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CONTEMPORARY RHETORIC DECONSTRUCTS RHETORICAL APPROACH IN PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to enrich the development of public relations research approach. The development can be conducted by deconstructing the focus of rhetorical study: from classical rhetoric to contemporary rhetoric. Rhetoric is vital to society to exist because rhetoric is the use of symbols, conducted by individuals and organizations, to influence opinions, understanding, and actions. Contemporary rhetoric focuses not only on public speech communication but also on the use of symbols. As a result, it extends the scope of rhetorical study, from political communication to other field of interest, including public relations and its branch of study, crisis management. By conducting critical ethnography, the author explored rhetorical phenomena as a part of crisis management dealing with crisis. In sum, the deconstruction creates a concept of public relations rhetoric.

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INTRODUCTION

Public relations competency, as a part of applied communication science, should involve message engineering, i.e. producing messages that effectively influence the public's perceptions toward organization. Since message is any productions, processes, and influences of symbols (Kriyantono, 2012), so public relations practitioners and academics should have a solid understand about symbols, messages, and the meaning they can produce. Public relations practices is directed to produce messages that help organization to maintain its reputation. Hence, message is "very core of communication study" (Griffin, 2012, p. 6); communication is anything that involves messages in some media or situation (Craig, 2007) so Fiske (2001, p. 2) said that communication is "social interaction through messages." The importance of message engineering is also supported by Heath (2005, p. 749): "Practitioners are paid to influence what people know, think, and do (by using symbols)."

The study of the way human produces symbols to construct particular meanings and use them to create messages in order to influence other's meaning and the way human studies the meaning of symbols and messages is the focus of rhetoric. In sum, rhetoric is theoretical base of public relations. However, as told by Heath (2005); Foss (2009); and Littlejohn & Foss (2008), the term rhetoric is still perceived as speech and having negative connotation. Many people perceive rhetoric as NATO (No action talk only); deceptive speech in order to manipulate or control people, for example, in political campaign. Rhetoric is philosophical thought of Aristotle, an Ancient Greece philosopher. From Sendjaja (1998), it can be said that the people in the time of Greece used the term rhetoric in the same way with people at this era uses the term communication. It means that the functions of rhetoric were similar to the functions of communication, therefore, rhetoric is the term for and the root of early communication. Mulyana (2000) called that rhetoric model of Aristotle which is the most classical model of communication. "Aristotle was the first person who studied communication, that its core was persuasion. He formulated the first model of verbal communication." (2000, p.134). Rakhmat (1999) argued that rhetoric was the Greek philosophical basis and it emerged simultaneously with civilization, i.e. when people learnt to speak fluently in order to persuade others for fulfilling the

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needs. As a scientific study, rhetoric was developed by Aristotle in his book of *De Arte Rhetorica*. Aristotle continued his teacher, Plato's idea about morality of rhetoric. Rhetoric, according to Plato, was a medium to deliver normative values, i.e. there is no absolute truth and everything is changeable. Aristotle explain Plato's idea more systematically and comprehensively by introducing three elements: *ethos* (source credibility), *pathos* (emotion or feeling), and *logos* (fact). In order that persuasion can go through well, communicator must be able to create messages to stimulate audience's emotions and feelings effectively. Furthermore, the message must be factual and can be proved with data and communicator must take a responsibility for any effect that is likely to happen. The integration of those three elements will stimulate audience accept the persuasive messages. The effort to integrate the three elements make rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Heath (1992) drew rhetoric in Ancient Greece as the art of argument because people used argument and counter-argument to give solution.

Contemporary Rhetoric

There are two important things during the 20th century. First, as written by Foss (2009), many scholars called the term rhetoric as speech communication, oral communication or public speaking which evaluate how to persuade audience through speeches. Second, contemporary rhetoric was born since World War I and II, to examine the use of symbols, such as propaganda, advertising, and mass media messages, in order to increase soldiers' motivation and to weaken the enemies (pyswar). As a result, rhetorical theory grew to study not only (i) to explain message arrangement and dissemination strategy with the aim to be informative and persuasive, but also (ii) the reasons why using symbols to persuade other people in decision making context and persuade people to do certain action; (iii) involve any kinds of symbols use, such as public discursive, verbal-nonverbal; and visualization; (iv) not only focus on individuals, but also management and organization study; (v) to formulate regulations and reconstruct reasons regarding the efforts to understand the correlation between public discourse and trust or the efforts to share public knowledge; (vi) the use of symbols in wide context and its impact on the creation of particular system; (vii) to study the creation of ideology structures by popular discourse, such as ideology of class, gender, and ethnic differentiation bagaimana struktur-struktur ideologi (Brimeyer, Eaker & Clair, 2004; Cisneros, McCauliff & Beasley, 2009; Hartelius & Browning, 2008). In addition, advertising is one of the most prevalent form of rhetorical research since it is persuasive discourse to persuade people to buy (Wills, 2011).

It can be concluded that contemporary rhetoric makes rhetorical study "moves from speech to all symbols use." (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 52), and "what we know and how we act as society are always communicated through rhetoric." (Cisneros, dkk, 2009, p.232). Borrowing Derrida's concept of deconstruction, contemporary rhetoric has deconstructed the use of symbols, especially in this article, in public relations study. If Mickey (2003) argued that deconstruction stimulate critical reflection toward public relations, so the author assumes that contemporary rhetoric as the result of rhetoric deconstruction is critical reflection that rhetoric is not the art

of speech only. Furthermore, due to the growth of communication technology, nowadays, rhetorical theory focus on all contexts or forms in which symbols use occurs—verbal, visual or nonverbal—such as film; television; radio; painting; sculpture; speech; architecture; corporate communication; law regulations; political speech; advertising; corporate image strategy; marketing, public discourse, fashion, design, graphic, and logo, which occur in interpersonal, organizational, and mass communication (Foss, 2009; Heath, 1992; Heath, 2005; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). In other words, all communication materials as the results of production, process, and implication of system of symbols are the objects or the artefacts of rhetoric. "There is virtually nothing that is part of the human experience that cannot be looked at from a rhetorical perspective." (Foss, 2009, p.855) and "One may condemn rhetoric... but one cannot escape it." (Cisneros, *et al*, 2009, p.234).

The situation above is linked to Kenneth Burke's idea, one of modern rhetoric scholars (Heath, 1992; Richardson, 2001; Smudde, 2000; Wills, 2011). Rhetoric, according to Burke, (1937, cited in Heath, 1992, p.20), deals with "the ways in which the symbols of appeal are stolen back and forth by rival camps." It can be said that rhetoric is the use and interaction of symbol through which individuals and or organizations influence opinions, understanding, and actions. Therefore, Burke promoted the concept of "the wrangle in the marketplace" in which individuals use words and visual symbols to share and evaluate information, shape beliefs, and establish norms for coordinated collective action" (Heath, 1992, p.17) in public sphere or marketplace. The process of facts interpretation, arguments, and accurate conclusion within public discourse is also the way for creating public policy. Some views compete to reach cooperation through coordinated collective actions from the society. Therefore, Burke concluded that "our form of government is a device for institutionalizing the dialectic process, by setting up a political structure that gives full opportunity for the use of competition to a cooperative end." (Heath, 1992, p.20).

Rhetorical theory discusses the important role of information and fact presentation to build and disseminate knowledge and opinions in order to motivate other people to do the wish of the communicator. However, messages will be accepted through debate and critic by evaluating truth and logical aspect of knowledge and facts under presentation. It stimulates public discourse in which every people has opportunity to express ideas and interpretations toward those facts. The dispute cannot be avoided and rhetoric calls this process argumentative or persuasive communication (Cisneros, *et al*, 2009). The spirit of debate and dispute inherited from rhetorical thought in Ancient Greece era. The debate stimulates individuals to negotiate and cooperate in collaborative decision making. Individuals as collective have the right to receive and judges messages, product, service, organization, and issues, as tools to make decision. Rhetoric will not be needed if individuals share the same information, opinion, and motive (Heath, 2005). As a result that rhetoric is the use of symbols to persuade other people, rhetoric evaluates reasons the way individuals or organizations use symbols to persuade others. There are particular meanings and ideologies within the reasons.

From Bower & Och's (1971, cited in Brimeyer, Eaker & Clear, 2004) work, it can be said that rhetoric is a rational tool and symbolic action to negotiate ideology. Negotiation is interaction between two kinds of rhetoric: agitation and control (establishment). Agitation is rhetorical strategy used by individuals or groups which have complaint and have no resources. Control is rhetorical strategy from people who has power legitimation to refuse changes from agitation groups. Negotiation between agitation and control groups will result in social changes and movements. The use of symbols in the negotiation process should be based on ethical standards, such as having rational evidences, good structures, clear frame and description and informative. Finally, Bower & Orch's rhetorical study was called social change or movement rhetoric.

Rhetoric in public relations study

Good rhetorical ability, such as public speaking, is a basis for Public Relations practitioners to deliver their persuasive messages, because, according to Heath (2005), rhetorical theory helps "to understand the messages that are strategically and ethically relevant to each task." (h.749). The management of symbols is at the heart of corporate rhetoric and public relations with the aim as management of multiple identities (Smudde, 2000). Skerlep (2001) mentioned that Public Relations practice is rhetoric because it functions to create and manage organizational messages (corporate discourse) which relate to conflict and polemic. Heath (1992, p.19) calls "Public Relations is rhetorical". Some definitions of public relations are made by many scholars, but, all definitions are the same: rhetoric as a tool to rationalize public relations' responsibility for the public (public responsibility) (Heath, 2009). Rhetoric study stimulates Public Relations practitioners to realize that persuasive process happens openly through debate and dispute, and public has opportunity to express opinions and judgements toward public relations messages. Therefore, rhetoric theory gives guidance to arrange message. Decision making should accommodate public's ideas and interpretations. In addition, Richardson (2001) proved that rhetoric is a powerful tool that can effectively persuade publics into action and change the world in the process. The study enrich research on rhetoric as a public relations tool in social movements.

Rhetoric views that the use of symbols in public relations practice should be able to give information, build structure and create good relations among the structures. Public relations messages are also directed to help public in making decision in order to support organization's programs with logical reasons, accurate facts and ethical consideration. It means that public relations messages should voice organization's ideas in public discourse by holding on the principle of "to be effective each individual or organization needs first to be ethical, good." (Heath, 2005, h.752) and avoiding deceptive and manipulative messages, character assassination, information failure and distortion which against the code of ethic. Therefore, Rhetorical research focuses on evaluating or criticizing organizational messages, whether the messages go hand in hand with ethical aspects or not, toward the issues in public discourses. Rhetorical research in public relations focuses on how symbolic strategy works, such as in managing issues and

corporate advocacy in crisis situations. Scholars are able to evaluate the influence of corporate symbols toward public opinions, the influence of symbolic strategy toward public debate on public policy, how the exchange of opinions, facts, and arguments through rhetorical strategies during negotiation and conflict resolution. Toth (1992) explored some research, such as Crable & Vibert (1985), Vibbert (1987), dan Heath & Nelson (1986), and found that the companies created particular issues through rhetoric strategy in order to create public's attention and opinion; Ice (1991) evaluated organization's discourse to influence public perceptions toward the company during Bhopal incident in India. Brimeyer, *et al.* (2004) studied rhetorical strategies from management and worker union regarding anti worker union campaign conducted by management. By using content analysis, the researchers evaluated some communication products, such as web, photos, booklets, flyers, and posters from management and union. Brimeyer, *et all* found that the union used agitation strategy and management used control strategy. Agitation involved: (a). Promulgation, the effort to gain social support toward the problem; (b). Solidification, rhetorical strategy to produce and increase cohesive relations among the workers; (c). Polarization, using empathic statements that individuals who did not agree with the union were status quo supporters. On the other hand, control strategy involved: (a). Avoidance, which consisted of *counterpersuasion* (to prove that agitator was wrong without direct confrontation); *evasion*, avoid challenge by bureaucratic procedures; *secrecy with a rationale*, management refused to give information and facilities until the union obey management's rule; (b). Suppression, strategy to weaken the union's cohesiveness.; (c). Adjustment, adjust with agitator complaints; (d). Capitulation, fulfil completely agitator's complaints.

PERSPECTIVES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY

Based on the description above, it revealed that theory building and research are related inseparably. Research has important role to develop public relations theory. Theory guides research and, in return, research refines theory (Dissayanake, 1988; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Research is a tool to explain, apply, and prove theory as well as to build new theory. Some literature (such as Botan & Hazleton, 2009; Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001; Coombs, 2007a, 2007b; Everett, 2009; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Hallahan, 1999; Johansson, 2007; Skerlep, 2001) have contributed to develop public relations theories. In general, those theories are evolved from two basic propositions: (1) Public Relations play as a management function; and (2) Public Relations are responsible to manage the relationship between the organization and its public (Everett, 2009). The two propositions require the process of adaptation and adjustment between organization and public. Hence, the propositions are the formal object of public relations study. Like in other social sciences, scientists have different perspectives (worldview) about how to view the object of study. There are at least three perspectives about object of study, namely: objective, interpretive and critical (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kriyantono, 2014b; Neuman, 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The objective perspective views that the organization as the center of activities influences the public's behaviors during the adaptation and adjustment

process. Public relations are defined as a management function and transmission process of communication, based on the organization perspectives, but they fails to describe the struggle of power in relationships (Curtin, 2005; Gower, 2006). On the other hands, interpretive and critical perspectives assume that both two parties –organization and its public- have ability to construct meanings and to negotiate their interest. Public relations research and practice focus more on interaction process in organization and how individuals produce meanings toward organization activities (Trujillo & Toth, 1987). However, criticism differs from interpretive in defining the construction process. Interpretive focuses more on social construction processing in individuals' ideas and between individuals (micro-level analysis) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kriyantono, 2014b; Neuman, 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Public is assumed as co-creator of meaning, interpretation, and goal formulation (Botan & Hazleton, 2009). It is interpretive public relations (Trujillo & Toth, 1987). Critical perspective views that the constructions of the individual's ideas are virtual reality because they are shaped by the historical processes and the power struggle of social, economy and politics in the society that result in false illusions of the constructions –macro level analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kriyantono, 2014b; Neuman, 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), therefore, it is critical public relations (Trujillo & Toth, 1987).

At the beginning, objective perspective has dominated public relations studies (Curtin, 2005; Gower, 2006; Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010; Skerlep, 2001; Trujillo & Toth, 1987; Wehmeier, 2009), with the Excellence Theory in Public Relations has been becoming a theoretical perspective that has been dominating public relations research (Gower, 2006; Skerlep, 2001). During 2000-2005, critical perspective – through postmodernism- has been adopted in public relations research (Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010). Critical perspective criticises excellence theory for not put power-control aspects in describing public relations realities (Gower, 2006; Wehmeier, 2009). There is a perspective struggle between the dominant, which is represented by excellence theory, versus critical including postmodernism (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2012). Variety of perspectives and school of thought are a sign for maturity of public relations science (Ihlen & Ruler, 2009). Therefore, there are still vast areas waiting to be researched by exploring alternative perspectives, including rhetoric and critical ethnography.

MUDFLOW CRISIS IN RHETORICAL APPROACH

To show how contemporary rhetorical approach can be conducted in public relations research, the author's PhD research is also described in this article (Kriyantono, 2011). Rhetorical approach can be applied on crisis management during mudflow crisis. Rhetorical research in public relations and organization has most often concerned itself with corporate advocacy, crisis, and issues management. (Richardson, 2001; Smudde, 2000). The mudflow event in Sidoarjo, Indonesia is an extraordinary event. The hot mud started to erupt on May 29, 2006. More than 640 hectares of land is flooded by the mud. Up to 70 thousand cubic meters of

hot sludge is still gushing from the volcano's steaming lips every day. Twelve villages have been affected and at least 60,000 people have been forced to flee their homes. In addition, many social facilities such as school buildings and houses of prayer were lost; more than 20 companies were shut down; more than 20 thousand people lost their jobs; and the agriculture sector lost billions of Rupiah (Rp) due to harvest failures. The physical damage created a serious danger to culture and values of a particular social system. It also created high levels of uncertainty, particularly to the victims. As a result, it became an acute crisis quickly when the situation could not be managed properly by the company, so that the situation became visible outside the company and stimulated public discussion. Public discussion is marketplace of competing ideas through which people constructed this reality. Rhetorical approach views that creation and dissemination the constructions is rhetoric in which symbol use occurs. It should be noted that people's rhetoric is depended on their political economy backgrounds. The company created its rhetoric through a crisis management strategy included its communication strategies; the government's regulations, the news from mass media, and the victims' demanding were also a product of rhetoric. However, the different rhetoric can create conflicts and become a serious problem. As a result of being a subjective matter and depends on the individual's interest, any efforts to compel the rhetoric to others can trigger controversy.

METHODS

The author conducted critical ethnography to explore rhetorical strategies from the actors involved on the crisis, such as the company (Lapindo Inc), Indonesian government, and the victims. Data was collected by conducting interview and content analysis to some communication products. The significance of conducting a critical ethnography is that it can enhance the understanding of public relations practitioners in this field, and the victims' reactions to crisis. A critical ethnography can reveal social practices regarding crisis management which is how people are and what they say and do. Based on people ideas about a critical ethnography, the critique and transformation of unfair and disabling forms of crisis policies were fostered. Critical ethnography was applied to collect information from the informants in depth. The approach allowed researcher to ask questions of the respondents in more detail, with flexibility, and freely about all aspects regarding the mudflow crisis.

The approach also allowed the researcher to use a variety of perspectives and theories to analyze data as well as a wide range of multiple sources of data, such as observations, interviews, focus group discussions, ethnography, documents, diaries, news from the mass-media, emails, articles or similar so that it does not depend on one theoretical model (Bazeley, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Kriyantono, 2010; Lichtman, 2006; Willis, 2007; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006; Yin, 1989). It is hoped that this current research will give a thick and rich description about the victims' perspectives of the crisis management. During this current research, the informants could freely express their opinions and emotions about the crisis without being controlled by the researcher. In other words, both sides could freely interpret and create the

reality of the crisis situation in a natural setting. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher aims to explain a specific situation about the victims' perspectives of the mudflow's crisis management rather than making a generalization. Consequently, the researcher collected data directly and it was limited by context to the natural setting (Hesse-Bibber & Leavy, 2006; Kriyantono, 2010; Lichtman, 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006; Yin, 1989).

RESULTS

From the beginning of data collecting, the author found out several rhetorical strategies of labeling the mudflow crisis. The victims, academics and the members of non-government organizations called Lapindo Mud which referred to the name of company. The people claimed that the mud erupted from the area of drilling activity that was operated by Lapindo Inc and resulted in their happiness and tranquility lost. The victims also called this name when they talk each other in everyday life. Several media that the victim made to communicate their opinion such as street banner, T-shirts, and Video Compact Disc (VCD) also used this rhetorical label of Lapindo Mud. As alternative media, these media were present as the substitution of mainstream mass media. Furthermore, the author also investigated the rhetorical strategies of mainstream media in Indonesia. The result was that media have different rhetorical label toward the crisis. Several mass-media often constructed the event as Lapindo Mud, however, some mass media used the name Hotmud in Sidoarjo, Sidoarjo Mud or East Java Mud. It is also interesting that sometime the same media use both Lapindo Mud and Sidoarjo Mud in its news. The name of Sidoarjo Mud and East Java Mudflow gives a meaning that Sidoarjo and all East Java province's communities have been impacted socially and economically by the disaster. What about the government and Lapindo Inc? Both of them use the attribution of Sidoarjo Mud or Porong Mud. The government use the words Sidoarjo Mud when speaking to public. These name can also found in all the Presidential regulations and the Presidential Decree. Similarly, in all occasions –seminars press-conferences, news-interviewing, and its media publications, Lapindo Inc called this event Sidoarjo Mud. It is argued that it is its rhetorical strategies to frame the event and to build public perception about the source of the mudflow and then who will take a responsibility.

It can be argued that these publications above were rhetorical strategy to shape or construct public's frame. The public attribution of the company's actions as the cause of a crisis is determined by how the crisis is being framed. Based on Druckman's theory of framing (2001, cited in Coombs, 2007a), it can be stated that the aim of rhetorical strategy was to convince the public that the source of the mud eruption was not Lapindo's drilling mistake, conversely, it was caused by earthquake in Jogjakarta, two days before the first eruption. It is hoped that the company's construction about the reality can change the public attribution and knowledge about the crisis. It should be noted that a naming or labeling this event as Sidoarjo Mud is one of the main program of Public Relations Officers of Lapindo. The different rhetorical strategies stimulated the dispute between the company, the victims, and the government. In a high political economy context, the objective reality was the construction of "a natural disaster".

This construction appeared not only in the company's messages but also in any formal regulations from the government at the beginning of the crisis. It can be read that this construction represents the power and interest of the political and economic elites. It is interesting that the government officers, when speaking to the public, tended to demand the company pay compensation, but they constructed "Sidoarjo Mud" in formal regulations. It can be said that the process of rhetoric walked softly and seemed normal. However, the company failed to shape the victims' rhetoric of reality. The victims constructed "Lapindo Mud". They claimed that this crisis happened because of the company's mistake, although they obtained compensation from the company. The research found that rhetorical strategy about the label of crisis connected to rhetorical strategy about the cause that trigger the crisis. The research found that the rhetorical strategies as part of crisis management focused more on maintaining the company's reputation than on the victims' fate.

The victims was living in the temporary shelters, waiting for months without clear information about the compensation, and the company was more busy to persuade public that the mudflow was not caused by drilling error. The Participant 2 in FGD said: "Lapindo was too busy defending themselves. They provided shelter and food for refugees just to show their corporate social responsibility. However, they did not want to be blamed for this disaster." Respondent 7 said: "Lapindo was talk active through media but not immediately gave solution to the victims. Compensation payments were late." It can be argued that the aim of the rhetorical strategy was to convince the public that the company was not guilty. As stated by Sunaryo, one of the officer of Lapindo: "First of all, we must have the same point of view about this mudflow. It is important to note that the event is Sidoarjo Mud, not (Lapindo Mud). It is a natural disaster happening in Sidoarjo. It is not true that the mudflow was caused by Lapindo's drilling activity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is common that disagreements always happen in a crisis situation. To deal with any conflicts, the state should give opportunity for all voices to be heard. As a result, the domination of ideology from the group which has the power can be avoided (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). However, from field observations, the victims have been oppressed by more powerful groups therefore the victims must struggle to gain their right. The situation happened, adopting Marxism, because economical-profit oriented directed any efforts to manage the crisis. Moreover, the victims did not have a great chance to access any means of production, included mass media and formal communication channel. The situation of oppression and unfairness happened at the beginning of the crisis. Adopting Toth's (2002), it can be concluded that crisis management conducted only a one way flow of information, argument, and influence whereby the company only disseminated its rhetorical views and dominated the victims. The rhetorical strategy was applied on behalf of the company's interest and even sometimes applied to distorted and avoided truth. From Berger-Luckman's (1967) idea, it can be said that the rhetoric will be an objective reality depends on two factors: (i) how the construction is shaped; (ii) the power to

communicate that the construction itself is about something that people believe is a social reality. By taking over several media and spending a large sum of money for advertisements on local and national media, Lapindo had the power to communicate the rhetorical strategy that it was a natural disaster. This power was also strong because of the political position of the owner of the company as the minister, the chairman of one of the biggest parties, and the chief of coalition parties. Adopting Althusser's idea about ideology, mass media is a tool to disseminate the company's points of views more subtly. One of Critical scholars, Foucault, said that "Power and knowledge cannot be divided" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 221). Based on Foucault's ideas, it can be concluded that power is an inherent part of all company's message. The advertisements, newsletters, regulations, as expressed in language, transferred power. As a result, power persuaded public perception about the reality. It created particular knowledge, such as the company was a hero and a generous and the victims were troublemakers. Furthermore "Power is a creative force that pervades all human activity" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

Contemporary rhetoric focus not only on public speech communication but also on the use of symbols, in all communication field of study, such as mass communication, political communication, public relations, and marketing communication. The use of symbols can be evaluated from intrapersonal to interpersonal to public discourse to social movements and mediated discourse. No human experience cannot be studied by rhetorical approach. It brings that contemporary rhetoric deconstruct rhetorical approach in public relations research. One of the field of studies is public relations during crisis situation. Crisis situation can be understood as marketplace of competing ideas in which the company's rhetoric compete with other rhetorical products, such as the government's regulations, the news from mass media, and the victims' demanding. However, Lapindo had the power to communicate its ideology that the mudflow was a natural rather than a manmade disaster.

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