


## Crisis Communication in the Post-Truth Era: A Case Study of Disaster Management by the Government

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> crisis communication, post-truth, disaster management, disinformation, public trust</p>	<p>This study explores the dynamics of crisis communication conducted by the government in responding to disasters during the post-truth era, where facts are often overshadowed by opinions and emotions in the dissemination of public information. The aim of this research is to analyze the government's crisis communication strategies, the challenges in building public trust, and the impact of disinformation on the effectiveness of disaster response. This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach, focusing on a specific natural disaster that reflects the complexity of communication in the digital age. Data were collected through documentation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of social media and mass media. The findings indicate that effective and responsive crisis communication is crucial for governments handling disasters in the post-truth era, where opinions and emotions frequently override facts, and misinformation spreads rapidly through social media. In such situations, governments need to deliver information quickly, accurately, and empathetically, while upholding values of honesty and transparency to build public trust. Communication strategies must be adaptive and collaborative, involving various stakeholders such as the media, community leaders, and the use of digital technology. A humanistic approach based on empathy and public education is also key to controlling public narratives and mitigating the overall impact of misinformation in disaster management.</p>
<p>This is an open access article under the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/">CC BY-NC</a> license</p> 	<p><b>Corresponding Author:</b> Suwanda Suwanda College of Information Technology <a href="mailto:suwanda90@gmail.com">suwanda90@gmail.com</a></p>

### INTRODUCTION

The post-truth phenomenon refers to a condition in which objective facts have less influence on shaping public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs. In the context of public communication, the post-truth era is marked by the massive spread of unverified information—often through social media—that accelerates the formation of alternative, data-free narratives (Rianto, 2019). In times of crisis such as natural disasters, misleading information or hoaxes can replace official government messages, creating confusion, anxiety, and even panic among the public. This is worsened by phenomena like echo chambers and confirmation bias, where people tend to believe information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs, regardless of its validity (Bustami et al., 2024).

The implications of the post-truth era on public information dissemination are highly significant, especially in crisis communication processes. When official authorities compete

with unreliable but popular information sources, the government's effectiveness in building trust and guiding public behavior is jeopardized (Suharyanto, 2019). Manipulative and emotional information can easily overpower fact-based clarifications, since social media algorithms prioritize engagement over truth. Therefore, in the post-truth era, public communication must go beyond merely delivering factual truths—it must also connect emotionally, build credibility, and adaptively respond to the dynamics of public opinion (Syuhada, 2018).

Crisis communication is the strategic dissemination of information by individuals, organizations, or government institutions during emergencies or public stability-threatening situations, aimed at reducing uncertainty, building trust, and directing public responses appropriately (Akhyar & Pratiwi, 2019). In the context of disaster management, crisis communication is vital for delivering early warnings, evacuation instructions, and clarifications of circulating information. According to W. Timothy Coombs' crisis communication theory (2007), crisis communication must be timely, accurate, consistent, and empathetic to maintain the credibility of the message sender and ensure public compliance with given instructions or policies.

Crisis communication is not only about transmitting information but also involves managing public perception under high-pressure situations. In the post-truth era, the challenge becomes more complex as official information must compete with unofficial narratives that are often more sensational and easily go viral (Solihin, 2021). Therefore, crisis communication today must be designed with consideration for audience psychological characteristics, digital information dissemination patterns, and the need for participatory and dialogical relations with the public. The government must build a communication system that is not only reactive during crises but also proactive in shaping credible, inclusive, and adaptive narratives in response to evolving information dynamics (Prastya, 2011).

The vital role of crisis communication in disaster management lies in its function as the main connector between the government and the public—delivering accurate, timely, and trustworthy information to minimize the negative impacts of a crisis (Andung et al., 2024). In disaster situations, delays or errors in communication can be fatal, potentially increasing casualties, causing failed evacuations, or even sparking social unrest due to panic. Therefore, crisis communication must be an integral part of the disaster management system, designed with preparedness, rapid response, and cross-sector coordination (Lestari, 2019). Moreover, good communication can strengthen public trust in the government, which is essential for ensuring public compliance with instructions and policies during crises (Nurdin, 2015).

Amid the spread of disinformation and hoaxes in the post-truth era, the urgency of crisis communication also involves the government's need not only to disseminate information but also to manage perceptions, neutralize rumors, and actively involve the community in mitigation and recovery processes (Darmadi, 2021). Empathetic, transparent, and data-based communication can ease collective anxiety and strengthen social solidarity in emergency situations. Thus, effective crisis communication not only saves lives and assets but also builds a foundation of public trust and societal resilience in the long term (Fadhal, 2020).

The challenge of maintaining public trust during crises is immense for the government, especially in the post-truth era, which is marked by the dominance of emotions and personal opinions over objective facts. In disaster situations, public trust can quickly deteriorate if government communication is perceived as slow, opaque, or lacking empathy toward affected communities (Koswara, 2014). The proliferation of disinformation and hoaxes on social media worsens the situation, as people are more likely to trust information that aligns with their beliefs, even if unverified. In addition, low media literacy and unequal access to information make it harder for official messages to reach all segments of society effectively (Darmasetiadi, 2019). Therefore, the government must manage crisis communication strategically, ensuring speed, accuracy, consistency, and active public engagement to maintain legitimacy and trust during crisis response (Lestari et al., 2016).

Research on crisis communication in disaster management has shown that the effectiveness of government information delivery heavily depends on the communication strategies employed. Ahdi (2015) emphasized the importance of integrating top-down, bottom-up, and horizontal communication through social media in disaster contexts, focusing on strengthening crisis detection networks and public participation. Lestari et al. (2012), through an evaluation of crisis communication implementation by BPBD DIY, found the highest effectiveness occurred when communication targeted responder networks rather than the media or general public. On the other hand, Aziz et al. (2020) showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government still faced challenges related to transparency, message consistency, and public engagement, despite having wide communication reach.

However, most of these studies have not explicitly addressed the unique challenges of crisis communication in the post-truth context, where opinion, emotion, and disinformation often dominate public discourse more than objective facts. Fardiah (2023), in her research on communication strategies during the Cianjur earthquake response, highlighted the importance of fast and comprehensible messaging, but did not explore the post-truth dimension in depth. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining how the government tackles crisis communication challenges in the post-truth era—particularly in building public trust and managing the flow of manipulable information during disaster situations.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at thoroughly describing and analyzing how the government implements crisis communication in disaster management during the post-truth era. This approach was chosen because it provides contextual understanding of communication phenomena in crisis situations, especially when facts and opinions compete in the public sphere. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2016). Informants in this study are selected purposively, namely individuals directly involved in the crisis communication process, such as officials from the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), the local government's public relations division, as well as community leaders or affected residents. The research is planned to take place in areas that have previously experienced disasters and have complex

communication dynamics. The collected data will be analyzed descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as suggested by Miles and Huberman. The validity of the data will be maintained through source and technique triangulation, as well as by confirming results with informants (member checking). The findings of this study are expected to provide a concrete picture of the government's crisis communication practices amid the challenges of the post-truth era and offer input for formulating more effective disaster communication strategies.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Crisis Communication in Government Disaster Response in the Post-Truth Era

In today's digital era, technological advancements are often seen as a threat to the continuity of human labor, particularly because many tasks can now be automated by machines and artificial intelligence. However, it is important to recognize that not all sectors can be entirely replaced by technology. One field that still requires human involvement and a personal touch is communication. While technology can accelerate the delivery of information, essential aspects of communication—such as empathy, intuition, understanding of social context, and the ability to build interpersonal relationships—cannot be fully replicated by machines. Therefore, human communication skills have become increasingly valuable amid technological progress, playing a vital role in maintaining human connection, resolving conflicts, and fostering harmonious collaboration in various professional and social contexts.

Crisis communication is a crucial part of communication strategy specifically designed to respond to emergency or extraordinary situations, such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks, major accidents, or social unrest. In such conditions, the public desperately needs information that is fast, clear, and trustworthy. As such, crisis communication plays a vital role in managing public perception, reducing panic, and guiding people to take appropriate actions. This strategy not only focuses on delivering information but also includes coordination between institutions, crafting messages that are sensitive to the public's psychological state, and utilizing various communication channels to reach all segments of society evenly.

As the primary actor in crisis response, the government bears significant responsibility for ensuring that messages conveyed during a crisis are transparent, consistent, and fact-based. Effective crisis communication can help the government control the public narrative, preventing it from being disrupted by misinformation or hoaxes. Furthermore, honest and responsive communication can also build and maintain public trust in the government as the responsible party for their safety and well-being. By building trust through sound crisis communication, the government can not only manage emergencies more efficiently but also strengthen its long-term relationship with citizens.

The post-truth era describes a social phenomenon where objective facts become less influential in shaping public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs. In this context, facts are often ignored or considered less important than narratives aligned with an individual's values or beliefs. Psychologically, people tend to follow the beliefs of their surrounding group or community, even if those beliefs are not supported by solid evidence. This demonstrates

how collective perception can override logic and data in forming a widely accepted social reality.

This phenomenon poses a significant challenge for mainstream mass media. In the past, mass media was viewed as a credible institution capable of ensuring the validity of information disseminated to the public. However, in the post-truth era, media must compete with a flood of alternative information sources, especially on social media platforms, which often bypass fact-checking processes. The blurred line between truth and falsehood has become a serious issue, as fake news or hoaxes can spread faster and more widely than verified reports. When lies are repeated and consumed en masse, they may be accepted as truth by a large segment of society.

The role of social media in this phenomenon is highly significant. On one hand, it provides a platform for freedom of expression and information sharing. On the other hand, this ease of access exposes the public to an overwhelming flood of information from sources that are not always credible. People are no longer just passive consumers but also producers of information—even without adequate journalistic capacity or communication ethics. As a result, much inaccurate or misleading information spreads widely without going through proper filtering processes. The public's limited ability to filter and interpret information leads to the emergence of misperceptions and acceptance of false content. This highlights the urgent need for high media literacy so that individuals can critically evaluate and verify information independently before believing or sharing it.

Effective crisis communication is crucial for governments in handling disasters during the post-truth era, as it can help build and maintain public trust while controlling the narrative amid widespread misinformation. In this context, it is vital for the government to deliver accurate and transparent information, engage the community, and use relevant communication channels. Addressing crisis communication during disasters in the post-truth era requires strategic steps. The following are key points:

1. Clear and Transparent Thinking
  - a. Deliver Accurate and Reliable Information: Don't hesitate to acknowledge uncertainty or incomplete information, but always provide accountable and factual data.
  - b. Provide Access to Public Data: Enhancing access to public data can build public trust and prevent the spread of misinformation.
  - c. Designate Authorized Spokespersons: The right spokesperson can deliver clear information and avoid the spread of conflicting messages.
2. Utilizing Technology and Media
  - a. Use Social Media Wisely: While social media can accelerate information dissemination, there must be controls to prevent the spread of misinformation.
  - b. Leverage Other Digital Platforms: In addition to social media, use government websites, mobile apps, and text messaging to deliver information.
  - c. Conduct Media Monitoring and Analysis: Monitor social media, mass media, and online platforms to identify issues and public perception.
3. Community Engagement

- a. Listen and Respond to Public Feedback: Pay attention to public concerns and respond swiftly and effectively.
  - b. Encourage Intergroup Dialogue: Promoting dialogue between groups can help reduce polarization and foster understanding.
  - c. Collaborate with Stakeholders: Cooperation with NGOs, volunteers, and media outlets can strengthen crisis communication efforts.
4. Building Trust and Adaptation
- a. Enhance Information Literacy: There must be efforts to improve public information literacy to help distinguish between true and false content.
  - b. Avoid Misleading Statements: Steer clear of ambiguous or misleading language; focus on delivering clear and factual messages.
  - c. Tailor Messages to the Audience: Adapt messaging to audience characteristics, including language, style, and appropriate communication channels.

By following strategic steps in crisis communication, the government can more effectively address the complex communication challenges of the post-truth era, particularly in disaster situations. Amid the rapid spread of conflicting information via social media, the government must position itself as the primary source of accurate, transparent, and consistent information. Efforts such as building official communication channels, involving trusted community figures or influencers, and strengthening public information literacy are vital to dispelling hoaxes and minimizing panic. Through responsive and human-centered communication, public trust in the government can be enhanced, thereby increasing the overall effectiveness of disaster response efforts.

## **Challenges of Critical Government Communication in Disaster Management in the Post-Truth Era**

### **The Spread of Misinformation and Disinformation**

In the post-truth era, emotionally charged information that aligns with personal beliefs tends to be more easily accepted and shared—often without verification. This leads to the widespread dissemination of misinformation (unintentional false information) and disinformation (deliberately false information), especially through social media. In disaster response, fake news such as incorrect evacuation locations, exaggerated casualty figures, or conspiracy theories about the causes of disasters can worsen the situation and disrupt government response efforts.

The government must work extra hard to swiftly and accurately address and correct every piece of false information circulating. However, the speed at which hoaxes spread often outpaces official clarifications. Once hoaxes are accepted as truth by the public, government clarifications may be perceived as attempts to withhold information, posing a serious challenge to maintaining social stability and safety during crises.

### **Declining Public Trust in Government and Media**

In the post-truth era, the public tends to be skeptical of authorities, including the government and mainstream media. People are more likely to trust information from their social groups or ideologically aligned figures, even if those sources lack credibility. This

erosion of trust significantly hampers crisis communication, as official messages are often ignored or rejected.

In a disaster context, when the government issues evacuation orders or provides aid information, public response depends heavily on their level of trust in the authorities. Low trust may lead people to disregard official guidance and instead follow misleading alternative narratives. Building and maintaining public trust must therefore be a top priority in any crisis communication strategy.

### **Speed vs. Accuracy of Information**

The need for rapid information dissemination during crises presents a major challenge. Delays can lead to panic and create space for hoaxes to thrive, yet rushing to release unverified information can backfire if the facts turn out to be inaccurate or change quickly.

The government must strike a balance between speed and accuracy when conveying information. This requires a well-planned crisis communication strategy, including trained spokespersons and efficient internal verification systems. Without proper management, conflicting information can cause the public to lose trust in official sources.

### **Dominance of Social Media as the Primary Information Source**

Social media has overtaken traditional media as the main source of information for the public. This presents challenges, as algorithms tend to prioritize emotional or sensational content over factual and informative posts. As a result, official government messages are often drowned out by attention-grabbing but potentially false content.

Government crisis communication must adapt to this shift in information consumption. Authorities need to actively engage on social media, collaborate with credible influencers, and present information in formats that are accessible and engaging. Without a strategic approach, official messages risk being overshadowed in the digital space.

### **Low Public Information Literacy**

A root cause of the widespread hoax problem is the low level of digital and information literacy among the public. Many people are not accustomed to verifying sources, distinguishing opinion from fact, or understanding the context of the information they receive. This makes them more vulnerable to manipulation—especially during crises, when emotions run high.

The government must not only deliver accurate information but also take responsibility for educating the public on how to consume information critically. Information literacy campaigns are a crucial part of long-term strategies to combat the challenges of the post-truth era. Without an information-savvy society, crisis communication will remain severely hampered.

### **Politicization of Information**

In the post-truth era, crises are often exploited for political purposes by certain groups. Government-issued information can be twisted or framed in ways that target specific individuals or serve particular agendas. This adds complexity to crisis communication, which must now address not only the crisis itself but also the political dynamics shaping public perception.

The government must communicate cautiously and neutrally, maintaining transparency in all decisions. Ignoring the potential for politicization can lead to a deeper trust crisis and further public confusion during disasters. Honest, consistent, and data-driven communication is key to minimizing the impact of politicized narratives.

#### Limited Communication Resources

Not all government agencies are adequately prepared in terms of human and technological resources to implement effective crisis communication. A lack of training, limited social media teams, and inadequate communication infrastructure can result in slow, uncoordinated responses.

The government must enhance internal capacity through regular training, the recruitment of crisis communication experts, and the development of clear and tested communication protocols. A robust communication system enables more structured, rapid, and credible disaster response efforts—providing reassurance and clarity to affected communities.

### CONCLUSION

Effective and responsive crisis communication is crucial for the government in managing disasters during the post-truth era, where misinformation can quickly influence public opinion. In such conditions, honesty, transparency, and the ability to build trust become the main foundations for maintaining stability and encouraging public participation. By wisely utilizing technology, delivering audience-tailored messages, and involving various stakeholders, the government can control the public narrative and reduce the impact of misinformation. A human-centered and empathetic communication approach is key to fostering strong relationships with the public and enhancing the overall effectiveness of disaster response. Government crisis communication in disaster management during the post-truth era faces major challenges because objective truth is often overpowered by opinions and emotions that spread rapidly through social media. Official information is frequently questioned or rejected if it does not align with people's personal beliefs. In this situation, the government must be fast, accurate, and empathetic in delivering information while also building public trust through education, media literacy, and community engagement. The communication strategies employed must be adaptive, transparent, and collaborative, involving the media, community leaders, and digital technology to ensure that the messages conveyed are more trusted and effective in reducing the impact of misinformation during a crisis.

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