

Medkom Bencana: A “Single Door” Model of Natural Disaster Information to Protect from Hoax Issues of Disaster in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia had faced some natural disasters which is happened in Lombok, Palu, and Sunda Strait. During the disaster happened, every people in Indonesia like victim, citizen around the affected/hostile area, till government needs a lot of information. As usual, when the disaster was happening, the victims want to know their family, the evacuation area or evacuation route, and also the lists of crisis centers to fulfill their needs. Not only victim, but media houses and governmental sector who are involved in disaster’s rescue and restoration also need huge information to map the affected area. So, the media can publish it on their own media and government can instruct and decide something from the factual information. To make it fast, accounted, and based on facts, National Disaster Management Authority or known as BNPB gather a huge number of journalists, civil servants in governmental sectors and also every board who are responsible to the disaster management in a WhatsApp Group called Medkom Bencana. As long as writer knows, till today there are 7 groups of Medkom Bencana which were created by BNPB. In order to know the reason of creating Medkom Bencana, the information are accepted, classified, and shared by BNPB, and the processing of gather information directly from disaster area, the writer interviewed Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, as man behind of this successful model of “single door” of natural disaster information. From his statement, the usage of new media like WA Group; Medkom Bencana could decrease the resistant of natural disaster information, especially hoax issues of disaster.

Keywords: disaster communication ; hoax issues ; medkom bencana ; WhatsApp ; BNPB

1. Introduction

As located in the ring fire of the world, Indonesia often faced the disaster such as earthquakes, landslides, tsunami, floods, or even volcanic eruptions. Especially since the biggest tsunami which was happened in Aceh to this day, various volcanic eruptions, landslides, floods, non-toxic and volcanic earthquakes, and toxic gases, still threaten the population throughout Indonesia. From the data that have been published by National Disaster Management Authority or known as BNPB on their website, in the past 10 years to last day of 2018, more than 15.000 evidences happened around Indonesia. They were accumulative from all the type of disasters. In 2018, BNPB noted that there were 2.572 disasters happened along Sabang to Merauke. As seen on the figure below, hundreds of tornado were dominated beside earthquakes (23 evidences), tsunami (1 evidence), and also landslides and floods (hundreds evidences).



Figure 1. Number of disasters in Indonesia among 2018 (Source: bnpb.go.id)

So, seeing from that data, I agree by the statement that disaster events in Indonesia provide lessons on the importance of disaster management (Budi HH, 2012). Institutionally, BNPB is an institution that is the main command of disaster management in Indonesia. Because, when the disaster was coming, BNPB as the government institution took a lead, instructed many stakeholders around them such as national police, Indonesia Army, Indonesia Red Cross, and collected the real data or factual information that could be shared to media, stakeholders, and of course, public or citizens. As authority of national disaster in Indonesia, BNPB obey with the Disaster Law Number 24 on 2007 that state there are many type of disasters which have been rescued and the regulation of disaster management (Indonesia, 2007). In this law, it is stated that there are 3 types of disasters; natural disasters, non-natural disasters, and social disasters. Not only giving the information, but BNPB as the national authority also instruct regional authority called BPBD to educate, give socialization, and also create activation or program related with disaster management (Rudianto, 2015).

Furthermore, Rudianto (2015) also described that disaster management must be supported by various approaches – both soft power and hard power to reduce the risk of disasters. In this law, actually, government has governed about these two approaches called disaster mitigation. Communication in disasters is not only needed in disaster emergency conditions, but is also important at the time and pre-disaster. Preparing the community in disaster-prone areas must always be done. In addition to adequate information about the potential for disasters in an area, training and internalization of the habit of dealing with disaster situations must also be carried out in continuity. But it must be remembered, abundant information alone is not enough to make people aware of the dangers of threatening disasters. So, the way to deliver the information must be done properly. Missing in communicating of information can cause uncertainty and create the situation become worst.

According to that law, it initiated BNPB to find the best way to make disaster management more effective and efficient. Because, it is also linear with Dougall, Horsley, & Mclisky (2008) statement that in every disaster, the main crisis communication center was the gateway for a flood of constantly changing information on transportation, accommodation, translation services, and telecommunications options. Seeing a crowded situation on the command center or in BNPB always called *Pos Komando*, so the Chief of Data and Information Center and Public Relation of BNPB, Sutopo Purwo Nugroho tried to use social media as the great option to share every information and communicate with some stakeholders who involved in particular disaster. Because, Indonesia is an archipelago country which consists of thousands islands from Sabang to Merauke. So, for waiting new information or update situation on far region from Jakarta, it could obstruct the decision making or even give the instruction from certain stakeholders if BNPB still use the traditional system.



Figure 2. Distribution of disaster events in Indonesia in 2018. (Source: bnpb.go.id)

As public relation of high-risk and high-tension institution when the disaster came, Sutopo – as he always called, find a shortcut way rather than traditional ways like make press release, data and information release, and design that releases as official letter and send it to the command center in BNPB and finally conducted the press conference to announce that letter. Thus, Sutopo cut off that system and make it easier than before. So, with his team, he made some groups contains of a lot of journalists – Indonesian journalists and foreign journalists, stakeholders, institution, and also related-affiliation of BNPB such as Ministry of Internal Affairs named Medkom Bencana. Of course, Sutopo said that it can help every mass media to get the updated information, new data, and also official statement from BNPB. Especially, in digital era, stated from (Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2016) that crises or disaster create information holes that organizations and publics work together to fill through creating and sharing information.

But, in fact, when the disaster came, a lot of information through social media was spreading by many people; whether it's hoax or not. Worse, the information is always in the name of "*submissions from the other groups*" without confirming or carefully viewing the contents of the message. Liu et al. (2016) in their paper, gave an example when the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) launched Disaster Reporter with the purpose of crowd sourcing and sharing "disaster-related information for events occurring within the United States, allowing citizens, first responders, emergency managers, community response & recovery teams, and others to view and contribute information on a publicly accessible map" (FEMA, 2013 in Liu et al., 2016). But, this example could be as "boomerang" if the information from citizens cannot be guaranteed – both original sources, copyright, and is it false/hoax information or not.

Because, nowadays, information which is spread on social media is very confused and creates chaos in the community. It happened because there were a lot of false information or hoax issues which were sent by any people such as WhatsApp Group members. It is also indicated that there were many people were arrested because spread the hoax information about disaster issues. As stated from (Rahma, 2018 in Tempo.co, 2018) that there were 12 citizens were arrested and jailed because of spreading hoax information. Not just stop at that moment, the spreading of hoax information also happened in Java. It was mentioned from (Febrylian, 2018 in Turnbackhoax.id) when the disaster came, some irresponsibility people spread hoax news related to the disaster. At that time, the earthquake was shaken Java by the magnitude of 6.1 SR. However, in the situation of disaster, there were still some individuals precisely shared hoax information that made the situation become more panic.

So, seeing that problem, this paper try to find out how the effectiveness and efficient way which initiated from "Medkom Bencana" and it will become a new model for any related government or national authority for disaster in other countries. Because of this innovative way, Sutopo got many awards from some institutions or even international mass media. Moreover, after reviewing many journals about disaster management and communication strategy from authority, Sutopo's strategy is one of existence strategy used in this world. In hence, it is no doubt that his strategy got more attention from around the world.

2. Method

To accomplish and support this paper, I used literature review to gather a lot of information such as from BNPB official website which is provided by Data and Information Center and Public Relation of BNPB. Not only that, as qualitative research approach, I also did in-depth interview with some staffs of Data and Information Center and Public Relation of BNPB, and also did observation to support my results. It is also stated by Patton (2002) that qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents. At first, I interested to research this model because since 2017 I worked as journalist in one of biggest media house in Indonesia namely Kompas Gramedia. As placed on news section in that media house, I had responsibility to publish many information related to any events, one of them is disasters. So that, to make this research results properly, I ask permission directly to Sutopo Purwo Nugroho for interviewing him. Unfortunately, he was still under treatment from his cancer disease.

So, at that time I decided to interview two of his staffs named Andri and Theophilus Yanuarto. From both of them, I heard so many explanations related to this topic. As stated from (Patton, 2002: 4) when we conducted qualitative research, so the data for qualitative analysis typically come from fieldwork. During fieldwork, I spend time in the setting under study-a program, the circumstances of Medkom Bencana WhatsApp Group, or wherever situations of importance the usage of social media and spreading the official releases, people interviewed, and analyzed some releases which had spread by Sutopo and his staffs. Meanwhile, for the data analysis as ideal as some journals which were discussed about disaster management, I used matrix method developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applied to analyze the data. This method included data reduction, data display, drawing conclusions, and validation. Data reduction entailed reducing the data gathered from written and oral records to words, phrases, and ideas that could be organized in meaningful ways (Dougall et al., 2008: 80)

3. Result and discussion

3.1 Traditional vs Modern Era of Communication Strategies to Disasters

(Lee M. in Pinkowski, 2008) explained that in many respects, strategies and policies for disaster public

relations by government can be separated into two categories, those that came before and those that came after the disaster. As stated from Rudianto (2015), government or stakeholders who are responsible with the affected areas of disaster must give more socialization, simulations, and education to the community. Before Sutopo substituted previous Chief of Data and Information Center and Public Relation of BNPB, the classic problem was still seen on the field about disaster information management. It was also justified from Andri and Philus, Sutopo's staffs, that the management and coordination of disaster evacuation and information are very lack. It happened because there were no control of information and lack of coordination inter-stakeholder. Thus, it is also amplified by the statement of (Budi HH, 2012) about "KIKK", namely Communication, Information, Coordination and Cooperation. He said that from the aspects of speed, accuracy, accuracy - reliability, aspects of communication and information are still problematic, especially when talking about the mazy information, various inaccurate actions such as uneven logistics, integration between sectors in disaster management or overlapping is still happened (Budi HH, 2012: 364).

From that situation, it can be inferred that the aspect of sector egocentricity was still visible – before Sutopo and his team in charge on Data and Information Center and PR of BNPB. During my observation – also when I was a journalist, the information about disasters were delivered through conventional ways. The communication flow is took so long, the decision making from BNPB was also indirectly and must got approval from supervisor or Chief of BNPB directly. Otherwise, in another aspect, the integration of information and effectiveness in disaster management must be done. Because, we know, that it could be decrease or minimize the conflicts and bring out the government to decide something perfectly. Imagine, Indonesia is one of the biggest archipelago countries in the world. So, how can the information and fast-responses or fast-decision could be delivered into the disaster area?

This problem were also be lamented by (Rudianto, 2015) until today there are so many research about disaster communication have been done, but in Indonesia communication studies related to disasters have been conducted after the earthquake and tsunami natural disasters in Aceh in 2014. So that, after more disasters often happened in Indonesia included natural disasters which were happened in Lombok, Palu, and Sunda Strait, awareness of the importance of communication in handling disasters is increasingly high. It is raised because according to Frank Dance (Littlejohn, 2006: 7 in Rudianto, 2015), one of the important aspects in communication is the concept of reducing uncertainty. Communication itself arises because of the need to reduce uncertainty, so that it can act effectively in order to protect or strengthen the ego concerned in interaction both individually and in groups. Of course, in disaster management, accurate information is needed by the community and private institutions that have concern for disaster victims.

Therefore, the ability to communicate messages about disasters to the public, government, media and opinion leaders can reduce risk, save lives and the impact of disasters (Haddow & Haddow, 2014). He also mentioned that there were 5 foundation of an effective disaster communications strategy such as: customer focus, leadership commitment, inclusion of communications in planning and operations, situational awareness, and media partnership (Haddow & Haddow, 2014: 4). In customer focus, PR of BNPB must understand what information their customers and their partners need like stakeholders and president and build communication mechanisms that deliver this information in a timely and accurately. Furthermore, the leader of the emergency operations must be committed to effective communications and must participate fully in the communications process. Communications specialists must be involved in all emergency planning and operations to ensure that communicating timely and accurate information is considered when action decisions are being considered. In the era of Sutopo, communication specialists are consists of staffs of Data and Information Center and Public Relation of BNPB, Operational Control Center of BNPB in region and also any stakeholders who are involved in the disaster.

An effective communication can be indicated from the timely collection, analysis, and dissemination of information from the disaster area in accordance with basic principles of effective communications, such as transparency and truthfulness. So, based on my interview results with Philus, in this recent system, the flow of communication and gather all the data from the field, there is an integrated system or plot among them.

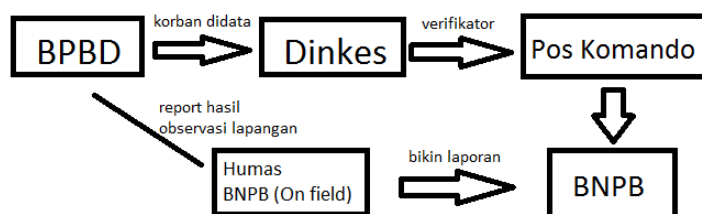


Figure 3. Flow

gather information from disaster area. (Source: BNPB)

or plot system to

As seen on the flowchart above, Data and Information Center and PR of BNPB gather all information in disaster area from Regional Disaster Management Authority (BPBD). Based on interview results from Philus, real-time and credibility information are gathered from every worker in BPBD because in BPBD there is no public relation division. After every part of BPBD collect data from disaster area, they will report the data to Public Health Officers (*Dinkes*) and PHO will analyze and add some information from BPBD especially investigate the number of victims on that disaster area. One thing and become a concern when disaster come to Indonesia is lacking information of victims' number. So, it is solved by using social media platform to update the number of victims and verified by Command Center (*Pos Komando*).

The role of Command Center is not only verification the information which are gathered by BPBD and PHO, but they also send the verified and classified information to the Data and Information Center and PR of BNPB. The particular information or official releases will be filtered by the staffs of BNPB and confirmed by Sutopo Purwo Nugroho to share and publish it on the mass media, stakeholders, or other governmental sectors who are related to the disaster. But, in fact, that flow is not always done by them. Because, BNPB already has some PR staffs and Sutopo – as the Chief instruct his staff to go to disaster area and observe the situation from the field and report it directly to the staffs in Jakarta if Sutopo is under-going treatment of his cancer. Because, they use one group which is Sutopo is the admin of the group, so the reportage can be filtered and verified by Sutopo directly to the mass media.

Talking about media, traditional media outlets (i.e., television, radio, Internet, newspapers, etc.) and social media outlets (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and others) are the most effective means for communicating timely and accurate information to the largest number of people. A partnership with the media involves understanding the needs of the media and employing trained staff who work directly with the media to get information to the public. Both traditional and social media may also serve as information sources for emergency managers, especially during the response and recovery phases (Haddow & Haddow, 2014: 4) Realizing live in information era and every people need information as fast as he get, credible and based on data and fact, Sutopo and his team gathered all professional journalists from all over media house, stakeholders, some ministry and other institutions who are related to the disaster management in one social media platform, WhatsApp. In this WhatsApp, Sutopo and his team made 7 WhatsApp Group named “Medkom Bencana”.

3.2 “Medkom Bencana” WhatsApp Group

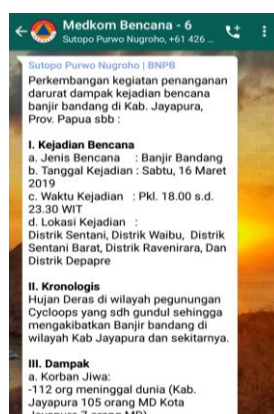


Figure 4. Screenshot of Medkom Bencana – 6 Group in WhatsApp (Source: private document)

As mentioned above, Medkom Bencana WhatsApp Group were initiated and created by Sutopo Purwo Nugroho and his team to gather all of the disaster information directly from the field and share it to this group. From the result of interviewed with Philus, he said that Medkom Bencana was made to give the information as fast as the disaster came. Because, living in the information era which is stated by (Behringer, 2006) that media also change their approaches to their audiences as in straight with the higher information needed by the people. Seeing that needs, Medkom Bencana is created by Sutopo’s team and utilize technology which is easy, cheap and efficient. Medkom Bencana also made by the purposes of bridging between media workers and BNPB to get the updated information and new official releases from BNPB directly without do the “old” press conference. As Philus said to me that the old way sometimes gave more time for the media and of course, staffs of Data and Information Center and PR of BNPB also must prepare a lot for conduct the press conference in the office. In fact, as confirmed by Philus that did the press conference regularly with the old fashion, it only takes time and bring the responses to the disaster slower than this day.

Moreover, Indonesia is not only Java but there are also thousands islands which must be considered and need fast-responses from the government, especially in the evacuation process when a disaster occurred. We can see on the table below, that there were so many accidents or disasters happened in Indonesia.

Table 1. Most disaster distribution in some provinces in Indonesia (Source: bnpb.go.id)

Province	Numbers of Disaster
Central Java	578
West Java	338
South Kalimantan	96
West Sumatra	91
South Sumatra	75

If we looked on the table, what BNPB must do if in each region or province the disasters come in the same time? Sure, it will take more times and huge efforts from the staffs of BNPB to collect all the information and make press conferences for some evidences. Based on that problem, Sutopo thought that using WhatsApp Group to get all of the data from disaster area is more efficient, effective, and cheap. So, the information about disaster from any different places could be gathered in one platform and more groups to be shared. It is also give the easiest way for BNPB and the media to synchronize the data that will be published on their own media production. For Sutopo’s staffs like Philus, Medkom Bencana give the opportunity for BNPB to share updated and genuine information from the official and original sources which are mentioned above.

Eventhough in some research result like as mentioned on (Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2015) indicated that the public prefers information from local rather than national sources, but for Indonesia contexts – the trusted information from media networks and BNPB which are spread from Medkom Bencana bring a great effect fro Indonesia to make a policy and instruction to the affected disaster area. Because, a lot of news portals or even big media network company also provide fact checking on their portal to prevent from hoax information. When the hoax information in localize-scale also spreading, BPBD cooperate with Command Center and report it to BNPB to share if that information is hoax or not and clarify the official one.

4. Conclusion

According to the result and discussion, it is important and needed for another government PR in Indonesia and also other countries which has same characteristic – like Indonesia in this globe to imitate or even developed more efficient from this “single door” model of natural disaster information. I – as the journalist feel happy and get some advantages from this group. Not only that, but I also cut off my time to follow the press conference when the journalist is being outside or moving. Besides the practice, but for empirical development, this communication model in disaster situation also bring the new ideas of develop more efficient or even simpler than this model. But, I realize the usage of Medkom Bencana in order to prevent from hoax information and give the new ways of sharing information from the government is still applicable.

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