

Asian Games 2018 Opening Ceremony Ticketing System: A Crisis Communication Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the communication crisis that occurred during the exchange of tickets at the Opening Ceremony of the 2018 Asian Games. The lack of communication done by *Kiostix* as the ticket provider triggers complaints from the ticket buyers. Aside from that, there was also a change in the ticketing provider just a few days before the Opening Ceremony of *Asian Games 2018* was held. There has been no official explanation and clarification as to why *Indonesia Asian Games Organizing Committee* (INASGOC) decided to change their ticketing provider in the last minutes. This research will be discussed using the Image Repair Theory by William Benoit and continued with an analysis of corrective actions as an analysis of the steps taken by INASGOC as the organizing committee for the *Asian Games 2018*.

Keyword: Crisis Communication, INASGOC, Asian Games 2018, Opening Ceremony, Ticketing System, Kiostix, Image Repair Theory, Image, Corrective Action

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mempelajari krisis komunikasi yang terjadi pada saat berlangsungnya penukaran tiket di Acara Pembukaan Asian Games 2018. Kurangnya komunikasi dari *Kiostix* selaku penyedia tiket memicu komplain dari pembeli tiket. Selain itu, terjadi pergantian vendor penyedia tiket pada hari-hari terakhir menjelang berlangsungnya Acara Pembukaan *Asian Games 2018*. Tidak ada penjelasan dan klarifikasi secara resmi tentang alasan *Indonesia Asian Games Organizing Committee* (INASGOC) memutuskan untuk mengganti vendor penyedia tiket di menit-menit terakhir. Riset ini akan dibahas menggunakan Teori Perbaikan Citra (Image Repair Theory) oleh William Benoit dan diteruskan dengan analisis tindakan perbaikan (*Corrective Action*) sebagai analisis dari langkah penyelesaian yang diambil oleh INASGOC sebagai panitia pelaksana *Asian Games 2018*.

Kata Kunci: Krisis Komunikasi, INASGOC, Asian Games 2018, Acara Pembukaan, Sistematisa Tiket, Kiostix, Image Repair, Image, Corrective Action

Introduction

A crisis is a turning point that can be threatening to the reputation of an organization and might be harmful to financial and survivability of an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs & Holladay (1996) found that organizations build reputation management because they have anticipated the need of it to be addressed will come sooner or later. Maintaining communication throughout the crisis is very important in order to successfully deal with the crisis itself (Malone & Coombs, 2009), because during a crisis, it is usually hard to find information resources due to the pressure of the stressful situation and the high demand for relevant information from stakeholders of the organization, starting from customers, vendors, employees, and media; hence it is important to maintain an efficient communication (Telang & Deshpande, 2016).

In 2018, Indonesia is back to becoming a host country for Asian Games for the second time, creating the history of having two cities as a host for the multi-sport event that is being held once every four years. Asian Games is the second biggest multi-sport event in the world, which is also the oldest and most prestigious event on the *Olympic Council of Asia* (OCA), dating back to its inaugural event in 1951. The Games follow the sports programme

of the Olympics, with athletics and swimming as core sports, as well as featuring disciplines which reflect the diverse sporting culture of the continent such as South East Asia's sepak takraw, South Asia's kabaddi, and East Asia's wushu. A total number of 462 medals were awarded at Asian Games 2018 across 47 sports and around 11,000 athletes from 45 participating nations (INASGOC, 2018). Asian Games unites Asian countries together as a unified continent and carries out a positive light to outshine the political and maritime issues that are ongoing in the region (The Jakarta Post, 2018).

However, as this is the biggest multi-sports event Indonesia has ever hosted and involving many stakeholders, the Organizing Committee is forced to face a lot of obstacles, with no exception of its ticketing vendor, *Kiostix*, which is supposed to help INASGOC raise revenue by selling tickets of the ceremonies and competitions. This research paper is focused on the analysis of crisis that happened in the ticketing system of Asian Games 2018 prior to the opening ceremony that was held in August 18, 2018. The aim of the research is to examine the action steps INASGOC done in overcoming the crisis.

Crisis Overview

In order to raise the hype of Asian Games 2018, *Indonesia Asian Games Organizing Committee* (INASGOC) held a torch relay that is brought from New Delhi, India, to go across 53 cities and 18 provinces in Indonesia from Yogyakarta and will end in Gelora Bung Karno Stadium Jakarta right on the opening ceremony of Asian Games 2018 on 18th August 2018.

Unfortunately, a problem occurred in the online ticketing system for the hyped up opening ceremony. The inaccessibility of *Kiostix's* website to handle the ongoing traffic led *Kiostix* to arrange maintenance for their website and sell offline tickets in their office in the south of Jakarta starting on Thursday (Kompas.com, 2018).

Aside from opening up their office to sell an offline ticket, *Kiostix* also serves ticket exchange from electronic ticket to wristband ticket. Unfortunately, the information of ticket exchange is not publicly and clearly informed to the customers, which resulting in some electronic ticket holders are not enlightened of the ticket exchange information; they are not aware that the ticket exchange could be exchanged not only on the day of the opening ceremony, but it can be done starting on 16th of August 2018, which is two days prior to the day.

A lot of complaints were delivered by the prospective audiences, not only by those who want to only exchange their electronic ticket, but also those who want to buy the offline ticket. As quoted from *Kompas.com*, the complaints were including both the ticketing service and the unprofessionalism of the staffs from *Kiostix* in serving the prospective customers, such as the absence of identity card that is used by the staffs so it was hard differentiating which one are the *Kiostix* staffs and which one are the customers. Not stopping there, the system of the ticket exchange is considered complicated with the customers having to exchange their electronic ticket into a physical wristband ticket, which is ineffective and diminishes the function of the electronic ticket itself.

The crisis did not stop there; all of sudden INASGOC announced a change of ticketing vendor for Asian Games 2018 competitions from *Kiostix* to *Tiket.com* and *Blibli.com* without clear and certain information. It is also a major problem that INASGOC failed to communicate to the customers and prospective customers. The change in competition ticketing purchase and exchange system where all the spectators who already having their online ticket are expected to exchange their online ticket to the physical ticket before they watch the match as well as what happened in the Opening Ceremony. Again, the decision

has been taken in the middle of the road without the official and clear announcement neither from the ticket vendor nor from INASGOC as the Organizing Committee of the *Asian Games 2018* that it is no longer needed to exchange their electronic ticket into the physical ones before watching the match. So, those who already purchased the online ticket are able to watch the match with only showing their online ticket along with their ID card the time when they want to watch their desired match.

Quoted from *Kompas.com* (2018), this crisis did not stop in the Opening Ceremony but went on until the competition days. Up until the time this news was released on *Kompas*, the organizing committee of Asian Games, in this case, did not provide any confirmation about what happened behind the ongoing crisis.

Literature Review

Corporate and Image

“Image” is how the audience perceives a person, group, or organization that is formed by the words, actions, and behaviour done by the person and other relevant actors (Benoit, 1997). Marziliano (1998) suggests that one shall not underestimate the power of the corporate image created by the public because it can be the measurement of the survivability of a company in the future, although the public does not necessarily shape the company.

Crisis Communication and the Public

During a crisis, (Fink, 1986) defines an organizational crisis quite broadly as a situation that can potentially escalate in intensity, that can jeopardize its public image. Frequently, a crisis induces a “sense of threat, urgency, and destruction, often on a monumental scale (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). When crises are handled inappropriately, they can affect not only the organization’s reputation but also the credibility and viability of its Operations (Howell, 2012).

There was the literature which proposes that the organization should strategically communicate, emphasizing, and responding to the stakeholders and the public during the crisis. The need for creating a proactive crisis communication plan has been raised by various authors who emphasized its importance in systematically responding to a crisis and in seizing control of a situation (Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2014)

Image Repair Theory

This research will be based on Benoit’s *Image Repair Theory*, which discusses the concepts of restoring one’s self-image or reputation. Benoit (1995) found that there are five strategies of image repair, which are: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. The reason why the researchers use this theory is because as the organizing committee, INASGOC preferred to not giving any confirmation regarding the issue and decided to change the ticket vendor in the middle of the run of Asian Games and again, without any confirmation. INASGOC remains silent to the entire communication crisis during the run of Asian Games 2018.

The theory of image repair is focusing on the key actions in form of message options, meaning that the theory suggested what can a corporation do or say in the face of crisis (Benoit, 1997). Benoit (1995) stated that: “communication is best conceptualized as a goal-directed activity.” For a company, government agency, and individual, image and reputation are very important. Therefore, if reputation falls, large resources are needed to recover.

Reputation may be intentionally or accidentally damaged through words or deeds. When this happens the communicator is faced with a negative image problem. Benoit created his theory on the assumption that because of negative images, communicators would be motivated to try to restore their image as one of the main goals of communication for the population.

Benoit suggested two approaches. First, a person or organization denies involvement in actions or denying actions that have been done. The second approach involves “victim” or blaming someone else (scapegoat). *“If the audience accepts another person to blame, the defendant’s image should be recovered”*, (Benoit, 1995).

Methodology

This paper is based on a research using the qualitative research methods. The researchers collect news and study approaches to identify those who are influenced by the crisis communication that happened, also supported by reviewing journals related to the topic to help analysing the problems.

The researchers view the data collected as the descriptive data which are collected in forms of words instead of numbers as the application of the qualitative research methods. The data are collected from the news released prior and during the day of the Asian Games 2018 Opening Ceremony, which are around 15 to 18 August 2018.

Furthermore, aside from collecting the news, the researchers find more evidences regarding the crisis that happened by doing short interviews to two people who bought Asian Games 2018 Opening Ceremony at *Kiostix* website and office. The interview is conducted in order to know deeper the representative of ticket holders’ opinions regarding the ticketing system and how well INASGOC handle the problems with their vendor.

Findings and Discussion

In conducting this research, the researchers found several findings and discussion towards the news released. Not stopping there, the researchers in this study tried to find more accurate data by conducting an interview with informants who were also experiencing difficulties at that time, especially when exchanging tickets. The following results are based on the analysis of several credible news portals and an interview with a ticket buyer.

Keeping silent in the face of crisis

There was no problem both from the ticket selling or even the ticket exchange at first. All activities on the website ran smoothly despite the early traffic. The first interviewee, Aditya, said that he bought the ticket once *Kiostix* started selling them online, around mid-July 2018. At that time, there were no errors in purchasing the tickets; all the processes were normal and smooth. But, the email sent to him after doing the payment was only a voucher instead of an e-ticket. He stated his worry a week before the Opening Ceremony held because he had yet to receive any information regarding ticket exchange. It means that the buyer should exchange the ticket on the day at the venue, Gelora Bung Karno, as what *Kiostix* promised before. He stated that he found two unusual things happened, such as the absence of seat number on the ticket, before *Kiostix* sending an email following to select the seat number, two weeks after purchase; and also there was no information on the day ticket exchange place (Aditya, 2018). The similar things also stated by the second interviewee, one of the ticket buyers who were also working as the volunteer of the 18th Asian Games: Jakarta-Palembang 2018 who was in charge in Jakarta. He stated

that he tried to purchase the ticket from the website of *Kiostix*, but due to the heavy traffic on the website, so he had to go to the *Kiostix*'s Office to purchase the ticket, two days prior the day (Prabowo, 2018).

Three days prior to the day, the crisis rose to attention. All of the sudden, there was a notification the ticket exchange can just be done on August 17, one day before the day at the *Kiostix* Office in South Jakarta. And the ticket exchange at Gelora Bung Karno can only be done on the day of the Opening Ceremony. The information was delivered personally through email to the ticket buyers and through various social media of Asian Games. By the time the ticket buyers went to the *Kiostix*'s office to exchange their tickets, the chaos begins. It happened when the number of ticket buyers who want to exchange their tickets are increasing but not accompanied by the staffs of *Kiostix* who are serving ticket exchanges, plus there is no difference between ticket sales offline with ticket exchanges so that many visitors who have queued must move in a line and repeat the queue due to standing in the wrong line. Additionally, the officers also did not use official IDs so that it was difficult to identify which are the customers and which are the staffs.

According to news released on *Kompas.com*, dozens of people were seen lining up under the tent while waiting for the queue number to be called. However, there is no sign of which one is the queue for exchanging tickets and which one is to buy tickets. Furthermore, still from the same source, there were some people who were still confused and got in the queue anyway. One of the buyers who were in line, Agung (*Kompas.com*, 2018) said that he had been in line to queue for the exchange ticket, but he went in the line for the purchase ticket instead. In addition, Christian's complaint was also conveyed. Christian (*Kompas.com*, 2018) has been lining up since 11:00. From the notification sent by the committee, the ticket exchange will open at 10:00. However, when Christian arrived, the ticket window had not yet been opened. Not stopping there, but the communication crisis also occurred because of the lack of service and information in English even though there are a lot of foreign people who also bought the ticket.

Quoted from *Kompas.com*, a number of foreign tourists complained about the poor ticket exchange services for the opening of the 2018 Asian Games in the *Kiostix* Office, Pejaten, Friday (08/17/2018). Language differences seem to be the main obstacle for foreigners to obtain information regarding the ticket exchange. The ticketing staff also made an announcement using Indonesian, not English. John Chiu a Hong Kong resident, one of the buyers of the 2018 Opening Asian Games Opening Ceremony, complained on *Kompas.com* (2018) that he had a bad impression regarding the ticketing system because of the lack of guidance using universal language for non-Indonesian speakers, both in the ticket exchange venue and on the electronic ticket.

On the other hand, both of the interviewees agreed that the service that *Kiostix* provide to the prospective customers was bad. There was no guidance from the staffs in the ticket exchange venue and no assistance in guiding the buyers in exchanging ticket or to buy ticket. There was also no direction of where to go, so there was a lot of confusion among the ticket buyers. Aditya added that all things related to the exchange of tickets were problematic, which are: 1) confusing information about the ticket exchange location and time. It was said that the ticket can be exchanged in the Gelora Bung Karno area, but in fact, just few days before he received an email to exchange the ticket in the *Kiostix* office directly. Likewise, another problem occurred with exchange hours; they announced that the ticket exchange starts at 10 in the morning, but in fact, it just started 45 minutes after; 2) there was no clear 'queuing' system when exchanging. It was a chaos, queue bursting,

because the ticket holders just relied on the queue number on paper that was not clear because the exchange location is very small. The amount of ticket holders did not align with the venue capacity; 3) many ticket holders failed to hear their number being called because of the small voice of the staff due to only relying on a portable microphone; 4) their system was not ready, when queue has started, the officer had yet to arrive, then the voucher barcode was unreadable, and the system was down during the exchange; and 5) there were thousands of exchangers, but only 14 laptops were serving (8 for company exchangers, 6 for individual exchangers). For Aditya, many foreign exchangers queued up and all complained about the same thing. For a multi-event on the level of Asian Games, they should be able to survey previous organizers (South Korea) about ticket handling like this.

Furthermore, the chaos and crisis not only happened in the *Kiostix* office, but it was getting worse on the day of Opening Ceremony, when it is supposedly to be the day of excitement. The gate that was opened for the ticket exchange was in Gate 5, 7 and 10. But on the day, the gate that is opened just on the Gate 5, which is near the Main Stadium, Gelora Bung Karno, Jakarta. More than a hundred people protested in front of gate 5 of the Bung Karno Stadium because they were not allowed to enter. They are citizens who do not have a ticket and access to enter the area of the opening ceremony of the 2018 Asian Games. Police officers in front of the gate insisted they are not allowed to enter the venue, while most ticket holders have been lining up since the afternoon. The issue is then getting more aggravated by the absence of representatives from *Kiostix* as ticketing vendor. And all in during this chaos, there was no official statements from INASGOC regarding the action steps they will do with their ticketing vendor *Kiostix*.

Taking Corrective Action

As one of the general image repair strategy, corrective action happens when company promises to evaluate and correct the problems occurred, and it can take the form of restoring the image of an organization to the previous state before the crisis takes place or to prevent similar crisis to happen in the future (Benoit, 1997).

What INASGOC did in the middle of ticketing chaos was not staying still. Instead of waiting for *Kiostix* to fix their ticketing system, INASGOC worked on handing the ticketing system to another vendor that is seemed more capable in handling such a big traffic, and they chose one of the biggest e-commerce *Blibli.com* and ticketing platform *Tiket.com* to handle the rest of ticketing matters, setting aside *Kiostix* to be the offline ticketing vendor instead. The thing is, everything happened all of sudden and without prior notice. As an act of corrective action, the ticketing director, Sarman Simanjorang, as the representative from INASGOC stated to the media that they are “evaluating because there are a lot of criticisms from the public about *Kiostix* ticketing system that is problematic. Even prospective spectators who have bought tickets are still confused about the ticket exchange system. So yesterday we decided to switch to a stronger and better partner” (Tirto.id, 2018).

Not stopping there, following Benoit’s image repair theory, in order to prevent similar problem occurring in the ticketing system of Asian Games, INASGOC also changed their system by utilizing the use of barcode in the electronic ticket so spectators can enter the venue of the match immediately without having to exchange their ticket again (Indosport.com, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The 2018 Asian Games is already over. The chaos of exchanging tickets until the change of ticket vendors at the beginning of the event became the spice of the implementation of this big event. Lack of clarity still exists today because there is no official response and statement to this, both from the *Kiostix* as the ticketing vendors, and INASGOC as the organizing committee. It was once a crisis. That being said, INASGOC as the organizing committee did not remain silent, like any other company whose facing crisis, INASGOC has not remained silent after they heard that there was a crisis happening on their ticketing system, they would not want to risk their reputation or even their image and would not want to harm the reputation of *Kiostix* as their ticketing vendor at that time. INASGOC chose to change their ticket vendor immediately without giving any official statements.

The movement taken by INASGOC considered being the Image Repair Theory, where INASGOC trying to repair their image due to the crisis happened. On this theory, INASGOC used of the Benoit's approach in image Repair theory by taking corrective action by changing their ticketing system and vendor, then stating their apology to media and promising to evaluate and prevent similar problems to happen in the run of Asian Game. The organizing committee prefers to switch the ticket vendor directly with only moderate confirmation to the media related to the crisis in the ticketing system with *Kiostix*. Furthermore, INASGOC seemed to do this action to show that the crisis on the ticketing system is purely caused by the ticketing vendor, *Kiostix* and not by INASGOC as the organizing committee.

It is undoubtedly recommended for future crisis communication researchers to have a more in-depth study of the sources in the course of writing similar research, as understanding the crisis that happened from different perspectives will help researchers know the details of the issues and prevent researchers from getting invalid data of the study.

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