

Roland Barthes' Analysis of Image Restoration Theory in Digital Era of The Film "Budi Pekerti"

Tri Fitri Nurul Aeni ^{*,a,1}, Riski Apriliani ^{b,2}, Sayfiddinkhon Akbarovich Sultonov ^{c,3}

^{a,b} Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia

^g Westminster International University in Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan

¹100210270@student.ums.ac.id, ²ra124@ums.id, ³ssultonov3@students.wiut.uz

Abstract

Films, within the field of communication studies, function as media for conveying social, cultural, moral, and political messages through structured systems of signs and narrative forms. This study examines the issue of image restoration in the film *Budi Pekerti*, which portrays moral conflict and a reputation crisis unfolding within the dynamics of digital communication. This issue is significant because social media has transformed interpersonal interaction and accelerated new mechanisms in the construction of public opinion. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this study utilizes textual observation and literature review as data collection techniques. Roland Barthes's semiotic theory is applied to interpret visual and narrative signs, while William Benoit's Image Restoration Theory is used to analyze the crisis communication strategies depicted. The analysis proceeds through three stages: identifying denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. The findings indicate that the five image restoration strategies—denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification—do not necessarily succeed in fully repairing a damaged reputation. Furthermore, *Budi Pekerti* illustrates image restoration not only as a communicative tactic but also as a process of moral transformation grounded in empathy and accountability. This study offers a novel contribution by integrating semiotic analysis with crisis communication theory to illuminate the moral dimensions of individual image recovery within Indonesian digital culture. Nevertheless, limitations arise from the absence of empirical audience data and the inherent subjectivity of semiotic interpretation. Future research should incorporate online surveys or audience perception studies to enrich and validate the analytical findings.

Keywords: Crisis, Film, Image Restoration Theory, Public Relations, Roland Barthes, Social Media

1. Introduction

Film is a form of audio-visual artistic expression that is not only useful as a medium of entertainment but also as a representation of social reality in society, including digital culture, regarding how public opinion and perception are formed through social media (Ismandianto & Sari, 2021). The use of social media enables the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, which can create a phenomenon of virality that is often used as a topic of online discussion, in the form of memes, videos, photos, and articles (Igben & Acchugbue, 2024). In the process of going viral, disinformation can occur where misleading information is deliberately spread to influence public perception with the aim of causing chaos (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). Public judgment is formed based on narratives that may not necessarily correspond to the actual context and conditions, making image crises easy to occur on social media. Reputation is vital in life because self-esteem influences how others treat us. When someone is accused of wrongdoing, the accused will try to repair their image (Benoit, 2015). The film *Budi Pekerti* (2023) illustrates how social media can destroy a person's reputation in an instant due to viral shaming from the spread of information snippets on social media, social pressure, and power imbalances.

In a recent study by (Rueyanno & Andhita, 2021) named "Implementation of Image Restoration Theory in the Film Hancock," the authors discuss the use of image restoration theory in the film

Hancock (2008), which shows that denial, corrective action, and mortification successfully restored Hancock's image. Ramadhani & Oktaviani (2023) in their study entitled "Content Analysis of Image Restoration Theory in the Film Sully 2016" found that the character Sully used three effective strategies, namely reduce of offensiveness, denial, and corrective action. Afkhami et al. (2025) in their study entitled "Arvan Cloud Muckraking by Geeks: A YouTube Crisis Communication," discussed how Image Restoration Theory was applied by an Iranian startup company accused of disrupting the internet network in Iran through the Arvan Cloud YouTube channel using several IRT strategies: minimization, compensation, differentiation, defensibility, corrective action, and mortification. This resulted in the company's efforts to repair its image through the Radio Geek podcast receiving 56% negative responses and only 16% positive responses.

Previous studies have not discussed the application of image restoration theory to individual non-celebrities who experience a reputation crisis in the digital age due to the impact of disinformation, especially in film. This study was conducted to fill this gap by exploring the main character through the strategies applied in self-image recovery using social media amid the complex cultural conditions of Indonesian society. This study aims to examine how image recovery in the digital era is represented in the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023) through the lens of Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis.

This study explores the representation of strategies of image repair through visual and symbolic elements in a film that reflects the contemporary practice of reputation recovery on social media. The film *Budi Pekerti* (2023) offers a comprehensive semiotic environment, wherein the narrative of apology, justification, and reconstruction of public image is intricately woven into the fabric of digital culture. This film is of particular significance because it bridges Indonesian cultural values with the global influence of social media, offering novel insights into how public relations and reputation repair are interpreted within a localized yet digitally connected context. As with image, honor and reputation are very important in human interactions (Benoit, 2024). This study is expected to provide a deep understanding of the interaction between media, meaning construction, and image restoration efforts in the digital context, as well as contribute academically to the study of semiotics and public relations.

2. Literature Review

A. Image Restoration Theory

The two basic assumptions of image restoration theory are that communication is goal oriented and maintaining a positive reputation is the main goal of communication (Benoit, 2015). IRT has five main strategies, one of which is denial, which is commonly used in the form of refutation (Sayed et al., 2022). There are four models of denial: simple denial, which involves refuting the allegations circulating; shifting the blame/scapegoating, which involves shifting the blame to another party who should be held responsible. Another related strategy to denial includes "whataboutism," which shifts public attention to other issues or parties, like attacking the accuser but different in concept. Straw denial involves using logical fallacies or flawed reasoning (Benoit, 2024). Evade responsibility involves those who cannot completely deny the allegations attempting to reduce the percentage of fault they bear. This strategy has four variations: provocation, which means blaming others for the actions taken by the organization or individual; defeasibility, which explains that the mistake occurred due to lack of control or information; accident, which means the crisis occurred due to an incident or bad luck; and good intention, where the party experiencing the crisis acknowledges the mistake but claims it was done with good intentions (Kurnal, 2021).

Reducing offensiveness comprises several interconnected strategies that function to mitigate reputational harm. First, bolstering seeks to counter negative sentiment by emphasizing prior positive actions, thereby re-anchoring public perception in a more favorable narrative. Second, minimization

attempts to persuade the audience that the crisis is less severe than it appears (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). Third, differentiation reframes the criticized behavior by comparing it with more serious transgressions, thus positioning the act as relatively minor. Fourth, justification—and its related form, transcendence—argues that the questionable action is defensible because it serves a higher or more important purpose. Fifth, attacking the accuser shifts attention to the credibility or motives of the party making the accusation, thereby weakening the legitimacy of the claim. Sixth, compensation offers monetary, service-based, or material restitution to reduce public anger and repair relational strain. Beyond these offensiveness-reduction strategies, moreover, corrective action involves acknowledging the problem and committing to future improvement, a response that often varies depending on the nature of the crisis. Finally, mortification requires admitting faults and issuing an apology to directly address reputational damage (Alasmari, 2025). In the context of *Budi Pekerti* (2023), Image Repair Theory (IRT) offers the analytical foundation for understanding how Prani strategically engages these mechanisms to reclaim her image amid widespread criticism on social media.

B. Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Semiotics, in short, is the study of signs. In semiotics, a sign has the meaning of something that represents something else. This can be many things, such as words, sounds, images, smells, tastes, actions, objects, and so on, which have the potential to be interpreted in other for For example, when the clouds turn cloudy, it can be interpreted that it will rain soon. Semiotics is concerned with how meaning is formed and how reality is represented and even constructed through signs, sign systems, and the process of signification (Chandler, 2022). Barthes explains that the signifier and the signified form a sign together in a single process (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021).

Barthes expands on Saussure's original concept that the meaning of a sign is divided into three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth, known as the "second order of signification," which combines verbal and nonverbal elements (Chandran & Jagadisan, 2024). Denotative meaning as a primary sign is described as the literal meaning that we directly see and recognize or the objective meaning (Rudrakumar & Venkatraman, 2022). The secondary sign refers to the meaning of the second stage of signification, which is a term for connotative meaning. This meaning describes the interaction that occurs when a sign encounters the emotions of the audience and existing cultural values. Denotation acts as a signifier, while connotation acts as a signified, forming a system of ideological meaning called myth (Halim et al., 2024). When connotation is adopted as popular ideology by society, a myth is formed (Saputra & Agus, 2022).

In the context of popular culture and mass media like film, Barthes focuses on how visuals and narratives serve as producers of certain ideologies that are rarely recognized by the audience (Thorina & Azeharie, 2023). This study describes how the audience's perception of the image recovery process is formed through visual and narrative signs. According to Barthes, the study of signs is closely related to the audience's perspective (Rudrakumar & Venkatraman, 2022). This perspective is pertinent to the analysis of how the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023) symbolically constructs the myth of redemption, sincerity, resilience, accountability, and social reintegration in its portrayal of image recovery on digital platforms.

3. Method

The selection of the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023) as the object of study is due to its relevance to image restoration and the dynamics of public opinion in the digital age. The issues raised in the film depict contemporary social problems occurring in society but have not been widely studied through semiotic analysis using image restoration theory. This study aims to bridge the study of public relations, culture, and morality in Indonesia in the context of modern cinema. Semiotic analysis is included in the

constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes the meaning of signs and the construction of reality through signs and symbols in a social and cultural context (Chandler, 2022).

This study is a descriptive qualitative study using Roland Barthes' semiotic model to understand the meaning, symbols, and messages contained in the film related to the digital image restoration process carried out by the main character based on Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020). Barthes' method aligns with IRT in that both emphasize the construction of meaning, with Barthes employing semiological systems and Benoit utilizing communicative acts. The integration of these two elements enables an examination of how visual and verbal signs signify strategies of image repair in the film.

The primary data in this study is the film *Budi Pekerti*, released on November 2, 2023, with a duration of 1 hour 51 minutes 11 seconds. The secondary data used is sourced from previous studies, books, articles, and other relevant sources. Data was collected through observation and documentation of scenes, symbols, dialogues, and visual elements related to image restoration. Data analysis used Barthes' model, which reveals three levels of analysis: denotation, connotation, and myth. The meaning of these signs was then analyzed using William L. Benoit's image restoration theory to examine the strategies used through the characters and narrative of the film. The data analysis techniques obtained are related to the elements of image restoration strategies, namely: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Wibisono, 2022). Analytical validity is ensured through methodological triangulation, peer review, and theoretical saturation, ensuring interpretations remain consistent and grounded in both theoretical and contextual relevance (Lisdiana et al., 2024).



4. Result and Discussion

This study examines the application of image restoration in the form of denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification with reference to the connotative and denotative meanings in the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023). From the semiotic signs that have been collected, it was found that Prani used all five strategies of image restoration theory. These findings are further elaborated in Tables 1 to 7.

A series of events unfolded after Prani's video went public and attracted a lot of attention. The foundation committee, which had initially been optimistic about Prani as a strong candidate for deputy principal, began to show doubts. When parents began to question the authenticity of the video and when her voice, which had been turned into a meme, was used as background music for gymnastics practice, Prani felt disturbed by it. She simply denied the foundation committee's questions and her gymnastics students' jokes by saying, "I am not cursing."

The two events in the previous scene (Table 1 and Table 2) reinforce Prani's desire to make a clarification statement so that all parties understand the actual situation. Even though her son Muklas, the principal, and the school committee forbade her from making a public clarification, with Tita's support, she recorded the video and uploaded it to her personal social media. Prani evades responsibility by provocation, openly blaming others for causing her anger in the video. The video receives positive reactions from netizens who support her action of reprimanding shoppers who cut in line. However, Sapto, the man in the eagle shirt, does not accept this and threatens to report Prani to the authorities if she does not make a clarification.

Table 1. Simple Denial


Scene	Dialog
 <p data-bbox="300 555 564 584">Scene 1. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 286 1383 387">Committee: "In that viral video yesterday, ma'am, it seems that Prani was having a lot of problems that made her explode with anger like that."</p> <p data-bbox="683 392 1383 456">Prani: "Oh, that video. I wasn't cursing at the men and women in it."</p>
 <p data-bbox="300 857 564 887">Scene 2. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 589 1383 654">Women exercising: " Prani is famous now, you know." Prani: "But I wasn't cursing, you know."</p> <p data-bbox="683 658 1383 723">The women exercising: "If you were cursing, it wouldn't be a big deal, ma'am."</p>

Denotation: Scene 1, Prani is giving a presentation for the vice principal election. During the Q&A session, the foundation committee brings up a viral video clip of her. Scene 2 Prani's voice from the viral video is turned into a meme by netizens and then used as background music for her aerobics group's practice, called Joglokaryan.

Connotation: Scene 1 Prani answered the foundation committee's questions confidently but grew tense when informed of an additional psychological test to confirm her mental health. Her voice faltered when the principal mentioned parental inquiries about the video's authenticity. Scene 2 She looked uncomfortable when her meme-turned-voice was used as background music during gymnastics, standing still without doing the routine. She then quietly corrected the gymnastics mothers' jokes about her fame from swearing.

Myth: Teachers are seen as authoritative, wise figures and good role models for society. In Javanese culture, the word guru means someone who is respected and emulated. The viral video about her, which caused the misunderstanding that she was cursing an older Putu seller, damaged her image as a teacher.

Table 2. Evade Responsibility (Provocation)

Scene	Dialog
 <p data-bbox="300 1718 564 1747">Scene 3. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 1449 1383 1550">Prani: "The men wearing eagle-printed T-shirts left their order with the men wearing ninja jackets. He insisted on cutting in line, lying that the men were his brothers."</p>

Denotation: Prani made a clarification video with her daughter Tita behind the house, using a backdrop, ring light, and a makeshift clarification script.

Connotation: Prani's confident, calm, and straightforward tone of voice and expression in the video are supported by a plain yellow background, which can be seen as a symbol of optimism, openness, but also spontaneity or impulsiveness (Aisha Annet, 2025). This demonstrates Prani's strong belief that she is correct and that others are responsible for her anger, not the putu seller.

Myth: The unadorned, messy, and cluttered location where the video was filmed reflects Prani's economic condition as a member of the lower class.

Table 3. Evade Responsibility (Defeasibility)


Scene	Dialog
 <p data-bbox="300 528 564 562">Ibu saya ini bukan berkata-kata kasar. Scene 4. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 286 1385 421">Muklas: "Because the video was small at the time, and you were wearing a mask. So, I just mistook you for my beautiful mother. I'm sorry, ma'am. But everything is clear now. My mother did not use harsh words. It's impossible for my mother to curse."</p>
<p data-bbox="204 566 1385 633">Denotation: Prani made a second clarification video with her son in the middle of the night with a blue backdrop.</p> <p data-bbox="204 638 1385 734">Connotation: The blue backdrop can be interpreted as calmness and trust that both are trying to build (Aisha Annet, 2025). The friendly tone of voice while smiling helps maintain Muklas's branding as a wise and friendly mental health influencer.</p> <p data-bbox="204 739 1385 806">Myth: Politeness is more valued and easier to gain sympathy; in the film, the scene aims to make netizens believe Prani is a friendly and calm person.</p>	

Table 4. Reduce Offensiveness (Attack accuser)

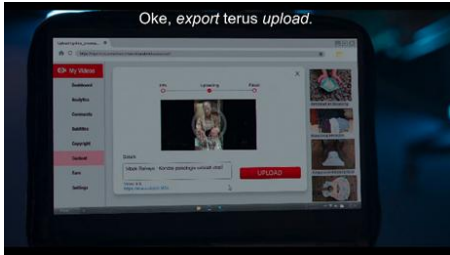
Scene	Dialog
 <p data-bbox="300 1225 564 1258">Oke, export terus upload. Scene 5. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 960 1385 1131">Narrator: "However, the media often overlooks whether the viral merchant is prepared for the popularity. The media tends to focus on clickbait without considering the psychological impact on the merchant. We, the band Amuk Tanah, interviewed Mbok Rahayu, who was exhausted after her business went viral."</p>
<p data-bbox="204 1263 1385 1330">Denotation: Tita is uploading a video of her interview with the putu seller using her band's YouTube account, which contains criticism of Gaung Tinta.</p> <p data-bbox="204 1335 1385 1402">Connotation: The video was recorded with a dark tone, flat intonation and expression, and dramatic narration as a form of sharp criticism.</p> <p data-bbox="204 1406 1385 1473">Myth: The digital editorial team prioritizes engagement without considering the impact on those being reported on.</p>	

Table 3 shows that Muklas had previously forbidden Prani from making a clarification because he had already denied that the woman in the video was his mother. However, netizens found a photo of himself on Prani's Instagram as clear evidence that Muklas was lying. Muklas himself works as an influencer, so his lie threatens his career. Defeasibility in evading responsibility means that the party is accused of lacking information or being unable to control the actions that occurred (Compton, 2016). In this case, the mask was the cause of Muklas' lack of information to recognize his mother's face.

The video on Table 4 report from the Gaung Tinta editorial team contains accusations against Prani as the cause of the putu seller stopping selling due to contracting Covid because Prani's mask slipped. Tita made the video as a counterattack to Gaung Tinta's framing, stating that the putu seller did not contract Covid because of Prani's mask slipping, but rather due to exhaustion from working after going viral. In reality, digital media often produces sensational content without concrete facts, relying only on the opinions and assumptions of people who can sway public opinion for the benefit of certain parties. Through her band's YouTube channel, Tita uploaded a video criticizing Gaung Tinta for only focusing

on engagement without considering the impact on others, such as the putu seller. This counterattack video is categorized as reducing offensiveness in the form of an attack accuser, which attacks the credibility of Gaung Tinta as the accuser of Prani.

Based on Table 5, Prani has not responded publicly to Sapto's summons, but her former students, encouraged by Muklas, have voluntarily made video testimonials to convince the public that Prani is a good and wise teacher. Through the hashtag #TerimaKasihBuPrani (Thank you Mrs. Prani), they have given their support and testimonials that Prani is a good teacher who has educated them to become better people. Prani is the embodiment of society's perception of a true teacher. Through her students, she is portrayed as a very wise figure who gives punishments that are not only deterrent but also beneficial. Prani is also portrayed as a compassionate teacher who provides moral support to students who do not move up a grade.

These videos are an application of the reducing offensiveness strategy, namely bolstering, by showing the good things Prani has done for her students, which is expected to reduce public sentiment (Kurnal, 2021). However, one video immediately backfired after Gora, one of the alumni, made a video testimonial about Prani's punishment of digging graves for a month, which became a new controversy. The punishment was considered excessive and inhumane. Gaung Tinta again made an accusatory report inviting psychological experts to condemn Prani's actions. The narrative that Gora visited a psychologist, possibly due to depression over the grave-digging punishment, added to the negative public sentiment towards Prani. As a result, parents were worried about enrolling their children in the school where Prani worked, and the community demanded that Prani be fired as a teacher.

Table 6 shows that the situation became increasingly uncontrollable with the disappearance of Prani's husband, who was undergoing treatment for depression, pressuring Prani to make an apology video so that netizens would be willing to help find her husband. Although the video was not uploaded in the end, the scene showed a strategy of mortification in the form of an apology to all parties involved in the case.

In Table 7, Prani resigned because the punishment on Gora damaged the school's credibility. She also wanted to protect Gora's privacy and morals by preventing Gora from lying about being framed by Gsaung Tinta. Although difficult and emotionally distressing—for example, listening to a recorded profanity used in student reflections—Prani accepted social punishment that exceeded her original educational intent to restore the school's image and Gora's reputation.

Table 5. Reduce Offensiveness (Bolstering)

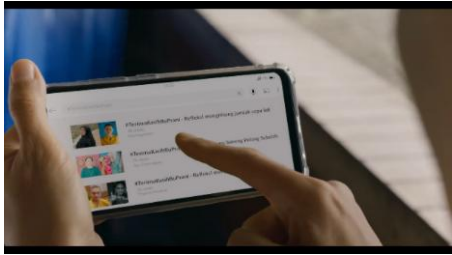
Scene	Dialog
	<p>Teacher Colleague of Prani: "It turns out Prani is using this buzzer."</p>
<p>Scene 6. Source: Netflix</p>	
<p>Denotation: Prani watches a collection of testimonial videos from her students with the hashtag #TerimaKasihBuPrani at school.</p>	
<p>Connotation: Prani smiles proudly as she watches the videos of her former students. The other teachers' joke that Prani has a buzzer refers to the term or culture of buzzing used on social media.</p>	
<p>Myth: Goodness will be repaid with goodness.</p>	

Table 6. Mortification



Scene	Dialog
 <p data-bbox="300 546 563 575">Scene 7. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 286 1385 595">Prani: "I am Prani Siswoyo. I would like to publicly convey the following five points. One, I apologize for causing a commotion in the Putu Mbok Rahayu area. Two, I apologize for accusing Mr. Sapto of trespassing. Three, on behalf of my daughter Tita, I apologize to the Mbok Rahayu family, whose video was uploaded without the family's permission. Four, I apologize for imposing an inappropriate punishment on my former student, who was underage at the time. I sincerely apologize and am willing to take responsibility."</p>
<p data-bbox="204 604 1070 633">Denotation: Prani made an apology video and plans to upload it to social media.</p> <p data-bbox="204 638 1385 739">Connotation: Prani was forced to make the apology video because her children wanted netizens to help find her husband, who had suddenly gone missing. Prani displayed a distressed expression; after recording the video, she washed her face to clear her mind.</p> <p data-bbox="204 743 719 772">Myth: Apologizing is better than honesty itself.</p>	

Table 7. Corrective Action

Scene	Dialog
 <p data-bbox="300 1202 563 1232">Scene 8. Source: Netflix</p>	<p data-bbox="683 929 1385 1030">Prani: "Gora doesn't need to make a public clarification. I also apologize because the principal acted spontaneously without asking you first if you were willing to make a public statement."</p> <p data-bbox="683 1034 1385 1099">Prani: "But I want to tell you one thing. I'm resigning from this school."</p>
<p data-bbox="204 1247 1385 1308">Denotation: Prani is telling Gora that he doesn't need to make a clarification video about his reasons for seeing a psychologist.</p> <p data-bbox="204 1312 1385 1373">Connotation: Prani's tired expression shows the emotional pressure she has been under. The use of top lighting that focuses on highlighting Prani's face gives a dramatic impression (Bordwell et al., 2020).</p> <p data-bbox="204 1377 1385 1438">Myth: Teachers are unsung heroes, for example, willingly sacrificing themselves to protect the reputation of their students and the institution.</p>	

A. The Digital Age and the Dynamics of Image Recovery

In the 21st century, we have witnessed firsthand how rapidly various social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) have developed. The development of social media has not only migrated users for their daily needs but has also transformed the economy, society, and politics in various ways (Civelek et al., 2016). In recent years, social media has become a powerful tool for reaching a global audience, disseminating information, and shaping public opinion, as users are free to share and produce content. At the same time, social media is also used to spread false information and trigger conflicts that can lead to crises. The culture and norms on social media provide a free space for uploading hate speech, excessive criticism, and boycott actions, which contribute to an increase in the number of online crises (M. Klok, 2024).

Prani's image crisis began with the spread of a video of her arguing in a public place, which then went viral on social media. This incident gave rise to various accusations (categoria) that threatened her integrity as a teacher. In an era where information spreads quickly and widely without control, it has

become a new challenge for organizations and individuals to maintain their reputation (Abid et al., 2024). Digital crises have become a social media phenomenon in recent times. This phenomenon appears both in the form of categories or accusations that become trends on digital platforms. This context creates a situation where the video is then turned into memes and parodies that can be viewed repeatedly. Unlike crises before the existence of social media, which only occurred through traditional media where self-defense was only stored in public memory or journalism archives, every mistake is now permanently recorded, just a Google search away (Hearit, 2023).

Prani, who was attacked due to misinformation on social media, used social media as a tool to repair her image. When the allegations first surfaced, Prani chose to employ a simple denial strategy in scenes 1 and 2, claiming that the allegations that she had cursed were a misunderstanding. This strategy was still effective because Prani had a strong positive branding within the school environment. Personal branding is defined as the ongoing process of cultivating one's image or "value" over an extended period of time. Effective branding facilitates the process of gaining acceptance and trust from one's social circle (Fitria, 2023). For instance, consider the case of Prani, a teacher who effectively cultivated a favorable reputation within her school community, thereby becoming a prominent candidate for the position of vice principal. However, the dissemination of a video containing misinformation about her on the internet led to a threat to her position. Compounding the situation were the ridicule she received from acquaintances at her gym as well as the parents of her students. This prompted her to devise a new strategic plan.

In her clarification video in scene 3, Prani adds evade responsibility and provocation by emphasizing that her angry actions arose because she saw injustice in the queue, so her anger was justified (Kurnal, 2021). Through this narrative, she tried to balance the negative impression by highlighting positive motivations, in line with Benoit's concept that emphasizing moral values can strengthen one's image amid accusations. Initially, Prani's clarification video received positive responses until Sapto made a rebuttal video stating that he did not cut in line, providing CCTV evidence. Another video from Gaung Tinta a citizen journalism emerged, claiming that Prani had transmitted Covid-19 to the putu seller because her mask had slipped during the previous viral incident. External parties such as the mass media and investigative agencies can exacerbate damage to an image by creating negative narratives about the accused party (Ndone, 2024).

To refute these accusations, Prani's daughter uploaded a news video explaining that the putu seller had fallen ill not because of Covid-19, but due to exhaustion from work. This action is a form of attack accuser in the framework of reducing offensiveness, which is to counter accusations by presenting counter-evidence that weakens the credibility of the framing. This strategy does not directly attack the accuser, but focuses on weakening the narrative of the accusation that is circulating (Compton, 2016). Thus, the public is led to question the validity of the previously viral framing, while reducing the perception that Prani was the main cause of the incident. Image restoration does not only depend on objective facts; the audience's perception in interpreting reality also plays an important role. Changes in public opinion can influence people to shift from condemning an action to supporting it. This perspective can be influenced by the various types of news media consumed (Gasana, 2024).

Testimonials from Prani's students describing her as a good teacher who cares for and is loved by her students are a form of bolstering because they highlight Prani's positive side, which is different from the viral incident, while also serving as a strategy to reduce offensiveness. The students' support serves to reduce the impression that Prani's actions represent her true character, so that the public is led to see it as a momentary incident. This strategy is effective in rebuilding personal credibility through a more neutral external narrative when done correctly. Showing sincerity in a crisis can increase support and minimize damage to reputation by improving public perception through sincere actions (Schilling et al., 2024). This strategy is effective if the punishment given to Gora is not publicized, which would actually

cause a new, bigger crisis. Choosing the wrong image recovery strategy can cause a new crisis that attracts even more public attention than the original crisis, making it the most fatal crisis management (M. Klok, 2024).

The previous strategy had an impact not only on Prani but also on the institution where she taught and her former student, Gora. The public strongly criticized Prani's action of punishing Gora by making him dig a grave, which led to the corrective action strategy of Prani choosing to resign from the school to restore the situation and prevent a potential follow-up crisis in the future (Aziz & Dharta, 2024). This action was not merely an admission of guilt, but a decision made to protect the reputation of the educational institution and Gora from the continued impact of the viral case. The resignation also showed Prani's moral responsibility in trying to stop the crisis from escalating. Prani was willing to bear the consequences so that her student, Gora, would not have to provide manipulative clarifications regarding his psychological condition. Thus, this sacrifice strengthened Prani's image as a teacher who upholds moral values even under pressure.

Another party, Muklas, Prani's son, also implemented a reputation recovery strategy by making a clarification in the media. Muklas stated that he did not recognize Prani as his mother because she was wearing a mask. This statement can be categorized as evasion of responsibility in the form of defeasibility, which is avoiding responsibility due to situational limitations (Ferguson et al., 2018). Its effectiveness is weak because the public can see the inconsistency. This shows that social pressure in the digital space often encourages individuals to use recovery strategies that risk worsening the situation.

Overall, the image recovery strategy in the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023) shows complex dynamics. Prani not only uses denial, mortification, and bolstering strategies, but also applies reducing offensiveness and corrective action as a form of moral responsibility. Meanwhile, the family is also involved by using evade responsibility, although the results are not entirely effective. This analysis shows that image restoration in the digital age is no longer individual, but collective, involving the immediate social circle and affected institutions. Benoit emphasizes that the application of this strategy must be chosen carefully and must be adapted to the crisis that occurs and the cultural context of the individual or organization from which it originates (Benoit, 2024).

Social media has also significantly changed traditional image recovery strategies, demanding a more cautious approach that considers the speed at which information spreads on the internet and how stakeholders are involved. The way public relations works has changed a lot in the digital age, which means that organizations need to change their strategies often so they can connect with people on social media (Jimin, 2022). This film emphasizes that reputation crises on social media require careful communication strategies, as any form of clarification can easily be reinterpreted, parodied, or even turned into memes that prolong the crisis. Organizations or parties that do not have a structured response team often face negative sentiment that dominates public discourse due to difficulties in controlling the narrative, such as the actions of Prani, who always receives negative backlash from other parties (Osemwegie, 2025). In contrast to conventional media, digital media introduces novel challenges for image restoration due to the following factors: algorithmic filtering, accelerated information diffusion, and interactive audience dynamics. The amplification of emotionally charged and controversial content by social media algorithms has the effect of making it more difficult for organizations to regain control of the narrative and to restore their reputation effectively (Austin & Jin, 2017).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates, through the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023), that image restoration in the digital age does not invariably lead to successful outcomes. The influence of social media algorithms, the intensification of cancel culture, and the volatility of public emotional responses often undermine

rational and ethically grounded communication strategies. Although Prani fails to recover her reputation within the digital sphere, she succeeds in preserving her dignity by consistently upholding honesty and moral responsibility. The film therefore underscores that the success of image restoration cannot be assessed solely on the basis of public approval; rather, it must also be understood through an individual's commitment to ethical and humanitarian principles amid an uncontrollable reputational crisis. In contrast to previous studies that highlight the effectiveness of digital image repair, this study reveals the limitations and negative outcomes of Prani's attempts. Prani employs all five of Benoit's image restoration strategies—denial (simple denial), evading responsibility (provocation, defeasibility), reducing offensiveness (attacking the accuser, bolstering), mortification, and corrective action—yet their combined use reflects the internal contradictions Benoit notes, such as denying wrongdoing while simultaneously apologizing for it (Benoit, 2024). Nevertheless, while her online reputation remains tarnished, the film illustrates that her image within the real-world community is ultimately restored, as shown by the reluctance of her students and colleagues to let her leave on her final day at school.

Building on this perspective, the study further emphasizes how Western theories such as Benoit's Image Restoration Theory and Barthes' semiotics are reinterpreted within the Indonesian cultural framework through the film *Budi Pekerti* (2023). While Benoit's framework highlights individual responsibility in managing reputational crises, the Indonesian narrative instead positions image repair as a collective reconciliation process. Consequently, the film portrays image restoration as a communal moral practice rooted in *rukun* (harmony), empathy, and shared moral accountability. Moreover, this cultural reframing enriches the broader theoretical dialogue by demonstrating that Western image-repair strategies acquire new meanings when embedded in localized moral and cultural systems. Ultimately, it reveals that reputation, morality, and self-recovery are culturally mediated and inseparable from community-based values and social ethics.

However, this study has several limitations that offer opportunities for further development. The primary constraint lies in its exclusive focus on the film text, without incorporating audience perspectives on the effectiveness of the portrayed image restoration strategies. To address this gap, future research is encouraged to integrate a critical discourse analysis approach in order to capture audience interpretations of the film's moral messages as well as their evaluations of the communication strategies employed.

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