The Indonesian National Police's Public Relations Branding Management Strategy in Managing Issues and Crises Regarding Anarchist Demonstrations

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Keywords:	Abstract
Branding Management, Crisis Communication, Public Relations.	In the era of digital transparency, the Indonesian National Police (Polri) faces mounting challenges in maintaining institutional legitimacy amid anarchic demonstrations that threaten public trust. This study analyzes the branding management strategies of Polri's Public Relations Division (Humas Polri) during the anarchic demonstrations held from August 25–30, 2025. The research aims to explore how issue and crisis communication were managed to preserve the institution's credibility. Using a qualitative literature-based approach, this study systematically reviews academic publications, reports, and media analyses related to branding management, crisis communication, and police public relations. Data were processed through thematic content analysis to identify strategic patterns and challenges. The findings indicate that Humas Polri employed a three-stage branding strategy: pre-crisis monitoring, real-time crisis communication, and post-crisis recovery. While these efforts ensured message consistency and mitigated misinformation, weaknesses were found in two-way engagement, digital responsiveness, and empathy-based messaging. The research concludes that Polri's branding approach remains structurally sound but communicatively limited, emphasizing information control over relational trust-building. Strengthening digital engagement, emotional resonance, and institutional coordination are key to improving public perception in future crises.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of information transparency and digital media, law enforcement institutions such as the Indonesian National Police (Polri) face significant challenges in maintaining public trust and organizational reputation. The anarchic demonstrations that occurred between August 25–30, 2025, became a major public concern and a critical moment for the institution's communication management. Improper issue and crisis handling can trigger negative public opinion and erode institutional legitimacy (Suspaningrum, 2024), emphasizing the strategic importance of crisis communication. Furthermore, the public demands transparency, accountability, and swift responses from police public relations officers during mass unrest or property damage, as the absence of these elements can further harm the institution's image (Albert et al., 2024). As the primary body

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responsible for public order and security, Polri must employ proactive branding management strategies to respond to and recover its reputation during crisis situations such as anarchic protests.

An anarchic demonstration refers to a protest that escalates beyond its civil intent—shifting from the expression of public aspirations into acts of violence, property destruction, and disorder that threaten public safety and private rights. Scholars of law and security define anarchic demonstrations as protest actions involving road blockades, tire burnings, property vandalism, and deliberate intimidation that violate legal norms and public order. Empirical studies in the Indonesian context indicate that such incidents are driven by multiple factors: structural dissatisfaction (economic or policy-related), political infiltration, or escalatory responses by security forces that often worsen the situation (Hidayatullah & Purnawati, 2021; Indriyanto, 2023).

Efforts to address anarchic demonstrations require a balanced combination of preventive and repressive measures—prevention through public communication, permit management, and strengthened channels for expressing aspirations, as well as clear law enforcement against perpetrators of violence without criminalizing peaceful protest. Studies on police procedures and legal protection emphasize the importance of human rights–compliant use-of-force protocols, proper evidence documentation, and transparent judicial processes to maintain public trust. Legal practitioners also recommend civic education and crowd management training within universities and community organizations to reduce the likelihood of escalation (Zubaidah et al., 2022).

The significance of branding management within Polri's Public Relations (Humas Polri) lies in the fact that anarchic demonstrations affect not only physical order but also the symbolic authority of the institution. Riots, vandalism, or road blockages are often perceived as institutional failures to uphold order, which may lead the public to question the police's credibility and effectiveness. In the context of public security (Kamtibmas), public perception of Polri serves as a strategic asset that determines the level of community support for its core duties (Nurnisya et al., 2021). Moreover, the rapid circulation of information through social media accelerates the spread of negative narratives, amplifying perceptions of institutional unpreparedness in handling crises (Sholahuddin & Damastuti, 2024). Thus, Polri's branding efforts should not merely focus on image-building but should be seen as a strategic organizational instrument for maintaining legitimacy and operational credibility in the eyes of the public.

During the August 25–30, 2025 demonstrations, Humas Polri faced two simultaneous challenges: managing rapidly evolving issues and handling post-event crises. The first challenge concerned positioning Humas Polri as a credible communicator capable of explaining the context of the demonstrations, de-escalating negative opinions, and restoring public confidence. The second challenge involved managing post-crisis narratives related to property damage, sensational media reporting, and legal actions that could affect institutional image. Studies on crisis communication within law enforcement agencies reveal that the implementation of crisis management stages (pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis) is not always optimal in the Indonesian context (Andriyanto & Hendriyani, 2022). Consequently, Polri's branding management requires an adaptive and context-sensitive framework, particularly in addressing anarchic protest situations as real-world case studies.

Furthermore, the concept of institutional branding within Humas Polri must encompass both internal and external dimensions: internally ensuring organizational readiness, communication capability, and inter-unit coordination; externally ensuring that messages delivered to the public and media are consistent, accurate, and capable of mitigating reputational damage. Institutional branding involves managing values, identity, image, and credibility—elements that are most vulnerable during crises (Albert et al., 2024). As a mediator between the institution and the public, Humas Polri must play a strategic role in managing narratives rather than merely reacting to events (Marda, 2024).

Therefore, branding management strategies should include preventive branding, real-time issue response, and post-crisis recovery branding.

Given this background, the urgency of this study becomes apparent: there has been limited research examining the specific branding management strategies of Humas Polri in dealing with anarchic demonstrations in Indonesia—especially those occurring during a particular time frame such as the August 25–30, 2025 incident. Previous studies have largely focused on general aspects of crisis communication or police public relations, without comprehensively integrating branding management, issue management, and crisis communication in the context of anarchic protests. Research on public sector communication strategies highlights that speed, openness, and active public engagement are the key determinants of effective branding during crises. Therefore, this research provides both empirical and conceptual contributions to the practice of Humas Polri and the broader literature on institutional reputation management in law enforcement contexts.

Several prior studies have examined related themes such as crisis communication in law enforcement agencies (Suspaningrum & Sunarto, 2024), police public relations for mutual understanding (Nurnisya, 2021), and public relations strategies for handling crises in government institutions (Sholahuddin, 2024). However, research that integrates branding management, issue and crisis communication, and anarchic protest phenomena remains scarce. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a contemporary and context-specific case study approach.

Based on the aforementioned background, urgency, and literature review, this research aims to: (1) analyze the branding management strategies implemented by Humas Polri in response to the anarchic demonstrations during August 25–30, 2025; (2) evaluate the effectiveness of issue and crisis management conducted by Humas Polri during that period; and (3) formulate strategic recommendations to strengthen Humas Polri's branding in handling future anarchic demonstrations.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a literature study design. This approach was selected because the research aims to understand and analyze in depth the branding management strategies of the Indonesian National Police Public Relations Division (Humas Polri) in managing issues and crises related to anarchic demonstrations based on conceptual frameworks and empirical findings. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is interpretive in nature and focuses on understanding social phenomena through the systematic analysis of textual and contextual data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The literature study method enables researchers to comprehensively review theories, concepts, and previous studies to construct a conceptual synthesis and identify strategic patterns relevant to the research context (Snyder, 2019).

Data Sources

The data used in this study are secondary data obtained from a wide range of scientific publications, including national and international journal articles, academic books, official government reports, and credible news sources related to branding management, crisis communication, and police public relations. The collected data also include previous studies focusing on public sector communication strategies in issue and crisis situations. Data sources were selected based on their credibility, relevance, and recency (within the last five years), in line with the guidelines proposed by Kitchenham et al. (2007), which emphasize the importance of using updated and reputable literature to ensure academic validity (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through systematic documentation and literature review techniques. The process involved identifying, selecting, and evaluating relevant literature aligned with the research focus. A systematic literature review (SLR) method was applied, which included several stages: (1) determining search keywords ("branding management," "crisis communication," "public relations," "Polri," "anarchic demonstration"); (2) screening articles based on inclusion and relevance criteria; and (3) extracting and synthesizing data to identify key themes and concepts. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of how Humas Polri's branding strategies are formulated and implemented in managing public issues and crises.

Data Analysis Method

The study used content analysis with a thematic approach to analyze the data. This analytical method involved data reduction, conceptual categorization, and interpretation of findings from various sources to uncover patterns and relationships between theories and real-world practices of police public relations branding (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis followed several stages: (1) organizing literature into major themes such as issue management, crisis communication, and institutional branding; (2) identifying strategies and models applied in law enforcement contexts; and (3) synthesizing interpretations that explain the relationship between Humas Polri's branding strategies and issue or crisis management during anarchic demonstrations. Through this process, the research is expected to produce a conceptual model that serves as a reference for developing effective communication and branding strategies in public institutions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Branding Management Strategies Implemented by the Indonesian National Police Public Relations Division (Humas Polri)

The findings from the literature review and data synthesis indicate that during the anarchist demonstrations held between August 25–30, 2025, Humas Polri adopted a multi-layered branding management strategy that combined elements of crisis communication, digital engagement, and institutional reputation management. This approach aligns with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes message alignment with the nature of the crisis and audience perception (Coombs, 2021). Humas Polri's strategy can be categorized into three stages: pre-crisis preparation, real-time issue management, and post-crisis recovery.

In the pre-crisis phase, the institution focused on monitoring public sentiment through digital platforms and media surveillance to anticipate potential escalation. This proactive monitoring allowed Humas Polri to map key issues, stakeholders, and sentiment trends. Similar to best practices outlined by Mahoney et al. (2022), early monitoring supports proactive issue framing and helps prevent misinformation from dominating the narrative (Mahoney, 2021). However, findings also show that the pre-crisis communication of Humas Polri still relied heavily on centralized statements rather than two-way engagement, which limited real-time interaction with the public.

During the crisis phase, Humas Polri utilized multiple communication channels, including official press releases, verified social media accounts, and collaboration with mainstream media. The focus was to disseminate transparent, factual, and timely information regarding police actions during the demonstrations. This aligns with research by Kim, (2020), which found that message consistency and transparency during crises significantly enhance public trust and mitigate reputation damage (Kim, 2020). Nonetheless, media analysis during the event period showed that Humas Polri faced challenges in countering citizen-generated content that often portrayed the institution negatively. The absence of a rapid-response digital task force hindered the timely correction of misinformation, revealing a gap between institutional communication pace and social media virality.

In the post-crisis recovery stage, Humas Polri emphasized reputational restoration through community engagement programs, open dialogues with civil society organizations, and reflective public communication campaigns. This approach reflects the recovery branding concept proposed by Geyser, (2009), emphasizing emotional reconnection and value reaffirmation after institutional crises (Greyser, 2009). However, the post-crisis effort remained limited to formal statements, lacking the storytelling and empathy-driven narratives that could enhance long-term public perception. The analysis suggests that while Humas Polri demonstrated structural readiness in managing institutional branding, its approach still prioritized information dissemination over relational communication.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Issue and Crisis Management

The evaluation of issue and crisis management during the August 2025 demonstrations highlights both strengths and weaknesses in Humas Polri's strategy. On the positive side, Polri's public relations succeeded in maintaining message consistency, coordination with national media, and control of official information flow, which helped prevent large-scale panic or misinformation escalation. This outcome aligns with previous findings by Suspaningrum and Sunarto (2024), who noted that message discipline and leadership visibility are key to effective crisis handling within the Indonesian National Police.

However, from a public perception standpoint, data from digital sentiment analyses (collected by independent monitoring agencies) revealed a mixed response: while official messages were considered factual, a significant portion of online discussions accused the police of being defensive and lacking empathy. This finding reinforces the argument of Men and Tsai (2022) that institutional credibility depends not only on factual accuracy but also on emotional resonance. Furthermore, the internal coordination between Humas Polri and regional police units (Polda and Polres) was occasionally inconsistent, resulting in delayed information updates. This gap in horizontal communication reflects the need for integrated crisis protocols across organizational levels.

Strategic Recommendations for Strengthening Humas Polri's Branding

Based on the analysis and evaluation above, three key recommendations emerge for strengthening Humas Polri's branding management in future anarchic demonstrations and crisis situations.

First, Humas Polri should adopt a real-time digital engagement framework supported by a specialized crisis response unit within its communication division. This would enable faster monitoring, response, and verification of public narratives circulating online, reducing the potential impact of misinformation. Second, the institution should transition from a reactive communication model to a relationship-oriented communication strategy that emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and participatory engagement with stakeholders. This approach is consistent with the two-way symmetrical communication model proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), which advocates for mutual understanding rather than one-sided information flow (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Third, Humas Polri needs to institutionalize crisis communication training and simulation programs across all police levels to ensure message coherence and strategic alignment during emergencies. Regular evaluations and public perception audits can also help identify narrative weaknesses and areas for improvement. As noted by Ihlen and Fredriksson (2021), consistent evaluation and adaptive communication practices are vital for maintaining institutional trust and legitimacy in high-pressure situations.

In summary, the case of the August 25–30, 2025 anarchic demonstrations demonstrates that while Humas Polri possesses the foundational structure for branding and crisis management, the

institution's branding strategy must evolve toward a more empathetic, transparent, and digitally responsive model. Strengthening these elements will not only enhance the image of the police but also solidify its role as a credible and trusted public institution in the democratic space.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Humas Polri's branding management during anarchic demonstrations demonstrated organizational preparedness and message discipline but lacked interactive communication and emotional connection with the public. Practically, it is recommended that Polri establish a real-time digital response team, strengthen empathetic and dialogic communication, and institutionalize crisis communication training across all levels. Limitations include the study's reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture on-ground dynamics or public sentiment variations. Future research should incorporate field interviews, social media analytics, and comparative case studies to deepen understanding of crisis branding effectiveness within public institutions.

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