



ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON X SOCIAL MEDIA REGARDING GOVERNMENT RESPONSE NARRATIVES TO THE 2025 SUMATRA FLOOD AND LANDSLIDE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze public perception on social media X regarding the narrative of the government's response to the 2025 Sumatra flood and landslide crisis through the perspective of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This study uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method on 59 public posts consisting of tweets, tweet replies, and tweet quotes during the period of November–December 2025. Data were selected purposively based on relevance to the issue of the government's response, then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, open coding, theme grouping, and theoretical interpretation using SCCT. The results show that public perception is dominated by critical evaluations of the government, especially regarding responses that are considered slow and inadequate, crisis communication that lacks empathy, policy inaccuracy, and the public's tendency to associate disasters with structural issues such as environmental damage and government governance. The findings also show a perception of regional injustice between the central and regional governments, although there is a small amount of support and ambivalent evaluation. From the SCCT perspective, crises that can be objectively categorized as victim crises tend to be perceived by the public as close to preventable crises due to the high attribution of responsibility to the government. This study confirms that social media X plays a crucial role as a digital space in shaping public perceptions, collective emotions, attributions of responsibility, and legitimacy toward government communications in crisis situations.

Keywords: Public Perception, Crisis Communication, Social Media X, SCCT, Sumatra Floods

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2025, the regions of Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra experienced a hydrometeorological crisis in the form of floods and landslides, which caused widespread humanitarian, social, economic, and infrastructure impacts. These disasters not only damaged settlements, public facilities, and transportation routes, but also placed

significant pressure on the government's capacity to handle emergencies, distribute aid, restore affected areas, and disseminate information to the public. In a crisis, the government's response is judged not only on the technical aspects of the disaster, but also on its ability to establish rapid, empathetic, transparent, and credible communication. National media coverage indicates that the government's response to the Sumatran floods and landslides has drawn public scrutiny, particularly regarding the lack of national disaster status and the growing pressure for the central government to take stronger action due to limited regional fiscal capacity to sustainably manage the impact of disasters (Tempo.co, 2025a). This situation demonstrates that disasters are not simply natural events but also serve as an arena for public evaluation of the government's capacity, commitment, and legitimacy in responding to crises.

The Sumatran flood and landslide crisis also demonstrates the complex relationship between natural factors and structural issues. On the one hand, the disaster was triggered by extreme rainfall, river overflows, and soil instability in several disaster-prone areas. However, on the other hand, several analyses have identified environmental damage, land conversion, deforestation, and unsustainable spatial planning as factors that exacerbate the risk and impact of the disaster (Hasyim, 2025). Therefore, this crisis cannot be understood solely as a natural event in its own right, but also as a matter of environmental governance and public policy. When the public perceives the disaster as related to policy, negligence, or governance failure, public perception of the government tends to shift from simply assessing the emergency response to a broader assessment of the state's structural responsibility. In this context, government communication becomes crucial, as the narratives constructed during the crisis can either strengthen or weaken public trust.

The media plays a strategic role in shaping how the public understands and assesses the crisis. From a communication perspective, the media serves not only as a channel for conveying information but also as a space for the production of social meaning, an arena for the exchange of opinions, and a medium for the formation of collective perceptions (Batubara, 2012). Messages appearing in the media can be used to gauge public opinion trends, construct reality, and emotional responses to an event (Kriyanto, 2022). In disaster situations, social media further expands these functions by enabling the public to quickly and openly convey experiences, criticism, solidarity, demands, and even disappointments. Social media serves not only as a platform for disseminating situational information but also as an arena for crisis communication, demonstrating how the public assesses the government's presence, policy effectiveness, and the communication sensitivity of public officials (Nur & Akbar, 2024). Therefore, analyzing public conversations on social media is crucial to understanding how government legitimacy is formed, negotiated, or questioned in crisis situations.

Among various social media platforms, X has unique characteristics as a digital public communication space that is real-time, open, responsive, and based on rapid interaction. Through short posts, replies, and quote tweets, X users can build collective conversations about the crisis, disseminate information, express emotions, and assess government actions. Public perception, in this context, can be understood as a collective meaning-making process formed through the interaction of community experiences, information flows, social emotions, and the political context surrounding an event (Fitri Jayanti & Arista, 2018). Perceptions of the government's response are crucial because they directly relate to trust, credibility, and the legitimacy of public policy (Hastrida, 2023). If

government communication is perceived as slow, non-transparent, inconsistent, or lacking empathy, negative public perceptions can intensify and develop into criticism of the government's capacity and responsibility in handling the crisis (Sulistiyowati & Hasanah, 2021).

The dynamics of public perception of the government's response to a crisis can be analyzed using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This theory emphasizes that the public constructs attributions of responsibility toward crisis actors based on the type of crisis, its history, its prior reputation, and the communication strategies employed in response (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019). In the context of natural disasters, the government can essentially be positioned as the victim of a crisis, as the crisis is triggered by external factors beyond the direct control of the organization or institution. However, in the digital public sphere, this crisis category can shift if the public perceives the government as having failed to mitigate the situation, being slow in its response, lacking empathy in its communication, or being linked to structural issues that exacerbate the disaster's impact. SCCT is relevant because it explains how public perceptions of government responsibility and reputation are shaped not only by the crisis itself but also by the narrative, response, and quality of communication that emerge during the crisis (Atasoy et al., 2021).

Previous research on flood disasters in Indonesia has extensively discussed government responses, institutional capacity, crisis communication strategies, policy evaluation, and mapping public conversations. However, studies specifically examining public perception on social media X as a process of forming meaning, emotions, criticism, and attribution of responsibility to the government in the large-scale flood and landslide crisis are still relatively limited. This gap is important to examine because public conversations on social media not only record momentary opinions, but also show how the public assesses the presence of the state, regional justice, policy accuracy, and empathy of government communication in emergency situations. Therefore, this study aims to analyze public perception on social media X regarding the narrative of the government's response to the 2025 Sumatran flood and landslide crisis through the perspective of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of digital crisis communication studies as well as practical contributions to the government in designing crisis communications that are more responsive, empathetic, transparent, and oriented towards public trust.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical approach using qualitative content analysis. This approach was chosen because the research did not aim to statistically measure public perception, but rather to understand the meaning, narrative tendencies, emotional expressions, and attributions of responsibility that emerged in public conversations on social media platform X regarding the government's response to the 2025 Sumatran flood and landslide crisis. In qualitative research, social reality is understood as contextual and shaped through the experiences, interactions, and construction of meaning by social subjects (Sugiyono, 2013). Therefore, qualitative content analysis was used to interpret public messages that emerge naturally in the digital

space, particularly because social media is a crucial platform for shaping public opinion, perceptions, and evaluations of government crisis communications (Kriyanto, 2022). Therefore, this method is relevant for examining how the public constructs assessments of response speed, communication empathy, policy accuracy, and government responsibility in crisis situations.

The data source for this study was public posts on social media platform X related to the flood and landslide crisis in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra. The data analyzed consisted of 59 public posts, consisting of tweets, tweet replies, and quote tweets published between November and December 2025. This time period was chosen because it represents a period of high public conversation intensity regarding the Sumatran flood and landslide crisis. Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation, where researchers observed and documented publicly available posts without engaging in digital conversations. Data were searched using relevant keywords and hashtags, such as #PrayForSumatera, #AllEyesOnSumatera, #SumateraBerduka, and other keywords related to floods, landslides, disaster victims, aid, national disaster status, and government responses. Data selection was conducted using purposive sampling with the following criteria: posts originated from public accounts, contained discussions about the government's response, contained elements of opinion, criticism, emotion, support, demands, or attribution of responsibility, and were published within the research period. This technique was used because purposive sampling allowed researchers to select data most relevant to the focus and objectives of the study (Akturan, 2025).

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the researchers conducted data reduction by selecting posts that aligned with the research focus and removing posts that were irrelevant, duplicative, or did not contain an assessment of the government's response. Second, the collected data were analyzed through open coding to identify initial meanings emerging from the texts, such as criticism of slow responses, lack of empathetic communication, policy inaccuracy, regional injustice, attributions of environmental damage, and ambivalent support or evaluations of the government. Third, codes with similar meanings were grouped into broader thematic categories and then analytically interpreted using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). SCCT is used as an interpretive lens to understand how the public constructs attributions of responsibility toward the government based on narratives, actions, policies, and communications that emerge during the crisis (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019). To maintain data validity, this study employed repeated readings of the data, consistency in the coding process, recording the context of the posts, and interpretations based on the alignment between the empirical data, thematic categories, and the theoretical framework. In this way, the results of the analysis are expected to be able to describe public perception in depth, systematically and contextually regarding government crisis communication on social media X.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This research focuses on analyzing public perceptions of the government's response to the 2025 Sumatra flood and landslide crisis, as articulated on social media platform X. The research data consists of 59 public posts published between November and December 2025, consisting of 37 tweets, 14 tweet replies, and 8 quote tweets. All data comes from

public, non-institutional individual accounts and is written in Indonesian. The data were selected because they contain opinions, assessments, emotions, or attributions regarding the government's response during the crisis. Therefore, the data in this study are not positioned as a statistical representation of the entire population, but rather as a form of public perception articulated openly in the digital space.

Table 1. Summary of thematic categories of public perception

Category	Support Code	Short Meaning
Government communication was perceived as poor and unempathetic.	Criticism of communication and lack of empathy, criticism of officials/image/inappropriate behavior, distrust/delegitimization of the government	The public believes that government communications lack empathy, tend to downplay the situation, and lead to a decline in trust in the government.
Government policies were deemed inappropriate in handling the crisis.	Criticism of the national disaster status, criticism of foreign aid policies	The public views the government's strategic decisions as inconsistent with the severity of the crisis and the needs of victims on the ground.
Government response and handling were deemed slow and inadequate.	Slow/unresponsive, inadequate aid/handling, weak budget/state capacity, poor coordination/leadership/information flow	The public perceives the government as incapable of handling the crisis quickly, adequately, and in an organized manner.
The government was perceived as partly responsible for the structural roots of the disaster.	Structural causes/damaging policies	The public does not interpret the disaster as solely a natural factor, but rather associates it with policies, negligence, and structural damage involving the government.
Disaster management was perceived as unfair to areas outside the center of power.	Regional/central-regional injustice	The public perceives an imbalance in the state's attention and priorities for affected areas outside the center of power.
Public perception also contained ambivalent support and evaluations.	Ambivalent appreciation/support/evaluation	Some members of the public continue to express support or mixed assessments of the government, although often accompanied by criticism.

Research findings indicate that public perception on social media X of the government's response to the 2025 Sumatra flood and landslide crisis was dominated by critical evaluations. This criticism was directed not only at the slow technical response but also at the quality of government communication, which was deemed to lack empathy, insufficient responsiveness, and inability to convincingly represent the state's presence amidst the victims' suffering. In the context of crisis communication, the public not only requires factual information regarding disaster conditions, the number of victims, aid distribution, or response policies, but also requires communication that demonstrates concern, clarity, openness, and a commitment to the affected communities. When

government communication is perceived as cold, defensive, slow, or overly administrative, the message conveyed is no longer read simply as information, but as an indicator of low empathy and weak moral responsibility. This aligns with the view that media serves as a space for the formation of social meaning, where the public assesses the actions of public actors through circulating messages, symbols, and narratives (Batubara, 2012; Kriyanto, 2022). Thus, the negative perceptions emerging in X demonstrate that government communication in crisis situations is not merely informative but must also build trust, emotional closeness, and public legitimacy.

From a Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) perspective, these findings indicate that the public forms a high attribution of responsibility toward the government. Conceptually, natural disasters such as floods and landslides can be categorized as victim crises, as the government also faces crises triggered by external factors such as extreme rainfall and regional geographic conditions. However, public conversations on X's social media show that the public does not interpret this crisis as a purely natural disaster. Instead, the public associates the crisis with a slow response, policy inaccuracy, weak coordination, and a lack of empathy in government communications. In SCCT, the higher the public's assessment of negligence, failure to anticipate, or inaccurate organizational response, the greater the attribution of responsibility and reputational threat attached to that actor (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019). Therefore, the crisis, objectively close to a victim crisis in this study, experienced a shift in perception toward a preventable crisis, as the public perceived elements of governance failure and the government's inability to mitigate the crisis's impact. This shift is significant because it demonstrates that public perception is shaped not only by the objective causes of disasters, but also by the quality of the government's response and narrative during the crisis.

Beyond technical and communication responses, research findings also show that the public links the Sumatran flood and landslide crisis to structural issues, such as deforestation, environmental degradation, land conversion, and unsustainable spatial governance. In this context, the public no longer positions the government solely as an actor in disaster management, but also as an actor perceived as having responsibility for the root causes that exacerbate disaster risk. This narrative demonstrates a shift in perception from a natural crisis to a governance crisis. This means that the public perceives disasters not solely as the result of natural factors but also as related to policy decisions, weak environmental oversight, and the permissiveness of practices that damage ecosystems. This view aligns with the understanding that public perception is formed through the interaction of experience, information, social context, and assessments of actors perceived as having authority to address public issues (Fitri Jayanti & Arista, 2018; Hastrida, 2023). Therefore, public criticism of the government is not only a momentary emotional reaction, but also a form of social evaluation of the state's capacity to manage risks, prevent vulnerabilities, and develop policies oriented towards public safety.

Another important finding is the emergence of perceptions of regional injustice in the government's response to the Sumatra crisis. Some members of the public believe that affected areas outside the center of power have not received equal attention, whether in terms of disaster status determination, communication intensity, or response priorities. This perception suggests that crisis communication is not only related to the speed and accuracy of information, but also to the public's sense of symbolic justice toward the

state's presence. When the public perceives that the suffering of victims in the regions is not receiving comparable attention, government communication can lose legitimacy even if technical policies are still implemented. In the context of social media, such perceptions can spread rapidly because X allows the public to construct a collective narrative through real-time criticism, solidarity, and demands for justice. This reinforces the view that social media serves as an arena for public evaluation of crisis communication, where collective emotions, attributions of responsibility, and government legitimacy are openly negotiated (Nur & Akbar, 2024; Sulistyowati & Hasanah, 2021). Thus, this discussion emphasizes that government responses to disaster crises must be understood comprehensively, not merely as administrative actions, but as public communication practices that determine the state's trust, reputation, and legitimacy before the public.

Discussion from the Perspective of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Research findings indicate that public perception on social media platform X regarding the government's response to the 2025 Sumatran flood and landslide crisis can be interpreted as a process of attribution of responsibility toward the government. From a Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) perspective, public perception of a crisis is determined not only by the type of crisis that occurs, but also by how actors deemed responsible respond, communicate, and construct narratives during the crisis (Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019). Objectively, the floods and landslides can be categorized as a victim crisis because they were triggered by natural factors, such as extreme rainfall, soil instability, and river overflows. However, field data shows that the public on social media platform X did not fully interpret this crisis as a natural disaster beyond the government's control. Instead, the public developed a critical perception that the government bears significant responsibility, particularly because the response was perceived as slow, aid was deemed inadequate, communication lacked empathy, and management policies did not fully address the victims' needs. Thus, in the construction of public perception, the crisis, which was initially close to a victim crisis, experienced a shift in meaning toward a preventable crisis because the public perceived elements of negligence, unpreparedness, or failure of governance in mitigating the impact of the disaster.

In the context of SCCT, high levels of public attribution of responsibility to the government increase reputational threats and undermine the government's legitimacy in the digital public sphere. Research findings show that public criticism is directed not only at technical government actions but also at the quality of crisis communications, which are perceived as lacking empathy. Government communications that are perceived as slow, defensive, intransparent, or that prioritize the image of officials over the suffering of victims can amplify negative public emotions. This is crucial because in crisis situations, government messages are understood not only as administrative information but also as symbols of the state's moral presence. When crisis communications fail to demonstrate concern, clarity, and support for victims, the public tends to interpret the government as unresponsive to the public's suffering. Within the SCCT framework, this situation indicates a mismatch between the type of crisis and the communication strategies that should be employed. Crises with increased levels of attribution of responsibility require more accommodating communication strategies, such as empathy, apologies, open

explanations, corrective actions, and commitments to recovery, rather than simply providing formal information or administrative clarifications (Atasoy et al., 2021; Kriyantono & McKenna, 2019).

Public perception of the crisis also evolved from evaluating the emergency response to critiquing the structural roots of the disaster. Field findings indicate that some members of the public linked floods and landslides to deforestation, land conversion, environmental damage, and weak policy governance. From a SCCT perspective, this expanded narrative reinforces the attribution of responsibility because the public no longer sees the government solely as a crisis management actor but also as an actor obligated to prevent structural conditions that exacerbate disaster risk. This means the government is perceived as failing not only in the response phase but also in the mitigation and prevention phases. When the public links the crisis to perceived problematic environmental and spatial planning policies, the government's reputational burden increases, as the crisis is understood to be the result of preventable actions or omissions. In this regard, social media X becomes a collective articulation space that allows the public to construct a narrative that disasters are not merely natural phenomena but also the consequence of governance failures. This perception aligns with the view that social media in crisis situations serves as an arena for emotional expression, criticism, solidarity, and public evaluation of authoritative actors (Nur & Akbar, 2024; Sulistyowati & Hasanah, 2021).

Furthermore, findings on regional injustice demonstrate that the attribution of responsibility in SCCT relates not only to the effectiveness of the response but also to the public's perception of fairness regarding the state's presence. Some public posts believe that Sumatra, as an affected region, has not received equal attention from the central government, both in terms of disaster status determination, distribution of political attention, and intensity of public communication. This perception suggests that government crisis communication must not merely explain the actions taken but must also be able to convince the public that the state is present fairly for all affected citizens. When the public perceives an imbalance in attention between the central and regional governments, the government's legitimacy can be weakened even if the government has taken technical steps to address the disaster. From an SCCT perspective, this emphasizes that the government's reputation in a crisis is shaped by the interaction between the factual response, communication narrative, attribution of responsibility, and the public's emotional experience. Therefore, this discussion emphasizes the need for the government to implement more empathetic, transparent, consistent, and accommodating crisis communication to prevent public perception from developing into delegitimization. Thus, social media X not only functions as a space for disseminating opinions, but also as an arena for forming attributions of responsibility and reputational assessments of the government in crisis situations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that public perception on social media X regarding the narrative of the government's response to the 2025 Sumatran flood and landslide crisis was dominated by critical assessments related not only to the technical aspects of disaster management, but also to the quality of communication, empathy, policy accuracy, regional

justice, and the government's structural responsibility. The public perceived the government's response as slow, inadequate, and lacking in an empathetic state presence amidst the suffering of the affected communities. From the perspective of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this finding indicates that the public builds a high attribution of responsibility towards the government, so that crises that can be objectively understood as natural disasters tend to be interpreted as crises that are closer to preventable crises because they are considered related to the failure of mitigation, environmental governance, crisis communication, and policy-making. Thus, social media X plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions, collective emotions, public criticism, and government legitimacy during the crisis. This finding emphasizes that government crisis communication needs to be carried out more quickly, transparently, empathetically, consistently, and justice-oriented in order to maintain public trust and strengthen the state's legitimacy in facing large-scale disasters.

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