

# Public Relations Strategy in Restoring Corporate Image at PT Toyota Astra Motor

Maria Wandita Utami<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia.  
Email: [ria.wandita248@gmail.com](mailto:ria.wandita248@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

In an era marked by globalization and increasingly fierce business competition, the company's image has become a strategic asset that significantly affects the trust of customers, business partners, and the wider community. PT Toyota Astra Motor as a leading player in the automotive industry is not immune to reputational risks that may arise from a crisis situation. One notable example is the case of airbag recalls, which poses a serious challenge to the company's public image. This study aims to analyze the image restoration strategy implemented by PT Toyota Astra Motor Indonesia in response to the airbag recall crisis. This research is based on the concepts of communication and public relations, with a special focus on William L. Benoit's Image Restoration Theory. This study emphasizes the role of public relations (PR) in managing crisis communication and mitigating reputational damage. Adopting a qualitative approach, data is collected through various communication channels, including mass media coverage, the company's official website, and exclusive interviews featured on Toyota's official YouTube platform. The findings reveal that PT Toyota Astra Motor uses a proactive, transparent, and strategic PR approach in overcoming the crisis. The company actively engages with mass media and digital platforms, collaborates with credible automotive experts, openly acknowledges these issues, and provides clear and consistent information while encouraging public dialogue. This comprehensive response was positively received by the public, showing that the PR strategy implemented was effective in rebuilding trust and restoring the company's image. The study highlights that transparency, accountability, and active stakeholder engagement are critical components of successful crisis management and can serve as a practical model for organizations facing similar challenges.

Keywords: Strategy, Public Relations, Image Recovery, Crisis Communication, Corporate Image.

## I. Introduction

In the era of very fast information flows, public relations plays an important role in a company. Public relations plays a role in connecting the companies where he works with stakeholders through the media, and even in direct contact (face-to-face) with the community. The image and promotion of the company are also in the hands of Public Relations, so a public relations person must have a good ability to interact with others and understand the other aspects of the company where he works. Public relations is a management function in carrying out communication activities, so basically the purpose of public relations is the purpose of communication. These goals are implemented into public relations programs (Effendy: 2009). Public relations is an integral part of an organization. The task of public relations is to be responsible for creating a positive image and participating in creating conditions so that the company is conducive, has a healthy work climate, strong social relationships and high performance of its human resources. The role of public relations in the



organization is very important, related to supporting the performance of the organization both internally and externally (Ruslan: 2023). In order for the company's goals to be achieved, the right strategy is needed from the division that handles the public relations function in a corporate organization. The strategy is used to work on the perception of stakeholders, both internal and external, to support the company in achieving its goals. With the right strategy, the company will be able to make money and energy efficiency and be able to realize the goals that have been set correctly (Lengkong: 2017).

Strategy is part of human life, when a person has knowledge, his life does not only rely on intuition but also relies on his logic in thinking. Strategy is essentially planning and management to achieve goals. But to achieve this goal, strategy does not function as a roadmap that only shows directions, but must show how the tactics operate. As defined by J L Thompson in Oliver (2007: 2) strategy as a way to achieve an end result, the end result concerns the goals and objectives of the organization and the competitive strategy for each activity. Meanwhile, functional strategies directly drive competitive strategies. Bennet in Oliver (2007:2) describes strategy as "the direction that the organization chooses to follow in achieving its mission". A good image and trust in the eyes of the public is one of the most important things for the existence of a company. Especially in today's information era, the role of public relations in building a positive image is increasingly needed. If trust and the company's image are damaged in the eyes of the public, then the company must be prepared to face a crisis of trust (Shilvy: 2022). A company that experiences a crisis of trust will be able to cause a prolonged growth of negative views from stakeholders, and the level of trust and company image in the eyes of the public will drop sharply. To maintain credibility with stakeholders, companies must react and respond quickly, information is managed effectively and provided at the same time to all affected parties (Shilvy: 2022).

At the beginning of 2023, PT Toyota Astra Motor (TAM) found a problem related to Veloz, Avanza, and Raize model car products that had to be recalled from circulation from the national market. This malfunction occurs due to a malfunction in the airbag or airbag. A faulty series of airbag ECU (Electronic Control Unit) has the potential to make the airbag unable to operate as it should in the event of an impact. The models affected by the recall program are 3,538 units from December 2022 to January 2023, consisting of 103 units of the Veloz, 3,360 units of Avanza, and 75 units of Raize. As a result of the sudden withdrawal information, Toyota Astra Motor's shares, which are also part of Toyota Motor Corporation, experienced a significant decline. This withdrawal information was published around June 2023. At the time, Toyota shares were worth 171.94 USD, and dropped to 154.86 USD within 3 days of the information being published. As a result, a strategy is needed to restore the company's image, so that the company's financial condition can run normally, and still gain the trust of the public/consumers. To restore the negative image that has been formed, a precise strategy from a public relations person is needed. "A public relations person must not only have technical skills and managerial skills under normal circumstances, but public relations must also have the ability to anticipate, face or handle a crisis of trust and loss of image) that happened" (Ruslan, 2006: 247). Furthermore, a tough challenge is the recovery of the public's positive image towards the company's trust. Public relations plays a very important role in restoring the company's image. From the explanation above, the researcher is interested in researching how the public relations strategy carried out by the Toyota Astra Motor company in recovering and maintaining the company's image.

## II. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Communication

Communication is one of the activities that we can encounter in our daily lives. By communicating, we can connect with each other. Broadly speaking, communication is the process of conveying information, messages, ideas or ideas from one party to another. Speaking is a very crucial activity for humans. It is not only limited to the context of organizational life, but also covers all aspects of human life as a whole.

Communication plays a central role in our lives, where we all engage in interaction with others through the process of communication. Communication methods can vary from simple to complex, and current technological changes have significantly changed the way humans interact and communicate. (Pohan & Fitria, 2021). Communication can vary from simple to complex, and today's technological changes have significantly changed the way humans interact and communicate. Communication can be interpreted as stated according to several experts, namely:

- a. Hovland, Janis and Kelley explain that communication is the process of individuals sending stimuli that are usually in verbal form to change the behavior of others. (AK, Harahap, & AB, 2022)
- b. Forsadale explained that communication is a process of providing signals according to certain rules, so that in this way a system can be established, maintained and changed. (AK, Harahap, & AB, 2022)
- c. Brent D Ruben defines it as a process through which individuals in relationships, in groups, in organizations and in society create, transmit, and use information to coordinate the environment of others. (Hariyanto, 2021)

Based on some of the above understandings, communication is the process of conveying messages, ideas, ideas from one party to another through certain channels with a conscious intention to influence the recipient.

## 2.2. Public Relations

Role Public Relations has a very important significance in building a reputation. Public Relations, which is generally defined as public relations, plays a critical role in an organization. J.C. Seidel said that "(Marisyah, Yudha, & Besar, 2023) Public Relations is a continuous process of management's efforts to obtain Goodwill (good faith) and understanding from customers, employees and the wider public", while according to Philip Lesly, said Public relations as "activities that help organizations and their public-public to adapt to each other". (Rahastine, 2021)

Public relations can be defined as a management function that evaluates public attitudes, studies the policies and procedures of individuals or organizations in accordance with the public interest, and runs programs to gain public understanding and acceptance (Denny Griswold (Nova), 2011: 43). Coulson (Lengkong, Sondang & Londa, 2017) said that public relations is a deliberately planned effort that is useful for building and maintaining mutual understanding between organizations and communities. Rumanti ( (Lengkong, Sondang & Londa, 2017) said that public relations is an interaction that creates public opinion as a beneficial input for both parties and is a professional profession in its field because it is one of the important factors in achieving organizational goals precisely and continuously because public relations is the survival of the organization concerned. Some definitions of Public Relations can be concluded that there is an ongoing and continuous process where the activity has the goal of building, maintaining and maintaining a positive image both internally and externally of the company.

The duties of a Public Relations officer focus on the interests of the public, always maintain good communication with the internal and external public, perform functions and focus on good morals and behavior so that they can provide a positive image of the company (Jaelani, 2020). Therefore, the relationship between Public Relations and the public is something that must be established. Because the company cannot stand without cooperation with other companies. Therefore, companies must create harmonious relationships with the public in particular, and with society at large (Sutherland et al., 2020).

### 2.3. Image Restoration Theory

The Theory of Image Restoration from William L. Benoit in Selvina L. Lengkong, (2017) was initiated by a professor at Ohio University named William L. Benoit, providing a clear picture of the theory of image restoration. The theory aims to maintain a positive image. According to Benoit, because of a bad image, communicators will make maximum efforts or be motivated to restore the good name or image to the expected level.

This theory refers to what the organization, its stakeholders and the public feel. The key to understanding image recovery strategy theory is to provide a quick and appropriate response to attacks or complaints that occur during a crisis. Benoit said there are two components that need to be considered when there is a crisis related to imaging. First, the organization must provide responsibility by taking action. Second, the actions that are built must be related to considering the effects that arise and the effects caused must give rise to positive reactions. There is a similar study that discusses image restoration. Among others, as follows:

**Table 1. Similar research related to image restoration strategies**

No	Research Title	Author	Research objectives	Theoretical concepts used
1	Public Relations Strategy in Restoring Corporate Image (Case Study of Rumah Makan Kawan Baru Megamas Manado)	Selvina L. Lengkong Mariam Sondakh J.W. Londa	The focus of the research is to find out how the public relations strategy is in restoring the image of the new restaurant of Friends Megamas Manado and what are the obstacles faced by public relations in restoring the image	The theory used uses the theory of image restoration according to William L. Benoit.
2	Public relations <i>strategy</i> in restoring the company's image	Tri nurul Filayly, Poppy Ruliana	Know the <i>public relations</i> strategy in restoring the company's image.	The concept used uses Marston's RACE model communication through four phases of research, planning and communication and evaluation actions. The theory used uses the theory of image restoration.
3	Public Relations Strategy in Building the Image of Interstudi Stikom	Tri Mutiara Wulandari, Gita Widyasanty	Knowing <i>public relations</i> strategies through external events in building a high university image.	Using cutlip and broom theory with pr stages
4	Eiger's public relations strategy in image restoration	Shilvy Andini Sunarto, Dinda Putri Adzani	Knowing the <i>public relations</i> strategy in restoring its image with the aim of finding out what obstacles the Eiger company experienced in restoring its image	Using the theory of image restoration by William Benoit

Based on some of the research titles above, it describes the stages in image recovery. Image restoration is important because an entity's reputation can affect the perception and support of various parties, including the general public, customers, business partners, and other stakeholders. A good image can create trust, increase attraction, and strengthen relationships, while a slumped image can lead to doubt, decreased support, and even detrimental financial impacts. Therefore, image restoration is a necessity to restore confidence and rebuild a positive reputation that may be disrupted by various factors such as controversy, mistakes, or other crises.

### III. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach that aims to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied, especially related to the strategy of restoring the company's image in the face of a crisis. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to comprehensively explore the communication and response processes built by the company, with an emphasis on the depth of analysis rather than the quantity of data. This research refers to the Image Restoration Theory put forward by William L. Benoit, which explains various strategies that organizations can use in responding to crises due to mistakes or issues that have the potential to damage reputation. This theory is the basis for analyzing how companies shape communication messages as an effort to improve their image in the eyes of the public. Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation studies by utilizing various sources, such as mass media reports, the company's official website, and communication content published through digital platforms, including interviews available on the company's official channels. The data obtained was then analyzed using the content analysis method (content analysis), which aims to identify patterns, themes, and trends in communication messages delivered by companies during crisis periods. The qualitative research process in this study involves several stages, namely the formulation of the research focus, the collection of relevant data, the reduction of data, the presentation of data, and the drawing of conclusions. The researcher plays the role of the main instrument in the analysis process, so the interpretation of the data is greatly influenced by the analytical ability and subjectivity of the researcher.

### IV. Results and Discussion

Product recalls usually occur when a product shows substandard quality or usually the product is potentially dangerous (Pruitt and Peterson, 1986 in Chu et al., 2005) Product recall begins with the discovery of a defect by the manufacturer, distributor, importer, retailer, or user himself. Product recall occurs when a product is deemed to pose a danger to consumers or violate safety regulations. The company's image plays an important role in the impact caused by product recall cases. According to Lehu in Flavian et al., (2005) company image is one of the basic elements that greatly influence the level of consumer confidence. Product recall cases can threaten the company's image that has been around for a long time and is difficult for the company to build. A good company image is an asset for the company, because the company's image is formed from customer perception of the company's products.

At the beginning of 2023, PT Toyota Astra Motor (TAM) found a problem related to Veloz, Avanza, and Raize model car products that had to be recalled or recalled from the Indonesian market in particular. This malfunction occurs due to a *malfunction* in the airbag or *airbag*. A *faulty* series of airbag ECU (*electronic control unit*) has the potential to make the airbag unable to operate as it should in the event of an impact. The models affected by *the recall program* are 3,538 units from December 2022 to January 2023, consisting of 103 units of Veloz, 3,360 units of Avanza, and 75 units of Raize. To overcome this problem, several public relations communication strategies are needed, such as:

#### 4.1. Transparency and Openness

In the face of the 2023 airbag recall, transparency is key. Toyota Indonesia must provide clear and accurate information about the problems faced, the steps taken, and their impact on consumers. A study by Grunig and Hunt (1984) emphasized the importance of open and honest organizational communication in managing a company's reputation.

#### 4.2. Proactive Communication

Not only responding, Toyota Indonesia must take the lead in disseminating information. Hosting press conferences, creating informative press releases, and using social media effectively are all part of a proactive communication strategy. According to Cutlip and Center (2010), a proactive approach can minimize reputational damage and build public support.

#### 4.3. Engaging Consumers

Toyota needs to make consumers feel involved in solving problems. Hosting Q&A sessions, webinars, or providing dedicated channels to ask questions can strengthen the bond between companies and consumers. According to Heath (2006), direct interaction can help gain a better understanding of consumer concerns and views.

#### 4.4. Highlighting Preventive Measures

It is important for Toyota Indonesia to highlight the preventive measures taken to prevent the recurrence of airbag problems in the future. This includes investments in technology improvements, changes in quality control, and an overall evaluation of the production process. According to Seitel (2017), showing the company's responsibility and seriousness in preventing similar problems can support reputation restoration efforts.

#### 4.5. Responsiveness to Consumer Feedback

Toyota needs to listen carefully to consumer feedback. A quick response to consumer complaints or questions can help reduce uncertainty and increase trust. Implementing an effective consumer feedback system can help create a sustainable feedback cycle (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007).

#### 4.6. Community Education

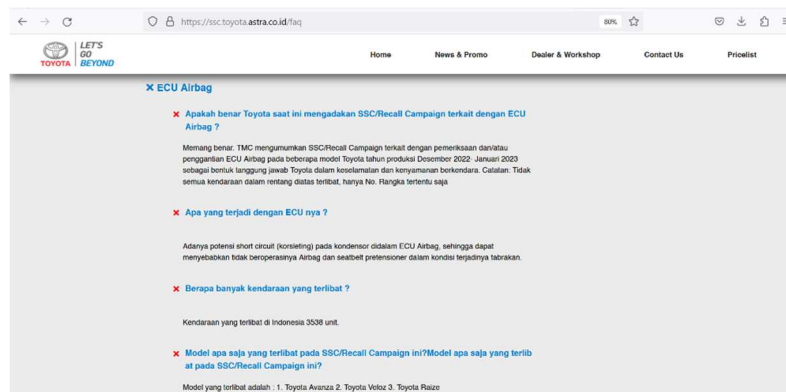
In addition to focusing on consumers, Toyota Indonesia also needs to educate the public at large. An outreach campaign on driving safety and Toyota's efforts in addressing the airbag issue can help build a better understanding among the public. According to Cutlip, Center, & Broom (2006), public education can be a powerful tool in changing public perceptions.

#### 4.7. Collaboration with the Media

Good cooperation with the media is important in disseminating information widely and evenly. Toyota needs to maintain positive relationships with journalists and the media to ensure accurate and balanced coverage. A study by Grunig (2009) highlights the importance of good relationships between organizations and the media in supporting PR goals.

#### 4.8. Monitoring and Evaluation

At this stage, Toyota Indonesia monitors the airbag recall process. Toyota Indonesia ensures that all customers affected by the recall have received airbag repairs free of charge. Toyota Indonesia also evaluated this airbag recall. Toyota Indonesia will use the results of this evaluation to improve the quality of its products and services in the future. PT Toyota Astra Motor (TAM) is responsible for responding to problems that occur quickly, starting by delivering clear, accurate and timely information about the reasons for problems with Airbags. The information is explained through the official [ssc.toyota.astra.co.id](http://ssc.toyota.astra.co.id) website as shown below:



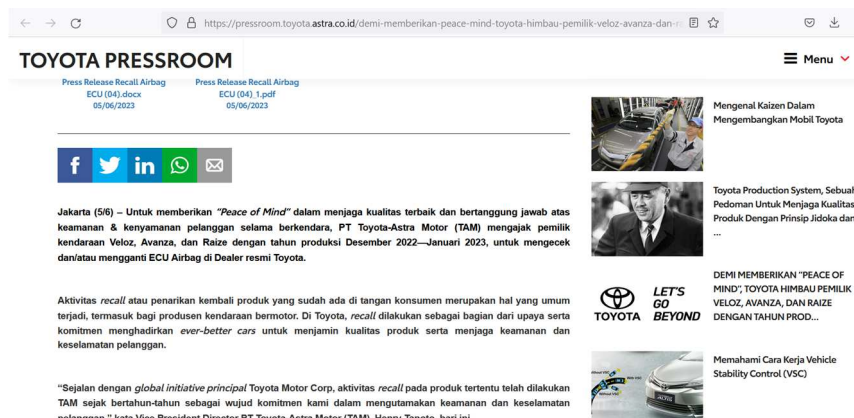
**Figure 1. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) ECU Airbags on [ssc.toyota.astra.co.id](http://ssc.toyota.astra.co.id) website**

One of the PR Strategies carried out in rapid image restoration was shown by PT Toyota Astra Motor (TAM) by conducting an exclusive interview with Toyota Management, namely Saleh Anwar, Technical Service Division Head, and Fitra Eri Pengobserver Otomotif through a podcast on the Toyota Indonesia youtube channel which discussed the famous Car Recall aired on December 24, 2022. In her interview, Fitrah Eri, who is one of the customers affected by the recall, was happy because she considered the Toyota manufacturer responsible even after the car was sold and Toyota still paid attention to the safety of its users. Fitra Eri is known as an automotive YouTuber who has a wide range of followers on the Youtube platform. By taking advantage of her popularity, Toyota can use Fitra Eri as a narrator or messenger to convey clarification or information related to certain products or issues. His presence in the automotive world and his credibility as a vehicle reviewer can give a positive and convincing impression to his audience. In addition, Fitra Eri can also provide an in-depth technical explanation of the various features and technologies possessed by Toyota products. This can help viewers who have a special interest in the automotive world to better understand Toyota products. By using prominent YouTubers like Fitra Eri, Toyota can also reach its target audience more efficiently, especially since many automotive enthusiasts actively follow its content. It is important to ensure that the collaboration with Fitra Eri is carried out with transparency and integrity, so that the clarifications submitted can be well received by the public. Therefore, the cooperation between Toyota and Fitra Eri must be based on clear facts and open communication so that the message conveyed can achieve its goals effectively.



**Figure 2. Podcast ToyotaIndonesia**

The recall is a step by Toyota to maintain quality and responsibility for customer safety and comfort. The responsibility of PT Toyota Astra Motor (TAM) is to inform customers who own Veloz, Avanza, and Raize models to be able to check their vehicle's ECU Airbag without being charged and if necessary to replace the ECU Airbag components at Toyota's official workshop. Information about the *recall* to customers In addition to contacting customers who routinely carry out maintenance at official workshops, Toyota also conveyed a statement regarding PT Toyota Astra Motor's (TAM) responsibility submitted through the [pressroom.toyota.astra.co.id](http://pressroom.toyota.astra.co.id) page and *the Airbag Recall Press Release* on June 5, 2023.



**Figure 3. Toyota Press Room**



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5 Juni 2023

**DEMI MEMBERIKAN "PEACE OF MIND", TOYOTA HIMBAU PEMILIK VELOZ, AVANZA, DAN RAIZE DENGAN TAHUN PRODUKSI TERTENTU UNTUK MENGECEK & MENGGANTI ECU AIRBAG DI DEALER RESMI TOYOTA**

Jakarta (5/6) – Untuk memberikan "Peace of Mind" dalam menjaga kualitas terbaik dan bertanggung jawab atas keamanan & kenyamanan pelanggan selama berkendara, PT Toyota-Astra Motor (TAM) mengajak pemilik kendaraan Veloz, Avanza, dan Raize dengan tahun produksi Desember 2022—Januari 2023, untuk mengecek dan/atau mengganti ECU Airbag di Dealer resmi Toyota.

**Figure 4. Airbag Recall Press Release**

The function of the press release in the case of Toyota recall is:

- To inform the public about safety issues associated with Toyota products. This press release must include accurate and complete information about the issue, as well as what actions Toyota will take to address it.
- Build Toyota's trust and credibility in the eyes of the public. Toyota must demonstrate that they are serious about customer safety and that they are taking appropriate steps to address the issue.
- Apologize to the affected customers. Toyota must express their regret to customers affected by the issue.

In the case of Toyota's recall in 2023, the press release issued by Toyota fulfills all of these functions. The press release explained that there were problems that occurred in several models of Toyota cars. Toyota also announced that it will fix the issue free of charge for all affected customers. The press release also expressed Toyota's regret to the affected customers. Toyota said it understands that this issue can cause concern and inconvenience for customers. Toyota also said that it is committed to customer safety and will continue to work to improve the quality of their products and services. Overall, the press release issued by Toyota in this recall case is a good example of how a press release can be used to handle challenging situations. The press release provided accurate and complete information to the public, built Toyota's trust and credibility, and apologized to affected customers. Especially in the steps of the image restoration strategy by PT Toyota Astra Motor, it received a good response from the public, which is considered that PT Toyota Astra Motor is considered open to conveying the Recall process compared to other manufacturers. This was conveyed directly by automotive observer Munawar Khalil through a live interview on CNN Indonesia on June 7, 2023.

*"The most important thing is that the recall process is carried out openly and announced, and this I think Toyota has carried out the correct procedure, indeed this is how it should be because as I said a few years ago there were still manufacturers who were embarrassed to announce the recall so secretly..."*

Another positive response regarding the recall strategy can be seen in the comment column which was greeted by consumers' satisfaction with the steps taken by PT Toyota Astra Motor.

## V. Conclusion



The image recovery strategy in the case of *Toyota car Airbag recall* has been in accordance with the image restoration theory. PT Toyota Astra Motor uses *public relations strategies*, namely transparency and openness, proactive communication, consumer involvement, highlighting preventive measures, responsiveness to consumer input, public education, cooperation with the media, and monitoring and evaluation. PT Toyota Astra Motor immediately responded to the problem transparently through various communication channels, including mass media and *online platforms* such as websites. They also held an exclusive interview through Toyota's official YouTube channel, with the management of PT Toyota Astra Motor and invited Fitra Eri, a leading automotive observer, to discuss the issue of Toyota car airbag recalls. This response actually received a positive response from the public, who considered that PT Toyota Astra Motor was willing to admit mistakes and be fully responsible openly, in contrast to other manufacturers who may consider the *recall* as something detrimental.

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