

## Public's perception on government's public communication in handling covid-19

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### ABSTRACT

**Covid** Task Force was assigned to handle the spread of the covid-19 virus, which keeps increasing and has caused loss of life and materials in various sectors. The task force is required to act quickly and accurately and keep focused, integrated, and synergic with ministries and regional government institutions. In doing its duty, the task force made many efforts, including implementing medical approaches such as preparing reliable medical staff and hospital facilities, implementing legal approaches such as issuing regulations to limit people from gathering or doing activities that may attract many people, and implementing communicative approach by delivering persuasive messages to encourage people to participate in accelerating covid-19 alleviation efforts. Communication strategies are implemented through various media to disseminate persuasive messages. Communicators are also trained to be a source of information regarding handling covid-19. They have to disseminate information to the public concerning strategies that the government is implementing to support and trust the government's efforts. In addition, the government also has to compose persuasive communication to encourage people to follow regulations and recommendations to suppress the spread of covid-19. The government's public communication efforts can succeed when it involves all communication channels, both the conventional and the new media, such as online and social media. In a crisis, media should be used as a friendly platform; therefore, through the task force, the government should provide complete and comprehensive information in the media.

**Keywords:** Perception; public; public communication; government; covid-19

## Persepsi publik terhadap komunikasi publik pemerintah dalam penanganan covid-19

### ABSTRAK

**Gugus** tugas covid bertugas untuk menangani penyebaran virus covid-19 yang penyebarannya terus meningkat dan telah menimbulkan korban jiwa dan dampak material bagi berbagai sektor di Indonesia. Gugus tugas dituntut untuk bertindak cepat, tepat, fokus, terpadu dan sinergis dengan lembaga/kementerian dan pemerintah daerah. Berbagai upaya dilakukan oleh gugus tugas, diantaranya melakukan pendekatan medis dengan mempersiapkan tenaga medis yang handal dan sarana pendukung di rumah sakit, pendekatan hukum dengan mengeluarkan peraturan-peraturan agar masyarakat tidak melakukan aktivitas yang mengundang massa serta dengan pendekatan komunikasi dengan menyampaikan pesan-pesan persuasif agar masyarakat turut berpartisipasi dalam menangani percepatan penanganan covid-19. Berbagai strategi komunikasi dilakukan dengan memanfaatkan berbagai media untuk menyampaikan pesan-pesan persuasif, komunikator juga dibentuk untuk menjadi sumber informasi penanganan covid-19. Komunikator harus mendiseminasikan informasi kepada publik bagaimana strategi yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah sehingga publik memberikan dukungan dan kepercayaan kepada pemerintah. Disamping itu, pemerintah juga harus menyusun pesan-pesan komunikasi persuasif agar masyarakat mematuhi segala himbauan, aturan agar penyebaran covid-19 dapat ditekan. Upaya komunikasi publik yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah dapat berhasil ketika pemerintah melibatkan seluruh saluran komunikasi baik media konvensional maupun media baru seperti media online dan media sosial. Media dalam situasi krisis harus digunakan sebagai sahabat oleh karena itu, pemerintah melalui gugus tugas idealnya memberikan informasi yang lengkap kepada media.

**Kata-Kata kunci:** Persepsi; publik; komunikasi publik; pemerintah; covid-19

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## INTRODUCTION

Let the people know the truth, and the country will be safe. The government can use these wise words from Abraham Lincoln as the fundamental principle to overcome the Covid-19 crisis. On June 6, 2021, the latest data indicated that the mortality rate due to Covid-19 in Indonesia kept increasing, reaching 51.612 (2.78%), which surpassed the average world's mortality rate of 2.15% (*Satuan Petugas Penanganan Covid-19*, or Covid-19 Task Force, 2021).

Efforts to educate people should have been made from the pandemic's beginning. However, the government did not take that opportunity and focused on issuing economic policies and regulations that they believed would be enough for Indonesia to survive the pandemic. Another problem also arose, in which the Ministry of Health, the primary institution that the government can use as a communicator to educate the people, failed to take that role. Through his controversial statements, the Minister of Health seemed confident that Indonesia would be able to survive the Covid-19 crisis.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic presents unique challenges for health practitioners and communicators. It is evident from the amount of misinformation about health, such as the problems in social media literacy concerning health information and the effect of Covid-19 on other diseases (Ratzan et al., 2020) but require retooling for present challenges. The 'Addressing Ebola and other outbreaks' checklist contains guiding principles built upon maxims developed from a World Health Organization consultation in response to the mad cow (bovine spongiform encephalopathy). Covid-19 is a global crisis that requires optimum efforts and involves many sectors. Therefore, the Indonesian government should have a well-planned and well-structured crisis management.

Crisis management is essentially a strategic step that the government can prevent the worse situation. It can only be done if the government responds quickly and acts responsibly to the Covid-19 crisis. In line with this, communication is an essential approach in handling a crisis through building mutual understanding with the public (Silvia, 2015).

Considering the role of the government as a communicator in disseminating information and messages in a crisis, then a leader is expected to reduce the problem, handle the consequences, and recognize the threats in a crisis (Watkins & Clevenger, 2021).

Several critiques should be mentioned regarding the Indonesian government's steps during the Covid-19 crisis. Firstly, the government failed in early detection because it did not give any early warning concerning Covid-19 development to the people. Secondly, the government did not take any early prevention measures. It did not educate the public regarding Covid-19 and its handling so that people searched and obtained that information from social media and other information channels. Unfortunately, that information was not official statements from the government, which meant they were not always reliable.

Currently, the Covid-19 crisis in Indonesia is in an acute phase, in which the number of Covid-19 patients keeps increasing rapidly because the public is yet to develop awareness regarding Covid-19 handling. It is an expected consequence of the government's failure to take strategic communication steps to handle the Covid-19 crisis.

However, it is not too late for the government to handle the Covid-19 crisis in Indonesia. As the front line in developing crisis communication to the public, The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (KOMINFO) can take several practical steps, including maintaining a good relationship with the public, providing the public with holistic information concerning Covid-19, and presenting information with universal and easy-to-understand language.

Firstly, the collective nature of Indonesian people can be put to an advantage for KOMINFO by disseminating information via specific communities and using such communities as a bridge to communicate with the public. The communities can be persuaded to be communicators that can disseminate information and calm the people. In fact, since Indonesian people have strong social solidarity, that character can be taken as an opportunity to prevent economic and social disruption, which potentially is worsening due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Parahita, 2020).

Secondly, considering media as a partner communicator for the government, the sheer

number of printed and electronic media and online and social media is an opportunity that KOMINFO can use to disseminate educational information about Covid-19 to the public quickly.

Ministry of Communication and Informatics must be the frontline in crisis communication utilizing all existing media platforms to disseminate information that the public can easily digest. The ministry must be proactive in designing strategic communication because keeping silent in a crisis is never a good option. The government's silence opens windows for the hoax and fake news to spread, making people more worried and panic. Fake information or hoax emerging during the Covid-19 pandemic are caused by, among others, the tendency to share and spread messages without implementing any critical thinking beforehand. Consequently, false information spread quickly among the public (Marsudi et al., 2020).

KOMINFO can prepare a single narration every day so that various media can get their information from a trusted and reliable source. To be more specific, KOMINFO should have its own social media team that can optimize the use of social media as a means for educating the public about Covid-19. Thirdly, KOMINFO should attempt to gather all messages/information about Covid-19 to create a principle of one voice to spread the correct and reliable information in easily digestible language.

KOMINFO should take over the role of the primary source of information. In other words, KOMINFO should be the primary communicator in handling the Covid-19 crisis. Every statement that KOMINFO issues must be by the principle of one voice. Dissemination of conflicting narratives and information will only confuse the public. Fourthly, the government through KOMINFO must act swiftly to handle Covid-19. Consequently, it requires strategic steps, which begin with listing what must and must not be done. These concrete steps will affect the economy, education, social, defense, and security sectors. If the government, via KOMINFO, has formulated the strategic steps to handle Covid-19, the information should be disseminated to the public via various media channels to be aware of and follow them. So far, each ministry or government institution tends to make its own efforts to handle Covid-19

and ends up doing different things. Hence, the government needs to publish specific guidelines.

Fifthly, teams that KOMINFO formed should be released from their daily duties so that they can focus solely on handling the Covid-19 crisis. They must not be burdened with other tasks. As the frontline of public communication, both in a crisis and at the usual time, KOMINFO regularly self-evaluates to improve their services of providing information to the public. Regarding Covid-19 handling, the evaluation focuses on two factors; the source of information/message and the content of the message.

Tan explains that the factor of the source is focused on the credibility of the communicator (source of information). Communicator's credibility includes expertise, trustworthiness, and likability. Meanwhile, the factor of content is focused on the message structure, which covers objectivity (one-sided or two-sided), order of argument, and conclusions; message style, that is, repetition and language used; and message appeals, i.e., emotional or rational appeal of the message which stems from how the communicator compose the message so that audience and understand it easily (Leonardi, 2013).

Another factor that should also be considered is the audience. The audience factor is assumed to include behavioral changes occurring in the audience after receiving stimuli. After receiving stimuli, the audience is engaged in the intervening process, which is the process in which individuals pay attention, gain understanding, and accept the information. According to Tan, intervening variables cannot be directly measured or observed because they are processed in mind. However, the intervening variable can be used to predict responses. In this instrumental persuasion theory, the responses are in the form of behavioral changes. Behavioral changes include the changes in opinion, affection, perception, and action. In the present study, this theory is relevant in discovering behavioral changes in the public after they receive information (Rakhmatin, 2017).

The present study uses Hovland, Janis, and Kelly's (Tan, 1981) Instrumental Model of Persuasion theory as its grand theory. The theory is based on the persuasive learning process, which shares similar components with

SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory. Hovland, Janis, and Kelly defined persuasive communication as a process in which an individual (communicator) sends verbal stimulus to change the behaviors of another individual (Tan, 1981).

The theory consists of stimuli, intervening processes, and responses. Stimulus is a characteristic of a communication situation that includes source, content/message, and audience factors. The intervening process involves paying attention to, understanding, and accepting information, which affects the communication process and determines the effect. The effect of communication is considered as a response, indicated by the changes in opinion, perception, affection, and action (Tan, 1981).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research focused on the Indonesian government's public communication in handling Covid-19. It employed a quantitative approach using the survey method. The research quantitatively described a population's tendencies, behaviors, or opinions by observing and analyzing a sample of that population (Creswell, 2013).

Based on specific reasons and rationale, Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and Tegal cities were selected as the population in this research (Creswell, 2013). Survey research is an everyday activity among the public, and many participants in this research have experiences with the survey as a particular method or as one of a series of research methods. Survey research is developed as a positivist approach in social studies. As explained by Robert Groves, a prominent expert in surveying, "survey produces information that is naturally statistical." The survey is the most basic form of quantitative research. Survey research asks respondents about their beliefs, opinions, characteristics, and previous or current behavior (Adiyanta, 2019). The rationale behind selecting the sample was the number of Covid-19 patients in the regions until late August 2020.

This survey research was conducted using the purposive sampling technique because the researchers took into account the specific rationale of the spread of Covid-19 infected areas, categorized in three levels; high,

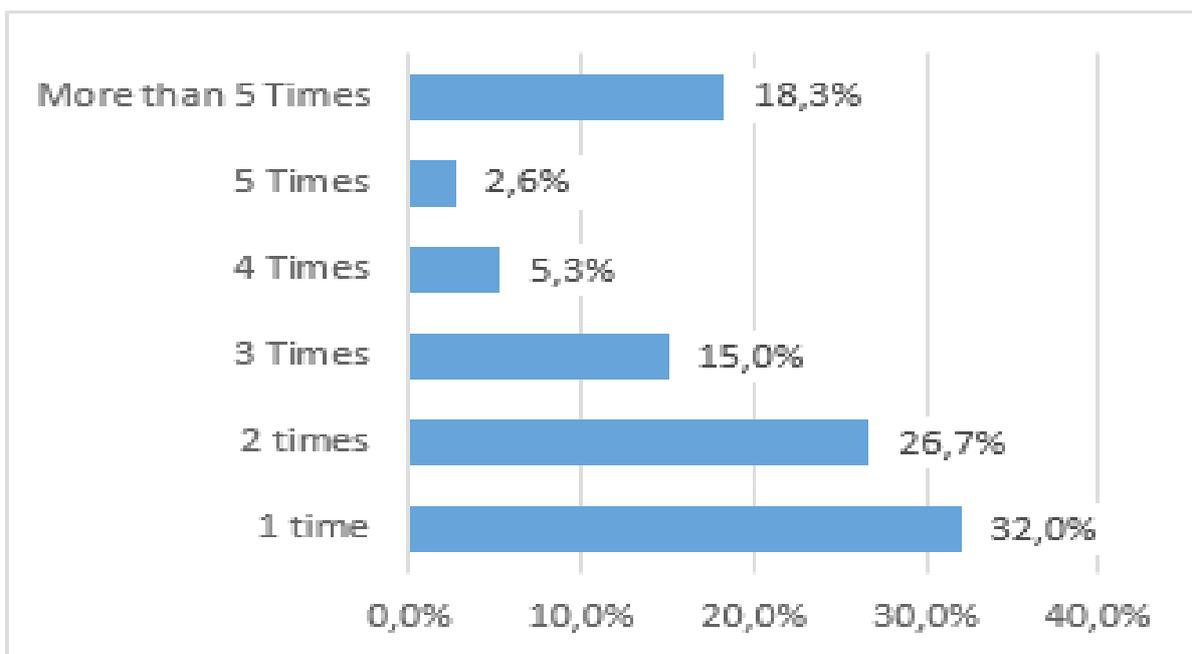
medium, and low. It aligns with Arikunto (2014), who stated that purposive sampling is a sampling selection technique based on specific considerations. In the present research, 453 respondents participated through an online google form.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussing communication in a pandemic, then three issues need to be improved. They are communication about policies, institutions, disaster communication patterns, information/message dissemination strategy, and dynamic feedback. Disaster communication is the essential communication perspective in handling the Covid-19 pandemic. The protocol of public communication during a disaster and emergency is the primary protocol that must be used. Risk communication system ensures that the government at the central level agrees to include communication protocol in various activities to handle and be cognizant about the pandemic. The same protocol is implemented in preparing and disseminating information to protect public health using quick, transparent, and accessible means. Haddow noted that disaster communication is necessary for reducing risk and saving lives from the effects of disaster (Tamitiadini et al., 2019).

The protocol is in place to help the public make rational decisions in and about the crisis. Communication is expected to serve as a means to ensure that the public responds to behaviors/actions that should be carried out to eliminate or reduce risks. In a situation of discomfort and uncertainty due to the pandemic, communication is key and part of the solution.

The following discusses the result of the Survey on Government's Public Communication in Accelerating Covid-19 Handling. The research was carried out in five cities representing different levels of Covid-19 spread. Jakarta and Surabaya represent cities with a High number of Covid-19 patients, Bandung City represents those in Medium level of spread, while Yogyakarta and Tegal represent cities with a Low number of Covid-19 spread. Four hundred fifty-three respondents participated in this research, gathered online through a google form. The analysis is presented regarding respondents' profile, univariate (single table) analysis for each question item



Source: Research findings, 2020

**Figure 1 The intensity of Finding Information Regarding Covid-19**

and studied variable, and bivariate (cross-tabulation) analysis between variables assumed to share correlation.

Respondents' profile includes origin area (city), age, sex, education, job, and marital status. Their intensity of finding information about Covid-19 in a day and their prioritized/primary source of Covid-19 information were also discovered.

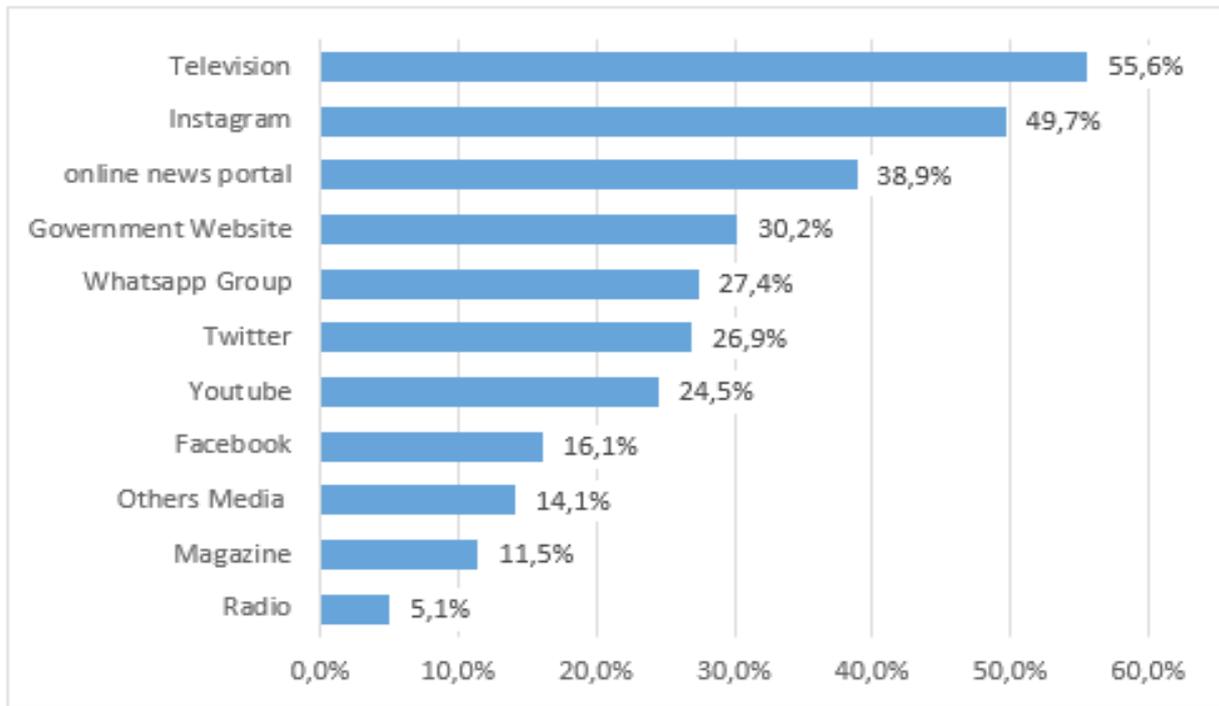
From questionnaires administered to the respondents, it was found that the most significant number of the returned questionnaire was from Surabaya City (21.2%), followed by that from Jakarta (20.5%), Tegal (19.9%), and lastly, Yogyakarta (18.8%).

The highest number of respondents claimed to work in the private sector (27.4%). The second and third positions (23.6%) were those whose occupation was a student (in university level and levels below it). The fourth rank was respondents who were their own boss (entrepreneur) (13.7%). It was followed by Civil Servants (7.1%) and small traders/sellers (3.8%). Professions with the least number of respondents in this research were farmers and TNI/POLRI (Indonesian Army/Police Force), each with only 0.4% of the total sample.

Figure 2 displays information about priority/primary source of information that respondents used to find information concerning Covid-19 Virus development. It should be noted that respondents could choose more than one option. The percentage was still calculated using the total number of respondents (453).

Based on Figure 2, it was known that the three most significant priority/primary sources of information regarding Covid-19 Virus development were Television (55.6%), Instagram (49.7%), and Online News Portals (detik.com, kompas.com, kumparan, et cetera) (38.9%). Ranked 4 to 7 were Government Websites (kominfo.gov.id, kemkes.go.id, et cetera) (30.2%), Whatsapp Group (27.4%), Twitter (26.9%), and Youtube (24.5%). The minor prioritized sources were Facebook (16.1%), Other Media (14.1%), Newspaper/Magazines (11.5%), and Radio (5.1%).

In an interview with Dian Wardiana, an expert in broadcasting, she said that television will always be the foremost priority or primary source of information for the public because it presents information in audio and visual at the same time. She added that the low level of literacy in Indonesia further propels television



Source: Research findings, 2020

**Figure 2 Media to Find Covid-19 Information**

as the most easily accessed media for people to find information without reading. Dian also noted that the use of social media to find information requires the internet (data), and it still involves reading, which made it less favorable than television. In line with this, Rumata (2017) stated that public information can be disseminated more effectively via television which can reach a wide range of targets simultaneously. On the other hand, the effectiveness of targeting audiences via mass media needs to be further evaluated.

The source factor was indicated by three elements: expertise, trustworthiness, and likability of the source. The following discusses the findings for each element and will conclude with categorizing the source factor as a whole.

The findings showed that most respondents mildly disagreed that information source/communicator/spoke-person from the government possessed the communication expertise in delivering messages concerning Covid-19 handling (38%), while 9.3% strongly disagreed. The source's expertise is of great importance in the public communication process. According to Rakhmat, communicators' expertise can be seen from relating to the topic

being discussed (Leonardi, 2013). In addition, the communicator's expertise in delivering messages is also apparent from the reiteration of the same message to the public. Their ability to answer questions about the topic or issue is crucial for convincing or influencing the public (Rakhmatin, 2017).

McCroskey noted that the source's credibility in the communication process is layered in dimensions. The layers are (1) expertise based on communicator's competency, information possessed, and authority displayed when delivering the information; (2) communicator's character, based on the objectivity of message delivery, displaying good motivation/intention, and reliability; and (3) dynamic, which is the ability to actively persuade the audience (S. Silvia & Paramita, 2019).

In the context of the source factor, ethos is the key to creating effective communication, in which the source/communicator must have credibility, authority, and control. According to Lucas, a source's credibility in the communication process can be developed through competencies, characters, and sincerity that the audience sees when the message is delivered (Putri, 2017). These three indicators

will determine the source/communicator's reputation in delivering information. Interviews with the informants noted that government spoke-person should show their capabilities, not be selected merely based on gender.

Communicator's credibility significantly affects the audience's decision-making process; as explained in Antony & Oktavianti (2020) namely credibility and attractiveness. The research aims to examine the credibility of the communicator on the purchase decision of the AHHA Clothing Line Atta Halilintar product after watching YouTube Atta Halilintar. The independent variable in this study is the credibility of the communicator and the dependent variable is the purchase decision. The approach used in this study is quantitative descriptive. Research data were collected using non-probability sampling techniques or purposive sampling techniques. This study uses SPSS for Windows 23 test for Validity, Reliability, Hypothesis (simple linear analysis, the higher communicator's quality is, the greater audience's buying decision will be. Conversely, the lower communicator's credibility, the public's decision will also decrease.

Discussion on credibility in communication discipline is not new because, in the fourth century, Aristotle used 'ethos' to refer to a communicator's characteristics that can influence the audience.

Aristotle noted that persuasion was achieved due to the personal characteristics of the speaker, who, when delivering their speech, instilled in the audience a feeling that they could be trusted. We are more likely to trust good people than others. This is a general rule in all matters and is absolute with no possibility of divided opinion. The opinion of some rhetoric experts that the personal goodness that a speaker display has no bearing on that speaker's persuasive power is not valid. A speaker's character can almost be said to be his most effective persuasion (Rakhmat, 2012).

In line with this, it is said that in the communication process, a communicator will succeed if they can show a source of credibility. In other words, the source of communicants' trust in communicators depends on the latter's expertise in their field and on their trustworthiness (Effendy, 2009).

The government has to show a source/communicator whose expertise is apparent

and can be traced in terms of their experience, knowledge, background/track record, and maturity. In addition, the source/communicator must possess the necessary competencies so that even though they are under pressure, the source/communicator can still deliver the message. Another competency that a spoke person must possess is vocal quality. A source/communicator must have clear, energetic, and enthusiastic enunciation.

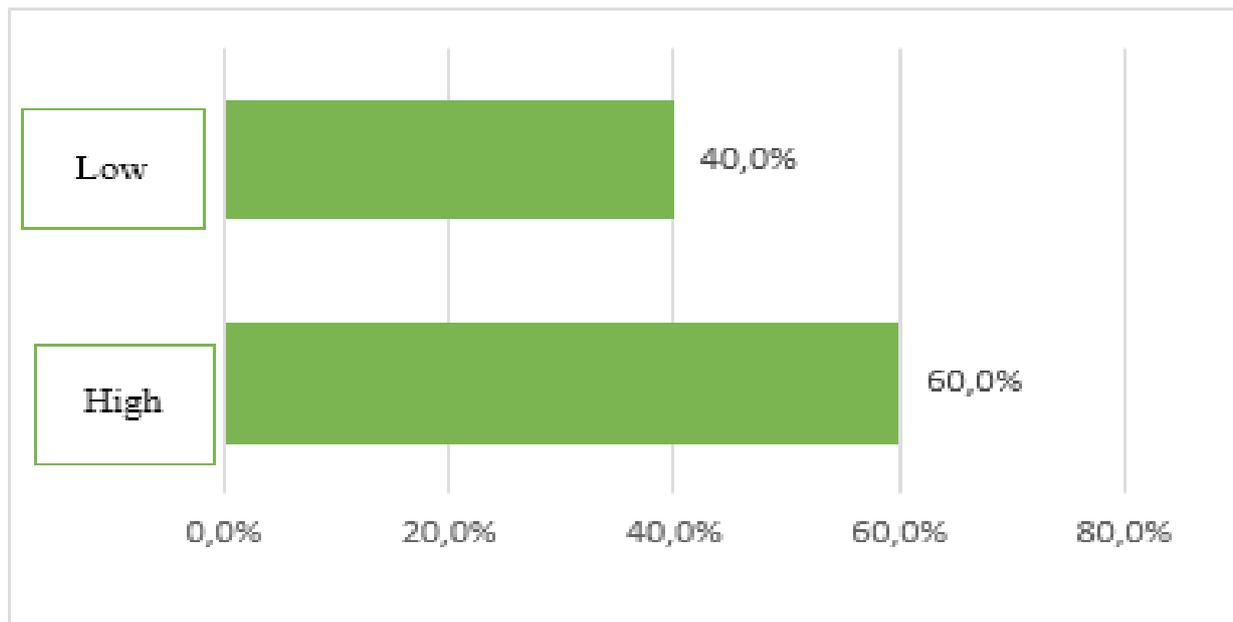
Based on the findings, the highest response stated that the respondents mildly disagreed that a source/communicator/government spoke-person on Covid-19 handling was trustworthy or reliable (34.2%), while 8.4% of respondents strongly disagreed. Trustworthiness is closely related to credibility, which is based on the communicator's knowledge in expressing their opinion on an issue (Ajzen, 2014).

Source's trustworthiness, that is, communicants' trust in communicator, is the second factor that can result in successful communication. Trustworthiness is usually related to the communicator's profession or expertise. Meanwhile, communication experts define credibility as a series of public perceptions of the communicator's characters (Rakhmat, 2012). Trust can only be built if communicators can deliver information following their own opinion and disseminate information independently without any intention to manipulate it (Leonardi, 2013).

In terms of Covid-19 information dissemination in Indonesia, based on both indicators measured in source factor, it was found that communicator's mastery or knowledge of the information (Covid-19 pandemic) is the most important thing to consider for the public to trust the communicator based on their expertise in delivering the information.

Based on the findings, the highest responses showed that most respondents (38.6%) mildly disagree that the source/communicator/spoke-person on Covid-19 handling had an appeal (likability), while 9.7% strongly agreed. Venus noted that a communicator's appeal or likability is often used to deliver a message, for instance, in public relations events, political campaigns, and marketing communication, so that it can reach the public more effectively (Rakhmatin, 2017).

The likability of information sources can be seen in some forms of message delivery,



Source: Research findings, 2020

**Figure 3 Categorization of Assessment on Source/Communicator Factor**

including being friendly and pleasant during delivery and sharing something familiar with the public, which will be a psychological appeal (Rakhmatin, 2017). Rakhmat argued that having something in common in communication will result in a more effective delivery because it facilitates the message decoding process, builds premise more effectively, makes it more likely for communicants to be attracted to the communicator, and develops respect and trust in the communicator (Rakhmatin, 2017).

From the responses regarding source factor, the score was calculated, and the total score for source factor was obtained, which was then categorized into two; High and Low. The categorization was carried out using the ideal score, in which the maximum score was the multiplication of the number of questions, and the highest score ( $3 \times 5 = 15$ ) and the minimum score was the multiplication of the number of questions and the lowest score ( $3 \times 1 = 3$ ). The score interval was  $(15-3)/2=6$ . Therefore the High category was on the 3-9 interval, and the Low category was on the 10-15 interval. The assessment of respondents' responses on the source factor is displayed in Figure 3.

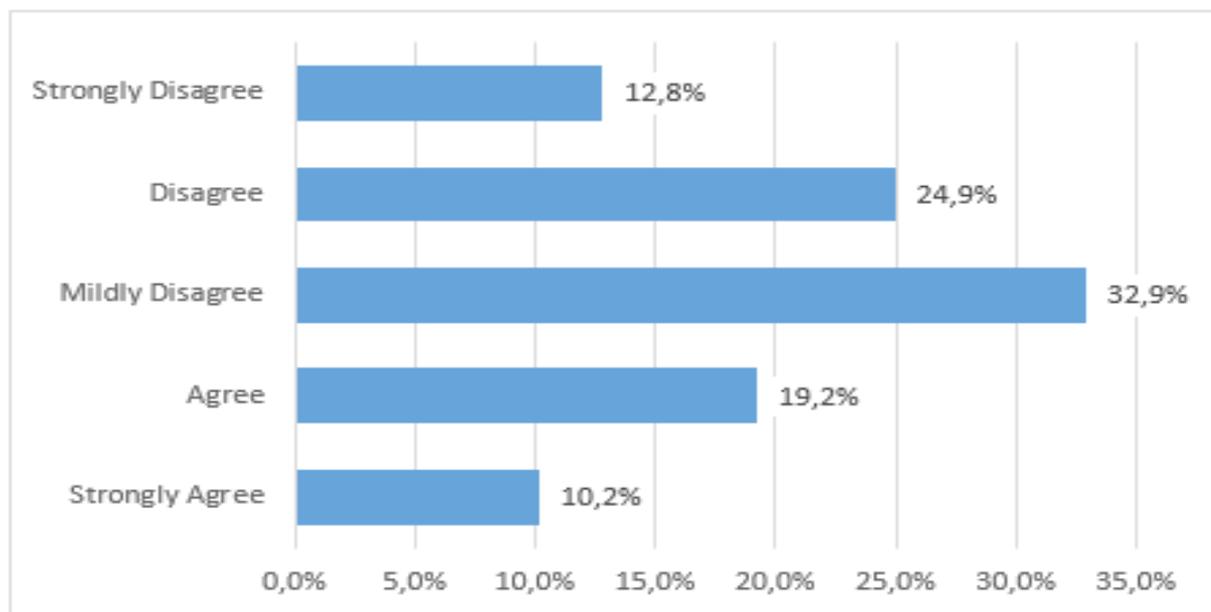
Based on Figure 3, it was found that respondents' responses on source factor were mainly in the High category (60%), while the

rest was in the Low category (40%). It indicates that the quality of a source/communicator/spoke-person in delivering information/messages on Covid-19 handling was considered Good. However, many respondents (almost half) thought that it was just adequate, indicating that the source's quality needs to be improved in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability.

The second factor in this research was the message (content) factor. The message factor was represented by five-question items about understandability, comprehensiveness, effects in alleviating worries, benefits for the public, and appeal. The following discusses the findings for each item, concluded by categorization of message factor as a whole.

Based on the findings, it was known that most responses showed that respondents mildly disagreed that the Message on Covid-19 handling delivered by the government was easy to understand (31,3%). 9.7% of respondents strongly disagreed with that statement. In the message factor, one of the crucial indicators that can be measured in the order of arguments during information dissemination is whether the message is easy to remember and understand for the audience (Leonardi, 2013).

According to the audience, a well-delivered



Source: Research findings, 2020

**Figure 4 Message Alleviates Worries**

message can be assessed by the usefulness (benefits) of the information (Rakhmatin, 2017). There are several components about understanding a message, including the audience as recipient and the communicator, in this case, the government, who delivers the message on Covid-19. In terms of the recipients, their background will significantly determine their understanding of the message. Meanwhile, the message delivery and order will affect how it is understood in terms of the communicator. In addition, the audience's understanding is affected not only by the textual content of the message but also by its visual appearance (Sidhartani, 2016).

Based on the findings, it was known that the majority of respondents mildly disagreed that the message about Covid-19 handling from the government was delivered comprehensively without anything being covered (37.1%), while 11.5% strongly agreed to that statement. The indicator for this aspect was that the message should be delivered comprehensively and not just from one side. The comprehensiveness of a message can be judged by, among others, the effectiveness of its sentences. Badudu noted that one's understanding of the effective use of language significantly affects others' understanding of the message one delivers.

Effective sentences can communicate the speaker's thoughts and feelings to the audience (Nurfaedah & Suwatri Jura, 2020).

Public involvement can be done through information transparency policies, which would create development policies that involve the public in formulating, criticizing, and supporting the policies (Yovinus, 2018). In the present research, the government needs to implement information transparency to the public to support the government's policies in handling the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, the public service function of the government can be implemented through public information transparency. It will be a unique challenge considering the advancement in communication technology has allowed the public to access information very quickly so that the public will realize when their right to complete and comprehensive information is not satisfied. The public needs information transparency in monitoring their environment (Kriyantono, 2015).

Several factors affect public policies' implementation, including human resources, bureaucracy disposition and structure, and communication. An essential factor in delivering information concerning public policies is the implementor, who must possess the expertise to

implement various tools to support the policies as a means to disseminate public information (Indah & Hariyanti, 2018).

In communication management for the government, comprehensive and structured planning is needed. Therefore, some components need to be considered so that the public can receive the policies that an institution delivers. The components in government communication management are problem identification, communication action, and evaluation (Indarto, 2012).

Based on Figure 4, it was known that the highest response was that respondents mildly disagreed that the message of covid-19 handling delivered by the government could alleviate worries or eliminate uncertainties (32.9%). Meanwhile, 10.2% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. Worries and uncertainties have to be overcome considering that the Covid-19 pandemic affects the health sector and the education, economy, and social sectors.

Worries and uncertainties can hinder the audience from receiving the message in full. The message decoding process can be done using various cultural experiences and backgrounds to reduce uncertainties or worries. In addition, previous studies noted that worries and uncertainties occur at the beginning of the communication process, undergo several stages, and involve rejection and adaptation before being accepted (Ibrahim, 2020).

The government's role as a communicator in delivering messages about Covid-19 policies is crucial in fighting against fake news or hoax that keeps increasing during the pandemic. Uncertainty will spread and grow if it is encouraged by false information or hoax. Such uncertainty may even create a public opinion not based on facts and consequently causes worries or even fear among the public (Budiman, 2017).

Based on the findings, it was known that the highest response was that respondents mildly disagreed that the message of Covid-19 handling delivered by the government benefited or was beneficial for the public (27.2%). Meanwhile, 12.1% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Message benefits perceived by the public when they receive the message should be one of the primary considerations in the message delivery process. Xu & Jeong (2019) argued that a benefit-based message

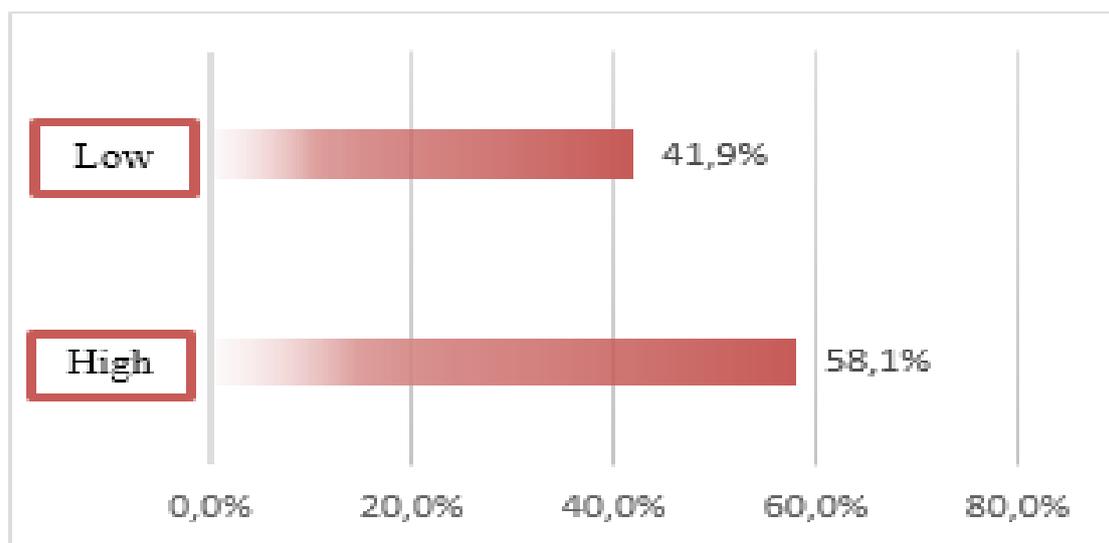
would persuade the public more to take action as intended by the communicator.

Based on the findings, it was known that the highest response was that respondents mildly disagreed that the message of Covid-19 handling was delivered in an appealing/attractive way by the government (37.3%). Meanwhile, 10.8% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Message's appeal targets the audience's emotional and rational sides. Hence, a message's appeal can be measured through the visuals displayed during message delivery, audio materials, verbal appeal or word choices, and non-verbal appeal (Tan, 1981).

Message's appeal can also be presented in rational information for the public. Andreu et al. (2015) noted that the appeal of messages that use a rational approach could influence consumers' awareness and emotion. Another study using the survey method in Austria measured message appeal on empowering messages during the Covid-19 pandemic, with 337 respondents stating that messages with emotional appeal can empower the message more than those with an informative appeal (Koinig, 2021) messages need to be carefully designed. In this context, both message specifics and audience specifics receive consideration. This research tries to scrutinize (1. Based on these previous studies, it can be concluded that the message's appeal needs to be presented in rational and emotional forms to develop public awareness and to empower the message about policies to handle the Covid-19 pandemic.

From the five statements about the message factor, the scores were calculated, and the total score for the message factor as a whole was found, which was then categorized into two, Low and High. Categorization was carried out based on an ideal score, in which the maximum score was the multiplication of the number of questions, the highest score ( $5 \times 5 = 25$ ), and the minimum score was the multiplication of the number of questions the lowest score ( $5 \times 1 = 5$ ). The score interval was  $(25 - 5) / 2 = 10$ ; therefore, the High category was on the 5-15 interval, and the Low category was on the 16-25 interval. The assessment of respondents' responses on the message factor is shown in Figure 5.

Based on Figure 5, it was known that respondents' responses on message factor were mainly in the High category (58.1%), while the rest was in the Adequate category (41.9%). It



Source: Research findings, 2020

**Figure 5** Categorization of Assessment on Message Factor

shows that the quality of the message delivered by the government's spoke-person was considered Good. However, almost half of the respondents thought it was just adequate (not good enough), indicating that the quality of the message needs to be improved in terms of its understandability, comprehensiveness, effects on alleviating worries, benefits for the public, and appeal. It was reflected in the opinion of many respondents who responded to the five items with Mildly Disagree.

It was also reflected in informants' interview questions regarding message factors. They hoped that the message was presented more appealing and informative for everyone. The message delivered up to now seemed to be not informative enough or not appealing enough because even though Limitation on Public Activities (PSBB) had been implemented, many people still carried on doing their activities as usual. In fact, patrolling officers only shouted 'do not gather in groups' to people as they went by, without even stopping to talk to the gathering people.

It indicates that the government implemented PSBB regulation only as a formality; there was no fine for those who did not wear masks or gathered in a crowd. Informants stated that information that the government delivered tends to be not fully open. In other words, there are some things still being covered. Consequently,

the public tends not to trust the government.

As an effort to improve public trust, the message on Covid-19 can be delivered using statistical data presented in visual form (infographic), including a testimonial from people, and involving relevant third parties.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the Survey on Government's Public Communication in Covid-19 handling, carried out in September-October, show that the quality of source/communicator in delivering messages about Covid-19 handling was good. However, several respondents (almost half) thought it was just adequate, indicating that the source's quality needs to be improved in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability.

Therefore, ministries/institutions should coordinate to prepare a communicator who can effectively deliver the message to the public. The communicator must have expertise, competencies, and credibility. Selecting such a communicator will make the dissemination of information concerning Covid-19 better and more accepted by the public. Ministries/institutions can select multiple communicators, but they all must uphold one voice principle.

Ministries/institutions can provide a single information channel that the public can access. A Single-channel of information can

also be the primary reference for information about Covid-19. The findings on the message (content) factor showed that the quality of the message disseminated by the government's spoke-person was considered Good. However, almost half of respondents deemed it adequate, which means that the quality of the message needs to be improved in terms of the message's understandability, comprehensiveness, effects in alleviating worries, benefits for the public, and appeal.

The delivery of the message itself can be improved by using interesting/appealing visuals without sacrificing the substance of the information. It can build public trust that the government (ministries/institutions) can handle Covid-19. In addition, in delivering the message, its rational and emotional aspects need to be considered to be more appealing to the public. It will serve to disseminate information and improve awareness and empowerment regarding policies on Covid-19 handling. To effectively handle the Covid-19 pandemic requires collaboration from all ministries/government institutions, and various information about Covid-19 should be managed by prioritizing transparency.

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