

## APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE THEORY IN EXPLORING THE VOICE OF COMMUNITY IN CONFLICT-PRONE AREAS

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**ABSTRACT.** This research is motivated by conflicts in urban areas, which are escalating in frequency. Johar Baru District was selected due to the prevalence of inter-group conflicts, specifically in the form of brawls, which have become a daily occurrence in the area. The prevalence of this kind of conflict traumatizes the residents left behind in the area. Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore the voices of the community in conflict-prone areas that need to be explored. Communication infrastructure theory was chosen to support the analysis because this theory was developed to articulate problems in urban areas. The research method chosen is a case study. The research results show that the community expressed three essential things related to conflict: the dangers of drugs, peace, and providing employment opportunities. This research also shows that Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) is reliable for mapping conflict in urban areas as well as capturing the voices of communities that have been marginalized in conflict-prone areas.

**Keywords:** brawls; communication infrastructure theory; intergroup conflict; peace; voices of community.

## PEMANFAATAN TEORI INFRASTRUKTUR KOMUNIKASI UNTUK MEMNGEKSPLORASI SUARA KOMUNITAS DI WILAYAH RAWAN KONFLIK

**ABSTRAK.** Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi konflik di wilayah perkotaan yang semakin rutin. Kecamatan Johar Baru dipilih karena konflik antarkelompok dalam wujud tawuran telah menjadi rutinitas sehari-hari di wilayah tersebut. Persistensi konflik membuat warga yang tinggal di wilayah tersebut menjadi trauma. Karena itulah, suara warga di wilayah rawan konflik perlu dieksplorasi. Teori infrastruktur komunikasi dipilih sebagai pendukung analisis dengan alasan teori tersebut dikembangkan untuk mengartikulasikan masalah di perkotaan. Metode penelitian yang dipilih adalah studi kasus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, komunitas menyuarakan tiga hal penting terkait konflik: bahaya narkoba, perdamaian, dan penyediaan lapangan kerja. Penelitian ini sekaligus menunjukkan bahwa teori infrastruktur komunikasi (CIT) andal untuk memetakan konflik di perkotaan sekaligus memotret suara-suara komunitas yang selama ini terpinggirkan di wilayah rawan konflik.

**Kata kunci:** konflik antarkelompok; ; perdamaian; suara komunitas; tawuran; teori infrastruktur komunikasi.

### INTRODUCTION

People's positions in conflict-prone areas often experience abandonment as their voices are drowned out by the chaos of the conflicting parties. As a result, communities residing in conflict-prone areas become increasingly marginalized, complicating empowerment efforts at empowering them. As Mac Ginty and Firchow (2014) emphasized, it is critical to capture the voices of local communities in conflicted regions. It is because the community's voice is authentic as it accurately captures its wants and aspirations. Villanueva et al (2017) stated the same thing. They revealed that a communicative approach that captures the local community's voice could frame how stakeholders (the government) take the best policies based on the local community's needs. This is in line with the view of Hamelink (2008) that said as part to resolve conflicts, a communicative approach needed because it facilitates interaction between communities.

The present research focuses on how the voices of the community in urban conflict-prone areas. As Heywood et al. (2024) said, the voices of communities in conflicted areas are needed because these communities are often isolated and are faced with challenges in seeking and accessing information. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) states that the form of community voice is a narrative. In the context of this research, narratives are built based on communication that exists between agents in the communication infrastructure.

Conflict is a visible phenomenon in urban areas. Many factors contribute to the causes, which range from population pressure to the failure to achieve social justice (Tadjoeddin et al., 2012), unequal urban welfare, segregation, and unemployment (Hamelink, 2008), or economic instability and imbalance (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2013). Conflicts in Indonesia frequently occur in urban areas (Saputra, 2011). Violence like brawls, mass judgments, mobbing (Tadjoeddin et al., 2012), and conflicts over economic resources (Muntaza, 2011) are some of the examples.

Johar Baru Sub-District, Jakarta Pusat, was selected as the research location. The mapping results of Jakarta National Unity and Politics Agency (BKBP, 2015) show that 16 sub-districts in Jakarta are areas prone to violence/conflict. (Tadie, 2009) explained that conflicts have become a daily routine for residents in the sub-districts. Conflicts In Tanah Tinggi Village are visible: brawls between villagers frequently occur (Simone & Fauzan, 2012) called Tanah Tinggi Village in Johar Baru Sub-District, which is considered as the most populous village in Jakarta. With diverse ethnicity and ageing infrastructure, Tanah Tinggi Village is Jakarta's poorest and most dangerous. Two other villages in Johar Baru Sub-District, namely Galur and Kampung Rawa have similar fates. These sub-districts have earned the nickname of the most conflict-prone villages in Jakarta (BKBP, 2015).

Data collected by Sujarwo & Solikha (2019) shows that from 2012-2016, there were 72 cases of conflict in Johar Baru District. Data from the Johar Baru Sector Police (2021) noted that in 2017 there were 31 brawl incidents, which decreased to 28 times in 2019, then surging to 37 times in 2020.

According to (Wirutomo, 2016), conflicts in the form of brawls in Johar Baru Sub-District occur due to intertwined structural, cultural, and process factors. Structural problems are uncontrolled because of population density. The scarcity of land led to poor housing conditions in Johar Baru Sub-District and the residents live in cramped conditions. Cultural factors make social life in Johar Baru District characterized as a "culture of poverty" due to structural poverty adaptation that has been present for a long time. The fluid, flexible, and negotiable dynamics of daily interactions ultimately create a processual arena. Wirutomo (2016) stated that the processual arena is an ongoing process of informal and unpatterned social interactions where people could express their aspirations.

The emergence of several street gangs adds to the complexity of the problem in Johar Baru Sub-District because these groups often start brawls (Darmajanti, 2013a). The street gangs consist of adolescents/youth of productive age and behaving delinquently (Hanania & Garvin, 2022)—due to poverty, unemployment, slums, overcrowding, social exclusion, as well as structural factors such as limited space for movement in their homes (Yasmine, 2017). Mauliate, Nurlambang, & Ludiro, (2014) mapped that as many as 40 groups frequently conduct

brawls in Johar Baru Sub-District, the groups in this area lacked clarity regarding the number of members and their structure. However, groups in Johar Baru Sub-District have become proficient in information technology, especially social media (Fensi, 2020), which is used as an arena for conflict-related activities such as digital vigilantism. Through social media, one group and another group were able to contact each other and fought through abusive comments, resulting in a clash in the real world.

According to Yudhi & Sadono (2018), with their egos and identities, these groups do not hesitate to attack other groups due to an old unresolved grudge. Furthermore, Sasongko et al (2020) stated that in the densely populated Johar Baru Sub-District, revenge is very easy to internalize due to low horizontal mobility. According to Yosephine & Lesmana (2020), trivial issues are the trigger factors, such as harassing comments on social media or online gaming arenas, miscommunication, rumors, or provocations, and intergroup brawls are very easy to occur. Due to the territorial conditions, such groups are prone to trigger tensions and rivalries (Klein et al., 2006) as intertwined with the social processes occurring within the community which makes violence and conflict inevitable.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the conflict in Johar Baru. Umar & Anom (2011) examined the conflict causes in the sub-district, while Darmajanti (2013b) studied the anatomy of conflict. Research by Sumarno (2014), Wirutomo (2016) and Munawar (2013), described the relationship between conflict in Johar Baru Sub-District and regional resilience. Further, the research by Aji (2017) focused on the role of family social control and youth involvement in the conflict. Research by Darmajanti & Suleeman (2017) examined the socio-cultural context in Johar Baru Sub-District, while Yasmine (2017), successfully uncovered the existence of street gangs as one of the leading actors of the brawl, and succeeded in unravelling the root of the problem that squeezed young people in Johar Baru District. Research by Ruwaida (2017) offered efforts to make it so it can grow social harmony in the areas.

This research explores how communities voicing their voices in urban conflict-prone areas. To answer that question, this research utilizes communication infrastructure theory (CIT). CIT is a theory of communication based on urban ecology, developed to articulate, and capture the voices of the community and empirically display

the communication infrastructure of urban living environments (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Communication infrastructure theory includes Neighbourhood Storytelling Networks (NSN) and communication actions. NSN has three levels of analysis: analysis at the macro, the meso, and the micro level. The three levels of analysis represent agents at each level. (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001) argue that the macro-level agents of NSN include mainstream media or large organizations with story production and dissemination of resources. However, macro-level agents fail to serve as community storytellers (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). That's why, in CIT, the focus is on storytellers at the meso and micro levels. In this study, meso-level agents were local organizations and local media/community media/social media/citizen journalism on the internet. Finally, micro-level agents were citizens through interpersonal communication networks.

Conflict research so far has focused on aspects of conflict resolution itself (Dharmariza et al., 2020; (Rozi, 2006) as well as post-conflict integration (Cangara, 2013; (Ulum, 2013), while the voice of the community is displayed, is still scarcely studied. Likewise, the use of CIT in investigating conflicts is still rarely researched. This is because CIT is more widely used to study health communication and urban public spaces. Based on the background explained above, the research aims to explain and analyze the voices of communities in conflict-prone urban areas. It is parallel with (Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2014) viewpoint. They state that hearing the voices of these communities will result in policies to build peace and transformation of conflict better and more sustainably.

## METHOD

This research used a case study method (Stake, 2009). Further, according to Stake, instrumental case studies comprehensively examine the cases with the aim of improving a theory. In the context of this research, CIT is broadened. According to Kekeya (2021) instrumental case study is used to explore general areas to understand the case.

Creswell (2015) stated that research that uses case study, the most important data collection involves a variety of interviews with the same individual. Since the data collection mentioned in this study is qualitative, it uses a qualitative research approach (Putlia, 2022). Denzin & Lincoln (2009) stated that the focus of qualitative

research includes interpretive and naturalistic approaches to the subject of study.

The data collection of this study is an in-depth interview with several informants (table 1) and qualitative content analysis. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with semi-structured interview techniques.

**Table 1. Research informant**

No	Informant(s)	Position	Data obtained
1.	HA	Opinion leader	Voices in meso level/ community organization.
2.	HP	Resident	Voices in micro level.
3.	FJ	Opinion leader	History of conflict, voices in meso level/ civic organization.
4.	TG	Resident	History of conflict, voices in micro level.

Source: research result

The study also analyzed observations and text data. The texts were obtained through searches in community media/local media and social media. The data that have been obtained in this study is processed. It uses NVivo 12 Plus software. The processing with Nvivo is mainly to obtain themes related to the voices of the community in the research area. The output of data processing with Nvivo 12 Plus is in a word tree (word cloud) that shows a visualization of text data. Following processing, the researchers analyzed data using the model of (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), which included reduction, presentation, and conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### History of Conflict

Remnants of the conflict can be seen around the Sentiong River which divides Tanah Tinggi Village from Kampung Rawa Village. The pedestrian bridge right in front of the Tanah Tinggi Flats had to be closed and fenced off because it provided access for conflict actors to attack each other. Several banners cautioning about the threat of conflict were also still visibly displayed. Likewise with the monitoring post which continues to stand until now even though the atmosphere has started to become more conducive.

Despite this, residents' collective memory of the conflict still lingers. Trauma has also become a daily intake for residents. If a firecrackers explosion is heard, residents would immediately come out, asking what was going on. Similarly, if there are teenagers clustered on the road or bridge, the same reaction would be seen. This

happens because conflict had a heavy social and psychological impact on residents.

There are no official records, mass media reports, archives or research that examines when the conflict in Johar Baru began. However, as stated by the informants, stories about conflict in Johar Baru District can be traced back to the late 1980s, or when the village football club began to grow and develop. Informant TG said, when he started serving as a *Babinsa* in 1989, conflict had already occurred, however, it was just occasionally. In a sense, only in certain places, over a period of several years, conflicts tend to be evenly distributed in all places.

The cause was none other than a feud between village football clubs (FC). Informant FJ admitted this. According to FJ, conflict has been going on since the village football era. For example, Kramjay FC against Sentika FC, or Oblak FC against Bonawi FC. However, conflicts caused by football games are not permanent and wouldn't last long. The conflict between the football clubs was short-lived, as stated by the informant TG:

"This football problem was not clear at that time. If there is a brawl where the problem is football, the best thing is to not let it drag on, we will handle it immediately."

Mass media reports about the conflict in Johar Baru District began to be recorded in the 2000s when online media began to become popular in Indonesia. Portal Liputan 6 reported that the conflict between youth groups lasted for two days in Galur Village, Johar Baru District, Central Jakarta, on 16-17 September 2001. Since then, during the period 2000-now, conflicts have become a daily routine for residents in Johar Baru District. According to TG, on average, 20-30 brawls occur in one year, with the most favorite time being at night until early morning.

### **Mapping of Johar Baru Sub-District Communication Infrastructure**

Voices about intergroup conflict are built on storytelling in each storytelling agent in the communication infrastructure. In Johar Baru Sub-District, the research findings show that the communication infrastructure comprising macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level agents are complete. Each of those agents has its say in intergroup conflicts. Before discussing the voices of each of these agents, the researchers first explained the existence of their communication infrastructure.

As previously stated, although this study found the presence of macro-level agents

(*Harian Kompas*, *Harian Poskota*, and *Harian Wartakota*), this study focused on meso and macro-level agents, it was not included in the analysis in CIT. Macro-level agents only speak for the masses, about the region, the country, and even the entire world. Furthermore, the imagined audience for macro-level agents is broad, ranging from the population of regional cities, regions, or nations (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001); (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2003)

Meso-level agents are less powerful storytellers than macro-level agents. Its foundation is community media and civic organizations that delimit a particular area or group of people in a storytelling system. At the meso-level, civic organizations and community media actors act to voice intergroup conflicts in specific communities. According to CIT theory, meso-level agents tend to focus attention on issues and voices of particular concern to the environment or society in an environment. The central premise of CIT theory is that communities become more integrated when individuals, local/ community media, and community-based civic organizations are connected and actively voicing their concerns about their environment.

Several community organizations located in Johar Baru Sub-District include Forum Betawi Rempug Sub-station 227 Kampung Rawa, *Forum Komunikasi Anak Betawi* (Forkabi), the Pancasila Youth Branch of Johar Baru Sub-District, Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, the Babussalam Waqf Foundation, Paskalis Foundation, Maranatha, Nias Church Foundation, and the Johar Baru Youth Association (Irjaba), and others. However, not all these organizations are related to intergroup conflicts. For this reason, only organizations who are close and voice conflicts are the informants of this research. Most of these community media/geo-ethnic media were based on online media, such as Johar Baru Channel, Irjaba Official, and Alhusmar radio streaming, while print-based ones included Johar Baru Bangkit bulletin and Bulletin Warga. However, print-based community media publishing is not continuous; some only have three editions, while others only have the first edition. Furthermore, the researchers include citizen journalism as a meso-level agent. It is because even though the media is written by individuals/citizens (micro-agents), the content is published on online media platforms. As a result, the researchers classify citizen journalism as a meso agent.

Researchers have identified citizen journalism as a meso-level agent for several reasons. Firstly, citizen journalism is produced







determines the extent of the 'recklessness' and 'violence' of brawls.

The next dominant voice at the meso and micro level agents is 'peace'. People who have lived in the Johar Baru region for a long time would undoubtedly expect it. The brawls have been going on for a long time, since the 1980s, and no one ever solves it. Many parties made preventive and repressive measures, and there is no solution until right now. The brawls continue and affect the residents' daily lives tremendously. The steep pace of peace efforts is in line with the research of (I. Ruwaida, 2017) which suggests that it is difficult to condition inter-group peaceful attitudes. It is because conflict-handling activities are still partial per region or group.

The stigma over Johar Baru Sub-District makes it difficult for productive and working-age residents to find work. The closely attached brawl image has led many companies to reject job applicants from Johar Baru. They eventually gave up and returned to unemployment.

Finally, when the provocation came, there was a brawl. Cycle like this go on and do not meet an endpoint. It also underlies the narrative of the third message, namely the provision of employment.

So far, the available jobs in Johar Baru District are dominant in the informal sector. Even if it is formal, it is only limited to honorary employees with low status, for example, office boys, couriers, or cleaners. The lack of skills makes labor absorption low. With safety programs, such as PPSU workers (Public Infrastructure and Facilities Officers), the absorption is also low because most of the teenagers/youth in Johar Baru Sub-District, let alone brawl actors, have low education or are even uneducated.

The results of this study show the emergence of local/community voices who want peace, provide jobs, and echo the dangers of drugs. CIT theory can capture local sounds that have been inaudible through stories by agents at the meso and micro levels. These local voices have been left behind in the structure, culture, and conflict processes.

These findings are in line with the research of (Villanueva et al., 2017) on community revitalization in urban planning. According to Villanueva *et al.*, CIT explicitly identifies actors involved in community activities and marginalized in urban planning. On that basis, CIT provides a theoretical and methodological framework for collaborative planning. As with the brawl research in Johar Baru, the findings

of (Villanueva et al., 2017) also identify the voices of the community, including local media priorities, concerns, and discourses. Therefore, CIT bridges the interests between revitalization actors and problems that arise in the community.

The application of CIT theory so far is still limited to research that examines public participation (Liu et al., 2018) such as research on social cohesion (Hope Cheong, 2006), interactions between different cultures (Ahadi & Murray, 2009); (Liu et al., 2018), as well as research on sustainable development issues (Kang, 2019).

In addition, CIT is also applied to intervention research through health communication (Moran et al., 2016) and health campaigns to reach economically disadvantaged communities (Wilkin & Ball-Rokeach, 2011). Therefore, the research results focused on intergroup conflicts at least contributed to the expanded use of CIT theory which otherwise had never been studied before. Research findings with CIT theory that uses a qualitative approach also provide a new input because the CIT theory has always been a quantitative research method.

The results of this study corroborate the findings about geo-ethnic media—in this study—citizen journalism through social media platforms—as meso-level agents. This in line with Hardyk, Loges, & Ball-Rokeach (2005) researched geo-ethnic media/community media as part of the CIT theory about community radio, and Stokes, Villanueva, Bar, & Ball-Rokeach (2015) examined mobile online media as the originator of storytelling networks as well as Kim, Jung, & Ball-Rokeach (2006) about geo-ethnic media variants.

## CONCLUSION

This study describes the pivotal role of CIT. Through the narratives, meso and micro-level agents who form communities in Johar Baru Sub-District raised three urgent issues related to frequent intergroup conflicts such as drug dangers, peace, and job creation. These three things mentioned are interconnected. The dangers of drugs are being concerned. It is because, so far, the conflict has served as a "camouflage" for drug dealers to operate. The ongoing protracted conflicts make peace a rare occurrence. Moreover, a lack of work encourages actors to be in conflict circumstances and continues fishing in the murky waters that lead to conflict. This study also demonstrates that Communication Infrastructure

Theory (CIT) is a reliable analysis tool for mapping urban conflicts and capturing the voices of marginalized communities in conflict-prone areas. It becomes evident that storytelling in meso and micro level agents transcends the utility of facilitating communication, being utilized to support the community network thus making a community have a higher bargaining position to be heard as well as being an instrument for mitigating conflict.

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