



The implementation of crisis communication strategies by PLN UID Bali in handling the 2025 Bali Blackout

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ABSTRACT

Crises in public service institutions require structured communication responses to manage uncertainty and sustain public trust. This study aims to examine how PLN UID Bali implemented crisis communication strategies during the 2025 Bali blackout. This study used a qualitative instrumental case study design. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with senior communication and SER Officer PLN UID Bali, journalists, and affected business actors. The analysis was guided by Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The findings showed that early crisis awareness was marked by the recognition of reputational risk, structural authority limitations, and heightened public expectations in a tourism-dependent region. These shaped the initial communication response. SCCT strategies were implemented adaptively rather than sequentially. The deny strategy functioned as institutional boundary clarification; the diminish strategy framed the blackout as a systemic transmission disruption; the rebuild strategy emphasized apology and recovery narratives; and the reinforce strategy highlighted institutional credibility and solidarity. The study showed that these strategies operated as mechanisms for managing public trust by reducing attributional ambiguity, clarifying institutional roles, and providing recovery-oriented narratives during uncertainty. The novelty of this study lies in extending the application of SCCT to the public energy sector in a developing country context and in reconceptualizing its implementation as an adaptive, iterative meaning-construction process shaped by real-time stakeholder interaction. By situating SCCT within a public utility institution embedded in multi-level governance and a high-visibility regional context, this study offers a contextualized understanding of how crisis communication strategies are implemented to sustain trust in the essential service disruptions.

Keywords: *Crisis Communication, Public Communication, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Public Service, Blackout.*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of power outages not only has an impact on community activities, but also has an impact on a crisis. From the perspective of crisis communication, an incident becomes a crisis not only because of the magnitude of the technical impact, but because of the emergence of uncertainty, panic, and urgent information needs from the public. Mahdavian et al. (2020), emphasized that power outages are often followed by communication blackouts, which are conditions where power outages also paralyze the communication system, making the crisis situation worse. This means that when the power goes out and information is not immediately available or inconsistent, the perception of the crisis will increase. Many regions in Indonesia still

face challenges such as a lack of transmission and distribution infrastructure, limited backup generation capacity, and the risk of natural and technical disturbances (Corio et al., 2023). Although the Java-Bali electricity system is well connected, the vulnerability to load imbalances and system disruptions can significantly impact it, especially during peak loads (Tanoto et al., 2021). Under conditions like this, a system that is not powerful enough can affect the electrical system's reliability and even cause a total blackout which also causes a communication crisis. Therefore, it is important to understand that power outages are a phenomenon that has the potential to trigger a communication crisis when institutions are unable to manage information quickly, transparently, and in a coordinated manner. Therefore, it is important to explore this phenomenon in order to see how the construction of crisis communication is formed as a result of power outages, as well as how communication strategies affect public perception and trust.

Although blackout incidents have been in the spotlight at the national level, scientific studies that specifically examine aspects of public communication in crisis handling by institutions such as PLN are still very limited. Most previous research has focused on the technical aspects of electricity (Nantan et al., 2023), infrastructure management (Laksana & Al Rahmat, 2022), energy system restoration policies (Setiawan et al., 2025), IoT-based smart energy meter to optimize energy efficiency and management (Salman & Pasupuleti, 2023), post-disaster recovery is influenced by complex factors (Hsu & Mostafavi, 2024), or power outage affects the national economic growth (Chen et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the realm of crisis communication, especially related to how agencies compile messages, determine communication channels, and establish relationships with the community in emergencies, is still rarely studied in the context of public agencies that provide energy in Indonesia. Moreover, no research has been found that systematically and in-depth analyzes the crisis communication strategy implemented by PLN UID Bali in the 2025 blackout incident. This indicates that there is a relevant research gap to be filled, in order to enrich understanding of the role of communication in responding to social and institutional challenges in the midst of crises. However, studying crisis communication is really important to decrease the public's negative reaction towards an organization (Koswara, 2014). It depends on the implementation of crisis communication stages. Then, the condition of crisis communication will affect the organization continually in the future. Specifically, the significance of studying crisis communication strategies is comprehending the management of emergency communication, protecting the reputation of an organization, ensuring whether the information is clear and accurate, enhancing preparedness for the future, understanding the strategies both tradition and social media-based, and connecting communication the risk of mitigation.

Based on the background of the problem above, this study aims to examine how PLN UID Bali implemented crisis communication strategies during the 2025 Bali blackout through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Specifically, this research analyzes how crisis awareness shaped the initial response, how deny, diminish, rebuild, and reinforce strategies were operationalized, and how these strategies were interpreted by media practitioners and affected public stakeholders. Furthermore, the study seeks to extend the application of SCCT in the context of public service crises within tourism-sensitive regions.

Obviously, research on crisis communication in the context of public service institutions is a complex and contextual discourse. According to Scalvini et al. (2025), delays or unclear communication during crises increase the space for disinformation and worsen public perception of authority. This aligns with Wirdani (2024), who emphasized that the media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion. In emergency contexts, the interaction between institutional messaging, media, and public interpretation becomes a decisive factor in determining whether a crisis escalates or stabilizes. Therefore, this study proposes three central research questions. First, how did crisis awareness shape the initial communication response of PLN UID Bali during the 2025 Bali blackout? Second, how were SCCT-based strategy (deny, diminish, rebuild, and reinforce) constructed and implemented throughout the crisis? Third, how were these crisis communication strategies interpreted by media practitioners and affected public stakeholders?. Furthermore, this research is grounded in the argument that the effectiveness of crisis communication in public service institutions depends not only on the speed of response but also on the strategic alignment between situational crisis characteristics and the selected communication strategies, as conceptualized in SCCT. It is assumed that when institutional responses correspond appropriately to crisis attributions and stakeholder expectations, public trust can be maintained or restored, even in high-impact service disruptions such as large-scale blackouts.

Therefore, companies must understand how media can shape public perception, especially in crises. Meanwhile, Schwell (2025) also emphasized that technical crises will develop into social crises if public communication is not carried out transparently and strategically. Therefore, public communication plays an inseparable, crucial role in handling crises and minimizing the negative impact on relations (Valentini et al., 2025). Especially in the basic service sector, such as providing electrical energy. Coombs (2007) emphasized that an effective crisis communication strategy must contain three main elements: instructional (what the community should do), regret or empathy (acknowledgement of the disturbance), and corrective (the steps taken). This study highlights whether PLN's communication choices align with situational demand and assesses these strategies in maintaining public confidence during a major service disruption.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach using an instrumental case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows the researchers to deeply understand the processes, dynamics, and meanings behind communication actions carried out by public institutions in emergencies. The instrumental case study design was adopted as the 2025 Bali blackout incident functions as a specific case through which broader insights into public sector crisis communication can be examined. The Bali blackout was selected due to its wide public impact and significant media attention, making it an information-rich case for analyzing crisis communication practices.

The data were collected through in-depth interviews. The informants in this study were selected by a purposive sampling technique based on their direct involvement in the 2025 Bali blackout incident. The informants consisted of a Senior Communication and SER Officer at PLN UID Bali, who was directly involved in managing crisis

communication. Then, the journalists from Jawa Post Radar Bali and Bali Puspa News, who provided an external media perspective, and a local business actor representing affected public stakeholders were also being the sample of this study. This composition enabled source triangulation by incorporating organizational, media, and public viewpoints, thereby strengthening the credibility and validity of the findings. The study focused on the seven-day blackout period, from the initial disruption to the restoration of communication systems, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of crisis response strategies during the emergency phase.

The process of analyzing the research data refers to Miles et al. (2014). It consists of interconnected stages carried out systematically. The first stage is data reduction. It refers to the process of selecting, coding, and organizing interview data to identify relevant themes based on Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). At this stage, the data were summarized and focused on information that reflected key aspects of PLN UID Bali's crisis communication strategies. The coding process was guided by SCCT's main categories: deny, diminish, rebuild, and reinforce, which served as analytical lenses for classifying communication responses and identifying recurring patterns.

In addition, the second stage is data display. In this stage, the reduced data were systematically organized into thematic matrices and structured narrative descriptions. The narrative presentation was arranged chronologically according to the stages of PLN UID Bali's crisis response, enabling the identification of relationship between communication strategies and situational development over time.

Moreover, the third stage of the analysis involved concluding the organized data. This interpretive process aimed to formulate analytical insights regarding the effectiveness and dynamics of PLN UID Bali's crisis communication during the blackout incident. The conclusions were generated through iterative reflection, continuously comparing emerging findings with SCCT concepts and validating interpretations across different informants to ensure analytical consistency and theoretical grounding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Crisis Awareness and Its Influence on Initial Communication Response

The emergence of crisis awareness within PLN UID Bali during the early stage of the 2025 blackout can be identified through recurring expressions articulated by organizational actors in the interview data. This awareness was reflected in statements emphasizing reputational risk, uncertainty escalation, structural limitation, and public expectation management. In this study, the extracted interview segments were coded to identify how specific forms of crisis recognition preceded and shaped communicative action. The categorization highlights how awareness of reputational vulnerability and information gaps functioned as triggers for early disclosure strategies. This pattern of awareness to action linkage is systematically displayed in Table 1 below. Clearly, it presents the coded meaning units alongside the identified awareness themes and their corresponding influence on initial communication decision.



Table 1. Coding Results for Crisis Awareness and Its Influence on Initial Communication Response

Coded Meaning Unit (Extracted Data)	Crisis Awareness Theme	Interpretation of Awareness	Impact on Initial Communication Response
“We immediately conveyed to the public... even though we internally were waiting for the real cause.”	Urgency to prevent speculation	Awareness of rapid information circulation and risk of misinformation	Early disclosure via official social media despite incomplete technical certainty.
“A blackout hasn’t happened in Bali for a long time... it has the potential to disrupt the company’s reputation.”	Rarity of total blackout	Awareness that unusual scale increases reputational vulnerability	Proactive communication framing to manage public perception
“PLN UID Bali only manages customers and does not produce electricity directly...”	Structural authority limitation	Awareness of institutional boundary within multi-level electricity governance	Clarification of role and responsibility in initial messaging
“The time for recovery causes anger and discomfort... uncertainty of information.”	Public expectation and uncertainty risk	Awareness that uncertainty escalates emotional reaction	Emphasis on explanation and reassurance in early communication
Bali as major tourism destination	High visibility and symbolic regional image	Awareness that blackout has broader socio-economic implications	Framing communication as reputational protection and trust mediation

Source: by Author (2025)

The blackout that occurred on May 2, 2025, became a critical moment in the operational history of PLN UID Bali due to its wide-scale impact and Bali’s strategic position as a major national and international tourism destination. The power outage lasted for several hours, creating significant disruption to public activities and triggering intense public attention. Based on the findings of this study, the incident was not only perceived as a technical disruption but also as a potential reputational crisis for PLN UID Bali.

"In short, in the afternoon before the night of the blackout, we immediately conveyed to the public through PLN UID Bali's social media what was happening so as not to cause many opinions out there, even though we internally were waiting for the real cause. The cause turned out to be due to the submarine cable." (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).

These findings suggest that although PLN UID Bali does not have direct control over upstream electricity generation, the public continues to perceive the organization as the closest and most visible representative of PLN. Consequently, PLN UID Bali positioned itself as a mediator of trust by providing explanations, expressing apologies, and addressing public concerns. This approach reflects an early form of empathic crisis communication, which becomes a foundational element in the application of crisis communication strategies discussed in the subsequent analysis using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007).

The statement indicates that the decision to communicate early was driven by the need to prevent the spread of public speculation and misinformation. However, the limited authority of PLN UID Bali over upstream electricity production, particularly regarding the submarine cable transmission system (SKLT), restricted the organization’s ability to fully validate and control technical information at the local level. The delay in obtaining definitive technical explanations consequently

heightened public uncertainty and posed challenges to maintaining institutional credibility during the crisis. In the condition of uncertainty regarding the technical cause during the incident, the Public Relations immediately took the initiative to convey initial information to the public through the official social media of PLN UID Bali.

From the beginning of the incident, internal awareness emerged that the blackout had the potential to escalate into a reputational crisis. This awareness was shaped by two main factors: the rarity of a total blackout in Bali and the high public expectations for service reliability in a tourism-dependent region, as conveyed by Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer at PLN UID Bali:

"A blackout has not happened in Bali for a long time. A blackout is usually widespread and can affect almost the entire area. Of course, it has the potential to disrupt the company's reputation, because the public has many questions. Then recovery takes a long time. The certainty of customers getting electricity is confusing, because PLN UID Bali only manages customers and does not produce electricity directly, so the control to know exactly and in detail upstream is not our control. The time for recovery causes anger and discomfort due to the uncertainty of information. This has the potential to damage the company's reputation." (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).

The statement suggests that such a total blackout is rare, in contrast to the planned blackouts or partial outages that are more common. This situation has also caused an escalation of public reaction. Even though it does not have control over upstream electricity resources, PLN UID Bali is still seen by the public as the company's closest representative in dealing with the community. Realizing this, PLN UID Bali acts as a mediator of trust, becoming an intermediary who explains the situation, conveys apologies, and alleviates public concerns. This strategy represents a form of empathic communication that is recognized as an important approach in the context of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007).

The coding results demonstrate that crisis awareness played a decisive role in shaping the initial communication response of PLN UID Bali. Awareness of reputational vulnerability, structural limitations, and high public expectations in a tourism-dependent region prompted early disclosure strategies, even under conditions of incomplete technical information. Rather than waiting for full verification, the organization prioritized uncertainty management to prevent speculation and emotional escalation. This indicates that crisis awareness functioned as a strategic trigger preceding the operationalization of SCCT-based response strategies.

SCCT-Based Strategy Construction and Implementation During the 2025 Bali Blackout

The construction and implementation of SCCT-based strategies during the 2025 Bali blackout can be traced through specific communicative actions articulated by informants throughout the crisis phase. The interview data reveal recurring patterns corresponding to the four primary SCCT response categories: deny, diminish, rebuild,

and reinforce. Following the analytical procedure outlined by Miles et al., (2014), meaning units were coded and classified according to these strategic typologies to identify how each response was framed and operationalized in practice. Rather than treating the strategies as abstract theoretical categories, the coding process highlights how they were constructed within organizational constraints, institutional hierarchies, and situational urgency. The data also showed that each strategy was implemented through particular mechanisms, such as clarification statements, technical explanations, apology narratives, and credibility reinforcement efforts. These patterns are systematically presented in Table 2. Clearly, it distinguishes between the extracted data, strategic construction logic, and corresponding implementation mechanisms throughout the crisis.

Table 2. Coding Results for SCCT-Based Strategy Construction and Implementation During the 2025 Bali Blackout

SCCT Strategy	Key Coded Meaning Units (Extracted Data)	Strategy Construction (How It Was Framed)	Implementation Mechanism	Stakeholder Interpretation
Deny	Clarification that disturbance originated from submarine cable; PLN UID Bali not responsible for electricity production; internal coordination before message release	Responsibility differentiation within multi-level governance structure; clarification of institutional boundaries rather than rejection of crisis	Tiered editorial approval; official social media clarification; coordination with central management	Media: necessary but slow; Business actors: reduced confusion and rumor escalation
Diminish	Explanation that blackout was systemic transmission disruption (SKLT); emphasis on technical cause beyond local authority	Systemic framing to lower perceived culpability and shift attribution from local negligence to structural issue	Repeated technical explanation via official statements and media briefings; contextualization within national system	Media: contextual but high tourism sensitivity intensified scrutiny; Business actors: accepted cause but remained concerned about preparedness
Rebuild	Public apology; narrative of officers working 24 hours; emphasis on recovery progress	Emotional stabilization through apology and corrective action storytelling	Apology statements; recovery progress updates; digital storytelling and media coverage	Media: effective if balanced with factual updates; Business actors: reduced emotional tension but economic concerns persisted
Reinforce	Repetition of positive institutional narratives; solidarity framing; emphasis on long-term service track record	Reaffirmation of institutional credibility and goodwill; positioning blackout as temporary incident	Narrative repetition across platforms; highlighting dedication, preparedness, and national service identity	Media: long-term image framing; Business actors: trust conditional but not fully eroded

Source: by Author (2025)

The table demonstrates that SCCT-based strategies were not applied in isolation but were constructed through organizational interpretation of structural authority and situational visibility. Deny and diminish strategies were more prominent during the early phase of uncertainty management, while rebuild and reinforce strategies became central during emotional stabilization and long-term reputation maintenance.

Deny Strategy: Early Clarification, Hoax Management, and Media Interpretation

The early phase of the Bali blackout crisis was marked by the rapid circulation of hoaxes and speculative narratives on social media, particularly allegations of internal technical negligence within PLN UID Bali. In response, the public relations unit immediately implemented a clarification strategy based on factual information, following a tiered editorial and approval process before dissemination through official channels.



Figure 1. PLN's statement regarding the cause of the blackout (Source: research data, 2025)

One of the early official updates released by PLN UID Bali stated that, "Technically, the disturbance was detected in the submarine cable transmission system; however, the exact cause was still under investigation and was not due to a cyberattack or any external interference." This clarification was intended to prevent speculation and reassure the public that the blackout was caused by technical factors rather than external threats.

Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer at PLN UID Bali, said, "There are issues that we immediately discuss, how we conceptualize the response, we ask for approval, we create content and spread it on social media because most of the hoaxes that circulate initially are from social media." (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).

The communication team compiled the narrative through a tiered editorial process and obtained approval from management before disseminating it through official channels, such as PLN UID Bali's social media. This layered process reflects the institution's effort to ensure message accuracy and alignment with higher-level directives, especially because communication at the unit level must coordinate with PLN's central management. As explained by Aulia Mursalini, as Senior Communication and SER Officer at PLN UID Bali, this cautious approach was not intended as an absolute denial, but as part of a controlled communication mechanism to avoid misinformation while waiting for technical confirmation of the incident.

"The internal difficulty is to ascertain the cause of the blackout because PLN UID Bali is not in charge of electricity production; it just takes time to determine what the cause is," added Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025.

This indicates that communication constraints were closely linked to organizational structure and technical jurisdiction, where the unit's limited authority in production required careful coordination before issuing public statements. This approach reflects a differentiated deny strategy within the SCCT framework, where PLN UID Bali did not reject the existence of the crisis, but denied direct responsibility by clarifying its institutional role as a distribution unit rather than a transmission or generation authority. It also reflects the differentiated denial strategy referred to in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), in which the organization rejects direct responsibility. Still, it acknowledges its involvement as the affected part (Ogunyombo et al., 2024). This strategy has proven effective in damping public anger while avoiding greater reputational damage.

From the media perspective, this early clarification was considered necessary, yet not entirely sufficient to meet journalistic expectations for immediacy and openness. Journalists noted that information access remained centralized and layered, which limited opportunities for real-time verification and follow-up reporting.

"We understand PLN's clarification, but for the media, speed and direct access are very decisive for news framing." (Ni Kadek Febriani, Journalist Jawa Pos Radar Bali, July 2025).

"The response to the media was rather slow, perhaps during the incident, PLN public relations was still waiting for certainty regarding the cause of the blackout." (Candra Winata, Journalist, Bali Puspa News, July 2025).

Meanwhile, from the affected business actors, the initial denial was perceived less as a rejection of responsibility and more as an explanation of uncertainty during the early phase of the crisis. The sudden power outage generated confusion, particularly in the absence of immediate official information. However, the appearance of clarification messages, whether accessed directly from PLN's official accounts or indirectly through media coverage and community-based social media platforms, helped provide an initial reference point for understanding the situation and countering circulating rumors.

"At first, I was confused because the electricity went out immediately, and there was no explanation. But after there was a clarification from PLN circulating on social media and in the news, at least we know this is not deliberate negligence." (I Gede Rawi Darsana, Business Owner, July 2025).

"At the beginning, no one could confirm the cause, but PLN's clarification helped explain that they were also still waiting for certainty. It makes the situation not even wilder." (Galih Fanda, Business Owner, July 2025).

These responses indicate that, for affected business actors, the deny strategy functioned primarily as an uncertainty management mechanism. Rather than being interpreted as a defensive stance, early clarification played a role in limiting the spread of hoaxes and speculative narratives, especially when mediated through trusted news outlets and widely followed local information accounts.

Unlike the classical deny strategy in SCCT, which typically involves outright rejection of responsibility, the case of PLN UID Bali demonstrates a differentiated denial mechanism. The organization did not deny the crisis itself but reframed responsibility by clarifying institutional boundaries within the electricity governance structure. This finding suggests that in public service institutions with layered authority systems, deny strategies may function less as reputational defense and more as structural clarification. Such contextualized denial expands SCCT's application beyond corporate crises toward multi-level governance settings.

Diminish Strategy: Systemic Framing of Responsibility and Public Attribution

Following the initial clarification phase, PLN UID Bali implemented a diminish strategy by emphasizing that the blackout originated from damage to the submarine cable (SKLT). It forms part of the national transmission system beyond the authority of the Bali distribution unit. This explanation was consistently communicated to frame the incident as a systemic technical disruption rather than a result of localized operational negligence.

"The submarine cable is part of the transmission system, which falls outside the authority of PLN UID Bali. It is known as SKLT and has its own designated operator." (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).

Through this framing, PLN UID Bali sought to reduce the level of responsibility attributed to the regional unit and to mitigate reputational pressure by clarifying institutional boundaries within the electricity governance structure. In line with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), such a diminish strategy is particularly appropriate for accidental or non-intentional crises, as it helps lower perceived culpability without denying the occurrence of the crisis itself.

The effectiveness of this strategy, however, cannot be separated from the broader communicative context in which the blackout occurred. Bali's status as a national and international tourism destination significantly amplified public and media attention, intensifying the communication crisis faced by PLN UID Bali.

"Bali is a domestic and international tourist destination, making it more prominent in the public eye. As a result, the communication crisis triggered by the blackout had a significant impact on PLN UID Bali." (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).

"Blackout in Bali is more sensitive because it concerns tourism and regional image." (Ni Kadek Febriani, Journalist Jawa Pos Radar Bali, July 2025).

"This Bali blackout is a warning because it looks like Bali is not ready to produce independent energy, and the news reaches the international stage." (Candra Winata, Journalist, Bali Puspa News, July 2025).

From the perspective of affected business owners, the systemic explanation regarding the cause of the blackout was generally understood and considered reasonable, as it aligned with information circulating in the media. However, this understanding did not fully eliminate frustration related to operational losses and business disruption.

“The explanation is quite clear, just like what is circulating on social media and the news. So we know this is not purely PLN's negligence.” (I Gede Rawi Darsana, Business Owner, July 2025).

“We can accept the cause, but in the future we hope that PLN will be more prepared with anticipation, because the impact on businesses is quite large.” (Galih Fanda, Business Owner, July 2025).

These statements suggest that the diminish strategy contributed to shaping how responsibility was interpreted among certain affected stakeholders, particularly business actors who relied on media explanations to understand the cause of the blackout. While the systemic framing did not eliminate frustration related to operational and economic losses, it appeared to help contextualize the incident beyond localized fault attribution. Rather than indicating a uniform public response, these findings illustrate that the diminish strategy functioned as a narrative framework through which some stakeholders made sense of the crisis. At the same time, the persistence of concern regarding preparedness and contingency planning indicates that acceptance of the explanation did not automatically translate into full satisfaction or trust recovery.

The systemic framing of responsibility reflects SCCT's diminish strategy; however, in tourism-sensitive regions such as Bali, attribution processes are intensified by symbolic regional reputation. This suggests that crisis attribution is not only organizational but also territorial, thereby complicating the application of diminish strategies in high-visibility destinations.

Rebuild Strategy: Apology, Recovery Narratives, and Public Emotional Response

The rebuild strategy was implemented through public apologies and a deliberate shift in narrative focus from identifying the cause of the blackout to emphasizing recovery efforts and service restoration. Although direct financial compensation was not provided due to institutional limitations, the apology functioned as a form of moral accountability, signaling PLN UID Bali's acknowledgement of public inconvenience and its responsibility as a public service provider.

“We attempted to shift the focus from the blackout issue to another narrative that highlights PLN's heroic efforts in addressing the problem, not merely emphasizing the cause, but constructing a positive storyline such as PLN personnel working tirelessly around the clock to restore electricity for the community. This is the narrative we continuously repeated through content and media coverage.” (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).”

Rebuild efforts were thus manifested not only through formal apologies but also through a reframing approach that redirected public attention toward corrective actions and recovery processes. Narratives such as “Unceasing Efforts” and “24-Hour Readiness” were consistently disseminated across digital platforms, framing PLN personnel as dedicated public servants. Within the SCCT framework, this strategy

aims to restore trust by demonstrating concern, empathy, and visible corrective action rather than material restitution alone.

From the media perspective, recovery-oriented narratives were generally perceived as necessary to stabilize public sentiment. However, journalists noted the importance of balancing heroic framing with factual updates to avoid perceptions of excessive image building.

“The public is eagerly waiting for PLN's official statement regarding the progress of the recovery, because it is a sign that the situation is being handled.” (Candra Winata, Journalist, Bali Puspa News, July 2025).

From the affected business actors, the rebuild narrative contributed to reducing emotional tension and restoring a sense of normalcy, even though economic losses caused by the blackout were not fully resolved.

“After an explanation and an apology, we became calmer. At least it can be seen that PLN does not let go of its hands and focuses on restoring.” (I Gede Rawi Darsana, Business Owner, July 2025).

“What is important to us is not only the cause, but how PLN handles and reports the recovery process.” (Galih Fanda, Business Owner, July 2025).

These findings suggest that, within the context of the Bali blackout, the rebuild strategy functioned primarily as a mechanism for emotional stabilization and trust maintenance, rather than complete trust restoration. The emphasis on apology and recovery narratives helped reassure certain stakeholders that corrective actions were underway, even as concerns regarding economic impact and future preparedness persisted (Hornsey et al., 2024).

While SCCT posits apology as a key rebuild mechanism, this study shows that in public utility crises, emotional stabilization may precede full trust restoration. The apology functioned more as effective containment rather than reputational repair, indicating that rebuild strategies in essential service sectors operate differently from consumer-based corporate contexts.

Reinforce Strategy: Institutional Credibility, Solidarity Narratives, and Long-Term Reputation Maintenance

In the context of the 2025 Bali blackout crisis, the reinforcement strategy was carried out by PLN UID Bali as an effort to maintain the long-term reputation capital that had been built before the crisis. This strategy was not directed to deny or negate the crisis, but to reaffirm institutional values, public service track record, and PLN's commitment as a strategic SOE. Within the framework of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), reinforce strategies serve to strengthen organizational goodwill through reminders of positive contributions in the past and strengthening emotional bonds with the public (Coombs, 2007).

From the internal perspective of PLN UID Bali, strengthening the reputation was carried out through the repetition of positive narratives regarding the dedication of officers and continuity of service. Narratives such as 24-hour preparedness, non-stop work, and sacrifice of field officers have become messages that continue to be repeated in various communication channels. In addition, elements of social solidarity and empathy were also consciously included in the crisis message. PLN was not only

positioning itself as a technical institution, but as part of the Balinese people who were also affected by the crisis.

“Positive narratives, that’s what we maintain, and we repeat in various media. We strive to evoke public concern through the narrative we convey, in the hope of fostering empathy among netizens. Some support us, others criticize; there are always two sides.” (Aulia Mursalini, Senior Communication and SER Officer, July 2025).

From the perspective of the media, this reinforce strategy was seen in PLN’s efforts to build long-term framing, not just a reactive response to blackout events. The journalist assessed that PLN consistently tried to maintain the image of the institution by placing the crisis as an incidental event in the course of a longer service.

“PLN tried to emphasize that this blackout is not the overall picture of their performance. There are efforts to maintain public trust so that they do not only see one incident.” (Ni Kadek Febriani, Journalist Jawa Pos Radar Bali, July 2025).

However, the media also emphasized the importance of a balance between image strengthening and information disclosure so that strengthening strategies were not perceived as excessive diversion of issues. From the perspective of affected business actors, the narrative of strengthening PLN’s reputation was received in various ways. Some informants admitted that they were still considering PLN’s track record in assessing this crisis, even though economic losses were still felt.

“The blackout was shocking, but it did not immediately make us lose faith completely.” (Galih Fanda, Business Owner, July 2025).

Meanwhile, other business actors assessed that the officers’ dedication narrative helped to ease emotions, although it did not completely erase the material impact experienced.

“Seeing the officers working until that night more or less made us feel cared for, even though the losses remained.” (I Gede Rawi Darsana, Business Owner, July 2025).

These findings showed that the reinforce strategy in the case of PLN UID Bali functions as a perception stabilization mechanism, not as an instant recovery tool. This strategy strengthened the institution’s position in the eyes of the public by emphasizing continuity, contribution, and solidarity so that crises were understood as temporary events, rather than reflections of structural failures. In the context of unintentional crises such as blackouts, this approach was in line with the SCCT which emphasizes the importance of maintaining goodwill so that public judgment is not reduced to a single event.

Solidarity and nationalism narratives were embedded in communication materials, portraying the blackout as a shared challenge rather than an isolated institutional failure. According to SCCT, this strategy was particularly effective in non-intentional crises where stakeholders were more receptive to goodwill reminders. This mechanism supports consistency in crisis narrative, a key principle in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) that prevents message fragmentation and wild speculation (Ogunyombo et al., 2024).

Media Relations and the Public Interpretation of SCCT-Based Crisis Communication Strategies

The interpretation of SCCT-based crisis communication strategies during the 2025 Bali blackout varied across stakeholder groups, particularly between media practitioners and affected public actors. To examine how these strategies were understood and evaluated, interview data from journalists and business actors were coded to identify recurring interpretive patterns. The coding process focused on how each group assessed the effectiveness, accessibility, and relevance of PLN UID Bali's communication responses throughout the crisis. Rather than analyzing interpretation solely in terms of message reception, the data were organized to capture differences in professional routines, informational expectations, and experiential vulnerability. This approach enables a clearer distinction between organizational intent and stakeholder perception. The results of this coding process are presented in Table 3, which categorizes the extracted meaning units according to actor, interpretation theme, evaluative orientation, and implications for crisis narrative construction.

Table 3. Coding Results for Media Relations and the Public Interpretation of SCCT-Based Crisis Communication Strategies

Coded Meaning Unit (Extracted Data)	Actor	Interpretation Theme	Evaluation of PLN UID Bali's Strategy	Implication for Crisis Narrative Construction
"Speed and direct access are very decisive for news framing."	Journalist	Speed & accessibility as framing determinant	Early clarification appreciated, but centralized approval slowed verification	Media framing influenced by information flow structure; delays shaped narrative tone
Limitation due to layered approval process	Journalist	Institutional transparency constraint	Information seen as controlled and hierarchical	Contributed to perception of partial openness during early crisis phase
"If possible, the information is like BMKG... periodic updates via SMS."	Business Actors	Expectation of real-time disaster-style updates	Social media insufficient for all stakeholders; need multi-channel system	Public expects crisis communication as information infrastructure, not only message delivery
"The explanation is there, but if you don't know how long it will end..."	Business Actors	Temporal certainty & predictability	Accuracy acknowledged, but lack of time estimate increased anxiety	Crisis narrative shaped by uncertainty duration rather than message content
Media & public rely on official clarification as reference	Both	Institutional credibility as anchor	PLN remained primary source despite criticism	PLN UID Bali retained narrative authority, though interpreted differently by actors

Source: by Author (2025)

In the 2025 Bali blackout, crisis communication did not operate through a linear organization to public transmission of information, messaging, media framing, and public interpretation. While PLN UID Bali functioned as the primary information source, journalists and affected community members played a decisive role in

interpreting, amplifying, and contextualizing crisis narratives across multiple communication channels.

From the perspective of media practitioners, effective crisis communication was closely associated with speed, accessibility, and openness of information. Journalists acknowledged the importance of PLN UID Bali's early clarification in countering misinformation; however, they also highlighted limitations related to centralized information flow and layered approval processes. These conditions constrained opportunities for real-time verification and follow-up reporting, particularly during the initial hours of the blackout.

"Speed and direct access are very decisive for news framing." (Ni Kadek Febriani, Journalist Jawa Pos Radar Bali, July 2025).

From the public perspective, particularly among affected business owners, crisis communication was assessed less on technical depth and more on the availability of timely, continuous, and accessible updates. Informants emphasized that uncertainty was heightened not by the absence of explanation, but by the lack of temporal clarity regarding service restoration. In this context, several respondents articulated expectations for crisis communication models that resemble real-time disaster information systems.

"If possible, the information is like BMKG. There are periodic updates via SMS, because not all business actors or the public use social media." (Galih Fanda, Business Owner, July 2025).

"The explanation is there, but if you don't know how long it will end, it's still difficult. What is needed is a certainty of time or at least an estimate." (I Gede Rawi Darsana, Business Owner, July 2025).

The findings revealed that the interpretation of SCCT-based crisis communication strategies during the 2025 Bali blackout was not uniform but mediated by professional roles and lived experiences. While PLN UID Bali positioned itself as the primary authoritative source of information, journalists and affected business actors evaluated the communication strategies through different evaluative lenses. Media practitioners emphasized speed, accessibility, and openness as core determinants of credible crisis communication, particularly during the initial hours of uncertainty. In contrast, affected public stakeholders prioritized temporal clarity and continuity of updates over technical explanation. Although deny and diminish strategies were acknowledged as necessary forms of responsibility clarification, their effectiveness was filtered through the institutional dynamics of information flow and the public's need for predictability.

These findings suggest that SCCT strategies, while conceptually categorized as deny, diminish, rebuild, and reinforce, are operationally interpreted within relational ecosystems involving media logic and stakeholder vulnerability. Thus, crisis communication during the blackout functioned not merely as an organizational response, but as a negotiated narrative shaped by journalistic mediation and socio-economic expectations.

The Bali blackout occurred in a region with high symbolic and economic visibility due to its tourism-dependent structure. In such contexts, media institutions operate under heightened urgency, as disruptions potentially affect national and international perceptions. Journalists' emphasis on speed and direct access reflects professional routings embedded in contemporary digital news cycles, where real-time verification



influences framing and agenda setting. At the same time, business actors experiencing operational losses during the blackout interpreted communication through an economic risk lens. For them, the absence of temporal certainty amplified financial anxiety, regardless of message accuracy. This contextual condition demonstrates that crisis communication in public service sectors intersects with infrastructure dependency and economic vulnerability. In high-visibility regions, crisis narratives rapidly expand beyond technical malfunction into reputational and economic discourse. Therefore, PLN UID Bali's communication strategies were situated within a layered environment where institutional hierarchy, media acceleration, and stakeholder exposure converged. This context shaped not only message dissemination but also how those messages were cognitively and emotionally processed by different actors.

From an interpretive perspective, the findings indicate that media practitioners assessed SCCT strategies primarily through criteria of transparency and accessibility, rather than through attributional logic alone. While deny and diminish strategies were theoretically aligned with SCCT's crisis type classification, journalists interpreted them in relation to institutional openness and information flow structure. Layered approval processes were perceived as limiting real-time responsiveness, which in turn affected framing opportunities. Conversely, business stakeholders interpreted rebuild and reinforce strategies through the lens of practical reassurance. Apologies and recovery narratives were appreciated symbolically, yet they did not fully mitigate anxiety in the absence of time-bound projections. This divergence suggests that interpretation operates at two levels: procedural evaluation (media) and experiential evaluation (public stakeholders). In other words, the same strategic message can generate differentiated legitimacy outcomes depending on interpretive position. These results highlight that crisis communication effectiveness cannot be assessed solely through strategic category alignment but must consider audience-specific interpretive frameworks.

Theoretically, these findings extend Situational Crisis Communication Theory beyond its attribution-centered orientation. SCCT primarily focuses on matching response strategies with perceived responsibility levels to protect organizational reputation. However, this case showed that interpretation dynamics also depend on temporal management and mediated access structures. The public's demand for periodic updates resembling disaster-information systems indicates that contemporary crisis communication is increasingly evaluated as a messaging. Meanwhile, journalistic expectations underscore that crisis narratives are co-produced through institutional interaction. This suggests that SCCT in public service contexts should incorporate two additional analytical dimensions: mediated framing dynamics and temporal predictability management. Crisis awareness and strategy selection may align with SCCT typologies, yet reputational outcomes are mediated by how information circulates within professional and public networks. Therefore, the Bali blackout case contributes to a more relational and ecosystem-based understanding of crisis communication theory.

Compared to previous applications of SCCT in the context of corporate crises, where attribution of responsibility often dominates the analysis, the Bali blackout illustrated a different approach, namely a focus on culpability and ethical accountability. In contrast, during infrastructure disruptions in public service sectors,



temporal certainty and accessibility become equally decisive variables. While previous studies have emphasized apology and corrective action as central to rebuild strategies, this case shows that without projected restoration timelines, emotional stabilization remains incomplete. Furthermore, unlike private sector crises where communication may be centralized within corporate PR units, public utility organizations operate within multi-level governance structures that influence speed and verification processes. This comparison indicates that SCCT requires contextual adaptation when applied to essential service institutions embedded in bureaucratic systems. Consequently, the Bali blackout case reinforces the argument that crisis communication strategies are not universally interpreted but are shaped by sectoral characteristics, stakeholder dependency levels, and mediated interaction patterns.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the crisis communication strategy implemented by PLN UID Bali during the 2025 Bali blackout was shaped by early crisis awareness, and functioned as the foundational trigger for strategic response formulation. Awareness of reputational vulnerability, structural authority limitations, and heightened public expectations in a tourism-dependent region directly influenced the decision to initiate early disclosure despite incomplete technical certainty. The findings showed that the implementation of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) strategies did not occur in a linear sequence, but it developed adaptively in response to situational dynamics. The deny strategy was operationalized as institutional boundary clarification rather than crisis rejection. The diminish strategy framed the blackout as a systemic transmission disruption within a multi-level electricity governance structure. The rebuild strategy was constructed through apology narratives and recovery-centered storytelling, while the reinforce strategy emphasized institutional credibility, solidarity, and long-term public service commitment.

Furthermore, the interpretation of these strategies varied across stakeholder groups. Media practitioners evaluated crisis communication primarily through speed, accessibility, and transparency of information flow, whereas affected business stakeholders interpreted communication through temporal certainty and recovery predictability. These differentiated interpretations indicate that crisis communication in public service contexts operates within a relational ecosystem shaped by institutional hierarchy, media logic, and stakeholder vulnerability. Theoretically, this study extends the application of SCCT to public utility institutions embedded in multi-level governance systems. It reconceptualizes crisis communication not merely as attribution-based strategy selection, but as an adaptive meaning-construction process mediated by structural authority constraints and sectoral visibility.

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