E-ISSN: 3032-0135
Vol. 3, No. 2, January - June (2026), pp. 1-14

Public Relations Strategies in Managing Corporate Reputation Through Green Campaigns (a Case Study of Corporate Communication PT. Surya Energi Indotama, Bandung , Indonesia)

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Abstract

Global pressure for decarbonization and the rise of ESG-driven investment have made "green" reputation a strategic corporate asset. In Indonesia, the commitment to Net Zero Emission (NZE) 2060 and growing public concern about pollution place PT Surya Energi Indotama (SEI) under strong expectations to operate sustainably and communicate its environmental performance credibly to avoid skepticism and greenwashing accusations. This study analyzes SEI's Public Relations (PR) strategies in managing corporate reputation through green campaigns. Using a qualitative case study approach—through interviews, document analysis, and observation the research explores how SEI designs, executes, and evaluates its communication strategies. Drawing on stakeholder, legitimacy, and reputation theories, the findings indicate that SEI's green campaign is crafted to engage key stakeholders and secure social legitimacy by presenting solar energy as a solution to national energy and pollution challenges. This narrative strengthens SEI's social and environmental responsibility, thereby enhancing its corporate reputation. The study highlights the shifting role of PR in the renewable energy sector, where it functions not merely as a promotional tool but as a strategic mechanism for managing intangible assets in the green economy era.

Keywords:	Public Relations Strategy, Public Relations, Corporate Communication, Reputation Management

Introduction

The shifting global landscape of the 21st century is no longer defined solely by geopolitics or economic dynamics, but by a crisis that threatens all living beings on Earth climate change. The 2015 Paris Agreement marked a turning point, where nations collectively agreed to limit global warming to well below 2°C, with an ideal target of 1.5°C, resulting in far reaching implications across sectors. This commitment has extended beyond diplomatic

forums and has generated a new global priority, decarbonization efforts and the establishment of Net Zero Emission (NZE) targets by 2060 to prevent severe climate impacts.

The consequences of these commitments are extensive, leading to radical transformation across the global business landscape. Pressure for change originates not only from environmental activists or regulators, but also from the core of the capitalist system itself the capital market. Some of the world's largest investors, such as BlackRock and Vanguard, now require companies to meet Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria to gain access to funding. ESG has become a critical tool for investment risk analysis. As stated by BlackRock CEO Larry Fink in his widely cited annual letter, climate change has become "a defining factor in companies' long-term prospects." Fink (2020) concisely stated that "climate risk is investment risk," compelling companies worldwide, including those in Indonesia, to seriously pursue green initiatives and implement green campaigns.

It is within this context that Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role in responding to ESG expectations and attracting stakeholder attention through green campaign initiatives. These campaigns are designed to represent companies as responsible, environmentally conscious, and aligned with a sustainable future. Their primary purpose is to manage and enhance corporate reputation. Referring to Fombrun (1996), reputation is the most valuable intangible asset, shaped by the collective perceptions of all stakeholders.

However, as corporations increasingly adopt green narratives across their operations, a new phenomenon has emerged greenwashing. Greenwashing refers to misleading Public Relations practices that portray a company as environmentally sustainable while its actual practices may not align with such claims. As public awareness of this issue grows, United Nations Secretary, General António Guterres has repeatedly emphasized the urgent need for "zero tolerance for greenwashing," demanding that corporate commitments be credible, accountable, and transparent (Guterres, 2022). These warnings highlight that effective PR

strategies can no longer be asymmetrical (communicating *at* the public), but must be symmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), emphasizing authentic dialogue, transparency, and responsiveness to criticism.

In Indonesia, commitment to reach NZE by 2060 (Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, 2021) has driven aggressive energy transition policies, including Presidential Regulation No. 112 of 2022. In 2023, President Joko Widodo officially launched the Indonesian Carbon Exchange (IDXCarbon) to accelerate progress toward NZE. Simultaneously, worsening air pollution in Jakarta has intensified public demand for concrete corporate action.

Within this urgent context, the Renewable Energy sector has emerged as a central actor, offering clean energy solutions to climate and pollution challenges. However, corporate claims of being "green" alone are insufficient to build a credible reputation. Companies in the renewable energy sector must proactively manage their stakeholder relationships. As argued by R. Edward Freeman (1984), businesses must create value not only for shareholders but also for all stakeholders. Doing so ensures the organization's social legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), meaning public recognition and acceptance that the company's operations align with societal norms and values.

This establishes the urgency of this research, where PT Surya Energi Indotama (SEI) one of Indonesia's pioneering solar energy companies represents an ideal case study. SEI operates at the convergence of multiple pressures, global investor demands for ESG transparency, government expectations for NZE 2060 support, and public scrutiny amid rising pollution concerns. For SEI, managing corporate reputation is no longer a secondary activity, but a strategic necessity to remain competitive.

Within this context, the Public Relations strategies carried out by SEI's Corporate Communication unit play a pivotal role. Among these strategies, this research focuses

specifically on SEI's Green Campaign activities, wherein the company seeks to translate its clean energy operations into reputation building value. However, with the high risk of greenwashing accusations as highlighted by Guterres (2022), these strategies must be conducted with precision, authenticity, and symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to avoid backfiring and damaging corporate reputation.

While many studies discuss Public Relations and reputation separately, there remains a gap in empirical research examining how such strategies are implemented by renewable energy companies in Indonesia. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how Public Relations strategies are used to manage corporate reputation through green campaigns using the case of Corporate Communication PT Surya Energi Indotama (SEI) in Bandung, West Java.

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Analyze and understand the planning process behind SEI's green campaign as a strategy to build corporate reputation;
2. Identify how SEI's Corporate Communication unit implements communication processes within its green campaign activities for stakeholders; and
3. Examine the specific strategies used in SEI's green campaign to enhance its corporate reputation.

Based on these objectives, the research questions are as follows :

RQ1: How does Corporate Communication PT Surya Energi Indotama plan its green campaign to build corporate reputation?

RQ2: How does Corporate Communication PT Surya Energi Indotama implement communication processes in delivering its green campaign to stakeholders?

RQ3: What specific green campaign strategies are used by Corporate Communication PT Surya Energi Indotama to build corporate reputation?

Thus, this study is theoretically positioned within stakeholder theory (Freeman), legitimacy theory (Suchman), and reputation theory (Fombrun) to examine how strategic communication is used to build and manage reputation. The study contributes comprehensive empirical insight into the evolving role of Public Relations within Indonesia's renewable energy sector particularly its shift from a technical promotional function to a strategic business function central to managing intangible assets in the green economy era.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study design to deeply examine the Public Relations strategies of PT Surya Energi Indotama (SEI) in managing corporate reputation through green campaigns within the renewable energy sector. Data were collected through source triangulation—namely in-depth interviews with key Corporate Communication personnel, document analysis of press releases, campaign materials, and digital content, as well as observation of social media activities and public engagement. Using purposive sampling, supported by snowball sampling when needed, the study selects informants directly involved in designing and implementing the green campaign. The analysis is guided by Stakeholder Theory, Legitimacy Theory, and Reputation Theory to explore how SEI plans, communicates, and frames its green initiatives to meet stakeholder expectations, gain legitimacy, and strengthen its reputation. Data were processed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model through stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to ensure credible and meaningful findings.

Results and Discussion

Results

From the results of data collection conducted in the field, the research findings show that the strategy of the green campaign process is carried out through three stages, namely: (1) issue mapping; (2) stakeholder segmentation; and (3) campaign messages based on technical

data such as installed solar power plant (PLTS) capacity, potential CO_2 reduction, and other social benefit values.

Below is an example of content (caption of solar energy educational content on SEI's Instagram, May 31, 2024):

"*Installed PLTS capacity of 1.7 MWp which can reduce carbon emissions by 1,744 tons of CO_2/year*."

This fact shows that the entire planning of SEI's campaign is evidence driven, not emotion driven, because it targets technical B2B/B2G audiences who demand data reliability.

In the framing of messages and narrative construction, the analysis of social media content and green campaign materials was carried out through two framing patterns, namely :

1. Framing solar energy as a solution to the pollution crisis and national decarbonization, as shown in video content (Instagram, July 2024) which features the narrative: *"Solar energy is not just an alternative, but an urgent need for Indonesia."*
2. Framing the company as a legitimacy actor by emphasizing contribution toward NZE 2060, as shown on LinkedIn (February 2024) which presents industrial scale PLTS projects complete with energy saving graphs.

In both framing patterns, the entire narrative is presented based on data, technical indicators, and infrastructure visuals.

Other findings from field observations also show that SEI implements cross platform communication strategies, namely :

- LinkedIn, focused on technical credibility, data, and industrial scale projects (target ESG investors and regulators);
- Instagram, public education through infographics, light storytelling, and short videos;

- Website, repository of technical evidence (capacity, projects, services, specifications).

Public engagement on Instagram tends to be critical, especially regarding environmental claims. In several posts, public questions appear with critical sentiments such as:

"Is there the detailed calculation?"

As feedback, SEI's social media team responds by directing users to email rather than answering openly in that forum. This is acknowledged by the SEI Corporate Communication team as a strategy to minimize prolonged "pointless debates."

Public interaction shows high sensitivity toward environmental claims (green campaigns) promoted by SEI. Similar comments indicate that the public expects publicly accessible verification of corporate claims. The absence of verification or unsatisfactory responses can trigger perceptions of potential greenwashing.

In efforts to build reputation, SEI consistently uses technical indicators such as PLTS uptime, installed PLTS capacity, cost saving potential, CO_2 offset potential, number of active projects, and geographic coverage. In several green campaigns, SEI displays daily energy production graphs and photos of technical inspections as visual representations of the company's credibility.

From field results, three mechanisms of reputation building can be identified:

1. Reputation Built Through Technical Data

   SEI displays energy graphs, certifications, number of projects, and CO_2 offset figures as reputation indicators.

2. Legitimacy Narrative as a National Solution

In many posts, SEI positions itself not only as a PLTS provider but as part of the pollution solution, a government partner toward NZE 2060, and a driver of the energy transition.

3. Avoidance of Greenwashing Risk

   SEI's Public Relations is very careful in making claims, although the consistency of supporting data varies across posts (graphs, cost saving invoices, customer testimonials, etc.).

Discussion

The research results show that SEI's green campaign strategy is consistent with Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984), especially because its B2B/B2G stakeholder characteristics require technical data, reliability, and measurable environmental results. These findings confirm that in the renewable energy sector, reputation is determined more by technical demonstration than symbolic appeal as seen in consumer industries.

SEI's sustainability framing also reflects efforts to obtain moral and cognitive legitimacy as described by Suchman (1995). However, the legitimacy is fragile because digital publics demand quantitative evidence that can be verified. The tension between the need to build a green narrative and the risk of being considered greenwashing shows that legitimacy in the platform era requires auditability, not merely persuasive narratives.

This research shows that the two-way symmetrical communication model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) is difficult to apply in a digital ecosystem controlled by algorithms. Platforms like Instagram prioritize virality and fast interactions, so deep dialogue is often obstructed and company responses tend to be redirected to private channels. These findings reinforce platform theory, which emphasizes the dominance of algorithmic architecture in contemporary communication.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the concept of *evidence driven reputation*, which extends Fombrun's model (1996). In the B2B/B2G renewable energy sector, reputation is built through publicly verifiable technical indicators such as energy graphs, certifications, and CO_2 offset data, not merely collective perceptions. Additionally, public sensitivity to environmental claims without strong evidence shows that greenwashing risk emerges when companies fail to provide traceable data. Thus, transparency becomes a key principle in building and maintaining green reputation in the digital era.

Theoretical Integration

Based on the research findings and previous discussion, it is deemed necessary to provide a more systematic mapping to show how the theoretical concepts used in this study are interconnected and form a comprehensive analytical framework. This theoretical integration is important to demonstrate logical consistency among stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, symmetrical communication theory, and the concept of evidence-driven reputation in explaining SEI's green campaign strategy.

Category of Findings	**Empirical Findings**	**Theoretical Interpretation**	**Practical Implications**
Green Campaign Planning	Campaign planning conducted through issue mapping, stakeholder segmentation, and development of data-driven messages.	Supports Stakeholder Theory (Freeman).	Maintain risk-based and evidence-driven planning.
Framing of Campaign Messages	Messages frame solar energy as a solution for energy crisis and environmental pollution.	Strengthens Legitimacy Theory (Suchman).	Expand visual evidence and strengthen data transparency.
Digital Communication Strategy	LinkedIn used for investors, Instagram for public engagement, and website for technical documentation.	Aligns with Platform Theory.	Enhance cross-platform content coordination.

Public Interaction and Dialogue	Public is highly critical of green claims; dialogue primarily redirected to email.	Confirms limitations of the Symmetrical Communication Model.	Develop measurable and more open public-engagement strategies.
Greenwashing Risk	Criticism arises when posts lack verification or supporting evidence.	Consistent with Greenwashing Literature.	Increase consistency in providing verifiable data.
Corporate Reputation	Reputation strengthened through provision of technical and verifiable evidence.	Supports Reputation Model (Fombrun).	Build a publicly accessible evidence repository.

This theoretical integration summarizes how SEI's empirical findings interact with stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, reputation theory, PR communication models, and platform society theory. SEI's green campaign emphasizes the relevance of legitimacy theory, but extends it through the concept of *datafied legitimacy*, which is legitimacy that depends on quantitative evidence that can be publicly verified.

In addition, the research expands Fombrun's reputation model by adding the dimension of *evidence driven reputation*, which emphasizes the importance of technical indicators in building green reputation. Analysis of SEI's communication practices shows that Grunig's symmetrical model faces structural limitations in a digital ecosystem controlled by algorithms. Integration with platform society theory reinforces that sustainability communication strategies are now mediated by algorithmic logic, not solely based on organizational communication principles.

Overall, this integration provides a comprehensive picture that green campaign strategies in the renewable energy sector must balance technical needs, legitimacy demands, and digital platform dynamics.

Novelty and Critical Insights

This research offers three main theoretical contributions. First, this research introduces the concept of *evidence driven green reputation*, namely green reputation built through technical evidence and data that can be publicly verified, thereby extending Fombrun's reputation model which previously focused on collective perception. Second, this research develops the concept of *datafied legitimacy*, namely legitimacy that can only be obtained if sustainability claims are supported by quantitative data that are publicly accessible, which updates Suchman's legitimacy theory to be relevant in the context of sustainability communication in the digital era. Third, this research identifies the model of *restricted symmetry*, which explains how attempts at two way symmetrical communication are limited by the architecture of digital platform algorithms and the risk of greenwashing. In addition, this research provides important empirical contributions from the Global South context and the B2B/B2G renewable energy sector, areas that have been underrepresented in global literature.

This research also reveals that green reputation in the energy sector cannot be built through symbolic narratives, but instead requires data transparency and the ability for public verification. The findings show that the architecture of platform algorithms structurally limits symmetrical dialogue as idealized by classical PR models, so communication strategies must be adapted to the logic of engagement, virality, and algorithmic visibility. Furthermore, greenwashing risk in the digital era is more caused by the absence of verification mechanisms, not only the inaccuracy of messages, thus requiring companies to implement the principle of transparency by design in every green campaign.

Conclusion

This research shows that SEI's green campaign strategy forms an evidence based communication pattern that integrates technical requirements, legitimacy demands, and digital platform dynamics. The findings are synthesized into the main understanding that green

reputation in the renewable energy sector is not shaped by symbolic representation, but by the convergence between technical data, public auditability, and algorithmic structures that determine how messages are produced, distributed, and received. In this context, SEI's green campaign functions not only as a communication tool, but as a coordination mechanism between stakeholder expectations, transparency needs, and platform logic.

The main theoretical contribution of this research lies in two conceptual updates, namely *evidence driven green reputation* and *datafied legitimacy*, as well as one new development, namely *platformized representation*. This last concept refers to the condition in which the company's "green" representation is no longer fully controlled by the organization, but is shaped by algorithmic architecture, curated visibility, and platform engagement mechanisms. Thus, corporate representation shifts from a centralized narrative toward a representation that is publicly negotiated through algorithmic dynamics. This is the key differentiation of this research compared to previous literature which still assumes a top down communication structure.

Practical implications can be formulated at three levels, namely at the level of individual PR professionals, new competencies are required in the form of technical data literacy and understanding of algorithms. At the organizational level, green campaigns must adopt the principle of transparency by design, including the provision of evidence that can be publicly verified and consistent responsiveness across platforms. At the policy level, these findings emphasize the importance of more structured environmental reporting standards or transparent calculation schemes as part of corporate claims to reduce the space for greenwashing and strengthen public trust.

Conceptually, this research affirms that reputation management through green campaign activities in the platform era can no longer be understood solely through classical PR theory, but requires an approach that integrates technical data, evidence based legitimacy, and critical

understanding of digital media infrastructure. Thus, green reputation is not only the result of communication, but the result of negotiation between the company, the public, and the algorithms that govern both.

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