

## Crisis Response vs Crisis Cluster: A Test of Situational Crisis Communication Theory on Two Crisis Clusters in Indonesian Public Relations

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### ABSTRACT

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is applied in this research to evaluate Air Asia crisis responses. The research tests whether crisis responses are consistent with the SCCT premise related to situation when a crisis has more than one cluster. SCCT argues that in this case, organisation's crisis response strategy is adjusted according to the crisis clusters. The crisis manager can use a defensive strategy for victim cluster and an accommodative strategy when the company has intentional cluster. From the premise, the researchers formulates a proposition: because of having two crisis clusters (victim and intentional clusters), the crisis response strategies of Air Asia are defensive and accommodative. This study analyses both news and press releases on the selected crisis. The content analysis of media news reveals that the company has both intentional and victim clusters, although the intentional cluster is reported more frequently. Content analysis of the company's press releases identifies that the response strategies are accommodative and bolstering instead of accommodative and defensive. Accommodative strategy is used because most public attributions appeared to be intentional, while a defensive strategy is not applied because the media rarely reported the event as victim cluster. As a result, the company were able to successfully deal with the crisis. It can be concluded that a company with two crisis clusters should choose the relevant crisis response strategy in accordance with the type of the cluster in the public domain.

**Keywords:** *Crisis cluster, crisis response, crisis communication, public relations, situational communication theory.*

### INTRODUCTION

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) focuses on public perception in determining the respond strategy used by the company to a crisis. This theory is rooted in attribution theory that individuals tend to provide a certain attribute to an event, especially for those that have a negative impact, to establish cause and responsibility for. As a result, SCCT measures the level of threat to determine the appropriate action that can be taken appropriately by the organisation in order to salvage a reputation (Coombs 1995; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Crisis is an inevitable situation for every company although it has been anticipated before (Anthonissen, 2008; Coombs, 2007a; 2010; Kriyantono, 2015; Taneja, Pryor, Sewell, & Recuero, 2014). Crisis is an unexpected situation that creates instability and uncertainty, and sometimes leading to rising panic. It can result in physical and non-physical damage that affect the company's operations and threatening their reputation (Coombs, 2004; 2007a; Devlin 2007; Fearn-Banks, 2011; McDonald, Sparks, & Glendon, 2010). The company needs crisis management to prepare for and overcome problems caused by crisis (Avery, Graham, & Park, 2016, Chen, 2012; Coombs, 2010; Devlin, 2007). Coombs (2010, p. 20) defines crisis

management as “a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damages inflicted... seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the organisation, stakeholders, and/or industry from damage.”

As a result, according to SCCT, a company should manage crisis responses by focussing on public’s perceptions or attributions since these perceptions affect the growth of crisis. A crisis management team needs to realise that the trigger of a crisis is not the event itself, but a result of the event’s handling (Harrison, 2005), including how the public and management interpret and react to the event (Coombs, 2007a; Zyglidopoulos, 1999). The crisis is the event that will trigger attributions from the public (Coombs, 2004) so that it will become something that is “intangible in the minds of people involving inside” (Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, & Terrell, 1993, p. 20) making the crisis situation bigger. A crisis can be attributed as something that is good or bad, depending on how people perceive it (Penrose, 2000): that is, individual perceptions determine more about the crisis development than the event itself (Burnett, 1998). In other words, “perception is the reality” (Regester & Larkin, 2008, p. 173). SCCT calls the public’s attributions crisis clusters (Coombs, 2007).

In addition, perception is a core of communication (Mulyana, 2010), that is determined by the quality of information given to public company (Kriyantono, 2012). “Every crisis is also a crisis of information ...failure to control this crisis of information results in failure to control the crisis” (Scanlon, 1975, cited in Harrison, 2005, p. 12). Therefore, it can be said that crisis clusters can emerge as a result of the quality of information relayed to the public during crisis. Then, SCCT proposes that the company should observe type of crisis clusters as a basis for determining the respond strategy to deal with crisis. It leads to SCCT premise that the crisis response strategy is adjusted according to the crisis cluster to maintain the company’s reputation (Coombs, 1995; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Therefore, the research aims to test whether Air Asia crisis responses are consistent with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) when the Air Asia crisis comprises two crisis clusters rather than a single crisis cluster. The research contributes to the growth of an Eastern perspective, particularly an Indonesian theory and practice of public relations. As an applied communication science, public relations has been dominated by Western perspective (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2017; Kriyantono, 2017).

#### LITERATURE REVIEW AND FORMULATING PROPOSITIONS

SCCT extends the theory of attribution by not only focusing on public attribution to a crisis situation, but also testing how those attributions affect company’s strategy in responding to the crisis and the effect of this strategy on reputation. Public attribution that could threaten this reputation can lead later to crisis types or clusters (a cluster is a form of type of public attribution). First, the victim cluster that the public believes the company is also a victim during the crisis. It is a weak attribution of crisis responsibility and a mild reputational threat. Second, the accidental cluster that the public believes the event, which is occurred, is not intentionally done by the company. It is a minimal attribution that results in a moderate reputational threat. Third, the intentional cluster that the company is attributed as the cause of the crisis and the crisis is occurred because of a mistake. It is a strong attribution that causes a severe reputational threat. (Coombs, 1995; 2004; 2007a; 2007b, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Those public attributions are determined by how the crisis is being framed (Coombs, 2007b). Druckman (2001, cited in Coombs, 2007b) identifies two types of frames: (1) the mass media's frames and (2) the public's frames. The mass media frames appear in the media news, while the public frames are the inherent pattern of knowledge that the public already has to understand its environment. It should be noted that mass media frames have the power to influence or form public frames, because messages can be frequently disseminated to the public (Kim, Han, Shanahan, & Berdayes, 2004). An and Gower's (2009) study revealed that human interest news exposure in the media made respondents more empathetic to victims and led them not to blame the company. This current research perceives that media attributions reflect the public attributions which create particular crisis clusters, therefore, the research examines the media news regarding the crisis and maps how media frame the crisis.

Furthermore, SCCT produces the premise that the success of an organisation in resolving crisis depends on the steps taken by the crisis manager to identify crisis types/clusters (level of crisis responsibility) as the basis for determining the strategy used to respond a crisis (Coombs, 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). A crisis response is "What the companies say and do after a crisis" (Coombs, 2010, p. 20). If the attribution of crisis at the low/weak level of attribution (victim cluster) the crisis manager can use a defensive strategy such as denial, attack the accuser, or scapegoat as crisis response strategies. When the organisation has minimum level attribution (accidental cluster), the strategies of crisis response that can be used are excuse and justification (it is also called a moderate defensive strategy), and when the crisis attribution is on high or strong level (intentional cluster), the organisation should use accommodative strategy such as apology or compensation to deal with the crisis (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Coombs (2007a) also suggests that the organisation applies bolstering strategy in every crisis to reinforce the cooperation and relationship with the public.

Other researchers have confirmed these premises of SCC theory. Chen (2012) studied the crisis of a fast train accident that was caused by signal damage and the officer did not tell his superiors of the mistake (intentional cluster). The Chinese government mostly used denial and scapegoat as crisis responses when, given the seriousness of the crisis, the government should have used an apology strategy. Using denial and scapegoat when the Chinese government was unable to suppress the negative news caused a bad reputation for the government. Kim's (2014) research on the Namyang Company crisis in Korea caused by the company's violation of employment contract provides another example. With the intentional crisis cluster, the company preferred using justification, attacked the accuser, and used scapegoat, excuse, and denial strategy rather than using apology strategy. The incompatibility of the crisis cluster with the crisis response strategy caused Namyang Company failing to resolve the crisis. Jeong (2009) showed that the public tended to perceive the company as responsible for the crisis. This was because the public knew that the company had a history of mistakes and unethical management including an oil spill crisis in Korea.

Thus, it can be concluded that the SCCT, which puts the public attribution as the priority, is the ethical standard of crisis communication strategy of public relations. Public attribution is the reflection of the real situation that the public feels. This ethical standard also becomes the fundamental principle of SCCT: crisis communication strategy should put the victim's physical and psychological interest as the priority, then it should focus on the

reputational assets of the organisation (Coombs, 2007a). Through crisis communication, public relations has obligation to serve the interest of the people and help them to decide appropriately on the basis of correct information (Haque & Ahmad, 2017).

Some research above has examined the SCCT premise above by focusing more on crisis events which have only one crisis type/cluster. However, it is possible that a company faces more than one type of crisis (Devlin, 2007) because crisis is “series of events” (Seeger et al., cited in Smudde, 2001, p. 34). It leads the researcher to ask an important question: If there is more than one cluster crisis, is the crisis response strategy also appropriate with the SCCT premise? This question leads to this current research which apply SCCT to a crisis response strategy by Air Asia when the QZ 8501 plane crash happened. Air Asia was once regarded as the best airline in Indonesia beating the national airline Garuda Indonesia (SWA-Online, 2013).

The Air Asia incident is an appropriate crisis to analyse because the crash involved bad weather, which is difficult to control, as well as involving management misconduct. When the accident happened on the morning of December 28, 2014, public attributions raised two types of crisis: management misconduct/wrongdoing (intentional cluster) and natural disaster (victim cluster). The public attributed Air Asia was the party that was responsible for the crisis (high level of crisis responsibility) because it committed a violation of the route consent given and did not propose a flight schedule change for Sunday (Hubdar, 2015). Air Asia was also attributed as the victim (low level of crisis responsibility) because of the bad weather that caused plane QZ 8501 to lose contact (Aldrian, Amsal, Rizal, & Kadarsah, 2014). However, the two versions of the cause should be systematically assessed to gain precise data about the real clusters. Therefore, the research formulates the first proposition: The crisis involves two crisis clusters, the intentional and the victim, which appeared in media news.

After the QZ 8501 accident, Air Asia cooperated with several parties such as the National Safe Guard, the army, and Indonesian police in the search process and the evacuation of QZ 8501 victims. They stated their apologies to the victims’ families and provided them with facilities, accommodation, transport, emergency call centre, and other services (Aci, Bah, & Eta, 2014). As well, Air Asia would give insurance of 1.25 billion rupiah (USD 96 thousand) to the victims of QZ 8501 based on the regulations (Faizal, 2015). The post-accident period of QZ 8501 impacted on Air Asia operations: there was a decrease of public trust; their stock fell; and parliament would form a special committee related to the QZ8501 accident (Sukmana, 2015).

It should be noted that a day after the plane had lost contact, Air Asia market stock fell by 7.8% (Murdaningsih, 2014). However, one year after crisis, the company was still able to achieve three awards in World Travel Awards as the best economical cost airline in the world, the best economical cost airline website, and the best economical cost airline application in 2015 (Bless, 2015) and it was not included in the 10 worst airlines in the world in 2015 (Suhendra, 2016). Based on the achievements after the crisis, it can be said that the crisis communication, as crisis response strategy, conducted by Air Asia was able to maintain the positive reputation consistent with SCCT premise: crisis response strategy is adjusted with crisis cluster. Therefore, a second research proposition was formulated: Because of having two crisis clusters (victim and intentional clusters), the crisis response strategies of Air Asia are defensive and accommodative strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the crisis communication strategy when the crisis is in the crisis response phase, which is the most intense period during a crisis (Coombs, 2010). Using the crisis phases provided by Devlin (2007), it can be said that the crisis response phase is the acute phase of crisis and post-crisis. In Air Asia case, this phase happened in December 28, 2014 (the loss of the plane) until March 20, 2015 (the search and evacuation of victims was stopped). During the time, the public attributed that the cause of crisis were the management negligence (cluster intentional) and bad weather (victim clusters).

The research uses content analysis method because it can parse the actual messages related to the crisis communication (Coombs, 2010). Content analysis is used on content of media news (to prove the media frame as representative of public attribution) and Air Asia company to describe the company's strategies since this method, according to Wimmer & Dominick (2011), contributes to describing communication messages and characters. Content analysis has been used to study the content of document, such as newspapers, reports, social networking sites (SNS) and similar media (Ahmad, Abdullah & Ismail, 2018). This research is done in two stages. The first stage describes media news during December 29, 2014 to March 20, 2015. The media selected is Jawa Post because it has the highest number of readers in East Java, where QZ8501 crashed; thus, there is a proximity principle with the public. The first stage aims to confirm systematically that Air Asia has two crisis clusters because media news reflects the existing public attributions. The second stage of the research depicts the strategy of crisis response communication of Air Asia that was relayed in press-releases on the company's website. This is because the press release "is one of the most important instruments for distributing information to society, and has become an essential 'information subsidy' for all mass media" (Moody, 2011, p. 3). The information in the press releases aims to build and maintain a positive attitude and opinion by the public (Bivins, 2008; Kriyantono, 2016). The approaches employed in this study are in line with Zhou (2013) that found the press releases were becoming the main means of the crisis communication during a crisis (Zhou, 2013).

The total samples are 47 news from Jawa Post that related to Air Asia crisis and 59 press release issued by Airasia on the website related to the crisis. As suggested by Arikunto (2006), the researcher takes the entire sample because the number of object is less than 100. The press release on QZ 8501 air crash is ceased on March 20, 2015 with the contents of the press release about the closing of the victims search operation. The reference unit of analysis was used to assess and calculate a set of words or phrases in the news and press releases that show something and meaning by categories (Kriyantono, 2014; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

This research uses three crisis cluster categories from SCCT. The three categories are applied to confirm systematically and precisely whether public attributions raise two dominant types of crisis: management misconduct/wrongdoing (intentional cluster) and natural disaster (victim cluster). These categories are formulated from some research conducted by Coombs (2007a; 2007b; 2010) and Coombs & Holliday (2002) (Table 1). If the news does not describe crisis cluster, but focused more on the evacuation process, it is put on non-cluster category. The news originally is presented in *Bahasa Indonesia*, the researchers translated into English. The coding was conducted before the news were translated.

Table 1: Crisis cluster in SCCT.

Crisis cluster	Crisis type	Description
Victim Cluster	Natural Disaster	The crisis which is caused by natural disasters like earthquake that makes a trouble for organisation
	Rumour	The fake information that is developed in public and damage the reputation of organisation
	Criminality/ violence in office	The ex-employee who attacks the new employee who works in organisation
	The damages of products that caused by extern party, sabotage and terrorism	The damage caused by extern party that causes financial loss for organisation
Accidental cluster	Challenges/	Stakeholder claims that the operation of the organisation is not based on the operational standard
	Technology error	The technology error that caused product defects such as the withdrawal of product due to containing toxic and hazardous substances.
	Technology failure	The technology failure or accident that caused by technology error
Intentional cluster/preventable cluster	Accident happened by human error	The accident happened because of <i>human errors factor</i> .
	Human errors that caused product damages	The damage of the product due to human errors factor that caused organisation / industry withdraw the released products.
	Violation of the law	The organisation do a violation of the rules or the law. The following examples of violations of the law committed by the organisation: 1. <i>With no injuries</i> , stakeholder is lied but did not caused any injured victim. 2. <i>Management misconduct</i> , a violation of rules committed by management. 3. <i>With injuries</i> , the stakeholder is in a position of danger as a result of actions taken by management and resulting victims.

For crisis response category, the researcher uses the formulation of SCCT (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2002):

Table 2: Crisis response strategy in SCC theory.

Crisis response strategy
Deny strategy, the organisation denies or rejects any statement/opinion which have relevance to the organisation as a cause of the crisis. Sub-strategies are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Denial, in this strategy the organisation is focus in explaining to the public that there was no crisis. This strategy can be used when the organisation is experiencing a crisis caused by negative rumours.</li> <li>b. Scapegoat, the organisation blames the parties outside the organisation as a cause of the crisis. This strategy is used when an organisation experienced violence/crime in the workplace, product damage by external parties, and sabotage, terrorism.</li> <li>c. Attack the accuser, confronts someone who claims that the organisation is guilty. Included in the category of crisis response is the crisis caused by natural disasters.</li> </ol>

Deny strategies can be categorized as defensive strategy.

*Diminish* is strategy to reduce the effects of the crisis. A statement by organisation for the public which aims to ensure that the crisis was not as bad as perceived by the public. Sub-strategies are:

- a. Excuse strategy (reason), the organisation statement which is explaining that the organisation does not have to be responsible for the crisis and not caused by the fault of the organisation. This strategy is used when an organisation in crisis caused by allegations (*challenges*).
- b. Justification, to convince the public that the effects of the crisis is not alarming. This strategy can be used on the type of crisis caused by the accident because of a technical error, a problem in the product due to a technical error.

The strategies can be called moderate defensive.

Rebuild strategy, This strategy is used by the organisation to rebuild the image. This strategy consists of sub-strategies, namely:

- a. Compensation, the organisation offers compensations to the public as a form of organisation responsibility. If this strategy is applied, it requires a large fee.
- b. Apology, the stated that it would fully bear the losses that caused by the crisis.

The strategies can be called accommodative.

The secondary response strategies which can be used to reinforce those crisis response strategies above:

Bolstering, the confirming cooperation and relationship with the public to maintain the reputation to keep it positive.

- a. Reminder, the tried to convey to the public related to their previous achievements at the time before the crisis.
- b. Ingratiation, done by praising the public that has been trying to support organisation to gain sympathy.
- c. Victimage, used by organisation to convince the public that the organisation is also a victim of the crisis

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research revealed that media framed the event into only two of three clusters: intentional cluster and victim cluster. 42.60% of 47 news showed intentional cluster which explicitly described that the plane crash occurred due to management wrongdoing: not having climate report, had not taken weather data, flight was not according to the schedule (illegal flight), and pilot's negligence that indicated taking morphine, see in Figure 1.

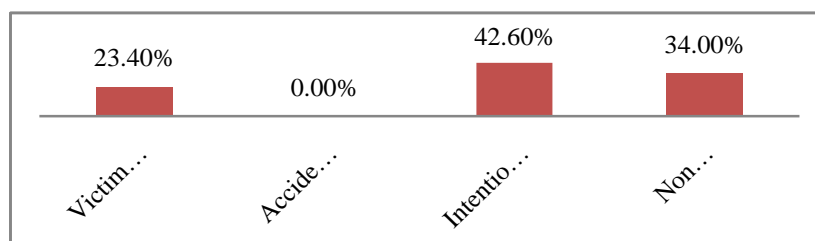


Figure 1: Frequency distribution of crisis cluster category in news stories.

The researchers provided some examples from the media stories which represented the intentional cluster. Example 1 described the intentional cluster which was caused by the pilot's negligence; Example 2 and 4 described the illegal flight; Example 3 was about not having climate report, had not taken weather data.

Example 1: Jawa Post, 2 January 2015

- The evacuation has not been completed, Air Asia is again highlighted in terms of the plane crash in the Java Sea. *The pilot who comes from Malaysia (FI) is positively identified using morphine.*

Example 2: Jawa Post, 3 January 2015

- Step by step, the cause of the plane crash of AirAsia QZ8501 began to unfold. *One of the pilots did not take the weather report that was provided by AirNav Indonesia.*

Example 3: Jawa Post, 4 January 2015

- The Ministry of Transportation *continues to investigate AirAsia Indonesia which has broken the flight schedule.* After temporarily stopping the AirAsia flight route Surabaya-Singapore, the Ministry of Transportation investigates the airport staff who is involved in licensing these flight.

Example 4: Jawa Post, 7 January 2015

- Illegal route will not cancel the passengers' right.

The analysis also showed some statements in media news that the crisis was caused by natural factors. Thus bad weather was categorised into victim cluster (Example 5-6). That is when the plane was on an altitude about 32.000 feet above sea, there was Cumulonimbus cloud. Because the plane lost contact, it was alleged that the plane flew into the storm cloud. However, media attributed the crisis as victim cluster: only 23.40% of the time. It can be said that public was likely to judge that the crisis was the company's fault, and that, as a result, the company must be responsible to help the victims. As described previously, SCCT suggests that frame of media influences how the public think about the event. The research also found that media did not frame the crisis as accidental cluster.

Example 5: Jawa Post, 30 December 2014

- The families of the victims regretted the flight schedule change. They thought, if the plane departed on schedule maybe the weather would have improved and the flight would be safe.

Example 6: Jawa Post, 31 December 2014

- Separately, Tony Fernandes did not want to assume the cause of the accident. He was sure that it was not human error. He said that the pilot had a lot of experience. "Everything will be revealed when the black box found, he said.

The non-cluster category refers to news items that did not refer to the cause of the event, but focused more on the evacuation process. This category appeared 34% of total news.

Regarding the crisis response strategies communicated through Air Asia media releases, five crisis response strategies were used by management of Air Asia to deal with the crisis: victimage (46%), ingratiation (20.34%), apology (13.56%), compensation (10%) and reminder (2%) (Figure 2). Bolstering strategies (reminder, victimage, and ingratiation) were the most frequently applied as crisis response (68.34%). These strategies comprised the efforts made by cooperating with various parties and establishing a relationship to



overcome the crisis. Air Asia stated that they appreciated every party that helped in the process of searching of the plane and victims. Example 7 is bolstering strategy appeared in press-release. Air Asia expressed cooperation and relationship with the public and admired the public that has been trying to support organisation.

Example 7: Surabaya, 20 March 2015

- Tony Fernandes, Group CEO of AirAsia said, "On behalf of the Air Asia family, I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank National Safe Guard, Police and the entire team involved in this effort for their immeasurable support. These past two and a half months have been extremely difficult but we are forever grateful for the unwavering support, encouragement and love we have received in our effort to support the families and loved ones of those on board QZ 8501."
- Sunu Widyatmoko, President Director of AirAsia Indonesia added, "Our crisis center in Mahameru Hall, East Java Region Police Headquarter is officially closed today. AirAsia has activated an information center reserved for families and relatives in order to ensure that they remain assisted when requiring further legal administrative assistance, as well as informed on the identification results." As the SAR operations come to an end, Air Asia and BASARNAS invite the families and relatives of QZ 8501 passengers to join a one-day trip to Pangkalan Bun and Karimata Strait on Sunday, 22 March 2015 and sow flowers at sea to commemorate their loved ones. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the families and friends of our passengers and colleagues on board QZ 8501.

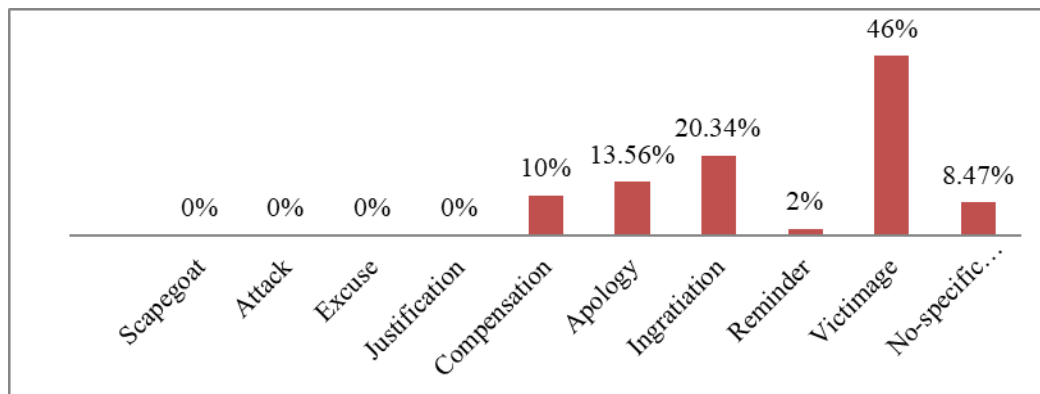


Figure 2: Frequency Distribution of Air Asia's Media Releases by Crisis Response Strategy Category.

The Apology strategy was mostly used in the beginning of the crisis when management made statements that QZ8501 had crashed. The Apology strategy was used to express condolence and apologies which were conveyed directly by the head of Air Asia (Example 8). The Compensation strategy was used to show the responsibility of Air Asia in dealing with the crisis and to calm the emotional effect caused by the crisis (Example 9).

Example 8: Surabaya, 3rd MARCH 2015

- Tony Fernandes, Group CEO of AirAsia commented, "*First and foremost, we once again would like to extend our deepest condolences to all the families and loved ones of the passengers on board QZ 8501.*"

Example 9:

- Sunu Widyatmoko, Chief Executive Officer of AirAsia Indonesia commented, "*We remain committed to providing the best for the families and to stay by their side. AirAsia will be establishing a post emergency information center for families wishing to obtain updates or seeking assistance.*"

From the total 59 press releases that were coded, the researcher identified that after getting the certain information about the crash, the strategy used were apology and bolstering. Furthermore, in the middle of crisis handling process, the management used compensation strategy. Then, in the final stage of crisis handling process, the strategy used was ingratiation. But throughout almost the entire crisis handling process, Air Asia's management combined the apology and compensation strategies with bolstering strategy. It is noted that the company did not apply any denial strategies during efforts to deal with crisis.

From the results, it is known that media framed the cause of the plane crash as management fault and weather problem (intentional and victim crisis cluster). Hence, this research has established the first proposition. But, the frame is dominated to be included as intentional cluster. Four management mistakes appeared in media news: (1) The pilot did not take the weather data before the flight, (2) the pilot and the crew did not follow the *briefing* with the airline before the flight, (3) the flight route taken was an illegal route, and (4) one of the pilots tested positive for morphine consumption. The frame was released by media few days after the official statement of the plane had lost contact and was confirmed as crashed. The intentional frame was constantly raised by the media until the end of the search process and evacuation of the victims, although there had been no official statement from the government.

However, there was another frame of the crash cause, bad weather, which can be categorised as victim crisis cluster. The perception as the victim was mostly came as quotations from Air Asia's management: bad weather occurred in the flight; there could not be any mistake because the plane was in a good condition; the pilot had high flying hours experience. However, it is interesting that the company did not apply a denial strategy as a common strategy for victim cluster.

The finding can enhance or enrich the existing theory by confirming the theory that Air Asia was success in dealing with crisis because their response strategies go hand in hand with types of cluster. This Air Asia crisis is unique because this crisis consist of two cluster crisis. The existing theory and previous research do not explore whether the premises of the theory will be proven when the company has two cluster.

SCCT states that the cause of crisis, which is a collection of public attribution, determines the crisis response strategy of a company. This led to examining the second proposition: the response strategy appropriate with the cluster crisis (accommodative and defensive strategies). The researcher found five crisis response strategies that were used by

Air Asia's management, namely, victimage, ingratiation, apology, compensation, and reminder. Apology and compensation are the kind of accommodative strategy as the proper strategies for the intentional cluster. This strategy was reinforced by bolstering strategies (victimage, ingratiation, and reminder). The researchers have not found any defensive strategy written in press-releases by Air Asia although the crisis also had the victim cluster. It means that the second proposition is not supported. It means that although the company had both intentional and victim clusters, the response strategies will not automatically be accommodative and defensive, as the SCCT proposes.

However, the researchers believe that the SCCT premise (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) is not totally wrong. This is because it is possible that Air Asia did not use any defensive strategies because they felt that the intentional cluster had widely grown in the public domain. The media news can be perceived as representative of public attribution, and public attribution reflects what the public feels about the event. By not applying denial (defensive) strategy, it can be said that Air Asia avoided the public's questions about the cause of the crisis. In addition, media scrutiny about the cause was very high. Air Asia preferred directing public's attention to search and evacuate the victims through bolstering strategies. What Air Asia did was very effective because Air Asia regained the public trust after the crisis ended being re-elected in several best airline categories. Although some management members of Air Asia commented through media that the company was a victim due to bad weather, they never made those statements in the press-release.

By determining crisis cluster, it can be said that Air Asia is able to collect an important component in controlling an environment in order to avoid public outrage. Controlling an environment often becomes the cause of failing or success to overcome the crisis (Burnett, 1998). Controlling the environment is one of the domains (area/scope) within the scope of normal public relations practice (Toth, 2002). By not having denial strategy, adopting Mohammed and Sharipudin (2017), public relation is seen as an important part of an organization in helping to bridge the gap with its public so that rapport can be established. Public relations uses crisis communication to overcome the negative consequence that can threaten a reputation (Coombs, 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Ferguson, Wallace, & Chandler, 2012; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013; Wigley & Zhang, 2011).

The activity of public relations in providing messages that are relevant to crisis situations and opening the opened communication channels is a proof that crisis response has adopted the principle of "ongoing dialogue between organisation and its public prior to, during, and after the crisis." (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2). In this current research, dialogue can be defined as crisis responses are consistent with the public attribution as a factor that determines the development of crisis which is positioning public as a partner rather than a target of communication so it is assumed to be more effective to build positive attribution for the company (Kriyantono, 2017).

In addition, by never using a denial response strategy as official communication, Air Asia relays the quality of information given to public company (Kriyantono, 2012), such as instructing and adjusting information (Coombs, 2010). Air Asia is able to control dominant attribution by not frontally fighting it, but adjusting it. Providing and controlling the information flow accurately and efficiently is an indicator of how well a crisis is handled: if it fails, then it becomes the biggest mistake, but if it works, it becomes a success in overcoming the crisis (Duhe, 2005; Duke & Masland, 2002; Kriyantono, 2012; Wigley & Zhang, 2011).

### CONCLUSION

The research has described crisis communication strategies dealing with crisis involving two crisis clusters. The research findings have confirmed that a company that has two crisis clusters should choose the appropriate crisis response strategy in accordance with the type of the cluster which has widely grown in the public domain. Therefore, the research affirms the SCCT premise in an Indonesian context. The study has limitation in generalising data because it focused only on the media news and the company's website. From the findings, the researchers recommend further research to prove the conclusion: that is, to test the SCCT premise in crisis situations that have two types of crisis clusters which are equally prominent in the public domain. In addition, quantitative methods, such as an experimental and a survey research, can be conducted to investigate the crisis cluster directly from public opinion in order to gain significant results. It is expected to enrich SCCT discussion and the study of crisis communication and public relations in general.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers thank to Universitas Brawijaya for supporting this work.

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