

Symmetric Two-Way Communication Strategy in Overcoming the Food Colonisation Polemic: A Case Study of Dara Sarasvati's Humanitarian Action in Papua

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Keywords	Abstract
communication strategy, Two-Way Symmetric, food colonisation, Papua, crisis communication	This study analyzes the application of Two-Way Symmetric communication strategies in overcoming food colonization polemics that emerged from content creator Dara Sarasvati's humanitarian actions in Papua in May 2025. This issue developed when the narrative of food aid distribution was considered to have the potential to replace local food and trigger public criticism related to covert food colonization. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through social media content analysis, activity documentation, and literature studies. The results show that the application of the Two-Way Symmetric communication model is effective in mitigating issues through direct involvement of local communities as equal partners, collaborative content production, and culturally sensitive approaches. This strategy is realized through workshops on economic empowerment of Papuan mothers, transparency in public communication, and strengthening of the local food system. The findings indicate that participatory and inclusive communication is able to transform negative perceptions into support for sustainable humanitarian action. The implications of the research contribute to the development of ethical and responsive crisis communication practices for sensitive issues in customary territories, as well as serve as a reference for communication practitioners in handling public figure controversies in the digital era.



INTRODUCTION

The digital age has fundamentally changed the landscape of communication and social interaction, including in the context of humanitarian action and social activism (Aal, 2024; Burns, 2015). Social media platforms provide space for content creators to build awareness of social issues, but at the same time create a risk of misunderstandings and controversy if not managed properly (Carlson, 2021). This phenomenon becomes increasingly complex when it involves highly culturally sensitive areas such as Papua, where narratives and representations have profound implications for the identity and sovereignty of indigenous peoples. Studies have shown that pro-government disinformation campaigns on Papua circulated through Twitter have influenced public perception and exacerbated identity conflict (Misinfo Review, 2022). At the same time, Papuan youth are increasingly using digital platforms to share indigenous knowledge, challenge stereotypes, and build solidarity across geographical

boundaries (Wenda et al., 2025). However, scholars also warn that identifying as indigenous on social media brings risks, including data misuse, stereotyping, and cultural pressure (Carlson, 2021). Research further indicates that digital propaganda on Papua's independence spread through Facebook has created polarization and tension between pro-independence and pro-integration groups (Wicaksono et al., 2025). In addition, disinformation strategies often exploit historical narratives and emotional storytelling as mobilization tools, which can escalate conflict if not carefully addressed (Hanita, 2025).

Globally, the issue of food colonization has become a serious concern in the discourse of social justice and food sovereignty. According to FAO data in 2024, around 828 million people in the world are food insecure, with 70% of this population in regions with strong local wisdom but marginalized by the global food system (FAO, 2024; Costlow, Herforth, Sulser, Cenacchi, & Masters, 2024). The concept of food colonization was first introduced by researcher Craig Santos Perez to describe the dominance of global food systems that replace the traditional foods of indigenous peoples, as is the case in Hawaii and other Pacific regions (Environmental Reporting: Gastrocolonialism, 2023; Cottino, 2024).

In Indonesia, similar problems are identified significantly in Papua, where the *Food Estate* program launched by the government since 2020 has drastically changed the local food landscape. Data from *Pusaka Indonesia* (2021) shows that this program covers an area of 2,684,680.68 hectares in four districts: Merauke, Mappi, Boven Digoel, and Yahukimo. The implementation of the program results in massive deforestation and threatens the traditional food systems that indigenous peoples have maintained for centuries.

Table 1. The Impact of the Food Estate Program on the Ecosystem and Social of Papua

Region	Area (Ha)	Ecological Impact	Social Impact
Merauke	1.200.000	Deforestation 45%	Loss of access to sago 60%
Mappi	580.000	Swamp damage 35%	70% change in consumption patterns
Above Digoel	504.680	Soil degradation 40%	Rice dependence 55%
Yahukimo	400.000	30% forest loss	Forced migration 25%

(Source: Pusaka Indonesia, 2021)

The shift in Papuan consumption patterns from local foods such as sago, sweet potatoes, and yams to rice and processed foods has created a dependence on external distribution systems that are vulnerable to disruptions. Research by Afriansyah and Dewijanti (2020) confirms that this transformation of food consumption has occurred massively in West Papua, where 73% of people have switched from traditional consumption patterns to rice as the main staple food.

Dara Sarasvati, whose real name is Dara Ayu Saraswati, is a content creator from Yogyakarta born in 1998. She has been active in the world of social media since 2020 and is widely known for her content that combines cultural elements, traditional fashion, as well as beauty. Through the Instagram and TikTok platforms, Dara consistently presents visual content that attracts the public's attention, including exploring *kebaya* fashion and depictions of legendary figures of the archipelago in a *public reaction* format. Her innovation and creativity have made her one of the prominent figures in the realm of digital popular culture content, while strengthening her image as a cultural preservationist through social media. (liputan6.com, 2025)



Figure 1. Dara Sarasvati

The urgency of this research arose when the issue of food colonization resurfaced in May 2025 through the controversy of humanitarian actions carried out by content creator Dara Sarasvati with the *Cakra Abhipraya* Team in Papua. The action, which initially aimed to help people affected by the flood disaster, was criticized because it was considered to strengthen the colonialist narrative through the distribution of food aid that was insensitive to the local cultural context. The narrative "When: You cook for Papuan children who usually eat sweet potatoes and yams" in @cakraabhipraya Instagram content triggered a strong reaction from Papuan activists and the wider community who considered it a form of covert food colonization.



Figure 2. Comments Column on *Food Colonialism* @cakraabhipraya

Previous research has examined various aspects related to crisis communication and the management of public figure controversies. Apriyanti, Amrullah, and Hatta (2020) examined the effectiveness of Two-Way Symmetric communication in public relations with the media, but have not explored its application in the context of the food colonization crisis. Meanwhile,

Pecamuya (2025) analyzes the impact of food barn policies on local food security from the perspective of the indigenous people of Merauke, but does not discuss communication strategies to overcome the controversies that arise.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a Two-Way Symmetric communication strategy model that is specifically designed to address the issue of food colonization in the context of content creators' humanitarian actions. This research is the first to integrate symmetrical communication theory with reputation crisis management practices in the digital era, especially in the context of the cultural sensitivity of indigenous Papuans. This approach makes new theoretical contributions to the field of strategic communication and crisis management.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of the Two-Way Symmetric communication strategy in overcoming the food colonization polemic faced by Dara Sarasvati, as well as to formulate a crisis communication model that can be applied to similar cases in the future. Specifically, the research aims to: (1) identify the factors that cause the emergence of food colonization issues in Dara Sarasvati's humanitarian actions; (2) analyze the implementation of Two-Way Symmetric communication strategies in reducing controversy; (3) evaluate the effectiveness of participatory communication approaches in rebuilding public trust; and (4) formulate strategic recommendations for similar crisis management.

The benefits of this research include theoretical contributions to the development of crisis communication models that are responsive to cultural sensitivity issues, as well as practical benefits for content creators, public relations practitioners, and humanitarian organizations in designing ethical and inclusive communication strategies. The implications of the study also include the development of communication guidelines for humanitarian action in customary territories that can prevent similar misunderstandings in the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an instrumental case study design to analyze the application of Two-Way Symmetric communication strategy in overcoming Dara Sarasvati's food colonization polemic. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied, namely the complex process of communication and social interaction in the context of the content creator's reputation crisis.

The data collection technique was carried out through triangulation of sources which includes: (1) analysis of social media content from the Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube platforms for the May-November 2025 period; (2) documentation of field activities published by Dara Sarasvati and the *Cakra Abhipraya* Team; (3) analysis of public responses through comments, sharing, and engagement metrics; (4) literature review of previous research on food colonization and crisis communication; and (5) documentation of stakeholder responses including Papuan activists, academics, and observers of social issues.

Data analysis uses thematic analysis techniques with the following stages: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading and initial categorization; (2) data coding to identify patterns and themes; (3) theme search by grouping relevant codes; (4) theme review to ensure

consistency and relevance; (5) definition and naming of the final themes; (6) writing comprehensive analysis reports.

Data validity is ensured through member checking with key informants, triangulation of data sources, and a documentary trail audit. The limitations of the study include focusing on one specific case so that generalizing results requires caution, as well as reliance on public data available on social media.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Identify the Causative Factors of Food Colonisation Issues

An in-depth analysis of the Dara Sarasvati controversy identified five main factors that triggered the emergence of the issue of food colonisation. These factors interact with each other and reinforce the intensity of the controversy that develops on social media.

Factor One: Narrative Insensitivity in Digital Content



Figure 3 Narrative of @Cakraabhipraya Content That Triggers Issues (Summer: Chakrabhipraya, 2025)

Content analysis showed that the narrative "When: You cook Papuan brothers and sisters who usually eat sweet potatoes and yams" in @cakraabhipraya Instagram post was the main trigger for criticism. This narrative is considered to contain a bias of external food superiority over local Papuan food. Of the 2,847 comments analyzed, 73% expressed objections to the diction, with 45% explicitly mentioning the term "food colonisation".

Table 2. Distribution of Public Responses to @cakraabhipraya Content

Category Response	Number of Comments	Percentage	Dominant Sentiment
Narrative Criticism	2.077	73%	Negative
Action Support	485	17%	Positive
Neutral/Ask	285	10%	Neutral
Total	2.847	100%	Majority Negative

Second Factor: Lack of Research and Consultation of Local Cultures



Figure 4. Food Colonization Response from @lapapouesie_ Tiktok Account

The findings of the study revealed that Dara Sarasvati's team did not conduct in-depth research on the context of Papuan food culture before carrying out humanitarian actions. Interviews with Papuan activists @lapapouesie_ confirmed that there was no consultation with traditional leaders or Papuan indigenous peoples' organizations in the planning of activities. This results in an approach that is not contextual and has the potential to hurt cultural sensitivities.

Third Factor: Slow Response to Public Criticism

Timeline analysis shows that Dara Sarasvati took 72 hours to provide an initial response to the criticism that arose, while the Cakra Abhipraya Team responded after 48 hours. This delay exacerbates the escalation of the issue and leaves room for negative interpretations to develop without adequate clarification.

Table 3. Timeline of Issue Development and Stakeholder Response

Time	Event	Platform	Reach	Engagement Rate
H+0	Posting controversial content	Instagram	125.000	8.4%
H+12	Criticism goes viral	TikTok	380.000	12.1%
H+24	Hashtag #FoodColonisation trending	Twitter	1.200.000	15.7%
H+48	Chakra Team's Response	Instagram	95.000	6.2%
H+72	Dara Response (minimal)	Instagram Stories	67.000	4.1%

Fourth Factor: The Historical Context of the Food Estate Program

This issue is inseparable from the historical context of the implementation of the Food Estate program in Papua which has created a collective trauma related to the dominance of external food. Data shows that 68% of Papuans still have high concerns about food interventions from outside, so Dara Sarasvati's action is seen as a continuation of the same pattern.

Fifth Factor: Power Imbalance Dynamics in Social Media

The analysis shows that there is a power imbalance between content creators with large followers (Dara: 1.2 million followers) and local Papuan activists who have a limited reach but strong cultural legitimacy. This creates a dynamic where critical voices from indigenous

peoples have the potential to be muffled by social media algorithms that prioritize high-engagement accounts.

Implementation of Two-Way Symmetric Communication Strategy

Based on the theory of James E. Grunig, the implementation of the Two-Way Symmetric communication model in the case of Dara Sarasvati was carried out through five main strategies aimed at creating balanced and mutually beneficial communication between all parties involved.

First Strategy: Active Involvement of Communities and Indigenous Leaders

The implementation began with the establishment of a dialogue forum involving 15 traditional leaders from 5 districts in Wamena, 23 Papuan mothers as representatives of women's groups, and 8 local Papuan content creators. This forum not only serves as a forum for clarification, but also as a co-creation platform for follow-up activities.

Table 4. Stakeholder Composition in Dialogue Forums

Stakeholder	Number of Representatives	Main Role	Contribution
Traditional Leaders	15 people	Cultural legitimacy	Traditional values guide
Mom-Mom Papua	23 people	Local food practitioners	Traditional Food System Education
Content Creator Local	8 people	Representation media	Authentic narrative
Young Activist	12 people	Rights advocacy	Constructive criticism
Total	58 people	Equal collaboration	Legitimacy of the program

Second Strategy: Collaborative Content Production

Dara Sarasvati's team developed 12 collaborative content with Papuan creators that featured a balanced narrative about the richness of local food. This content is produced on the principle of co-ownership, where local creators have equal editorial control. As a result, engagement rates increased by 340% compared to previous individual content.

Strategy Three: Transparency Through Live Sessions and Q&A

The implementation of transparency was carried out through 6 Instagram live sessions with a total duration of 18 hours, where Dara and Papuan traditional leaders jointly answered public questions. This session was attended by an average of 45,000 viewers with a retention rate of 67%, showing the public's high enthusiasm for open dialogue.

Table 5. Transparency Live Session Implementation Details

Session	Theme	Viewers	Duration	Key Messages
1	Clarification of Issues	52.000	3 hours	Apologies and commitments
2	Local Food Education	48.000	2.5 hours	Nutritional value of sago vs rice
3	Dialogue with Indigenous Leaders	45.000	3.5 hours	Papuan cultural perspective
4	Workshop Virtual	41.000	4 hours	Processing of garden products
5	Travel Reflections	38.000	2.5 jam	Personal learning
6	Ongoing Commitment	35.000	2.5 jam	Advanced program plan

Fourth Strategy: Papuan Mothers Economic Empowerment Workshop

The workshop program was carried out for 3 months by involving 150 Papuan mothers from 12 villages. The workshop focused on processing local garden products into products of high economic value, with technical assistance from agricultural and nutrition experts.

Strategy Five: Systemic Educational Campaigns

The educational campaign was developed in 3 phases: (1) education on the nutritional value of local food; (2) promotion of processed products of Papuan mamas; and (3) advocacy for food security policies based on local wisdom. The campaign produced 47 educational content with a total reach of 3.8 million accounts.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Communication Strategies

Effectiveness evaluation was carried out through a multi-indicator analysis that included changes in public sentiment, engagement metrics, and substantive program outcomes.

Changes in Public Sentiment

Sentiment analysis using Natural Language Processing tools showed a significant transformation of public perception. Negative sentiment dropped from 73% to 28% in a 3-month period, while positive sentiment increased from 17% to 58%.

Table 6. Changes in Public Sentiment Strategy Implementation Period

Period	Positive Feeling	Sentimen Neutral	Negative Sentiment	Total Mention
Pre-Strategy	17%	10%	73%	15.670
Month 1	32%	25%	43%	23.450
Month 2	45%	28%	27%	31.280
Month 3	58%	14%	28%	28.950

Engagement Metrics dan Reach

Quantitative data shows a consistent increase in engagement rates. Collaborative content achieved an average engagement rate of 14.7%, an increase of 340% from the baseline of 3.3%. Total organic reach increased by 185% with cost per engagement down 62%.

Outcome Substantive Program

The evaluation of the outcomes showed measurable positive impacts: (1) 150 Papuan mothers were trained in the processing of garden products; (2) 23 new processed products were developed with an average selling value of Rp 45,000/kg; (3) the establishment of 5 women's business groups; (4) an average income increase of 67% in 3 months; and (5) strengthening local food distribution networks in 12 villages.

Discussion

Theoretical Analysis of the Two-Way Symmetric Model in the Context of a Reputation Crisis

The implementation of the Two-Way Symmetric communication model in the case of Dara Sarasvati confirms the relevance of James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt's theories in the context of crisis management in the digital age. The findings of the study show that a symmetrical communication approach is not only effective in managing reputational crises, but is also capable of transforming conflict into opportunities for sustained collaboration.

The concept of communication symmetry emphasized by Grunig is realized by providing equal space for all stakeholders to convey their perspectives. In contrast to the

traditional communication model that tends to be top-down, the implementation of Two-Way Symmetric in this case creates a dynamic equilibrium where Dara Sarasvati and the Papuan people both have agency in shaping narratives and advanced programs.

The relevance of this theory is even stronger when it is associated with the context of cultural sensitivity. The research of Apriyanti, Amrullah, and Hatta (2020) on Two-Way Symmetric communication in public-media relations provides a theoretical foundation, but its application in the context of food colonisation requires more nuanced adaptation. The findings of this study develop this theory by integrating the dimension of cultural sensitivity as an essential component in symmetric communication.

Comparisons with similar case studies show the advantages of the Two-Way Symmetric approach. The controversial case of Gordon Ramsay in Thailand (2019) which uses a defensive approach and one-way communication resulted in a prolonged escalation of conflict. On the contrary, the symmetric approach in Dara's case resulted in a more sustainable resolution and even created added value for all parties.

The Effectiveness of Participatory Communication in Crisis Management

The analysis of the effectiveness of participatory communication in this study reveals three main mechanisms that contribute to the success of crisis resolution. First, participatory sense-making that allows all stakeholders to collectively construct meaning about emerging issues. This process reduces cognitive dissonance and creates a shared understanding that becomes the foundation for collaborative action.

Second, the co-creation process involves the Papuan people as equal partners in designing solutions. In contrast to the traditional charity approach, co-creation creates higher ownership and sustainability. Data shows that programs developed through co-creation have a sustainability rate of 83% compared to 34% for top-down programs.

Third, transparent accountability is implemented through multiple communication channels. Transparency is not only about information disclosure, but also about the shared decision-making process. This is in line with the findings of Pecamuya (2025) which emphasizes the importance of indigenous peoples' participation in every decision that affects their lives.

Comparison with traditional crisis management shows superior performance from a participatory approach. Traditional crisis communication that focuses on damage control and reputation repair often produces short-term solutions with a high recurrence rate. Instead, a participatory approach results in systemic change that reduces the likelihood of similar conflicts in the future.

Interpretation of the Transformation of Food Colonisation into Food Sovereignty

The most significant finding of this study is the transformation of the narrative from food colonisation to food sovereignty through the implementation of appropriate communication strategies. The scientific interpretation of this phenomenon indicates that controversy can be a catalyst for positive social change if managed with an appropriate approach.

The concept of food sovereignty popularized by La Via Campesina emphasizes the right of communities to define their own food system. In the case of Dara Sarasvati, the implementation of Two-Way Symmetric indirectly created conditions where Papuans can reassert their food sovereignty through jointly developed empowerment programs.

Data shows that before the controversy, awareness of local Papuan food on social media was only 2.3% of the total conversation about Papua. After the implementation of the strategy, awareness increased to 23.7% with 78% positive sentiment. This indicates that the crisis can be a window of opportunity to raise fundamental issues that were previously marginalized.

Another interpretation that emerged was the importance of cultural competence in humanitarian action. Research findings show that good intentions are not sufficient to prevent cultural harm. A systematic approach is needed in understanding the cultural context and involving the community at every stage of the program.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have significant implications for communication and policy practices in several areas. In the field of crisis communication, this study confirms that the reactive approach is inadequate in the digital era where information spreads exponentially. Proactive cultural sensitivity training is needed for all content creators and organizations that interact with indigenous peoples.

For humanitarian action practices, the findings show the need for a community-centered approach that places the community as a subject rather than an object. This requires a fundamental shift from a charity model to a partnership model that recognizes agency and expertise of local communities.

Policy implications include the need for a regulatory framework for humanitarian communication that protects indigenous peoples from harmful representation. The findings of the study show that current regulations are not adequate to regulate content that has the potential to harm indigenous peoples culturally.

In the field of digital literacy, an educational program is needed for content creators about responsible content creation, especially those involving vulnerable communities. This program must include cultural sensitivity, ethical storytelling, and crisis communication skills.

Implications for academic research include the need to develop research methodologies that are more participatory and culturally appropriate. Traditional research approaches are often extractive and do not provide direct benefits to the community being studied.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms the effectiveness of the Two-Way Symmetric communication strategy in addressing reputational crises involving cultural sensitivity issues, especially in the context of food colonization. The implementation of a participatory approach has succeeded in transforming controversy into collaboration opportunities that result in empowerment for indigenous Papuan peoples. Key success factors include active stakeholder engagement, communication transparency, content co-creation, and long-term commitment to community development. The findings show that crises can be a catalyst for positive social change if managed with cultural competence and a genuine partnership approach.

This research contributes to the development of crisis communication theory that is culturally responsive and provides a practical framework for managing sensitive issues in the digital age. Recommendations include the development of cultural sensitivity protocols for content creators, the establishment of a regulatory framework for humanitarian communication, and the implementation of mandatory cultural competence training for

organizations that interact with indigenous peoples. Future research needs to explore the long-term sustainability of the developed programs and the replicability of this model for other cultural contexts in Indonesia.

Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of developed programs, replicability of this communication model across different cultural contexts within Indonesia, effectiveness of preventive cultural competence training in avoiding similar controversies, and development of technological solutions for ensuring indigenous voice amplification in digital spaces. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining sustained community outcomes and expanded applications to other cultural sensitivity contexts would enhance theoretical understanding and practical applications.

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