

# Public's Attribution vs Punitive Behavior in Indonesian Public Relations Practice

Rachmat Kriyantono, Yuyun Agus Riani, Rizky Ika Safitri

Universitas Brawijaya  
Jalan Veteran, Malang 65145  
Email: rachmat\_kr@ub.ac.id

**Abstract:** *The research aims to test situational crisis communication and attribution theories in Indonesian context. Crisis threats companies' reputation and affects the public's attribution which will lead to the creation of punitive behavior from the public towards the organization. The study used a quantitative approach with experimental method and content analysis in the pre-research. Involving 90 respondents, the research finds that mass media influences public's attribution within the experimental group who were given positive and negative news. The research shows that the crisis history and the relational reputation determine the public attribution toward the initial crisis responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *attribution theory, global challenge, public's attribution, punitive behavior, situational crisis communication theory*

**Abstrak:** *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji situational crisis communication dan teori atribusi dalam konteks Indonesia. Krisis akan mengancam reputasi perusahaan karena publik akan menemukan penyebab krisis melalui media massa dan memengaruhi atribusi publik, sehingga publik akan melakukan penilaian lalu menghukum organisasi tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode eksperimental dan analisis isi dalam tahap pra penelitian. Melibatkan 90 responden, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa media massa memengaruhi atribusi publik untuk kelompok eksperimen, yaitu kelompok yang diberikan berita positif dan negatif. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sejarah krisis dan reputasi relasi menentukan atribusi publik terhadap tanggung jawab krisis awal.*

**Kata Kunci:** *atribusi publik, perilaku menghukum, perubahan global, teori atribusi, teori komunikasi krisis situasional*

Crisis threatens the organization's reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2010; Kriyantono, 2015) because it causes a physical and non-physical disruption, such as a life threatening event, causing injury or loss of life, and destructive to a system of the organization and the community's environment as a whole (Duke & Masland,

2002; Kouzmin, 2008). According to Spillan (as cited in Claeys, Cauberghe & Barton, 2010), no organization can avoid crisis. The changes during crisis can affect the way stakeholders interact with the organization (Coombs, 2007b, p. 163). A poor relationship between an organization and public can trigger confrontation. This occurs when public expresses its outrage

due to its dissatisfaction with the company's operations. As a result, unmanageable crisis will damage reputation. Crisis can be a turning point to reach positive goal (Kriyantono, 2015), on the other hand, a planned crisis management can maintain good reputation in the middle of marketplace tight competition (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007a; Miller, 1999; Kriyantono, 2015).

Devlin (2007, p. 1) stated, "crisis management is special measures taken to solve problems caused by a crisis". This implies that a crisis might involve a lack of information and failure to provide and control the flow of information accurately and efficiently (Duhe, 2005; Kriyantono, 2012; Wigley & Zhang, 2011). The activities to manage information to address a crisis is called crisis communication. Communication is blood of organization (Harjana, 2000; Kriyantono, 2014), therefore, communication is also foundation of any crisis activities which also mentioned by Coombs (2010, p. 25) that "communication is the essence of crisis management".

At first, communication crisis research was mostly conducted in management study, such as in Coombs, 2010; Duhe, 2005; Dyer, 1995; Jeong, 2009; Kriyantono, 2012; Kriyantono, 2015; Maggart, 1994; Wigley & Zhang, 2011). But, then followed by the public relations studies (Coombs, 2010). Public relations is a management function in communication (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2011; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), so its duty to collect, process, and relay information required addressing a crisis.

Hence, public relations research makes crisis communication as a main point in crisis management research (Coombs, 2010).

One of prominent crisis communication theories is Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by W. Timothy Coombs. The theory is rooted from Weiner's Attribution Theory, which appears in its premise, "crisis are negative events stakeholders will make attributions about crisis responsibility, and those attributions will affect how stakeholders interact with the organization in crisis" (Coombs, 2010, p. 38). In the public relations field, the theories explain how stakeholders react toward the organization's crisis response in order to protect the reputation during crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007b; Coombs, 2010; Jeong, 2009) because SCCT research focuses on public (Coombs, 2010). However, most research focuses on the organization centered approach rather than a public approach (Choi & Lin, 2009) although SCCT has often been overlooked (Kriyantono, 2012). The current research collaborate SCCT and Attribution Theory to investigate the role of mass media to create public's attribution toward mud flow crisis. Finally, the attribution determines how the public's assessment to responsible person and impact on the punitive behavior of public toward the organization.

The research was inspired by Jeong's (2009) study about how public attribution is affected by public punitive behavior toward Samsung's oil spill in South Korea. Jeong finds that public who read good news about

Samsung's histories attributed that the accident was not an intentional mistake and they did not claim the company to take responsibility. On the other hand, the public who read bad news about Samsung's perceived that the oil spilled was occurred from the company's wrongdoing, so they demanded Samsung to take full responsibility.

The SCCT and Attribution Theory are part of western academic discussion. Both theories provide normative guides to bring the companies to success in dealing with crisis in order to maintain good reputation. In global challenges, the companies need good reputation to survive the competition (Regester & Larkin, 2008). However, it is interesting to evaluate whether the premise still can be applied or not due to the different of crisis type. Many SCCT and Attribution Theory research focus on crisis, which the sources are illuminate. For example, Samsung's crisis was because oil spilled in the ocean from Samsung's tanker. How if the cause of crisis is not fully clear and debatable, like mud flow crisis in Sidoarjo? At the beginning until today, there has been dispute of the cause and the actor who should be responsible to deal with the crisis. The victims and some academics perceive that the mud flow eruption was triggered by drilling mistake by the company (Lapindo Inc.). However, the government, the company and other academics perceived that it triggered by a natural disaster or earthquake. The Indonesian courts decided that Lapindo Inc. was not guilty by stating that it was a natural phenomenon. The government

finally decided that the company is responsible to pay compensation for the victims in the disaster zone 1 and 2, while the government will pay other victims who live outside those areas. It can be said that the cause triggering the crisis are still not clear: intentional or natural disaster because the eruption source is beneath of the earth.

Therefore, the researcher determined research questions:

- (1) How the effect of news media type about Lapindo Inc. to the public's attribution towards the responsible actor on positive experimental group, negative experimental group, and control group?
- (2) How the effect of the public's attribution to punitive behavior toward Lapindo Inc.?

The crisis mud flow was one of the biggest crisis in Indonesia. This crisis caused a physical and non-physical disruption such as a life threatening event which caused an injury or loss of life, and destructive to a system of the organization and the community's environment as a whole (Duke & Masland, 2002; Kouzmin, 2008). It is a physical crisis, which is also causing physical damage, and it is a non-physical crisis, which is creating serious danger to the culture and values of a particular social system. Physical damage caused the victims moved from their homes which made them missed their social-cultural life, such as social interaction, and family bonds. The mud flow has been occurring since 29 May 2006. The center of eruption was 200 meters from Lapindo's drilling activity in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Lapindo Inc. was a production-sharing contract and owned by

Bakrie Group. The main production is natural gas and exploration efforts will provide clean and cheap energy for the communities and the industries. Nowadays, the eruption has become a lake of mud and has submerged 12 villages. It compelled more than 60,000 people to leave their homes by forced displacement and resulted in 14 deaths. However, the crisis has not been solved completely while the compensation payments have not conducted properly by Lapindo in the past eight years since the first crisis. Some of the victims have not been receiving the compensation and there is a clear lack of information about when the payments will be completed.

SCCT used to explain the reaction of the public to crisis and the public relation strategy. The public has a particular attribution about the crisis that determines the company's reputation. Therefore, this theory tries to examine some aspects of the crisis that influence the public's attribution (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b). SCCT emphasizes on protecting the public from damage, rather than protecting the company's reputation since the first priority is to warrant safety and survival of the public (Reynold as cited in Veil, Liu, Erickson, & Sellnow, 2005). However, in the end it will develop positive attribution of the public to the company's reputation,

It would be irresponsible to begin crisis communication by focusing on the organization's reputation. To be ethical, crisis managers must begin their efforts by using communication to address the physical and psychological concerns of the community. It is only after this foundation is established that crisis managers should turn their attentions to reputational assets (Coombs, 2007b, p. 165).

It appears that the concept of 'reputation' means that the company has 'legitimacy' which means "an organization's right to exist" (Metzler as cited in Veil, et al., 2005, p. 19; Culbertson, et al., 1993, p. 18). In short, legitimacy is approved by the community (Habermas as cited in Culbertson, et al., 1993), therefore, the public's interpretation is important to support an organization's competence (Veil, et al., 2005) as the aspect of the reputational crisis model that determines the degree of the company's reputation (Zyglidopoulos, 1999). To gain a positive interpretation, the company must satisfy the expectation of its public. Therefore, it can be said that an organization's character can be defined by its community concern. In terms of the company's reputation, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory describes three factors in a crisis situation that potentially threaten the reputation of the company. These three factors are an initial crisis responsibility, a crisis history, and a prior relational reputation. The initial crisis responsibility is the level of the public's attribution toward the company's responsibility of the crisis, whether the company is perceived to have caused the crisis or not (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b).

Thus, the public attribution is determined by how the crisis is being framed. Druckman (as cited in Coombs, 2007b) described that there are two types of frames. The mass media frames are created by the mass media (i.e. news, advertising, opinion column), while the public frames are the public's knowledge to understand the environment (also see Johansson, 2007; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). It

is important to note that mass media frames have the power to influence or form public frames because messages can be frequently disseminated to the public.

The crisis frames, in addition, form three clusters of crisis, called crisis types: a victim cluster, an accidental cluster, and an intentional cluster (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b). According to Coombs (2007a; 2007b), the company is categorized as the victim cluster when the public perceives that the company is not the cause of the event. In other words, the company is judged as being a victim of the crisis, for example earthquakes, landslides, floods, a homicide within the company, or product sabotage. The accidental cluster emerges if the public considers that the event is accidentally caused by the company. In other words, the company is perceived as not deliberately causing the event. However, an intentional cluster occurs when the public decides that the event happened because of the company's mistakes. Coombs (2007b, p. 167) gave examples such as "technical-error product harm and technical-error accident" as being accidental clusters and "human-error accident, human-error product, organizational misdeed" would be considered an "intentional cluster". It can be concluded that there is a negative correlation between the victim cluster and the attribution level of crisis responsibility. On the contrary, there is a positive correlation between the intentional cluster and the attribution level of crisis responsibility (also see Cho & Gower, 2006).

Furthermore, according to Coombs (2007a; 2007b), the company's reputation is also shaped by crisis history and prior

relational reputation. Crisis history occurs when the public perceives that the company has experienced the same situation previously. Coombs (2007a, p. 3) called a crisis history "consistency". Prior relational reputation is the public's perception of how the company has cared for the public in previous situations. If the company did not treat the public well on the other occasions, it has a bad prior relational reputation (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b). Coombs (2007a, p. 3) called the prior relational reputation "distinctiveness". From the description above, it is obvious that this theory is closely linked to Weiner's Theory of Attribution (Choi & Lin, 2009; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b; Jeong, 2009) which states that a person tends to seek the information about the causes of a negative and unexpected event. The public tends to attribute the responsibility for a crisis situation to a particular person because it has an emotional response to the crisis. If the company is attributed as the cause of the event, its reputation will fall and this situation could evoke public anger. As a result, the public will probably avoid interaction with the company (Weiner, 2006 cited in Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b) which also supported by these opinion:

The core of SCCT is crisis responsibility. The attribution of crisis responsibility have significant effect on how people perceive the reputation of an organization in crisis and their effective and behavioral responses to that organization following a crisis (Coombs, 2010, p. 38).

The public has attributions toward a crisis which appeared due to the management's actions and comments dealing with a crisis. The

theory emphasizes on how ‘an organization should concentrate to the victims than focus on the organizational reputation’ (Coombs, 2007a; 2007b). By understanding crisis situation, SCCT says, a crisis manager is able to determine which strategies will maximize the reputation protection. SCCT centers to crisis manager who assesses the reputational threat. A threat is number of damages as result of crisis and will affect to the organizational reputation if the organization does not solve it immediately (Coombs, 2007a; 2007b).

SCCT offers a two steps process for assessing the crisis threat (Coombs, 2010; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b). The first step is to determine the initial crisis responsibility attached to a crisis. The initial crisis responsibility is the level of the public’s attribution toward the company’s responsibility of the crisis, whether the company is perceived to have caused the crisis or not (Claeys, et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007a). Public attribution can be categorized into three clusters of crisis, called crisis types: a victim cluster, an accidental cluster, and an intentional cluster (Coombs, 2007a; 2007b).

The second step in assessing the reputational threat involves crisis history and prior relationship reputation. The crisis history occurs when the public perceives that the company has experienced the same situation previously. The prior relational reputation is the public’s perception of how the company has cared for the public in previous situations (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b). As mentioned by Kriyantono (2012, p. 292) that “attribution is needed in a crisis situation because it is how an individual perceive a

crisis source”. The Attribution Theory was rooted from psychology, which explains, “How we understand the cause of our behavior and others” (Ardianto, 2010, p.109). Thus, the theory is applied as a guidance for crisis communication (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b; Coombs, 2010). The Attribution Theory is adopted in a crisis situation because people needs to find out the cause of the event that triggers crisis. The public’s attribution toward the cause of the event can determine emotional reaction whether he/she want to support or to punish (Littlejohn & Katherine, 2009, p.62). Therefore, the current research applied Attribution Theory as a basis to investigate the effect of public’s attribution to punitive behavior toward parties which are assumed as the cause of the crisis. If the public assesses the organization is the actor who should be responsible, the public is likely to punish. On the other hand, the public will support if it thinks that the organization is not the actor who cause the crisis.

## **METHODS**

The cluster theme considered by Jeong (2009) whom then collaborated SCCT’s clusters with the concepts of Attribution Theory by grouping initial crisis responsibility clusters into two variables: external attribution (organization as a victim) and internal attribution (organization as an actor). The current research adopted Jeong’s group of clusters to measure the influence of mass media toward the public’s attribution.

The current research focuses on the public’s attribution or the public’s perceptions toward the crisis. The public was chosen from

the public awareness, that was the public who recognizes a crisis and actively search information about it, who live outside the disaster zone 1 and 2. Although they were not victims, they are aware because they live near the disaster zone and often search information whether the mud flow to their villages. Ninety respondents agreed to participate on the research and asked to read and comprehend the information letter. They signed a consent form which they agreed as respondents. The consent form and information letter were translated into Indonesian by an accredited interpreter because all respondents are Indonesian. In addition, the researchers assured that the respondents could withdraw their participation and no penalties given. They were assured that their responses are solely to be used for the purpose of the research as part of thesis, journal or book, and that their confidentiality will be maintained. However, respondents were required to provide some personal details including date of birth, ethnicity, religion, education, and other demographic aspects. The confidentiality of respondents was ensured by assigning respondents a code consisting of either letters or numbers or a combination of these.

Every day during the crisis, the company will come under the scrutiny of the mass media. Upon reporting the crisis frequently, media makes the situation visible to the external public. The types of news will determine the type of the public's attribution toward the organization. Jeong (2009) categorized the news about crisis into two types: (1) high distinctiveness

information: history of social responsibility; (2) low distinctiveness information: history of unethical management. In this current research, the former information was called positive information and the latter was negative information. Positive information or good news was the information that supports or describes positive aspect of the company, such as some corporate social responsibility programs conducted by the company. Negative information described the company's activities, which resulted in negative impacts on the community.

Although the crisis occurred in May 2006, the crisis has not been ended completely. At present (2016), it is a dormant stage because the public's dispute about the issue slowed down but rises up again usually when commemorating this event, which is every 29 May. At this stage, basically, Lapindo Inc. is able to solve the issue or at least to make sure that the public is satisfied with the answers. So that the issue is assumed to be over until someone or the mass media revives it with new thoughts and new problems.

The research applied experimental method and chose newspaper as a tool to control the respondents' perceptions. Most of experimental research used newspaper as a controlling tool because most people receive news from newspaper (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). Pfau dan Wan (in Coombs & Holladay, 2009) described that if the people receive news from television they will focus on message sources. However, if people receive news from newspaper they will focus on message content. Therefore the content of newspaper is easier to proceed.

The respondents live in Candi District, Sidoarjo Regency that is near the disaster zone so they are aware and actively search the information. The research applied true experimental design, where the researchers can control all variables that possible to affect the experimental process (Sugiyono, 2011, p. 75), with a post-test only control design.

Based on Jeong's (2009) study, the research applied a three-group experimental design with high distinctiveness (positive group), low distinctiveness (negative group), and no information (control group) condition. In the high distinctiveness, respondents read good and favorable news about Lapindo Inc., i.e. news articles described that Lapindo has performed well in its activities. In the low distinctiveness, respondents read bad and unfavorable news about Lapindo Inc., i.e. news articles described that Lapindo has performed poorly in its activities. Then, the researcher conducted a content analysis to determine which news article can be grouped as good or bad news.

The variable of the public's attribution was defined as the perception toward the crisis responsibility, i.e. the organization or the government or other parties as the actor who take responsibility to the crisis. This variable has four item of questionnaire: (i) the mud eruption was caused by Lapindo's drilling mistake; (ii) Lapindo must be responsible on the eruption; (iii) the eruption was natural disaster; (iv) the government must be responsible on the eruption.

In addition, punitive behavior variable was defined as public's perception to punish the actor who was assumed to be responsible

with the item of questionnaire "what is the proper punishment to the actor who is responsible?". Using Validity Test on the instrument shows that there was correlation between each item toward the total score, with the score of Pearson correlations was 0.102-0.921. Then Reliability Test shows score 0.720 using Cronbach's Alpha. To answer the research questions, the researchers used One-Way Anova and Pearson Correlation.

## FINDING

Most of the respondents are males (58%), age 21-30 years old (56%), and 60% are private employees. The One-Way Anova described whether type of news affects or not to public's attribution toward the actor who must be responsible to the crisis. Each group consisted of 30 respondents. From the table 1, it can be described that a group with positive or favorable news had mean score 14.97 which was lower than negative group (15.63) and control group (15.03). Respondent who read negative or bad news gave internal attribution, i.e. Lapindo must take responsibility to the crisis because of drilling mistake.

It can be stated that manipulation of negative news affected higher than a group with manipulation of positive news. The decision making was done based on probability value (see table 2) which was 0.022. The comparison between  $sig$  and  $\alpha$  was  $0.022 > 0.05$ , so it means that "there was no value difference among positive, negative, and control groups".

In addition, table 3 described that the value of the F count was  $\leq$  the value of the F



table, i.e.  $0.896 \leq 3.101$ . It means that there is no average value different among positive, negative, and control groups. Data of negative experimental group and controlling experimental group are not different because of the strong public perceptions toward crisis. As a result, positive news did not affect public's attribution so that positive news did not affect to external attribution of the public significantly.

To answer the second research question, the researchers used Pearson correlation (Table 4).

Table 5 described that internal attribution and punitive behavior have positive correlation ( $r = 0.645$ ). The higher internal attribution, the public tends more to punish the actor. The lower internal attribution, the lower punitive behavior. The research also compared the value of the t-count with t-table or table coefficients ( $\alpha$ ). Based on t-test, the  $t\text{-count} > t\text{ table}$ :  $7.91 > 1.98$ . Based on probability,  $sig < \alpha$ :  $0.00 < 0.05$ . The results proved that "internal attribution" affected punitive behavior toward Lapindo Inc. as the actor who must take responsibility to the crisis.

**Table 1 Descriptive One-Way Anova**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Positive	30	14.97	1.608	.294	14.37	15.57	12	18
Negative	30	15.63	2.266	.414	14.79	16.48	12	20
Control	30	15.03	2.414	.441	14.13	15.93	12	20
Total	90	15.21	2.123	.224	14.77	15.66	12	20

Source: Primary data

**Table 2 Sig value of One-Way Anova**

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3.970	2	87	.022

Source: Primary data

**Table 3 Value F One-Way Anova**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.089	2	4.044	.896	.412
Within Groups	392.900	87	4.516		
Total	400.989	89			

Source: Primary data

**Table 4 Pearson Correlation of Internal Attribution**

		Punitive Behavior	Internal Attribution
Pearson Correlation	Punitive behavior	1.000	.645
	Internal Attribution	.645	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Punitive behavior	.	.000
	Internal Attribution	.000	.
N	Punitive behavior	90	90
	Internal Attribution	90	90

Source: Primary data

**Table 5 Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	1.146	.420		2.732	.008	.313	1.980
Internal Attribution	.374	.047	.645	7.912	.000	.280	.468

Source: Primary data

**Table 6 External Attributions**

		Punitive behavior	External attribution
Pearson Correlation	Punitive behavior	1.000	-.091
	External attribution	-.091	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Punitive behavior	.	.196
	External attribution	.196	.
N	Punitive behavior	90	90
	External attribution	90	90

Source: Primary data

**Table 7 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	4.618	.227		20.303	.000	4.166	5.070
Public External Attribution	-.030	.035	-.091	-.861	.392	-.100	.039

Source: Primary data

Table 6 describes the negative correlation value (r) between external attribution and punitive behavior (r= -0.047). It means that the higher external attribution, the lower punitive behavior. The researchers also compared the t-count with t-table or table coefficients ( $\alpha$ ). Based on t-test, t-count > t-table:  $-0.091 \leq 1.98$ . Based on probability,  $sig < \alpha$ :  $0.392 > 0.05$ . It means that internal attribution had positive correlation with public's punitive behavior (r = 7.91) and external attribution had negative correlation with punitive behavior (r = -0.091).

Further analysis found that internal attribution had positive correlation with

punitive behavior (r = 7.91). Conversely, external attribution had negative correlation with punitive behavior (r = 0.091). Internal attribution is positive which means the higher internal attribution of the public, the higher punitive behavior of the public. Meanwhile, the external attribution is negative means the higher external attribution, the lower punitive behavior of the public. To sum up, attribution influences punitive behavior of the public.

In term of punitive behavior towards the responsible actor, 63% respondents were positive and came from experimental group, 73% respondents from negative

experimental group said that the company should be received severe punishment for its wrongdoing, while 30% respondents from control group asked to medium punishment for the company. It can be said that majority of the respondents chose to give severe punishment for the company as a responsible actor. It related to the respondents' attribution. They attributed that crisis happened because of drilling mistake by Lapindo Inc. so that Lapindo was perceived as the responsible actor. The crisis was also attributed as intentional crisis that the accident happened because the company did mistake intentionally.

## DISCUSSION

SCCT explains that a crisis manager will be able to determine strategies to maintain reputation by understanding the public's attribution toward the responsible actor. Positive or negative attribution itself depends on the organization's responds towards the crisis. The research found that positive and negative report appeared on media affected public's attribution concerning the stakeholders which have to take fully responsibility on it. However, we knew that news tone on media built by media framing toward the crisis. Adopting Druckman (as cited in Coombs, 2007b), it can be said that the respondents who read the news will focuses on the media framing when they form their opinion by filling the questioners.

This research finds more than 50% of respondents from the experimental group positively affected by the message

from the media, while the rest (47%) from the experimental group were negatively affected. Further data defines that around 60% of the control group stated that the cause of the crisis was the drilling mismanagement activities. As a result, over 70% opinions pointed out that the company who should responsible for the mud flow crisis. These results also supported by the statement almost 40% of respondents in the experimental group which shows positively against the opinion that natural disasters as the cause of the crisis. Alike, negative group react for 34% respondent point out that the government should not take responsibility for the crisis of the mud flow in Sidoarjo, which means that the company was the party that need to take any action to solve the problem. While around 40% of the control group expressed doubt on the cause of the crisis, similar to around 30% of respondents' who state that the crisis should not be relayed on the government. To sum up, the majority of respondents assumed that the cause of the crisis was the mismanagement of the drilling business of the Lapindo Inc. It will let the attribution form that the company has to take responsibility for the crisis.

As describe above, it said that Sidoarjo Company has to responsible for the mud flow crisis. Refer to SCCT, the organization who caused the crisis is in intentionally clusters, in this matter the company have to take action if the "organization deliberately put people at risk, take action inappropriate or violate the laws/regulations" (Coombs & Holladay as cited in Coombs, 2007a).

Reflect from the research finding, it shows that the public criticizes the company, who purposely took actions that violate the rules as stated by Akbar (2007, p. 76) that "PT Medco Energi as the holder of 32% of Lapindo, has warned that the operator immediately install a safety casing diameter of 9<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>".

The hypothesis on this variable is "there is effect of the mass media toward types of public attribution of the actors which responsible for the crisis of the mud flow in Sidoarjo in all three groups (i.e. the experimental group of positive, negative experimental group, and the control group). The research finding prove that the hypothesis is rejected, in other word there is not effect to the public attribution on various types of news on mass media. This research finding was not confirming the Attribution Theory of handling crisis, which indicate that information deliver in newspapers may affect public attribution. Furthermore, attribution built by the public seems accuses the corporate to responsible and be penalized as their mismanagement causing the Sidoarjo crisis. The main reason to punish the company as the crisis happens for quite long time that shows it let negative word of mouth. As stated by Coombs & Holladay (2006), "due to the crisis, the stakeholders can disconnect or create negative word-of-mouth". As a result, public accept the negative word-of-mouth and generate attribution that the company should take responsibility for the mud flow crisis.

Regarding to SCCT, the mud flow crisis in Sidoarjo has some results in the company, Lapindo Inc., including actors

who rated public should be responsible for the crisis. Attribution actors must responsible due to the public accusing that the crisis occurred as the errors committed by Lapindo drilling (internal attribution). Public give the attribution crisis causes to the company since there was an issue in the resolution phase or dormant stage. As stated by Kriyantono (2012, p. 161), organization thought that they are capable manage their issues as they assumed over. However, in reality, the Sidoarjo mud flow crisis still several times appeared in the mass media therefore public dissatisfaction, especially victims who have not received compensation for their property.

This experimental study found little difference between negative and positive information about the company's responseto the crisis. There seems an advantage for the company to provide positive information as one form of crisis response. In spite of that, the research finding describes that it does not guarantee that the positive information delivers trough media may influence the public attribution, especially in the crisis, which happened for quite longtime such as Sidoarjo mud flow crisis.

Another reason that led the hypothesis rejected because this theory applied after the Sidoarjo mud flow crisis, which was going on for almost seven years. The researchers imply that the theory might be possible to be generalized in all cases as it showed from the experimental conducted after 7 years crisis, that the treatment on media does not have significant influence to public attribution. Unlike the research which has done by

Jeong (2009) about oil spills at sea involving Samsung which held just one month after the crisis occurs. It figured out that media able to form public attribution. Thus, it might be considered for the future research to examine crisis theory for only the crisis phenomenon, which has recently occurred so that the public still has the opportunity to build a different attribution.

The second hypothesis in this study is the influence attribution to public punishing behavior to the company who responsible for the crisis. The data describes that 63% of respondents from the experimental group respond positively and 30% of respondents of the control group clearly stated that the company as the responsible party who should be given a severe punishment. It may conclude here that the attribution of public affects the public punishing behavior. The more public attribution stating that the company is a party who has responsible for the crisis, the further the public shows the punishment behavior.

In addition, this research analysis divides into two analyses for public attribution. Firstly, internal attribution which is about the crisis caused by mismanagement of the company, and secondly, external attribution which is about the crises caused by natural disaster. The result shows that most public generate internal attributions which influence the punishment behavior to force the company takes any responsible. The higher the internal attributions made by public, the higher the punitive behavior shown by the public to the company.

Most respondents who make an external attribution tend to give neutral answer or not showing the punitive behavior. The higher the external attribution of public, the lower the punitive behavior shown by the public. On the other hand, the lower the public punitive behavior, the higher the punitive behavior shown by the public. To sum up, the attribution has an influence on the public punitive behavior though it gives little significance. Moreover, internal attributions have more influence than external attribution, however, it does not guarantee the internal attributions may affect the public punitive behavior. The number of the public punitive behavior showed that public could not positively response what the corporate done to prove their responsibility, which actually is not able to stop the negative public word-of-mouth.

The finding above confirming the Attribution Theory stated by Littlejohn (2009, p. 62) that “attribution someone about the causes and control of a situation can cause an emotional reaction that affects their willingness to help and their chances to punish”. It is proved with attribution formed by the community of sub-village Candi Sayang, the causes of the crisis and the person in charge of the crisis affecting their chances to punish those responsible. However, this Attribution Theory may help the company to see attribution built by the public about the sources and causes of crises in order to determine some factors, which might be threatening the company reputation and its image.

SCCT is used to portray the corporate communications to crisis management. In the Sidoarjo mud flow case, the company does not maximizing their crisis management so does threatening the company's reputation in the end. It shows from public opinion that sees the company as the party who has to take responsibilities. In this matter, the strategy is still required for the companies or organizations to assist the public in building their attribution of the crisis. One of the strategies could be about the usage of media to deliver positive message though in fact Lapindo might yet finds a significant results.

The findings establish the previous study from Kriyantono (2012) that based on the Situational Theory of the Public where the victims were not passive. They actively sought explanation by frequently questioning to the opinion leaders and demonstrating against the company and the government to gain information. They demanded information about social warning, compensation and solution. As result of information seeking process, this research revealed a model of communication flow among the victims. This model enhances the knowledge that the victims obtained the information particularly from personal communication among them and local opinion leaders to explore the information that they had already obtained from the mass media. The victims also admitted that there was a problematic situation as part of problem recognition, however, they did not obtain clear information and could not express their feelings because of the communication barriers or constraint

recognition, such as closed communication channels.

Therefore, there is no wonder that all respondents attributed the mud flow crisis to the intentional cluster where the company was the actor that should take responsibility to solve any problems, including giving complete compensation. In terms of the crisis history, the respondents also construed that the agreement and regulations were not obeyed many times. The payment of compensation became circuitous. Instead of giving fresh money, the company offered a new residence in the relocation scheme. The company stimulated public outrage when a thousand victims, who choose the relocation offer, signed an agreement to gain a new house earlier than those who demanded fresh money. The issues of relocation and cash money evolved into a critical stage because this situation led to disagreement among a group of the victims. As a result, there was a lack of confidence in the company and in the government. Even though some respondents admitted that they have a reasonably comfortable life after receiving compensation, they felt that the company did not take care of them well. The reasons were they felt that they lived in hardship and waited for months uncertain about their fate, however the compensation was an inherent responsibility of the company as the source the crisis and they still lost social-cultural aspects which couldn't be replaced by money.

Above all, this research convince that it is important to take into account the situation

when the crisis happened, so the company must manage media better. The most essential is by delivering any information relates to any action and response taken by the company to show its sympathy and crisis tackling for the victim and other parties affected by the crisis. Furthermore, the findings in this study indicate that during the crisis the form of positive or negative information expose in the mass media did not give a significant effect to the public opinion, except the problem solving which taken by the company for handling the victim. Last, the company better not to focus only on its reputation when the crisis occur instead of attempting the crisis quickly and properly, since it led its reputation be restored by itself.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study found that there is no effect on the attribution of public, which shows on the positive experimental group in the Dusun Candi Sayang, Sidoarjo. Positive information represent in mass media led the public attribution, which illustrates that the company was the party who need to take responsibility for the crisis. Additionally, there is no consequence on the public attribution of the experimental group. Negative or positive report on mass media has no different attribution for public regarding to the caused and the responsible party for the crisis. Alike with experimental group, the control group in this research also gives the same attribution, which accused the company was the party who has to take responsibilities on the crisis. Public believe that the drilling mismanagement causing

the crisis. Besides, there is no effect on the public attribution of the media on the negative experiment. Negative tone on media relate to the mud flow crisis gave the same result as the positive news, which indicated Lapindo as the one has resolve the problem, similar opinion stated by the control group.

There is a consequence of the public attribution; it tends to form the punitive behavior of the public. In detail, the internal attributions shows that the higher attribution formed is the higher punitive behavior presented by the public. On the other hand, the higher the external attribution is the lower punitive behavior to the company.

For future research, this research suggests to enhance Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) with the finding of this research as one discussion on the management theme. Moreover, SCCT theory is used to explain each cluster with its strategy in accordance to maintain the company's reputation, thus the coming research better to focus on applying SCCT on identifying the responsible stakeholders of the crisis as well as the strategy to reputation restoration management.

The Attribution Theory developed from psychology science, so it is very possible to be discussed in the communication management themes in order to determine the company management dealing with particular punitive behavior of the public. Especially, for Lapindo Inc. as the main stakeholder, which associated with the crisis, it may suggest to Lapindo Inc. for focusing only on activities to generate

good relations with all keys stakeholders that might be supporting them to come over with solution instead of concern most on the company's reputation.

It is clearly seen from this research that printed mass media take main role on supporting communication management during the crisis. That shows from the public punitive behavior as the impact of the attribution from the printed mass media. To continue this research, it may recommend to conduct another research which purposes to discover the uses of the electronic media treatment for the relatively a new crisis. In addition, the limitation of this research was the experiment only conducted on very little external public, as ignoring some related data such as education, occupation, thus it is suggested to describe further this matter on the coming research. A qualitative research, such as an ethnography research is strongly recommended for future research in order to explore the thick description about the public's insight during the crisis as well as how a crisis management is conducted by the management. It is also suggested to conduct a content analysis with the aim to compare the attributions of mainstream media, online media, alternative media, and the company's media. Content analysis may be able to rich the understanding about how the crisis framed by the actors involved in it.

## REFERENCES

Ardianto, E. (2010). *Metodologi penelitian untuk public relations kuantitatif dan kualitatif*. Bandung, Indonesia: Simbiosis Rekatama Media.

- Cho, S. H., & Gower, K. K. (2006). Framing effect on the public's response to crisis: Human interest frame and crisis type influencing responsibility and blame. *Public Relations Review, 32*(4), 420-422
- Choi, Y., & Lin, Y. (2009). Consumer responses to Mattel product recalls posted online bulletin boards: Exploring two types of emotion. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 21*, 198-207.
- Claeys, A.S., Cauberghe, V. & Barton, P.V. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the situational crisis communication theory and the moderating effects of locus of control. *Public Relations Review, 36* (3), 256-262.
- Coombs, W.T. & Holladay, S.J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly, 16*, 165-186.
- Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, S. J. (2009). Further explorations of post-crisis communication: Effects of media and response strategies on perceptions and intentions. *Public Relations Review, 35*, 1-6.
- Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, S. J. (2010). Examining the effects of mutability and framing on perceptions of human error and technical error crises: Implications for Situational Crisis Communication Theory. In W. Timothy Coombs, & Sherry J. Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communications*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007a). Attribution theory as a guide for post-crisis communication research. *Public Relations Review, 33*, 135-139.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007b). Protecting organization reputation during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review, 163-176*.
- Coombs, W. T. (2010). Parameters for crisis communication. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Crisis*



- Communications*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Culbertson, H. M., Jeffers, D. W., Stone, D. B., & Terrell, M. (1993). *Social, political, and economic contexts in public relations: Theory and cases*. New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publisher.
- Cutlip, S.M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (2006). *Effective public relations* (B. S. Tri Wibowo, Trans. 9 ed.). Jakarta, Indonesia: Kencana Prenada Media.
- Devlin, E. S. (2007). *The crisis management planning and execution*. New York, USA: Auerbach Publication.
- Duhe, S. F. (2005). The source behind the first days of the anthrax attacks: What can practitioners learn? *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50(1), 7-12.
- Duke, S., & Masland, L. (2002). Crisis communication by the book. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 47(3), 30-35.
- Dyer, S. C. (1995). Getting people into the crisis communication plan. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40(3), 38-41.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. New York, USA: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.
- Harjana, A. (2000). *Audit komunikasi, teori dan praktek*. Jakarta, Indonesia: PT Grasindo.
- Jeong, S. H. (2009). Public's responses to an oil accident: A test of the attribution theory and situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review*, 35, 307-309.
- Johansson, C. (2007). Goffman's sociology: An inspiring resource for developing public relations theory. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 275-280.
- Kouzmin, A. (2008). Crisis management in crisis?. *Journal of Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 30(2), 155-183.
- Kriyantono, R. (2012). Measuring a company reputation in a crisis situation: An ethnography approach on the situational crisis communication theory. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(9), 214-223.
- Kriyantono, R. (2014). *Teknik praktis riset komunikasi: disertai contoh praktis riset media, public relations, advertising, komunikasi organisasi, komunikasi pemasaran*. (7<sup>th</sup> Ed). Jakarta, Indonesia: Kencana Prenada Media.
- Kriyantono, R. (2015). *Public relation & crisis management: Critical public relations approach, critical ethnography, and qualitative*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Kencana Prenada Media.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2009). *Encyclopedia of communication theory*. California, USA: Sage.
- Maggart, L. (1994). Bowater incorporated: A lesson in crisis communications. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 39(3), 29-31.
- Miller, K. (1999). Issues management: The link between organization reality and public perception. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 44(2), 5-10
- Regester, M., & Larkin, J. (2008). *Risk issues and crisis management in public relations: A casebook of best practice*. London, UK: Kogan Page.
- Sugiyono. (2011). *Metode penelitian kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung, Indonesia: Alfabeta.
- Veil, Liu, Erickson, & Sellnow, S. R., Liu, M., Erickson, S., & Sellnow, T. (2005). Too hot to handle: Competency constrains character in Chi-Chi's Green Onion crisis. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 50(4), 19-22.
- Wigley, S., & Zhang, W. (2011). A study of PR practitioner use of social media in crisis planning. *Public relations Journal*, 5(3).
- Zyglidopoulos, S. (1999). *Three essays on reputational crises*. Doctor of Philosophy, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

