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## Trust Restoration Strategy Analysis Customers, Negative E-Wom Mitigation, and Corporate Image Restoration in The Case of PT Pertamina

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**Abstract,** *The case involving PT Pertamina emphasizes the importance of building consumer trust and maintaining the company's image in the energy sector. The crisis that occurred can have a negative impact on the company's reputation, especially amidst the rapid spread of information through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). This study aims to examine strategies that can be used by PT Pertamina to restore public trust, handle negative e-WOM, and restore the company's image. The approach used is qualitative-descriptive, with data collection through literature reviews and digital media analysis. The findings show that open and honest communication, rapid response to consumer complaints, and the use of technology in analyzing data are key elements in image recovery efforts. In addition, consumer involvement, implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, and improving service quality have also proven effective in strengthening customer loyalty. By implementing this strategy consistently, PT Pertamina has the opportunity to build a positive image and establish a more solid relationship with the community.*

**Keywords:** PT Pertamina, Consumer trust, Corporate image, e-WOM, CSR

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The case of PT Pertamina highlights how crucial customer trust and corporate image are to long-term survival and success, especially in the vital energy industry. Operational challenges, controversial policies, or declining service quality can quickly erode customer trust. In this digital era, negative impacts are amplified by the spread of information through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which can shape public perception widely and quickly. Therefore, PT Pertamina requires a comprehensive and integrated strategy to restore lost trust, mitigate the impact of negative e-WOM, and restore the overall corporate image. Word of Mouth (WOM) is a form of communication in the marketing world that has been developed by experts and is widely applied by business actors (Aoki et al., 2019). In general, WOM is a method of oral communication that takes place directly from one individual to another, where the communicator is viewed as a non-commercial party by the recipient of the message, especially regarding brands or service products (Arndt, 1967).

Discussions from various journals provide important insights to formulate such a strategy. First, effective crisis communication, as emphasized in the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, must be a top priority. PT Pertamina needs to adopt a transparent, accountable, and participatory communication approach, especially when facing issues or crises. Active engagement with the community, listening to concerns, and providing clear and honest

information are crucial steps to rebuild credibility. Admitting mistakes and showing concrete steps of improvement will further strengthen the effort to restore trust.

Furthermore, a deep understanding of online sentiment and interactions is essential. The netnography method discussed in Heliyon allows PT Pertamina to analyze online conversations and identify the main sources of negative e-WOM. This information is invaluable in designing targeted responses. In addition, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), as stated in the Strategic Information Systems Journal, can enhance a company's ability to analyze sentiment at scale, personalize communications, and respond to customer complaints more efficiently, thereby minimizing the impact of negative e-WOM.

Efforts to rebuild public trust do not only depend on external strategies, but also require strengthening the company's internal systems. In this regard, an article from Management Accounting Research emphasizes the need for a transparent and accountable management control system. PT Pertamina must demonstrate its commitment to product and service quality through a trusted internal mechanism, and ensure that problem handling is carried out responsibly and openly. On the other hand, a study in the Journal of Retail and Consumer Services highlights the importance of digital interaction in shaping public perception. Therefore, Pertamina is required to actively manage its digital reputation by responding to consumer input and building positive relationships across various online channels. A positive company image also has a beneficial internal impact, especially for employees. They will feel proud to be part of the company, which ultimately encourages work enthusiasm and increases productivity. This contributes to the growth and increase in the company's profitability. On the other hand, companies with a good image are also more attractive to investors, because they are considered to have competitiveness and convincing performance. Therefore, companies with a positive reputation will find it easier to carry out various efforts to develop.

Although the details of the last three journals are not available, the general literature in the fields of management, communication, and consumer behavior still provides relevant strategic guidance. Among them are a deeper understanding of crisis communication, proactive reputation management, the psychological dimensions of restoring trust, the important role of *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR), and lessons learned from cases of other companies facing similar crises. All of these perspectives show that restoring trust and repairing an image is not an instant process, but rather requires a comprehensive approach that includes effective communication, understanding public perception, quick and accurate response, strengthening internal systems, and dedication to social responsibility.

By synergizing all these aspects, PT Pertamina can formulate a comprehensive strategy that not only restores public trust, but also increases the company's resilience to potential future crises. Proactive actions in monitoring and handling e-WOM, coupled with service improvements, open communication, and the implementation of positive CSR programs, will play a major role in reinforcing Pertamina's image as a credible and trustworthy company. The successful implementation of this strategy will be an important foundation for Pertamina in maintaining the loyalty of existing customers and attracting new consumers, thus supporting the company's sustainability and growth in the long term.

## **2. OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS**

Purpose of the Article:

1. Examining the main causes of declining customer trust in PT Pertamina, including various operational incidents, controversial pricing policies, and less than optimal service to consumers.
2. Finding the right strategy to restore consumer trust, by emphasizing honest and open communication, improving service quality, and implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs.
3. Examines the negative impact of *electronic word-of-mouth* (e-WOM) on corporate image and evaluates mitigation strategies that can be implemented to shape public perception more effectively.
4. Exploring relevant image restoration approaches to assist PT Pertamina in improving its reputation in the eyes of customers and the wider community.
5. Providing applicable suggestions for PT Pertamina in the process of rebuilding consumer trust and strengthening loyalty to its products and services.

Benefits of the Article:

1. For PT Pertamina, this article can be a reference in designing communication strategies, improving customer service, and managing reputation in order to maintain and improve the company's image.
2. For academics and researchers, this article offers useful information regarding consumer trust recovery strategies, negative e-WOM management, and image restoration efforts in the energy sector.
3. For the general public and consumers, this article is expected to increase understanding regarding the importance of the role of companies in maintaining transparency, service quality, and social commitment.

4. For other business actors, this article can be a guide in dealing with a crisis of trust and developing effective communication strategies for similar situations.
5. For governments and regulators, this article provides insights for formulating policies that support more transparent and customer satisfaction-oriented energy industry governance.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

In this study, the method used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. This study was conducted to understand in depth how the role of Word of Mouth (WOM) in building consumer trust in new brands, as well as the strategies and impacts it causes. Because this study did not use a questionnaire, data was collected through other relevant techniques and can provide accurate and comprehensive information.

#### **1. Research Approach**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, where data is obtained from various sources that support the analysis of the influence of WOM in shaping consumer trust. With this approach, the study aims to describe the phenomena that occur, understand the strategies implemented by business actors, and explore the impact of WOM in the world of marketing.

#### **2. Data source**

This study uses Secondary Data, namely Information obtained from scientific journals, books, industry reports, academic articles, as well as data from digital media and e-commerce platforms that discuss the influence of WOM in marketing.

#### **3. Data collection technique**

Since this study did not use a questionnaire, several alternative techniques were used to collect data, namely:

- a. Observation: is one of the techniques in collecting research data. In general, observation can be interpreted as the process of observing and carefully observing a phenomenon to obtain data that will later be used to explain the object of study (Umar Hamdan Nasution, 2024). The main purpose of observation is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context and behavior of the subject in its natural environment. There are two types of observation methods used, namely:

##### **1. Participatory Observation**

In this method, researchers participate directly in the activities being observed, making it possible to understand social interactions in more depth.

## **2. Non-participatory Observation**

In this approach, the researcher only acts as an observer without being involved in the subject's activities, which aims to maintain a neutral and objective point of view.

Observations were made by analyzing how customer reviews, comments on social media, and interactions between customers and brands can affect consumer trust. Some aspects observed include:

- a) WOM distribution patterns on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Shopee, and Tokopedia.
- b) How brands respond to customer reviews on marketplaces and social media.
- c) The influence of customer testimonials on new brand image and appeal.
- d) Documentation Analysis

To strengthen the research findings, data were also collected from various documents and trusted reference sources, such as previous research reports, industry articles, and academic journals that discuss WOM and e-WOM marketing strategies.

## **4. Data Analysis Techniques**

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, where each data collected was categorized based on the patterns, themes, and relationships found. The stages of analysis include:

- a) Data Reduction – Filtering relevant information and grouping data based on certain categories such as factors influencing consumer trust, WOM effectiveness, and business strategies used.
- b) Data Presentation – Arranging the results of interviews, case studies, and observations in a systematic narrative form to make them easier to understand.
- c) Drawing Conclusions – Drawing conclusions based on the findings that have been analyzed and comparing them with previous theories and research.

## **5. Data Validity**

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques, where information obtained from interviews will be compared with the results of observations and secondary document analysis. In this way, the data collected can be more accurate and objective.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In today's digital era, a company's image is not only shaped by traditional advertising or promotions, but also by direct interaction with consumers on digital platforms. Social media, online reviews, and e-WOM (Electronic Word of Mouth) play a very big role in shaping public perception of a company. PT Pertamina, as a leading energy company in Indonesia, is not free from major challenges in maintaining and improving the company's image, especially when facing a crisis. In this context, restoring customer trust, mitigating negative e-WOM, and restoring the company's image are very important strategies to maintain market position and public trust.

1. Restoring Customer Trust Customer trust is a key pillar in ensuring long-term business continuity. Research by (Sallam, 2016) shows that corporate image significantly affects customer satisfaction and trust, which ultimately triggers positive word of mouth. When a crisis occurs, trust that has been built over the years can collapse in a short time. Therefore, efforts to restore consumer trust must be a top priority for companies.

a) Open and Clear Communication One effective way to restore trust is through transparent and honest communication. PT Pertamina needs to take proactive steps in conveying information to the public. Consistency of messages across all communication channels, from the official website, social media accounts, to direct interactions with customers, is essential. Utilizing social media as a means to convey clarification and regular updates is a crucial step. When a company shows openness in addressing issues, customers are more likely to give it a second chance to fix things.

b) Empathetic Approach In addition to effective communication, a human-focused approach is also needed. Customers will feel more appreciated and cared for if they feel real empathy from the company. In this case, the role of the customer service team becomes very important. They must be equipped with the ability to show concern and provide relevant solutions for customers affected by the crisis situation.

c) Follow-up

After communicating the recovery steps, it is important to follow up with customers. Pertamina must show that they are not just making promises, but are also committed to implementing the solutions that have been delivered.

## 2. Mitigating Negative e-WOM

Negative information spread through electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), especially on social media, can spread very quickly and influence public perception widely. (cindy novtantia putri, 2023)also asserts that e-WOM has a significant influence on consumer brand trust and purchasing decisions, making it a crucial factor in a company's digital reputation. A single bad review or negative comment can have a significant impact on a company's reputation, especially if not handled properly.

a) **Proactive Response to Complaints** One of the most effective strategies in dealing with negative e-WOM is to provide a quick and initiative response. PT Pertamina needs to form a special team that actively monitors and responds to various complaints on digital platforms. Each response must be tailored to the characteristics of the problem being conveyed, and delivered professionally and responsibly.

b) **Providing Concrete Solutions**

Admitting mistakes and providing clear and tangible solutions to customer complaints shows that the company is truly listening and cares. This approach can not only prevent the situation from escalating, but also opens up opportunities to rebuild trust and strengthen relationships with customers.

c) **Collaboration with Positive Influencers**

In addition to providing direct responses, PT Pertamina can also collaborate with influencers or brand ambassadors who have a positive image to help improve the company's reputation. Involving figures who are trusted by the public can be an effective strategy in reducing the negative impact of e-WOM and improving public perception of the company.

### **Corporate Image Restoration**

After a crisis, companies need to take strategic and planned steps to rebuild their impacted image. Reputation recovery cannot rely solely on improving services or products, but requires a more comprehensive and sustainable approach.

In the long-term context, CSR strategies not only improve public image, but also strengthen customer loyalty (Hai-Thanh Phan, 2025)in a meta-analysis study stating that "CSR positively influences both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty", showing the importance of ongoing ethical communication in building trust.

**a) Communication Campaigns that Emphasize the Positive**

One effective approach is to initiate a communication campaign that highlights the various improvement efforts that have been made by the company. This campaign can include information about the latest innovations, successes in handling problems, and commitments to quality and safety. Through social media, advertising, and other communication channels, PT Pertamina can present a narrative that strengthens a positive image and emphasizes customer orientation.

**b) Implementation of Targeted CSR Programs**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be used as a strategic tool to restore public image. Research by Rastini & Nurchaya (2019) shows that targeted CSR can build customer trust, which then has a positive impact on e-WOM (Ni Made Rastini, 2019) PT Pertamina can initiate CSR programs that target environmental issues or support communities affected by the crisis. Active involvement in social activities will build the impression that the company cares and is responsible, thereby strengthening public trust.

**c) Utilizing Customer Testimonials**

Showing testimonials from customers who are satisfied or have felt direct attention from the company can be a powerful way to rebuild public trust. These testimonials can be disseminated through social media, the company's official website, or promotional materials, by highlighting relevant positive customer experiences.

**The Role of Social Media in Recovery**

Social media has become a very effective communication channel in this digital era. In addition to functioning as a source of information, social media is also a platform where companies can monitor and understand customer perceptions directly and quickly.

**a) Monitoring and Engagement**

PT Pertamina needs to invest in a social media monitoring system to monitor the development of the company's image in cyberspace. In addition, the company must also be actively involved in conversations that occur on social media, not only to respond to complaints, but also to proactively share information that is useful to customers.

**b) Using Data and Sentiment Analysis**

Social media provides companies with the opportunity to collect invaluable data on customer sentiment and reactions. Using sophisticated data analysis tools, PT



Pertamina can monitor how customers respond to the company's actions. This data can be used to develop more targeted and effective recovery strategies.

### **Customer Involvement in the Communication Process**

Customer trust can be strengthened when they feel actively involved in the recovery process. One way to involve customers is to organize a communication forum or survey to obtain feedback on the steps taken by the company.

#### **a) Online Discussion Forums**

Hosting online forums or discussions with customers gives them the opportunity to voice their opinions and provide feedback directly. This engagement shows that the company values the customer's contribution to the decision-making process.

#### **b) Customer Satisfaction Surveys**

Surveys conducted after a crisis or recovery has occurred can provide valuable insights into customer perceptions and assess whether the steps the company has taken have been effective in repairing its image and rebuilding trust.

### **Data Analysis and Measurement**

Assessing the effectiveness of a company's image recovery cannot be done without in-depth data analysis. The use of technology to monitor customer sentiment across digital platforms is essential to assess the impact of each step taken. Sentiment analysis technology allows for real-time monitoring of public opinion. With this tool, PT Pertamina can find out how customers respond to their actions, whether the reaction is positive or negative. This helps the company determine the next steps in the image recovery process.

### **Long-Term Strategy for Restoring Customer Trust**

Restoring customer image and trust requires more than just a temporary measure. Companies need to have a long-term strategy to repair customer relationships and ensure the company's reputation is maintained.

### **Continuous Improvement of Customer Experience**

PT Pertamina must commit to continuously improving customer experience. This can be done by updating customer service, improving product quality, and adopting the latest technology for higher efficiency and customer satisfaction.

### **Employee Training**

Improving customer service quality starts from within the company. Proper employee training will ensure that every interaction with customers runs smoothly and provides a positive

experience. Well-trained employees will be better prepared to deal with various crisis situations more effectively.

## **5. CLOSING**

### **Conclusion**

As a large company, PT Pertamina needs to implement a comprehensive and sustainable strategy to restore customer trust and improve the company's image affected by the crisis. The crisis that occurred can damage the company's reputation, so it requires a comprehensive approach so that the image can be restored effectively. In this context, prioritizing customer trust is very important so that PT Pertamina can maintain its position as a leader in the energy industry.

Key steps that need to be taken include transparent communication, mitigating negative e-WOM, and actively engaging with customers. Open and clear communication can reduce public misunderstanding and prevent the spread of incorrect information. Proper e-WOM management will also help control negative perceptions spread across various digital platforms. PT Pertamina must continue to interact with customers and provide a quick and solution-oriented response to complaints that arise.

In addition to short-term steps, PT Pertamina must also design a sustainable long-term strategy. Some initiatives that can be implemented include improving service quality, employee training, and implementing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs that have a positive impact on the community. Improving service quality will ensure a better customer experience, while employee training will improve their ability to handle crises.

By integrating these steps effectively, PT Pertamina can not only restore the company's image, but also build customer trust and loyalty in the long term. Success in implementing this strategy will make PT Pertamina a more transparent, responsible, and trustworthy company in the eyes of the public. Finally, these steps will support the company's sustainable growth and ensure business continuity in facing future challenges.

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