

Disaster Communication Management Fire and Rescue Service in Fire Handling in Medan City

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the disaster communication management carried out by the Fire and Rescue Agency (DISDAMKARMAT) of Medan City in fire suppression, identify the challenges faced, and evaluate its effectiveness. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation study. The research results indicate that DISDAMKARMAT Medan City's disaster communication management has been comprehensively implemented, covering planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation stages. In the planning stage, DISDAMKARMAT has routine socialization and education programs for the community. This study recommends increasing more massive and adaptive preventive education, developing specific strategies to address public behavior, and strengthening information and hoax management systems, to achieve more optimal disaster communication effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Fire is one of the disasters that requires special attention and requires prevention and how to deal with it, this needs to be done to minimize or eliminate the possibility of a fire, so regulations regarding the prevention and handling of fire hazards are very important (Aprina & Yusran, 2020). After a disaster occurs, emergency response, rehabilitation and reconstruction are needed. Disaster communication management is the planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating of various disaster messages both during the message production process, delivering messages and when providing responses or feedback, both before a disaster, during a disaster, and after a disaster in forming disaster-resilient humans (Lestari, 2007).

Along with the development of information technology, DISDAMKARMAT Medan City utilizes social media as a means of communication and education to the public. Their official Instagram accounts, @disdamkarmatmedan (11,600 followers) and @pak.damkar_medan (53,600 followers), are actively used to convey information on service activities, education, and documentation of fire handling directly through the live streaming feature. This initiative aims to build transparency, increase community participation, and strengthen disaster literacy. The use of Instagram as a disaster communication channel reflects a shift from one-way to two-way communication that is more responsive and participatory.

Research by Ismail and Suldani (2024) on disaster communication through social media by DISKOMINFO and BPBD Makassar City confirmed that platforms such as Instagram and Facebook can increase the speed of information delivery, community involvement, and real-time monitoring of disaster situations. However, they also noted that its effectiveness is highly dependent on the consistency of use, the validity of the information conveyed, and the scope of the audience reach. This phenomenon is reinforced by the findings of Adita Miranti, et al. (2021) in their research in East Purwokerto which showed that before the training, most PKK members did not know how to use APAR or the first steps when dealing with a fire. However, after participatory training, their understanding and preparedness increased significantly. These findings indicate that effective disaster communication is not only about conveying information, but must also involve direct practice to improve community skills.

Disaster communication studies have been conducted by several researchers, one of which was by Puji Lestari in 2007 regarding Earthquake Disaster Communication Management in Gantiwarno District. The results of this study indicate that disaster communication management in Gantiwarno at that time was less than optimal, there was a lack of planning, organization, implementation and evaluation. In addition, there is still a lack of infrastructure in disaster mitigation so that the mitigation process is slow. Then there is no early warning system when there is a potential for a flood disaster from BPBD to the community and the BPBD institution in Naga Raya Regency does not yet have a social media account and an official website as a means of information and education to the community (Ritonga et al., 2024).

In its implementation there are still obstacles to disaster communication management such as traditional communication (community trust in the figure of the late Mbah Marijan), the existence of mass media information that actually causes unrest for the community and the political interests of donors or volunteers (Lestari, et al., 2012). Junaedi in 2011 revealed that communication in the context of disasters, especially broadcast communication, plays an important role in disseminating disaster information to the community. However, in reality, the role of the media does not match the expectations of the community (Harianto et al., 2023; Ohorella et al., 2024). Planning is a process of thinking, guessing and determining priorities that must be carried out rationally before carrying out actual actions in order to achieve predetermined goals (Susanto, 2011). Mobilization without planning will not run effectively because it is in planning that goals, budgets, standards, work methods, procedures and programs are determined (Sukarna, 2011). Therefore, if the basis for planning is clear and focused, it is likely that the implementation of disaster communication management will run optimally. In line with Soehatman Ramli (2010) that managing a disaster cannot be done suddenly but must be planned with good management before the disaster occurs. Previous research in Magelang City showed that ineffective communication management can hinder fire control (Ritonga et al., 2024). However, similar studies in Medan City are still limited, so in-depth exploration is needed to understand this problem.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

In the book *Organizational Communication* by R. Wayne Pace and Don F. Faules (2010) it is explained that the definition of organizational communication can be seen from two perspectives, namely subjective definition and objective definition. Both have their own characteristics. Organizational communication from a subjective perspective is the organizational behavior that occurs and how those involved in the process transact and give meaning to what happens. The functions of communication include informative function, regulatory function, persuasive function, and integrative function.

Disaster communication is the process of creating, sending, and receiving messages by one or more people, directly or through the media, in the context of disasters during pre-disaster, during disasters, post-disaster and generating responses or feedback (Lestari, 2018). Disaster Communication is needed in critical situations, because the essence of communication in such situations is to reduce uncertainty. In handling the impact of disasters, both the community, volunteers and disaster management parties certainly need information that is guaranteed to be accurate, and to maintain the accuracy of the information provided, good communication is needed. In carrying out this disaster communication, there are several stages carried out in reducing disaster risk, namely preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery (Purnomo and Rony, 2010).

Disaster mitigation communication is communication carried out in an effort to prevent disasters from occurring (Haddow, 2008). Communication related to disaster mitigation is very necessary because of the need to reduce

uncertainty in the community environment so that they can act effectively. Communication management is a reciprocal process of exchanging signals to provide information, persuade or give orders based on the same meaning and conditioned by the context of the relationship between communicators and their social context (Sikumbang et al., 2024).

Suprpto (2009) said that simply put, communication management is management applied in communication activities. This means that management will play a role or act as a driver of communication activities in an effort to achieve communication goals. Disaster communication management is the planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating of various disaster messages both during the message production process, message delivery, message reception, and when providing responses/feedback, both before a disaster, during a disaster, and after a disaster in forming disaster-resilient people (Lestari, 2007)

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method. Qualitative research according to Bogdan and Taylor in Lexy J. Moleong (2021) is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. In qualitative research, the methods usually used are interviews, observations, and document utilization (Moleong, 2021). The main subject in this study was the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service (DISDAMKARMAT). The research subjects consisted of several informant criteria that were selected purposively, considering their involvement and direct relevance to disaster communication management. To obtain informants that were in accordance with the research objectives, the researcher set the following informant criteria:

1. Active officers of the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service.
2. Officers of the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service who have a minimum of two years of service with the intention of understanding fire disaster management in more depth.
3. Officers of the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service who have attended basic level Firefighting Training with the intention of understanding the basics of fire disaster management.
4. Medan City Fire and Rescue Service officers domiciled in Medan City with the intention of understanding areas that require special handling in the implementation of fire disaster management.

In this study, the data analysis technique uses an interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). This model consists of three main components that take place in a cycle, namely: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. All three are carried out continuously during the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Disaster Communication Management of the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service (DISDAMKARMAT)

Planning is a crucial stage in disaster communication management to ensure preparedness and coordinated response. The research findings show that the Medan City DISDAMKARMAT has had a proactive communication plan, focusing on routine socialization and education to the community. This was emphasized by Mr. Aswin (Informant 1), Head of the Inspection and Prevention Section, who stated, "So far we have routinely socialized and educated the community." Furthermore, this planning involves coordination with the RT/Lurah and a field trip program for school children from various levels, as an effort to instill an understanding of the dangers of fire from an early age.

Direct observation confirmed the implementation of this education program. Researchers saw routine visits from various schools, from elementary, junior high, to high school levels, to the Medan City DISDAMKARMAT office environment for socialization and education guided directly by the Damkarmat team. During the observation, the presenter was seen providing education to elementary school children, starting from an introduction to the team of officers, followed by an introduction to fire extinguishers in the form of nozzle hoses, APAR (Light Fire Extinguishers), fire hydrants, alarms, PPE, fire helmets, fire-resistant shoes, and others.

Next, the children were shown how to extinguish small fires, medium fires, and large fires. The educational event ended in the afternoon, closed with an agenda of officers touring the city with children while riding in fire trucks and sitting on the trucks. Fahmi Tanjung (Informant 2), Data and Information Operator, confirmed the existence of a structured system for pre-disaster, including education and socialization programs, supported by formal documents such as SOPs. At the operational field level, Gladini Putra Iswanto (Informant 3), Team Leader, and Dennis Saragih (Informant 4), Firefighter, revealed that routine briefings were conducted before each field assignment, where communication directions and task divisions were explained in detail.

In relation to previous research, proactive communication planning through socialization and education is very much in line with the findings of Puji Lestari, et al. (2012) in their research on Merapi 2010 Disaster Communication Management. Although the disaster contexts are different (Merapi vs. fire), both studies show the urgency of careful planning in the dissemination of pre-disaster information to improve community preparedness. Likewise, Ketzia Tobing's (2022) research on the communication strategy of the Binjai City BPBD in disseminating flood disaster information also found that dissemination through counseling and the use of mass media is an integral part of communication planning. This confirms that a proactive approach in preventive education is a fundamental element in effective disaster communication management, regardless of the type of disaster threat.

At the operational level, Gladini Putra Iswanto (Informant 3), Squad Leader, described a clear squad hierarchy (squad leader, deputy, members) with a well-defined division of tasks, ensuring that each member understands their

role. Dennis Saragih (Informant 4), Firefighter, confirmed this structure and emphasized that effective communication within the team is key to cohesiveness and smooth operations. In addition, DISDAMKARMAT has also organized cross-agency coordination by forming a special communication group involving BPBD, ATCS, PLN, Ambulance, health team, and police. The presence of officers from other agencies such as the police and TNI at the scene also strengthens the evidence of this cross-agency coordination.

Theoretically, this organization is very much in line with the principles of General Management which emphasize the importance of a clear organizational structure, division of tasks, and effective coordination to achieve goals. Faules & Pace (2010) in *Organizational Communication Theory* also emphasizes that defined communication channels, functional hierarchical structures, and coordination between units are essential for organizational effectiveness. The existence of the PUSDATIN unit as an information center shows the centralization of communication functions, while the division of tasks between operational areas and teams shows the decentralization of structured and efficient execution. The formation of WhatsApp groups with related agencies is an organizational adaptation to technology to facilitate rapid horizontal coordination, which is crucial during the Response and Recovery phases of the disaster management cycle.

The researcher's observation during the interview with the staff of the Information Data Center, when the bell rang several times indicating a fire, showed the speed of the officers' response. All officers were seen rushing to run and head to the car, with two fleets immediately leaving accompanied by the sound of sirens. The target response time of 15 minutes is the main priority. Fahmi Tanjung (Informant 2) confirmed the speed in locating information and the vital role of live streaming as the main means of communication to the public. Observations through the DISDAMKARMAT social media account, namely Instagram, found two active accounts (@disdamkarmatmedan with 11,400 followers and @pak.damkar_medan with 53,400 followers) which both have thousands of posts of content about firefighting and rescue activities, as well as daily information in the form of Instagram Stories.

One of the key strategies observed was the use of live streaming on Instagram when an incident occurred. The researcher saw the @pak.damkar_medan account doing Instagram live streaming while on its way to the scene of the incident on Jl. Reli. In the live stream, officers are seen on their way to the location, and there is two-way communication through public comments that provide information such as traffic jams and the exact location of the incident. This live streaming function disseminates real-time information and even helps field operations through feedback from the public, such as directions for alternative routes in the midst of traffic jams. The livestream continues when officers arrive at the location and the fire is out. Through this Instagram platform, the entire community knows what is happening at the scene and what the situation is. Social media has proven to be a very important communication channel in the implementation of disaster communication management, reaching all levels of society with important information about fires and rescues, and even

becoming a forum for interactive communication between officers and the community.

Evaluation is an important stage for continuous learning and improvement in disaster communication management. DISDAMKARMAT Medan City shows a strong commitment to the routine evaluation process and the use of feedback from various parties. Mr. Aswin (Informant 1) emphasized that routine evaluations are carried out after each handling is completed, led by the head of the agency, to identify obstacles and areas for improvement. Indicators of communication success are also measured through community satisfaction surveys. Fahmi Tanjung (Informant 2) confirmed that there was a post-disaster evaluation to study the obstacles that occurred from the beginning to the end of the incident. At the operational level, Gladini Putra Iswanto (Informant 3) emphasized that evaluation is a mandatory agenda that involves the exchange of information from the bottom up and vice versa. Dennis Saragih (Informant 4) added that the leadership is very open to suggestions and input from officers in the field, even trying to realize these ideas to maximize performance. Although direct observation does not explicitly record the formal evaluation process, the overall disaster communication management practices that appear to be running well, from planning to implementation, indicate a cycle of continuous evaluation and improvement.

Challenges faced by the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service (DISDAMKARMAT)

Despite having an organized communication system and good implementation efforts, DISDAMKARMAT Medan City faces several significant challenges in its disaster communication management, especially those related to community behavior at the scene and technical constraints. Mr. Aswin (Informant 1) highlighted the behavior of the community who often ignored the instructions of officers, were busy taking photos or recording videos, and some even took dangerous initiatives. He also mentioned the challenge of misunderstandings in the field, such as residents mistaking the position of officers. Observations at the scene of the fire on Jl. Rela confirmed this challenge; although the fire had been extinguished when the researchers arrived, the presence of a crowd of residents indicated the potential for disruption that could be caused by public behavior amidst the chaos.

In general, from the results of the observations, it can be concluded that there are challenges in the field, both due to congested roads, panicked community conditions, and educational socialization that has not yet reached all levels of society. Regarding technical constraints, although there are alternative solutions (WhatsApp, generators), problems such as HT interference or power outages remain a challenge. Fahmi Tanjung (Informant 2) added the challenge of the speed of information dissemination because not all people have access to sophisticated technology or face network problems. He also emphasized the serious challenges of hoaxes and false reports that could disrupt the response. From the field, Gladini Putra Iswanto (Informant 3) felt the challenge of public panic that made them difficult to control and even tried to seize firefighting

equipment. Dennis Saragih (Informant 4) also complained about the undisciplined behavior of the community, who were too focused on documentation, and did not understand the conditions of officers in the field.

Theoretically, these challenges show the complexity of disaster communication (Haddow, 2009) where messages must be delivered in stressful conditions, uncertainty, and often in the midst of crowds. The behavior of the community who panic or disobey can be associated with a lack of understanding of risk communication, as well as cognitive biases that often arise in crisis situations. Puji Lestari (2007) also mentioned that communication barriers, both internal and external, including technical problems and misunderstandings, are aspects that must be considered in disaster communication management, which is relevant to this finding. Technical constraints such as network and equipment problems are also challenges in maintaining the smooth flow of information, especially in the Response phase which requires high speed and accuracy.

The views of academics and the community also clarify the dimensions of this challenge. Agus Suriadi (Triangulation 1 - Academics), although not specifically discussing the operational challenges of DISDAMKARMAT, his view on the need to "grow collective awareness in the community that this disaster process is everyone's responsibility" implicitly acknowledges the fundamental challenges in changing public behavior and building a sense of shared ownership of disaster issues. The community itself, such as Fatmawati, Thoni Heriansyah, Rizka Nurhamidah, and Asri Widyanti, directly experienced and confirmed the challenges of public behavior at the scene. Rizka Nurhamidah also specifically highlighted the technical challenges in delivering directions, such as the volume of the officer's voice being too low or the frequency of repetition being inadequate.

This shows that the biggest challenges are not only from within the officers, but also from the dynamics of complex field conditions and the reception of messages by very diverse audiences with different levels of preparedness and understanding. In relation to previous research, challenges related to community behavior, such as panic and non-compliance, as well as the spread of hoaxes, are common problems in disaster communication that have also been identified in previous studies. Ikhsan's (2018) research on the communication management of the Medan City BPBD in flood management also noted similar challenges related to coordination and socialization in the midst of crowds or emergency conditions. The issue of hoaxes and misinformation, as mentioned by Fahmi Tanjung, is a universal challenge in crisis communication which is also a major concern in disaster communication literature (Haddow, 2009). This shows that although each disaster has unique characteristics, the challenges in managing panic or undisciplined public behavior, as well as disinformation, are consistent across various disaster communication management contexts.

Barriers and Challenges to Political Communication of the Amir Hamzah and Hasanul Jihadi Couple on Social Media

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, hoaxes or fake news are one of the most significant challenges in implementing political communication, especially in the digital era where information can spread very quickly through

social media. In the context of the Binjai City Pilkada, hoaxes not only spread misleading information, but also have the potential to shape public opinion negatively towards certain candidates, in this case Amir Hamzah, who is the incumbent mayor and regional head candidate.

As a public figure who is currently serving, Amir Hamzah is often the target of hoaxes, one of which is the narrative that says that he does not care about the drug problem in the Binjai City area. There were accusations that he allowed the proliferation of drug barracks as if he had not taken concrete action as a regional head. Narratives like this are a form of black campaign that tries to damage the image and public trust in his leadership.

However, according to informants, these accusations are baseless and were deliberately constructed to influence public perception emotionally, not based on data and facts. In dealing with hoaxes like this, the political communication team from the candidate pair – especially Amir Hamzah – took strategic steps by building a counter-narrative. One approach taken is to emphasize that drug eradication is a collective responsibility, involving cooperation between local governments, law enforcement officers, and the wider community. That way, the drug issue is not simplified as a single failure of the local government, but rather as a systemic problem that needs to be addressed comprehensively.

In addition, as a form of affirmation of the commitment to eradicating drugs, Amir Hamzah actively attended the destruction of drug evidence carried out by the Binjai District Attorney's Office. This direct participation is also part of a symbolic communication strategy, to show the real involvement and concern of the regional head for the problem. Documentation of attendance at such activities is then disseminated through social media as a form of clarification and balancing information, as well as restoring public trust.

Thus, the challenge of hoaxes in political communication cannot be underestimated. Fast, data-based handling, and the use of social media for direct clarification are important elements in a modern political communication strategy. Handling hoaxes is not only about refuting, but also building a stronger, more credible narrative that touches the collective consciousness of society.

Damaged roads are another theme often used to attack Amir Hamzah as the mayor of Binjai. His position as the highest leader in the city government is considered to play a major role in the progress of infrastructure development in Binjai City. To respond to such comments, Amir always coordinates with related parties or agencies to resolve the polemic of damaged roads. The progress of resolving the problem is then published in his personal social media content.

Effectiveness of Disaster Communication Management of the Medan City Fire and Rescue Service (DISDAMKARMAT)

Disaster communication conducted by DISDAMKARMAT Medan City is considered effective, especially in building public trust, ensuring a quick response, and improving the positive image of the organization. Mr. Aswin (Informant 1) assessed that the socialization and education program was very effective in improving community preparedness, and the popular hashtag "if

there is a problem, just report Damkar" reflects a positive response and a very good image in the eyes of the public. This phenomenon, according to him, even increases the work spirit of officers because they feel supported and appreciated by the community. Fahmi Tanjung (Informant 2) also stated that communication practices have been very good thanks to the optimization of technology, and the many direct messages (DM) containing thanks on Instagram prove that there is positive feedback from the community.

This optimization of technology is clearly visible from observations of the active DISDAMKARMAT Instagram account and the use of interactive live streaming. The speed of response of officers observed in the field during the fire on Jl. Rela is also an indicator of the effectiveness of internal communication and coordination. At the field team level, Gladini Putra Iswanto (Informant 3) and Dennis Saragih (Informant 4) assessed that internal team communication was very effective and responsive, supported by adequate training and synchronous coordination.

Theoretically, this effectiveness is very much in line with the main objective of disaster communication (Haddow, 2009), namely to save lives, reduce losses, and build public trust. The rapid response from DISDAMKARMAT and positive acceptance from the community, as well as a good image, indicate that the communication carried out has succeeded in creating awareness, facilitating appropriate actions, and strengthening the relationship between the institution and the public. Optimal use of social media also indicates the organization's adaptation to changes in the modern communication landscape to achieve greater effectiveness. In the context of General Management, increased work morale due to positive feedback from the community also indicates good internal motivation within the organization, which contributes to overall performance.

Triangulation from academics and the community also confirmed and enriched the understanding of this effectiveness. Agus Suriadi (Triangulation 1 - Academics) supported the effectiveness of preventive communication and the importance of socialization at various levels of society, including schools, to build long-term preparedness. The community in general (Mrs. Fatmawati, Thoni Heriansyah, Rizka Nurhamidah, Asri Widyanti) confirmed the speed of response of officers and the ease of understanding the directions given in the field. They also expressed high trust in the information conveyed by DISDAMKARMAT officers, especially through social media, indicating that the messages received were considered credible. However, the community's expectations for more intensive and diverse socialization (through more interactive social media content, banners, etc.) indicated that effectiveness could be further improved, especially in the Mitigation and Preparedness phases. Suggestions from field officers (Gladini and Dennis) regarding the addition of communication tools such as HT or whistles were also important inputs to improve the effectiveness of communication in the field, especially in the Response and Recovery phases. In relation to previous research, the effectiveness of DISDAMKARMAT communication, especially in rapid response and building public trust, is in line

with the main objectives of disaster communication emphasized by Haddow (2009).

The positive image of DISDAMKARMAT, which was also identified from community feedback, supports the findings of Ikhsan (2018) which shows that good communication can increase the credibility and public support for disaster management institutions. Although Linya Ketzia Chlodya Br Tobing's (2022) research focuses on flood socialization, the effectiveness resulting from outreach and the use of mass media also reflects the importance of using diverse channels to reach a wide audience and build preparedness. The community's expectations for more massive and adaptive socialization of modern media show that there is room for continuous improvement, in line with the principle of learning from experience which is also the core of evaluation in disaster management.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medan City DISDAMKARMAT Disaster Communication Management Process has been structured and comprehensive. This can be seen from the proactive planning stages through routine socialization and education, utilization of social media and PUSDATIN units as part of the early warning system, and consistent internal briefings. In terms of organization, DISDAMKARMAT shows a clear structure with a specific division of tasks from the information center to the field team, supported by integrated cross-agency coordination. The implementation of communication is characterized by a high response speed, the use of various reporting channels, and innovations such as Instagram live streaming for real-time information and two-way interaction. Finally, the evaluation stage is carried out routinely after each handling, led by the head of the agency, using community satisfaction surveys as indicators, and facilitating feedback from field officers for continuous improvement. This entire process reflects the application of systematic disaster communication management principles. Medan City DISDAMKARMAT faces significant challenges in its disaster communication management, especially related to community behavior and technical constraints. Community behavior that often ignores officer directions, is busy taking photos/recording videos, taking dangerous initiatives, and is difficult to control because of panic are the main obstacles. In addition, there are challenges in the form of misunderstanding the position of officers in the field. Technical constraints include HT interference or power outages, although there are alternative solutions. The speed of information dissemination is also a challenge because not all people have access to sophisticated technology or face network problems. Medan City DISDAMKARMAT disaster communication is considered effective in increasing community preparedness and fire management, but still has room for improvement. This effectiveness is reflected in the positive image and high public trust in DISDAMKARMAT, the speed of response that is appreciated by the public, and the positive feedback (for example through thank you DMs) received. Socialization and education programs are also considered effective in building an initial understanding of the dangers of fire.

FURTHER STUDY

Further studies are recommended to explore the role of inter-agency collaboration and the use of digital communication technologies in enhancing disaster communication management within fire and rescue services. Future research could adopt a comparative approach between different cities or regions to identify best practices and context-specific challenges. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews with frontline responders and community stakeholders may provide deeper insights into communication barriers and opportunities for more effective coordination during fire emergencies.

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