

Navigating Turbulence: Analyzing the Crisis Response of Sriwijaya Air following the SJ182 Plane Crash using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

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ABSTRACT

Aircraft accidents show that the industry is vulnerable to crisis and capture the complexity of crisis management and communication. This study examines the crisis response strategies employed by Sriwijaya Air in the aftermath of the SJ-182 plane crash on January 9, 2021. Utilizing the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework, the research categorizes and analyzes the airline's crisis communication actions based on primary and secondary strategies. The content analysis of news articles from Kompas.com, Detik.com, CNN Indonesia, and Reuters, as well as posts from Sriwijaya Air's social media accounts, reveals the implementation of excuse, compensation, partial apology, and ingratiation strategies. The findings indicate that while Sriwijaya Air avoided denial strategies, its delayed response negatively impacted public perception. The study highlights the importance of prompt and transparent communication in crisis management. It suggests areas for future research, including examining internal decision-making processes and the long-term impacts on organizational reputation and resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

A crisis can occur anytime, anywhere, and impact any organization. As our world becomes increasingly complex, the potential for crises escalates. Crises are unavoidable for any organization, even if predicted in advance (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019), and they may or may not pose a direct threat to a brand (Ma, 2020). A crisis is characterized by an increased level of uncertainty, necessitating direction, action, clear information, and accountability (Weible et al., 2020). All organizations, including airlines, are susceptible to crises. One significant crisis faced by airlines is that of airline accidents. According to Purnamasari & Galih (2021), several plane crashes have occurred in Indonesia over the last ten years, claiming many lives. The majority of these severe accidents have been experienced by civil aviation in Indonesia.

Throughout 2021, the National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT) investigated 20 aviation accidents, 10 of which were classified as serious (KNKT, 2021). The most notable incident was the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 accident on January 9, 2021. Sriwijaya Air SJ-182, en route from Jakarta to Pontianak, disappeared from radar screens four minutes after takeoff near Lancang Island, Kepulauan Seribu. The aircraft carried 50 passengers and 12 crew members. Initial information about the crash was shared by FlightRadar24, a Swedish internet-based service providing real-time aircraft flight tracking information, via their @Flightradar24 Twitter account. The disappearance of the plane quickly became a trending topic on Twitter under the hashtag #SJ182 and was extensively covered by various media outlets. The rapid spread of information, coupled with the lack of immediate confirmation from Sriwijaya Air, led to several speculations within the community regarding the cause of the crash. One prevalent speculation was that the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 aircraft was not airworthy. However, this speculation was refuted by the Ministry of Transportation and the President

Director of Sriwijaya Air.

The investigation into the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 plane crash was conducted by the National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT) with the cooperation of various international parties, including the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) from the United States, the Transport Safety Investigation Bureau (TSIB) from Singapore, and the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) from the United Kingdom. On November 10, 2022, the KNKT released the final accident investigation report, which indicated a disturbance in the mechanical system of the aircraft operating the Jakarta-Pontianak route. The KNKT acknowledged that the safety measures taken by various parties were appropriate and could enhance flight safety. However, several safety issues required further attention. Consequently, the KNKT issued three safety recommendations to Sriwijaya Air for additional safety improvements (KNKT, 2022). In late 2022, the families of the victims filed a lawsuit against the Boeing Company in the United States. The lawsuit alleged that Boeing had not replaced the spoiler or wing section of Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 since 2012, which was suspected to be a contributing factor to the incident (Natalia, 2022).

Based on reports and statistical information from the KNKT (2024), the number of aviation accidents in Indonesia increased from 2021 to 2023. In 2021, there were 20 cases, which rose to 24 cases in 2022 and further increased to 31 cases in 2023. This rise in accidents highlights the urgent need for enhanced preventive measures and indicates that aviation companies in Indonesia are particularly vulnerable to crises resulting from such incidents. Consequently, research on the crisis communication strategy employed by Sriwijaya Air in the aftermath of the SJ-182 crash remains highly relevant. The SJ-182 crash, one of the deadliest aviation accidents since 2021, continues to be a significant case, with the victims' families still seeking justice from the Boeing Company. These incidents underscore the aviation industry's high vulnerability to crises and the complexity of managing and communicating during such events (Ray, 1999).

Crisis management is essential for institutions and organizations (Ayman et al., 2020), as it prepares them to address and overcome problems arising from crises. Coombs (2015) outlines three major stages in the crisis management process, each with distinct substages: 1) pre-crisis, 2) crisis event, and 3) post-crisis. The pre-crisis stage focuses on prevention and preparation. During the crisis stage, management must respond effectively to the crisis. The post-crisis stage involves seeking ways to prepare for future crises and implementing the commitments made during the crisis phase, including follow-up information.

This research focused on the crisis response strategies employed by Sriwijaya Air during the crisis stage of the SJ-182 crash. The crisis stage presents unique communication challenges, making it an interesting topic for research. Internally, the crisis management team must gather and process information to make informed decisions. Externally, stakeholders need to be informed about the crisis and the steps being taken to address it. In essence, a corporation must be accountable in any crisis, support the actions of management, and demonstrate concern (Firoozi & Ku, 2023).

When an organization faces a crisis, the general public and stakeholders seek to explain and evaluate the organization's responsibilities for the incident, often influenced by media coverage. Therefore, providing a clear explanation is crucial for an organization's response to crises. In such situations, managers use the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to understand the context and pre-select appropriate response strategies based on their responsibilities for the crisis. According to Coombs (2007), SCCT is an extension of attribution theory. It tests hypotheses related to how the perception of a crisis affects the crisis response and how the response influences outcomes such as reputation, sentiment, and consumer willingness to buy. Yum and Jeong (2015) explain that attribution theory is a social psychological framework that posits people understand an event by identifying its cause.

In his Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Coombs (2015) categorized an organization's crisis response strategies into primary and secondary categories. Primary strategies are divided into three groups based on the organization's acceptance of responsibility for the crisis: deny, diminish, and rebuild. Deny crisis response strategies include attacking the accuser, denial, and scapegoating. Diminish crisis response strategies involve excuses and justifications. Rebuild crisis response strategies consist of compensation and apology. Secondary crisis response strategies are classified as bolstering strategies and include reminder, ingratiation, and victimage. Reminder strategies aim to inform stakeholders about the organization's past good deeds. Ingratiation strategies involve praising stakeholders. Victimage strategies depict the organization's representatives as victims of the crisis alongside other affected individuals.

Researchers use SCCT to describe the crisis response strategies employed by Sriwijaya Air during the SJ-182 crash. This theory not only aids in describing the strategy but also helps uncover Sriwijaya Air's perspective on the crisis and the outcomes of its crisis communication efforts. Academically, this research aims to fill a gap in the study of crisis communication strategies used by airlines in the event of plane crashes. Previous studies have explored various crisis communication strategies airlines use during such incidents. For example, research on Garuda Indonesia during the Boeing 737-400 crash highlighted innovative public relations strategies and their effectiveness in mitigating reputational damage (Handayani & Anom, 2010). Another study examined Air Asia and Malaysia Airlines during the QZ8501 and MH370 crashes, finding that press releases were key in their crisis communication efforts (Warsihantari & Putra, 2018). Additionally, the use of SCCT in the study of crisis communication responses has been implemented in the Lion Air JT610 crash, revealing a mix of primary crisis response strategies, including diminish and rebuild strategies, along with

secondary strategies such as ingratiation and victimage (Amali, 2019).

Previous research has introduced novel frameworks for crisis response strategies specific to the aviation industry, enhancing the theoretical understanding of crisis management phenomena and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Additionally, earlier studies have contributed significant methodological advancements by employing detailed content analysis techniques to evaluate the effectiveness and transparency of the information disseminated, establishing benchmarks for best practices in aviation crisis communication. This study differs from previous ones, focusing on the content analysis of Sriwijaya Air's crisis communication through online media coverage. Unlike other airlines, Sriwijaya Air did not issue a press release regarding the SJ-182 crash. It provided limited information regarding the case's development, directly or through its website and social media accounts. This approach offers a unique perspective on the role of third-party media in crisis communication, which has not been extensively explored in previous studies, thus contributing new insights to the field.

METHOD

This research employs the content analysis method to classify and describe the crisis response strategies utilized by Sriwijaya Air. Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research method (Shannon & Hsieh, 2005) that systematically analyzes and processes messages. It focuses on the message itself and addresses broader issues related to the impact of the communication process and the communication itself (Budd et al., 1967). This study, content analysis is applied to examine a company's crisis response strategies through online media using the SCCT model.

The data collection technique in this study involved media monitoring through the collection, reading, observation, and documentation of news articles in online media that covered the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 crash. The four online media sources selected for this research are Kompas.com, Detik.com, CNN Indonesia, and Reuters. Kompas.com, Detik.com, and CNN Indonesia were chosen due to their extensive coverage of the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 plane crash compared to other national online media outlets. The frequency of news coverage indicates the level of attention the media gives. Reuters was included to provide a global perspective, which can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the event's chronology by presenting different viewpoints.

However, not all news articles related to the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 Boeing 737-524 incident were used as research data. Instead, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select specific news articles based on established criteria (Kriyantono, 2015). The criteria for selecting news articles, in line with the research objectives, included: (1) articles published during the initial crisis period, from January 9, 2021, to February 10, 2021; (2) articles with high news value; and (3) articles that substantially discuss crisis management strategies as outlined by Coombs (2015) in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

Furthermore, researchers also gathered data from Sriwijaya Air's Twitter and Instagram accounts as additional sources. The details of the number of news articles analyzed in this study from various online media are as follows: (1) 19 out of 100 news articles from Kompas.com; (2) 14 out of 130 news articles from Detik.com; (3) 6 out of 49 news articles from CNN Indonesia; and (4) 3 out of 11 news articles from Reuters.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, researchers present the findings of the content analysis conducted on news articles related to the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 Boeing 737-524 incident, sourced from four online media outlets: Kompas.com, Detik.com, CNN Indonesia, and Reuters. As previously stated, this research focuses on the crisis response strategies implemented by Sriwijaya Air following the incident. To achieve this objective, each news article was meticulously analyzed to identify instances where Sriwijaya Air's crisis communication efforts were evident. The analysis was guided by the crisis response strategy categories proposed by Coombs (2015) in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). These categories include denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. Researchers specifically examined how Sriwijaya Air's crisis response actions, statements, and messaging in the news articles aligned with or deviated from these established crisis response strategies.

For example, instances of denial may involve Sriwijaya Air refuting allegations or downplaying the severity of the incident. Diminishment strategies may include shifting blame or minimizing the impact of the crisis. Rebuilding strategies encompass expressions of remorse, offers of compensation, or promises of corrective action. Finally, bolstering strategies could involve highlighting positive aspects of the airline's safety record or emphasizing its commitment to passenger welfare.

By systematically applying these crisis response strategy categories to analyzing news articles from each media source, the researchers gained deeper insights into how Sriwijaya Air navigated the crisis communication landscape across different platforms and audiences. This comprehensive approach enhances the robustness of the research findings and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of crisis communication in aviation companies.

A. First Response on Sriwijaya SJ-182 Crash Flight

The initial response in crisis communication is crucial. Coombs (2015) argued that speed is a critical factor in effective crisis response. A fast response is the first step in regaining control and credibility for an organization (Augustine, 1995). Researchers have found that when an organization reports a crisis before other sources, effectively “stealing the thunder,” its managers and the organization are perceived as more credible (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2010). Therefore, a quick response provides significant reputational protection benefits.

Reports in four online media indicated that the first response regarding the crash of the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 Boeing 737-524 was delivered during a press conference by Major General TNI Bambang Suryo Hadi, Deputy for Operations and Preparedness of the National Search and Rescue Agency, and Budi Karya Sumadi, Minister of Transportation. The initial information provided after a plane crash is typically limited to flight numbers, aircraft types, routes, accident locations, and the expected number of passengers and crew members on board (Ray, 1999).

Sriwijaya Air should have had the opportunity to give the first response as the company was facing a crisis. Coombs (2015) emphasized the importance of the speed of a company’s initial response in a crisis, suggesting that even when information isn’t yet available, it is better to inform the media that updates will be provided as soon as possible. When asked about the plane crash, Sriwijaya Air’s Corporate Communication stated that management was still communicating and investigating the case and would issue an official statement once more information was available. If Sriwijaya Air had been able to “steal the thunder” by responding promptly to the plane crash, it could have strengthened its position as a responsible party. As previously noted, stealing the thunder can enhance the credibility of both organizational managers and the organization itself.

Regarding Sriwijaya Air’s failure to “steal the thunder,” Reuters noted, “Sriwijaya did not respond immediately to a request for comment” in the article titled “Indonesia resumes search for victims, the black box of crashed Sriwijaya jet” (Reuters, 2021). This delay certainly put Sriwijaya Air’s reputation at stake as the public increasingly questioned the circumstances of the plane crash. Based on news content analysis, it can be concluded that Sriwijaya Air’s crisis response was quite slow. To maintain a positive image, a company must take quick and effective steps when facing any problem, as a crisis can damage even the most positive image of an established company (Primasari, 2018).

B. Crisis Response Strategies Carried Out by Sriwijaya Air

After discussing the initial response to the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 crash crisis, the researchers will now examine the crisis response strategies implemented by Sriwijaya Air in the aftermath of the incident in Kepulauan Seribu. The analysis utilizes the crisis response strategies proposed by Coombs (2015), which classify strategies into primary and secondary categories. The primary crisis response strategies include denial, diminishment, and rebuilding, while the secondary ones involve bolstering.

Sriwijaya Air faced a severe crisis as 62 passengers and crew members perished in the SJ-182 crash on January 9, 2021. According to the SCCT model, the SJ-182 crash falls into the preventable cluster of crises, indicating a strong attribution of crisis responsibility regardless of the organization’s history or prior reputation. The primary rebuild response strategy and additional secondary bolstering response strategies are recommended for crises within this preventable cluster. These include compensation and full apology as primary strategies, along with reminders, ingratiation, and victimage as secondary responses (Verwer, 2018).

C. Primary Crisis Response Strategies

Based on the news content analysis regarding the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 crash in four online media outlets, it can be concluded that Sriwijaya Air employed primary crisis response strategies classified as diminishing and rebuilding without resorting to denial strategies. The denial strategy aims to dissociate the organization from the crisis (Coombs, 2015) and includes attacking the accuser, denial, and scapegoating strategies. In the “attack the accuser” strategy, the crisis manager confronts and challenges the claims against the organization. The denial strategy involves outright rejecting the existence of a crisis. The scapegoating strategy blames external individuals or groups for the crisis.

Sriwijaya Air employed diminishing crisis response strategies, such as excuses, and rebuilding crisis response strategies, such as compensation and apology. Diminishing crisis response strategies attempt to reduce the perceived organizational control over a crisis or the attribution of adverse effects to the organization (Coombs, 2015). These strategies include excuses and justifications.

Sriwijaya Air’s excuse strategy aimed to reduce the organization’s responsibility for the cause of the plane crash. One temporary allegation was that the aircraft was not airworthy due to its age of 26. The President Director of Sriwijaya Air, Jeff Jauwena, countered this by stating, “The information I received was that the plane was in good condition because previously it flew to Pontianak back and forth, then to Pangkal Pinang. This is the second route to Pontianak, so there should be no problems” (Farisa & Galih, 2021). Additionally, the CEO mentioned that the plane’s departure was delayed 30 minutes due to rain. This statement was reinforced by the Chairman of the National Transportation

Safety Committee (KNKT), Suryanto Cahyono, who said, “So regardless of age, if the aircraft is maintained according to applicable regulations, in this case from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, there should be no problems.”

The allegation that the SJ-182 aircraft was not airworthy was exacerbated by Sriwijaya Air’s delayed response during the crisis. The airline did not promptly issue an official statement directly to the media or through its social media accounts, leading to suspicions of intentional negligence. The public inundated the airline’s Instagram comments section with inquiries about SJ-182 (Detik.com, 2021).

An excuse strategy alone was insufficient in managing the SJ-182 crash crisis. According to SCCT, excuse strategies are more suitable for crises with a low level of responsibility. Furthermore, an excuse strategy’s ability to reinforce the organization’s assets is minimal. Sriwijaya Air attempted to persuade the public that the crash was not due to intentional or negligent actions by the airline, such as flying an unairworthy aircraft. The exact cause of the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 crash could only be determined after the investigation.

In addition to the excuse strategy, Sriwijaya Air employed compensation and apology as part of its rebuilding crisis response strategies. Rebuilding strategies aim to improve the organization’s reputation by taking actions and making statements that benefit stakeholders and mitigate the crisis’s negative effects. Coombs (2015) asserts that compensation strategies are most appropriate for crises with visible victims, and apologies are suitable for crises where the organization is clearly responsible.

Victims and their families are hit hardest in the event of a plane crash, and the fate of the victims largely determines the crisis’s severity. Fatalities, in particular, attract significant media attention. While crises naturally raise organizational concerns about economic and strategic issues, major losses of life shift the focus to trauma, pain, and distress. Management concerns extend beyond financial problems to addressing the suffering of victims and their families and friends. Companies respond to such challenges by providing support, counseling, reparation gestures, and expressions of regret through memorial services to honor the victims. Recognizing responsibility and addressing human factors is essential to effective crisis management (Ray, 1999).

Sriwijaya Air’s compensation strategy involved stating its readiness to facilitate the needs of the families of SJ-182 passengers. The airline committed to ensuring all passengers’ rights, including fulfilling compensation of Rp 1.25 billion for each family of passengers who were victims of the SJ-182 crash. This compensation was a priority for Sriwijaya Air to resolve. Additionally, the CEO of Sriwijaya Air guaranteed that the best assistance would be provided and assured that the rights of the passengers’ families would be fulfilled. This commitment was conveyed by the CEO of Sriwijaya Air and reported by Detik.com: “Sriwijaya Air guarantees to provide the best assistance and ensures to fulfill the rights of the families of passengers.”

In addition, Faisal Rahman, the district manager of Sriwijaya Air Pontianak, West Kalimantan, conveyed a compensation strategy to fulfill the rights of the passengers’ families: “For sure, we at Sriwijaya will provide hotel facilities to the families of passengers” (Cipta, 2021). This facility was provided to ensure the health and stamina of the families were maintained while they awaited information regarding the loss of contact with the Sriwijaya Air plane.

During a press conference held at the National Police Hospital on January 12, 2021, the CEO of Sriwijaya Air reiterated the compensation strategy. President Director Jefferson Irwin Jauwena emphasized, “We are committed to continue to provide the best service for the families of the victims” (Achmad, 2021).

Sriwijaya Air’s statements in the compensation strategy highlight the element of empathy. This aligns with the perspective that a company’s spokesperson should not avoid expressing empathy and sadness verbally and nonverbally, as it can stimulate stakeholder empathy for the company, especially during a crisis (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021).

The verbal crisis response strategy in compensation must also be conveyed nonverbally. The commitment from Sriwijaya Air’s CEO to provide compensation of Rp 1.25 billion to each family of passengers who were victims of the SJ-182 plane crash was reported in CNN Indonesia on February 3, 2021. The article, titled “Sriwijaya Air Has Compensated Rp1.25 Billion to 11 Victims of SJ-182,” included a statement from the Minister of Transportation, Budi Karya Sumadi, confirming that Sriwijaya Air had compensated 11 victims of the SJ-182 accident, with each family receiving Rp 1.25 billion. Budi Karya also mentioned that, according to the insurance information, 36 of the 47 victims had not yet received compensation, although they were included in the administrative process of the carrier’s responsibility (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

Another non-verbal compensation strategy undertaken by Sriwijaya Air was the establishment of emergency response centers and crisis center posts at four locations: (1) Terminal 2D at Soekarno Hatta Airport, with the family command post in the inner corridor and media posts in the outer corridor; (2) Pontianak Supadio Airport; (3) Pier II Jakarta International Container Terminal (JITC) Tanjung Priok, North Jakarta; and (4) the Antemortem Command Post at the POLRI Kramat Jati Hospital, East Jakarta. Additionally, Sriwijaya Air provided hotline numbers for contact: 021-80637817 for passenger families and 021-80637813 for the media (Hendaryato & Widyastuti, 2021).

Regarding the apology strategy, Sriwijaya Air has not issued a full apology. Similar to other aviation companies, such as Malaysian Airlines System (MAS) in 2014 following the MH370 disappearance, Sriwijaya Air has only expressed

regret rather than a complete apology (Othman & Yusoff, 2020). Coombs (2015) states that apologies are the most complex and controversial crisis response strategy, distinguishing between full and partial apologies. So far, Sriwijaya Air's apology strategy has been a partial apology, typically an expression of concern and regret without full responsibility or a promise to prevent future crises.

Four online media reports regarding the SJ-182 crash indicate that Sriwijaya Air has not issued a statement fully acknowledging responsibility for the crisis or promising to prevent similar incidents in the future. According to Kellerman (2006), a full apology must express concern and regret and include a promise to acknowledge the crisis, accept responsibility, and not repeat it. Understanding how and for whom apologies repair trust provides insight into factors that influence the development and maintenance of trusting relationships (Ma et al., 2019).

The following is a form of partial apology delivered by Sriwijaya Air through its Twitter account on January 9, 2021, at 9:37 PM:

Media Statement: Sriwijaya Air Flight Information SJ182

We can confirm that flight SJ-182 from Jakarta route to Pontianak has lost contact today, January 9, 2021, at 14:40 WIB. Our plane was manned by 6 active crew. The details of the passengers on the flight were 40 adults, 7 children, 3 infants, and 6 of our crew as passengers.

Our prayers go out to all our passengers and crew and their families.

Until now, we have been coordinating with the relevant authorities and providing all the necessary support.

For family and relatives, please contact the following hotline numbers:

021- 8083 7816 and 021-8063

Social media platforms are critical arenas where people confirm a company's real-world performance in the contemporary digital landscape (Teguh et al., 2023). On January 10, 2021, at 6:34 am, Sriwijaya Air tweeted again about SJ-182, this time presenting their Official Response Regarding the Disaster on Flight SJ-182 in the form of photos. The wording in this official response was similar to that used in previous media statements, expressing concern and regret: "Sriwijaya Air expresses its concern and deep condolences to the entire family of the passengers and crew on flight SJ-182. May the family continue to be given fortitude by God Almighty. We will continue to provide full support and assistance to the families of SJ-182 passengers during the evacuation and identification process."

Additionally, on January 12, 2021, at 8:38 am, Sriwijaya Air tweeted, "We Are with You SJ-182," accompanied by a black-and-white image showing the airline's sorrow and concern for the victims of SJ-182.



Fig 1. Sriwijaya Air's tweet about the SJ-182 plane crash on January 12, 2021.

D. Secondary Crisis Response Strategies

Based on the results of the content analysis of news regarding the crash of the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 aircraft in four online media, it can be concluded that Sriwijaya Air employed ingratiation as a secondary crisis response strategy. Secondary crisis response strategies, specifically bolstering strategies, aim to complement primary crisis response strategies and build positive connections between the organization and its stakeholders. Coombs (2015) suggests that ingratiation is particularly suitable for crises involving assistance from external actors. Ingratiation strategies involve the organization offering praise to stakeholders.

Sriwijaya Air executed ingratiation strategies by praising the numerous parties who had assisted since the plane crash up to victim identification. During a press conference held at the Police Hospital on January 12, 2021, the CEO of Sriwijaya Air thanked the Police Hospital for their efforts in identifying the victims. Additionally, Sriwijaya Air expressed

gratitude to the Minister of Transportation, Budi Karya. The following is the statement from the CEO of Sriwijaya Air, as quoted from Kompas.com (Aditya & Galih, 2021):

“Once again, we thank the hospital staff for working so hard and the Minister of Transportation for constantly helping us. I see the stamina of this minister is very strong, very great.”

Many stakeholders were involved in handling the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 aircraft case, including the National Search and Rescue Agency (BASARNAS), the National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT), the National Police (Polri), the Ministry of Transportation, PT Angkasa Pura II, and others. Ray (1999) emphasized that airlines must collaborate fully with organizations like the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in crisis communications regarding plane crashes. The airline will appoint appropriate personnel to ensure proper accident handling and will work with the NTSB and FAA to arrange the necessary equipment and external services for rescue and maintenance operations.

Table 1 illustrates Sriwijaya Air’s primary and secondary crisis response strategies based on the content analysis of news articles from four online media sources.

Table 1. Crisis Response Strategies Used by Sriwijaya Air on Sriwijaya SJ-182 Crash

Crisis Respons Strategies	Used by Sriwijaya Air	Unused by Sriwijaya Air
Deny Strategies		
Attack the Accuser	-	√
Denial	-	√
Scapegoat	-	√
Diminish Strategies		
Excuse	√	-
Justification	-	√
Rebuild Strategies		
Compensation	√	-
Apology	√	-
Bolstering Strategies		
Reminder	-	√
Ingratiation	√	-
Victimage	-	√

As shown in Table 1, the crisis response strategies used by Sriwijaya Air include excuses, compensation, apology, and ingratiation. According to Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Sriwijaya Air’s decision to avoid denial strategies, such as attacking the accuser, outright denial, and scapegoating, is highly appropriate. This approach mirrors Lion Air’s response in the 2018 JT610 case, where they also refrained from employing denial strategies in their crisis response (Amali, 2019). Crisis managers should avoid using denials if an organization may be held responsible for the crisis (Coombs, 2015). Denial is the most dangerous crisis response strategy, especially if the organization denies responsibility but is later found to be responsible, thereby amplifying the damage to the organization’s reputation (Kim et al., 2004).

While it is commendable that there were no news articles from the four online media outlets indicating that Sriwijaya Air employed denial strategies, it is unfortunate that Sriwijaya Air did not immediately publish a press release on its website or social media. This stands in contrast to the responses of AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines during the crashes of QZ8501 and MH370, respectively, or Garuda Indonesia’s response during the 2007 Boeing 737-400 crash (Handayani & Anom, 2010). AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines communicated the crisis on the first day with the highest number of press releases. AirAsia issued four press releases on the first day and one on a later date, while Malaysia Airlines issued six press releases on the first day, four the next day, and one on the third day (Warsihantari & Putra, 2018).

Despite the crisis being an event typically associated with a negative tone of reporting, Sriwijaya Air’s delay in publishing a press release resulted in a significant number of news articles with a negative tone across four online media outlets, particularly the global outlet Reuters. The results showed that of the 3 news articles published by Reuters, 2 had a negative tone, and 1 had a positive tone. Meanwhile, national media outlets, such as CNN Indonesia, Detik.com, and Kompas.com, displayed a more neutral tone overall in their coverage. Of the 6 articles published by CNN Indonesia, 4 had a neutral tone, and 2 had a negative tone. Of the 14 articles published by Detik.com, 8 had a neutral tone, 2 had a negative tone, and 4 had a positive tone. Finally, of the 19 articles published by Kompas.com, 11 had a neutral tone, 3 had a negative tone, and 5 had a positive tone (Research Finding, 2024).

The crisis response strategies employed by Sriwijaya Air during the SJ-182 plane crash indicate the airline's attempt to manage the crisis through a comprehensive approach aimed at restoring relationships with stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends heavily on their consistent and sincere implementation. For instance, the excuse strategy must be executed carefully to avoid appearing as an attempt to evade responsibility. Meanwhile, compensation, apology, and ingratiation strategies should be carried out with transparency and openness to rebuild public trust effectively.

The findings of this study, which focus on the crisis response strategies employed by Sriwijaya Air in the immediate aftermath of the SJ-182 crash in January 2021, remain highly relevant as the case continues to evolve into 2024. Recent developments, including the ongoing legal proceedings against Boeing and further safety recommendations issued by the National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT), highlight the enduring impact of the initial crisis management efforts. Comparing the crisis response strategies employed by Sriwijaya Air during the initial phase of the SJ-182 plane crash in 2021 with the ongoing developments in 2024 allows for a nuanced evaluation of the airline's approach over time. It sheds light on any adaptations made in light of new information or challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion described previously, it can be concluded that Sriwijaya Air used excuse, compensation, and partial apology strategies as primary crisis response strategies. Additionally, Sriwijaya Air employed ingratiation as a secondary crisis response strategy. The excuse strategy aimed to reduce allegations that the Sriwijaya Air SJ-182 aircraft was not airworthy. The compensation strategy involved fulfilling the rights of the victims and their families. The apology strategy was executed by expressing concern and regret.

The ingratiation strategy involved expressing gratitude to stakeholders who assisted Sriwijaya Air during the crisis. Unfortunately, Sriwijaya Air was not the first party to respond to the SJ-182 aircraft crash, indicating a relatively slow crisis response. A quick response is essential for reassessing management and restoring organizational credibility. Sriwijaya Air could also have optimized the use of social media in its crisis response strategy, as social media is a natural channel for follow-up information.

While this study provides valuable insights into Sriwijaya Air's crisis response strategies, it is important to acknowledge its reliance on publicly available information and media reports. These sources may not fully explain the airline's internal decision-making processes during the crisis. Future research could benefit from accessing internal documents, conducting interviews with key stakeholders within the airline, and gathering firsthand accounts from individuals directly involved in the crisis response. This approach would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies. Furthermore, investigating the long-term impacts of Sriwijaya Air's crisis response strategies on its reputation, stakeholder perceptions, and organizational resilience could contribute to a more holistic understanding of crisis management in the airline industry.

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