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Crisis Management Of Ipdn Public Relations In Handling Issues On Social Media: A Case Study Of The Death Of A Prospective Cadet From North Maluku In 2025

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Abstract

Social media has transformed communication patterns between government institutions and the public, while also providing a space for public opinion to develop and influence institutional image and trust. This condition challenges the Public Relations (PR) division of the Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri (IPDN) in handling the issue of the death of a prospective cadet (calon praja) registered from North Maluku in 2025, which developed across mass media and social media. This study aims to analyze issue handling, communication and information management processes, efforts to maintain institutional image and public trust, and the communication practices of IPDN PR from the perspective of Islamic communication ethics. The study used a qualitative method with a case study approach and a constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), observation, and documentation with informants selected through purposive sampling, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that crisis management by IPDN PR involved four main processes: information identification and verification, coordination and message management, dissemination of information to the public, and monitoring and management of public perceptions. Analysis using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) highlights the importance of adapting communication responses to the characteristics of the issue

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and public conditions, while the perspective of Dozier and Broom shows a division of strategic, coordinating, and technical roles in managing crisis communication. The practice of information verification also corresponds with the Islamic principle of tabayyun, although this principle was not explicitly used as a formal guideline. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening internal coordination, information accuracy, social media monitoring, and adaptive communication responses in crisis management within government institutions.

Keywords: Crisis Management, IPDN Public Relations, Social Media, SCCT, Crisis Communication

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of everyday life, including in education, government, and public services. The We Are Social and Meltwater (2024) report recorded about 214 million active social media users in Indonesia, or 79.5% of the national population. Social media use is dominated by visual, interactive, and fast platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, while X (Twitter) serves as a space for discussing public issues, policies, and government services. The public no longer merely consumes information but has become an active actor in spreading information and shaping public opinion. This shift reinforces the concept of *mediatized governance*, in which governance is influenced by media logic and public opinion forms in digital conversation before the government's official explanation is published.

In this context, government public relations occupies a strategic position. Under Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 13 of 2011, government public relations is understood as communication activity carried out by government institutions or apparatus in performing the management function of information and communication to the public and receiving feedback from stakeholders. Suprawoto (2018) positions government public relations as a communication link between the government and the public in conveying public policy, while Law Number 14 of 2008 on Public Information Disclosure requires state institutions to provide accurate, true, and non-misleading information. In the social media era, government communication with the public has shifted from vertical, top-down patterns to horizontal and interactive ones, so PR practitioners must monitor public conversation (*social listening*), identify issues, clarify misleading information, and design communication strategies that keep issues from escalating into crises.

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These demands were evident in the death of a prospective cadet (*calon praja*) of the Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri (IPDN) registered from North Maluku Province in 2025. As a civil-service higher education institution under the Ministry of Home Affairs, IPDN is constantly in the public eye, and events involving its cadets receive wide attention in mass media and social media. After the case spread, public narratives went beyond the cause of death to the transparency of health selection for prospective cadets, the physical and mental burden of basic education, and allegations of symbolic and structural violence long assumed to be inherent in semi-military education. A gap emerged between the institution's official information and public perceptions formed on social media. The crisis faced by IPDN was therefore multidimensional: an event crisis, a communication crisis as information in digital space moved faster than official clarification, and a crisis of public trust.

In crisis management studies, Fearn-Banks (2017) argues that organizations with good crisis communication plans are better able to reduce negative impacts, protect reputation, and maintain public trust through systematic communication steps. Kriyantono (2015) explains that crises in government institutions can develop faster in the era of democracy and social media because the public is free to access, spread, and interpret information. In the *Crisis Communication 4.0* phase, public trust is influenced by timeliness, message consistency, sincerity, and information credibility (Rachmiatie et al., 2026). The ethical dimension is inseparable: Bowen (2007) views public communication ethics as the basis for communication decisions that prioritize the public interest, Heide and Simonsson (2021) stress that crisis communication must be transparent, empathetic, and responsive, and Johansen et al. (2012) regard crises as communicative phenomena shaped by how organizations manage information and build meaning in public space.

This study uses three analytical frameworks. First, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007), which holds that crisis response strategies must match the crisis cluster (*victim*, *accidental*, or *preventable*) based on the level of responsibility attributed by the public, with *deny*, *diminish*, *rebuild*, and *bolstering* as strategy options. Second, the PR roles of Dozier and Broom: *expert prescriber*, *communication facilitator*, *problem-solving process facilitator*, and *communication technician*. Third, Islamic communication ethics (Hefni, 2017), which includes *tabayyun* as stated in QS Al-Hujurat verse 6, *shidq*, *amanah*, *qaulan sadidan*, *qaulan baligha*, and *qaulan layyina*.

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Previous studies have examined PR communication and crisis communication. Rahmawati (2022) found that response speed, message style, and information consistency are important in building public trust toward a provincial government's PR, but in the context of general public issues. Mubarokah (2021) discussed PR crisis management conceptually through the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stages. Subakir (2023) showed that consistent social media content can improve an educational institution's reputation, while Trisnawati and Syarah (2017) examined a polytechnic's PR role in new student admissions; neither addressed crisis handling. Jiang et al. (2025) found that Chinese higher education institutions tend to use *corrective action*, *adjusting information*, *bolstering*, and *victimage* when facing academic and sexual misconduct by faculty. Rachmiatie et al. (2026), in an experiment with 1,200 students, found that crisis messages produced by artificial intelligence were judged more consistent and timely, while human-written messages were perceived as more sincere and credible. Wiwitan and Yulianita (2018) showed that PR practice in Islamic universities is grounded in honesty, exemplary conduct, and trustworthiness, and Wiwitan et al. (2026) showed that artificial intelligence can support early detection of issues and potential crises.

A synthesis of these studies shows that crisis communication research on educational institutions generally focuses on general reputation crises or uses quantitative approaches, whereas studies of crisis management in civil-service education institutions, especially in sensitive cases such as the death of a student developing on social media, remain very limited. The novelty of this study lies in examining crisis communication management in a civil-service education institution during a sensitive and emotional student death under intense digital public pressure, by integrating SCCT, the Dozier and Broom PR roles, and Islamic communication ethics. This study aims to analyze (1) how IPDN PR handled the issue of the death of the prospective cadet from North Maluku on social media, (2) the communication and information management process and the reasons for the communication strategy used, (3) IPDN PR's efforts to maintain institutional image and public trust, and (4) IPDN PR's communication practices from the perspective of Islamic communication ethics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative methodology with a single-case study approach and a constructivist paradigm. The case study approach was chosen because the study aimed to understand a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context and to answer

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"how" and "why" questions using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). The constructivist paradigm was used to understand how IPDN PR constructed meaning and communication actions when facing public issues on social media. The researcher acted as the main instrument (*human instrument*) in data collection, interpretation, and drawing conclusions (Ardianto, 2010). The study did not aim to generalize its findings to all government institutions.

The subjects were five informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in handling the issue and their professional capacity to explain crisis management strategies, consisting of internal IPDN PR personnel and one expert informant (Table 1). The object of the study was the crisis communication management of IPDN PR related to the death of the prospective cadet from North Maluku, with social media analysis focused on the Instagram and TikTok accounts of IPDN PR from the day of the incident until one week afterward, when public communication activity increased. The research location was the IPDN Jatinangor Campus, Sumedang Regency, West Java, where the IPDN PR office is located.

Table 1. Research Informants

No	Informant Position	Informant Status
1	Head of IPDN Public Relations	Main informant
2	Implementing staff/social media admins (two persons)	Main informants
3	Head of IPDN Public Relations Team	Supporting informant
4	Professor of Communication Science, Universitas Islam Bandung	Expert informant

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews using a flexible and open interview guide, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with IPDN PR personnel and the expert informant moderated by the researcher, and observation of IPDN PR's digital communication activities. Secondary data were obtained through documentation of activity archives and PR guidelines, IPDN social media posts and interactions, online news coverage, and academic literature. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (as cited in Ardianto, 2010) in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was tested through source triangulation, comparing data from

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informants with different roles, and method triangulation, comparing interview, observation, and documentation data (Ardianto, 2010).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Results

The case occurred when a prospective cadet, identified by the initials M.I.N., was taking part in the Basic Mental and Discipline Education for Prospective Cadets (Diksarmendispra) at the IPDN Jatinangor Campus in 2025. According to IPDN's official statement, M.I.N. suffered a medical emergency in the form of cardiac arrest, received initial treatment on campus, was referred to UNPAD hospital, and was declared dead by the medical team. The incident was widely reported by online media, television, and newspapers and spread across Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, and YouTube. Public responses varied. Some expressed empathy for the family, while others questioned how Diksarmendispra was run, the health supervision system for prospective cadets, the readiness of medical handling, and information transparency, mostly in the comment sections of IPDN's official accounts and news media accounts.

Issue handling by IPDN PR

Issue handling proceeded in stages: receiving information, verifying facts, internal coordination, monitoring the development of the issue on social media, identifying public responses, and determining the information to be conveyed to the public. The Head of PR explained that the initial information was not responded to immediately but was first confirmed with the IPDN Manggala Unit, the caregivers attached to prospective cadets: “Because this concerns a prospective cadet and is quite a sensitive event, we cannot immediately give information to the public, so we put it on hold until we knew the condition and the chronology clearly” (Head of IPDN PR, 2026). The Head of the PR Team stated that coordination with leadership took place the following day and that “after the information was clear, only then did we decide what needed to be conveyed to the public” (Head of IPDN PR Team, 2026).

At the same time, the social media admins monitored comments, posts, and news shared by the public on Instagram and TikTok. The admins did not answer substantive questions about the case on their own understanding; monitoring findings were passed to the PR team to determine communication steps. One admin stated, “If there are questions or comments related to the substance of the case, we do not immediately answer based on our own understanding”

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(Social Media Admin, 2026), and such questions were held because no direction had yet been given. The expert informant argued that once an issue has developed on social media, PR cannot choose not to respond, because the issue will most likely continue to spread and be reported by mass media, while the absence of an explanation can raise questions and open room for speculation (Neni Yulianita, 2026).

Communication process and information management

IPDN PR's communication process proceeded in stages: information verification, internal coordination, monitoring of issues and public opinion, narrative drafting, channel selection, clarification, monitoring of public responses, and evaluation or follow-up response (Figure 1). The substance of the information was not drafted independently by the admins. The admins carried out technical publishing and monitoring functions based on materials and directions from PR. The Head of PR stated, “We cannot rely only on the initial information. We must first make sure with the parties who know directly” (Head of IPDN PR, 2026). Amid pressure from leadership to clarify promptly, PR considered several options, including inviting the press and having IPDN leadership give the clarification directly.

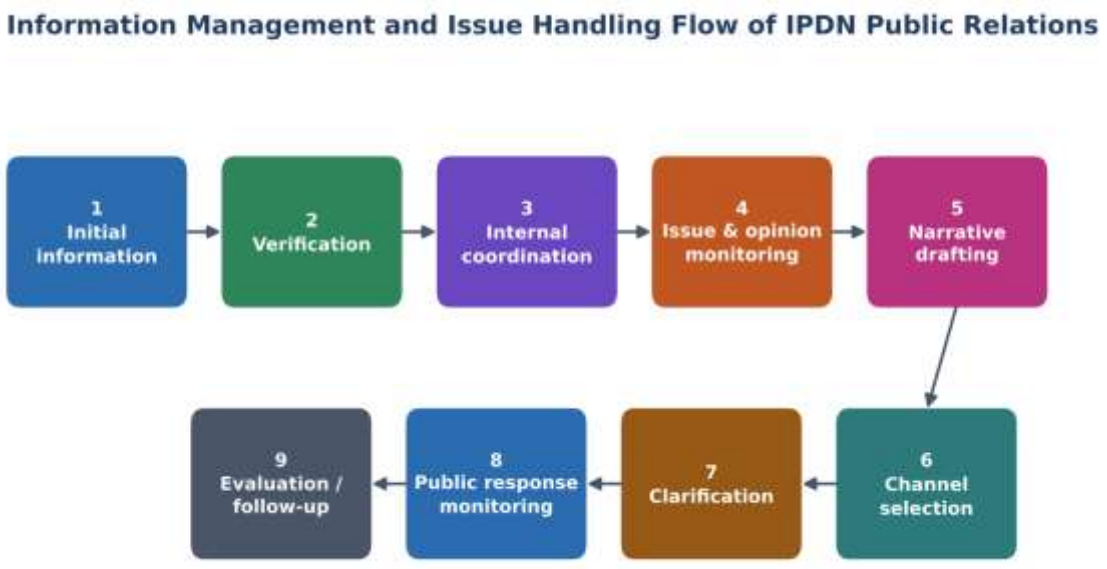


Figure 1. Information management and issue handling flow of IPDN Public Relations

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Another important finding is that IPDN PR did not use its official social media accounts as the main channel for conveying information about the case. PR chose credible press media instead. The Head of the PR Team explained, “If we posted directly on social media, the public response would surely be as if IPDN were trying to cover up and, so to speak, defend IPDN. That is why we prefer to clarify through credible press media” (Head of IPDN PR Team, 2026). At a press conference (Figure 2), IPDN leadership presented the medical chronology: the victim had complained of weakness after the evening assembly, received first aid at the Semeru Abdi Clinic, was referred to UNPAD hospital, and could not be saved because of cardiac arrest. Leadership also stressed that the victim had passed all formal health selection procedures. Social media continued to serve as a space for monitoring the development of the issue and public opinion.



Figure 2. IPDN press conference on the death of the prospective cadet (screenshot of a KOMPASTV broadcast)

Observation showed public comments questioning the case, but PR did not respond directly to comments through its official social media accounts; responses were given through clarification to the press and a press conference. The expert informant warned that public comments should not be taken lightly because they can grow into wider conversations and shape shared perceptions, as in an *echo chamber* (Neni Yulianita, 2026).

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The communication strategy rested on five considerations. First, certainty and accuracy of information, because unverified information can create new problems. Second, the sensitivity of the case, which concerns an individual and the institution at once. Third, the development of public opinion on social media, which was continuously monitored. Fourth, the need to keep information consistent, so clarification narratives were prepared in advance and information delivered through the press stayed uniform when it circulated again on social media. Fifth, consideration of the likely public response if information were delivered directly through social media.

Efforts to maintain institutional image and public trust

Institutional image was maintained through narrative management that remained fact-based. The Head of PR stated, “We must convey things as they are, but the way of conveying must be right. We should not let a clarification come across as defensive or as blaming others” (Head of IPDN PR, 2026). PR also avoided presenting unclear information as if it were fact, because this could further reduce public trust if it later proved untrue. Not all internal information was released; information was selected based on certainty of facts and the need for clarification. The Head of the PR Team stressed that social media was still monitored because it showed how information and public responses developed, but that official information “does not always have to be posted by ourselves” (Head of IPDN PR Team, 2026).

Based on observation and documentation, IPDN PR also posted positive information about the institution's activities, achievements, education, and services. The expert informant considered that social media should be used to build image, so that the public does not receive only one picture of IPDN from negative coverage (Neni Yulianita, 2026).

Communication practices from the perspective of Islamic communication ethics

IPDN PR did not specifically use Islamic communication ethics as a formal guideline in handling this issue. Communication practices were based more on PR duties and functions, internal procedures, information needs, and the situation developing on social media. The expert informant stressed that PR must be factual, must not cover things up, and must disclose facts so that problems do not “explode” when suddenly revealed (Neni Yulianita, 2026). Nevertheless, five communication practices were found: (1) caution in verifying information, namely confirming with internal parties before information was released; (2) delivering information that could be

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accounted for, because admins coordinated substantive questions with the team or leadership so that answers matched official information; (3) efforts to maintain the truth of information, in that information differing from the official version was not immediately used as a basis for responses, as the Head of the PR Team stated, “We must not respond to something whose truth is still unclear”; (4) adjusting language to the characteristics of social media, because according to the admins internal terms should be avoided so the public can understand; and (5) the attitude toward negative comments, namely no direct response on social media, with clarification given only through a press conference.

DISCUSSIONS

Crisis management of IPDN PR in handling issues on social media

The case shows that an event inside an institution can become a public issue once information enters social media, where facts, opinions, assumptions, and speculation mix. In such a situation, IPDN PR did more than convey information: it monitored, coordinated, managed messages, and weighed response strategies. Verification before responding can be understood as *fact finding*, that is, an effort to understand what actually happened before deciding on a communication action. This matters because social media lets information spread far faster than internal verification, so responses based on unverified information risk creating new communication problems. The coordinative nature of this process is consistent with PR's position as a link between the organization's information needs and the public's information needs.

Social media in this case had two functions: a space where the issue developed and a source of information (*listening*) for PR to understand what the public was thinking, asking, and questioning. However, the expert informant's view that an issue that has already developed should not be met with silence shows that monitoring alone is not enough. Monitoring must be followed by the ability to decide when to respond, what information to give, and through which channel. Thus, IPDN PR's crisis management already had strong verification and coordination mechanisms but still had room to optimize proactive communication through social media.

Crisis communication strategy viewed through SCCT

Within the SCCT framework (Coombs, 2007), IPDN's position in the eyes of the digital public was vulnerable. Although the cause of death was stated to be cardiac arrest and the victim had passed health selection, the public's collective memory of a history of violence in civil-service

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education institutions led people to place this crisis in the *preventable cluster* or at least at the threshold of the *accidental cluster*, with high expectations of moral accountability. Comments on Instagram and TikTok that quickly linked the case to internal supervision, the physical burden of semi-military education, and procedural transparency show that PR faced a crisis of perception and legitimacy, not merely an *event crisis*. Under such high attribution of responsibility, a defensive response risks worsening escalation.

IPDN PR's response showed a combination of *diminish* and *bolstering* strategies. *Diminish* appeared in the press conference that transparently presented the medical chronology to dampen speculation and correct misleading narratives without appearing to avoid responsibility. *Bolstering* appeared in posts about the institution's achievements and activities and humane narratives about prospective cadets on official accounts, which served as a counterbalance so that public memory was not wholly dominated by a single crisis narrative. The decision not to make social media comment sections an arena for debate and to focus clarification on the press has two sides. On one side, it kept the institution out of a *flame war* that could widen negative sentiment through algorithms, and it made the narrative more controlled and formally legitimate. On the other, the lack of a quick response on digital channels briefly left an *information vacuum* that led some netizens to question the institution's openness. In this analysis, *diminish* through mass media was judged able to dampen the crisis at the macro level, so IPDN PR should in future add a more adaptive *instructing information* approach on its own digital platforms to engage a public that demands real-time two-way dialogue.

The role of PR in managing crisis communication

Issue handling involved three positions in the IPDN PR structure with different roles, which can be mapped using the Dozier and Broom PR roles (Table 2). The Head of PR most strongly showed the character of an *expert prescriber*, determining the direction of communication and coordinating with leadership and related units. The Head of the PR Team was closer to the roles of *communication facilitator* and *problem-solving process facilitator*, bridging those who held information and those who carried out communication, and taking part in coordination and consideration of responses. The social media admins mainly acted as *communication technicians* through monitoring, documentation, and post management.

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Table 2. Analysis of IPDN PR Roles Based on Dozier and Broom

Informant Position	Dominant Role	Form of Practice	Description
Head of Public Relations	Expert prescriber	Determining communication direction; coordination with leadership and related units	Determining institutional policy and response direction
Head of PR Team	Communication facilitator and problem-solving process facilitator	Information coordination; connecting internal parties and communication implementers	Bridging decision-making and communication implementation
Social Media Admins (two persons)	Communication technician	Monitoring, documentation, management of content, comments, and social media	Technical implementers and a source of information on public responses and conversation dynamics

This division of roles produced an information *gatekeeping* mechanism: admins were not authorized to give substantive answers based on personal understanding, and questions or information needing clarification were passed to the PR team. The division maintained consistency, accuracy, and control of information, but it made the technical position dependent on the strategic one, creating potential delay between a public question and the organization's answer. Yet admins were the first to notice shifts in public conversation and could therefore serve as an *early warning system* for strategic decision-making. The resulting communication flow, from the public or social media to the admins, the Team Head, the Head of PR, the determination of communication direction, message drafting, and back to the public, is hierarchical in decision-making but circular in information flow, because public responses re-enter the organization through monitoring. The effectiveness of PR roles is therefore determined not only by clear task division but also by the speed of coordination across levels in balancing information accuracy and the demand for fast responses.

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Communication practices from the perspective of Islamic communication ethics

IPDN PR did not say that it verified information because it applied the principle of tabayyun, but when analyzed from the perspective of Islamic communication ethics, this action corresponds with *tabayyun*, namely checking information before believing or spreading it (Hefni, 2017). This correspondence is relevant to the nature of social media, which allows information to spread quickly without verification. The admins' caution in using information within PR's authority, because the official account represents the institution and is not a personal communication space, corresponds with the principle of *amanah*. Efforts to maintain the truth and precision of information relate to *shidq* and *qaulan sadidan*, while adjusting language so the public can easily understand relates to *qaulan baligha*. These correspondences are the researcher's interpretation of field practices, so the finding does not mean IPDN PR consciously applied Islamic communication. A more accurate conclusion is that IPDN PR's communication practices correspond with the value of tabayyun and other principles even though they were not a formal guideline in crisis handling.

Crisis management model of IPDN PR in handling issues on social media

Based on the findings, a crisis management model of IPDN PR was formulated that is not linear but continuous and forms a six-stage cycle: issue identification and monitoring, information verification, internal coordination, message management and determination, information delivery to the public, and monitoring and management of public perception, with maintenance of institutional image and public trust as the final outcome (Figure 3). The model is reinforced by SCCT, the Dozier and Broom roles, and the principle of tabayyun. Its main strengths lie in information verification, internal coordination, message control, channel selection, and monitoring of public responses, while its main challenge is balancing response speed with the certainty that information is true and accountable.

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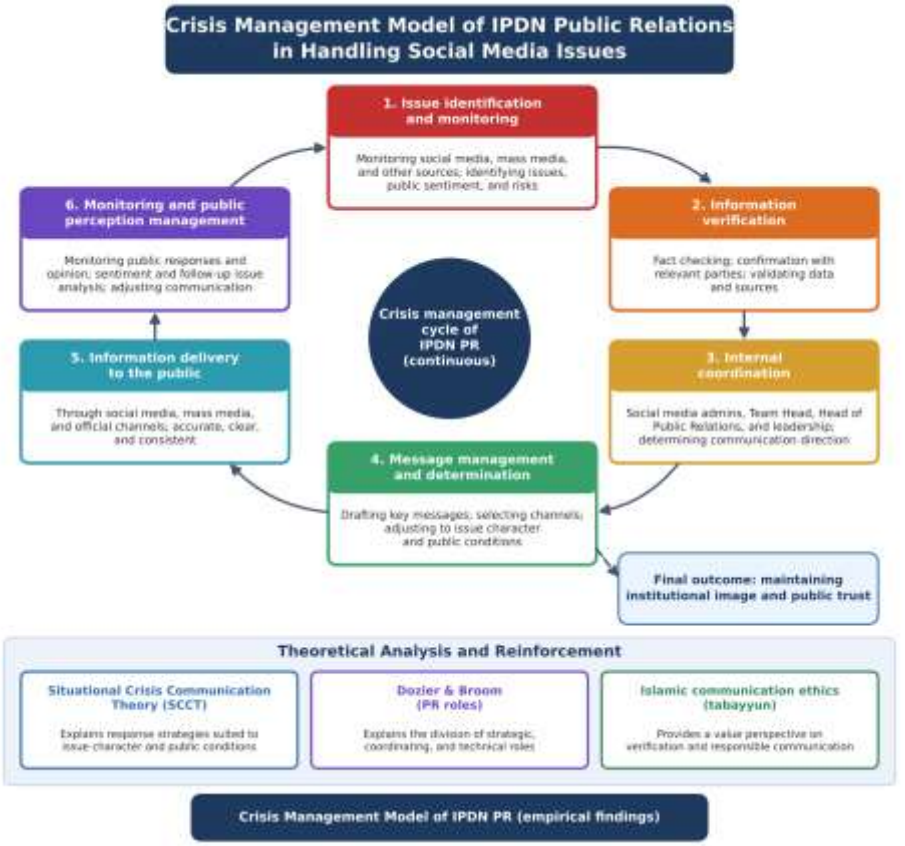


Figure 3. Crisis management model of IPDN Public Relations in handling issues on social media

This model is an empirical synthesis of one case in one institution, with data drawn from internal PR informants and one expert informant and from the Instagram and TikTok accounts during the first week after the incident. It is therefore not a new universal theory but a conceptual description of crisis management patterns in the context of this study, which can serve as a basis for strengthening IPDN PR's crisis communication practice on sensitive issues that develop quickly on social media.

CONCLUSION

IPDN PR handled the issue of the death of the prospective cadet from North Maluku through issue identification, information verification, internal coordination, monitoring of news and social media, and determination of the form of communication to the public. The

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communication process was staged and continuous, with official clarification through credible press media and social media used mainly for monitoring. The strategy was based on considerations of information accuracy, case sensitivity, the development of public opinion, information consistency, and likely public response. SCCT analysis shows adjustment of the response to crisis conditions through *diminish* and *bolstering* strategies, while Dozier and Broom analysis shows a division of strategic, facilitating, problem-solving, and technical roles.

Institutional image and public trust were maintained through fact-based information, non-defensive narrative management, channel selection, social media monitoring, and continuous positive institutional communication. From the perspective of Islamic communication ethics, IPDN PR's practices correspond with the principles of tabayyun, amanah, shidq, qaulan sadidan, and qaulan baligha, but these principles were not used as a formal guideline, and this correspondence is the researcher's interpretation.

Practically, IPDN PR is advised to prepare standard operating procedures for digital crisis communication, strengthen social media monitoring as an early warning system with systematic reporting, build a rapid response mechanism that still safeguards information accuracy, establish a communication authority matrix among social media admins, the Team Head, the Head of PR, and leadership, develop social media as a two-way communication space, and improve PR personnel's crisis communication capacity, including issue monitoring, information verification, and writing sensitive messages. Theoretically, future research can examine the relationship among crisis communication strategy, PR roles, organizational reputation, and communication ethics in public organizations.

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