

## Crisis communication and marketing strategy during covid-19 pandemic in Karang Anyer village

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**How to Cite This Article:** Faustyna. (2023). Crisis communication and marketing strategy during covid-19 pandemic in Karang Anyer village. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 7(2). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v7i2.6108

Received: 23-03-2023, Revision: 19-05-2023, Acceptance: 16-06-2023, Published online: 30-07-2023

**Abstract** This research explored how crisis communication relates to marketing strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding marketing strategies is crucial for businesses and institutions, especially in local communities, to manage their operations before, during, and after a crisis. The study found that many business actors faced difficulties with marketing strategies due to a lack of comprehension of crisis communication during the pandemic. The researchers used qualitative methods with purposive sampling to ensure study quality. The results, integrating the Situational Communication Crisis Theory, are relevant in communication science. They revealed a mismatch between managers' crisis communication activities and the capabilities of an ideal public relations officer in executing marketing strategies. The study recommends implementing training on crisis communication related to marketing strategies to enhance product promotion effectiveness during crises. This understanding will empower businesses and institutions to navigate uncertainties better and maintain resilience.

**Keywords:** crisis communication; covid-19 pandemic; marketing strategy

### INTRODUCTION

The research under consideration centres on crisis communication concerning marketing strategies amid the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various sectors, including business and marketing (Susilawati et al., 2020; Susilo et al., 2021; Susilo & Wijaya, 2023; Vellingiri et al., 2020; Zaremba et al., 2021). Focusing on Karang Anyer Village in Indonesia, a community grappling with the repercussions of the crisis, especially in terms of economic downturn and dwindling market demand, the study examines how effective crisis communication and marketing strategies have enabled the village to weather these challenges.

Karang Anyer Village, situated in the Beringin sub-district, Deli Serdang Regency, Sumatera Utara Province, Indonesia, spans an area of approximately 2.84 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to a population of 5,620 people (Faustyna, 2020). The village's livelihood primarily revolves around farming, with rice, vegetables, and fruits being the principal agricultural

products. Additionally, the village boasts promising tourism potential, particularly in natural and cultural attractions. In response to the crisis and to uplift the community's well-being, Karang Anyer Village has undertaken various endeavours, such as developing a creative economy and tourism initiatives while enhancing infrastructure, including roads and public facilities. However, the village also grapples with challenges, including limited access to essential services like roads, electricity, and clean water, insufficient employment opportunities, low living standards, restricted access to healthcare and education services, economic disparities, environmental degradation, and social disharmony.

Marketing communication is indispensable in establishing a connection between businesses and their target audience, conveying brand messages, and fostering consumer engagement (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Fill, 2009; Smith, P & Taylor, 2004). However, the pandemic necessitated a transformative shift in these activities as conventional marketing channels and strategies faced disruptions. The unavailability of physical events, trade shows, and face-to-face interactions compelled marketers to explore alternative avenues to engage and interact with consumers (Asmoro et al., 2020; El Hedhli & Zourrig, 2022; Susilo & K. Santos, 2023).

This research delves into the transformation of marketing communication practices amid the pandemic's influence on various channels, including digital, social media, content marketing, and influencer marketing. Businesses found themselves compelled to hasten their digital evolution, directing investments into online platforms to maintain connections with consumers despite physical limitations. Virtual communication platforms, video conferencing tools, and live streaming technologies witnessed a surge in adoption, facilitating real-time engagement with audiences (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012).

Moreover, the pandemic significantly impacted consumer behaviour and sentiment, necessitating adjustments in marketing approaches. In the face of fear, uncertainty, and economic repercussions, businesses adopted a more empathetic and compassionate communication style (Cho, 2020; Sampurna et al., 2020; Susilo & K. Santos, 2023). Recognising the need to address consumer concerns, provide pertinent information, and offer support, organisations worked to foster trust and loyalty during these trying times.

By exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on marketing communication activities, this study yields invaluable insights into the strategies employed by organisations to navigate unprecedented challenges. It underscores businesses' resilience and adaptability in swiftly responding to dynamic circumstances, emphasising the significance of digital transformation and customer-centric approaches. Drawing lessons from this global crisis, marketers and businesses can prepare for future disruptions and bolster their communication

strategies in an increasingly unpredictable world.

This research is centred on the challenges village officials face in implementing crisis communication activities related to marketing strategies for production. The assumption is that these problems arise from a lack of understanding of effective marketing methods, exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Karang Anyer Village. The ineffectiveness of crisis marketing and communication strategies during the pandemic has resulted in adverse effects on the local economy and village communities, necessitating the implementation of training programs.

The primary objectives of this study are to identify and assess the marketing and crisis communication strategies employed by Karang Anyer Village in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the study aims to pinpoint the factors influencing the success of these strategies. The particular focus lies on the marketing strategies undertaken by village officials as they engage in dialogue with the public. This research is motivated by the need to address the following urgencies: (1) discerning indications of marketing strategies understood by Karang Anyer Village officials and (2) accessing data and information that can serve as valuable evaluation material.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researcher adopted a qualitative methodology using case studies, and data was gathered through interviews with village officials and the village head of Karang Anyer. Additionally, relevant documents pertaining to the village's marketing and crisis communication strategies were analysed. The study's findings offer valuable insights into best practices for managing a pandemic crisis, with a particular focus on marketing strategies that organisations and society can utilise in the future. The hope is that these results will positively contribute to developing effective crisis communication and marketing strategies during a pandemic.

A qualitative case study is frequently employed in social research to delve deeply and comprehensively into a subject by collecting data through observation, interviews, or documents related to the case. The research followed several essential steps in using qualitative methods, encompassing determining the cases to be studied, collecting and analysing data, providing interpretation, and concluding the study.

The present study employs a comprehensive analysis, beginning with identifying cases under examination, which may include organisations, community groups, or individuals. The primary objectives encompass exploring the marketing strategies implemented by village officials engaged in crisis communication activities to promote products through effective communication. Additionally, the research aims to investigate diverse perspectives from actors and managers, utilising a qualitative exploratory design.

The flexible nature of the research design in qualitative studies acknowledges the dynamic character of the subject matter. This adaptability allows researchers to obtain rich data, emphasising the emergence of empirical phenomena rather than solely focusing on the number of samples as a measure of validity. This approach involves careful consideration during the design phase to anticipate various aspects, ensuring the research's in-depth investigations align with the complexity of the subject's views (W. Neuman, 2013; W. L. Neuman, 2003).

Faustyna (2020) emphasised the importance of maintaining consistency between epistemological approaches and ontological assumptions that underlie the qualitative perspective, particularly in case studies. Consequently, the inductive approach employed by qualitative researchers transcends mere justification of preconceived notions, emphasising genuine comprehension of the field situation and deriving theories from the collected data.

The case study methodology, characterised by exploring how and why questions, addresses contemporary problems with limited researcher control over the studied cases (Dembereldorj, 2019). Data for this study were sourced from interviews and document analysis, incorporating diverse sources such as reports, observations, personal notes, diaries, biographies, and information from various sources, including social media (Amali, 2019). The researchers collected data from documents and social media related to cases of unsold products obtained from a wide range of media outlets and informants.

Subsequently, the researcher interprets the study and its analytical results to offer a deeper understanding of the research findings. Interviews were conducted in 2021 and 2022, two years after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Karanganyer Village, revealing that the marketing strategy was ineffective. The researcher interviewed several village officials, village heads, and local community members to gather comprehensive information about marketing strategies employed during crisis communication activities. In particular, Mr. Iwan, the director of Bumdesa Karang Anyer, conducted promotions with the assistance of the head of Karang Anyer.

The sampling technique utilised in this research was a purposive sampling model, considering specific criteria: research subjects included the Head of Karang Anyer Village, Karang Anyer village officials, and informants capable and willing to share their experiences related to understanding, planning, and promotion. The selected informants comprised one out of three village heads, five village officials, and five residents, totalling eleven participants residing in Karang Anyer Village.

Out of eleven individuals approached, ten willingly participated in the interviews. While the names of the informants were provided, their backgrounds remained undisclosed. The data for the case study analysis were obtained from these informants, encompassing information on their understanding of marketing strategies during crisis communication

activities amid the pandemic.

The researcher employed various techniques to collect data, including observation, interviews, and document analysis pertaining to the cases under scrutiny. Data collection involved conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews to assess the understanding and skills of animal feed managers. This approach allowed for a flexible yet detailed investigation into the matter (Hess & Mulyana, 2022). A well-structured interview guide was utilised, organised into different thematic sections, and adapted based on new insights gleaned after each interview. The final number of participants was determined when repeated answers indicated data saturation, achieved after conducting ten interviews (Sallot et al., 2015). The interview process was facilitated by three lecturers and assisted by three students who played a supporting role.

The interviews took place within Karang Anyer village, either at the village head's office or the village head's yard, creating an environment conducive to relaxed and intimate dialogue. Throughout the interviews, the informants' responses were recorded and, when necessary, photographed to ensure accurate data collection. Furthermore, observational data were gathered during several visits to the village, with the author participating in various informal and formal meetings. Detailed field notes were taken during these observations, capturing the operations involved in crafting messages at the Village office. Additionally, data were sourced from Karang Anyer's Facebook social media platform and documented in the form of photos.

The researchers employed meticulous data analysis techniques, conducting a thorough examination using appropriate analytical methods. The existing documents were carefully scrutinised and categorised under marketing strategies as crisis responses, aligning with the SCC Theory (Situational Crisis Communication Theory). This application of case studies allows for the exploration of developmental aspects and provides an overview of the prevailing conditions.

The primary data incorporated in this study are based on the SCCT theory, proposed initially by W.T. Coombs and Holladay S.J. This theory elucidates public reactions to crises and the ensuing impact on an organisation's reputation. Moreover, it offers a valuable framework for understanding how to effectively safeguard an organisation's reputation during crisis communication activities (Coombs, 2007a; Amali, 2019).

The field observations and meetings conducted with actors and managers of Bumdesa in Karang Anyer Village served as a preliminary stage, preceding the systematic data collection process that involved semi-structured qualitative interviews and case study analysis. As proposed by W.T. Coombs and Holladay S.J., SCCT is a theory that emerged from its origins. The resulting data was promptly coded and analysed upon conducting initial interviews, followed by collecting and coding additional data. The recorded conversations were analysed using tools to explain public reactions to crises and their impact on an

organisation's reputation (Amali, 2019; Coombs, 2007b). This theoretical framework also aids in comprehending how to optimise reputation protection during crisis communication endeavours (Coombs, 2007a).

Subsequently, the researcher draws conclusions based on the interpretation of the data, which are then utilised to develop broader theories or concepts. Finally, the findings are interwoven with interview data and observations, seamlessly integrated into the results section of this study to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

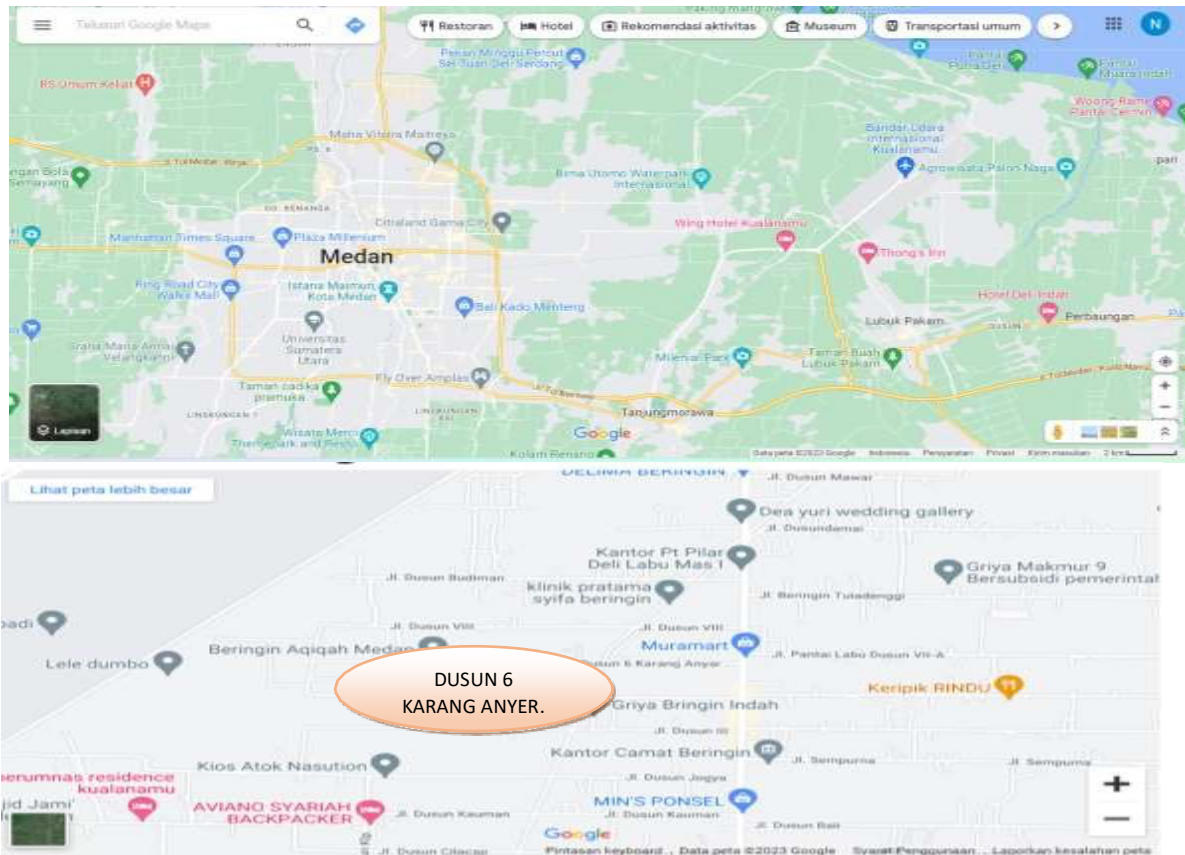
The outcomes of this study reveal the following key findings. Firstly, Karang Anyer Village has adopted a proactive crisis communication strategy, demonstrating transparency and openness in disseminating information to the community. This approach involves communicating policies and steps taken to tackle the pandemic, fostering a sense of trust and assurance among the populace. Secondly, the village has also embraced innovative marketing strategies. Notably, it has developed animal feed products derived from local agricultural and fishery produce, which are thoughtfully packaged to cater to market demands. This creative approach has proven effective in generating interest and meeting consumer needs.

Thirdly, effective communication and collaboration between the village government, local entrepreneurs, and village communities play a crucial role in the successful implementation of marketing and crisis communication strategies. The cohesive effort among stakeholders ensures a coherent approach to achieving desired outcomes. Lastly, external environmental factors, including support from sub-district and district authorities, as well as prevailing market conditions, have a significant impact on the success of marketing strategies. These external elements influence the effectiveness of the village's marketing endeavours.

Based on these findings, the researchers assert that effective marketing and crisis communication strategies hold immense potential to assist organisations and communities in navigating the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1). Additionally, fostering cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders is pivotal in ensuring the triumphant execution of such strategies. The profile of Karang Anyer village can be seen on the map on Figure 1.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has had wide-ranging impacts on various aspects of life, including the realm of business and marketing. During such challenging times, crisis communication related to marketing strategies is essential for businesses, ensuring that their clients and customers feel acknowledged, understood, and well-informed. In Karang Anyer Village, the village head and officials have taken noteworthy measures to engage in a dialogue with the public, providing crucial information about changes in business operations,

such as revised opening hours, product delivery methods, and services. Moreover, the Indonesian government has extended support beyond mere product or service sales, offering assistance to the public during the crisis.



**Figure 1.** Map of Karang Anyar Village, Beringin District, Deli Serdang Regency, Sumatera Utara Province

Source: Field Research Results assisted by Google Map (21 March 2023)

A key aspect of effective crisis communication lies in delivering swift, clear, and easily comprehensible messages to the public. Village officials employ unambiguous language, avoiding ambiguity that may confuse customers or diminish their sense of importance. They also prioritise the art of communication, emphasising positive values to uplift morale and rebuild public trust.

In the context of marketing strategies, social media has emerged as a highly effective platform for engaging with the public. With many individuals spending increased time on social media during the crisis, businesses can appropriately utilise this platform for promotional purposes. Remaining flexible and adaptive, businesses continue to innovate and adjust their strategies in alignment with changing circumstances.

Recognising that crisis communication and marketing strategies should be tailored to each business's unique needs and goals is crucial. The most effective approach will vary based on the individual circumstances of each business. In Karang Anyer Village, these

strategies have proven valuable during the pandemic, demonstrating the significance of proactive and well-crafted crisis communication and marketing endeavours for businesses and communities alike.

### **Understanding of crisis communication among Karang Anyer Village Officials**

The concept of crisis communication is vital for organisations and individuals facing potential crises that may adversely impact their reputation, finances, or safety. Crisis communication involves exchanging information between an organisation and its stakeholders through various communication channels during times of crisis. Experts and reliable sources define crisis communication as follows.

According to (Coombs, 2007a), crisis communication is the process of exchanging information between organisations and their stakeholders through formal or informal channels during crisis situations. Seeger (2006) characterises crisis communication as an interactive and dynamic process between an organisation and the public affected by a crisis to establish a shared understanding of the crisis and the measures taken to address it. (Ulmer & Pyle, 2021) describe crisis communication as a strategic process adopted by organisations to manage and mitigate the impact of a crisis on their reputation and performance, involving the exchange of information and messages with stakeholders. (Claeys & Coombs, 2020) - explain crisis communication as the dissemination of messages intended to address undesired situations that may harm the organisation and its stakeholders. Faustyna & Rudianto (2021) view crisis communication as an interactive process between an organisation and its stakeholders during a crisis, seeking to achieve a common understanding of the crisis, its impact, and the actions taken to manage it. Lastly, (Indasari & Anggriani, 2020) define crisis communication as a strategic communication process undertaken by organisations to overcome crises that could affect their reputation and sustainability. This process involves informing the public about the current situation, providing transparent explanations about the actions taken in response to the crisis, and reducing the negative impact of the crisis.

For Karang Anyer village officials, understanding crisis communication is crucial, particularly in managing crises such as natural disasters, social conflicts, or security incidents that may affect the villagers. By having a solid grasp of crisis communication principles, these officials can plan effective and timely communication strategies while maintaining positive relationships with the villagers and other relevant parties. This understanding helps them navigate crises more effectively and fosters transparency and trust among all stakeholders involved.



## **Product profit-sharing marketing strategy in Karang Anyer village**

Developing a profit-sharing marketing strategy for products in Karang Anyer village involves several key steps. The first step is to identify superior products that can serve as the focal point of marketing efforts, enhancing their attractiveness and selling potential.

Next, a comprehensive market analysis is crucial. This entails studying consumer behaviour, market trends, customer needs, and potential target audiences. By understanding the unique characteristics of the market, an appropriate and effective marketing strategy can be devised.

Ensuring product quality is paramount before initiating marketing activities. Products to be marketed must meet market demands and expectations. Improvements in production processes, raw materials, and product packaging may be necessary to attain the desired level of quality.

Once product quality is assured, the next step is to embark on product promotion. Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok can effectively reach a broader audience. Additionally, physical promotions such as banners placed strategically in the village can further increase visibility. Collaboration with other parties can significantly expand market reach. Partnering with city shops or online stores can help introduce the village's products to a broader community.

Network development plays a vital role in enhancing business prospects and product competitiveness. Involving local business actors and strategic partners can strengthen the village's network, leading to increased opportunities. Providing excellent customer service is another essential aspect of the marketing strategy. Ensuring customers have a pleasant and satisfactory experience when purchasing products in Karang Anyer village can foster loyalty and encourage word-of-mouth referrals.

By following these steps and implementing a well-thought-out profit-sharing marketing strategy, Karang Anyer Village can enhance the success and visibility of its products, ultimately contributing to its overall economic development and prosperity. By implementing the aforementioned marketing strategies, sales and product competitiveness in the village are anticipated to increase. In the digital era, crisis communication activities have become more complex, requiring efficient and effective communication methods. The Internet has emerged as a significant marketing platform, offering vast revenue generation opportunities.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider the fundamental principles of crisis and digital communication strategies when utilising Internet media. While there is a wealth of knowledge about crisis communication in the digital age, it is essential to prioritise the fundamental communication schemes. Drawing from the crisis communication strategy employed by the Bali Provincial Tourism Office, valuable

insights can be derived for dealing with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism in Bali. Factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of such communication strategies must be carefully examined. The Bali Provincial Tourism Office approach involved disseminating information through various online platforms, such as the Love Bali website, social media, endorsers, and press conferences, to convey messages in an interactive manner (Wacika, 2021). Similarly, in the realm of teaching and learning activities, crisis communication strategies can prove effective when employed by educators (Miftah, 2019).

Strategic communication effectiveness and its organisational impact have been discussed in prior studies. Elements contributing to effective communication encompass communication patterns, channels, content, style, leadership, interpersonal relationships, and learning, implementation, and evaluation of communication strategies (Mahbob et al., 2019). In marketing strategies, Go Smart marketing and the 7P framework (product, price, promotion, place, people, process, physical evidence) have been instrumental (Jumiati & Humaidi, 2019). Several variables, such as car factors (country of origin, quality, price, brand reputation), psychological factors (motivation, attitudes, personality), and integrated marketing communication tools, play a role in shaping consumer behaviours (Sawmong, 2018). It is worth noting that successful marketers carefully cultivate customer satisfaction and loyalty, as consumer purchases are significantly influenced by psychological characteristics, including motivation, personality, and attitude (Jumiati & Humaidi, 2019).

### **Impact of the Pandemic on the marketing strategy process in Karang Anyer Village**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed the way people live, work, and interact, leading to substantial changes in marketing strategies across various sectors, including in Karang Anyer village. Several notable impacts of the pandemic on marketing strategies in the village have emerged.

**Increased Use of Online Media:** In response to social restrictions and physical distancing measures, numerous businesses in Karang Anyer village have shifted their marketing efforts to online platforms. Formerly reliant on traditional media such as brochures and banners, many entrepreneurs now utilise websites, social media, and online marketplaces to promote their products.

**Decrease in Tourist Numbers:** Karang Anyer village, a popular tourist destination, experienced a significant decline in the number of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic. This decrease has significantly impacted marketing strategies for businesses relying heavily on tourism for revenue generation. As a result, these businesses are compelled to explore alternative marketing approaches to remain financially viable.

**Product Adjustments:** The altered consumer demand during the pandemic, with people preferring to stay at home, has prompted businesses in the village to adapt their products to meet the changing market needs. For example, several businesses now offer delivery services to facilitate consumer purchases from the comfort of their homes.

**Emphasis on Hygiene and Health:** Given the heightened focus on hygiene and health during the pandemic, many businesses in Karang Anyer village have integrated cleanliness and health as core marketing strategies. Some have even introduced additional hygiene products, such as hand sanitisers and face masks, to reassure consumers.

To address the impacts of the pandemic on marketing strategies, entrepreneurs and business people must be adaptive and responsive to changing circumstances. This may entail more effective utilisation of online media, product customisation, and prioritising hygiene and health in their marketing efforts.

Post-COVID-19 crisis communication has played a vital role in managing the response to the pandemic's aftermath. COVID-19, caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), rapidly spread globally, exerting significant social and economic repercussions. The outbreak necessitated effective crisis communication to engage in dialogue and disseminate critical information to the public (Faustyna, 2020).

In this context, public relations, collaborating with the government, played a crucial role in handling cases of virus transmission during COVID-19. The timely and accurate communication of information to the public was paramount in managing the crisis (Faustyna & Rudianto, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

The researcher's findings underscore the significance of crisis communication research in relation to the marketing strategy employed in Karang Anyer village during the pandemic. Understanding the marketing strategy village officials adopt during a crisis is important for practical training. The results demonstrate that a well-structured crisis communication strategy, encompassing pre-crisis, during-crisis, and post-crisis phases, proves highly beneficial in promoting products and overcoming marketing challenges.

The marketing strategy is orchestrated through a comprehensive comprehension of crisis communication activities led by Mr. Sugeng, the village head, and Mr. Iwan, the Director. Thus, it is advisable to conduct targeted training programs to acquire proficiency in implementing an efficient crisis communication strategy. Such training can empower institutions to respond swiftly, yielding positive outcomes for business ventures in Karang Anyer Village.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Village Officials promptly establish a dedicated Public Relations division to handle crisis

communication activities, thereby facilitating the optimal execution of marketing strategies, emphasising leveraging online media platforms. As a leader, initiating such efforts under the guidance of the Village Head can lead to the early implementation of digital strategies.

A final point to highlight is that the marketing strategy pursued by village officials using Facebook as an online media platform is no longer active since 5 March 2021. This emphasises the importance of regularly updating online media presence to maintain relevance and effectiveness.

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