

Government Crisis Communication Strategies in Dealing with Misinformation in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand in depth the crisis communication strategies implemented by the government in dealing with misinformation in the digital era. The rapid spread of misinformation in the digital space is a serious challenge, especially in crisis situations that demand fast, accurate, and reliable communication responses. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, focusing on government institutions that have a strategic role in public communication, such as the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) and the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB). Data was collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, documentation studies, digital media observations, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results show that although the government has utilized social media as the main channel in crisis communication, challenges such as limited message reach, lack of coordination between agencies, and low public trust still hinder the effectiveness of the strategy. Cross-sectoral cooperation, people's digital literacy, and the role of credible and trained spokespeople are key factors in building information resilience and increasing public trust during crises. Therefore, an adaptive, transparent, and data-based crisis communication strategy is indispensable to maintain social stability in the midst of dynamic digital information flows.

Keywords: Crisis communication, misinformation, government, digital era, social media.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology, especially in the last few decades, has brought about major changes in the information ecosystem. In the past, information production was dominated by official institutions such as print, television, and radio media that had a strict selection and editing process. However, now anyone with internet access can become a producer of information



through blogs, videos, social media, or other digital platforms. On the other hand, the way information is disseminated has also shifted drastically. In the past, the distribution of information depended on time and physical media (e.g. newspapers or television broadcasts), but now information can spread instantly and massively through social media, instant messaging apps, and other digital platforms (Ni Luh Manik Puja Dewi, 2023).

Finally, the public's information consumption patterns have changed. People no longer rely on a single news source, but instead access multiple sources quickly and simultaneously, often in the form of short pieces, visuals, or even memes. This has an impact on public thinking, perception, and behavior, as well as creating new challenges in terms of information validity and the spread of hoaxes. Overall, advances in digital technology and social media have disrupted the traditional information landscape and created a more dynamic, open, and complex era of communication (Umayah, 2020).

The digital age, especially with the advent of the internet, social media, and communication applications, has revolutionized the way humans communicate. Information can now be sent and received in seconds, without being limited by geographical distance. This allows communities to:

- Get real-time information (e.g., disaster updates, government policies, or international news).
- Increase public participation in social, political, and economic discussions.
- Expanding the reach of messaging in social, educational, and health campaigns (Saptadi & Sumarta, 2023).

Thus, public communication becomes faster, more efficient, and more inclusive. However, behind this speed and ease, there are serious challenges: misinformation (misinformation spread without malicious intent) and disinformation (misinformation deliberately spread to mislead). The digital era allows anyone to be a source of information without having to go through a verification or editing process, as traditional media does. Consequently:

- Fake information, conspiracy theories, or fake news can spread quickly and widely.
- People often have difficulty distinguishing between what information is true and what is not.
- There has been polarization of public opinion, social tensions, and even disturbances to political stability and security (Elisabet & Siahian, 2021).

In crisis situations such as natural disasters, pandemics, social conflicts, or failures of the public service system, people naturally place high hopes on the government to provide explanations, solutions, and a sense of security. The government is seen as the main authority that should lead the handling and communication of the crisis. In crisis situations such as natural disasters, pandemics, social conflicts, or public service system failures, the government automatically becomes the center of public attention. This is due to the high expectations that are naturally addressed to the government as the highest authority in handling emergencies. The public is waiting for the presence of the

government to provide a clear explanation of the situation that occurred, offer concrete solutions, and provide a sense of security and certainty. In conditions of uncertainty, the government is seen as the party that has the legitimacy, resources, and responsibility to effectively control the crisis. Therefore, the government is required not only to act quickly and appropriately, but also to build open, transparent, and calm communication, in order to maintain public trust and steer people out of crisis situations safely (Dumilah et al., 2020).

In a crisis situation, if the government's response is considered slow, non-transparent, or inadequate, criticism from the public and the media tends to emerge. This criticism is no longer limited to conventional media, but spreads much faster and more widely through social media, which amplifies the domino effect of public discontent. In the digital age, critical voices can go viral in just a matter of minutes, creating immense pressure on governments to respond immediately. In addition, distrust of the government is also easy to grow, especially when people feel that they do not get accurate, consistent, and timely information. The lack of clear communication from the authorities can worsen public perception, leaving people feeling abandoned and disoriented. In these conditions, the government's credibility can be compromised, and efforts to handle the crisis become increasingly difficult due to the lack of support from the public (Tarto & Gunawan, 2019).

Mixed information is one of the main factors that trigger public distrust of the government, especially in crisis situations. This kind of information is usually unverified, incomplete, or even contradictory to each other. The sources are also diverse, ranging from unofficial media, social media, to individual opinions that quickly go viral. In emergency conditions, people tend to seek information as quickly as possible, and if the government has not yet submitted an official clarification or statement, then the unclear information will fill the communication gap. As a result, the public forms perceptions or opinions based on the initial information that is circulating, which is not necessarily true or accurate. This situation has the potential to create panic, misunderstandings, and ignite skepticism towards the government. Therefore, it is important for authorities to respond quickly and provide valid, consistent, and easily accessible information to prevent the spread of disinformation and maintain public trust (Sulistiyowati, 2021).

Misinformation, which is the spread of false or misleading information, can exacerbate conditions during crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, or social unrest. When inaccurate information is widespread, it often causes panic among the public because they feel they do not get a clear and correct picture of the real situation. In addition, confusion also arises due to the contradiction between the information circulating and the reality experienced, making it difficult for people to determine the right steps to deal with the crisis. Furthermore, misinformation can generate resistance or rejection of policies and measures taken by the government, as the public becomes skeptical or distrustful of official directives. As a result, the effectiveness of crisis handling is disrupted and the recovery process can run more slowly. Therefore, the dissemination of

true, transparent, and reliable information is very important to control the situation and maintain public order and trust during the crisis (Rahmah & Nasution, 2024).

The government's failure to effectively manage crisis communication will have a serious impact on the government's image and role in the eyes of the public. When governments are unable to deliver clear, timely, and transparent information during times of crisis, public trust in the government's capabilities and goodwill will decline. People began to doubt the legitimacy of the government as a competent leader in handling emergency situations. This decline in trust can make the public feel unheard or ignored, leading to dissatisfaction and even resistance to the policies being implemented. In addition, poor communication can also exacerbate the impact of the crisis itself, as inaccurate or late information will lead to confusion, uncertainty, and less effective handling. As a result, the crisis has become more difficult to control and the recovery process has been delayed, which ultimately harms society as a whole and the stability of the country. Therefore, effective crisis communication management is essential to maintain the legitimacy of the government and ensure a quick and appropriate response in dealing with crises (Duryat, 2021).

An adaptive, transparent, and data-based crisis communication strategy is crucial in facing the challenges of information dissemination in the increasingly complex and dynamic digital era. Adaptive communication allows governments or organizations to quickly adapt messages and delivery methods according to changing situations and audience needs. Transparency in communication creates public trust because information is conveyed honestly, openly, and without concealment, thus reducing speculation and misinformation. Additionally, a data-driven approach ensures that every communication decision is supported by accurate facts and analysis, so that the message conveyed is relevant and effective. By combining these three aspects, crisis communication strategies are able to reduce panic, clarify information, and build strong relationships between the government or organizations and the community, so that crisis handling can run more optimally and public trust is maintained (Widaswara & Dasih, 2025).

Not all government agencies have adequate digital communication capacity, so they face various challenges in carrying out communication functions effectively in the digital era. This limitation includes the ability to carry out early detection of hoaxes or false information that is widely circulated on social media and other online platforms. In addition, many institutions also still have difficulty in managing issue management quickly and precisely, which is very important to respond to problems or crises that arise in real-time. The ability to utilize various digital platforms to convey messages to the public in an attractive, clear, and targeted way is also still not optimal in a number of agencies. This condition leads to the potential for delays or ineffectiveness in government communication, which can ultimately affect public trust and the effectiveness of handling various important issues. Therefore, increasing digital communication capacity in all government agencies is an urgent need to face communication challenges in the era of information technology that continues to evolve (Rijal et al., 2023).

The research papers discuss government crisis communication strategies in the digital era, particularly in addressing misinformation and poverty alleviation. Studies highlight the importance of utilizing digital media, such as social media and websites, to communicate effectively with the public during crises (Amalia & Putri, 2021). The Surabaya City Government's use of "Bangga Surabaya" media demonstrates a shift from traditional mass media to digital platforms for crisis communication (Amalia & Putri, 2021). Internet usage is crucial in all stages of crisis management, from pre-crisis to post-crisis (Salma, 2018). Effective crisis communication strategies involve not only using digital media but also adapting communication principles and methods (Salma, 2018). Strong leadership and transparent communication are essential in managing crises, especially during global events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Shofiyanah & Hidayat, 2021). Participatory approaches, including direct dialogue with the public, are also emphasized in government communication strategies.

Therefore, this research has a very important role in understanding and examining in depth how crisis communication strategies run by the government are designed, developed, and implemented, especially in the context of facing the challenges of misinformation that are increasingly rampant in the digital era. By studying the various approaches and methods used by the government in conveying information during a crisis, this study aims to assess the extent to which these strategies are able to reduce the spread of misinformation and maintain public trust. In addition, this study also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis communication strategy, both in terms of speed, clarity, transparency, and adaptability in responding to the rapidly growing information dynamics on social media and other digital platforms. The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations and policies that can strengthen the government's communication capacity, so as to be able to improve the quality of crisis handling and build public trust in the midst of the complexity of the current digital era.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, which aims to deeply understand the crisis communication strategies implemented by the government in dealing with misinformation in the digital era. This approach was chosen because it is able to describe the process, message content, and role of government communication actors in managing the spread of false or misleading information during crisis situations (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). The research was conducted on government institutions that have a strategic role in public communication, such as the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) and the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB). The informants in this study consisted of government public relations officials, crisis communication practitioners, and digital media experts who were purposively selected because of their involvement and knowledge in crisis communication issues. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with key informants, documentation studies of official government

documents, press releases, and official government social media uploads, and digital media observation to observe communication patterns and government responses on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. The data obtained was analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method to identify the main themes in the communication strategy used. The analysis is carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To maintain the validity of the data, the researcher applied triangulation techniques, both source triangulation and method triangulation, by comparing the results of various data collection techniques. The limitation of this research lies in the scope of time, namely the government's crisis communication strategy carried out in the range of 2020 to 2024, especially in responding to strategic issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and political issues that have a wide impact on society and are vulnerable to misinformation in the digital space.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Misinformation in the Digital Era

The characteristics of misinformation in the digital age have several characteristics that make it very dangerous and difficult to control. Misinformation tends to spread very quickly through various digital platforms, especially social media. This speed is supported by the ease of sharing information instantly without an adequate verification process. Additionally, misinformation is often difficult to verify because it lacks a clear source or is based on data that has been manipulated. Moreover, misinformation content is usually emotional, using provocative narratives to provoke an instant response from users, such as fear, anger, or sympathy (Rahardaya & Irwansyah, 2021). In this context, social media algorithms have exacerbated the spread of misinformation by creating an echo chamber of the digital environment where users are only exposed to information that aligns with their own views, reinforcing bias and hindering the formation of objective opinions. In Indonesia, various examples of cases have shown the serious impact of misinformation, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic filled with hoaxes about vaccines and alternative medicines, as well as in political momentum such as elections, where false information about a particular candidate or party is widespread. Even in situations of natural disasters, such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, misinformation often appears in the form of false warnings or conspiracy theories that actually muddy the situation (Ikhsan et al., 2021).

The government's crisis communication framework is based on communication theory that emphasizes the importance of delivering information effectively and strategically in emergency or uncertain situations. Crisis communication is defined as the process of delivering messages designed to inform, calm and direct the public during a crisis event, such as a natural disaster, disease outbreak, or socio-political turmoil. The basic principles of crisis communication include speed of response, where governments are required to provide information immediately to avoid information gaps that can be filled by

speculation or hoaxes. In addition, clarity of messages is essential for the public to understand the information appropriately, while consistency and transparency in message delivery are needed to build and maintain public trust. However, in the digital era, the government faces more complex challenges, especially related to information overload that makes it difficult for people to sort out which information is good and relevant. On the other hand, the level of public distrust towards government institutions is also increasing, exacerbated by the rampant misinformation and disinformation on social media. Therefore, the government's crisis communication framework must be able to adapt to digital dynamics by strengthening online presence, cross-sector collaboration, and the use of appropriate communication channels (Nasrul Efendi et al., 2023).

Government Communication Strategy in Dealing with Misinformation

The government's communication strategy in dealing with misinformation includes preventive and reactive approaches that complement each other. Preventive strategies focus on long-term efforts to increase public resilience to false information, including through digital literacy programs that aim to equip people with critical skills in filtering and evaluating information. The government also conducts educational campaigns targeting various community groups, both through mass media and social media, to increase public understanding of actual issues and how to recognize hoaxes (Della et al., 2025).

In addition, cooperation with digital platforms such as Meta, Google, and TikTok is important in limiting the spread of misinformation content, including through reporting mechanisms and the removal of harmful content. Meanwhile, reactive strategies are carried out when misinformation is already circulating in the community. The government is required to provide clarification quickly and precisely, using official channels such as ministry websites, verified social media accounts, and press releases. Data- and fact-based counter-narratives also need to be conveyed to neutralize the negative impact of misleading information. Case studies in Indonesia show the application of this strategy in various contexts, for example the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) which actively released clarifications and debunks during the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) which delivered official information updates during natural disasters, and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) which played a role in countering disinformation before and during the election process. These efforts underscore the importance of an adaptive, responsive, and collaboration-based government communication strategy across sectors in facing information challenges in the digital era (Sahrir, 2022).

The Utilization of Social Media as a Crisis Channel

The use of social media as a crisis communication channel has become an important strategy for the government in the digital era. Social media plays a dual role, namely as a source of information as well as a means of clarification

when disinformation or public panic occurs. In crisis situations, social media allows the dissemination of information quickly, widely, and directly to the public without having to go through conventional media intermediaries. State institutions such as the Ministry of Communication and Information, the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) are actively utilizing platforms such as Twitter to deliver early warnings and clarifications of issues, Instagram to share infographics and visual education, and YouTube for more in-depth explanations in the form of videos. However, the use of social media also faces a number of challenges and weaknesses. One of them is limited coverage, especially for groups of people who are not active on social media or do not have adequate internet access. Minimal interaction, such as a lack of response to public comments or questions, can also decrease the effectiveness of communication (Muhammad Dimas Aldy & Muhammad Irwan Padli Nasution, 2023). In addition, the low level of public trust in official government accounts is an obstacle in ensuring that the message conveyed is truly accepted and trusted by the public. Therefore, the use of social media as a crisis channel must be supported by a proactive, participatory, and integrated communication strategy with other communication channels to increase trust and effectiveness in information delivery.

Cross-Agency Coordination and the Role of the Spokesperson

Cross-agency coordination is a crucial aspect in smooth crisis communication, especially between central and regional government agencies. Good synergy allows for uniform, timely and consistent information delivery in accordance with conditions on the ground, thereby avoiding confusion or message contradictions that can worsen the crisis situation. In this context, the role of government spokespersons is vital as an official liaison between the government and the public. The spokesperson is responsible for conveying the official message in clear, accurate, and convincing language, while at the same time serving to calm the public so that they do not panic or misunderstand. Through effective communication, spokespersons also help build and maintain public trust in the government's handling of crises. However, the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination in responding to misinformation needs to be evaluated periodically. This evaluation is important to identify barriers, such as overlapping tasks, slow responses, or lack of information synchronization, as well as to improve cooperation mechanisms to ensure that efforts to address misinformation are running optimally and can have a positive impact on managing crises (Cahyati et al., 2021).

Public Perception and Response to Government Communication

Public perception and response to government communication are determining factors for the success of handling information crises. The level of public trust in official information delivered by the government varies widely, depending on the credibility of the institution, the transparency of communication, and previous public experience. Low trust can trigger

skepticism and decrease the effectiveness of the message being conveyed. In response to the clarifications and counter-narratives provided by the government to counter misinformation, the public showed mixed reactions; Some accept and adjust their views, while others still remain doubtful or even reject official information (Shofiyanah & Hidayat, 2021). In addition, information crises often cause significant psychological impacts, such as confusion due to overlapping information circulating, panic triggered by scary news, to digital apathy, which is an indifferent attitude to information due to fatigue or boredom in the face of a flood of news that is not clear to the truth. These psychological impacts need to be a concern in designing government communication strategies so that messages can be received effectively and the public remains positively involved in the crisis handling process (Almadina Rakhmaniar, 2024).

Recommendations for Improving Crisis Communication Strategies

The recommendations for improving crisis communication strategies emphasize several important aspects that need to be developed so that the government's response to emergency situations becomes more effective and reliable. First, increasing the capacity of human resources (HR) in the field of public communication is very crucial. This includes training in communication skills that are adaptive to digital dynamics, crisis management skills, and an in-depth understanding of public psychology and social media. With competent human resources, government messages can be compiled and conveyed more precisely on target and convincingly. Second, strengthening regulations related to the dissemination of information on digital platforms needs to be strengthened, including strengthening partnerships between the government and social media service providers such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Bustholil Arifin et al., 2024). This cooperation aims to break the chain of misinformation through rapid detection, reporting, and removal mechanisms of content that harms the public without sacrificing freedom of expression proportionately. Finally, increased public involvement in the crisis communication process is also critical. The government needs to encourage active community participation through open dialogue, education, and information transparency at every stage of crisis handling. With this inclusive approach, public trust can be built and communication becomes two-way, so that the community is not only a passive recipient, but also a partner in facing and overcoming crises together (Amril & Sazali, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Misinformation in the digital age is growing at a rapid pace and is a serious challenge for governments, especially in crisis situations that demand fast and accurate communication responses. The spread of false or misleading information can exacerbate crisis conditions and cause confusion in society if not immediately addressed with effective communication strategies. However, the crisis communication strategy implemented by the government still faces various obstacles, such as limited message reach, lack of

coordination between agencies, and low level of public trust in official information. To overcome this, the government has utilized social media as the main channel in crisis communication, considering its ability to reach the public widely and quickly. However, the effectiveness of social media use is highly dependent on the speed of clarification, the quality of the message conveyed, and the consistency of communication between government agencies. In addition, cross-sectoral cooperation involving government, media, digital platforms, and civil society is an important key in combating the spread of misinformation. Educational approaches and increasing digital literacy in society are an essential part of this effort to build stronger information resilience. An adaptive, transparent, and data-based crisis communication policy must continue to be developed in order to strengthen public trust and maintain social stability in the midst of a very dynamic flow of information. In this context, the role of credible and trained spokespersons is very important because they are the main liaison between the government and the public, able to convey accurate and reassuring information, so as to reduce panic and increase public trust during times of crisis.

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