

# **How North Sumatra is Dealing with Covid-19 (An Overview of Communications Management)**

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## **Abstract**

The coronavirus disease-19 (Covid-19) cases that occurred in North Sumatra continued to show an increase from time to time. This pandemic has an impact on the weakening of the economy in North Sumatra as well as the increasing unemployment rate. This condition is exacerbated by the low level of public trust in the government in handling Covid-19. The purpose of this study was to analyze the handling of the Covid-19 in North Sumatra which was carried out by the local government and the Covid-19 handling task force. The analysis was carried out using a communication management approach. This study recommends the need for government intervention on the people's economy through the formation of a task force at the environmental level which is the lowest part of the government structure.

## **Keywords**

Pandemic Impact on Economy, Management Communication, The Environmental Task Force.

## **1. Introduction**

In the Indonesian province of North Sumatra, the number of cases of coronavirus disease-19 (Covid-19) is on the rise. The distribution estimates have been very steady throughout the city districts since it began spreading in early 2020. The same can be said for national data. Government communications, such as erroneous data and information, a lack of socialization, and poor public trust, are among the key factors (Wicaksono 2019).

However, there are four major issues with government communication in dealing with the pandemic on a national level, including erroneous data and information, a lack of socialization on various issues, a lack of public confidence, and inefficient government communication (Ardiyanti 2020). The ambiguities of the politicization of the pandemic, the neglect of research at the start of the crisis, low economic capacity, and a minimal healthcare infrastructure intensify the handling of Covid-19..(Winanti 2021). The government's communication strategy for dealing with the Covid-19 situation is far from ideal. Especially during the pre-crisis period, when several public figures made statements that appeared to downplay Covid-19's threat (Surahmat 2021; Tawai 2021; Suharyanto 2021). While in four European countries: Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden, there is a big role in how leadership informs and explains strategies against this pandemic (Sjölander-lindqvist 2020 ).

There have been numerous reports of an increase in Covid-19 instances in Medan. Gender, age, education level, and employment status, on the other hand, had no significant impact on Covid-19 preventive behavior (Amelia, 2020 ). The management of Covid-19 in North Sumatra also relates to national policies. The increase in cases created a gap between the residents of Medan City's perception (performance) and expectations of the Covid-19 Task Force of North Sumatra Province (Rezeki 2020 ). Furthermore, this pandemic has an influence not only on public health issues but also on an increase in unemployment, necessitating social protection as well as support for companies (big, medium, and small) to avoid job losses (Djalante 2020; Kusmanto 2020 ).

### 1.1 Objectives

The purpose of this research is to examine how the North Sumatra Provincial Government and the North Sumatra Covid-19 Task Force dealt with the Covid-19 epidemic in North Sumatra. A communication management technique is used to conduct the analysis.

## 2. Literature Review

Communication is viewed by management as a means to an end, something that must be used in conjunction with organizational goals, taking into consideration cost analysis concerns (Mihai 2017). When it comes to communication planning, it determines how information travels, through which channels, from whom it originates, to whom it is disseminated, and how frequently it occurs (Markaki 2013). Communication management provides a paradigm for everyone in the company to maximize their responsibilities and resources in the organizational management of all communication activities, utilizing a systemic and tactical communication model (Sahputra 2020).

Problems in communication management are caused, firstly, by inadequate identification of goals, objectives, and communication tactics. As well as inadequate use of strategic communication skills and inadequate access to communication skills (Besley 2020). Goals are defined as audiences with particular, demanding behaviors that communicators desire to see occur as a result of their communication efforts, according to Besley's model. Before proceeding any further, this should be explicitly stated. The main goal of this article is to comply with and carry out the government's request to handle Covid-19 in North Sumatra. Second, communication's aims (objectives) influence the cognitive or emotive processes that precede conduct. Accepting the government's vaccination recommendation or complying with requests for masks, hand sanitizers, and social distance, for example. Third, messages, communication behavior, communication styles, channels, and communicators are all part of strategies. The tactic's content is a messaging choice, while the tactic's use of simple language and narrative is a tactical option. Facilitating conversation is a tactical choice of communication objectives in the same way. When discussing communication efficacy as a way of accomplishing communication goals, tactics are crucial. Therefore, public involvement can be interpreted as an increase in public opinion.

## 3. Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method that examines the phenomenon of leadership policies and government performance in the regions in handling breaking the chain of the spread of Covid-19 in North Sumatra. The data collected was then analyzed descriptively. Data analysis was carried out by describing the information collected as it was to get answers to Bah's research objectives (2020a; 2020b). The variables analyzed are the policies implemented and breaking the chain of the spread of Covid-19.

## 4. Data Collection

The spread of Covid-19 has been designated a pandemic since March 11, 2020, with the first case verified in North Sumatra on March 21, 2020. People who had recently returned from a trip abroad were among the victims. Furthermore, there were 1,551 positive cases on June 30, 2020, with 92 fatalities (5.9 percent ) (Table 1 and Figure 1). Generally, positive cases of Covid-19 in North Sumatra have become local transmissions between environments, family relationships, and work relationships. The local government suspects that the cause of the increase in the transmission is mainly due to the community's undisciplined implementation of prevention of transmission such as not being disciplined in wearing masks, not regularly washing hands, and not being disciplined in keeping a distance.(Balitbang 2020).

Table 1. The Development of Covid-19 in North Sumatra for the Period of July 21, 2021

REGION	POSITIVE RATE	RECOVERY RATE	MORTALITY RATE	BOR TT COVID-19	BOR TT ISOLATION	BOR TT INTENSIVE
GLOBAL		90,99%	2,15%			
NATIONAL				74%	73%	75%
NORTH SUMATERA	7,15%	76,49%	2,87%	59%	60%	49%

Source: North Sumatera Province Government

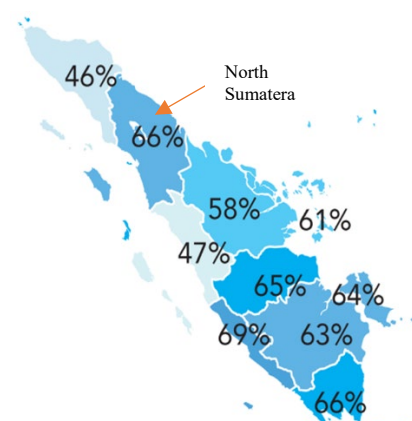


Figure 1. Vaccine Acceptance Rate in North Sumatra  
Source: Ministry of Health

In terms of vaccine receptions, North Sumatra Province is one of the regions with a low acceptance rate of 66 percent, implying that 34% of those who got immunizations are not included in the group..(Kementrian and UNICEF 2020).

## 5. Result and Discussion

### 5.1 Numerical Result

The population of North Sumatra in 2020, based on the 2020 Population Census, is 14.80 million people. This means that North Sumatra is the province with the fourth largest population in Indonesia, after West Java, East Java, and Central Java. Generations X, Z, and Millennials make up the majority of North Sumatra's population. Generation X, those born between 1965 and 1980 and who are between the ages of 40 and 55, account for 19.68% of the population. The Millennial generation, which includes those born between 1981 and 1996 and are between the ages of 24 and 39, accounts for 25.83% of the population. Meanwhile, the population of Generation Z who was born between 1997 and 2012, aged 8-23 years was recorded at 31.70%..

With a large population of productive age in North Sumatra, it should be followed by an increase in the number of working people. However, in reality, the absorption of labor for the productive age population has been disrupted due to national economic shocks and the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the National Labor Force Survey by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in August 2020, the number of the workforce in North Sumatra was 7.35 million people, an increase of 4.05% compared to 2019.(Badan Pusat Statistik). This year, the national economy is experiencing difficult conditions coupled with economic problems so that the productive age workforce cannot be absorbed by employment. BPS also noted an increase in the number of unemployed in North Sumatra in 2020 by 32.78% compared to 2019. This survey also shows that young people are most affected by the increasing number of unemployed in North Sumatra. As many as 30.98% of the total unemployed in North Sumatra are aged 20-24 years, 17.24% are aged 15-19 years, and 17.19% are aged 25-29 years. One of the reasons for this increase in unemployment is that many companies have reduced the number of employees during the Covid-19 pandemic..

Likewise, business actors also experience the impact of the conditions that occur. Based on the Covid-19 Impact Survey on Business Actors conducted by BPS in October 2020, it was noted that 67.77% of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (UMK) and 41.13% of Large Medium Enterprises (UMB) in North Sumatra experienced a decline in revenue turnover. Some companies took bitter decisions by reducing working hours, reducing the number of employees, and some turning to other economic sectors to keep the company's economy moving. According to statistics from the Provincial Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs in 2020 (Table 2), the Covid-19 epidemic affected 672,000 MSMEs and 7,700 cooperatives in North Sumatra. This figure is dispersed throughout all of North Sumatra's regencies and cities..(Balitbang 2020).

Table 2. Covid-19 Handling Policy

No	Policy	Scale	Description
1.	Kesawan City Walk to realize The Kitchen of Asia on Jalan Ahmad Yani, Medan on March 28, 2021	Government Policy of Medan City	This policy creates a crowd every night the area operates. Until finally the Mayor of Medan closed this culinary area again on May 5, 2021.
2.	Lebaran Disbanded Lebaran Homecoming in 2021	Central Government policies implemented in the province and city districts.	This policy raises pros and cons in the community because going home or returning to their hometown to meet relatives during Eid is a community culture that has been formed for years. In practice, the effectiveness of this policy still needs to be evaluated, because the number of Covid-19 spreads continues to grow.
3.	Restrictions on Community Activities on 12-20 July 2021	Central Government policies implemented in the province and city districts.	By limiting working hours, this strategy puts an end to face-to-face teaching and learning in schools and restricts activities to sectors that are designated as important (50%). However, information is often interpreted as irrational because face-to-face interactions at schools are forbidden, but malls are open as if Covid-19 had not existed. Likewise, the limitation of operating hours to malls, cafes, and restaurants until 20.00 WIB as if Covid only comes during the day and does not spread at night.

The North Sumatra Provincial Government (Pemprovsum) made changes to the budget allocation for certain activities (refocusing) the 2020 Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) for the handling of Covid-19 amounting to Rp1.5 trillion. This amount consists of the health sector of Rp.987.1 billion, the provision of social safety nets to Rp.315 billion, and the handling of economic impacts of Rp.200 billion..(Balitbang Provsum).

For the provision of social safety nets, the Provincial Government distributes assistance through government officials at the village level to communities recorded in the Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS) and/or outside DTKS in the form of nine basic commodities (Sembako) and cash. In practice, this assistance caused problems in several areas because it was considered not right on target. One of them was a demonstration by housewives who questioned the transparency of the distribution of social assistance distributed by village officials. The mass media are busy reporting social assistance which is considered socially inappropriate. The social assistance distributed to this also did not continue, even though the spread of Covid-19 continued to increase, and the community's economy was still experiencing a decline.

In terms of communication management, messages regarding Covid-19 that do not successfully reach the intended audience will have a different impact on the message's meaning. For example, regarding the issue of vaccination and public distrust of Covid-19. In terms of vaccination, at least people are divided into three groups. First, who accepts voluntarily. Second, who accept by force. Third, who refused. The public's perception of the Covid-19 issue, which is also divided into three categories, has an influence. To begin with, some people believe in Covid-19's existence. Second, some people believe some, but not all, of the facts of Covid-19. Third, those who deny the existence of Covid-19 and believe it is a worldwide conspiracy with specific goals.

People's understandings that are different from the government regarding the handling of Covid-19 are handled differently, causing public distrust of the government. Central government policies implemented at the level of North Sumatra Province also create a negative impression in the community's perspective. For example, in the first year of the pandemic, there is an obligation to isolate in the hospital for residents who are positive for Covid-19. So that the word dicovidkan (a person purposely has covid) arises in the community, which indicates that the hospital and related officials have purposefully sentenced the community to be positive for Covid-19 for economic reasons. Then the case

of fighting over the body which the hospital declared as a Covid-19 patient, while the victim's family believed the patient died from an illness that he had long suffered..

Meanwhile, the government has never said clearly that none of the victims died as a result of Covid-19, but rather as a result of a long-term congenital illness. This condition creates a separation between government policies in handling Covid-19 on the one hand, and public understanding of Covid-19 on the other (Mudhofar, 2021; Leofitri, 2021; Lubis, 2021). Effective government communication plays a major role in informing the public about issues (Kim and Kreps). The media has a significant influence on this. The announcement of a state of emergency to combat the spread of Covid-19 significantly boosts public information consumption..(Casero-Ripollés 2020).

## 5.2. Graphical Results

Communication management is a very important factor as a management tool in order to achieve goals.(Sahputra 2020). In simple terms, communication management is a model for maximizing organizational performance, using a systemic and tactical communication model, to optimize their respective roles and resources in the organizational management of all communication activities. (Sahputra ). Communication management as a conceptual model of strategic decision making. Strategy in communication management intentionally creates strategic decision-making situations that are part of the process of creating a retrospective and prospective atmosphere within the organization.(Raupp and Hoffjann 2012).

To write and talk effectively on behalf of the organization, communication management establishes a link between business and corporate communications. The emphasis is on spoken and written materials to attain objectives with and through people. (Mihai 2017). The role of communication as a management tool is to facilitate the relationship between people, to build a beneficial environment for the internal development of the organization.(Bucăța and Rizescu 2017). An institution must translate strategy formulation into action. For companies to achieve their goals optimally, the principles of using development communication strategies are to be able to avoid unwanted effects.(Sudarman, 2018; (Dharma, 2021; Suharyanto, 2020; Sahputra, 2018).

The overlap between communication science research and scholarship on strategic communication is not uncommon. While organization and communication appear occasionally, and increasingly (Figure 2), in communication science research, strategic communications scholars rarely analyze science communication science..(Schafer and Fahrnich). Therefore, opening a meeting between science communication, organizational strategic communication and rhetoric is one possible path (Ihlen, 2020; Tawai, 2021).

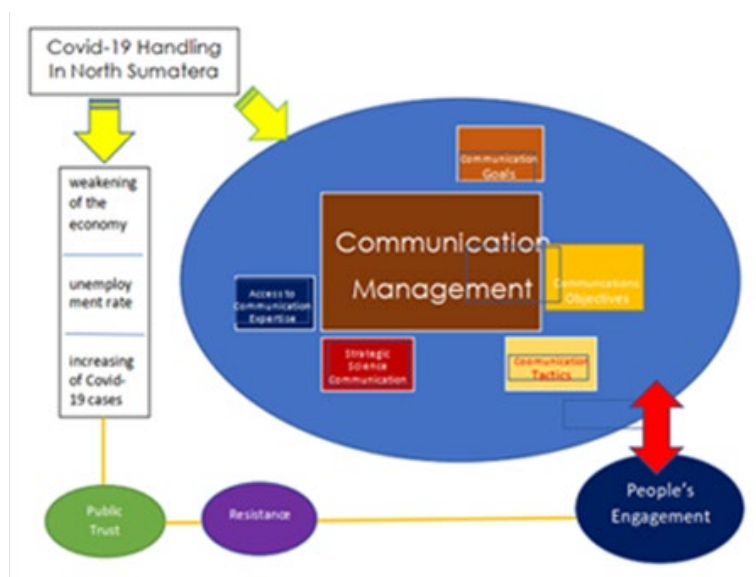


Figure 2. Communication Framework on Handling Covid-19 in North Sumatra

## 5.3. Proposed Improvements

Through the five-issue communication management approach paradigm, the challenge of dealing with the Covid-19 epidemic in North Sumatra is observed through the community's engagement in it. We will see how the problems in handling Covid-19 will always be related to community involvement at various levels. This confirms that problems arise in implementing policies in handling Covid-19 related to the trend of increasing the number of Covid-19 cases, directly related to differences in perceptions between the community and the government..

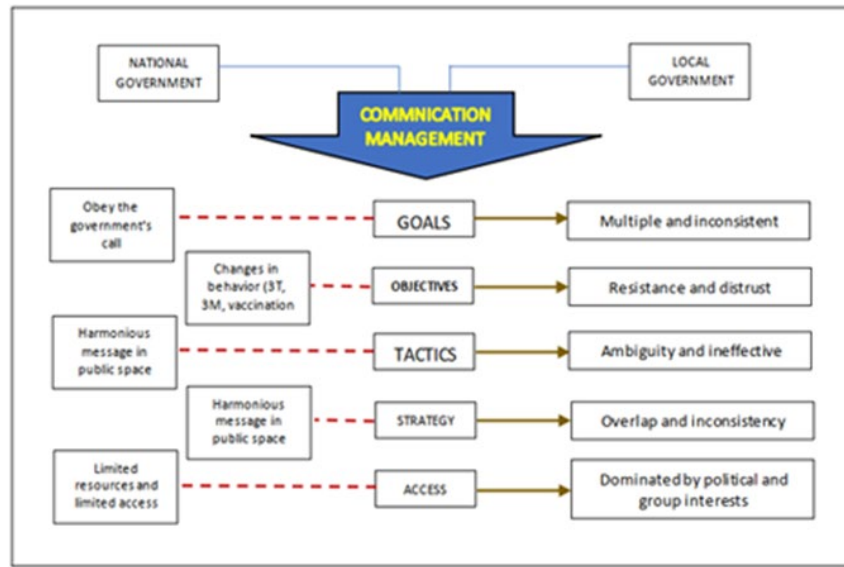


Figure 3. Problems in Handling Covid-19 in North Sumatra

One of the difficulties that arise in communication management while dealing with Covid-19 is the lack of community engagement in handling operations in North Sumatra (Figure 3). It appears that society is still viewed as the source of the issue. On the other hand, the community has great potential in participating in dealing with the problem of handling Covid-19. This community involvement is strengthened by involving the public in raising awareness, utilizing figures who are trusted by the community, and raising public aspirations..(Association), has a clear concept (Buluş 2017) where both parties are open to positive and constructive communication until both parties get what they want from the communication.

The efficient development of the Covid-19 task force structure down to the environmental level, which is the lowest structure in the national government system, is community engagement in handling Covid-19 in North Sumatra. The important task of the Covid-19 task force at the lowest level is to inform and educate the public door to door about what and how the Covid-19 pandemic is, about government appeals or regulations regarding Covid-19 related matters, directly recording the condition of the community, providing The first treatment for people who have the potential to be infected or transmit Covid-19. In each ward, ward task force members are accountable for an average of 30 households. Teachers, academics, community leaders, organizational leaders, intellectuals, and others with weight in the community are recruited to participate in this task force. They work everyday door to door in their local community. In carrying out their duties, they are supervised by an independent team who is given direct access to the head of the Covid-19 task force team at the provincial and district/city levels.

#### 5.4. Validation

In the third quarter of 2021, Bank Indonesia reported a decrease in cooperatives in North Sumatra, as well as a rise in inflation. This shows that efforts to deal with the economic impact of Covid-19 in North Sumatra Province have not had a significant impact on driving the economy (Balitbang 2020). The Labor Force Survey of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020 recorded a total working-age population of 203.97 million with 9.77 million unemployed, underemployed 13.09 million, part-time workers 33.34 million, and only 82.02 million full-time workers.(Badan Pusat Statistik 2020)

## 6. Conclusion

In the perspective of communication management, the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in North Sumatra is indicated to have problems in five aspects that are reviewed in this study. This situation arises as a result of the pandemic's impact, which has resulted in an increase in the number of unemployed people and a falling economy. The impact of the Covid-19 epidemic is expected to become a frequent occurrence in Indonesia because it affects many areas of the country. Because the pandemic has hit nationally, the central government has also implemented various structural policies down to the provincial level. The North Sumatra Provincial Government with the Covid-19 task force in North Sumatra is an extension of the central government in handling this pandemic.

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**Bahrum Jamil** was born on January 26, 1963, in Medan. I graduated from the Department of Communication of the Faculty of Social and Political Science in 1987 and from the Master's Program in Public Administration at Medan Area University in 2009. In 1987, at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Medan Area University, I began my career as a teacher. As an instructor, in many manufacturing companies as well as hospitals and hotels, I have had the opportunity to become an HR specialist. I am always invited to provide various organizations in different sectors with training, especially soft skills training. I also conducted practices as a consultant and trainer at various government departments after completing the Public Administration Program. Emphasis on public service and Quality Control Processes. In addition to teaching, I was able to provide students with practical examples in the area, according to the subjects I taught, especially in the Public Administration and Communication Studies Program.

**Taufik Wal Hidayat** was born on December 18, 1971, in Medan, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. In 1997 he received a Bachelor's degree (S1) in Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), University of Sumatra Utara (USU). In 2011, he completed his Master's degree in Public Administration (MAP) at the University of Medan Area (UMA) Postgraduate (PPs) and now, in 2021, he is completing his PhD (S3) in Communication at the Postgraduate Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) in Medan. Since 2007 until now as a lecturer in the communication science study program at FISIP UMA in 2019 until now he has been trusted as the administrator of the Center for Regional Policy Studies and Development at FISIP UMA. Apart from teaching, Taufik Wal Hidayat is also frequently asked to be a speaker at various journalism and mass media seminars and workshops held by a number of student press institutions in Medan. And starting in 2001 he was active as a journalist at the Analisa Daily and online media rekatamedia.com.

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