



## **Analysis of Indonesian Government Policy Communication in Handling the Pandemic**

<sup>1</sup>Sriyono, <sup>2</sup>Abner Herry Bajari, <sup>3</sup>Jackson Yumame, <sup>4</sup>Ilham, <sup>5</sup>M. Zaenul Muttaqin

<sup>1-5</sup>University of Cenderawasih, Indonesia

E-mail: [mzaenul69@gmail.com](mailto:mzaenul69@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

This research analyzes communication tools or media as a public policy subsystem used by the government and identifies forms of public policy communication in handling pandemics in Indonesia. This type of research is qualitative and designed using a literature study approach; focuses on communication in the network of actors, circulation of ideas, interests of policymakers, and their influence on the public environment. The data sources are divided into two groups: primary data sources and data sources derived from observations, and secondary data derived from books and articles relating to pandemic policies during the COVID-19 emergency as documents. The results show that the government's communication tool is the central government's official website through the COVID-19 Task Force and local governments; a data and information centre. The form of public policy communication handling the pandemic in Indonesia shows that in the early days, most people were divided into the pros and cons of information about COVID-19. Circulation of information is confusing and challenging to limit because restrictions on activities outside the home lead to the intensive use of digital technology and impact the information circulating, which is partly false information. Therefore, the communication of pandemic handling policies requires some vertical and horizontal changes.

**Keywords :** *Discourse Analysis, Public Policy, Public Communication, Information Trajectory*



## **INTRODUCTION**

Provide Communication is one of the discussions often revealed lately, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic hit almost all parts of the world. However, several communication studies have focused on the media as an intermediary for disseminating information across social elements and political instruments. On the other hand, contemporary public policy analysis studies focus on policy distortions between the central government and local governments so that an established policy analysis has revealed a lot of roles and a series of actions taken by the government and the community as public policy actors.

Research by Fakhrurroji et al. (2020), using a mass communication approach, shows that pandemic handling communication is difficult to achieve the goal of building obedient and obedient social stability because many other issues also influence public perception. Then Fauzi's research (2020) looks at it from a more specific perspective; namely, a review of the implementation of large-scale social restrictions reveals that in the implementation of this policy, there are still obstacles in the internal implementor related to understanding the policy orders. Marwiyah (2021), through his research on the Enforcement of Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) policy, stated that one of the keys to handling the pandemic rests on community participation to be actively involved in protecting the surrounding environment, including limiting social mobility between regions. These studies indicate that intensive and aligned communication vertically and horizontally determines the achievement of policy objectives for handling and preventing pandemics. This research focuses on several things less reviewed explicitly in previous studies, namely the analysis of policy communication in handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

By taking a different mapping, this research sees a mutual influence of public policy communication on the realities of society during a pandemic. So the purpose of this research is to analyze communication tools or media as a public policy subsystem used by the government and identify forms of public policy communication in handling pandemics in Indonesia.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Malik (2018) explains that policy communication has close ties to its implementation environment. Policy communication does not only depend on the



interaction of ideas and cross-actor relationships in the policy formulation subsystem. Furthermore, according to Malik (2018), the study of the public policy environment, or the public sphere, is, in fact, an integral part of providing input on policy formulation. It is related to developing democracy in the state's life. Democracy, according to Littlejohn (2009), is measured by how equal communication is in the public sphere and equal opportunities in communication and accessing or distributing information. This opportunity is translated into the public policy agenda. Edward III has described many discussions on policy communication in Nugroho (2020); the success of policy implementation rests on effective communication. We see that the success of handling and preventing the spread of COVID-19 cannot be separated from the network of policy actors from both government and non-government in transmitting information about the dangers or impacts of the pandemic on health. However, what is more important is how the public responds, participates, and supports in implementation the policy.

## **METHOD**

The paradigm of this research is qualitative with a descriptive type. This research focuses on communication in the network of actors, circulation of ideas, interests of policymakers, and their influence on the public environment. This research types of data sources are divided into two groups: primary data sources and data sources derived from observations, and secondary data derived from books and articles relating to pandemic policies during the COVID-19 emergency as documents.

Data collection techniques used in this research are observation and literature study. To answer the two research questions, we first mapped the dominant media used by the government to transmit policy communications. We limit these media to digital or online media because online media is widely accessible, efficient, and real-time.

## **RESULTS**

### **1. Description Communication Tool for Pandemic Prevention and Handling Policies**

In producing information regarding the pandemic, the government established a public communication protocol policy for handling COVID-19 through the Presidential Staff Office in 2020. Based on our investigations, government



communication relies on persuasive efforts to calm the public and be aware of the spread of the pandemic. Then, communication is related to coordination between government agencies so that communication or information received by the community remains in harmony. Government communication is related to efforts to grow media literacy. In this case, access to information media regarding pandemic data is guaranteed for the public. The last is communication regarding health protocols for the wider community, including the movement to wash hands with soap. Internally, the President formed a task force to accelerate the handling of COVID-19 through Presidential Decree No. 7/2020 for coordination between institutions and an information centre on COVID-19 data in Indonesia. This task force is the guideline for handling the pandemic in each region and is presented through its website. In addition, each institution has its own data centre to provide factual information about the pandemic, including websites belonging to local governments.

## **2. Forms of Public Policy Communication for Pandemic Handling**

In this paper, identification crystallized in policy discourse during the pandemic, with the classification of policies in the early days of the COVID-19 disaster emergency status or the policy of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) and the Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities (PPKM). Discourse analysis of these policies uses a discourse analysis approach developed by Fairclough includes textual analysis, discourse practice analysis, and social practice analysis.

Based on the research results, the PSBB policy discourse is through government Regulation Num. 21/2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions began to be implemented on March 31, 2020. However, the government, especially local governments, does not fully understand this policy. Fauzi (2020) explained that some organizers are still biased in understanding the legal basis of the PSBB policy. It has resulted in the implementation of this policy experiencing problems in several government institutions. The implementation of this PSBB policy is guided by Law no. 6/2018 concerning Health Quarantine, Law no. 36/2009 on health, and Law no. 4/1984 on Infectious Disease Outbreaks. Minister of Health Regulation No. 9/2020 concerning Guidelines for Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of



Accelerating the Handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019. However, using PP as a policy product cannot regulate criminal sanctions in detail. In addition, the Health Quarantine Act does not regulate this issue. So policy implementers have not fully understood the text or narrative of the PSBB policy.

Then on July 3, 2021, when the spread of COVID-19 in each region experienced further developments, the government implemented the PPKM policy through "Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 15 of 2021 concerning the Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities. However, in the early stages of implementing PPKM, it was only applied to two islands with a relatively high distribution level, the islands of Java and Bali. The implementation of policies at this time seems to lead to adaptation efforts by involving community participation (Nawang Sari, 2021). It means that at this stage, there are adaptation efforts that do not only come from the government body but also the grassroots level or the wider community.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on an analysis of the public policy timeline since the beginning of the pandemic in Indonesia, several obstacles pose challenges to policy communication. First, biased communication is related to data. The public is skeptical about the data discrepancy between the Central Government and the data released by the Indonesian Doctors Association (Fakhrurroji et al., 2020). Second is the circulation of confusing information. It is because the wider community uses digital technology optimally in daily life, especially the prohibition of activities outside the home makes the intensity of activities carried out remotely. In the Indonesian context, the proliferation of information with various versions spread on social media that cannot be dammed, even information that cannot be accounted for is circulating freely, causing panic in the community to increase (Fakhrurroji et al., 2020). Third, the communication of policies on handling the pandemic does not go hand in hand with effective solutions related to economic problems. It means that the impact of the pandemic does not only point to health and social problems but also economic problems at the grassroots level. Because of research by Marwiyah & Rizeki (2021), people who see the surrounding situation state that their condition is not okay. Most of them disagree with the policy of limiting activities outside the home. For the community, tiny entrepreneurs, in



terms of the economy, the government is also limited to making their merchandise quiet; it is feared that the community will not be able to pay for their children's schooling. Fourth, communication and coordination at the government level are polarized with assumptions that seem to underestimate COVID-19 (Fakhruroji et al., 2020). It forms differences in attitudes amid society which also spreads (Sumadiria, 2014).

These points provide a complete picture of the blueprint of communication dysfunction, both within the government and in the community (Baran, 2006; Sumadiria, 2014). Within the government, for example, policy communications delivered by the COVID-19 Task Force at the national level tend to reveal the number of victims of infection and death without being accompanied by positive developments that provide peace for the public (Fakhruroji et al., 2020). This kind of communication pattern also triggers mass anxiety, even at the level of destructive actions in relationships, vertically pointing to government policies and communications and horizontally pointing to excessive suspicion among the community. Communicating government public policies with an undirected and measurable vision has triggered a wave of mass social depression (Bandura, 1977; Sanderson, 1993). At the community level, communication through social media seems to have resurfaced surprisingly during the pandemic, making it difficult for some of the information circulating to prove its validity.

Communication is one of the most important factors in policy implementation. McBeth et al. (2019) explains that in the policy vehicle, political decision making is a determinant of how government communication is managed. Thus, the urgency of handling the pandemic rests on the government's public relations practice. Public relations in handling the pandemic relies on the Covid-19 Task Force, must carry out the goals and directions of government policies. Lee et al. (2012) explained that the function of public relations is to describe the vision, mission, and policy objectives. In practice, public relations takes the form of accountability reports, education, and policy campaigns to the public.

Communication in crisis situations serves to reduce the information gap between the government and the public. The configuration of effective communication depends on how the circulation of information applies in both directions, reciprocally by the government and the community (Kriyantono & Sa'diyah, 2018). With this method, public voices are absorbed in the mitigation policy agenda.



Modern communication patterns give people the opportunity to access information quickly. This has triggered the birth of various social media platforms that have also spurred changes in vertical communication patterns between the government and citizens. Graham, Avery & Park (2015) research shows that most of the United States local governments communicate crisis mitigation by utilizing social media. So that limited direct interaction during the pandemic places social media as a medium of communication (Haryanti & Rusfian, 2018).

However, this study shows that public communication during the pandemic is not optimal enough if it only relies on one communication channel. The government needs to combine digital media devices with conventional methods such as mass media, as well as social networks in the community (Ramadani, 2019). Fadhal (2020) emphasized that the role of opinion leaders at the community level such as religious leaders and leaders in the school environment and grassroots bureaucracy is an important instrument in this social network. Kriyantono & Sa'diyah (2018) explained that the weakness of public communication during the pandemic was influenced by the lack of communication management competence and public communication culture. We saw this weakness, for example, when the civil emergency policy had become a government discourse along with the PSBB policy. This discourse immediately triggered a reaction of rejection in various parties because it was considered hasty and not in line with human rights. With this reaction, the government then failed to take civil emergency steps (Firdausi, 2020). This communication dissonance caused public trust in the government to decrease and the government's explanation afterward was doubtful.

Based on the facts we reviewed, we provide some evaluative notes for future government communications in a pandemic situation. First, the government needs to avoid exposing unhealthy debates in public. Second, contradictory discourses need to be delivered consistently, convincingly, and in line with public communication protocols for handling the pandemic. Third, the government needs to clarify the concept of disaster mitigation with an effective design in the long term. Fourth, using a communication approach based on local wisdom to make mitigation communication patterns in social networks aligned.

a) Optimization of Media Usage. According to Levi (2000), health information (reports) in the media regarding health care and risks are always able to attract the attention of the public, including health professionals and policy makers. Submission of information





should not rely on complex and lengthy bureaucratic processes. In this digital era, information is chasing each other. The fast-moving working paradigm should be used in disseminating information. The government is required to be pro-active in disseminating policy achievements and information dissemination on work carried out 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Ramadani, 2019). This pandemic condition also needs to be spread quickly with clear data. The mechanism for delivering messages in the form of breaking news can be continued. The government must optimize the role of media such as television, radio, print media, and especially digital. Media reports can influence awareness, attitudes, and potentially contribute to changing public health behavior, practices, and policies (Levi, 2000). The role of social media is also very crucial in the midst of a pandemic, considering that this media mediates public communication to avoid direct physical meetings. According to Haryanti & Rusfian (2018), to increase digital penetration, among others, by increasing the adoption of the use of mobile communications, such as social media, which can increase public participation in innovation, collaboration, interaction and consumption (Haryanti & Rusfian, 2018). The power of social media that is real time and asynchronous makes information from the government accessible anytime and anywhere. So that the government's public communication will be effective in anticipating the changes that occur, and the public will get up to date, fast, interactive and factual information;

b) Counter Narrative/Issue. Information on social media or other sources can become counter-productive alternative narratives (hoaks or fake news) that interfere with the government's narrative. This condition can lead to misinformation and disinformation in the community. Therefore, the government needs to clear up misunderstandings about the spread of Covid-19 issues or myths. For example issues: conspiracies, characteristics of sufferers, social stigma, discrimination against Covid-19 patients, types of drugs, healing methods, 'New Normal' as a 'safe' condition, transmission of corpses of Covid-19 patients, Indonesia hot areas of the Equator safe for Covid-19, and etc. Government communications must be delivered responsively, routinely, continuously, transparently, based on facts and medical knowledge. The government needs to recognize the characteristics of the media to be proactive in countering the framing of the issue quickly;

c) Use of the Combination of Public Communication Public Relations Model. So far, the public relations model implemented by the government in handling the Covid-19 pandemic is still using the publicity model (Press agency) and Public Information, which





tend to be one-way. The role of public relations is only to create and convey accurate and relevant information to influence the public. In these two models, the party representing the government is framed as a celebrity PR (for example, the spokesperson for the Covid-19 Task Force). If you look at Grunig and Hunt's exposure to both models, the communication process aims to convey information on cognitive (knowledge) and affective (interpretation, awareness) aspects of the pandemic, rather than persuading or changing audience attitudes (conative or behavioral). This model is quite appropriate to be used at the beginning of a pandemic to build knowledge about Covid-19 awareness. open and interactive relationship with the public. The goal is to achieve the expected change in public health behavior. Therefore, the government should use another model, the two-way asymmetric and symmetric model in the next stage of public communication. As explained by Grunig and Hunt, both public communication process for persuading public behavior change, namely through dialogue, interactive communication, in order to persuade public behavior, education, dissemination of ideas, getting public input, and reaching understanding regarding this health issue. way model, the government can try to on an ongoing basis to convince the public to behave according to health protocols with the support of health or medical scientific methods, evidence or data. Regular public discussions can be held considering the dynamics of the crisis that changes over time. The speakers for the discussion come from the medical community, biomolecular researchers and others who have health knowledge, and involve educators, the Indonesian Teachers Association, community and religious leaders, etc., to help persuade the public. The government must play the role of building health information literacy;

d) Right Man in The Right Place. The Covid-19 Task Force Team is responsible for delivering public information about the pandemic. Therefore, the role of official government public communicators at the central and regional levels should only be carried out by experts or parties with knowledge and experience in the field of health or medicine and able to communicate communicatively to the public.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research results, the policy for handling and preventing the spread of COVID-19 cannot be separated from the factors of communication tools used and the attitude of policy communicators from institutions or government elites. The PSBB policy,



implemented in the third month of 2020 and followed by PPKM in 2021, shows that there are still some challenges related to policy communication. This research note shows that the PSBB policy was initially not well understood by some implementers, including the provisions regarding sanctions that were not regulated on the legal basis of drafting a Government Regulation on PSBB.

It confuses the community, where some do not take the pandemic seriously. Some people are sanctioned by the data on the government's official website. It is exacerbated by the efficient and fast dissemination of information on social media, causing some of the information to be challenging to filter out the truth. Then, based on the identification of forms of public policy communication in handling the pandemic in Indonesia, it shows that in the early days, some government elites considered COVID-19 not too dangerous. It has caused most people to be divided into the pros and cons of the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, in the last section, the circulation of information is confusing and challenging to limit because restrictions on activities outside the home lead to the intensive use of digital technology. It impacts the information circulating, some of which is false information.

Therefore, the communication of pandemic handling policies requires vertical and horizontal changes—vertically starting from the state apparatus from the highest level to the lowest level. Horizontally, the public needs to receive integrated socialization, education, communication, and coordination so that all parties have one attitude, goal, and language in preventing and overcoming the coronavirus in Indonesia.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (optional)**

The authors thanks to all colleageous at FISIP Universitas Cenderawasih who have supported and contributed to the completion of this research. This research funding supported by the PNPB FISIP Universitas Cenderawasih under Grant [number 110/UN20.3.1/PG/2022]

#### **DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

This papers contain original materials which are not currently under review in any other conference or journal, and has not been previously published.



## REFERENCE

- ABC Australia*, (1 April 2020). Pemerintah Indonesia diminta terbuka dan tegas tangani virus corona. Diakses dari <https://www.vivanews.com/berita/nasional/43205-pemerintah-indonesia-diminta-terbuka-dan-tegas-tangani-virus-corona?medium=autonext>.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. New Jersey: Printice-Hall.
- Baran, S. J. (2006). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* (4th Editio). New York: McGraw Hill Companies.
- BBC News Indonesia. (2020). "Virus Corona: Panic Buying Terjadi Di Enam Kota Besar, 'Ini Bukti Tidak Ada
- Fakhruroji, M., Tresnawaty, B., Sumadiria, H., & Risdayah, E. (2020). Public communication strategy for handling COVID-19 in Indonesia: Sociology perspective of mass communication and religion. *LP2M UIN Sunan Gunung Djati*. <http://digilib.uinsgd.ac.id/id/eprint/30753>
- Fauzi, A. (2020). Implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions, A Public Policy in Handling the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Negara*, 16(1), 174-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46730/jiana.v18i2.7946>
- Haryanti, Sri & Rusfian, Effy Zalfiana. (2018). "Government Public Relations and Social Media: Bridging
- Levi, Ragnar. (2000). *Medical Journalism: Exposing Fact, Fiction, Fraud*. Sweden: Studentlitteratur, Lund
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Encyclopedia of communication theory* (Vol. 1). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412959384>
- Malik, A. (2018). Public space as a representation of public policy and communication medium. *Sawala: Jurnal Administrasi Negara*, 6(2), 82-88. <https://doi.org/10.30656/sawala.v6i2.914>
- Marwiyah, S., Yolanda, M., & Rizeki, K. (2021). Policy Analysis of the Implementation of Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) on the Mental Health of the Probolinggo City Community. *Journal of Innovation Research and Knowledge*, 1(6), 127-134. <https://www.bajangjournal.com/index.php/JIRK/article/view/635>
- Nugroho, R. (2020). *Public Policy*. Elex Media Komputindo.
- Nawangsari, E. R., Rahmadani, A. W., Firmansyah, N. Y., & Zachary, Y. A. (2021). Jelakombo Village Community Participation in the Implementation of Micro-Scale Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) in Jombang Regency. *Jurnal Syntax Transformation*, 2(5), 593-605. <https://doi.org/10.46799/jst.v2i5.270>
- Sanderson, S. K. (1993). Macro sociology: an approach to social reality. *Trnsl. F. Widjidi dan S Menno*. Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Sumadiria, A. H. (2014). *Sociology of Mass Communication*. Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media.



**PROCEEDING**  
**THE 2<sup>nd</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF MATARAM**



- Fadhal, Soraya. (2020). Komunikasi Publik di Tengah Krisis: Tinjauan Komunikasi Pemerintah dalam Tanggap Darurat Pandemi Covid-19. In Media, Komunikasi dan Informasi di masa Pandemi COVID-19. Didik Haryadi Santoso, Nurudin, Fajar Juanedi (eds.). Mbridge Press.
- Firdausi, Fadrik Aziz. (2020). “Darurat Sipil COVID-19 & Sejarah Status Keadaan Bahaya di Indonesia”
- Kriyantono, Rachmat & Halimatus Sa’diyah. (2018). “Kearifan Lokal dan Strategi Komunikasi Publik
- Lee, Mordecai., Neeley, Grant & Stewart, Kendra (Ed.). (2012). *The Practice of Government Public*
- CNN Indonesia.com (c). (2020). “ANALISIS: Lockdown Daerah, Simbol Karut-marut Penanganan Corona”.
- Ramadani, Thoriq. (2019). “Implementasi Kebijakan Pengelolaan Komunikasi Publik Di Kementerian.