

Crisis Communication in the Early Phase of COVID-19 by Indonesian Government Body

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Abstract— Early phase become the critical period in crisis, because the public anxiety and confusion is very high. This condition increases the public's need of information from official sources. This article aims to discuss the official statement from: Indonesian Ministry of Health and Indonesian National Board of Disaster Management in the early phase of Covid-19 in Indonesia. The data sources official statement that posted in the two Indonesian Government bodies' official website between March – May 2020. For analysis, author use frame analysis model Robert N Entman. Result shows the main theme of BNPB official statement is to persuade people to limited their mobility; meanwhile in the Ministry of Health contains of justification for government decision and repetition to obey the health protocol designed by Indonesian government.

Keywords— *crisis communication, frame analysis, government communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

In a crisis related to disease outbreaks or health issues, the main actors are central government organizations and state authorities at all levels ranging from city / regency, provincial to national, even to international levels. Government organizations include the health sector, police and first aid organizations (rescue). Furthermore, organizations responsible for infrastructure and energy (regarding readiness, response and recovery activities) and semi-state civil society organizations such as the Red Cross [1]. In the midst of this difficult situation, the Indonesian government's risk communication came under criticism. At the beginning of the spread of Covid-19 in Wuhan, China, Indonesia seemed to take it lightly by stating that people with the virus could recover on their own, would not enter Indonesia, etc. Then since March 3rd, 2020, when President Joko Widodo announced the first Covid-19 case in Indonesia, information crises have continued to occur, starting from the different number of victims between the central and regional governments, the rise of 'spokesmen' from various agencies, differences in data between the central and regional governments, and differences in policy making. The confusion of information on Covid-19 data have broad implications such as the uneven distribution of logistics to trace the Covid-19 suspects, and the uncoordinated act between government bodies [2].

The Indonesian government was painfully slow to respond, and when it did react, the response was hesitant and fragmented. Initially, it was populist antisocialism that

blinded the government. Subsequently, the executive's response was hampered by its self-perceived inability to go against religious traditions; petty considerations of hurting political rivals; and deep-seated corrupt practices that had damaged the country's health sector prior to the crisis (and continued to damage it during the outbreak) [3].

The confusion between officials worsen the crisis, because the Covid-19 not only pandemic, but also risen the infodemics. WHO explains that infodemics are an excessive amount of information about a problem, which makes it difficult to identify a solution. They can spread misinformation, disinformation and rumours during a health emergency. Infodemics can hamper an effective public health response and create confusion and distrust among people [4].

Infodemics could spread because of internet that make everyone have a possibility to produce, modify, and distribute information. The problem is not everyone has an enough knowledge or has an authority to talk about Covid-19 so there will be the spreading of potential false information or fake information. The condition could make the crisis situation worsen [5]. The problem is getting higher because people motivation to get the information not only for knowing about what's going on, what to do, but also to fits their needs or perspective. The risk is people just choose the information that fits to their needs without consider the credibility of information sources [6]

This research aims to know how the early response from Indonesia government body in responding the Covid-19 situation in the early stage, by make a content analysis to official statement from Indonesia Ministry of Health and Indonesia National Board of Disaster Management (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana – BNPB). Both of the government body have a vital role in the early stage of Covid-19 in Indonesia. The official statement is between March – May 2020, because between the period of time there were so many decision related to the Covid-19 made by Indonesian government.

II. METHOD

This research use frame analysis method to know what is the frame that chosen by the Ministry of Health and BNPB. Framing is a potentially useful paradigm for examining the strategic creation of public relations messages and audience responses [7]. Authors collect the information from the official website of both government body (Kemenkes.go.id

and BNPB.go.id). Author limit the official statement that only related with issues about : lockdown, area quarantine, large scale social restrictions (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar - PSBB) and worship between in March – May 2020. The time frame chosen because it was the first three months after the COVID-19 case officially occur in Indonesia. At that time, Indonesia government released many policies, new policies to deal with the situation On the other hand, the issues are the government decision in responding Covid-19 situation and the issues lead the public discussion where there were the pros and cons inside it. After choosing the text, our next step is make an analysis to the text sample of each month with frame analysis Robert N Entman model that contains of define problem, defining causes, making moral judgement and treatment recommendation.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Frame of Ministry of Health

March 2020 - Official Statement related to Lockdown

There are four official statement in March 2020, and most of them (two of four) related to the lockdown issue. In the early stage of Covid-19 in Indonesia, there was several public call for lockdown, but the government refuse it. The official statement states Indonesian government still not consider the lockdown as an option (define problem) because lockdown in another countries was failed (defining causes). At that time, several local government (such as city major, district major, or province governor) decide the lockdown. Answering it, the statement declare that central government is the only institution who can decide whether it will be lockdown or not (moral judgement). The statement also persuade to people to decrease the mobility and social activity (treatment recommendation)

April 2020 – Official statement related to Homecoming

The Ramadan fasting period in 2020 came in April, and traditionally, the Indonesian people will make a trip to homecoming in the end of Ramadan fasting period. In the Covid-19 situation, people urged to restrict their mobility. The official statement states to ask people not do the homecoming in this year, because it will be the way to prevent Covid-19 spread (define problem). Minister of Health explains the potential of Covid-19 transmission in homecoming activities (defining causes). As the moral judgement component, Minister of Health stated that "people should keep the safety of families and relatives at home" and followed by the data that Covid-19 has spread across the Indonesia with 7.000 confirmed positive cases. As the treatment recommendation, the official statement said the disciplinary and cooperative from people is the only way to prevent the Covid.

May 2020 – Official statement related to Large-scale social restriction (PSBB)

Government decide to set PSBB instead of lockdown in order to prevent or minimize the spread of Covid-19. The decision was lead the pros and cons. Ministry of Health give official statement to justify that PSBB was the most effective way (define problem); because Covid-19 spread rapidly (defining causes). Ministry of Health claimed the PSBB show result as expected, because in several region there was

a trend the decline of Covid-19 spread (moral judgement). Once again, Ministry of Health state in order to stop the pandemic it needs the active role and cooperative from people and advices people to stay at home because so many Covid-19 cases came from person without symptoms

Frame of BNPB

March 2020 – Official statement related to worship activities

One of activities need to be adapted in early phase of Covid-19 was congregational worship. Religion issue is an sensitive case in Indonesia so it needs clarity to state about it. In the official statement, BNPB state that the Covid-19 spread should be minimize and it needs the active role of people (define problem). The government decision to limited the congregational worship is in order to prevent the Covid-19 transmission in the worship place (defining causes). As the moral judgement, the statement using words from the head of BNPB who persuade people to be the "hero for humanity" by obey the government decision. To strengthen the message, this official statement also use the cleric of Istiqlal Mosque (one of iconic mosque in Indonesia) that stated human should make an effort and not only surrender and justify what happened was a destiny. As the treatment recommendation, this official statement use the Istiqlal Mosque cleric that said we should obey what the ulama (the religious leaders) and government (umaro) said.

April 2020 – Official statement related to large-scale social restriction (PSBB)

The statement delivered by Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, who said the PSBB decision should followed by all government bodies whether it is in central or in region. So, Joko Widodo underlined the need of "*one vision and one strategy*" in the practice of PSBB (*define problem*). The problem in PSBB because there were different perceptions between central government and the regional level government-toward the policy. As the moral judgement to justify that PSBB is the right choice, this official statement exposes president's words that PSBB have the valid legal basis. For the treatment recommendation, president said PSBB should followed by ministerial regulation in order to explain about the details.

May 2020 – Official statement related to large-scale social restriction (PSBB)

PSBB once again become the most theme in the May official statement. The sample is using official statement of the Head of BNPB, Donny Monardo, about the impact positive of PSBB three months after it enforced. There were 124 head of region report to the central government about the decrease of Covid-19 transmission (defining problem). But on the other hand, the PSBB also lead the work termination. Monardo claimed until May 2020 there were 7 million Indonesian people lost his or her job (defining causes). On moral judgement aspects, this official statement using the strong commitment of regional government can help to cut the Covid-19 transmission. On the treatment recommendation component, there is no concrete statement about what to do, only underlining the regional government should keep "the strong leadership and good governance" to

decrease the transmission Covid-19 and minimize the direct and indirect risk of the virus

Early phase become the critical period in crisis situation. As Coombs stated that initial response toward crisis situation should take these three elements into consideration: (1) be quick, (2) be accurate, and (3) be consistent [8]. Both of the government bodies shows their quickness in message delivery to respond the public anxiety about the situation; and the consistency about the theme that shows by their consistency to repeat the message to strengthen the government policy. The challenge is about the accuracy, because another government body make some counter-productive statement that leads to public anxiety and somehow make the public become skeptical and cynical to the government. As Mietzner [3] wrote: *“the executive’s response was hampered by its self-perceived inability to go against religious traditions; petty considerations of hurting political rivals; and deep-seated corrupt practices that had damaged the country’s health sector prior to the crisis (and continued to damage it during the outbreak)”*.

On a wider context, Masduki [9] wrote Indonesian government positioned COVID-19 as ‘political event’, prioritizing economic stability rather than managing public health crises, it shows that market-driven communication practices have stymied the need to protect public health. On the positioned as ‘political event’ it also shows on one official statement that underlined “the need of strong commitment of regional government”. Strong commitment means the uniformity of policy between central government and regional government. In fact, there were several regional government make their own policy in COVID-19 prevention.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Health and the National Disaster Management Agency are two institutions that have an important role in the early phase of Covid-19 because of their authority in dealing with the direct impact of Covid-19, namely the health sector and disaster management. Both Agencies use the official website channels of their respective Institutions to deliver announcements and official statements relating to government decisions. The content of the message from BNPB generally contains an appeal to limit the

movement of people; while the Ministry of Health generally contains things that strengthen arguments against government decisions such as the PSBB decision instead of a lockdown, and keeps repeating messages about the importance of complying with health protocols.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The data in this paper is a part of research entitled “Komunikasi Risiko (Risk Communication) dalam Penanganan Covid-19 di Indonesia” funded by JIH Hospital and UII Yogyakarta, year 2020.

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