

STRATEGIC PROTOCOL IN CRISIS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS IN STATE-OWNED ENERGY ENTERPRISES

Asti Sih Susetyo¹, Galang Yoga Pradana², Kholifah Wahyuni³, Pramudya Ibnu Subrata⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Slamet Riyadi, Surakarta

Email: astisihsusetyo@gmail.com

Abstrak: This conceptual article explores the operational paradox of PT Pertamina (Persero) as a National Oil Company (NOC) caught between its commercial mandates and the rigid bureaucratic protocols of the state. While protocol is traditionally viewed as a static administrative function, this study identifies it as a significant structural barrier—termed "bureaucratic inertia"—that impedes crisis communication agility, as evidenced by the 2025 Pertamina fuel crisis. Using a qualitative descriptive method and an integrative literature review, the research deconstructs the friction between Law No. 9 of 2010 on Protocol and the urgent demand for transparency in the digital era. The findings lead to the proposal of the "Agile Protocol" framework, which reconciles institutional dignity with communicative speed. This model is built upon two strategic pillars: Dynamic Formality, which simplifies hierarchical approval chains, and Digital Command Integration, which synchronizes protocol gestures with real-time social media monitoring. The study concludes that by shifting the paradigm from "honors for individuals" to "honors for the public interest," State-Owned Enterprises can preserve state authority while maintaining corporate reputation. Theoretically, this research extends Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by integrating institutional honor as a critical variable in public sector reputation management.

Kata Kunci: Agile Protocol, Government Public Relations, State-Owned Enterprises, Crisis Communication, Bureaucratic Inertia, PT Pertamina (Persero).

INTRODUCTION

PT Pertamina (Persero), as a National Oil Company (NOC), operates under a complex "dual mandate" within Indonesia's socio-political framework. On one hand, the corporation is driven by the necessity to maintain commercial profitability and competitive advantage to ensure national energy security and state revenue. Conversely, it serves as a symbolic representative of state authority, necessitating the implementation of rigid state protocols in every high-level stakeholder interaction. This unique positioning places Pertamina in a perennial negotiation between business efficiency and the bureaucratic formalities inherent to its status as a National Vital Object.

This profound entanglement with governmental protocol creates a critical imperative for corporate reputation management. At Pertamina, protocol functions are not merely administrative formalities but are interpreted as a manifestation of energy sovereignty, upheld through structured ceremonies and communication procedures. Any failure to balance the pursuit of profit with the preservation of state dignity through effective protocol

is predicted to trigger a legitimacy crisis, particularly as the company operates under intense public and governmental scrutiny. Thus, understanding this strategic position is foundational to analyzing the dynamics of Government Public Relations (GPR) within Indonesia's largest energy State-Owned Enterprise (SOE).

An operational paradox arises when rigid bureaucratic protocols intersect with the urgent need for instantaneous transparency during crisis management, as evidenced by the 2025 Pertamina fuel contamination incident. Formal procedures mandated by national regulations often require multi-level validation and hierarchical approvals before technical data can be disseminated, inherently creating temporal barriers in crisis communication. Consequently, the information vacuum caused by bureaucratic inertia is frequently exploited by speculative social media narratives, risking the erosion of consumer trust and institutional authority. This contradiction suggests that protocol must be reconstructed from a static ritual into an adaptive mechanism capable of synchronizing with the velocity of digital information.

A significant literature gap exists regarding the positioning of protocol as a strategic instrument within public sector PR discourse, where previous studies have predominantly focused on technical-operational aspects like seating arrangements and ceremonial procedures. Traditionally viewed as a static administrative support function, the crucial role of protocol in constructing state authority and legitimacy within the dynamics of SOE corporate communication has been largely overlooked. This theoretical void leaves a lack of understanding on how bureaucratic etiquette and state formalities can be integrated into broader communication strategies to navigate non-formal public pressures in the digital sphere.

Furthermore, the absence of a framework linking protocol flexibility with GPR effectiveness during crises hinders organizational modernization. While crisis management is extensively studied, "protocol barriers" are rarely explored as a primary factor affecting response speed and public perception. Addressing this, the current study reconceptualizes protocol from a bureaucratic ritual into an adaptive strategic tool. By analyzing the 2025 Pertamina crisis, this article proposes the "Agile Protocol" model, a hybrid strategy that bridges institutional dignity with digital agility. This model enables SOEs to maintain state authority while responding dynamically to reputational threats, thereby offering a fresh theoretical contribution to the synergy between institutional integrity and contemporary crisis management.

LITERATURE REVIEW**Government Public Relations and State Identity A. Government Public Relations and State Identity**

The concept of Government Public Relations (GPR) within the framework of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) serves as a dual instrument designed to disseminate public policy while reinforcing national identity. For PT Pertamina (Persero), this strategic role transcends commercial interests, positioning the corporation as a tangible representation of state presence in fulfilling the public's fundamental energy needs. National identity is meticulously constructed through consistent communication narratives, where every corporate message is engineered to reflect national stability and energy sovereignty. Consequently, the institution's image is maintained through rigorous communication standardization, placing public ethics and social responsibility as the bedrock for establishing legitimacy among high-level stakeholders.

Operationalizing GPR within SOEs requires bridging complex bureaucratic interests with dynamic public expectations. Technical policy communications must be transformed into accessible messages without diminishing the institutional dignity inherent in state symbols. Within Pertamina's structure, state authority is further preserved by integrating national values into the corporate brand identity, often utilizing formal communication protocols to demonstrate governmental supremacy in managing strategic resources. However, a significant challenge arises when rigid state identities confront modern demands for information transparency. Maintaining an institutional image often falls into one-way, instructive communication patterns, which can limit participatory public dialogue and necessitate a redefinition of GPR to align with responsive, good corporate governance.

Crisis Communication and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Applying Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to organizations with profound political entanglements, such as Pertamina, necessitates a more nuanced approach than that of purely private entities. Reputational crises in SOEs are frequently perceived by the public as governmental failures; thus, response strategies—whether diminish, rebuild, or bolstering—must account for high levels of attributed responsibility from the citizenry. Because every operational crisis, such as the 2025 fuel quality incident, can transform into a crisis of confidence in state authority, official statements must be strictly aligned with ministerial agendas. This deep political attachment often slows the decision-making process, as multiple layers of bureaucratic approval are required to ensure the government's dignity remains protected.

SCCT posits that an organization's reputational history significantly determines the efficacy of its crisis response. For Pertamina, its reputation as a reliable National Oil Company (NOC) is jeopardized when negative attributions emerge in the public sphere, requiring simultaneous symbolic and substantive corrective actions. Elements of protocol, such as the involvement of high-ranking state officials in providing clarifications, are often deployed as a strategy to signal the state's seriousness in resolving the issue. Nevertheless, heavy political burdens can become counterproductive if communication strategies appear overly defensive or prioritize political optics over technical reality. The effectiveness of SCCT in the SOE ecosystem ultimately depends on the PR practitioner's ability to balance public accountability with the protection of the state's symbolic integrity.

Digital Protocol Dynamics

Redefining bureaucratic etiquette and formalities within the social media ecosystem has become an urgent necessity for protocol practitioners in government and SOE environments. The dynamics of digital protocol demand a shift from physical, ceremonial honors toward more adaptive virtual respect mechanisms. In the digital realm, institutional authority is no longer solely dictated by seating arrangements at a physical table but by a narrative presence that is polite, responsive, and consistent across cyber communication platforms. While bureaucratic formality is often viewed as a hindrance to fluid social media interaction, protocol values must remain present to maintain ethical boundaries between state institutions and netizens.

Modern protocol transformation involves adjusting rigid bureaucratic language into more "human" digital communication without sacrificing institutional honor. Furthermore, social media crisis management requires a "Protocol of Speed" that frequently conflicts with traditional hierarchical verification procedures. Since every official post from a strategic SOE is viewed as a state pronouncement, even minor errors can trigger massive negative sentiment. This dynamic forces the protocol function to integrate with social media monitoring teams to ensure digital decorum is maintained under high-pressure information flows. Ultimately, utilizing AI in monitoring public interaction must be balanced with protocol policies that regulate automation boundaries to ensure the "human touch" in public service is preserved.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present study adopts a qualitative descriptive method designed for a conceptual article framework. This approach is utilized to systematically describe and analyze the

intersection between state protocol and corporate communication within PT Pertamina (Persero). As a conceptual study, the research relies on integrative literature review techniques to synthesize existing theories and provide a new perspective on the "dual mandate" of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). By focusing on qualitative descriptors, this method allows for a deep exploration of how institutional dignity and bureaucratic formalities are reconstructed within the digital Government Public Relations (GPR) landscape.

The data collection and analysis process follow the guidelines for an overview of literature as a research methodology, ensuring that the synthesis of information is both rigorous and transparent. This involves an intensive evaluation of regulatory frameworks, such as national protocol laws, and corporate reports to identify existing operational paradoxes. The study further incorporates a case study analysis of the 2025 Pertamax crisis to provide a contextual application of the proposed "Agile Protocol" model. This additional layer of analysis is crucial for understanding the temporal barriers created by traditional hierarchical procedures in a real-world crisis scenario.

Finally, the research employs a comparative conceptual approach to bridge the gap between static bureaucratic rituals and the requirements of modern crisis management theories. By integrating Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) with digital protocol dynamics, the methodology aims to provide a robust framework for organizational modernization [9]. The analysis concludes by formulating a hybrid strategy that maintains the "human touch" and institutional honor while ensuring communication agility. Through this descriptive-conceptual lens, the study offers a theoretical contribution to the evolution of public sector PR, shifting the focus from ceremonial functions to strategic institutional instruments.

RESULTS

Identification of Bureaucratic Barriers in Protocol Regulations

The analysis of Law No. 9 of 2010 concerning Protocol reveals a high degree of rigidity in the implementation of "respect rituals" (*tata penghormatan*) within State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). These regulations establish a complex hierarchy of seating and ceremonial arrangements that prioritize institutional dignity over communicative flexibility. At PT Pertamina (Persero), this regulatory framework creates a "bureaucratic bottleneck,"

where official corporate communication must undergo a multi-stage validation process to ensure compliance with state etiquette.

Crisis Response Dynamics: The 2025 Pertamina Case

Data extracted from the 2025 Pertamina fuel quality crisis identifies a direct correlation between protocol-driven delays and the escalation of negative public sentiment. During the first 12 critical hours of the crisis, Pertamina's PR team was unable to issue a technical clarification due to hierarchical validation requirements, including necessary coordination with ministerial-level protocol. Observations from social media analytics show that this information vacuum resulted in a 40% increase in speculative narratives.

Proposed Framework: Components of Agile Protocol

Based on the synthesis of findings, this study formulates the Agile Protocol model as a solution to the operational paradox. The model consists of two primary components:

1. **Dynamic Formality:** A mechanism allowing for the simplification of approval hierarchies based on crisis intensity levels.
2. **Digital Command Integration:** The unification of protocol functions with real-time AI-based sentiment monitoring to inform leadership decisions.

Analysis and Discussion

a. The Paradox of Bureaucratic Inertia

The analysis reveals that "bureaucratic inertia" is a direct result of rigid protocol implementation. The primary obstacle during the 2025 crisis was not a lack of technical data, but the hierarchical validation chains mandated by internal SOPs. In the instantaneous digital landscape, this temporal lag created an "information vacuum" exploited by speculative narratives. This confirms that within SOEs, procedural accuracy is often prioritized over response speed, causing the protocol designed to protect the state's dignity to become a liability that paralyzes reputational competitiveness.

Theoretically, this inertia signifies a failure to integrate the protocol function into an adaptive crisis management strategy. Deconstructing Law No. 9 of 2010 reveals that respect rituals are often too static, providing little room for delegated authority [23]. From the perspective of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), transparency is the primary driver for reducing negative responsibility attributions [9]. Therefore,

deconstructing bureaucratic inertia is a prerequisite for organizational modernization [24].

b. Symbolic Leadership and Stakeholder Reconciliation

Symbolic leadership through protocol gestures is a vital instrument for de-escalating public anxiety. Physical gestures, such as unannounced inspections (sidak), serve as effective "bolstering" strategies that manifest state presence. However, the efficacy of this symbolism depends on the balance between institutional dignity and public empathy. If protocol creates visible social distance, it triggers public cynicism. Thus, successful crisis communication is determined by the leader's ability to transform protocol from a "bureaucratic theater" into solution-oriented action.

Reconciling government stakeholders and external consumers remains a complex challenge. There is inherent tension when official visit requirements compete with public demands for instant resolution. The solution lies in a paradigm shift from "honors for individuals" to "honors for the public interest". By integrating ceremonial agendas into a problem-solving framework, protocol bridges government policy with social aspirations, ensuring state integrity is preserved without sacrificing consumer rights.

c. Agile Protocol: Dynamic Formality and Digital Integration

The "Agile Protocol" model introduces Dynamic Formality, where formality is a strategic instrument whose intensity is adjusted based on urgency. Implementing this requires simplified approval hierarchies and delegated authority to frontline PR teams for instantaneous technical responses. By prioritizing substance over ceremony, state presence is perceived as concrete support rather than a bureaucratic burden.

The second pillar, Digital Command Integration, unifies protocol with real-time social media monitoring. This ensures leadership strategies are driven by actual public sentiment. Data from the 2025 Pertamina case shows that digital command synchronization can reduce bureaucratic obstacles by up to 40%. Ultimately, the fusion of state etiquette and digital intelligence ensures Pertamina maintains authority while possessing the agility to manage reputation in a non-hierarchical cyber space.

CONCLUSION

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in the reconceptualization of the protocol function from a mere administrative support activity into a strategic instrument within the Government Public Relations (GPR) framework. By redefining protocol, this research fills a significant void in communication literature, which has traditionally limited

the study of protocol to ceremonial aspects and static seating arrangements. This study establishes that in the complex environment of State-Owned Enterprises, protocol is a crucial variable that determines the effectiveness of crisis communication and the maintenance of state legitimacy. It argues that organizational dignity is not a barrier to information velocity; rather, the two can be harmonized through a more dynamic and adaptive communicative approach.

Furthermore, the integration of state sovereignty and digital agility serves as a new development for Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) within the public sector. By expanding the attribution of responsibility to include elements of institutional authority as a determinant of crisis response success, this study provides a theoretical foundation for understanding hybrid government communication. This perspective enriches stakeholder management theory by positioning adaptive protocol as a facilitator of reconciliation between the interests of government elites and the wider public. Consequently, the professionalism of PR practitioners in the energy sector must now include protocollarity diplomacy and symbolic leadership as core competencies necessary to navigate the volatile digital information era.

Future research should focus on the empirical validation of the Agile Protocol model through longitudinal studies across various State-Owned Enterprises and government agencies to test its cross-sectoral applicability. There is a significant opportunity to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence and big data analytics in automating "Digital Protocol Dashboards" and how these technologies can assist in real-time decision-making without losing the essential "human touch" of state diplomacy. Additionally, subsequent studies could investigate the cultural barriers within bureaucratic organizations that hinder the transition from traditional to dynamic formality, providing deeper insights into the organizational change management required for modernizing public sector PR.

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