



## “COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF STARBUCKS INDONESIA'S IN RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS AND REBUILDING BRAND REPUTATION”

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### **Abstract**

*Starbucks Indonesia is independently operated by PT Sari Coffee Indonesia and has no direct affiliation with United States foreign policy or geopolitical conflicts involving Israel and Palestine. However, Starbucks remains the target of a consumer boycott in Indonesia due to the widespread and global issues. Starbucks also experienced a communication crisis management, which left customers wavering and its reputation severely shaken. As a result, Starbucks suffered losses and several stores were closed. The method used in this study is a qualitative method to reveal the steps taken by Starbucks Indonesia in overcoming the crisis. Through analysis of social media content and official company statements, it was found that Starbucks Indonesia emphasized transparency, clarification of neutral positions on political issues, and a commitment to the value of diversity. Communication strategies on social media became a primary tool in shaping a positive narrative and strengthening a humanistic brand image. Data collection was carried out from various official online media news sources, social media, official company statements, journal articles, and references from various websites. The results of the study indicate that Starbucks successfully restored its reputation and still enjoys the trust of the Indonesian public in general. These findings contribute to academic understanding regarding the application of SCCT theory and serve as a practical reference for companies facing reputational crises.*

**Keywords:** *Communication, Strategy, Brand*

### **Abstrak**

Starbucks Indonesia dioperasikan secara independen oleh PT Sari Coffee Indonesia dan tidak memiliki afiliasi langsung dengan kebijakan luar negeri Amerika Serikat maupun konflik geopolitik, yang melibatkan Israel dan Palestina, namun Starbucks tetap menjadi sasaran boikot konsumen di Indonesia akibat isu yang berkembang secara luas dan mengglobal. Starbuck pun mengalami managemen krisis komunikasi, yang membuat pelanggan goyah dan reputasi terguncang hebat. Dampaknya Starbuck merugi dan sejumlah gerai ditutup. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini yaitu metode kualitatif untuk mengungkapkan langkah yang ditempuh Starbuck Indonesia dalam mengatasi krisis. Melalui analisis konten media sosial dan pernyataan resmi perusahaan, ditemukan bahwa Starbucks Indonesia menekankan transparansi, klarifikasi posisi netral terhadap isu politik, dan komitmen terhadap nilai keberagaman. Strategi komunikasi di media sosial menjadi alat utama dalam membentuk narasi positif dan memperkuat citra merek yang humanis. Pengumpulan data dilakukan bersumber dari berbagai berita media online resmi, media sosial, pernyataan resmi perusahaan, artikel jurnal, dan rujukan dari berbagai situs web. Hasil penelitian menjawab bahwa Starbucks berhasil mengembalikan reputasi dan masih mendapat kepercayaan oleh



masyarakat Indonesia secara umum. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman akademik mengenai penerapan teori SCCT dan menjadi acuan praktis bagi perusahaan dalam menghadapi krisis reputasi.

**Kata Kunci:** Communication, Strategy, Brand

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In a digital age characterized by the speed of information and the dominance of social media, a brand's reputation can change drastically in a matter of hours or even seconds. Starbucks Indonesia, part of the Starbucks Corporation's global franchise network, is a prime example of how misperceptions, such as accusations of support for Israel, can trigger a serious reputation crisis through boycott movements and declining consumer loyalty, which have been occurring since 2023.

Although Starbucks Indonesia is independently operated by PT Sari Coffee Indonesia and has no direct affiliation with United States foreign policy or the geopolitical conflict involving Israel and Palestine, the brand has nonetheless become the target of a consumer boycott in Indonesia due to the widespread and global issue. Starbucks' crisis stemmed from growing boycott sentiment against brands perceived to support Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Starbucks, a global American brand, was caught up in the issue due to social media claims that the company funds or supports Israel. Starbucks began to be targeted for boycotts after management sued Starbucks Workers United, the Starbucks workers' union, in early October 2023. The lawsuit arose after Starbucks Workers United expressed solidarity with Palestinians by posting a since-deleted message on X (formerly known as Twitter) expressing solidarity with Palestinians. (Risalah, 2023).

According to an official statement from Starbucks management, the lawsuit was filed because Starbucks Workers United was deemed to have misused the company's brand, logo, and intellectual property. Starbucks also accused the union of damaging its brand and endangering coworkers with pro-Palestinian tweets. The lawsuit sparked allegations that Israel was affiliated with the company. However, this claim is not supported by facts, as Starbucks closed its operations in Israel in 2003 and has no business ties with the country.

This was revealed by Starbucks on its official website, [www.starbucks.co.id](http://www.starbucks.co.id), which confirmed that rumors that Starbucks provided financial support to the Israeli government and/or the Israeli Army were false. Starbucks decided to discontinue its partnership in Israel in 2003 due to operational challenges experienced in that market (Starbucks, 2023).

However, widespread and rapid disinformation spread through social media, leading to a misperception of Starbucks in the public, including in Indonesia. The impact of this crisis was significant. Starbucks suffered losses. Its profits continued to decline significantly. The losses reached nearly US\$12 billion, equivalent to Rp 186 trillion (at an exchange rate of Rp 15,491 per USD). The image below illustrates Starbucks' declining earnings. At the end of the investment, Starbucks shares plummeted, resulting in a stock market crash.



(sumber: IDXChannel)

Picture 1 Starbucks shares continued to decline and suffered losses of up to IDR 186 trillion

Starbucks Indonesia's sales reportedly declined by 35% by the end of 2024, after previously posting a net loss of Rp 50.11 billion in the first half of 2024. This position reversed from the same period the previous year, when the company still recorded a profit of Rp 52.63 billion. Furthermore, the threat to business continuity also impacted more than 6,000 local employees and 70,000 coffee farmers who are partners with Starbucks Indonesia. (Tonce, 2024).

In addition to financial losses, the company also faced significant social pressure in the form of stigma against customers who continued to loyally visit Starbucks outlets. The Baikot campaign also resulted in vandalism at several outlets, social pressure, and protests inside Starbucks outlets, which negatively impacted employee psychology. In the first quarter of 2025, the company was forced to close 11 outlets across various regions and experienced mass layoffs in several locations.

Starbucks Corporate Secretary Eva Andrianie, as quoted by Tempo, stated that throughout the past year, Starbucks stores faced significant challenges. These challenges

were not caused by operational issues, but by false information linking Starbucks to the conflict in Israel. The company also faced social pressure in the form of stigma against customers who continued to loyally visit Starbucks stores (Hasan 2025).

The Baikot protests also led to vandalism at several stores, fueled by a widespread boycott campaign on social media. This misinformation spread globally and triggered an emotional reaction from pro-Palestinian supporters. The vandalism included physical damage to stores, protest graffiti, and threats against staff. Social pressure, including protests held inside Starbucks stores, negatively impacted employees' psychological well-being.

In the first quarter of 2025, the company was forced to close 11 stores across various regions and experienced mass layoffs in several locations. Starbucks Corporate Secretary Eva Andrianie said the boycott movement forced the company to limit the number of store openings to 10-15 per year. Earlier this year, Starbucks also closed 11 stores due to the ongoing impact of the boycott (Hasan, 2025).

Starbucks is a famous coffee shop from the United States founded by Jerry Baldwin, Gordon Bowker, and Zev Siegl. Starbucks was first established in Seattle, Washington, USA, on March 30, 1971. Its name is taken from the book *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. In 1982, Howard Schultz, who worked with Hammarplast, joined the company as a marketing manager for various types of coffee and to educate the ins and outs of the coffee business. Starbucks first opened stores in Vancouver and Chicago in 1987. Starbucks' business grew very successfully and eventually Starbucks began to go international, with the first branch outside North America located in Tokyo, Japan, which opened in 1996 (Michelli, 2007)

Since 2000, Starbucks has expanded, with at least 33,000 locations worldwide, including in Indonesia, with total net revenue reaching US\$2.2 billion. In Indonesia, Starbucks opened its first store at Plaza Indonesia on May 17, 2002, managed by PT Sari Coffee Indonesia, which was formed through a partnership between Starbucks Coffee Company and PT Mitra Adiperkasa Tbk (MAP). PT Sari Coffee Indonesia is also the only company with an exclusive license to establish and operate Starbucks in Indonesia. In a short time, Starbucks has expanded to more than 500 stores in 59 major cities in Indonesia by the end of 2023 (Starbucks, n.d.).

However, Starbucks Indonesia currently faces a major challenge related to the boycott triggered by public reaction to the war in the Middle East. Starbucks must face a complex problem, because the boycott incident has caused a company management crisis that has affected the company's reputation and operations in the local market. This crisis can also be called a communication management crisis, defined as a situation that makes it difficult for an organization or individual to convey appropriate and effective messages to the public or related parties.

According to W. Timothy Coombs in his book "Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding," a communication crisis occurs when an organization experiences an unexpected situation that has the potential to damage its reputation and public trust in the organization. The best way to handle a crisis is to prevent it. The first thing an organization must do to avoid greater losses due to the impact of a crisis is crisis prevention (Coombs, 2022).

In facing this crisis, Starbucks Indonesia is required to respond quickly and strategically through effective communication. Starbucks must be able to restore public trust following the Baikot movement. In facing this crisis, an effective and responsive communication strategy is crucial for maintaining customer loyalty and restoring the company's image.

To restore Starbucks' positive image and maintain its reputation, effective organizational communication through sound communications management is essential. Swift and appropriate decisions must be made to mitigate the impact of the crisis and restore its tarnished reputation. Public trust must be rebuilt, as public trust is a key source of strength for any company, enabling it to grow and thrive again (Wulandari et al., 2025).

A crisis communications strategy is key to curbing disinformation, correcting public perception, and rebuilding a tarnished brand image. Communications should not only be clarifying but also address the emotional and social aspects of Indonesian society, which is highly sensitive to humanitarian issues and global solidarity (Lengkong et al., 2017).

Starbucks Indonesia has made various efforts, such as issuing an official statement stating that it has no affiliation with Israel, emphasizing that its operations are entirely run by

a local company, and highlighting its contributions to local communities and Indonesian coffee farmers. However, the challenges faced are not simple. Amidst the massive flow of information and emotionally shaped public opinion, the company must be able to develop a communication strategy that is not only informative, but also persuasive and sustainable.

Therefore, it is important to examine in depth how Starbucks Indonesia implemented crisis management communication strategies in response to this crisis, and how these efforts contributed to the restoration of its brand image. The purpose of this study is to determine and explore how Starbucks' communication strategies restored public trust following the Baikot action. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the field of crisis management communication, especially for companies operating in complex and dynamic socio-political environments such as Indonesia.

## **II. THEORITICAL STUDIES**

Communication is crucial for any organization's activities, as it maintains good relationships and the company's public image. Poor communication can erode customer trust, potentially damaging the company's reputation. A company's crisis must be addressed immediately. Coombs defines crisis management as coordinated steps designed to address a crisis in a manner that protects the organization and its stakeholders from potentially significant adverse impacts (Coombs, 2022).

Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is one of the most comprehensive and widely used approaches to corporate crisis management. SCCT is based on the assumption that an organization's communication response to a crisis must be tailored to the public's perception of the organization's responsibility for the crisis. This theory emphasizes the importance of mapping the type of crisis, the level of threat to reputation, and appropriate communication strategies to minimize negative impacts.

Communication strategies in SCCT are divided into several types, including denial, diminish (downplaying the impact), rebuild (recovery), and reinforce/bolster. The rebuild strategy is highly relevant in the context of brand reputation recovery, as it encompasses concrete actions to repair damage and rebuild public trust. In the case of Starbucks Indonesia, the application of SCCT can be seen in how the company identified the type of crisis it faced, assessed the level of threat to its reputation, and selected an appropriate communication strategy to respond to public pressure and rebuild its brand image.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODS**

In this research, the method used by the author is qualitative with a descriptive case study research approach. The data obtained by the author are in the form of words, images, documentation and observations based on internet searching methods. Bogdan and Taylor in Pratama Moleong, say that qualitative methods can be interpreted as research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people or behavior that can be observed and directed at the setting and individuals. Both also state that the characteristics of qualitative research are: (1) natural, (2) data is descriptive not numerical, (3) data analysis is inductive, and (4) meaning is very important in qualitative research (Susilo, 2022).

Qualitative research methods are research stages used to generate descriptive, directive data. Researchers can also conduct observations about individuals/institutions and general conditions. Meanwhile, internet search methods involve collecting data from the internet as research material (Sasmita R.S, 2020). The data used as the basis for this research comes from various journal articles, online media coverage, and references from various websites. The data was collected from various primary and secondary sources, including news clippings from online media, social media, and the official Starbucks website.

### **IV. RESEARCH RESULTS**

In this study, the researcher used the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by W. Timothy Coombs, which serves as a highly relevant analytical foundation. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the type of crisis a company is facing and adapting communication strategies based on the level of responsibility perceived by the public.

In this context, SCCT theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding how Starbucks Indonesia responded to the crisis and rebuilt its brand reputation. Effective crisis communication relies heavily on the use of appropriate communication strategies to mitigate broader negative impacts. Coombs defines a crisis as an unexpected event that threatens the important expectations of a company's owners and stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance.

According to his article "Protecting Organization Reputations during a crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)", "crisis management is a process of preventing, preparing for, responding to, and learning from

crises. Therefore, crisis management is divided into three stages: pre-crisis, during crisis, and post-crisis (Coombs, 2022).

Pre-crisis is the prevention and preparation process, such as building a response plan if a crisis cannot be avoided. Next, during a crisis, the phase after a crisis has occurred, and how a multinational company like Starbucks Indonesia responds quickly and effectively. Finally, the post-crisis phase is the phase after the crisis has subsided, where Starbucks Indonesia works to rebuild its damaged reputation (Putri & Rahmawati, 2025).

In this regard, SCCT provides strategic guidance for responding to crises through four main approaches: Deny, Diminish, Rebuild, and Reinforce/Bolster. Each of these strategies is used selectively depending on the type of crisis and public perception of the company's responsibility. Effective crisis management communication relies heavily on the use of appropriate communication strategies to mitigate broader negative impacts. SCCT offers a framework that guides organizations in selecting appropriate communication strategies based on the context and response they face. Starbucks also adopted SCCT to formulate appropriate communication strategies to address the crisis that hit them.

However, in facing this crisis, Starbucks Indonesia was not only required to solve problems operationally, but also to be able to manage public perception strategically. As a concrete step in implementing its communication strategy, Starbucks Indonesia chose digital media as the main channel in its image recovery strategy. Starbucks Indonesia utilized various digital platforms such as Instagram and the official website to convey clarifications and strengthen the company's narrative. Starbucks Indonesia utilized social media to convey its messages and emphasize that their operations are independent of global policies. This step was taken by considering the speed of information dissemination, the breadth of audience reach, and the ability of digital media to build responsive and empathetic two-way dialogue.

The crisis experienced by Starbucks Indonesia, particularly the consumer boycott triggered by geopolitical issues and public perception of the company's affiliation, serves as a relevant case study for assessing the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies. In the pre-crisis phase, Starbucks monitored public sentiment and socio-political trends, including the Palestinian issue, which triggered a boycott of global brands. Furthermore, Starbucks Indonesia distanced itself from geopolitical issues and emphasized that its operations were local and independent of global policies.

During the crisis, Starbucks implemented a Deny Strategy to protect its brand reputation, stating that Starbucks Indonesia was not involved in the conflict that triggered the boycott. They issued an official statement via [www.starbucks.co.id](http://www.starbucks.co.id), confirming that the company does not support any party in the Palestine-Israel conflict and that the allegations are baseless.

Starbucks' next step is to avoid political statements and strengthen its local image through social programs and community collaborations. Furthermore, Starbucks is also maintaining service and improving customer experience in its stores. During the crisis, Starbucks employed various communication approaches, such as CSR campaigns to demonstrate its social commitment, using social media to communicate directly with customers, and utilizing purchase and discount programs as a way to engage with customers (Andra Ardhana & Purwanti, 2025).

Meanwhile, in the post-crisis phase, the company conducts recovery and evaluation to repair its reputation and prevent similar crises. In this regard, Starbucks reinforces a positive narrative through social media and local campaigns. Starbucks demonstrates empathy, responsibility, and commitment to the values upheld by Indonesian society through various activities, including contributing to MSMEs, barista training, and community activities.

Starbucks adopted a diminished approach by stating that its support for Israel was false and a mere misunderstanding. This was stated in an official statement on its website [www.starbucks.co.id](http://www.starbucks.co.id). In one of its statements, Starbucks denied providing financial support to Israel. Starbucks stated that this was completely untrue. "Rumors that Starbucks or Howard provide financial support to the Israeli government and/or the Israeli Army are false. Starbucks is a public company and is therefore required to disclose any corporate donations annually through a proxy statement," it stated on its official website. Starbucks also denied ever sending any profits to the Israeli government and/or the Israeli army (Starbucks 2023).

In a subsequent statement, Starbucks Indonesia asserted that it has no political affiliations and does not fund any conflicts. Starbucks also emphasized that the company strongly values diversity and has never been involved in geopolitical issues. This was also stated on its Instagram account @starbucksindonesia, which explained that Starbucks has no political agenda and has never used its profits to support government or military operations anywhere and never has.

Despite this, Starbucks acknowledged that it once operated in Israel, but its stores have been closed since 2003. The closure in Israel in 2003 was purely for operational reasons and had no connection to any political, governmental, or military issues. Starbucks emphasized that its business entity prioritizes humanitarian values. They condemn all forms of violence, the loss of innocent life, and all forms of hate speech and the use of weapons.



#### Akun Instagram Starbucks

Starbucks also adopted a communication strategy based on the Rebuild Strategy approach, which is used when an organization is deemed responsible for a crisis and needs to restore public trust. Starbucks Indonesia implemented the Rebuild Strategy by demonstrating empathy, providing clarification, and strengthening its commitment to local values. Starbucks Indonesia also implemented a communication approach focused on transparency and openness to rebuild public trust.

Through visual posts and written statements, the company attempted to clarify its position and take concrete steps to improve public perception. This was to emphasize that Starbucks Indonesia is a local business entity that operates independently and is not directly affiliated with the policies or political positions of the global entity at the source of the controversy.

On its official website, Starbucks states that in the markets where they do business, Starbucks is proud to be part of the local community working directly with local business partners who operate Starbucks stores, employ thousands of local residents, serve millions of customers, and have a positive impact on many people through corporate support that comes from local neighborhoods and cities.

To strengthen its positive image and restore its reputation, Starbucks has adopted a Bolstering Strategy, highlighting its social contributions. This is evident in several public statements where Starbucks Indonesia has expressed empathy for community concerns and affirmed its commitment to social values.

The steps taken through social campaigns provide support and empowerment to local MSMEs as a form of support for the creative economy. In addition, Starbucks is involved in community and social activities in Indonesia, such as sustainability programs and cultural preservation. Through the Starbucks Foundation, PT. Sari Coffee Indonesia provided five grants totaling US\$155,000 under the Global Community Impact Grants program to support non-profit organizations in Indonesia.

Through this program, PT. Sari Coffee Indonesia donates to the Indonesian Movement for the Welfare of the Deaf (GERKATIN), Habitat for Humanity Indonesia, Indonesian Street Children Organization (ISCO), The Learning Farm, and Prestasi Junior Indonesia, to support several initiatives that benefit the local community. In addition, PT. Sari Coffee Indonesia employees throughout Indonesia participate as volunteers to support initiatives focused on youth development, clean water, sanitation and hygiene, and inclusivity.

Liryawati, chief operating officer (COO) of PT Sari Coffee Indonesia, explained that the Starbucks Foundation Global Community Impact Grants program is a tangible expression of support and contribution to local communities. Starbucks is very pleased and proud of this program and looks forward to collaborating with local organizations to create positive change through grants and other resources (Gozal, 2025).

Not only that, at the Starbucks Indonesia anniversary celebration which took place at one of its new stores at Starbucks Lippo Mall Nusantara on May 14, 2025, Starbucks Indonesia stated that it would again donate coffee tree seeds to coffee farmers in Indonesia. Anthony Mc Evoy, CEO of PT Sari Coffee Indonesia, the Starbucks brand licensee in Indonesia, said that Starbucks has become the largest buyer of premium Arabica coffee from Indonesia, which is a clear proof that Starbucks has brought Indonesia to the world stage. Starbucks has planted the seeds of change, literally and figuratively, by donating more than half a million coffee tree seeds to coffee farmers on the islands of Java to Sumatra, to the Seed-to-Cup Experience Store in Bali which shows its commitment to sustainable growth (Bungalan, 2025).

Jojor Sabella Ignasia, Head of Marketing & Communication at PT Sari Coffee Indonesia, stated that Indonesia's rich culture and traditions inspired Starbucks to release its 2025 collection, featuring a range of beverages, food, and merchandise themed around Indonesian culture. The collection includes new beverages based on single-origin Sumatran coffee, dishes with a touch of local flavor, and exclusive merchandise featuring seven iconic Indonesian cities: Jakarta, Medan, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Bandung, Bali, and Lombok, plus a special Indonesian edition (Karlita, 2025).

This approach demonstrates that Starbucks is using strategies aligned with SCCT to control the narrative and restore its reputation. To restore its reputation, Starbucks' communications are designed with a humanistic approach, emphasizing the values of diversity, openness, and concern for local communities. Visual storytelling on Instagram and content campaigns featuring local employees, unique Indonesian products, and collaborations with creative communities are part of the narrative built to bring the brand closer to consumers. By framing messages emotionally and relevant to local values, Starbucks Indonesia has successfully shifted the public's focus from the crisis to a community-oriented brand image.

The application of Coombs' theory is also evident in the timing and consistency of communication. Starbucks Indonesia did not delay its response to the crisis, but instead immediately issued a statement and actively engaged with consumers through comments, direct messages, and discussion forums. Overall, Starbucks Indonesia's communication strategy in responding to the crisis and rebuilding its brand reputation demonstrates a comprehensive application of Timothy Coombs' theory. The company was able to strategically manage the crisis and rebuild public trust. They not only responded reactively to the crisis but also built a recovery narrative rooted in local values and community involvement.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Starbucks Indonesia faced serious challenges and public pressure due to allegations of involvement in supporting Israel, which triggered a reputation crisis. Not only was Starbucks boycotted, but it also experienced vandalism, and employees and loyal customers were intimidated. As a result of these actions, Starbucks experienced crisis communication management that shook consumer loyalty, Starbucks shares fell drastically and suffered losses, and several outlets were forced to close, accompanied by employee layoffs.

Responding to these allegations, Starbucks implemented strategic steps based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) or Situational Crisis Communication Theory created by W. Timothy Coombs, with the aim of managing the crisis effectively and restoring the company's reputation.

Using the SCCT theoretical framework, Starbucks Indonesia identified that the crisis it faced was not due to the company's direct fault, but rather to public perception of its global brand affiliation. In addressing this situation, Starbucks Indonesia employed a crisis communication strategy through four main approaches: Deny, Diminish, Rebuild, and Reinforce/Bolster, with the aim of rebuilding public trust in the brand. The communication strategy implemented reflected the company's efforts to maintain transparency, clarify its neutral position on political issues, and affirm its commitment to the values of diversity and social awareness.

Starbucks Indonesia utilizes social media and its official website as primary channels to convey humanistic and positive messages. The narrative it constructs serves not only as a clarification but also as a reconstruction of its brand image that aligns more closely with local values and the aspirations of the Indonesian people. This research confirms that Starbucks Indonesia did not delay its response to the crisis, but instead promptly issued a statement and actively engaged with consumers. The company was able to strategically manage the crisis and rebuild public trust.

Based on the analysis conducted in this study, the authors recommend that Starbucks conduct regular reputation audits and sentiment analysis to measure the effectiveness of its communication strategy. Furthermore, Starbucks should maintain local values such as cultural diversity, environmental stewardship, and community empowerment in its communication campaigns to strengthen emotional bonds with consumers.

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