



Public Perceptions of The Indonesian National Police Throughcounter-Narratives in Image Rehabilitation Following The August 28, 2025, Protest Tragedy In Jakarta

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Abstract: In response to mounting public pressure and criticism on social media, the Indonesian National Police (Polri) implemented a counter-issue strategy by posting apologies, messages of empathy and details of various religious activities on the Instagram account @divisihumaspolri. This formed part of their response to the tragic incident during a demonstration involving aBrimobtactical vehicle, which resulted in the death of an online motorcycle taxi driver. This tragedy triggered a crisis of public trust in the National Police Chief. This study aims todeterminethe extent to which efforts to restore the institution’s image have been carried out using a counter-issue strategy and how the public perceives these efforts. Interview techniques, accompanied by observation of posts on the Instagram account @divisihumaspolri and a literature review, were employed in this study, which is based on a descriptive qualitative method. To ensure the validity of the research results, source triangulation was employed as a data analysis technique. The main finding of this study is that the public perceives the National Police’s communication as still being defensive and lacking transparency. The communication strategies implemented have not been fully effective in restoring the National Police’s image and public trust, asevidencedby negative public sentiment.

Keywords: Perceptions, Society, Counter-Narrative, Image Restoation,

Introduction

Demonstrations are a fundamental human right of the people, protected by law, as stated by the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnasham); this serves as a call for the government to provide space for such demonstrations, in line with the complex social and political dynamics in Indonesia.

Public attention on 28 August 2025 was focused on events in the Pejamongan area of Jakarta. Initiated by the Labor Party and a number of labor unions in front of the Indonesian House of Representatives and People’s Consultative Assembly building, protesters called for the abolition of the outsourcing system and improved welfare for workers. As reported by Tempo.co (2025), The protest, which focused on issues of justice, the rule of law, and

freedom of speech, was attended by various segments of the public, including college students. A riot then broke out, during which a Brimob armored vehicle was seen allegedly running over an online motorcycle taxi driver who was participating in the demonstration.

Footage captured by local residents also went viral on social media, sparking discussions on TikTok, Instagram, X, and various other platforms. Naturally, this elicited a wide range of reactions, predominantly criticism. Public attention has turned to the professionalism and transparency of the police force due to the spread of this video, even before the National Police had a chance to issue a clarification or press release regarding the matter. Public communication has come under scrutiny as a result of this incident. The public forms or shapes opinions on various matters through the spaces created by social media, which represents a form of development in the digital age ([Nasrullah, 2018](#)). Counter-narratives, as part of an institution's efforts to manage information, are a crucial step in ensuring that the narrative shaping public discourse remains on track.

Press conferences and other communication activities by the agency are a form of implementing a counter-narrative as an effort to maintain public trust. As explained by Benoit (1997) Image repair strategies including corrective actions, shifting responsibility, and issuing apologies are the primary objectives of image repair for institutions or organizations facing a crisis

Literature Review

According to Herlina et al. (2023) In the book *Introduction to Communication Science*, the provision of information to influence a person's attitudes and actions through the transmission and reception of messages is defined as communication. This applies even through intermediary media, even in the absence of face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, communication practices focused on how institutions or organizations convey messages to the public are defined as public communication. Managing public trust is the primary function of public communication, including for law enforcement agencies that must interact with the public ([Herlina et al., 2023](#)).

The Public Relations Theory proposed by Grunig & Hunt (1984), In his work "Managing Public Relations", he provides an understanding of the interaction between organizations and the public through his theoretical framework. Using four models of social relations namely, press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical this study employs these models to evaluate the Indonesian National Police's public communication management regarding the demonstrations in Jakarta.

Counter-messaging, a crisis communication strategy, is an effort to respond to a crisis quickly, accurately, and consistently in order to prevent misinformation ([Coombs, 2015](#)). The use of the official social media account @divisihumaspolri on Instagram to provide information and clarification regarding the crisis served as a form of counter-narrative emplo

yed by the Indonesian National Police.

The image repair strategy proposed by Benoit (1997) This is also accompanied by a counter-issue strategy, whereby whenever an organization faces a crisis, it must take defensive measures and work to restore its image. Based on image repair strategies, there are five main approaches: denial, shifting responsibility, reducing negative impressions, corrective action, and apology. Through this theory, this study aims to evaluate efforts to restore public image through counter-issue strategies by the Indonesian National Police.

Perception is the individual process of interpreting information based on experience, social context, and personal values, as stated by Rakhmat (2018), The interpretation of a message by the public makes perception a crucial dimension in communication studies. Drawing on Perception Theory, this study seeks to assess public understanding of the Indonesian National Police's communication strategies following the demonstrations in Jakarta.

Public perception shapes an institution's image through organizational communication based on experience and social interaction, [Ardianto & Soemirat \(2010\)](#) argues that an organization's communication activities and institutional behavior shape the public perception of that organization. Informative, people-centred and interactive communication is key to building a positive image of the police, in line with the significant role social media plays in shaping public perception.

The study by [Yudananto & Damastuti \(2023\)](#) is one of many that examine the role of public communication and police public relations strategies in shaping the institution's image. It is understood that consistent messaging, delivered in an informative and empathetic manner, can shape public perception.

Publicising the police's involvement in community activities is one of the strategies for building a positive image for the organisation ([Fitri et al., 2024](#)). The suboptimal nature of efforts to restore the police force's reputation was also highlighted by a study by Rahman to & Lestari (2024) which found a lack of empathy in the aftermath of the Kanjuruhan tragedy. Public trust in the police is largely influenced by a humanistic approach in their public communications ([Nurfadila, 2025](#)). The actions of law enforcement officials are not the only major factor influencing public perception; communication and information management also play a significant role.

Research conducted by Khumayah (2024) indicates that civil servants' understanding of the Corruption Perceptions Index indicators remains suboptimal. This is due to limitations in outreach efforts, access to information, and institutional communication capacity, which ultimately hinder efforts to establish transparent and public-trusted governance. These findings confirm that the quality of an institution's information management and communication significantly influences the formation of public perception.

In line with this, [Rohman et al. \(2025\)](#) explain that the implementation of e-governm

ent and information technology can serve as important tools for enhancing transparency and accountability in public institutions. However, the effectiveness of this implementation depends heavily on the institutions' readiness to manage public communication in an open, participatory, and responsive manner. Both studies demonstrate that information transparency and effective communication strategies are key factors in building public trust in state institutions, particularly in contexts that have the potential to trigger a crisis of trust.

Research Gap

There is a gap in the literature, as previous research has primarily focused on internal rather than external institutional communication patterns, particularly regarding how the public forms perceptions of institutional communication specifically in relation to counter-issue strategies during crises. How the public perceives the Indonesian National Police's (Polri) counter-issue strategies, particularly during crises of public trust such as the recent demonstrations in Jakarta, constitutes a research gap in this study.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine public perceptions of the counter-issue strategy employed by the Indonesian National Police (Polri) in response to the August 28, 2025, demonstration in Pejompongan, Jakarta, as well as to determine how the counter-issue strategy contributed to efforts to restore the Indonesian National Police's public image following the incident.

The use of a different approach represents an innovation in this study, which seeks to understand the relationship between institutional communication and public perception in the aftermath of a crisis. Public responses and perspectives on counter-issue strategies and crisis communication are the focus of this study, particularly in relation to the demonstrations in Jakarta.

Theoretically, this study integrates three theoretical frameworks through the application of three theories, namely Public Relations Theory ([Grunig & Hunt, 1984](#)) to understand the function of two-way communication between institutions and the public, as well as Perception Theory ([Rakhmat, 2018](#)) to explain how the public interprets institutional messages and Image Repair Theory ([Benoit, 1997](#)) to see how communication strategies are used in image recovery efforts.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, as explained by Sugiyono (2019), Qualitative research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena through descriptions in words and language within their natural context.

This study was conducted as desk research, involving monitoring of the official social media account @divisihumaspolri and hybrid interviews with informants. The subjects of this study were members of the public who were aware of and followed news coverage of the demonstrations that took place on August 28, 2025. The focus of this study was the counter-narrative strategies employed by the Indonesian National Police through official channels, such as the police's official social media accounts and press conferences.

The Miles and Huberman model serves as the analytical framework for data obtained through in-depth interviews and documentary observation, as explained by Sugiyono (2019). Data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions are key stages in the data analysis process; these steps are taken to ensure data consistency. Additionally, data source triangulation is conducted alongside methodological triangulation ([Sugiyono, 2019](#)).

Purposive sampling is a method for selecting informants based on specific criteria that align with the research phenomenon ([Sugiyono, 2019](#)). In selecting informants, the criteria used were members of the public who actively follow national news and the Pejampongan demonstrations; these were then divided into two groups, the general public and students, to ensure a diversity of perspectives. The students' critical perspectives and information literacy formed the basis of this approach, whilst the general public provided a layperson's perspective.

Result and Discussion

The failure to restore public confidence in the institution is evident in the public's perception of the police's communication and clarification efforts. Rather than providing transparent explanations about the ongoing legal process, some informants stated that the National Police are "too busy trying to improve their image." Public perception of the National Police's communication strategy is dominated by distrust and disappointment.

Moral responsibility was demonstrated by the National Police Chief's actions in meeting with the victims' families and offering an apology; informants noted that the National Police had actually attempted to provide a prompt clarification, but the message conveyed was seen as merely a formality rather than a transparent account of the truth. The Indonesian National Police demonstrated one-way communication; the lack of responses or engagement with public comments and criticism, and a focus solely on providing clarifications, were the main findings of the observations made through posts by @divisihumaspolri. Public engagement tends to be overlooked, with the focus instead on conveying messages.

Based on the interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the majority of informants held negative views of the police following the demonstrations in Jakarta. They

believe that the decline in public trust in the police was triggered by initial actions that were perceived as lacking credibility and fairness. There are both internal and external factors influencing public perceptions of the police.

Internal Factor

A range of internal and external factors have contributed to the public's negative perception of the National Police. In response to this issue, the public's experiences and emotional state have been the primary internal factors. Even prior to the Pejampongan protest tragedy, some members of the public had expressed a loss of trust in the National Police due to repeatedly witnessing actions by officers deemed inconsistent with core values.

A sense of solidarity amongst fellow civilians fuelled feelings of anger and empathy, and these emotional states influenced public perception. Upon viewing footage of the incident, some informants reported feeling "pity and anger". The police's message, perceived as defensive and formal, met with rejection from the public; a sense of formality was also felt in the police's expression of apology. Emotional states act as a formative factor in shaping public perception of the content of the police's message.

External Factor

Negative sentiment in social media posts serves as evidence that the influence of the social environment and media coverage are external factors shaping public perception. Social pressure arises from a lack of trust in the police's clarifications compared to the information and narratives circulating on social media. The first thing the informants became aware of was angry-toned information. Social media and angry public comments were the first things that several informants encountered. The fact that negative messages spread far more quickly than official clarifications demonstrates that the digital space has become the primary arena for shaping public perception.

Negative sentiment in social media posts serves as evidence that the influence of the social environment and media coverage are external factors shaping public perception. Social pressure arises from a lack of trust in the police's clarifications compared to the information and narratives circulating on social media. Social media and angry public comments were the first things that several informants encountered, and the fact that negative messages spread far more quickly than official clarifications demonstrates that the digital space has become the primary arena for shaping public perception. As one informant noted, the police seemed "too busy building a positive image rather than resolving the case openly," indicating that the public was acutely aware of the police's focus on narrative control rather than substantive resolution.

It can be concluded that a combination of internal and external factors mutually influence the formation of public perception regarding the Indonesian National Police. This

subsequently explains the ineffectiveness of the Indonesian National Police's counter-issue strategy in rebuilding public trust.

Discussion

Public Perceptions of the Counter-Issue Strategies Implemented by the Indonesian National Police (POLRI)

The emphasis on the moral aspect alone, rather than addressing legal liability, is considered a key factor in the ineffectiveness of the police's counter-narrative strategy. The public perceives that, given the already overwhelming public pressure, the apologies issued by the police amount to little more than a response to that pressure. Informants noted that, from a humanitarian perspective, the police's actions represented a necessity rather than an exceptional measure, and therefore did not succeed in alleviating public pressure. The neglect of the core issue in favor of narrative and opinion management was identified as the primary finding regarding the police's communication approach.

The empathetic posts from the National Police, as seen in interviews and observations of the official social media account @divisihumaspolri, remain largely symbolic and fall short of meeting demands for transparency and justice, in line with research conducted by [Rahmanto & Lestari \(2024\)](#) which found that efforts to restore the police's image remain suboptimal because the crisis communication approach adopted tends to be perfunctory and defensive.

The transparency of the message which should be the primary focus of the National Police's communication approach has been neglected. Although some informants acknowledge the speed of the National Police's response through press conferences and posts on the official @divisihumaspolri account, their statements still appear to avoid disclosing on-the-ground facts. According to Image Repair Theory, this step is called "mortification" (apology) and "reducing offensiveness" through the narrative employed. If an apology is not accompanied by evidence of follow-up actions, it risks becoming a mere public relations effort; this alignment is the key to its effectiveness.

The dominance of the Public Information model is evident in the steps taken by the Indonesian National Police; according to Public Relations Theory, this model merely serves as a conduit for messages without allowing for interaction or feedback. The atmosphere of emotion and skepticism on the official social media account @divisihumaspolri stems from the public's interpretation of the messages.

Internal Factors

The interpretation of events is influenced by internal factors such as an individual's experiences, emotional state, and knowledge. In line with Rakhmat's (2018) Perception Theory, which posits that prior experiences shape the interpretive lens through which new

information is processed, this study found that the informants' critical attitude towards the Indonesian National Police had already existed prior to the Pejampongan demonstration tragedy. This pre-existing distrust, reinforced by documented inconsistencies between the police's stated values and their actions ([Alfaza & Utari, 2024](#)), meant that public scrutiny of the counter-narrative was already heightened before any official statement was issued. Consequently, the police's symbolic gestures of apology were evaluated not as genuine accountability, but as mere formalities that failed to capture the essence of substantive justice.

These internal factors were further exacerbated by the emotional aftermath of the demonstrations. Negative sentiments arose from feelings of anger and disappointment triggered by witnessing footage of the incident. According to Rakhmat's (2018) Perception Theory, emotions significantly influence the reception of information: when an individual is in a heightened emotional state, messages are more likely to be interpreted through that emotional filter and consequently rejected. This explains why empathetic posts from the National Police failed to stem the tide of negative public sentiment evident in the comments section of @divisihumaspolri. The primary factors influencing how the public assesses the National Police's counter-narrative strategy are therefore rooted in personal experiences, emotional states, and individual knowledge frameworks.

External Factors

The social environment and the flow of public communication in the digital sphere are external factors that influence public perception of the Indonesian National Police. In the age of social media, the formation of public opinion occurs not only through direct interaction but also through the consumption of information circulating across various platforms. In the tragedy of August 28, 2025, a video of an online motorcycle taxi being run over by a Birmob vehicle which went viral on TikTok and Instagram became the primary trigger for the formation of negative perceptions toward the Indonesian National Police. Social stimuli shaped by external factors, as per Perception Theory, influence the formation of an individual's perceptions. Clarifications from the police institution were not trusted as much as the flow of information and narratives circulating on social media, thereby creating social pressure. Information obtained from social media and angry public comments were the first things the informants learned; this indicates that external factors are also very important in the public's evaluation of the demonstration in Pejompongan.

The absence of engagement with public criticism on the @divisihumaspolri account further compounded this dynamic. Posts featuring an "apology," "joint prayers," and "the National Police Chief's visit to the victims' families" demonstrated a degree of empathy; however, the failure to respond to public criticism meant that the National Police's communication approach remained fundamentally one-sided. Evaluated through the lens of Grunig &

Hunt's (1984) Public Relations Theory, the Indonesian National Police's communication pattern reflects the Public Information model, a one-way transmission of messages without allowance for interaction or feedback. This stands in stark contrast to the Two-Way Symmetrical model, which Grunig & Hunt (1984) identify as the most effective approach for genuinely managing the relationship between an institution and its publics, particularly in contexts requiring trust restoration.

The Role of Counter-Narratives in Efforts to Restore the Public Image of the Indonesian National Police

Based on observations of the first five posts on the @divisihumaspolri Instagram account following the online motorcycle taxi run-over tragedy on August 28, 2025, in Jakarta, the National Police employed a counter-issue strategy to manage the crisis and restore its image. In these posts, the National Police attempted to highlight their humanitarian side through “apologies,” “expressions of condolences,” “calls for collective prayer,” “prayer for the deceased,” and “a visit by the Metro Jaya Police Chief to the victim’s funeral.” However, the public viewed these activities as merely symbolic and an attempt at image management.



Figure 1. Post on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

In the post above, the Indonesian National Police featured the National Police Chief standing tall in his official uniform in front of the institution’s emblem as a form of an official statement from the agency. Through the text of the post, the National Police expressed their apologies for the “tragic accident involving an online motorcycle taxi driver” and emphasized their condolences along with a pledge to conduct an internal review.



Figure 2. Comments on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

However, the public reaction was dominated by angry and sarcastic comments. As seen in many netizens’ comments, such as “He was hit by a car, sir, not run over,” which reflect disappointment with the choice of wording and the way the agency interpreted the tragedy. More than 13,000 comments expressed a similar sentiment: anger.

From the perspective of crisis communication analysis, the public views the use of the term “hit” as a form of denial of the facts and an attempt to downplay the extent of the authorities’ fault. Based on Image Repair Theory (Benoit (1997), this strategy falls under the category of “reducing offensiveness” an attempt to mitigate negative impacts without fully acknowledging the error. Such an approach actually exacerbates public perception because it is viewed as manipulative and lacking transparency. Consequently, the counter-issue strategy in the first post can be said to have failed in its aim to reassure the public, as the message conveyed does not align with the public’s expectations of justice and honesty.



Figure 3. Post on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

The post above shows a photo of the victim with the caption “We Mourn the Passing of Brother Affan Kurniawan.” Visually, the National Police sought to demonstrate empathy and concern for the victim. No explanation regarding the chronology of events or the legal action taken was included in the post, which focused solely on expressing condolences; consequently, the public perceived the post as merely symbolic and a belated response. “Only just got round to editing it, have you? How many hours have passed now?” posted by one netizen in the comments section, reflecting the widespread disappointment within the public; the high number of likes can be said to represent the public’s disappointment with the National Police.



Figure 4. Comments on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

Analysis suggests that the public actually interprets the empathy expressed by the National Police as nothing more than a public relations exercise. Within the framework of Public Relations Theory (Managing Public Relations), the communication pattern employed still follows the public information model that is, the one-way delivery of messages without considering public feedback. The National Police appear to focus solely on disseminating empathetic messages without fostering a space for dialogue, causing the messages to lose their substantive meaning and fail to contribute to the institution’s image recovery. The lack of clarity and delays regarding information transparency are the primary causes of the tone of comments, which are dominated by anger and distrust accompanied by demands for greater accountability; consequently, the second post has still failed to quell public anger.

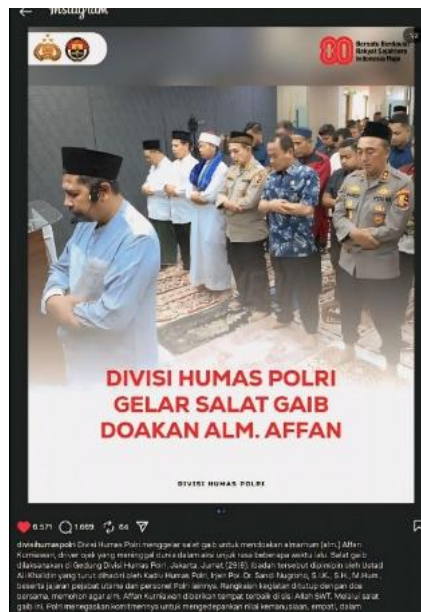


Figure 5. Post on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

The post above features a photo of Indonesian National Police personnel performing a collective prayer for the deceased, accompanied by a caption urging the public to join in praying for the victims. The Indonesian National Police sought to highlight the organisation’s religious side and its commitment to humanitarian solidarity through the key message of its post. However, comments such as “It’s just a formality because it’s already gone viral” emerged, suggesting that the public remains sceptical, as evidenced by the public’s unmet demand for transparency.



Figure 6. Comments on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

Analysis shows that public expectations have not been met, even though this measure has moral merit. The emphasis on humanitarian values can be seen as moral reinforcement based on the actions of the National Police. This strategy has proved ineffective as it has not been accompanied by corrective action (concrete measures); without providing legal clarity, it is merely viewed as an attempt at moral washing. The third post continues to provok

e negative reactions and is not yet considered effective, as there remains a gap between the symbols of empathy and the need for transparency.



Figure 7. Post on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

The National Police Chief can be seen visiting the victim’s family home in the post above. It appears that the National Police Chief showed empathy towards the victim’s family and offered his condolences and an apology. However, scepticism remains evident in the public response. “Best actor of the year” and “So what is a fitting punishment for the perpetrator?” are just two of the many sarcastic comments on the post above.



Figure 8. Comments on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

This post demonstrates an element of mortification (a direct apology) without being accompanied by concrete corrective action. Although this is not yet sufficient to change nega

tive perceptions, the post has succeeded in appealing to the public's sense of empathy. The restoration of trust through transparency and fairness is still not evident in the National Police's post and is merely seen as an attempt to improve their moral image. This is evident from the 1,700 comments, which show that the public is still questioning legal accountability and the transparency of information regarding the incident. Consequently, even by the fourth post, the National Police have yet to succeed in restoring their image



Figure 9. Post on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

The post above shows the Provincial Police Chief and several police officers attending the victim's funeral, laying flowers and paying their last respects. The caption reads, "As a final tribute from the National Police to the deceased." Symbolically, this post aims to emphasize that the National Police value the victim as a citizen and a member of society. However, in the comments section, the public responded with disappointment, with comments such as "Is a life just repaid with an apology?" and "Anyone can say sorry, sir." This indicates that the public is still awaiting follow-up regarding this tragedy; they want transparency regarding the perpetrator and concrete legal action. However, as of the fifth post, the identity of the perpetrator and the consequences they face have still not been revealed.

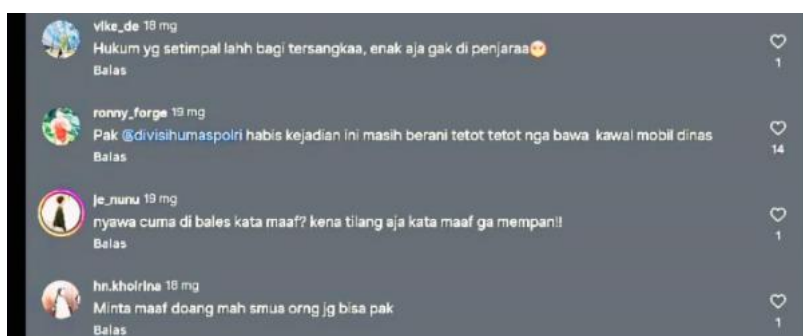


Figure 10. Comments on Instagram @divisihumaspolri

Source: Instagram @divisihumaspolri 2025

Ceremonial gestures that fail to provide clarity regarding legal proceedings are causing the public to lose even more trust in the National Police. The post in question failed to foster dialogue between the institution and the public within the framework of the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model (Managing Public Relations). The National Police are perceived as prioritising image over legal clarity, with communication that is merely one-way based on public perception. Indeed, the latest post has not yet succeeded in restoring the force's image following the tragedy.

A communication strategy focused on moral and empathetic image-building, which fails to address the substance of the justice the public expects, is evident in the five posts published by the National Police following the Pejampongan demonstration tragedy. The counter-narrative strategy is deemed to have failed, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly negative reactions in the comments section of each post, due to a one-sided approach in which the institution focused solely on restoring its image.

To restore public trust, the National Police must shift its approach from symbolic communication to participatory communication. True image restoration requires more than just apologies or expressions of moral integrity; it demands concrete actions that demonstrate fairness, transparency, and institutional accountability.

The Indonesian National Police need to engage in participatory communication to restore public trust. Concrete action regarding the enforcement of justice is required, not merely an apology. The consistency between official statements and the responsible actions taken influences public perception, as demonstrated in [Alfaza & Utari \(2024\)](#) research. A lack of alignment between principles and justice will only serve to erode public trust. Stages of public engagement such as 'Two-Way Symmetrical Communication' have not yet been implemented and remain limited to the 'public information' stage ([Grunig & Hunt, 1984](#)). The main factor behind the failure of the Indonesian National Police's crisis management was the gap between the message the public wanted to hear and the message actually

conveyed by the police. Negative perceptions will only intensify in the absence of transparency and public participation.

Conclusion

The crisis of public trust in the National Police following the tragic demonstrations on August 28, 2025 during which an incident allegedly occurred in which an online motorcycle taxi driver was run over by a Brimob vehicle, demonstrates that the communication strategy employed by the National Police has not been fully effective. The National Police's efforts to address the issue through "official statements," "apologies," and religious events such as "joint prayers and prayers for the deceased" are viewed by the public as merely image-building and symbolic gestures. The public believes that the police place more emphasis on their moral image than on legal accountability, as the information shared by the National Police on their Instagram account @divisihumaspolri is still perceived as opaque and one-sided. Public perception of the National Police following the trampling tragedy has tended to be negative. Internal factors within the public, such as past experiences and emotions toward the police, and external factors, such as the influence of social media and public opinion, have contributed to this negative view of the National Police.

These findings carry important practical implications for the Indonesian National Police and other public institutions. First, the National Police must shift from a symbolic, one-way communication approach toward a participatory model of crisis communication, one that actively acknowledges public concerns, engages with comments, and provides substantive legal updates alongside expressions of empathy. Second, the timing and framing of official communications must be carefully managed; delays in releasing information create a vacuum quickly filled by unverified narratives on social media. Third, institutional accountability must be demonstrated through concrete follow-up actions—not merely apologies if communication strategies are to contribute meaningfully to image restoration. These lessons extend beyond the National Police to any public institution managing a crisis of trust in the digital age.

This study contributes to crisis communication and institutional communication scholarship by offering an external stakeholder perspective on the effectiveness of counter-issue strategies—a perspective that has been underrepresented in prior research focused primarily on internal institutional communication patterns. By integrating Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1997), Public Relations Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), and Perception Theory (Rakhmat, 2018), this study demonstrates that image restoration cannot be evaluated solely from the communicating institution's perspective; the interpretive frameworks, emotional states, and social environments of the receiving public are equally determinative

of outcomes.

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