

## **Pesantren Sexual Violence: Kemenag's Crisis Communication Strategies – Qualitative Content Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes crisis communication strategies employed by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI/Kemenag) responding to sexual violence in pesantren using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). A qualitative content analysis of 24 official Kemenag publications from the period of 2022 to 2025 indicates a predominance of corrective action through the implementation of regulatory measures (PMA 73/2022), enforcement of licensing protocols, and institutional reorganization, further enhanced by the incorporation of religious moral principles across various strategies. In contrast to secular implementations, Kemenag integrates Islamic ethical universals, specifically "Fiqh Wathoni" or "Contextual Jurisprudence", thereby optimizing adherence within clerical hierarchies while advancing from a regulatory foundation to a paradigm of programmatic renewal. Significant deficiencies are identified, including the limited Instructing Information and adjusting information attributable to hierarchical gatekeeping structures. The findings extend the applicability of SCCT to faith-based governance, advocating for a sequenced approach to public guidance, victim-centered empathy facilitated through santri networks, and the sustained application of religious bolstering. This research establishes a comprehensive framework for reforms in child protection within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as educational institutions.

**Keywords:** crisis communication strategy, sexual violence, pesantren

### **INTRODUCTION**

The prevalence of sexual violence within Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) has intensified in recent years, eliciting considerable public apprehension and academic scrutiny. Existing studies (Aprilia et al., 2022; Nabila et al., 2023; Suparjon, 2025) highlight that such cases are not merely isolated acts of individual misconduct but reflect deeper structural problems rooted in asymmetric power relations between kyai and santri (Pebriaisyah et al., 2022; Fuadi et al., 2023). Sexual violence in pesantren is also associated with long-term psychological consequences for victims, including trauma, fear, and diminished psychological well-being (Resky, 2025; Listiana et al., 2025). The significance and intricacy of this issue highlight the immediate necessity for governmental action, specifically by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), via regulatory frameworks, protective measures, and administrative penalties, which may encompass the annulment of institutional

licenses. Nonetheless, the effective execution of these policy initiatives requires the establishment of comprehensive crisis communication strategies to ensure uniform, reliable, and child-centered public messaging. The prevalence of sexual violence within Indonesian pesantren has intensified in recent years, eliciting considerable public apprehension and academic scrutiny. Existing studies (Aprilia et al., 2022; Nabila et al., 2023; Suparjon, 2025) highlight that such cases are not merely isolated acts of individual misconduct but reflect deeper structural problems rooted in asymmetric power relations between kyai and santri (Pebriaisyah et al., 2022; Fuadi et al., 2023). Sexual violence in pesantren is also associated with long-term psychological consequences for victims, including trauma, fear, and diminished psychological well-being (Resky, 2025; Listiana et al., 2025). The significance and intricacy of this issue highlight the immediate necessity for governmental action, specifically by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), via regulatory frameworks, protective measures, and administrative penalties, which may encompass the annulment of institutional licenses. Nonetheless, the effective execution of these policy initiatives requires the establishment of comprehensive crisis communication strategies to ensure uniform, reliable, and child-centered public messaging.

Crisis communication serves a pivotal function in influencing organizational reactions in the context of delicate and critical scenarios. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) posits that the communicative approaches utilized by organizations must correspond with the degree of public attribution of responsibility (Coombs, 2007). In the context of sexual violence in pesantren, the crisis falls into the category of a preventable crisis because the public perceives Kemenag as responsible for ensuring adequate oversight and protection systems (Winarno et al., 2025; Maulanasyah & Ahmad, 2023). Consequently, methodologies such as Corrective Action, which is designed to address and rectify systemic vulnerabilities, and Bolstering, which serves to augment the institution's ethical commitment, are routinely utilized. This trend corresponds with international governmental crisis communication protocols. Studies from Malaysia (Masngut & Mohamad, 2021), Europe (Velthorst, 2015; MacLean, 2015), and Canada (Hayek, 2024) similarly demonstrate the dominance of corrective and reform-oriented communication in crises involving moral responsibility. Kemenag's communication practices therefore reflect a broader international trend in how public institutions frame their responses to morally charged and institutionally embedded crises.

The urgency of this research is further reinforced by the limited academic scholarship analyzing how Kemenag constructs its crisis responses to sexual violence in pesantren through official textual communication. Previous studies have largely examined Kemenag's crisis responses in contexts such as hajj cancellations or media controversies (Prastya & Utami, 2020; Nengsih & Darwis, 2022), while sexual violence, despite its gravity, has not been

systematically analyzed using SCCT. Meanwhile, policy-focused studies (Baihaqi et al., 2023; Rahayu, 2023; Ramadhan & Soeskandi, 2023) emphasize the need to strengthen regulations and victim protection mechanisms but do not address how institutional narratives shape public understanding and accountability. This gap highlights the necessity of examining Kemenag's crisis communication to understand how the state communicates responsibility, moral positioning, and institutional reform.

In this investigation, the implementation of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is firmly established. International research by Masngut and Mohamad (2021), Velthorst (2015), MacLean (2015), and Hayek (2024) demonstrates that text-based analysis of official statements is a valid approach to understanding governmental crisis communication patterns. In Indonesia, studies such as Prastya and Utami (2020) and Nengsih and Darwis (2022) similarly affirm the suitability of narrative analysis for examining Kemenag's public statements. However, no existing research applies SCCT to investigate Kemenag's responses to sexual violence in pesantren, thereby establishing the theoretical and empirical significance of this study.

This study conducts a qualitative content analysis of 24 official publications issued by Kementerian Agama (Kemenag) between July 2022 and November 2025 regarding sexual violence cases in pesantren. Kemenag's documented crisis communication strategies consist primarily of corrective action (policy reforms, sanctions, task forces), bolstering (moral commitments, religious values), instructing information (policy guidelines), adjusting information (victim empathy), and denial (jurisdictional clarification), categorized according to Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

The research addresses three objectives that directly correspond to its analytical findings: (1) to classify Kemenag's strategies into SCCT categories (revealed corrective action as dominant); (2) to examine embedded narratives (identified moral-religious framing); and (3) to assess strategy fit for preventable crises (found appropriate but with gaps in victim empathy).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Coombs (2007) constitutes Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as a fundamental theoretical framework within the domain of crisis communication research. SCCT asserts that an organization's crisis response must be congruent with the level of public attribution of accountability. In lieu of merely outlining the methodologies by which institutions should articulate their messages in times of crisis, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) elucidates the underlying justification for the enhanced appropriateness of particular response strategies, which are determined by the perceived extent of accountability. The theory classifies crises into three principal categories: victim crises, in which responsibility is externally attributed and organizational blame is minimal; accidental crises, which

involve unintentional events and moderate responsibility; and preventable crises, characterized by negligence, weak internal control, or organizational failure, resulting in high public attribution of responsibility. In contexts marked by avertable emergencies, it is expected that institutions will enact comprehensive strategies that incorporate remedial measures, recognition, and official expressions of regret, whilst simultaneously instituting supportive initiatives aimed at reinforcing organizational credibility. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) further underscores the criticality of judiciously selecting appropriate response strategies, which include the dissemination of instructing information to deliver factual clarity, the modification of information to express empathy, and reputational strategies such as corrective actions, bolstering, and, when pertinent, denial. Recent empirical evidence supports SCCT's propositions. Jiang et al. (2025), for instance, found that preventable crises, such as academic and sexual misconduct in Chinese higher education institutions, predominantly elicit corrective action and adjusting information as primary response strategies, reinforcing the centrality of structural accountability and public empathy in high-responsibility crises.

In instances of crisis, the methodologies employed by governmental entities for communication vary markedly from those utilized by corporate entities, primarily due to the unique responsibility that governments bear in ensuring the protection of the citizenry, maintaining social order, and adhering to ethical standards. As a result, governmental crisis communication transcends the mere preservation of institutional reputation by prioritizing transparency, accountability, and precision in the dissemination of public policy information (Johansen & Frandsen, 2020). International studies demonstrate that governments commonly prioritize corrective action and bolstering when responding to public crises. In Malaysia, for example, Masngut and Mohamad (2021) found that the government relied heavily on narratives of structural reform and moral commitment during the COVID-19 crisis to restore public trust. Resembling patterns were recognized in both Europe and Canada, where governments pushed the importance of regulatory reforms, systemic advancements, and ethical legitimacy as core aspects of effective crisis communication (Hayek, 2024; MacLean, 2015). Within this broader scholarship, SCCT is particularly valuable because of its predictive capacity regarding responsibility-based communication strategies, a relevance also highlighted in Jiang et al. (2025). These investigations collectively substantiate that the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) can function as a potent analytical framework for scrutinizing crisis communication within governmental contexts, encompassing the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) in Indonesia.

Analyses of the crisis communication methodologies employed by Kemenag indicate that the institution has developed a remarkably cohesive structure for managing public conflicts. Prastya and Utami (2020) show that

Kemenag framed the cancellation of the hajj pilgrimage through policy explanation and systemic improvement narratives. Nengsih and Darwis (2022) further reveal that Kemenag frequently employs clarification and factual reinforcement in response to negative media coverage. These studies demonstrate the ministry's tendency to rely on corrective action and bolstering strategies in moments of institutional stress. However, none of these works specifically investigate how Kemenag constructs its crisis responses to sexual violence in pesantren within the SCCT framework. This disparity is of considerable importance, considering that sexual violence represents a particularly delicate emergency that engages child safeguarding, ethical legitimacy, and the overarching cohesion of Islamic educational establishments.

Scholarly literature increasingly recognizes sexual violence in pesantren as systemic and recurring, thereby meeting the criteria of a preventable crisis under SCCT. Structural power imbalances between kyai and santri (Pebriaisyah et al., 2022; Fuadi et al., 2023), weak institutional oversight mechanisms (Aprilia et al., 2022; Rahayu, 2023), and limited legal and child protection literacy within religious communities contribute to the persistence of abuse. The ramifications are significant, frequently presenting as enduring psychological distress, declining mental well-being, and impaired social progression (Resky, 2025; Listiana et al., 2025). Considering that these adverse consequences may be mitigated through suitable regulatory frameworks, vigilant oversight, and effective institutional governance, occurrences of sexual violence within pesantren can legitimately be categorized as a preventable crisis. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) posits that such emergencies necessitate governmental entities, particularly the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI/Kemenag), to implement robust corrective action strategies, encompassing comprehensive reform, the establishment of innovative regulatory frameworks, the creation of specialized task forces, and the enforcement of administrative penalties.

The theoretical construct of this research is firmly based on the rational interconnection between SCCT, the attributes of sexual violence within pesantren contexts, and the communicative strategies utilized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) in its formal documentation. This research proceeds from the assumption that SCCT provides a theoretically coherent classification of crisis types and corresponding response strategies based on responsibility attribution; that sexual violence in pesantren constitutes a preventable crisis requiring systemic and decisive responses; that Kemenag's official news releases serve as representative artifacts of its crisis communication practices; and that qualitative content analysis is an appropriate methodological approach for identifying communication strategies consistent with SCCT categories.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, employing qualitative content analysis as delineated by Mayring (2000, 2014). This methodological choice is appropriate because it provides a systematic procedure for identifying patterns of meaning, discursive structures, and crisis communication strategies within official government texts. Qualitative content analysis holds substantial significance in the realm of document-centered investigations pertaining to organizational communication, as it prioritizes the interpretation of textual significance over the perceptions of the general populace. The method has also been widely adopted in previous studies examining governmental crisis responses, including Masngut and Mohamad's (2021) analysis of Malaysia's COVID-19 communication strategies and Prastya and Utami's (2020) examination of crisis messaging by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) regarding the postponement of the hajj pilgrimage. Such methodological alignment indicates that the analysis of policy texts and official reports can yield valid and replicable insights into institutional communication practices.

The data for this study consist of 24 official articles published by Kemenag between concerning cases of sexual violence in pesantren. The aforementioned documents were meticulously chosen through purposive sampling, contingent upon their content relevance, their function as institutional representations of the Kementerian Agama (Kemenag)'s crisis responses, and their temporal congruence with evolving regulatory frameworks. The quantity of documents is deemed adequate in accordance with the principle of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), which posits that the sufficiency in qualitative sampling is contingent upon the depth and specificity of the data rather than simply the numerical size of the sample. This sampling rationale is also consistent with guidance on qualitative sample sufficiency by Wutich et al. (2024), who emphasize that qualitative content analysis can be rigorous even with a limited corpus when the data are homogeneous and contain explicit information relevant to the research questions.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages following Mayring's framework. The first stage involved data reduction through close reading to identify meaning units within each article. The unit of analysis in this study consists of paragraphs or statements containing crisis communication strategies, while the contextual unit encompasses the complete article as a representation of Kemenag's institutional stance. The subsequent phase encompassed the classification process employing the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework as delineated by Coombs (2007, 2012). Manual coding was conducted to preserve interpretive sensitivity to policy language and contextual nuances, which is essential in governmental communication studies.

We established detailed definitions to foster methodological accuracy and consistency throughout the coding process. Instructing information refers to factual explanations that help the public understand the crisis situation, including policy steps or administrative directives. Adjusting information encompasses expressions of empathy or emotional support intended to reduce uncertainty among affected parties. Corrective initiatives signify the formulation of policies, repercussions, institutional modifications, or regulatory approaches that are intentionally structured to stop a recurrence, which covers the issuing of orders from ministers, the assembly of focused task forces, and the enforcement of administrative penalties. Bolstering includes statements that highlight institutional achievements, moral commitments, or positive values to reinforce legitimacy. Denial pertains to efforts aimed at severing the organization's linkage to accountability for the crisis, whereas excuse encompasses endeavors to mitigate responsibility through assertions of unintentionality or external limitations. The insights shared within this document highlight the essential coding structure developed to enhance transparency, replicability, and theoretical consistency in line with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

The final stage of analysis involved interpreting the categorized data by linking the findings to SCCT, regulatory developments, and prior research on sexual violence in pesantren (Aprilia et al., 2022; Fuadi et al., 2023; Rohmah & Aimah, 2025). A constant comparison process was used to examine internal consistency across categories, while theoretical triangulation ensured that interpretations remained grounded in established scholarly discourse on crisis communication and institutional accountability.

The rigor of the research validity was enhanced by the establishment of a comprehensive audit trail that meticulously recorded analytical decisions, coding methodologies, and the introspections of the researchers to alleviate interpretative bias. This systematic and accountable methodological structure enables the study to produce a comprehensive portrayal of Kemenag's crisis communication strategies in responding to sexual violence in pesantren, while ensuring that the findings meet qualitative standards of coherence, transparency, and scholarly rigor.

The final stage involved interpreting categorized data by linking findings to SCCT, regulatory developments, and prior research. Constant comparison ensured internal consistency, while theoretical triangulation grounded interpretations in established scholarship. Research rigor was maintained through a detailed audit trail of analytical decisions and coding practices. Detailed coding results for each of the 24 articles are presented in Appendix A, enabling verification of the strategy distribution and narrative patterns.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



The qualitative content analysis of 24 official Kemenag articles, meticulously documented in Appendix A, establishes corrective action as unequivocally the dominant primary strategy, systematically appearing across 14 distinct articles (specifically Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21, and 24). Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) theoretically mandates corrective action as the cornerstone response for preventable crises, defined by high public attribution of organizational responsibility where stakeholders perceive institutional negligence as the proximal crisis cause (Coombs, 2007, 2012). In the pesantren sexual violence context, this classification manifests with crystalline precision through Kemenag's multi-layered remediation: legislative enactment exemplified by PMA 73/2022's comprehensive architecture ("seven chapters encompassing general provisions, forms of sexual violence, prevention protocols, handling procedures, reporting mechanisms, monitoring frameworks, evaluation processes, administrative sanctions, and closing provisions across 20 articles," Article 3); enforcement actions including license revocation ("pesantren permit revoked due to leader's indecent acts," Article 8; "not hesitate to revoke permits for abuse tolerance," Article 21); and institutional restructuring via specialized mechanisms ("Task Force formed to enhance prevention and handling effectiveness in pesantren," Article 17; "integrated corrective measures including 512 child-friendly pesantren pilots," Article 19). These interventions directly eliminate the structural preconditions which regulatory voids, oversight lapses, and institutional autonomy, long documented as enabling conditions for kyai-santri power abuses (Pebriaisyah et al., 2022; Fuadi et al., 2023), thereby fulfilling SCCT's causal remediation imperative. These directly address structural preconditions enabling kyai-santri power abuses identified by Fauz (2023) as gender-based violence rooted in patriarchal pesantren dynamics.

Bolstering constitutes the second most prevalent primary strategy, systematically deployed across 6 articles (6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 20, 23), strategically reinforcing organizational legitimacy through layered moral, historical, and evidential narratives. Representative instances include historical valorization ("pesantren contributions spanning hundreds of years," Article 16), external validation leveraging empirical authority ("PPIM research confirms low pesantren vulnerability to sexual violence," Article 15), Islamic ethical universals, and stakeholder endorsement ("appreciation for pesantren declaring JPPRA commitment," Article 10). Adjusting information deploys selectively yet purposefully across 3 articles (14, 18, 22), expressing calibrated institutional empathy ("deeply concerned especially when leaders perpetrate... state stands with victims," Article 22; "build collaboration despite limited budgets," Article 14). Denial remains precisely circumscribed to a single jurisdictional dissociation instance ("not registered as pesantren under Kemenag authority," Article 5), exemplifying SCCT's disassociation tactic for non-responsibility cases. Notably, Instructing Information registers complete

absence across the entire corpus, representing a systematic deviation from SCCT's prescribed primary response sequencing for public guidance.

Appendix A's chronological mapping reveals Kemenag's communicative architecture evolving methodically through crisis life cycle phases (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2019), where organizations progress from acute sense-making through remediation toward sustainable renewal. The 2022 regulatory foundation phase (Articles 1-4) responds to emergent attribution amplification following serial incidents, systematically constructing normative infrastructure absent from Prastya and Utami's (2020) hajj cancellation Instructing Information dominance: multi-stakeholder harmonization ("Draft PMA prevention regulation enters inter-ministerial stage at Ministry of Law," Article 1), expert integration ("gathered inputs, considerations, thoughts from experts," Article 2), and comprehensive legislative architecture ("PMA 73/2022 regulates violence forms, prevention, handling, reporting flows," Article 3). This foundational corrective orientation transitions to 2023 enforcement intensification (Articles 5-11), where reputational threat escalation from high-profile cases catalyzes overt sanctioning rhetoric ("not hesitate to revoke permits proven tolerating abuse," Article 21) substantially exceeding Nengsih and Darwis's (2022) defensive media clarifications, complemented by precise Denial circumscription ("not registered under Ministry pesantren authority," Article 5). 2024 governance consolidation (Articles 12-16) signals acute phase stabilization enabling strategic diversification: multisectoral MoU institutionalization (Article 12), empirical bolstering via institutional benchmarking ("33 of 58 state religious universities established PPKS Task Forces," Article 15 alongside "many PTKI had SOPs before general campuses"), reputational defense ("safeguard pesantren from negative media narratives," Article 16), and empathetic positioning ("deeply concerned... heartbreaking when leaders perpetrate," Article 14). Culminating in 2025 programmatic institutionalization (Articles 17-24), Kemenag manifests renewal through scalable interventions: Task Force operationalization ("Satgas enhances systemic prevention," Article 17), curriculum mainstreaming ("gender and reproductive health integrated into Pesantren Nurul Islam teaching," Article 19), national pilot scaling ("512 child-friendly pesantren toward 6,530 total," Article 19), best practices dissemination ("hundreds of pilot pesantren attended national sharing," Article 19), and ethical reframing ("religious education institutions must become safest learning spaces," Article 23).

Kemenag extends SCCT through Islamic framing addressing Fauz's (2023) gender analysis of pesantren violence. Corrective actions invoke jurisprudence ("Fiqh Wathoni national fiqh," Article 9). Fiqh Wathoni refers to contextual Islamic jurisprudence addressing worldly/social issues, distinct from ritual worship (rabbaniyah), representing Indonesia's national fiqh for contemporary challenges like child protection (Azizah, 2021). In Kemenag's PMA context, it legitimizes state regulations as "national Indonesian fiqh" for

sexual violence prevention in pesantren. Bolstering deploys ethical universals ("exalting humanity through fiqh wathoni Islamic values," Article 7) optimizing stakeholder internalization absent from Jiang et al.'s (2025) Chinese bureaucratic remediation; Adjusting information paternalistically reframes solidarity ("state collaboration despite limited budgets," Article 14; "deeply concerned... build cross-sector partnerships," Article 14) within guardianship norms distinguishing Indonesian Islamic governance from Western individualism (Hayek, 2024). This faith-mediated hybridization explains empirically superior pesantren compliance evidenced through pilot scaling (Article 19) versus documented secular institutional backlash patterns.

Governments have historically adopted a reactive approach to regulation, formulating policies in response to crises rather than preemptively, a pattern observable in crisis communication strategies. This tendency manifests in the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), where guidelines addressing religious extremism, as cataloged in Appendix A, emerged following the 2018-2020 radicalization incidents. Systematic gaps illuminate institutional and cultural determinants. Complete Instructing Information absence systematically violates Coombs' (2007) mandated primary response sequencing because pesantren hierarchical gatekeeping privileges internalized directives ("continuous child-friendly pesantren socialization," Article 19; "open to evaluation and guidance from stakeholders," Article 13) over direct public mobilization characteristic of mass democracies (Masngut & Mohamad, 2021). Sparse adjusting information deployment (three articles) reflects deliberate bureaucratic distancing preserving hierarchical authority but systematically forfeiting relational repair capital essential for sustained victim-institution trust documented across institutional abuse literatures (Velthorst, 2015), explained by paternalistic communication norms prioritizing collective moral restoration over individualized empathy

Kemenag's corrective-bolstering religious sequence succeeds theoretically because preventable crises within clerical hierarchies necessitate simultaneous systemic repair and theological reaffirmation, empirically validated through pilot institutionalization (Article 19) and scaling absent in secular counterparts (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). This advances SCCT through faith-mediated adaptation theory directly addressing Jiang et al.'s (2025) religious governance lacunae.

## CONCLUSION

Kemenag's crisis communication across 24 official articles demonstrates Situational Crisis Communication Theory compliance through dominant corrective action systematically addressing preventable crisis preconditions via regulatory enactment, licensing enforcement, and institutional

restructuring. Religious moralization integration across strategies framing reforms within Islamic ethical universals optimizes compliance within pesantren hierarchies while progressing from 2022 foundational regulation to 2025 programmatic renewal. Notable gaps include absent Instructing Information and sparse adjusting information reflecting hierarchical gatekeeping constraints. Kemenag should sequence public guidance during attribution spikes, amplify victim-centered empathy through santri networks, and sustain faith-mediated bolstering for cultural legitimacy. This establishes SCCT's applicability to religious governance contexts providing blueprint for child protection reforms in Islamic education institutions.

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### SURAT PERNYATAAN ORIGINALITAS

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(Nadia Humaira)

