

ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS OF MIE GACOAN MEDAN-MANSYUR IN MAINTAINING CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMID HYGIENE ISSUES

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Submission: 20-04-2026	Revised: 06-06-2026	Accepted: 27-06-2026	Published: 30-06-2026
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Abstract

This study was motivated by the reputational crisis experienced by Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur Branch following the viral spread of sanitation-related issues on social media, which had the potential to reduce customer trust and loyalty. The study aims to analyze the role and strategies of Mie Gacoan's Public Relations in restoring the company's image and maintaining customer loyalty after the emergence of the issue. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The study involved seven informants, consisting of three internal company informants, namely the outlet manager, regional Public Relations staff, and operational employee, as well as four external informants who were Mie Gacoan customers. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that Mie Gacoan's Public Relations strategy in addressing the reputational crisis was implemented through three main stages: rapid crisis response, information transparency, and reputation recovery. Responses delivered within less than 24 hours, accompanied by accurate and credible information, proved effective in mitigating the spread of negative issues on social media. In addition, the utilization of visual content through influencers and the implementation of service innovations, including a self-service system and QR code-based digital ordering, played a significant role in rebuilding customer trust. The study found that the combination of transparent crisis communication and service quality improvements was effective in maintaining stable customer visits and sustaining customer loyalty following the reputational crisis. This research highlights the importance of responsive, transparent, and adaptive Public Relations strategies in crisis management and in maintaining long-term relationships with customers.

Keywords: Crisis, Consumer, Loyalty

INTRODUCTION

The viral sanitation issue involving Mie Gacoan's Medan Mansyur Branch serves as a notable example of how a reputational crisis can escalate rapidly in the digital era. The circulation of negative content and comments on social media regarding the cleanliness of the restaurant environment triggered various public reactions, ranging from doubts about service quality to concerns over declining customer loyalty. This phenomenon demonstrates that a single issue disseminated widely through digital platforms can significantly influence public perceptions of a company within a relatively short period. Such conditions require organizations to respond to crises promptly, transparently, and strategically in order to minimize potential negative impacts.

In the digital age, a company's sustainability is increasingly determined by its reputation, which is recognized as a highly valuable intangible asset. Particularly within the highly competitive culinary industry, business success is no longer solely dependent on the quality of products and services offered but also on the company's ability to maintain a positive image and sustain public trust over time. At the same time, the characteristics of social media enable information to spread rapidly without spatial or temporal limitations, allowing a reputation that has been built over many years to deteriorate within hours due to the viral spread of negative issues.

In this context, Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role as a strategic function in managing organizational communication and reputation. PR is no longer limited to disseminating information; it also serves as a reputation management function responsible for building, maintaining, and restoring public trust in an organization. According to Doorley and Garcia (2020), Public Relations has evolved into a reputation management function aimed at aligning organizational identity with public perceptions. Therefore, the ability of PR practitioners to manage crisis communication has become a critical factor in determining an organization's success in maintaining consumer trust and loyalty when confronted with issues that have the potential to damage its reputation.

From an Islamic perspective, maintaining cleanliness and a positive reputation is not merely viewed as a business tactic, but as a manifestation of faith and a form of trust (*amanah*) toward consumers. This is in line with the word of Allah SWT in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 222: "...Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves." This verse emphasizes that *thaharah* (cleanliness) is a fundamental value in Islamic law. Therefore, for culinary business entities, neglecting hygiene standards is equivalent to ignoring the basic principles of public service in Islam, which in turn can damage the trust entrusted by customers.

The importance of food hygiene crisis management has become increasingly critical when considering the profile of contemporary consumers. Based on data

from Populix (2023), Mie Gacoan dominates the spicy noodle market favored by millennials and Generation Z, with more than half of respondents choosing this brand due to social media influence and competitive pricing. The heavy reliance on the digital ecosystem means that any operational failure exposed publicly has the potential to become a systemic threat to corporate reputation. Therefore, this study is essential to map how crisis communication management is carried out at the regional (branch) level. The inability of Public Relations to deliver honest and solution-oriented clarifications risks triggering mass boycotts. Furthermore, from the perspective of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, this study is important to evaluate whether PR practices have implemented the principle of *Qaulan Sadida* (truthful and honest speech) in responding to crises.

Despite its rapid growth, Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur faces operational challenges that affect its corporate image. A crisis of trust emerged following the circulation of hygiene and sanitation issues that went viral in the digital sphere, triggering strong negative sentiment among local consumers. Without proper Public Relations crisis management, this phenomenon risks destroying customer loyalty, which has been the foundation of the company's business in the region.

This study identifies a research gap in previous literature. Research conducted by Lestari (2023) focuses more on central marketing strategies and halal certification issues at a macro level. Meanwhile, Saraswati and Pratomo (2022) emphasize only the speed of digital response to general service complaints, and Hidayat (2023) examines the influence of brand image on purchasing decisions without addressing sanitation crisis aspects. The novelty of this study lies in its specific analysis of concrete Public Relations actions at the branch level (Medan Mansyur) in handling sanitation crises, as well as their impact on post-incident customer loyalty.

Based on the above explanation, this study focuses on summarizing and examining in depth the role and strategies of Public Relations of Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur in managing crises caused by hygiene issues on social media. In addition, this study analyzes the effectiveness of these Public Relations strategies in maintaining customer loyalty after the spread of negative issues, presented through a comprehensive descriptive narrative approach.

In line with the research focus, the objective of this study is to describe and analyze the role and strategies of Public Relations of Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur in mitigating and neutralizing negative issues related to hygiene. Furthermore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these communication strategies in maintaining and restoring customer loyalty following a reputational crisis.

METHOD/.

To ensure validity through source triangulation, the researcher selected seven key informants consisting of the Outlet Manager, Regional Public Relations staff, operational employees, and four consumers from the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts as representatives of public opinion. The informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as their direct involvement in the company's crisis communication management or their experiences as consumers who were aware of and responded to the hygiene issue that went viral on social media.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore strategies for mitigating negative sentiment, supported by non-participant observation of hygiene standards at the outlet. In addition, documentation and media analysis were conducted to examine the key messages employed by management in responding to the crisis. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the company's crisis communication strategies from both internal and external perspectives.

The following table presents the research informants:

Table 1. Research Informants

No.	Informant Name	Position/Status	Informant Category	Age
1	Haryo Pramono	Outlet Manager of Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur	Internal Company	34 Years Old
2	Amanda Syahputri	Regional Public Relations (PR) Staff	Internal Company	28 Years Old
3	Reza	Operational Employee	Internal Company	22 Years Old
4	Alex	Customer (Generation Z/University Student)	External (Community)	23 Years Old
5	Aisyah	Customer (Millennial/Employee)	External (Community)	27 Years Old
6	Fakhri Rizky	Customer (Generation Z/Regular Customer)	External (Community)	21 Years Old
7	Mawarni	Customer (Millennial/Regular Customer)	External (Community)	35 Years Old

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Overview of the Reputational Crisis and Its Impact on Customer Loyalty**

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with the Outlet Manager of Mie Gacoan Medan-Mansyur, the impact of the reputational crisis triggered by the viral hygiene issue in December 2023 was directly felt in the outlet's operational performance. The informant explained that within 24–48 hours after a video showing staff handling food without gloves circulated on Instagram and TikTok, customer visits declined by approximately 20% compared to normal conditions. In addition, customers who continued to visit the outlet became more critical by raising various questions regarding the company's hygiene standards and sanitation procedures. As stated by Informant 01:

"The impact was immediate and very real. Within those two days, we recorded a decline of around 20% in daily customer visits compared to normal periods. The atmosphere at the outlet became quite tense because customers who came in suddenly became very critical. They actively asked about our hygiene protocols, kitchen sanitation standards, and even our internal control mechanisms."

These findings indicate that the dissemination of information through social media can rapidly shape public perceptions and directly influence consumer behavior. The crisis not only affected the company's image but also had psychological implications for employees, who were required to provide additional explanations and reassurance to customers regarding the quality and safety of the food being served.

Field findings indicate that the reputational disruption experienced by Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur Branch originated from the influence of User Generated Content (UGC) in early December 2023. This phenomenon peaked when an amateur documentary video spread widely across Instagram and TikTok. The content exposed production room conditions perceived by the public as unhygienic, showing direct contact between staff hands and food without the use of gloves. This triggered widespread criticism from internet users, who viewed it as a serious neglect of food sanitation procedures.

From a theoretical perspective, the footage functioned as a fundamental stimulus due to its "amateur authenticity," which is generally perceived by audiences as more credible than formal corporate marketing narratives. Within a very short time less than six hours after publication the For You Page (FYP) and Explore algorithms escalated the issue from a local scale in Medan to a national-level debate. Consequently, a digital snowball effect emerged, where sharing and reposting features accelerated the dissemination of information, generating massive public sentiment pressure that was difficult for management to anticipate in the early stages. This dynamic exponentially influenced how customers perceived the brand. Some social media users expressed antipathy and doubts regarding food hygiene protection, while others compared the incident to similar scandals in the culinary business sector. This phenomenon demonstrates the capacity of social

media to construct public opinion collectively and simultaneously, while rapidly expanding the scope of the issue.

Based on data obtained from in-depth interviews with the Outlet Manager and Regional Public Relations Staff, it was revealed that within 24 to 48 hours after the video went viral, operational impacts began to emerge significantly:

1. A decline in daily customer visits was identified, with an estimated decrease of approximately $\pm 20\%$ compared to the average number of visits during normal periods prior to the reputational crisis.
2. The branch's official social media platforms were flooded with escalating negative comments, ranging from demands for transparent clarification to various accusatory narratives regarding inadequate managerial oversight.
3. Customers who continued to visit the outlet actively raised critical questions related to hygiene protocols, sanitation system standards in the kitchen area, and the internal control mechanisms implemented by the company.

In addition to the quantitative consequences reflected in declining customer visits, qualitative impacts also emerged in the form of shifts in communication dynamics between customers and employees. Several staff members reported the need to provide additional explanations to visitors in order to minimize their anxiety and doubts. This phenomenon indicates that the crisis not only damaged external reputation but also intervened in the internal stability of organizational dynamics.

These findings reinforce the thesis that issues in the digital sphere are instantaneous (real-time), large-scale, and difficult to manage without structured and integrated crisis management. This reality aligns with the concept of a *digital firestorm* in Public Relations theory, which describes situations where waves of public sentiment evolve more rapidly than an organization's capacity to formulate and disseminate official statements. In such circumstances, delays in response pose a significant risk of expanding the scope of the problem and exacerbating the erosion of public credibility.

Public Relations Strategies of Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur in Managing the Crisis

The interview results with the Regional Public Relations (PR) Staff revealed that the crisis communication strategy implemented by the company was centered on rapid response, transparency, and honesty in information dissemination. The PR team closely monitored public conversations on social media by utilizing social media listening tools to track the development of emerging negative sentiments. Informant 02 explained:

"We conducted rigorous social media listening by monitoring Instagram Insights and the hashtag #MieGacoanMedan to measure the spread of the issue. Our

clarification response was released within less than 24 hours to prevent the spread of unfounded speculation."

Furthermore, the informant emphasized that the development of the clarification message was guided by the Islamic communication principle of *Qaulan Sadida*, which stresses honesty, truthfulness, and accuracy in communication. The company openly acknowledged weaknesses in its operational supervision, issued a public apology, and promised a comprehensive investigation into the incident.

In addition to issuing a clarification, the PR division also implemented several corrective actions as a demonstration of its commitment to improvement. Informant 02 stated:

"We immediately released an official clarification, conducted an internal audit of the Medan-Mansyur kitchen, and accelerated the process of obtaining the Hygiene and Sanitation Eligibility Certificate (SLHS) from the local Health Department. We communicated these efforts through our official accounts so that consumers would know that we were serious about making improvements."

These findings indicate that the communication strategy adopted by the company was not limited to message dissemination alone but was also supported by tangible corrective actions that could be verified by the public. Such an approach demonstrates the integration of effective crisis communication practices with concrete operational improvements, thereby enhancing public trust and supporting the restoration of the company's reputation.

Based on interviews with the outlet's operational staff, the company implemented several fundamental changes to its service system and hygiene standards following the crisis. Informant 03 explained:

"We carried out a comprehensive deep cleaning of the kitchen facilities. Management has now appointed a dedicated Hygiene Officer for every shift to monitor employee compliance. Protective equipment such as masks and gloves must be worn strictly, and their use is ensured to be clearly visible to consumers."

Furthermore, a self-service system and digital ordering through QR Codes were introduced to reduce physical contact between employees and customers. These measures serve as concrete evidence that the company undertook sustainable operational improvements as part of its reputation recovery strategy.

The interview results with consumers revealed that the company's rapid response and transparency were the primary factors influencing the restoration of public trust. Informant 04 stated that the prompt clarification and the company's openness in showcasing the kitchen environment through digital content helped restore confidence in Mie Gacoan.

"At first, the amateur video was quite alarming, but Gacoan's response was incredibly fast. In less than a day, they had already issued a sincere apology. In addition, when I saw content from a Medan food vlogger who was invited to directly inspect the kitchen, I became convinced that it was only a temporary mistake."

These findings suggest that the use of visual evidence and third-party endorsements through local influencers was highly effective in reducing negative public sentiment.

Another consumer also perceived the transformation of the service system as having a positive impact on hygiene perceptions. Informant 05 explained:

"For me, the QR Code system on each table is very beneficial because customers no longer need to share conventional menu books that may harbor bacteria. With the self-service model, we can directly inspect the cleanliness of the plates and the condition of the service counter ourselves."

In addition to hygiene considerations, consumers also took into account the affordability and competitive quality of the products. The same informant added:

"Besides that, it is difficult to find an alternative spicy noodle restaurant that is as affordable for students as Gacoan. Therefore, for me, the clarification and the improvements made at the outlet were enough to maintain my loyalty."

Post-crisis promotional programs also contributed to the recovery of customer loyalty. Informant 06 revealed that discount programs combined with improved hygiene standards encouraged them to revisit the outlet.

"It was very influential. There was a special dine-in discount promotion. Combined with the fact that the kitchen is now more open and the staff consistently wear masks, my anxiety disappeared and was replaced by satisfaction."

Meanwhile, the availability of a digital complaint channel was perceived as strengthening the relationship between the company and its customers. Informant 07 stated:

"The QR code on each table is now integrated with a private complaint channel. If there is a hygiene issue at our table, we can simply report it through the system, and the manager responds directly without the issue needing to go viral on social media first."

The informant further emphasized that official certification and visible improvements in operational practices were the primary reasons for the restoration of trust in the company.

"The official government certification and the company's transparency were the most important factors. When I visited the outlet again, I noticed that the cleanliness of the toilets and dining areas was significantly better than when the outlet first opened."

Overall, the findings indicate that the Public Relations strategy implemented by Mie Gacoan Medan-Mansyur in addressing the reputational crisis was effective through a combination of rapid response, information transparency, tangible corrective actions, operational system transformation, and two-way communication with consumers. This integrated strategy successfully restored public trust while maintaining customer loyalty following the crisis.

Fundamentally, Public Relations is a managerial function that emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of harmonious relationships between an organization and its target publics. As explained by Zebua (2023), Public Relations integrates various strategic efforts to construct a positive image while safeguarding credibility in the eyes of the public. Meanwhile, Nurhanifah (2023) highlights that the scope of Public Relations extends beyond mere information dissemination, encompassing active engagement in building relationships with diverse community groups. In crisis situations, this role becomes increasingly critical, as corporate reputation is placed in a highly vulnerable position, requiring tactical, responsive, and well-measured communication management.

Through field data analysis adopting the Miles and Huberman framework – comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing – it was found that the Public Relations scheme implemented by Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur Branch is structured into three crucial stages: rapid response, information transparency, and image restructuring.

1. Rapid Response Strategy

The primary focus at this initial stage is the localization of the issue to prevent its escalation into a more extensive crisis. The procedures undertaken include

a) Digital Conversation Monitoring and Sentiment Analysis.

Research findings demonstrate that the PR division did not merely monitor standard engagement metrics but conducted comprehensive social media listening. Management reported utilizing Instagram Insights to detect peak periods of negative sentiment spikes. They tracked specific hashtags such as *#MieGacoanMedan* and filtered comment sections to determine whether discussions remained focused on sanitation issues or had expanded into personal attacks on staff. Content analysis identified increased activity in post tagging and mentions, where digital audiences attempted to draw management attention by tagging local media accounts in Medan. The PR team responded by monitoring citizen journalism channels to measure the distribution of the viral video.

b) Internal Alignment and Management Perception Synchronization.

Within less than 12 hours, cross-sector coordination was executed involving outlet leadership at Medan Mansyur and the central communication team. The Outlet Manager emphasized the urgency of conducting an emergency meeting to verify the authenticity of the viral footage. This strategic step aimed to ensure that public statements would not be perceived as denial or defensive. The consolidation process sought to establish a unified narrative (*one voice policy*), preventing frontline staff from delivering contradictory responses when interacting with customers.

c) This alignment was implemented through immediate briefings for all frontline employees on how to respond politely yet professionally during the crisis.

d) Formulation of Key Messages and Publication of Factual Clarifications.

The construction of key messages was carefully designed to reduce public anger without appearing justificatory. The PR department established three main message pillars: (1) an open apology and acknowledgment, (2) a commitment to comprehensive investigation, and (3) re-education regarding hygiene Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This approach aligns with the Islamic communication principle of *Qaulan Sadida*, which emphasizes truthful, accurate, and appropriate speech. Through Instagram feeds and stories, Mie Gacoan employed empathetic yet formal language. They chose not to delete negative comments as a form of transparency but responded consistently to indicate that corrective actions and disciplinary measures were underway. Within less than one day, management released an official statement, adopting the principle of immediacy in crisis communication, which emphasizes rapid response to curb opinion escalation. This prompt action received positive appreciation from consumers, as the company was perceived as responsible and able to minimize harmful speculation.

2. Clarification and Transparency through Visual Documentation

At this stage, Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur focused on restoring public trust by shifting from textual narratives to visual evidence. The research findings are as follows:

a) Exposure of Corrective Actions (Evidence-Based Transparency)

Through Instagram content observation, management presented a series of comprehensive cleaning processes (*deep cleaning*) in the kitchen facilities. Branch leadership stated that the documentation was taken immediately after operations to demonstrate a total improvement effort across all areas, not only those exposed in the viral video. This aimed to reassure customers that hygiene standards had been restored. Posts in the form of short videos and Instagram stories showing staff wearing complete sanitation equipment received positive attention, reflected in a shift in public comments toward appreciation of the company's transparency.

b) External Legitimization through Collaboration with Local Digital Figures. To counter perceptions that the cleaning documentation was merely symbolic image-building, management applied a third-party endorsement strategy. The PR division invited several culinary influencers in Medan with strong follower bases around the Dr. Mansyur area. These

food bloggers were granted access to kitchen facilities to independently review procedural improvements. Observations revealed partnership content where these external parties provided neutral reviews of post-crisis kitchen conditions. Psychologically, the public tends to trust third-party testimonials perceived as objective, as evidenced by high engagement in terms of content saves and shares on social media.

- c) **Public Re-education on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).** The crisis momentum was utilized to educate the public on standardized hygiene practices. Interviews revealed that management conducted re-training sessions for all staff at the Medan Mansyur branch. The mandatory use of masks and gloves is now strictly monitored and made visible to customers. The company also regularly uploads graphical information regarding food quality control. These efforts aim to construct public understanding that the viral incident was an anomaly rather than a daily operational practice. This strategy aligns with corrective action techniques within the image repair framework. Observations indicate a decline in negative sentiment within one week after the implementation of this visual education strategy.

3. Reputation Reconstruction and Customer Loyalty Recovery (Rebuilding Phase)

This final phase is oriented toward sustaining a positive image continuously to ensure that customer loyalty remains intact. The procedures implemented include:

- a) **Consistency of Educational Messaging and Operational Transparency.** The primary post-crisis challenge lies in maintaining the stability of positive public perception. The PR team scheduled regular content under the theme *"Behind the Kitchen"* to familiarize the public with consistently maintained kitchen standards. From an algorithmic perspective, this strategy aims to ensure that newly generated positive content suppresses older negative records in search engines. Observations of the official account indicate an increased frequency of posts related to hygiene practices, such as proper handwashing procedures and the sterilization of cooking equipment. This approach builds the impression that cleanliness has become an integral part of the company's work culture, rather than merely a reactive response to the crisis.
- b) **Optimization of Internal Supervision and Direct Feedback Channels.** Management implemented a transformation in outlet supervision systems by appointing a dedicated Hygiene Officer for each work shift. This officer holds full authority to monitor staff compliance with sanitation protocols. In addition, QR codes were installed on each dining table to facilitate

customers in providing private feedback or complaints regarding cleanliness directly to management without having to publicize them on social media. Field observations indicate that the open kitchen area now features more organized partitions, and staff demonstrate significantly higher discipline in sanitation practices compared to the period prior to the viral incident.

c) Traffic Recovery through Economic Stimuli and Promotional Strategies.

To restore declining consumer interest, the company integrated hygiene narratives with incentive-based promotions. In response to an approximate 20% decline in customer visits, management launched special discount programs for both online orders and dine-in services in the Medan area. Interview data confirm that within three weeks of implementing the recovery program, daily visitor volume returned to normal levels. The re-emergence of long queues at the Medan Mansyur branch serves as empirical evidence that customer trust and loyalty have been significantly restored. This finding underscores that effective Public Relations strategies must be integrated with tangible operational improvements to achieve sustainable outcomes.

4. Evaluation of PR Strategy Effectiveness through Operational System Transformation and Physical Evidence

Based on direct field observations conducted by the researcher at the Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur outlet after the incident, a fundamental reconstruction of service mechanisms was identified. These changes are aimed at reducing physical contact while enhancing transparency as a strategy for customer loyalty retention:

a) Minimization of Physical Interaction through Service Staff

Restructuring. Findings at the site demonstrate a policy to limit the number of personnel responsible for directly delivering orders to customers' tables. This policy serves as a tactical response to public concerns regarding staff hand hygiene. By reducing the frequency of direct contact between personnel and serving plates, the risk of cross-contamination can be effectively minimized. Additionally, this measure creates a visual representation of a cleaner, more organized, and professional service environment in the eyes of customers.

b) Transformation toward a Self-Service Model.

The most significant operational shift is the transition to a self-service model. Customers are now instructed to collect their orders independently at designated pick-up points once their queue number is called. This system grants customers full autonomy to personally verify the quality and cleanliness of their meals prior to consumption. They can directly observe the condition of

utensils, menu accuracy, and sanitation standards at the serving counter without intermediary staff. This approach effectively restores public trust by leveraging personal control over purchased products.

- c) **Integration of Digital Ordering Systems via QR Code Technology.** In an effort to reduce congestion at cashier areas and eliminate risks associated with manual data input, Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur has implemented an online ordering system accessible through QR codes placed on each table. Based on field observations, customers simply scan the code to access the menu, place orders, and complete electronic payments from their seats. This technological innovation eliminates the use of conventional menus, which are potentially prone to bacterial transmission due to repeated handling. Moreover, it reduces close-range verbal interactions that may pose sanitation risks. Another advantage is the integration with digital complaint channels, allowing customers to instantly report any hygiene-related issues through the same platform, thereby reinforcing organizational transparency.

Analysis of the Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies in Restoring Customer Loyalty

The success of the rapid response strategy, which integrates intensive monitoring and the dissemination of key messages, has proven to be a fundamental instrument in mitigating the escalation of negative rumors within the digital ecosystem. The findings confirm that proactive managerial actions in the public sphere, executed within less than one day, significantly narrowed the space for the spread of unauthenticated information. This accelerated response fostered a positive psychological perception that the corporation was not indifferent to public concerns, thereby preventing the risk of mass rejection (boycott) that could threaten long-term customer retention.

The utilization of visual instruments, such as authentic documentation of production area sterilization processes, combined with strategic collaboration with local influencers, emerged as the most impactful persuasive technique on consumers' cognitive frameworks. Sentiment analysis indicates that the intensity of negative responses gradually declined when the public was presented with "empirical evidence" rather than mere "formal assurances." The dissemination of such documentation successfully rebuilt customer confidence, where managerial transparency became a decisive variable in restoring organizational integrity in the public eye.

Furthermore, field observations reveal that the policy of reducing serving staff and transitioning to a self-service operational model represents a highly relevant maneuver in addressing customers' visual trauma following the

contamination issue. Through this approach, Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur effectively transferred “control authority” to consumers, allowing them to independently validate the hygiene aspects of the products they receive. This structural transformation serves as concrete evidence that management implemented substantial systemic improvements, rather than merely engaging in impression management within digital spaces.

The implementation of QR codes at each table also played an effective role in establishing a new service standard aligned with the principles of a low-touch economy. In addition to enhancing operational efficiency, this innovation functions as a personalized communication channel that enables customers to submit complaints privately. The researcher considers this initiative a preventive strategy to maintain customer loyalty by ensuring that minor complaints do not escalate into future viral crises, as the company has provided an official platform for real-time audience engagement.

The effectiveness of the integration of these strategies and technologies is validated through source triangulation involving managerial staff, operational employees, and customers, as well as methodological triangulation through observation, interviews, and digital analysis. This framework enables a comprehensive evaluation of the role of Public Relations at Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur. The managerial perspective outlines the rationale behind decision-making processes, the employee perspective reflects the realities of field execution, and customer feedback captures the evolution of trust following the crisis clarification. All data were synchronized to ensure the authenticity of findings and minimize bias through coherent empirical evidence.

In general, a comparison between the conditions before and after the implementation of PR strategies demonstrates a significant transformation, as summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Comparison of Conditions Before and After PR Strategy Implementation

Success Parameter	Pre-Clarification Phase	Post-Clarification Phase
Digital Sentiment	Dominated by negative narratives, criticism, and public backlash on social media	Shifted toward neutral-to-positive sentiment, with increasing appreciation for the company's corrective actions
Customer Traffic	Declined by approximately 20% due to reduced public trust	Returned to normal levels and stabilized following the implementation of recovery strategies

Perception of Hygiene and Sanitation	Widespread doubts regarding food safety and operational cleanliness	Trust in hygiene standards improved through visual evidence, internal audits, and sanitation certification
Customer Trust	Decreased due to concerns about food safety and health risks	Gradually restored through prompt clarification, transparency, and corrective actions
Brand Image	Experienced reputational damage and negative associations related to hygiene issues	Improved through open communication, influencer collaboration, and publicized operational improvements
Social Media Engagement	Characterized by negative interactions, complaints, mentions, and criticism	Increased positive engagement, including inquiries, appreciation, and support for improvement efforts
Complaint Rate	Increased both online and offline as consumers expressed dissatisfaction	Declined following service improvements and the introduction of digital feedback channels
Repeat Purchase Intention	Reduced due to uncertainty regarding product quality and safety	Increased as consumers observed tangible improvements in hygiene and service quality
Customer Loyalty	Threatened by declining confidence in the brand	Strengthened through transparency, operational improvements, and promotional programs
Word of Mouth (WOM)	Dominated by negative discussions and warnings shared among consumers	Shifted toward positive recommendations and endorsements from customers and local influencers
Crisis Communication Effectiveness	Lack of immediate response allowed speculation and misinformation to spread	Rapid (<24 hours), transparent, and fact-based responses successfully mitigated crisis escalation
Perceived Corporate Transparency	Public questioned the company's accountability and internal supervision	Public perceived the company as more transparent through audits, public disclosures, and accessible complaint mechanisms

From the perspective of digital public opinion, prior to the release of the official statement, public discourse was dominated by uncontrolled assumptions and accusations. However, following the implementation of transparency measures, the wave of negative sentiment gradually subsided and was replaced by more constructive responses. From a business standpoint, the decline in customer visits by approximately $\pm 20\%$ during the early phase of the crisis served as a tangible indicator of a threat to customer loyalty. Nevertheless, through consistent implementation of the transparency phase, customer volume recovered within approximately three weeks.

This finding reinforces that crisis communication strategies integrated with concrete operational improvements are capable of restoring customer interest. Consumers who were initially skeptical of hygiene standards demonstrated significant behavioral changes. Theoretically, this achievement aligns with the *two-way symmetrical communication* model, in which management actively engages in dialogue and adapts its strategies based on public feedback.

Therefore, the effectiveness of Public Relations in maintaining customer loyalty at Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur is not only reflected in visitor statistics, but also in the establishment of more transparent and participatory relationships between the company and its customers.



Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives on Crisis Communication and Public Relations

1. Dynamics of Crisis Communication Management in the Digital Ecosystem

The success of Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur in mitigating waves of speculation through an accelerated response (within less than 24 hours) aligns with fundamental principles in contemporary crisis management. In the era of information disruption, response speed (*immediacy*) has become a determining variable in an organization's ability to contain the phenomenon of a *digital firestorm*. This responsive strategy is highly relevant to the premise proposed by Putri and Jamil (2022), who emphasize that in social media-based crises, every second of delay

creates a vacuum in which the public constructs uncontrolled negative narratives. Therefore, the immediate presence of management in the public sphere functions as an emergency brake, halting crisis escalation before it develops into permanent reputational damage.

2. Implementation of Image Restoration Theory through Corrective Action

The strategic actions undertaken by Mie Gacoan—such as executing a *deep cleaning* program publicly documented through visual channels, along with the transformation of its operational system into a self-service model—represent a concrete manifestation of the *Corrective Action* strategy within image restoration theory. According to Pratama (2021), the effectiveness of reputation recovery efforts does not solely rely on rhetoric or formal statements, but rather on tangible actions that can be publicly validated. The transformation of *physical evidence* at the Medan Mansyur outlet serves as an empirical stimulus capable of reducing consumer skepticism regarding hygiene and sanitation standards comprehensively.

3. Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model in Maintaining Customer Loyalty

The utilization of QR codes as private feedback channels and collaboration with local influencers reflects the adoption of the *two-way symmetrical communication* model. This approach aims to create a balance between organizational profitability and the informational rights of the public. Sari et al. (2023) explain that transparency and the provision of dialogical space for customers significantly strengthen post-crisis loyalty. This occurs because consumers feel acknowledged as active participants whose voices are heard, thereby fostering emotional bonds and rebuilding trust in the brand.

4. Islamic Communication Perspective: Integration of *Qaulan Sadida* Values

The internalization of the principle of *Qaulan Sadida* in every clarification narrative released by Mie Gacoan—emphasizing honesty, truthfulness, and accuracy of information—serves as a key ethical pillar in reconstructing consumer trust that had previously declined. As explained by Hidayat (2020), communication practices from an Islamic perspective are not merely persuasive instruments for branding purposes, but represent a moral responsibility toward society. Management's willingness to openly acknowledge operational shortcomings at the Medan Mansyur outlet became a catalyst for generating collective public empathy, proving to be more effective than defensive rhetoric or denial of facts.

5. Service Digitalization in the Context of the Low-Touch Economy and Consumer Safety

The innovation of digital-based ordering systems and the reduction of physical interaction at the outlet represent a forward-looking adaptation to changing consumer behavior in the *low-touch economy*. Fauzi and Nugraha (2024) highlight that contemporary customer loyalty is strongly correlated with *perceived safety* within

service environments. The functional transformation implemented by Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur demonstrates that effective Public Relations strategies must integrate cross-sectorally with operational management systems to create a consumption experience that is safe, hygienic, and trustworthy.

Practical Implications

This study not only contributes academically to the development of Public Relations and Islamic Communication studies but also provides significant practical implications for culinary business entities. Based on field findings at Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur, several strategic implications can serve as operational guidelines for management in maintaining customer loyalty:

1. Decentralization of Crisis Communication Authority at the Branch Level

Each outlet of a national-scale company should possess autonomous crisis mitigation protocols while remaining aligned with central policies. In the case of Mie Gacoan Medan Mansyur, although coordination with the regional team was maintained, tactical responses at the branch level proved to be crucial in controlling issue escalation before reaching a national scale. This demonstrates that empowering operational-level communication accelerates decision-making and reduces risks associated with delayed responses. Such protocols should include streamlined message approval processes, the designation of competent local spokespersons, and adaptive response scenarios tailored to regional consumer characteristics.

2. Proactive and Structured Digital Monitoring Systems

Social media monitoring must evolve from a supplementary function into an integral part of daily real-time operations. The digital era requires organizations to act not only reactively but also proactively in detecting early signs of crises. The use of social media listening tools, hashtag tracking, and in-depth sentiment analysis becomes essential in understanding public opinion dynamics. Without consistent monitoring systems, organizations risk losing critical opportunities to control digital narratives. Therefore, establishing a dedicated digital listening team becomes a strategic necessity.

3. Supremacy of Visual Transparency in Trust Restoration

The findings confirm that digital audiences exhibit significantly higher trust in concrete visual evidence (photos and videos) compared to normative textual statements. In the context of hygiene-related crises, visualizing kitchen sterilization processes and transparent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provides stronger persuasive power by directly addressing public concerns. Modern communication strategies must leverage the aesthetics and authenticity of visual content as primary instruments in restoring reputation and customer loyalty.

4. Synergy Between Operational Changes and Public Narratives

Crisis communication without tangible operational improvements will be perceived merely as impression management. Conversely, operational improvements without effective communication strategies may go unnoticed by the public. Therefore, integration between operational management and strategic communication functions is essential. Evaluating sanitation standards, strengthening internal systems, and conducting employee retraining must be accompanied by honest and transparent information dissemination to ensure long-term customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Public Relations strategy implemented by Mie Gacoan Medan-Mansyur played a significant role in managing and recovering from the reputational crisis triggered by the viral hygiene issue on social media. The crisis initially resulted in a decline of approximately 20% in customer visits and generated widespread negative sentiment among consumers. In response, the company adopted a crisis communication strategy characterized by rapid response, transparency, and honesty, in line with the Islamic communication principle of *Qaulan Sadida*. The Public Relations team promptly issued an official clarification, acknowledged operational shortcomings, and communicated corrective measures to prevent misinformation and restore public confidence.

The study further reveals that the company's reputation recovery efforts were not limited to communication activities but were reinforced through tangible operational improvements. These included conducting comprehensive kitchen sanitation procedures, appointing Hygiene Officers to monitor compliance, enforcing stricter hygiene protocols, implementing digital ordering through QR codes, and adopting a self-service system. Such actions provided visible evidence of the company's commitment to improvement and strengthened consumers' perceptions of hygiene and safety. The integration of communication strategies with concrete operational reforms proved essential in rebuilding credibility and enhancing the effectiveness of crisis management efforts.

Moreover, the findings indicate that consumer trust and loyalty gradually recovered as a result of the company's transparency, responsiveness, and continuous service improvements. Consumers perceived the rapid clarification, open access to information, visible hygiene enhancements, promotional programs, and digital complaint channels as indicators of accountability and customer orientation. These efforts contributed to more positive public sentiment, increased repeat purchase intentions, improved brand image, and the restoration of customer loyalty. Overall, the study concludes that the combination of effective crisis communication, operational transformation, and consumer engagement successfully enabled Mie

Gacoan Medan-Mansyur to restore its reputation and maintain customer loyalty following the crisis.

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