication Strategy
Effectiveness

Keyword_3 :

Communication Media

Keyword_4 : External
Stakeholders

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has spread throughout the world, poses a challenge for business people in implementing a communication strategy to reach out to their stakeholders. In addition to maintaining and enhancing the company's good name in public, a communication strategy is also useful for improving relationships with company stakeholders, both internal and external stakeholders. This research was conducted using descriptive qualitative research methods, based on the interactional communication strategy by Wilbur Schramm. The results of the research findings show that the implementation of the communication strategy carried out by PT Air Mas Perkasa uses the communication media Instagram, Youtube, Zoom, and interpersonal communication in improving relationships with stakeholders, especially external stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic. The feedback obtained after using social media as a company communication medium is public awareness about PT Air Mas Perkasa.

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1. Introduction

In running its business, a company or organization needs a number of appropriate strategies to increase sales revenue, improve good relations with stakeholders, and so on. Communication strategies are important to have and develop in an organization or company. Because, if the company or organization has, and can carry out the right communication strategy and in accordance with the company's goals, then the company can have a good image in the eyes of the public. Communication strategy is a way to explain and promote the communication vision between two interlocutors to reach an understanding of the message that has been conveyed (Liliweri, 2011 p.240).

When the situation and conditions are normal, a company or organization can carry out various kinds of communication strategy activities to create a good image of the company. Before entering 2020, PT Air Mas Perkasa had already made a work program plan for the

next one year. However, since January 2020 a new virus emerged which later resulted in a pandemic in the world. This pandemic is called COVID-19 which has hit almost all countries in the world, including Indonesia.

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has various impacts on Indonesia. Under these conditions, the government issued a new rule, namely PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) where this rule was made to limit the space for people to move so they don't do a lot of activities outside the home. With this policy, it causes business people and businesses to feel very disturbed and hit in carrying out their business activities because they are hindered by the new regulations issued by the government.

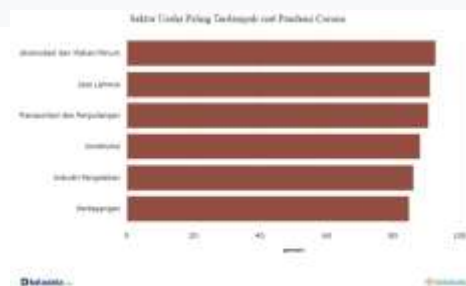


Figure 1 : The Most Affected Business Sector During the COVID-19 Pandemi

Source : <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2020/09/15/6-sektor-usaha-paling-terdampak-saat-pandemi-corona#>, on June, 21 2021.

The business sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic include households, MSMEs, corporations, and the financial sector. Ramadhan (2020) stated that the Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani Indrawati stated that there were four sectors most affected by COVID-19, namely the households, the MSME sector, the corporate sector, and the financial sector.

The corporate sector in which apart from the business sector which includes economic activities, there are also communication activities within companies affected by COVID-19. Communication activities in the company also changed during the pandemic. Communication changes that occur in a company are also supported by increasingly developing communication technology.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals' habits of communicating and interacting with others using physical encounters need to be avoided. Face-to-face communication and interaction as much as possible is replaced with meetings through internet-based online applications or commonly referred to as virtual meetings and social media facilities such as Instagram and YouTube. The change in communication methods is considered to be a new challenge and problem for most people in the world, including business actors.

Before the pandemic, humans could communicate directly by face to face or non-verbal communication. According to Woods (in Yuliarti, 2020, p. 17) Nonverbal communication is communication that is carried out between two or more people directly in face-to-face communication.

However, due to the COVID-19 virus which has caused many changes, it requires us to learn and adapt to new ways of communication, namely through online. Where we can not communicate face to face directly, but we can communicate via video calls. Whether it's for interpersonal communication, communication carried out within a company or organization, as well as in establishing relationships with external parties. The use of social media as a

medium for both conducting interpersonal communication activities and improving relations with external parties carried out by the company has also increased due to COVID-19.

Communication activities within the company have been disrupted due to COVID-19. Researchers are interested in examining how a company's strategy is to improve relationships during a pandemic, especially communication activities with External Stakeholders. In the company's communication activities with External Stakeholders, Public Relations practitioners are needed to bridge the gap between the company and the External Stakeholders. The role of Public Relations practitioners in a company is the key to the success of a company in creating good company relationships with their stakeholders. Where, if the company has good relations with the public and external parties, then the company can achieve the goals of the communication strategy that has been planned by the company's Public Relations practitioner.

During a pandemic like this, there are several things that need to be adjusted so that the company's communication with External Stakeholders is maintained. So have a good relationship with the public and external parties. One of the roles of the company's Public Relations practitioner is to maintain a well-established communication flow between a company and the public.

Prior to COVID-19 in Indonesia, PT Air Mas Perkasa's Public Relations practitioners were able to carry out various communication strategies to create a good image of the company. Such as through CSR programs, making live talk shows and seminars, and so on. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, all communication strategies that have been made by Public Relations practitioners must be turned into online activities to improve the image of a company. Of course, conditions like this are a challenge for Public Relations practitioners/professionals in carrying out their duties, and how they improve relations with External Stakeholders in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. In this case, the researcher wants to know what communication strategies are being carried out and what communication media are used by Public Relations practitioners at the PT Air Mas Perkasa company to carry out these communication strategies during the pandemic.

2. Method

This study will use qualitative methods. Qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning of an individual or group that is considered a problem. One of the qualitative research processes can be done by interviewing both research participants and participants in research asking general to specific questions.

This research will use descriptive method. Descriptive method is a method to examine a group of people, objects, conditions, systems of thought, or an event in the present. The descriptive method aims to create a systematic, factual, and accurate description, description of the facts, nature, and relationships between the phenomena being studied (Nazir 2017, p. 43).

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the research above, it can be seen that in carrying out a Public Relations communication strategy to improve relations, especially good relations communicate between companies and External Stakeholders. Based on the research findings, the communication process carried out by PT Air Mas Perkasa is in accordance with Wilbur

Schramm's communication model, where PT Air Mas Perkasa as the sender sends messages such as the introduction of new products, product sales in the form of events such as webinars and talk shows through Youtube and Zoom channels. The meeting, which was held with PT Epson Indonesia as the receiver, where during the communication strategy, PT Air Mas Perkasa also faced noise such as frequent missed communications due to unstable internet network. As well as Public Relations practitioners PT Air Mas Perkasa can be said to have fulfilled the elements of the Two-way Symmetrical Model Public Relations model, because they have carried out two-way communication with PT Epson Indonesia and emphasized the willingness to adapt to each other due to changes in communication between the company and its public, where face-to-face communication needs to be avoided and replaced by virtual communication. One of the aims of the webinar was to promote the latest products, and to gain mutual benefits, which can be seen from the routine two-way communication of PT Air Mas Perkasa in implementing a virtual communication strategy with External Stakeholders to improve relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic, so that PT Air Mas Perkasa and PT Epson Indonesia have the same understanding. In contrast to the Two-way Asymmetrical Public Relations model according to Grunig and Hunt, in this model information, feedback, and benefits are only obtained by one party, while the other party only gets little or no benefit.



Figure 2 :PT Air Mas Perkasa webinar banner

Source : Company Internal Data, on March 25, 2021

The banner above shows the schedule of events, discussion topics, as well as resource persons that will be discussed in the PT Air Mas Perkasa webinar with PT Epson Indonesia. Where this activity is proof that PT Air Mas Perkasa carries out symmetrical two-way communication because both PT Air Mas Perkasa and PT Epson Indonesia are both willing to adapt to each other with changes to virtual communication.



Figure 3 : PT Air Mas Perkasa Webinar Activities

Source : Company Internal Data, on March 25, 2021

The webinar activity with PT Epson Indonesia was successfully attended by more than 100 participants, which is proof that many people are interested in the webinar held between PT Air Mas Perkasa and PT Epson Indonesia. The feedback that PT Air Mas Perkasa got after the seminar was getting sponsorship funds from PT Epson Indonesia, increasing good relations with External Stakeholders, and getting a good corporate image from PT Epson Indonesia and other PT Epson Indonesia public.

In this study, where researchers examined PT Air Mas Perkasa in improving relations with PT Epson Indonesia as an External Stakeholder, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, several stages of problem solving communication strategies were needed to achieve organizational goals.

In the first stage of the public relations communication strategy, namely, Defining the problem (or opportunity). Where at this stage both PT Air Mas Perkasa as a company and PT Epson Indonesia as a brand of the company's External Stakeholders, both agree that the problem faced is the difficulty of communicating directly, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. So, what usually companies and brands can do offline meetings and events can now be replaced with virtual meetings via Zoom.

Meanwhile, the problem faced by both the company and the brand as an External Stakeholder is the frequent occurrence of missed communication when conducting virtual meetings due to the sometimes unstable internet network, and often turning off the camera during virtual meetings. Sometimes companies also like to be refused to do virtual meetings with brands because they don't have good time management, so that several virtual meetings occur at the same time or the time is too close. In addition, the impact felt both from the company side and the brand itself is the declining sales side compared to before the pandemic.

At the stage of the second Public Relations communication strategy is Planning and programming. Where the Public Relations communication strategy that has been carried out by PT Air Mas Perkasa to improve relations with External Stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic is to improve interpersonal relationships, by sending hampers during holidays, holding face-to-face meetings by implementing health protocols, and communicate online through social media such as Instagram to share information on communication activities broadcast via Zoom or Youtube. Through Zoom or Youtube, companies and brands carry out communication activities such as talk shows and webinars.

The long-term plan that is expected to occur between PT Air Mas Perkasa and the brand, one of which is PT Epson Indonesia is to hold offline seminars Back by implementing health protocols, and more often webinars with PT Epson Indonesia, in the hope of having a good communication relationship between PT Epson Indonesia as External Stakeholder with PT Air Mas Perkasa and increasing revenue both from the company side and PT Epson Indonesia as a supplier of goods.

The third stage of the Public Relations communication strategy is Taking action and communicating. Where at this stage the Public Relations communication strategy that has been carried out by PT Air Mas Perkasa during the COVID-19 pandemic in improving relations with External Stakeholders is the first interpersonal communication. Where face-to-face interpersonal communication is carried out, which before the pandemic was usually done every two weeks, now after the COVID-19 pandemic has changed to at least once a month. Followed by using social media such as Youtube and Zoom meetings to hold webinars or talk shows with PT Epson Indonesia as an External Stakeholder on a regular basis every

two months a day, where invitations to participate in the event are usually distributed via Instagram and e-mail blast, the last one is the result of the webinar and talkshow activities that are distributed to media partners, both print and electronic media portals in the form of press releases so that news of the activities are published in their news portals. Which results in a positive company image and an increase in brand sales thereby creating a mutually beneficial relationship. And all communication media used are interconnected and cannot be separated.

However, according to PT Air Mas Perkasa and PT Epson Indonesia as one of the External Stakeholders, it is acknowledged that using the Zoom meeting application is more effective to use because the communication tends to be two-way, and each party can easily communicate directly. Where if there are customers who ask about more specific things, the brand itself can immediately answer it and the company as an intermediary can also easily withdraw the question data when finished conducting a virtual meeting. For if there are unanswered questions, the company, namely PT Air Mas Perkasa, can directly send it to the brand to be answered. Unlike Youtube, where communication tends to be one-way, where customers or prospective customers can only ask questions via the chat column, and cannot ask questions by speaking directly using the microphone.

The last stage in the public relations communication process is evaluating the program. Where in this stage to find out what feedback can be obtained after completing all stages of the Public Relations communication strategy. At this stage, the feedback that PT Air Mas Perkasa gets from the brand is getting marketing funds or sponsorship funds, then the feedback that PT Air Mas Perkasa gets from the public is a good company image and the public knows PT Air Mas Perkasa better, because when using Youtube and Zoom meetings as communication media, the public reach can be wider than if PT Air Mas Perkasa conducts offline seminars with brands that come from city to city and the company's revenue increases due to collaboration with external parties. However, PT Air Mas Perkasa lacks coordination with other divisions, causing frequent missed communication between divisions.

Meanwhile, PT Epson Indonesia received feedback from its users or customers that two-way communication and increased sales can occur, because it uses Zoom communication media. Because so far PT Epson Indonesia cannot sell and interact with customers directly. It has to be through intermediaries, such as when there are webinars or talk shows, new brands can communicate with customers to offer the products they offer so as to increase the flow of buying and selling between PT Epson Indonesia and its customers.

4. Conclusion

PT Air Mas Perkasa has innovated in carrying out communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely by conducting online talk shows and webinars through Zoom Meetings and Youtube. Where during the communication strategy activities the relationship between PT Air Mas Perkasa and external stakeholders increased as evidenced by the company getting marketing funds and sponsorship funds from external parties, and the company gaining wider awareness in a short time because of using social media, and increasing good relations with external stakeholders. Meanwhile, an external party, namely PT Epson Indonesia, succeeded in increasing product sales, which before collaborating with PT Air Mas Perkasa to conduct webinars and talk shows decreased and established good relations with PT Air Mas Perkasa.

PT Air Mas Perkasa has also implemented a communication strategy in accordance with the communication model following the Wilbur Schramm communication model, where during the research, researchers found a circular communication pattern such as the Wilbur Schramm communication model, where PT Air Mas Perkasa and PT Epson Indonesia could carry out symmetrical communication simultaneously. two-way, both willing to adjust to changes in communication that occur between the company and the public and receive each other's feedback that has been given, used by the company to improve again in future events, so that communication occurs continuously. And the Public Relations practitioner of PT Air Mas Perkasa has fulfilled the elements of the Public Relations model proposed by Grunig and Hunt, namely the Two-way Symmetrical model. It can be seen that during the communication strategy, PT Air Mas Perkasa and PT Epson Indonesia have the will to adapt to each other due to changes in communication between the company and the public.

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