



## Crisis Management Handling, Corporate Reputation, and Customer Trust in Urban Public Transportation: Evidence from KAI Commuter Users among University Students in Jabodetabek

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**Abstract.** This study examines the influence of crisis management handling on corporate reputation and customer trust in urban public transportation, focusing on KAI Commuter users among university students in Jabodetabek. Public transportation disruptions, such as delays, overcrowding, operational failures, and unclear information, may erode passengers' confidence and damage an organization's reputation if not managed effectively. Using a quantitative explanatory survey design, data were collected from 150 university students who actively used KAI Commuter services and had experience or knowledge of service disruptions. The variables were measured using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed with simple linear regression. The findings indicate that crisis management handling has a positive and significant effect on corporate reputation, with a regression coefficient of 0.721 and an  $R^2$  value of 0.556. Crisis management handling also positively and significantly affects customer trust, with a regression coefficient of 0.760 and an  $R^2$  value of 0.521. These results suggest that rapid response, transparent information, empathy, appropriate solutions, and service improvement are essential in maintaining reputation and strengthening trust in commuter rail services. The study contributes to the literature on crisis communication, service recovery, and public transportation management in Indonesian metropolitan mobility.

**Keywords:** Corporate Reputation; Crisis Management; Customer Trust; Public Transportation; Service Recovery.

### 1. BACKGROUND

Urban public transportation plays a crucial role in maintaining mobility, accessibility, and economic productivity in metropolitan areas. In densely populated areas like Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek), commuter rail services are not only a means of transportation but also an essential public infrastructure that supports daily activities, including education, employment, social participation, and urban connectivity. For students, the KAI Commuter Line serves as a strategic mobility system, enabling access to campus, internships, organizational activities, and other academic pursuits. However, the increasing reliance on commuter rail also increases public sensitivity to service disruptions. Delays, overcrowding, ticketing issues, operational disruptions, and information delays can quickly become service crises because they directly impact user time, safety, and trust. Recent studies on public transportation show that service quality, perceived safety, reliability, and user experience significantly influence satisfaction and future intentions to use public transportation (de Oña, 2022; Hidayat & Choocharukul, 2023).

The significance of studying crisis management in KAI Commuter is reinforced by the increasing scale of its operations and passenger demand. KAI Commuter remains the primary rail-based public transportation provider in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area, serving

millions of passengers every month. During the first semester of 2024, KAI Commuter recorded 156.8 million passenger trips on the Jabodetabek Commuter Line, with an average of more than 961 thousand passengers per working day. Furthermore, by September 2024, total ridership had reached 241.8 million passengers, representing a significant increase compared to the previous year. Such growth reflects the high dependence of urban communities, including university students, on commuter rail services for daily mobility. Consequently, any operational disruption, service failure, or communication breakdown may affect a substantial number of passengers and rapidly influence public perceptions, making effective crisis management, corporate reputation, and customer trust increasingly important organizational concerns. (KAI Commuter, 2024).

In the context of urban public transportation, crisis management should not be understood solely as a technical recovery process. It is also a communicative and relational process in which an organization demonstrates responsibility, transparency, empathy, and problem-solving capacity. When a crisis occurs, passengers evaluate not only whether a disruption exists but also how the organization communicates its causes, provides timely updates, offers alternatives, and demonstrates concern for affected users. The digital communication environment further exacerbates this challenge because dissatisfaction can spread rapidly through social media and online conversations. Crisis communication studies emphasize that transparency, strategic responses, and message consistency are crucial in shaping public perception during disruptive events (Holland et al., 2021; Nuortimo et al., 2024).

In the context of public services, passengers may attribute responsibility to the service provider when they perceive a disruption as poorly explained or inadequately handled. Therefore, a crisis response strategy needs to combine speed, accuracy, empathy, and accountability. Furthermore, moral evaluations, emotional responses, internal coordination, and response speed influence stakeholder assessments during a crisis (Coombs & Tachkova, 2023; Iveson et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Wang, Zhang, et al., 2021). For KAI Commuter, this means crisis management is not only about restoring train operations but also about protecting the relationship between the company and its users.

Service recovery is particularly relevant in transportation services because service failures are often experienced directly and collectively by passengers. When users experience delays, congestion, or unclear information, they expect the company to acknowledge the problem, explain the situation, offer solutions, and prevent recurrence. Public transportation studies show that reliability, comfort, information quality, perceived safety, and service performance significantly influence passenger satisfaction and behavioral intentions

(Chuenyindee et al., 2022; Ding et al., 2023; de Oña & de Oña, 2023; Ong et al., 2023). Thus, crisis management can be seen as a form of service recovery that shapes how customers reinterpret negative service experiences.

Corporate reputation is another important consequence of crisis handling. Reputation reflects accumulated stakeholder evaluations of an organization's competence, credibility, responsibility, and ethical conduct. In public transportation, reputation is formed not only through normal service performance but also through how the company behaves under pressure. A company that responds quickly, communicates honestly, and shows responsibility during disruptions is more likely to maintain a favorable reputation. Conversely, slow, defensive, or unclear responses may damage public perceptions. Trust is closely related to reputation because customers tend to trust organizations they perceive as competent, reliable, and responsible. Recent studies confirm that reputation dimensions influence consumer trust, while perceived value and trust are also central in public transportation acceptance (Stravinskienė et al., 2021; Vongvit et al., 2024).

Customer trust is especially important for university students, who are frequent users of commuter rail services. Students rely on transportation predictability to manage academic schedules, examinations, internships, and social activities. When crises are handled effectively, students may still perceive the company as dependable despite temporary disruptions. However, when crisis handling is perceived as slow, unclear, or indifferent, trust can decline. Recent transportation research shows that real-time information, digital competence, service quality, passenger satisfaction, and trust are increasingly important in shaping public transport evaluation in contemporary urban mobility systems (Henriquez-Jara et al., 2025; Nilsson et al., 2025; Saeidi et al., 2025; Wahab et al., 2025; Flores et al., 2025).

Although many recent studies have examined public transportation service quality, passenger satisfaction, crisis communication, corporate reputation, and customer trust separately, limited attention has been given to the integrated relationship among crisis management handling, corporate reputation, and customer trust in commuter rail services, particularly among university students in the Indonesian metropolitan context. This gap is important because students represent active, digitally connected, and mobility-dependent users who can evaluate both operational service and crisis communication performance. Therefore, this study aims to examine how crisis management handling influences corporate reputation and customer trust among KAI Commuter users who are university students in Jabodetabek. The study is expected to contribute to marketing, service management, business ethics, and public transportation research by demonstrating how ethical, transparent, and responsive crisis

management can protect organizational reputation and strengthen customer trust in urban public transportation.

## **2. METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative explanatory survey design to examine the effect of crisis management on corporate reputation and customer trust among KAI Commuter users who are students in Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek). In line with the logic of quantitative research, variables are operationalized into measurable indicators and tested through hypothesis-based statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

### **Population and Sample**

The study population consisted of students in the Greater Jakarta area who use KAI Commuter services. This population was selected because students are an active urban mobility group who often rely on commuter rail services for academic, organizational, internship, and social activities. The sample consisted of 150 students who met certain criteria: they were active students in Greater Jakarta, had used KAI Commuter services, had experience or knowledge of service disruptions, and were willing to voluntarily complete the questionnaire. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling.

### **Data Collection and Management Techniques**

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of structured statements developed from indicators for each variable. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This scale allowed respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding crisis response, information transparency, empathy, service recovery, corporate image, and customer trust. The collected data were tabulated and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. Data screening was also performed to identify incomplete responses, inconsistent answers, and possible input errors (Hair et al., 2022).

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Before conducting the regression analysis, validity and reliability tests were conducted to assess the quality of the research instrument. Validity was assessed using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation, and reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Hypothesis testing was conducted using two simple linear regression models. The first model examined the effect of crisis management on corporate reputation, while the second examined its effect on customer trust. The regression equation used was  $Y = a + bX + e$ . A t-test was applied to determine whether the independent variables had a significant effect on each dependent variable. The coefficient

of determination was used to measure the extent to which the variance in corporate reputation and customer trust could be explained by crisis management. Regression analysis is appropriate for examining the predictive relationship between independent and dependent variables in quantitative social research (Field, 2024).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 150 university students in Jabodetabek who used KAI Commuter services and had experience or awareness of service disruptions. The respondent profile indicates that the sample was dominated by female students (62.0%), while male students accounted for 37.3%, and 0.7% did not disclose gender. In terms of age, the largest group was students aged 21-22 years (52.0%), followed by those aged 23-24 years (24.7%) and 19-20 years (19.3%). This distribution shows that most respondents were active university students in the typical age range for undergraduate education. The frequency of KAI Commuter use also supports the sample's relevance. Most respondents reported using the commuter rail service often (54.7%) or very often (27.3%). Only 16.7% used it occasionally, and 1.3% rarely used it. Thus, the respondents were sufficiently exposed to the commuter rail service and were able to evaluate crisis handling, corporate reputation, and customer trust based on direct mobility experience.

**Table 1.** Respondent profile.

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	93	62.0
	Male	56	37.3
	Not disclosed	1	0.7
Age	17-18 years	3	2.0
	19-20 years	29	19.3
	21-22 years	78	52.0
	23-24 years	37	24.7
	More than 24 years	3	2.0
	Frequency of KRL use	Rarely	2
	Occasionally	25	16.7
	Often	82	54.7
	Very often	41	27.3

#### Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

The descriptive statistics show that respondents tended to provide positive evaluations of all three research variables. Crisis management handling obtained a mean score of 41.71 with a standard deviation of 2.28, based on a possible observed score range from 36.00 to 50.00. This indicates that students generally perceived KAI Commuter as having made visible efforts

to respond to service disruptions, provide information, and improve services after disturbances occurred. Corporate reputation obtained the highest mean score, 42.40, with a standard deviation of 2.21.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of variables.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Crisis management handling	150	36.00	50.00	41.71	2.28
Corporate reputation	150	39.00	50.00	42.40	2.21
Customer trust	150	32.00	50.00	41.69	2.41

This suggests that KAI Commuter was generally perceived as having a favorable reputation among student users. The reputation score reflects perceptions of credibility, responsibility, service professionalism, customer concern, and positive corporate image. Customer trust obtained a mean score of 41.69 with a standard deviation of 2.41. Although the mean indicates a positive trend, the minimum score for customer trust was lower than for the other variables, suggesting that some respondents may have experienced uncertainty, dissatisfaction, or reduced confidence during service disruptions.

### **Regression Results and Hypothesis Testing**

Two simple linear regression models were used to test the effect of crisis management handling on corporate reputation and customer trust. The first model examined the effect of crisis management handling on corporate reputation. The result showed a positive, statistically significant effect, with a regression coefficient of 0.721, a standard error of 0.053, a standardized beta of 0.745, a t-value of 13.601, and  $p < 0.001$ . The regression equation for the first model was  $Y_1 = 12.313 + 0.721X$ . This means that every one-unit increase in perceived crisis management handling was associated with a 0.721-unit increase in corporate reputation. The coefficient of determination for the first model was 0.556 (R-squared) and 0.745 (R). This indicates that crisis management handling explained 55.6% of the variance in corporate reputation. Therefore, hypothesis H1a, which states that crisis management handling affects corporate reputation, was supported by statistical analysis.

**Table 3.** Regression and hypothesis testing results.

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Decision</b>
H1a	Crisis management handling → corporate reputation	0.721	0.053	0.745	13.601	< .001	0.556	Supported
H1b	Crisis management handling → customer trust	0.760	0.060	0.722	12.678	< .001	0.521	Supported

The second model examined the effect of crisis management handling on customer trust. The result also showed a positive, statistically significant effect, with a regression coefficient of 0.760, a standard error of 0.060, a standardized beta of 0.722, a t-value of 12.678, and  $p < 0.001$ . The regression equation for the second model was  $Y_2 = 10.001 + 0.760X$ . This means that every one-unit increase in perceived crisis management handling was associated with a 0.760-unit increase in customer trust. The second model produced an R value of 0.722 and an R-squared value of 0.521. This indicates that crisis management handling explained 52.1% of the variance in customer trust. Thus, hypothesis H1b, which states that crisis management handling affects customer trust, was supported by the data.

### Assumption and Instrument Quality Notes

The residual normality tests indicated that the residuals in both regression models were not normally distributed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance values for the models predicting corporate reputation and customer trust were both below 0.05. Consequently, the regression findings should be interpreted carefully. The statistical patterns are meaningful for identifying preliminary relationships, but future studies should consider data transformation, robust regression, bootstrapping, or alternative nonparametric procedures if similar distributional issues persist.

**Table 4.** Instrument quality summary.

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Valid items</b>	<b>Invalid items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Crisis management handling	8 of 10	2 of 10	0.180	Not reliable
Corporate reputation	6 of 10	4 of 10	0.015	Not reliable
Customer trust	7 of 10	3 of 10	0.199	Not reliable

The validity and reliability results also require methodological caution. In the crisis management handling construct, 8 of 10 items were valid, while 2 were not. In the corporate reputation construct, 6 of 10 items were valid, while 4 were not. In the customer trust construct, 7 of 10 items were valid, while 3 were not. Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.180 for crisis management handling, 0.015 for corporate reputation, and 0.199 for customer trust, all below the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.60. Therefore, although the regression results indicate significant relationships, the findings should be presented as preliminary and strengthened by revising weak items, conducting a pilot test, and recalculating the reliability before final journal submission.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The positive effects found in this study indicate that student users evaluate KAI Commuter not only based on routine service performance but also on the company's response to disruptions. In commuter rail services, crises such as delays, overcrowding, operational failures, ticket issues, or unclear service information can directly impact users' academic schedules and daily mobility. When companies respond quickly, communicate openly, demonstrate empathy, and provide concrete solutions, users are more likely to perceive the organization as credible, responsible, and professional.

The relatively strong R-squared value for the reputation model indicates that crisis management is not a peripheral element of public transportation management. Rather, it is part of the service provider's reputation infrastructure. For student users, reputation is formed through accumulated experience of how companies manage uncertainty. Disruptions are tolerable when users receive clear explanations and realistic alternatives. However, delayed information, inconsistent announcements, or inadequate solutions can cause reputational damage, as users interpret such responses as organizational indifference or weak accountability.

The results also indicate that crisis management has a significant positive effect on customer trust. This finding is important because trust in public transportation extends beyond trust in day-to-day train operations. It also encompasses confidence that the company will act responsibly when problems arise. In the context of student mobility, trust means believing that KAI Commuter will provide timely information, ensure passenger safety, acknowledge the impact of disruptions, and support users in making alternative travel decisions.

The slightly higher regression coefficient in the trust model compared to the reputation model suggests that crisis management may have a very direct psychological effect on customer trust. During a service crisis, passengers experience uncertainty and a loss of control. Responsive communication can reduce anxiety by providing passengers with information about the cause, estimated recovery time, alternative routes, and safety procedures. Empathetic communication also signals that the organization recognizes the inconvenience passengers experience. This communicative and operational response can strengthen trust in the company's reliability and responsibility.

These findings can also be interpreted within the broader context of crisis management practices in public transportation systems. Unlike many service industries, transportation crises often affect large numbers of passengers simultaneously and generate immediate operational, social, and reputational consequences. Therefore, effective crisis management requires not

only operational recovery but also coordinated communication strategies that provide timely, accurate, and actionable information. For KAI Commuter, disruptions such as train delays, signaling failures, overcrowding, and service interruptions require rapid communication through multiple channels to minimize uncertainty and maintain passenger confidence. The present findings suggest that passengers evaluate crisis management not solely based on the resolution of technical problems, but also on how effectively the organization communicates, demonstrates accountability, and supports passengers throughout the disruption process.

From a managerial perspective, these findings imply that KAI Commuter should treat crisis communication and service recovery as strategic components of customer relationship management. Crisis information should be consistently communicated through station announcements, field officers, official social media, mobile apps, and digital signage. The company should also develop standard operating procedures to communicate the cause of disruptions, estimated recovery times, travel alternatives, and post-crisis corrective actions. For students, real-time information is crucial as they need to adjust class attendance, exam schedules, internship schedules, and other academic activities.

These findings are also relevant to business ethics. Public transportation providers have an ethical responsibility to communicate honestly and transparently during service disruptions because passengers rely on these services for essential mobility. Ethical crisis management involves more than just technical troubleshooting; it requires accountability, empathy, fairness, and respect for affected users. When these principles are consistently practiced, a company can protect its reputation and maintain public trust, even when operational disruptions cannot be completely avoided.

In a densely populated metropolitan area like Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek), commuter rail services are part of everyday public infrastructure. Therefore, crisis response should not be viewed as a temporary operational reaction, but as a long-term reputational and relational strategy. A crisis may begin as a service disruption, but its consequences are communicative, reputational, and ethical. The ability to respond quickly, transparently, empathetically, and with concrete solutions is crucial to maintaining public trust in urban public transportation.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that crisis management plays a crucial role in shaping a company's reputation and customer trust in urban public transportation services. Based on the findings, KAI Commuter users, including students in Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek), tend to evaluate the company more positively when service crises are handled through rapid response, transparent

information, empathy for passengers, appropriate solutions, and continuous service improvement. These aspects indicate that crisis management is not merely an operational activity but also a strategic communication process that influences how passengers perceive the credibility and responsibility of public transportation providers.

In practice, the findings suggest that KAI Commuter should strengthen its crisis response procedures by improving real-time communication, passenger-oriented service recovery, coordination between operational units, and post-crisis evaluation. These strategies are crucial for maintaining public trust, especially among young, digitally connected passengers who can quickly share their service experiences on online platforms. This study also contributes to the academic literature by extending the understanding of the relationship between crisis management, corporate reputation, and customer trust in the context of urban public transportation services.

While previous studies have often examined these variables separately, the present study provides empirical evidence that effective crisis management can simultaneously strengthen corporate reputation and customer trust among commuter rail users. These findings enrich the literature on crisis communication, public transportation management, and relationship management by demonstrating the strategic role of crisis response in shaping stakeholder perceptions during service disruptions. From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for KAI Commuter and other public transportation operators in developing more effective crisis communication strategies, improving service recovery mechanisms, and strengthening passenger engagement through transparent and timely information delivery. Ultimately, these efforts can help organizations maintain public trust, enhance corporate reputation, and support the long-term sustainability of public transportation services.

However, this study has several limitations. Although the regression results show a significant effect, interpretation should be approached with caution because the residuals are not normally distributed and the instrument still needs improvement. Future studies should refine the questionnaire items, conduct broader trials, and involve a more diverse group of commuter users beyond college students.

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