

# PUBLIC COMMUNICATION OF THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT ON THE PPKM POLICY TO SUPPRESS THE SPREAD OF THE COVID-19 VIRUS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION OF THE INDONESIA GOVERNMENT ON THE PPKM POLICY TO SUPPRESS THE SPREAD OF THE COVID-19 VIRUS

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Abstract

Indonesia government has declared Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a non-natural disaster. Until 2021, the pandemic still hits Indonesia and is required further handling, especially by actively encouraging the enforcement of health protocols such as the policy of implementing restriction on community activities (PPKM) to suppress the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia. For this reason, public communication is crucial to convey information, also to educate and to persuade public to comply with health protocols and be willing to be vaccinated. The purpose of this study is to determine public communication related to COVID-19 vaccination. The method used in this research is qualitative-descriptive approach. The results of this study is that government needs to quickly change the existing communication approach. Firstly, central and local governments need to coordinate well to formulate an integrated message to convey to public. Secondly, the government needs to carry out continued and integrated communication.

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Introduction:-

Communication is an important thing in life. There are various types of communication, ranging from horizontal communication, namely communication between people, to vertical communication, namely communication from superior to subordinates and vice versa.

According to Lewis (in Arni Muhammad, 2011) downward communication is to convey goals, change attitudes, form opinions, reduce fears and suspicions that arise due to misinformation, prevent misunderstandings due to lack of information and prepare organizational members to adapt to change.

For a government program to be successful, it is crucial that the community participate actively within. For this reason, it is necessary to have the right way of public communication, particularly on government policies, namely the implementation of restrictions on community activities (PPKM) to suppress the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia.

Before PPKM was implemented, Indonesian Government has taken various steps to overcome the pandemic for one and a half year. However, it has not been fully able to bring the community out of the crisis caused by the coronavirus disease.

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In various mass media reports, the President of the Republic of Indonesia (RI) Joko Widodo asked all Indonesian people to remain calm. His statement was not accompanied by the government's readiness to provide adequate information to face the health crisis.

After long Eid al-Fitr holiday, Covid-19 cases in Indonesia increased again on July 27, 2021. Based on data from Indonesian Ministry of Health, new cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia increased by 45,203. Meanwhile, the number of deaths increased by 2,069 a day, bringing the total to 86,835 cases. The number of recovered cases increased by 47,128 people to 2,596 million people.

By August 11th 2021, the number of active cases of Covid-19 in Indonesia is steady at 426,170. Active cases are patients who still undergo self-isolation or hospital treatment.

This spike prompted the government to impose Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM). The President said that the implementation of PPKM is inevitable so as to reduce the transmission rate, as well as to control the capacity of provided hospitals. (CNN Indonesia, 2021)

Political Communication Observer at Esa Unggul University, Jamiluddin Ritonga, assessed that the government's communication and coordination were getting worse in handling the pandemic. Jamiluddin said the government's poor communication has been obvious since the implementation of the Emergency Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) in several areas.

He gave an example when President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) still used the term Emergency PPKM. Meanwhile, in the Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 22 of 2021 which was signed by the Minister of Home Affairs, Tito Karnavian on the same day, the term PPKM Level 4.

These official statements from governments are unintegrated, some of which are even contradictory. Like when discussing the discourse on the extension of the Emergency PPKM, a number of government officers had spoken before Jokowi launched an official statement.

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Ministry of coordinator for Human Development and Culture Muhadjir Effendy, for example, said that the Java-Bali Emergency PPKM policy was extended until the end of July 2021. Then Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati also revealed that the Emergency PPKM scenario could last up to six weeks.

Meanwhile, on the same day the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut Binsar Panjaitan admitted that he had not been able to decide on the option of extending the Emergency PPKM because it was still in the evaluation process.

Not only that, the policies made are often run half-heartedly. In this Emergency PPKM, the government has not made derivative rules such as the distribution of social assistance (bansos) to the community.

There are still many people who do not get social assistance. Thus, the government from the beginning did not prepare social assistance packages to be given to residents during Emergency PPKM.

Not to mention the short-term limitation of mobilization which confuses the community, starting from PSBB, PPKM, Micro PPKM, Emergency PPKM to PPKM Level 1 to Level 4. Similar terms with similar substance only confuse the community and local government.

It is as if the government is deliberately playing with the term to escape the use of Law (UU) Number 6 of 2018 concerning Health Quarantine. Government seems to avoid the regional quarantine policy, aka lockdown, where the state is obliged to provide compensation to provide life for its people.

The question is whether Emergency PPKM will really reduce community mobility. When viewed in detail, it seems the effect is uneven. For example, for office activities, PPKM Emergency seems to only expand the provisions that were previously for the red zone to the orange zone while tightening the green zone. So the orange and green zones are tightened, but the red zones are the same.

This might prevent non-red zones from “upgrading”, but it is not yet clear how the strategy for making red zones “downgrades” will be. In the end, public awareness to limit their activities is likely to help the effectiveness of PPKM policies. (The Conversation, 2020)

Lack of vigilance was the source of previous PPKM failures. Many people misunderstand vaccines as a substitute for masks, hand-washing and distance kept. No matter how ferocious the variant is, if the virus does not enter one’s respiratory tract, it will not infect the body. Vaccines are important to reduce severity but only physical intervention can block the virus.

It is very important to study the public communication carried out by the government when dealing with the pandemic crisis. When a crisis occurs, the government’s public communication will affect fundamentally in managing risk, maintaining public health and

maintaining citizen trust (Sanders, 2020). The sooner the government’s crisis communication is reviewed, the better.

Based on the description above, the researcher wants to dissect the government’s public policy on the PPKM Policy to Reduce the Spread of the Covid-19 Virus. This study only focuses on public policies related to emergency PPKM implemented by the government by using a descriptive study.

### Literatur Review public communication:-

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One of the factors that influence the implementation of public policy is communication (Ramadani, 2019). McBeth, Lybecker and Stoutenborough in Ramadani (2019), “In today’s policy world, communication is a key element of policy making”. Government Public relation communication is therefore crucial. Intense public communication occurs in crisis.

Liu and Levenshus in their writing Crisis Public Relations for Government Communicators in Lee, Neeley, & Stewart (2012) explain the difference between disasters, emergencies and crises. Disasters and emergencies refer to extraordinary events caused by nature. A crisis is a human-caused disaster. The link between the two can occur. There are 5 characteristics of a crisis (Lee, Neeley, & Stewart, 2012):

1. The presence of property damage, accidents, loss of life, life and reputational damage;
2. Involving a large number of people;
3. Can be identified beginning and end;
4. Crisis often occurs suddenly;
5. Get wide media coverage and public attention. This can be the basis for determining the government to declare a crisis condition.

If you look at these five criteria, then the Covid-19 pandemic can be declared in the category of crisis, given the enormous impact it has on humans. The role of government is very important in crisis management in a country.

Anthony de Mello explained in his book “The Heart of the Enlightened: A Book of Story Meditation”, quoted in the Protocol to the Public Communication for Handling Covid-19 (Presidential Staff Office, 2020), that there is a link between public panic and the increase in the number of victims of the pandemic. According to Mello, the victims of the pandemic can be 5 times, if there is panic during the pandemic. Excessive panic in the face of Covid-19, can trigger psychosomatic symptoms (Leandha, 2020).

Reflecting on that, communication is, thus, the pulse in pandemic crisis management. Public trust needs to be built and maintained to avoid panic, so that the handling of the pandemic runs smoothly.

According to Coombs quoted by Kriyantono & Sa’diyah (2018), communication is the essence of crisis management. A crisis situation is a situation that has the potential to cause physical, psychological, social, economic disturbances, etc. Government public communication is very important in dealing with this Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Moenawar (2020), government public communication is a process of delivering ideas, programs, government ideas to the community in dealing with and anticipating the impact of Covid-19. Public communication facilitates information, dialogue, stimulates participation, policy making and public empowerment (Moenawar, 2020). The government uses social media in public communication crisis management, to control and evaluate the public’s response.

In public communication, these are essential to be considered: Transmission, consistency and clarity of messages (Ramadani, 2019). Transmission means accurate communication, understood by the communicator of the message. Consistency means that information is consistent, aligned, and coherent from one message to another. Clearly means the message is delivered in simple language, easy for the public to understand.

One form of consistency is the existence of a single narrative about conditions and policies. The single narrative of Government communication is interpreted as an understanding on an issue, not different between data or substance between institutions. Each agency statement should not deny statements, other cross-institutional policies, and be able to quickly manage existing issues (Ramadani, 2019).

In a crisis situation, public communication management is important to reduce the information gap. For this reason, public communication strategies need to pay attention to the public's voice (Kriyantono & Sa'diyah, 2018). This pattern serves as feedback (input) to the agency's interactive communication activities, which include public involvement in crisis management.

The dynamic communication pattern of the community in the midst of the onslaught of digital technology, makes the public able to access information actively and quickly. The factuality and actuality of information is the key to handling the crisis. Social media plays an important role in bridging this information access gap.

However, according to Haryanti & Rusfian (2018), differences in social, economic, cultural and knowledge resources of a community lead to differences in public access to social media. Therefore, effective public communication in times of crisis does not only rely on digital media, but must optimize the combination of digital and conventional media.

For example, the use of traditional or local communication channels, mass media, social media, chat applications, creative networks (Ramadani, 2019). There are also opinion leaders (opinion leaders, influencers), educational institutions (campus, schools), religious groups, social, local bureaucracies (RT, RW), etc.

The use of communication channels between individuals and groups, as well as direct communication interventions in the field are needed, in order to absorb public responses and accelerate the delivery of information from the government.

Quoting Kriyantono & Sa'diyah (2018), one of the reasons for the failure of government communication in dealing with the crisis is the lack of understanding of communicators in managing communication and public culture.

It should be understood that not all crisis management communication strategies can be applied to different publics, regions or countries. For example, the public communication strategy applied in Western countries, is not necessarily appropriate to be adopted in Indonesia.

In crisis conditions, communicators must understand who the communicant (recipient of the message) is and their local wisdom. Local wisdom is a thought, an idea that contains the value of wisdom, goodness, that is present in a society from generation to generation and tradition (Kriyantono & Sa'diyah, 2018).

### **Research Method:-**

Paradigm is a basis view from scientists in their research. Paradigm used by permanent scientists on the real thinking framework (Moleong, 2007). Based on Neuman (2001) stated generally scientific paradigm was an overall thinking system that covers basic assumptions,

inner matter, model quality research, and method of answering questions. In social science, the positivism paradigm is becoming dominant paradigm. The other Paradigms used in social science is social constructivist and social criticism. On that basis, the researcher assesses that the constructivist paradigm fits the issue that the researcher takes.

Based on that explanation, this approach is suitable to be applied in this research because it examines the government's public policies related to KDP in suppressing the spread of covid which is explained through subjective descriptions and interpretations. To find these results, the author needs to describe the structure of the discourse and then interpret the government's public policies in the mass media.

This study uses a descriptive study method by referring to journal articles, mass media reports, artifacts on social media and all other sources that can be accessed online. Sources that are relevant to the topic of discussion are collected and then reviewed. The information obtained is then linked to each other. All data collection activities are carried out online in the period July-August 2021.

### Result and Discussion:-

Government Policy for Implementing PPKM to Control the Rate of Covid-19

In the past year, the government issued several policies and strategies to control the corona virus. Although the terms have changed, such as Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), Transitional PSBB, and Implementation of Restrictions on Community Activities (PPKM), the essence is the same: limiting people's mobility.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has delivered an official explanation regarding the latest developments in the Implementation of Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) on July 20, 2021. The President revealed that the policy of implementing PPKM is something that cannot be avoided in order to reduce the rate of transmission of Covid-19, as well as control the capacity of hospitals that handle Covid-19 patients so as not to overcapacity.

To implement the policy for the temporary extension of the PPKM, two Instructions from the Minister of Home Affairs have been issued, namely Instructions from the Minister of Home Affairs No. 22 of 2021 regarding the Implementation of PPKM Level 4 for Regencies/Cities in the Java and Bali Regions, and the Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs No. 23 of 2021 regarding the Implementation of Micro PPKM (Level 4 and Level 3 for Regencies/Cities in the Outer Regions of Java and Bali).

This PPKM is also adjusted according to the assessment level of each Regency/City. Determination of the level based on WHO standards, namely the assessment level of the pandemic situation which measures the rate of virus transmission compared to the response capacity (3T). In addition, it also uses indicators of daily confirmed cases, BOR levels, and vaccination achievements.

Government then gradually loosened the restrictions. Business sector, namely the traditional market (other than those selling basic daily needs), is allowed to operate until 3 p.m. with a maximum capacity of 50%, with strict health protocols whose settings are determined by the Regional Government (Pemda). However, currently, traditional markets that sell basic daily needs are still allowed to be opened until 8 p.m. local time with 50% visitor capacity.

In addition, street vendors, grocery stores, credit voucher agents/outlets, barbershops, laundry, hawkers, small workshops, vehicle washers, and others similar small businesses are

allowed to operate with strict health protocols up to 9 p.m. local time, whose technical arrangements are regulated by Regional Government.

Food stalls, street vendors, hawkers stalls and the like that have their place of business in an open space are allowed to operate with strict health protocols up to 9 p.m. local time and 30 minutes maximum meal time for each customer.

Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut Binsar Panjaitan decided that the government in the near future will increase the frequency of testing and tracing, and build isolation centers in densely populated residential areas in agglomeration areas.

### Poor communication ways of Jokowi's minister

Jokowi said that there would be an option for an emergency PPKM extension that had been carefully studied. The decision on whether or not to extend the emergency PPKM must be seriously considered. Regarding this emergency PPKM, the Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture Muhadjir Effendy first said that President Joko Widodo had decided to extend the implementation of the emergency community activity restrictions (PPKM) until the end of July.

One day after Muhadjir released the statement, Ministry of Coordinator for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut Binsar Panjaitan said the government was still evaluating

the implementation of the Emergency PPKM which had been running since July 3. Whether or not the emergency PPKM will be extended will be announced in 2-3 days. (VOI.id, 2021)

The Java-Bali COVID-19 Handling Coordinator said relaxation could be done if the condition improves. From that, it is obvious that government needs to improve the public communication style used that has been messy so far, where the end of the government's statement regarding the emergency of PPKM is an apology.

Not only to public, communication approach within institutions and ministry members also have to be improved, so as there is no different statement released by different ministry representatives.

For example, regarding the Emergency PPKM and handling of COVID-19. The Coordinating Minister for PKM said that the PPKM was extended until the end of July, while the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs would announce it in the next 2-3 days. These eventually create confusion in public.

This problem has been going on for a long time so the government should be able to coordinate far way better. In particular, on information that has not been announced to the public.

### **This PPKM Policy Is Impulsive And A Later Response**

This PPKM policy is only a reaction to the spike in early July 2021. Even the government openly admits that they never predicted that COVID-19 cases would spike in June.

This policy shows that preventive measures were not running optimally before this case exploded. The government, with case data since March last year, should be able to learn how to formulate policies that prevent the spikes better.

### **Conclusion:-**

The government needs to quickly change the pattern of communication. First, the central and local governments need to coordinate so that there is a synergy of one communication message. The government needs to use various media channels that reach the whole society to communicate the message.

Second, the government needs to carry out continuous and integrated communication. Without proper public communication to the people will not adopt the expected behavior and the government's goal of suppressing the spread of the virus will not be achieved.

Government information becomes dominant in the public sphere, both in cyberspace and conventional media, which are the main sources of information today. Stuttering in the first two phases can be a lesson so that it will not happen again in the future.

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