

Proactive Approach to Digital Reputation Management in Managing ESG Issues: A Case Study of Mining Industry Indonesia (MIND ID)

Pratiwa Dyatmika, Mining Industry Indonesia (MIND ID), Indonesia
Amirul Hazmi Hamdan, State University of Medan, Indonesia
Irwan Saputra, Kindi PR and Strategic Communications Consulting, Indonesia

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Abstract

Issue management in the context of social media presents significant challenges, particularly for high-reputation-risk industries such as mining, which are often targeted by cyber defamation and character assassination. Organizations operating in such sectors must adopt effective strategies to manage issues proactively in the digital sphere. This case study explores the issue management approach of MIND ID, the state-owned holding company overseeing several major mining enterprises in Indonesia. The research employs qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with four key informants and document analysis. Findings indicate that MIND ID adopts a proactive, systematic approach to issue management, focusing strategically on real-time media monitoring. This system enables the organization to detect early signs of reputational threats, resolve misinformation, and engage transparently with stakeholders before issues escalate into a full-blown crisis. MIND ID can respond swiftly and strategically to emerging concerns by continuously tracking digital conversations, reinforcing its public image and organizational legitimacy in a volatile media environment. This study contributes to the discourse on digital reputation management by highlighting the critical role of anticipatory strategies and continuous issue surveillance in high-risk sectors. It argues that in the era of heightened stakeholder scrutiny and digital interconnectivity, a proactive approach to reputation management is essential for safeguarding corporate reputation and sustaining stakeholder trust.

Keywords: corporate reputation, issue management, media monitoring, proactive approach

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Introduction

The swift evolution of digital media and communication platforms has fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of corporate reputation management. This paradigm shift has curtailed organizational control over public messaging, necessitating the adoption of specific digital communication strategies that markedly diverge from traditional media relations. The digital sphere inherently contains risks, particularly the rapid and frequently anonymous dissemination of digital attacks, leading to substantial challenges such as cyber defamation and character assassination. Consequently, effective issue management is paramount for organizations aiming to sustain and bolster their corporate reputation within the digital environment.

The difficulty of executing effective issue management is magnified for firms operating in sensitive sectors, such as the mining industry, given their intrinsically high reputational risk profile. Robust issue management is crucial for ensuring the accurate reception of corporate messages and for precluding information vacuums. A solid issue management program, which involves the systematic preparation and resolution of problems, allows companies to identify emerging concerns early, thereby preventing their escalation into full-blown crises (Bratfalean & Deaconu, 2020).

This research focuses on MIND ID, Indonesia's state-owned mining holding company. This entity faces the unique complexity of being a nascent organization (established in 2023) while simultaneously managing the reputation tied to the legacy and public perception of its older member companies, such as Antam and Bukit Asam. In the digital realm, attacks often target individual executives, posing the risk of character assassination, which can subsequently damage the corporate reputation as a whole.

A salient challenge confronting MIND ID involves the stewardship of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) concerns. A critical case involves the international critique directed at Indonesian nickel, which is frequently branded "dirty nickel." This controversy arises from documented concerns regarding extensive deforestation, air and water contamination from nickel smelter waste, suboptimal working conditions, and significant carbon emissions stemming from reliance on coal-fired power for processing. MIND ID's official position asserts that the "dirty nickel" campaign constitutes a negative strategy employed by rival nations who perceive Indonesia's success as the world's largest nickel producer as a threat. Hence, strategic reputation management is indispensable for surmounting these digital and geopolitical hurdles and ensuring business continuity (Jančiauskaitė et al., 2019).

The digitization of information requires integrating reputation management with robust risk and effective communication strategies to mitigate opportunistic behavior and information asymmetry (Bernini et al., 2021). To competently navigate this dynamic landscape, the deployment of technology in reputation management is essential, particularly through the proactive observation, collection, and analysis of information from diverse social media sources. Contemporary technological tools empower organizations to monitor online discourse in real-time, enabling rapid issue identification and efficient response, thus curtailing negative reputational impacts. This technological innovation and rapid response capability are vital for maintaining the digital reputation, public trust, and business sustainability of a large, high-risk holding company like MIND ID. Proactive issue management ensures active digital platform surveillance to detect early indicators of reputational attacks, swiftly correct misinformation, and preserve transparency in stakeholder communication.

Research Question

Issue management is a crucial element in maintaining and developing a digital reputation (Forcadell et al., 2020). This study specifically seeks to understand How is the issue management of MIND ID implemented in maintaining and developing the digital reputation of the mining holding company in the face of ESG issues?

Literature Review

Effective management of digital reputation necessitates an integrated approach founded on established concepts of issue and reputation management, all adapted for the dynamic digital age. This chapter will delineate key theoretical concepts, including Online Reputation Management (ORM), the issue management process, and associated reputational risks such as cyber defamation and character assassination, which are essential considerations for organizations like MIND ID operating in high-risk sectors.

Online Reputation Management (ORM)

Online Reputation Management is formally defined as the strategic process of monitoring, influencing, and managing how an organization, brand, or individual is perceived across various digital platforms. The central objective of ORM is to ensure that positive digital content achieves prominence in search engine results and social media platforms, thereby mitigating the visibility and potential impact of negative information.

Effective ORM demands active participation on social media, real-time monitoring, and a rapid crisis response capability. Its scope transcends merely handling negative reports to encompass the deliberate management of both positive and negative reports. Digital communication strategies in ORM are generally categorized based on their origin (positive or negative content) and their nature (active or reactive engagement).

1. Active-Positive: The organization proactively disseminates positive content to build and reinforce its reputation. This includes campaigns and positive messaging (Kaiser, 2011, as cited in Portmann 2013, pp. 79; van Gaalen, 2009).
2. Active-Negative: Disseminating negative information about competitors or counteracting potential threats.
3. Reactive-Positive: Responding to and promoting existing positive content about the organization.
4. Reactive-Negative (Issue Management): Responding to existing negative content to reduce its adverse impact. This involves managing complaints and negative messages to minimize their visibility in search results (Portmann, 2013, pp. 79).

ORM is fundamentally interwoven with Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing. Its ultimate goal is to protect and enhance reputation by strategically influencing search engine results and effectively leveraging positive stakeholder testimonials (Beal & Strauss, 2008; Dover, 2011; Silverman, 2011, as cited in Portmann 2013, pp. 81).

The Online Reputation Analysis Process

The effective analysis of online reputation involves three critical stages: Scanning, Monitoring, and Forecasting (Portmann, 2013, pp. 82). Scanning (Stage I): This initial detection phase involves continuous environmental analysis to identify early changes that could potentially

affect the organization. In this stage, automated text analysis (sentiment analysis, Natural Language Processing/NLP) can process data from the social web, although human expertise remains crucial for interpreting this data into meaningful information (Sterne, 2011, as cited in Portmann, 2013, pp. 82). The challenge here is managing information overload to filter raw data into manageable issues.

Monitoring (Stage II): Following identification, monitoring focuses on continuous, targeted observation of issues deemed important. Unlike scanning (which is broad), monitoring is deductive, focusing on previously identified reputational threats across social platforms. It is crucial because information can flow from the social web to traditional media, increasing the potential impact. **Forecasting (Stage III):** This final stage uses predictive techniques (like scenario planning or trend analysis) to anticipate future issues related to business activities. The goal is to predict trends based on historical data, though predictions are often inexact. Because digital media demands rapid response, analysis often feeds directly into forecasting, requiring well-trained communication personnel for interpretation and analysis.

Issue Management Process

Issue management is a proactive, strategic process developed to identify, evaluate, and respond to socio-political issues that may significantly affect a company's reputation and operational scope (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 280–281). By adopting a proactive stance, organizations prevent latent issues from escalating into major crises.

The classic issue management framework consists of four primary stages: (1) Environmental Scanning, this involves the deep analysis of variables across commercial, economic, political, technological, social, and cultural environments to understand potential changes. Tools like DESTEP (Demographic, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological, and Political factors) and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) are utilized to identify relevant trends and potential issues that concern both the organization and its stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 284–285).

Issue Identification and Analysis, the purpose of this stage is to determine the intensity, public interest, and urgency of an identified issue. Analysis assesses the issue's persistence, the organization's capacity to influence its resolution, and the identity of key stakeholders involved (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 286). A valuable tool for this stage is the Position-Importance Matrix, which maps stakeholders and the public based on their position (support or opposition, scaled -5 to +5) towards an issue, and their importance (0 to 10) to the organization.

Issue-specific Response Strategies, based on the analysis, organizations choose one of three primary response strategies (Cornelissen, 2014, pp. 286): **Buffering (Delay/Avoidance):** Strategies aimed at resisting external demands or delaying the issue's development by maintaining existing organizational behavior and limiting public communication. Tactics include decision postponement, remaining silent (non-reaction), and avoiding involvement with external demands, **Bridging (Adaptation/Dialogue):** Involves recognizing the issue, acknowledging external expectations, and adjusting organizational activities to align with stakeholder concerns. This is achieved through transparent reporting (e.g., environmental performance) and open dialogue, **Advocacy (Influence/Lobbying):** Aimed at actively altering public opinion and stakeholder expectations through issue campaigns and lobbying efforts to align them with the organization's views and practices. This requires strong public persuasion to frame the organization's position as rational and morally sound.

Evaluation, the final stage evaluates the evolution of the issue and the resulting changes in public opinion and stakeholder expectations. This assessment determines whether the chosen strategy (buffering, bridging, or advocacy) successfully influenced public opinion and was positively received by stakeholders. For instance, evaluation for bridging assesses whether transparency successfully built trust.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This research operates under the post-positivist paradigm, which recognizes that scientific claims are tentative and must be open to continuous testing and questioning. The post-positivist framework necessitates that research hypotheses remain open to the possibility of falsification. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in the post-positivist paradigm, recognizing that scientific claims are tentative and require continuous testing and questioning. An intrinsic single case study focusing on MIND ID was utilized to gain deep insights into the “how” and “why” of its issue management practices.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants relevant to issue management, including a Director (Peak Management/Decision Maker), a Division Head, a Department Head, and an Issue Implementer from MIND ID, plus two Media Industry Actors, this was supplemented by document studies, such as the company’s Annual Report, Sustainability Report (2023), and Media Monitoring Reports (October 2023–June 2024).

The primary technique used for data analysis was pattern matching (Yin, 2018). This technique involves systematically comparing empirical data patterns collected through interviews and documents against the established theoretical propositions laid out in the theoretical framework. Data gathered was coded using categories corresponding to the elements of the theoretical framework. If the identified patterns align with the propositions, the initial hypothesis is supported; conversely, deviations require the revision of the hypothesis.

Findings

The research found that MIND ID implements a comprehensive five-stage proactive issue management framework (Identify, Capture, Plan, Mitigate, and Validate) which expands upon the traditional four-stage model (Cornelissen, 2014) to suit the high-risk digital environment of a mining holding company. This proactive approach aims not only to safeguard digital reputation but also to actively develop it.

This framework aligns with the concept that effective reputation management in the digital age requires a proactive system centered on continuous issue monitoring and data-driven decision-making.

Identify (Environmental Scanning)

The initial stage, Identify, focuses on early warning detection and intensive environmental monitoring to recognize and detect potential issues before they escalate into crises. This stage

expands on Cornelissen’s traditional Environmental Scanning by incorporating specific data-driven tools.

Table 1

MIND ID’s Implementation Elements for the Identify

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Issue Identification through Risk Assessment	Potential issues are prioritized based on risk levels and categorized using the six pillars of the MIND ID Sustainability Pathway (e.g., Environment & Climate Change; Governance). This process helps prevent minor issues from escalating into major crises by addressing problems early. For instance, the “Dirty Nickel” issue was categorized as having high expectation and high risk
Corporate KPI	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to reputation and stakeholder satisfaction are used to measure management effectiveness. These KPIs are newly implemented in 2024 to assess the health of the company’s reputation. Monitoring KPI changes (e.g., a drop in community satisfaction) allows MIND ID to take immediate corrective action
Stakeholder Mapping	Critical internal and external stakeholders (e.g., local communities, investors, government) are mapped using power-interest grids to understand their influence and relationship to the issue. This mapping helps determine which stakeholders must be prioritized for communication and involvement
Historical Data Media Monitoring	Analyzing past media data and trends (e.g., prior pollution incidents or labor issues) allows the company to identify recurring patterns. This knowledge informs proactive strategies, ensuring readiness before similar problems resurface

Capture (Issue Identification and Analysis)

The Capture stage focuses on intensive, real-time data collection and analysis related to a specific, detected issue, thus expanding the scope of initial Issue Identification and Analysis (Cornelissen, 2014).

Table 2*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Capture*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Media Monitoring on Realtime-Issue	Employing technology to detect and respond to developing issues rapidly, often identifying negative news or shifting public sentiment within hours. This enables immediate response to negative coverage (e.g., corruption allegations)
Survey On-Site	Conducting physical surveys in operational areas (e.g., nickel mines) to gather immediate empirical data on environmental quality (air/water) or working conditions to ensure response accuracy and transparency
Survey Perception	Gathering stakeholder perceptions (e.g., from local communities, investors) to understand external views of the issue, aiding in adjusting corrective actions and communications

Plan (Issue-Specific Response Strategies)

MIND ID executes its strategic response planning (Plan) across four steps, emphasizing Stakeholder Engagement and the control of public narrative.

Table 3*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Plan Stage*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Stakeholder Engagement	Active dialogue with primary stakeholders (e.g., local communities, investors) is crucial for developing robust, supported, and comprehensive mitigation plans. This reduces resistance to new projects and supports sustainability pillars
Agenda Setting Plan	A structured approach (often monthly) defining key messages and communication strategies, prioritizing issues, and ensuring consistency with corporate values. Effectiveness is regularly measured by the Ministry of BUMN

Mitigate (Issue-Specific Response Strategies: Implementation)

This stage focuses on executing the planned strategy to reduce negative exposure and impact.

Table 4*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Mitigate Stage*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Content & Narrative Development	Crafting clear, transparent, and consistent messages that highlight corporate commitment and responsibility. Narratives counter negative campaigns (e.g., “Dirty Nickel” motives) and emphasize operational efficiency
Publication	Disseminating the developed narrative through targeted channels (website, press releases, social media, media interviews) to ensure wide reach and positive opinion promotion. Timely and consistent release is essential

Validate (Evaluation)

The final stage, Validate, assesses the success of the intervention and provides feedback for continuous improvement, going beyond Cornelissen’s traditional Evaluation phase.

Table 5*MIND ID's Implementation Elements for the Validate (Evaluation) Stage*

Implementation Element	Point of Detail
Scoring Agenda Setting	Quantitatively assessing the effectiveness of implemented steps against planned objectives. This scoring system helps determine if communication strategies successfully influenced public opinion and achieved the desired goals
Monitoring & Evaluation	Continuous quantitative and qualitative measurement of impact, such as measuring environmental changes or local satisfaction levels after intervention. This determines if the issue has been thoroughly resolved
Media Monitoring & Evaluation on Relevant Issue	Analyzing post-mitigation media coverage and public sentiment change. For example, monitoring successfully neutralized negative hashtags (e.g., #RampokdiMIT was removed within 2 hours), and tracking dominant positive media exposure on environmental initiatives (262 positive articles vs. 7 negative articles in June 2024)

Discussion

The implementation of issue management by MIND ID confirms the theoretical argument that a proactive system is central to successfully managing high-risk digital reputation. The findings demonstrate that MIND ID adapts and expands the conventional issue management framework (Cornelissen, 2014) into a robust, five-stage process (Identify, Capture, Plan, Mitigate, and Validate) to suit the unique challenges of the mining sector in the digital age. This approach prioritizes early detection and strategic coordination, overcoming the traditional limitations of reactive crisis management.

Proactive Issue Management and Digital Reputation

The core principle driving MIND ID's strategy is proactivity, primarily achieved through intense real-time media monitoring.

Technological Integration for Early Detection

The transition from traditional environmental scanning to the Identify and Capture stages highlights the central role of technology in reputation management. MIND ID uses advanced monitoring tools to track online conversations and shifts in public sentiment across various digital platforms in real-time. This real-time capability allows the company to detect early signs of reputational attacks, such as cyber defamation and character assassination, which are frequent risks for high-reputation-risk entities like mining companies. This immediate detection capability ensures issues are identified within hours, preventing minor problems from escalating into major crises. Academically, this supports the argument that continuous digital monitoring is the most critical factor for effective reputation management.

Data-Driven Decision Making

The extensive use of data, particularly through Corporate KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and Historical Data Media Monitoring, moves the process beyond subjective assessment. KPIs tied directly to reputation and stakeholder satisfaction allow MIND ID to quantitatively measure management effectiveness and pinpoint areas needing immediate improvement, such as declines in local community satisfaction. By analyzing historical data on recurring issues (e.g., environmental concerns), the company can anticipate future problems and prepare proactive strategies, reinforcing the predictive element necessary for successful Online Reputation Management (ORM). This data-driven approach strengthens the theoretical argument that effective issue management must be transparent and rooted in accurate, relevant information.

Stakeholder Engagement as a Central Strategic Element

The findings underscore that Stakeholder Engagement is not merely a communication function but a central strategic element integrated across the entire framework, particularly in the Plan and Mitigate stages.

Legitimacy in Critical Sectors

For a holding company in the critical mining sector, dealing with complex ESG issues (such as "Dirty Nickel") requires robust legitimacy. MIND ID addresses this by emphasizing that defining critical issues must have a clear legal basis and align with the company's six Sustainability Pillars (Environment & Climate Change; Society; Economic Development). This strategic alignment ensures that external communications about positive contributions (e.g., managing waste, supporting local economic development) are consistent and aimed at reducing social friction and resistance to new explorations.

Strategic Prioritization Through Mapping

MIND ID utilizes detailed Stakeholder Mapping (using power-interest grids) to categorize stakeholders (e.g., Key Player, Context Setter, Subject, Crowd). This allows for the efficient

allocation of limited resources by prioritizing engagement with the most influential and interested parties (Key Players), ensuring strategic communication is tailored to specific groups, such as addressing investor concerns about environmental impact or managing media narratives about community issues. This inclusive, collaborative approach, exemplified by working with academic institutions like IPB on mitigation strategies, builds trust and ensures response plans are robust and supported externally.

Strategic Response and Narrative Control

The success of MIND ID's reputation management is heavily dependent on controlling the narrative through effective response strategies.

Proactive Narrative Shaping (Agenda Setting)

MIND ID employs a formal Agenda Setting Plan to define key messages and publication priorities, often conducted monthly. This proactive shaping of the narrative is crucial for steering media attention toward positive corporate actions (e.g., environmental initiatives like tree planting or CSR programs) and away from negative issues. The effectiveness of this agenda setting is quantitatively assessed through scoring, which includes measuring the percentage of negative news coverage against positive coverage.

Mitigating Cyber Attacks

In cases involving high-risk attacks like character assassination against the CEO, the Mitigate stage involves swift and targeted counter-measures. For example, in managing the negative hashtag #RampokdiMIT, MIND ID used strategic interventions (including competitive hashtag use) to dilute the negative narrative, resulting in the hashtag being neutralized within two hours. This rapid, technology-driven intervention showcases the effectiveness of a proactive, coordinated response in minimizing the impact of reputation threats in the highly dynamic social media environment.

Conclusion

MIND ID implements a comprehensive and proactive issue management process, which is crucial for safeguarding and cultivating its digital reputation, particularly when confronting complex Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues, given the high reputational risks faced by mining companies, including cyber defamation and character assassination. This strategy adapts conventional models into a robust five-stage framework: Identify, Capture, Plan, Mitigate, and Validate. The effectiveness of this system hinges on the use of real-time media monitoring and advanced technology for early detection, enabling the organization to rapidly identify emerging issues and swiftly correct misinformation, ensuring transparency with stakeholders. Data collection in the Capture phase is comprehensive, relying not only on media monitoring but also onsite surveys and perception surveys to gather accurate, empirical information regarding the issue's impact, forming a strong foundation for developing strategic responses.

The implementation of this proactive model has significant implications, theoretically arguing that constant, technology-driven monitoring of issue developments on digital media is the most critical factor in effective reputation management. The framework demonstrates the necessity of integrating data-driven decision-making and continuous evaluation (the Validate phase) to

ensure accountability and organizational learning. Practically, this model serves as a reference for companies operating in high-risk environments, emphasizing the need for comprehensive empirical data collection, clear and consistent content and narrative development, and active engagement with stakeholders to build legitimacy and trust.

For future academic contributions, it is recommended to conduct further research, such as comparative analysis between the MIND ID model and other national or international mining companies, to identify industry best practices and understand how contextual differences influence issue management effectiveness regarding ESG issues. There should also be a dedicated focus on exploring the role of advanced digital technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics in enhancing predictive capabilities and increasing the speed and accuracy of corporate response. Additionally, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the long-term effectiveness of these proactive strategies on digital reputation and stakeholder trust, ensuring the continuous development and improvement of the strategic framework for managing complex issues in the dynamic digital environment.

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Contact email: pratiwa.dyatmika@mind.id