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Communication Strategy in Crisis Management of PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat (PBB) (Case Study of PT PBB's Communication Strategy in Managing the Crisis After the Termination of the 2020-2021 Liga 1)

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Abstract: The name Persib Bandung on the Indonesian football scene is respected because of its status as a legendary and outstanding team in Indonesian football. Persib's achievements in Indonesian football are not only limited to the big names and achievements they have achieved. More than that, Persib also managed to maintain its existence as a great team for 88 years. Especially in the current era of the football industry. Since the Indonesian football competition entered the industrial realm, Persib has been listed as the team with the best finances. In 2017, Forbes magazine named Persib as the richest team in Indonesia. Apart from that, when the crisis of stopping competition hit, Persib was one of the teams that was able to recover quickly. This is what attracted researchers' interest in making Persib a research subject, especially in terms of crisis management carried out by PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat (PBB) as the company that oversees the management of the Persib team in maintaining Persib's existence as a big team in Indonesia. Because, along the way, especially in the era of the Indonesian football industry, there have been a number of incidents that could potentially cause a crisis for Persib. As happened in 2020 when the competition was stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The research uses qualitative methods with a case study approach. The data collection technique is through in-depth interviews, observation and document search. This research produces a model of the stages of crisis management and communication carried out by PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat (PBB) in dealing with the crisis of ending the 2020-2021 Liga 1. In the research, it was also discovered how PT PBB's reforms were carried out in maintaining the existence of Persib Bandung in the Indonesian football arena.

Keywords: PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat, Communication Strategic, Crisis Management.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic, which struck Indonesia in early 2020, delivered a heavy blow to the national football industry. It resulted in the suspension of all professional football activities, including the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season, which at the time had only been running for three weeks. PSSI and PT Liga Indonesia Baru (LIB), as the authorities of professional football in Indonesia, had no choice but to halt all football activities. The reason was clear: for the sake of humanity.

This was because the Covid-19 pandemic was a public health emergency that threatened many lives. Therefore, suspending the competition was considered a wise step to reduce the increasingly widespread transmission at that time. Nevertheless, the suspension of the competition created a crisis for Indonesia's professional football clubs. They were put in a difficult position, facing potential financial crises due to the lack of income.

Moreover, the competition was suspended for quite a long period — more than a year — from March 2020 to August 2021. This situation aligns with what Laurence Barton described in his book *Crisis in Organizations: Managing and Communicating in the Heat of Chaos*. Barton states: “A crisis can have negative effects that impact various crucial aspects of an organization, such as its reputation and finances.”

These negative effects, as mentioned by Barton, were the very threats facing all professional football clubs in Indonesia during the competition's suspension due to the pandemic. The Institute for Economic and Social Research of the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Indonesia (LPEM FEB UI), estimated that the economic losses from the halt of domestic football competitions reached between IDR 2.7 trillion and IDR 3 trillion in just one year¹. To illustrate, in the football industry, there are three main sources of club revenue: matchday, broadcast, and commercial.

Without any competition, the club's sources of income were automatically eroded, while they still had obligations to pay the salaries of players and team staff. All professional football clubs in Indonesia experienced financial turbulence—Persib Bandung was no exception. The absence of competitions caused a significant decline in PT PBB's revenue across various sectors.

In addition to losing income from match ticket sales and broadcasting rights, Persib's revenue from sponsor partnerships, merchandise sales, and its café also saw a significant drop. For example, merchandise sales revenue for PT PBB during the Covid-19 period dropped by up to 50%. Likewise, the revenue from food and beverage sales at the Persib Café declined by up to 60%².

In this situation, an organization's ability to strategically manage the crisis through proper communication became crucial to maintaining its reputation, public trust, and the sustainability of the club. PT PBB, as the professional entity managing Persib Bandung, was faced with the need to design and implement an effective crisis communication strategy to respond to the situation and prevent it from escalating. The communication steps taken—both through official channels and social media—were a reflection of the management's efforts to maintain the club's image, foster sponsor relations, and adapt its business and operational strategies during the crisis.

As a result, PT PBB's crisis management strategy was considered effective in mitigating the broader impact of the crisis. PT PBB was able to reduce the potential of a widespread financial crisis through various strategies. Proof of this can be seen when the

¹ Lidwina, Andrea. 2020. "The Collapse of the National Football Industry During the Pandemic - Katadata Data Analysis, ", <https://katadata.co.id/analisisdata/5fc1d891dc6c4/robohnya-industri-sepak-bola-nasional-saat-pandemi> (January 2022)

² Snaz, Erwin. 2020. "Shopee Liga 1 2020 Postponed Twice, Persib Bandung's Business Declines", <https://www.bola.com/indonesia/read/4375604/shopee-liga-1-2020-ditunda-dua-kali-bisnis-persib-bandung-menurun?page=4> (January 2022)

pandemic subsided and the competition resumed in August 2021—Persib emerged as one of the most prepared teams to return to the league. Their readiness was not only in terms of the team but also from a financial standpoint.

From the perspective of team composition, Persib's squad was notably strong. They managed to retain around 80% of their 2020–2021 Liga 1 squad for the 2021–2022 season. According to the Transfermarkt website, the market value of Persib's squad for the 2021–2022 Liga 1 season reached IDR 83.87 billion. This record placed Maung Bandung as the second most valuable squad in the league, behind only Bali United.

This situation stood in contrast to many other clubs, most of which lost key players ahead of the 2021–2022 season. One such example was Persija Jakarta—Persib's rival and main competitor in the championship race. Ahead of the 2021–2022 Liga 1 season, Persija lost around 50% of its squad from the 2020–2021 season³. Aside from Persija, both Arema FC and Persik Kediri also lost many of their key players while preparing for the upcoming league.

Both clubs were left without any of their foreign players. As a result, Arema and Persik had to completely overhaul their foreign player rosters before the new season began⁴. Of course, such squad overhauls—carried out by most teams heading into Liga 1 2021–2022—inevitably disrupted their preparation for the competition.

From a financial readiness perspective, throughout the 2021–2022 Liga 1 season, Persib Bandung was backed by 11 brands as sponsor partners. Interestingly, among the 11 sponsoring brands for Persib that season, one of them joined during the league's suspension—specifically in August 2020. The brand Persib successfully secured during the Covid-19-induced league halt was Telkomsel⁵.

The 11 companies that officially sponsored Persib in the 2021–2022 Liga 1 season were: Indofood, PermataBank Syariah, Intersport Soccer, Kopi ABC, Telkomsel, Mobil Pom Mikro, Halodoc, Indaco Warna Dunia, Panther Energy Drink, Didimax, and Sportama. This made Persib the team with the second-highest number of sponsors in Liga 1 2021–2022, just behind Bali United. These figures indicate that Persib was able to recover quickly from the crisis caused by the suspension of the competition due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Deputy CEO of PT PBB, Teddy Tjahyono, admitted that it was not easy for Persib to get through the difficult period when the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season was suspended. PT PBB had a lot of homework to do to maintain the squad composition and preserve partnerships with sponsors. This is understandable, considering that sponsorship is the main source of funding for football clubs in Indonesia. Teddy acknowledged that when the Covid-19 pandemic struck and the competition was forced to stop, Persib's management immediately took the initiative to communicate with sponsors and players.

“In Indonesian football, sponsorship is indeed the primary source of funding for a team's operations throughout the competition. So, we (Persib management) continued to strive and innovate to ensure the team could keep its sponsors. When the league was suspended, we immediately established communication with all the sponsors. We approached each sponsor individually and explained the situation. Likewise, we explained the condition to the players as well.” (Interview with Teddy Tjahyono, January 2022)

³ Ngasorake, Unggul Tan. 2021. "Left by Many Players, This is the Promise of the President of Persija Ahead of League 1", <https://www.bolanas.com/read/492783540/ditinggal-banyak-pemain-ini-janji-presiden-persija-jelang-liga-1?page=all> (January 2022)

⁴ Hanavi, Alvino. 2020. "Arema FC dan Persik Kediri Paling Apes, Inilah Daftar Pemain Asing yang Putuskan Cabut dari Liga 1 2020", <https://sportfeat.bolasport.com/read/442468643/arema-fc-dan-persik-kediri-paling-apes-inilah-daftar-pemain-asing-yang-putuskan-cabut-dari-liga-1-2020?page=all> (Januari 2022)

⁵ Setiawan, Arif. 2020. "In the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Persib Bandung Again Gets a New Sponsor", <https://www.bolasport.com/read/312270676/di-tengah-pandemi-covid-19-persib-bandung-kembali-dapatkan-sponsor-baru?page=all> (December 2021)

From the explanation above, and based on the direct account from the key source in this research, it is evident that communication was a crucial aspect of PT PBB's crisis management when the 2020 Liga 1 season was halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is undeniable that communication plays a vital role in managing a crisis. In the context of PT PBB, a communication strategy served as a tool to build and maintain stakeholder trust and preserve the organization's image.

With the right communication strategy, PT PBB was able to minimize the negative impact of the crisis and maintain Persib's existence in Indonesian football. Another reason that motivates this research is the researcher's personal affection for Persib Bandung. As a *bobotoh*—a Persib fan—the researcher wanted to understand how the club is managed and whether it is run by credible individuals in their respective fields. Therefore, the researcher is interested in exploring in detail how PT PBB's communication strategies helped maintain Persib's existence during the crisis caused by the suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHOD

Research Methods

In conducting the research, the researcher used a qualitative research method. Qualitative research aims to explain the phenomenon as deeply as possible through the collection of as deep data as possible. This research does not prioritize the size of the population or sampling, even the sampling and population are very limited. If the data collected is in-depth and can explain the phenomenon being studied, then there is no need to look for other sampling. Here, what is emphasized is the issue of depth (quality) of data, not the amount (quantity) of data (Kriyantono, 2006: 56).

The reason the researcher chose to use a qualitative research method is because this research seeks to explain the phenomenon as deeply as possible through the collection of as deep data as possible related to the crisis management carried out by PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat, in relation to maintaining the existence of Persib Bandung in the Indonesian football industry.

In this study, the researcher will try to explain in detail how the strategies and stages of crisis management carried out by PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat in dealing with every problem that arises.

Research Object

The research object in this study is the crisis management of PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat (PBB), in maintaining the existence of Persib Bandung in the Indonesian football industry. The researcher focuses the research on the crisis management efforts carried out by PT PBB when facing polemics related to the ecosystem in Indonesian football.

Research Area

In accordance with the problems raised in the study, the research location chosen as a data source is Graha Persib, Jl Sulanjana, Bandung City which is the office of PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat (PBB).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of PT PBB's Crisis Management Stages

The Covid-19 pandemic undeniably became a crisis situation for all stakeholders in Indonesia's football industry. Due to the pandemic, all football activities in the country were halted, including the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season, which at the time had only run for three weeks. Clubs, players, coaches, and team staff were among the most affected parties by this

crisis. With the competition suspended, club revenues drastically declined. The threat of financial crisis loomed, inevitably affecting players, coaches, and support staff.

PT PBB, the company responsible for managing the Persib Bandung team, acknowledged that the suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season constituted an unexpected crisis—difficult to predict and impossible to avoid. Thus, when faced with such a crisis, an organization essentially has only two options: to survive and face the crisis with strategic planning, or to surrender and wait for collapse.

Naturally, PT PBB chose the first option: to survive and confront the crisis. Armed with a wealth of experience and organizational knowledge from its stakeholders, the company began to act strategically in addressing the situation.

1. Pre-Crisis Stage

During the pre-crisis stage, decision-makers at PT PBB did not immediately react. Instead, they observed and analyzed the situation in order to map out all potential scenarios. When the government began restricting public activities, resulting in the temporary suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season on March 20, 2020, PT PBB’s top executives responded by holding internal meetings.

In the process, PT PBB leaders reviewed the emerging problems, formulated strategic plans, and prepared various resources as "ammunition" to adapt to the situation. According to the researcher’s analysis, the steps taken by PT PBB during the pre-crisis stage were quite appropriate. In other words, PT PBB did not focus solely on the cause of the problem but immediately considered strategic measures to adapt to the crisis.

At the same time, PT PBB opened itself to learning, transformation, growth, and change as the issue of competition suspension escalated. The objective, as mentioned earlier, was to adapt effectively to the crisis—considering that the Covid-19 pandemic had reshaped human life in general. Therefore, several changes had to be made for PT PBB to withstand the storm. One noticeable adjustment was the optimization of digital media to maintain sponsor activations.

This was done by Persib to retain partnerships with sponsors, as sponsorship remains the club’s largest source of income. Thus, when the decision to suspend the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season was officially confirmed, PT PBB initiated intensive communication with its sponsors. Based on the findings and analysis conducted by the researcher, PT PBB’s crisis management process during the pre-crisis stage can be illustrated through the following model:

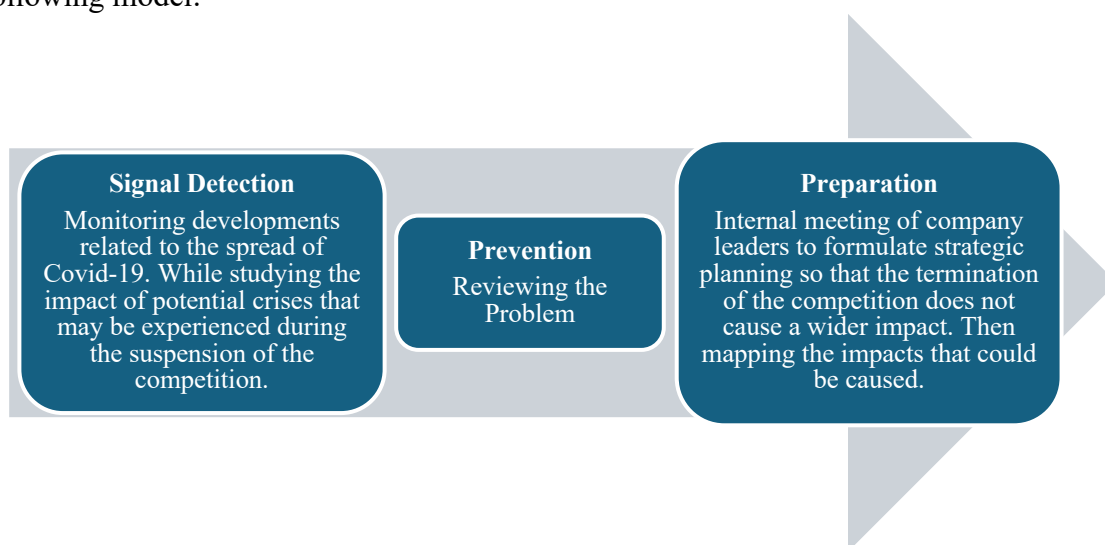


Figure 1. PT PBB Crisis Management Model in the Pre-Crisis Stage.
Source: Researcher

2. Crisis Stage

Entering the crisis stage, PT PBB began implementing a number of strategies that they had previously prepared in the pre-crisis stage. The initial step taken by PT PBB was to visit all sponsor partners and explain the conditions of the competition termination due to Covid-19. At this time, it was seen that PT PBB's main focus was to maintain cooperation with sponsor partners. Naturally, because sponsorship is a source of income for professional football clubs. Therefore, in various ways, cooperation with sponsor partners must be maintained.

Moreover, PT PBB still has to bear the operational burden of the club. The operational burden that must be borne is also quite large, namely the salaries of players, coaches, and team staff whose value can reach billions of rupiah. Therefore, intensive communication was carried out with sponsor partners. Communication to sponsor partners was carried out persuasively and transparently. The aim is to avoid misunderstandings.

Communication was carried out intensively until it resulted in a number of agreements to adjust brand activation during the termination of the competition. One of them is maximizing sponsor brand activation through digital media and social activities carried out by PT PBB through the 'Sauyunan' program. Both of these things are undeniably examples of adaptations that PT PBB is trying to do regarding adjustments to cooperation with sponsor partners. Previously, brand activation was more often done through matches. Through the display of sponsor brands on jerseys and billboards on the sidelines when the match is taking place.

However, because the competition was stopped, brand activation could no longer be done. The most logical and reasonable step that can be taken is of course to make adjustments, by inserting more sponsor partner brand activations in posts on Persib's social media. Not only with sponsor partners, intensive communication was also carried out with the players. Especially in an effort to communicate the decision to adjust the contract by up to 25 percent. This was also accepted by the coaches and players, so that most of the players decided to stay in the Persib squad.

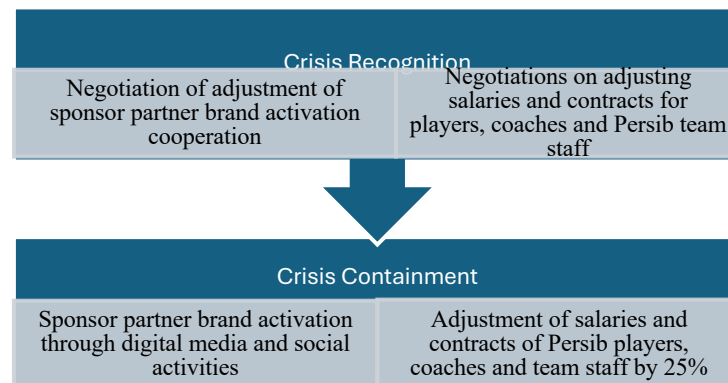


Figure 2. PT PBB Crisis Management Model in the Crisis Phase.

Source: Researcher

3. Post-Crisis Phase

Referring to the presentation of the informants in the research findings, the results of the crisis management strategy carried out by PT PBB in facing the termination of the 2021-2022 Liga 1 were fairly successful. According to the researcher's analysis, the indicator of success can be seen from PT PBB's ability to maintain cooperation with most of its sponsor partners in the 2020 season.

In fact, when the competition was suspended, which was the crisis phase experienced by PT PBB, they were still able to bring in one sponsor partner to support the Persib team's journey in League 1 2021-2022. This certainly makes Persib's financial

condition in welcoming League 1 2021-2022 fairly safe. This indicator can be seen from the success of maintaining around 80% of the squad from the previous season. Plus, the success of bringing in star players such as Marc Klok and Mohammed Rashid.

Overall, the characteristics of organizational learning in DRT theory are very visible in the crisis management stages carried out by PT PBB. The crisis management strategy carried out focuses on efforts so that they can adapt to the situation. At the same time, PT PBB also opens itself to learning, transformation, growth and change when the issue of stopping the competition is increasingly widespread. The goal, as mentioned above, is so that they can adapt to the crisis situation. Given that the Covid-19 Pandemic has changed the order of human life.

This is also in line with the characteristics of organizational learning in DRT. Organizational learning is the ability of an organization to articulate learning openly both internally and externally. Internal learning includes overcoming barriers to learning and improving ineffective practices that cause crises, thus must be communicated throughout the organization.

The purpose of organizational learning is to change the attitudes, values, and beliefs of organizational members to explain new ways of working (Ulmer and Sellnow, 2020). This is also what PT PBB did, instead of focusing on finding the cause of the crisis that occurred, they were committed to trying to solve the problems related to the termination of the 2020-2021 Liga 1. Various updates have been tried, such as adjusting the brand activation cooperation of sponsor partners through digital media to social activities.

Of course, both methods are considered effective during the Covid-19 pandemic. Because there are no competitions being held, the most optional step that can be taken to maintain the brand activation of sponsor partners is to maximize digital media. As an illustration of the crisis management process carried out by PT PBB in dealing with the termination of the 2020-2021 Liga 1, the following is a crisis management model and the processes carried out by PT PBB in dealing with the crisis situation.

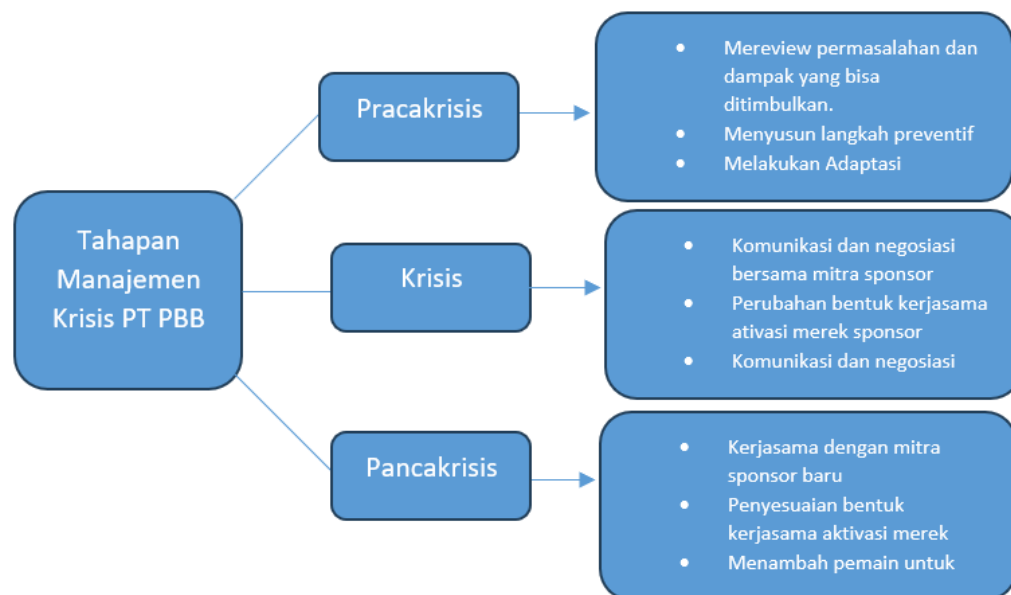


Figure 3. PT PBB Crisis Management Model Based on Coombs’ Crisis Management Model (Source: Researcher)

Analysis of PT PBB’s Communication Strategy in Responding to the Crisis of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 Suspension

In practice, in facing the crisis caused by the suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season, PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat (PT PBB) implemented various communication

strategies, both internally and externally, to mitigate the impact of the crisis. One type of communication used by PT PBB to maintain good relations with its stakeholders was the implementation of organizational communication.

According to Zelko and Dance (2006), organizational communication is an interconnected system. It consists of both external and internal organizational communication (Rismawati, 2021:63). These two types of communication described by Zelko and Dance were also applied in PT PBB's crisis communication strategy.

Internal organizational communication was conducted by PT PBB's top management through regular evaluation meetings. These meetings focused on formulating strategic and innovative steps to adapt to the crisis and minimize its impact on Persib. Internal communication was also carried out with players, coaches, and team staff. The communication was aimed at negotiating and providing constructive information regarding crisis response measures.

External organizational communication occurred when PT PBB approached and communicated with sponsor partners. The communication process was carried out in an open and transparent manner. This aligns with what Ulmer & Pyle (2021) stated in their research—that open and transparent communication is essential for an organization to succeed in managing a crisis. Through planned and continuous organizational communication, PT PBB was able to integrate crisis handling schemes and action plans comprehensively.

Additionally, PT PBB engaged in negotiations to adjust sponsor activation agreements during the competition suspension. The goal was to maintain positive relationships among stakeholders. As Ulmer and Sellnow (2020) emphasize, an organization should take a long-term approach focused on building goodwill over time. The negotiation process began after the internal communication phase. It involved PT PBB and affected parties such as sponsors, players, coaches, and team staff.

The negotiations focused on mutual understanding and finding the best possible solutions during the crisis. Examples include negotiations on salary adjustments for players and staff, digital activation agreements with sponsors, and operational efficiency within the Persib team. The negotiations were tough and exhausting due to the many interests that needed to be reconciled. However, thanks to the goodwill of all parties and PT PBB's effective communication leadership, common ground was eventually found.

Players agreed to a contract value adjustment of up to 25%. Likewise, sponsors understood the situation and accepted proposals to shift brand activation to digital media and social activities. In a time of pandemic and the absence of football competitions, the use of media and digital technology became a crucial instrument in PT PBB's communication strategy to maintain engagement with stakeholders.

Through various digital platforms such as social media, the official website, and mobile apps, Persib regularly published and streamed engaging and interactive content for bobotoh (fans) and the general public. Moreover, digital media was also used to facilitate sponsor brand activation during the pandemic through product placement content and digital campaigns.

By implementing the three communication strategies above in a synergistic manner, PT PBB was able to mitigate the severe impact of the crisis caused by the Liga 1 suspension. In fact, Persib managed to bounce back with a strong performance in the following season. This shows that effective communication is one of the key factors in the success of organizational crisis management. In relation to DRT (Discourse of Renewal Theory), it emphasizes that when facing a crisis, an organization must engage in efficient and ethical communication.

Based on the research findings and analysis conducted, the following is the model of the crisis communication strategy applied by PT PBB during the suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season.

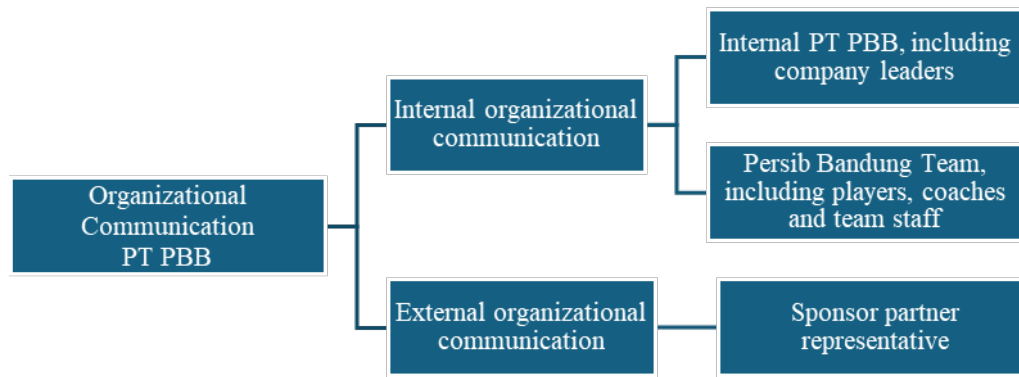


Figure 4. PT PBB’s Crisis Communication Model
(Source: Researcher)

Renewal Analysis to Sustain Persib's Post-Crisis Existence

It is undeniable that the suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season due to the Covid-19 pandemic was an extremely difficult period for everyone involved in Indonesian football, including Persib Bandung. Nevertheless, PT PBB chose to look ahead and implement various innovations to ensure that Persib would continue to exist and grow positively beyond the crisis. Several renewal efforts carried out by PT PBB to sustain and develop Persib post-crisis include:

1. Development of Adequate Football Infrastructure

One form of PT PBB's long-term commitment to developing and maintaining Persib's existence is the initiation of supportive infrastructure development. At least two vital infrastructure projects are underway: a new training center for Persib players in the Gedebage area of Bandung, and the management of the Gelora Bandung Lautan Api (GBLA) Stadium.

Both infrastructure projects are under development, although not yet fully completed. The new training center is expected to be ready in 2024, while the stadium management is still under further negotiation with the Bandung city government. These infrastructure developments will further strengthen Persib’s position as a leading football club, not only in terms of management and finance but also in facilities.

2. Marketing Strategy Renewal and Digitalization

Beyond infrastructure, Persib’s management has also aggressively renewed its marketing strategies and embraced digitalization. Various new breakthroughs have been made in digital branding, merchandise sales, and social media content innovation. In fact, during the pandemic, Persib succeeded in securing a three-year sponsorship deal with Telkomsel—an extraordinary achievement considering that many clubs lost sponsors due to the league suspension.

Renewal in marketing strategy and digitalization is now a common practice in this digital era. It has also been widely adopted by many professional football clubs in Europe. Even social media content can generate additional income for clubs. For example, English club Liverpool FC has become the highest-earning football club from YouTube content. The Reds earn approximately 663,000 USD per month from YouTube, equivalent to

around IDR 9.2 billion. This demonstrates that Liverpool remains one of the world's biggest football brands with a massive global fanbase⁶.

3. Financial Stability

In addition to renewing infrastructure and marketing strategies, Persib has also focused on strengthening the team and financial stability to remain competitive in Liga 1. From a team perspective, Persib managed to retain nearly all of its core players while also bringing in top-tier recruits such as Marc Klok and Mohammed Rashid. A strong squad and deep bench are essential for competing for the championship title.

Financially, the good news is that Persib has become one of the most financially stable teams post-pandemic. This is evident from their ability to sign high-profile players with large salaries and to begin building their own training facility. This combination of team strength and financial stability will be crucial to Persib's performance in upcoming Liga 1 seasons. In conclusion, Persib's management has continuously pursued innovations and renewal efforts post-crisis to remain strong and competitive in Indonesian football.

It is evident that many forms of renewal were initiated by PT PBB after the crisis caused by the 2020–2021 Liga 1 suspension. One of the most visible is the shift in partnership patterns with sponsors. Beyond maximizing brand activation through matches, post-crisis PT PBB began to rely more heavily on digital media as a marketing tool. Another significant renewal that reflects PT PBB's vision for the holistic development of Persib is the focus on improving football infrastructure. This progress has been visible since 2022 through the management of the GBLA Stadium and the planned construction of the team's training center.

These findings align with the principles of Discourse of Renewal, which recommends that a prospective vision should lead to new directions and goals developed through the organization's crisis communication. Organizations that are forward-looking and not focused on past problems (retrospectively) after a crisis are more likely to experience renewal (Putri, 2022).

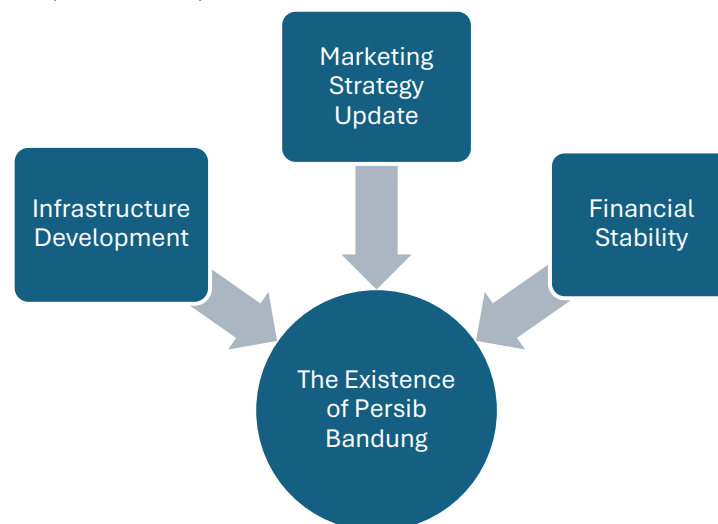


Figure 5. Model of Renewal or Innovation carried out by PT PBB after the Crisis of Termination of Competition to Maintain Persib's Existence in the Indonesian Football Industry
(Source: Researcher)

⁶ Jackson, Elliott. 2019. "Liverpool lead Manchester City and Barcelona in highest-earning YouTube channels", <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/sport/football/football-news/liverpool-lead-manchester-city-barcelona-17171247> (Oktober 2023)

Analysis of Digital Media Utilization

In an effort to maintain cooperation with sponsor partners amidst the crisis due to the termination of the 2020-2021 Liga 1, PT PBB took the initiative to utilize digital media as an alternative in carrying out brand activation in order to provide added value for sponsors. According to the researcher's analysis, in fact, utilizing digital media to maintain their activation of sponsor partners through digital media is the most realistic thing that PT PBB can do. Considering Persib Bandung's exposure on various social media is quite high.

Referring to data released by RESULT Sports in 2020, Persib Bandung is ranked 22nd most popular football team on social media, with a total of 17 million followers from four social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube.

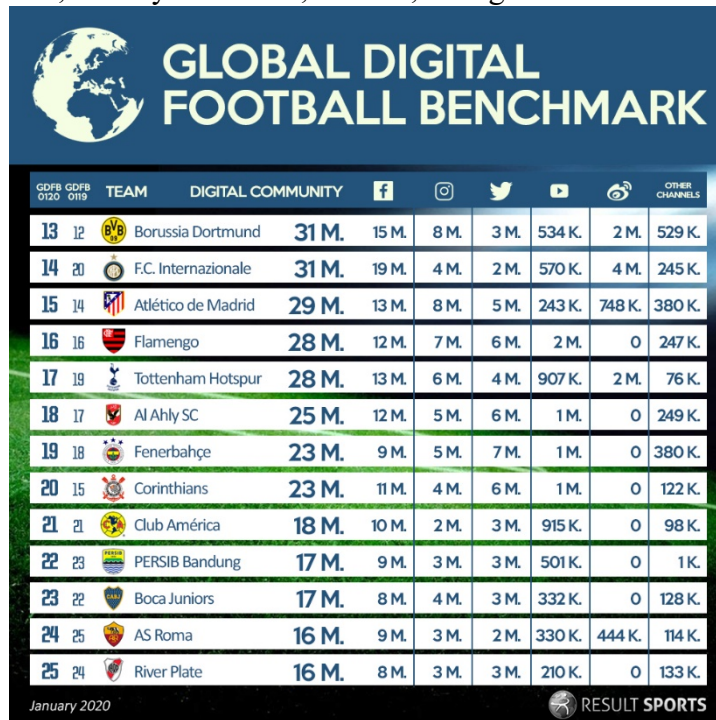


Figure 6. List of the Top 25 Global Digital Football Benchmark 2020

Source: Twitter @resultsports

This position places Persib as the team with the most followers in Indonesia, even beating several big European clubs such as Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, and Juventus. This data illustrates how great the opportunity is for sponsor partners to activate their brands through Persib's social media.

Therefore, in situations where it is not possible to activate brands directly through matches, utilizing digital media is the most solution for PT PBB to continue to provide added value for sponsors. Some of the strategies implemented by Persib in activating sponsor brands through digital media include:

1. Product Placement Sponsorship on Social Media

Persib actively posts content on social media such as Instagram, which explicitly displays products from several sponsors. For example, by displaying food and beverage product packaging from Indofood and ABC Kopi on the table, or players wearing uniforms that say Mobil Pom, and so on. For example, in the image below, which is a sponsor brand activation post uploaded by Persib via its Instagram social media on May 30, 2021 and August 14, 2021.



Figure 7. Persib Bandung Instagram posts featuring products or brands from sponsor partners
(Source: Instagram @Persib)

Not only that, Persib also activated the sponsor partners' brands through a number of campaigns. One of them is the #dirumahaja campaign, which has been quite encouraged by the government during the Covid-19 pandemic. This strategy is quite effective because Persib's millions of followers will see the sponsor's products. Moreover, if the content gets thousands of likes and comments, the level of social media user activity in interacting with the display of the sponsor's products will be even better.

In addition to Instagram, Persib also optimally utilizes YouTube social media for sponsor activation. Interesting content is uploaded in the form of event aftermovies, goal clips and important match moments, to behind-the-scenes videos of Persib players' daily lives. These contents always feature Persib's Branding sponsors dominantly, such as backdrops, banners and billboards of Indofood, Permata Bank, Envi, Panther Energy Drink and other sponsors. In fact, several sponsor products are also strategically placed in each video.

The use of multi-platform social media such as Instagram and Youtube has proven to be quite effective in helping sponsors to continue brand activation amidst the pandemic, thus providing revenue sustainability for Persib. This can also be seen from the engagement rate of Persib's posts during the six months of the 2020-2021 Liga 1 competition suspension, which is quite high. Because it managed to generate a total of 334 thousand likes/posts and 12 thousand comments, involving 3.4 million followers on the social media account.

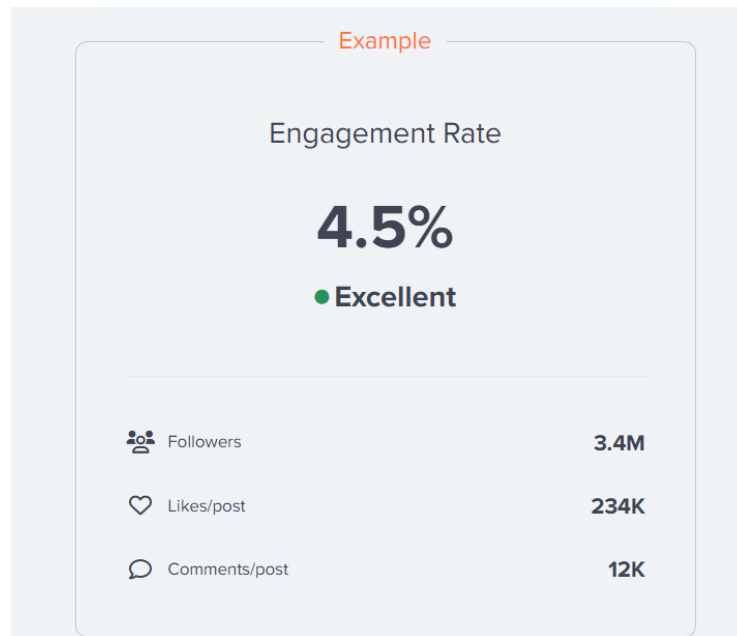


Figure 8. Engagement Rate of Persib Bandung Instagram Posts During the Suspension of the 2020-2021 Liga 1 (Source: Hypeauditor)

2. Covid-19 Campaign and Advocacy with Sponsors

In addition to product placement, Persib also utilizes creative content on social media such as posters and campaign videos to advocate for sponsor products or services. One example is the #dirumahaja campaign involving Persib players and featuring the Halodoc application. This campaign synergizes with the government's program to encourage people to continue their activities from home during the pandemic, while also educating the use of Halodoc's consultation and telehealth features.

For example, as in the image below, Persib promotes the use of the Halodoc application, which is one of Persib's sponsor partners in the 2020-2021 League 1.



Figure 9. Persib Bandung Instagram post featuring the #dirumahaja campaign (Source: Instagram @Persib)

In the post, a copy of #dirumahaja is added, which is a government campaign during the Covid-19 period. In the post, Persib also involved one of its players, Dedi Kusnandar as a model. The goal is to attract more attention from its followers on social media, most

of whom are bobotoh or their fans, as the target market. Persib also implemented a similar strategy in promoting the Telkomsel MAXStream football streaming service through several trial matches broadcast exclusively on the platform.

This is certainly related to the crisis communication strategy and updates implemented by PT PBB in dealing with the termination of the 2020-2021 Liga 1 competition. The reason is, effective organizational rhetoric involves crisis communication that helps the audience understand the crisis better. This communication involves what is learned through the crisis, what values and directions guide the organization moving forward, and what the crisis means moving forward (Ulmer and Sellnow, 2020).

Ulmer and Sellnow also embody that in terms of renewal, the effectiveness of organizational rhetoric focuses on structuring reality for the audience and providing direction for the future of the organization. Overall, through the findings and analysis of the research, for PT PBB, the crisis of the termination of the 2020-2021 Liga 1 has determined them to be able to carry out various innovations for the progress of the Persib team.

Starting from the renewal of the marketing activation of sponsor partner brands which have been intensively encouraged through digital media, in addition to activation through matches. More than that, PT PBB also always wants to make Persib a truly established club. Not only from the managerial and financial aspects, but also the availability of adequate infrastructure.

Through the analysis that has been presented by the researcher, the use of digital media by PT PBB to maintain the activation of sponsor partner brands can be clearly seen through the following model.

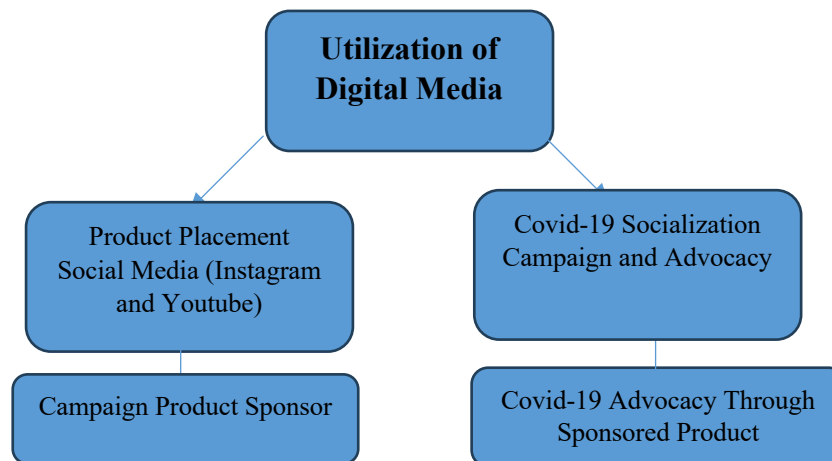


Figure 10. Analysis Model of PT PBB's Social Media Utilization in maintaining sponsor brand activities during the 2020-2021 Liga 1 suspension (Source: Researcher)

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, the researcher can draw several conclusions regarding the communication strategy in PT PBB's crisis management during the suspension of the 2020–2021 Liga 1 season. The conclusions are as follows:

1. PT Persib Bandung Bermartabat implemented a structured and systematic crisis management process. The analysis and review conducted during the pre-crisis stage were key to the success of their crisis management. Through this process, PT PBB's top executives were able to develop various strategic plans aimed at saving Persib from the severe crisis caused by the league suspension. Moreover, effective communication with

- stakeholders enabled PT PBB to maintain cooperation with sponsors and preserve the team's squad, as the contract adjustment of 25% was well-communicated and accepted.
2. In terms of communication strategy, as previously explained, both internal and external organizational communication played a central role in PT PBB's crisis communication efforts. Internal communication—through internal meetings among PT PBB's leadership—resulted in several strategies that helped Persib survive and adapt during the league suspension. Internal communication was also carried out with the entire Persib team, involving the dissemination of information regarding the 25% salary reduction, which was ultimately accepted by the players, coaches, and staff. External organizational communication was conducted extensively with sponsor partners, particularly regarding the adjustment of brand activation partnerships, which were shifted to digital media and social initiatives through the "Sauyunan" program. As a result, the majority of sponsors agreed to the revised arrangements, and more than half of Persib's sponsors during the 2020–2021 season continued their partnerships with PT PBB in the following season.
 3. The renewal efforts undertaken by PT PBB to sustain Persib's post-crisis existence were notably aggressive. They no longer focused solely on managerial and financial recovery, but have moved toward providing adequate football infrastructure. This is demonstrated through their plans to build an international-standard training center and manage the GBLA Stadium, both of which are currently in progress.
 4. The use of digital media as a brand activation tool for sponsors was optimized through four main social media platforms—especially Instagram and YouTube, where Persib has a large follower base. The features available on these platforms were fully utilized for promotional purposes, with the goal of maximizing brand activation for Persib's sponsor partners.

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