

The Role of Media in Policy Communication for Flood Management in Banjarmasin City

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of media in the communication of flood management policies in Banjarmasin City, an area prone to flooding due to its geographical characteristics and rapid urbanization. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and content analysis of local media coverage. The data were analyzed using techniques of data reduction, thematic categorization, and narrative interpretation. The findings reveal that the government's communication strategy remains predominantly top-down, relying heavily on digital media and technocratic narratives that are often difficult for the public to comprehend. Local media play a significant role in disseminating policy information but tend to favor government perspectives while providing limited space for civil society voices. The study also identifies several communication challenges, including unequal access to information, weak inter-agency coordination, and limited public dialogue. These findings highlight the need for a reformulation of flood policy communication strategies to be more dialogical, participatory, and community-based to enhance public awareness, preparedness, and active engagement in disaster mitigation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Banjarmasin, the capital city of South Kalimantan Province, is widely recognized as the “City of a Thousand Rivers” due to its extensive river network. However, its geographical condition as a lowland area renders the city highly vulnerable to flooding. In addition to natural factors, rapid urban

development has exacerbated flood risks. Population growth and economic expansion have driven the utilization of land surrounding rivers for residential and commercial purposes. Consequently, land absorption capacity has declined due to the reduction of water catchment areas, a problem further aggravated by suboptimal drainage systems and weak environmental management.

The major flood that struck South Kalimantan in 2021 caused 15 fatalities and displaced more than 100,000 residents. This disaster was not solely the result of intense rainfall but was also linked to environmental degradation caused by large-scale mining activities and palm oil plantation expansion. Such degradation was worsened by weak regulatory enforcement and the absence of a holistic and sustainable spatial planning framework (2021 South Kalimantan Floods, 2025). Furthermore, tidal flooding induced by sea-level rise has become a recurring phenomenon in Banjarmasin. Areas around the Barito River estuary, particularly densely populated neighborhoods affected by land conversion, are increasingly exposed to tidal inundation (Radar Banjarmasin, 2024). Uncontrolled urbanization and land-use changes without ecological considerations have further intensified the disaster risk.

To address these challenges, the Banjarmasin City Government has implemented various flood mitigation and climate adaptation policies. One of the key initiatives is the Climate Village Program (ProKlim), which has been carried out in 20 locations with the aim of promoting community-based mitigation and adaptation measures (Resilient Cities, 2025). The government has also collaborated with the Kalimantan III River Basin Authority in flood control projects, including the preparation of Land Use Diligence and Environmental Management/Monitoring Documents (UKL-UPL) along the Veteran River. In addition, partnerships with local communities and academic institutions, such as the Faculty of Forestry at Lambung Mangkurat University, have been established to foster local innovations for enhancing the city's flood resilience.

Within the realm of public policy, the mass media serves as a crucial intermediary between government and society. Media outlets not only disseminate policy information in a factual and objective manner but also shape public opinion and promote government accountability. In the digital era, social media platforms have provided an interactive space enabling two-way communication between authorities and citizens, thereby fostering more responsive engagement (Marcelinus et al., 2024). In Banjarmasin, the media plays a pivotal role in communicating flood management policies, including the dissemination of early warnings, mitigation guidelines, and logistical aid information.

Local media outlets collaborate with regional governments to provide real-time reports on flood conditions, evacuation routes, and emergency shelter locations. Additionally, they play an educational role by encouraging citizens to refrain from littering, which can clog drainage systems and exacerbate flooding (Yuni Lestari, 2024). The contribution of the media to building collective awareness is thus central to promoting active community participation.

The Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning (PUPR) of Banjarmasin also leverages social media to disseminate flood hazard maps and water resource management information. Local media such as Radar Banjarmasin regularly report on flood control policies and the challenges of their implementation. Beyond news coverage, media organizations also support disaster preparedness training, including through youth organizations and amateur radio communities that assist in accelerating information dissemination during emergencies.

Despite the availability of multiple communication channels, the effectiveness of policy communication on flood management remains a persistent challenge. Information gaps, low levels of public policy literacy, and limited community engagement constitute major obstacles in the communication process. In the context of disaster mitigation, uneven and poorly targeted information delivery can hinder community preparedness.

This study, therefore, seeks to evaluate the extent to which communication strategies for flood management policies in Banjarmasin have been effectively implemented. It also aims to identify existing barriers and formulate more adaptive, inclusive, and participatory communication strategies. Within this framework, the media is not only regarded as an information conduit but also as a strategic actor in shaping public awareness, fostering dialogue, and encouraging active community

involvement in the implementation of flood mitigation policies.

Based on this background, the study formulates four main research problems:

1. What communication strategies are employed by the Banjarmasin City Government in addressing flood management?
2. How do media outlets frame and disseminate these policies to the public?
3. To what extent is policy communication effective in raising awareness and enhancing community participation?
4. What challenges are encountered in implementing flood management policy communication through the media?

This study employs a theoretical framework grounded in a multi-level approach to understanding the role of media in policy communication on flood management in Banjarmasin City. Conceptually, the main theory applied is Policy Communication Theory (Dunn, 2018), which highlights how public policies are communicated from the government to society as part of a participatory and responsive implementation process. In this context, communication serves not only as a medium for transmitting information but also as an instrument for shaping public understanding and support.

To examine how the media influences public attention toward flood-related issues, this research also refers to the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which emphasizes that while the media may not always dictate what people should think, it can direct public attention to particular issues. Furthermore, to analyze how the media constructs narratives of flood policies, the study applies Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which explains that the media can highlight certain aspects of policies in order to shape meanings accepted by the public.

Finally, to understand communication aspects in disaster risk situations, the research adopts Risk Communication Theory (Covello & Sandman, 2001), which focuses on how governments convey flood risks and how society responds to such information. With this theoretical framework, the study is able to comprehensively explain the role of media in transmitting, framing, and influencing the effectiveness of flood policy communication in Banjarmasin.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to provide an in-depth depiction of the role of media in policy communication on flood management in Banjarmasin City. The primary focus of this research is to understand how policy communication strategies are formulated by the government, how the media frames such information, and the extent to which this communication is effective in fostering public awareness and participation.

The research locations include flood-prone areas such as Alalak, Mantuil, Teluk Dalam, and Sungai Lulut. The informants consist of officials from relevant agencies (BPBD, PUPR, Kominfo), local media journalists (Banjarmasin Post, Antara Kalsel), academics, environmental community activists, and community leaders. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observations, as well as document studies and content analysis of reports from five major local media outlets.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, complemented by snowball sampling to reach additional relevant participants. The data were analyzed using content analysis to identify framing and agenda-setting patterns in the media, and thematic analysis to process interview and FGD data. The analytical process followed the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with key informants. With this approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of flood management policy communication at the local level.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Strategy for Flood Management by the Banjarmasin City Government

The findings show that the communication strategy for flood management policies implemented by the Banjarmasin City Government is dominated by informative and persuasive approaches oriented toward one-way transmission. Policy communication is delivered through various channels, including official digital media such as government websites, social media (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter), local mass media (Banjarmasin Post, Antara Kalsel, TVRI Kalsel, Kompas TV), face-to-face forums (neighborhood meetings, RT gatherings, and technical socialization), as well as visual media such as billboards and educational banners. This strategy is intensified before and during the rainy season, along with the activation of the early warning system from the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD). However, not all of these information channels reach society equally, particularly in peripheral areas with limited digital access.

Field findings indicate that the communication strategy remains focused on conveying formal technical information with minimal public dialogue. This is reflected in the absence of two-way communication mechanisms that enable feedback and community participation. Although complaint channels such as LAPOR are available, accessibility for groups with low digital literacy remains a structural barrier. In addition, the government's communication style tends to be technocratic and less adaptive to the needs of lay society.

Citizen participation in the policy communication process is also found to be limited. Communities generally only receive information once technical activities are underway, without being involved since the planning stage. The involvement of youth groups and local communities in disaster education efforts has not been systematically institutionalized. This condition reflects that government communication strategies still operate linearly, where the government acts as the sender and the public as passive recipients. This strategy aligns with the classical communication model of Shannon and Weaver (1949), which emphasizes message transmission without considering social context or reciprocal interaction.

Such a one-way communication strategy is inconsistent with the principles of development communication, which require participatory, dialogical, and community-based approaches as argued by Servaes (1999). The limited involvement of society in the formulation and evaluation of flood management policies indicates a weak sense of ownership of public policies. In the context of disaster management, policy success is largely determined by active participation and collective awareness.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the communication strategy of flood management policy in Banjarmasin City requires substantial reformulation. The government needs to build an inclusive and adaptive communication ecosystem, strengthen public dialogue spaces, and promote cross-actor collaboration, including community leaders, youth groups, and local media. Such transformation is crucial for ensuring that policies are not only formally communicated but also capable of mobilizing collective participation in sustainable flood management efforts.

Media Framing of Flood Management Policies

Analysis of reports from five major local media outlets—Banjarmasin Post, KalimantanPost, Antara Kalsel, InfoPublik Kalsel, and banjarmasin.klikpost.id—reveals two dominant framing patterns in the communication of flood management policies in Banjarmasin: structural-infrastructure framing and responsive-sympathetic framing.

1. Structural-infrastructure framing positions flooding as a technical issue requiring physical solutions, such as river dredging, embankment construction, or pump installation. For example, the headline "Banjarmasin City Continues Drainage Project at 14 Locations" highlights the absence of infrastructure as the root cause of flooding.
2. Responsive-sympathetic framing emphasizes government presence during emergencies, focusing on logistical assistance, official visits, and the establishment of disaster response teams, as seen in headlines like "Mayor Distributes Aid to Affected Residents."

However, both patterns tend to neglect the participatory, educational, and evaluative dimensions of policy communication. Media narratives are more oriented toward legitimizing government policies rather than offering critical reflection on effectiveness or citizen involvement. This finding aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which suggests that the media does not directly shape what people think, but influences what they think about. By focusing on symbolic government activities, media creates the perception that policies are already running optimally, even though implementation on the ground still faces challenges.

Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) is also relevant here, as the media selectively emphasizes formal government actions while overlooking alternative narratives such as citizen experiences, policy criticism, or long-term mitigation needs. This trend is reinforced by the tendency of media outlets to rely on official press releases with little exploration of social realities. The limited inclusion of independent sources—such as local communities, environmental organizations, or academics—indicates a weak media role as a watchdog and deliberative public forum.

Looking ahead, strengthening policy journalism capacity that is more investigative and participatory is crucial. The media should function not only as a one-way information channel but also as a mediating actor that enables two-way communication between government and citizens in the context of disaster management policies.

Effectiveness of Policy Communication on Public Awareness and Participation

The study finds that flood management policy communication in Banjarmasin City has not been fully effective in fostering public awareness and active participation. Although information has been disseminated through various channels, such as government social media and local media, it has not been accompanied by deep understanding or meaningful community involvement. Communication remains top-down, dominated by informative approaches with minimal public dialogue. Policy messages are often delivered in technocratic language, difficult for lay citizens to comprehend, and fail to accommodate substantive citizen aspirations.

From the perspective of McGuire's Communication-Persuasion Matrix (1989), the effectiveness of public communication ideally consists of six stages: exposure, attention, comprehension, acceptance, retention, and action. The study reveals that communication implementation in Banjarmasin is effective only at the early stages (exposure and partial comprehension), while acceptance, retention, and action have not been achieved optimally.

Key obstacles include the use of technical language, the absence of two-way communication forums, the lack of local communication agents to bridge government and citizens, and a heavy reliance on digital media that does not reach all social groups.

Citizen participation in flood management policies currently appears incidental and informal, such as community clean-up activities during floods and voicing concerns through social media.

Institutionalized involvement of community groups, such as youth organizations or environmental groups, has not been systematically facilitated. These findings reinforce the importance of participatory approaches in the design and implementation of public policy communication.

Therefore, communication reform must move toward a more inclusive, dialogical, and community-based approach. The government needs to establish communication mechanisms that encourage citizen involvement from planning to policy evaluation. Transformative communication should not only convey information but also build shared understanding, strengthen public ownership, and foster sustainable collaboration between government and society.

Challenges of Flood Policy Communication Through Media

This study identifies four major challenges in communicating flood management policies in Banjarmasin City, which are structural, technical, and cultural in nature:

1. Information access inequality remains a serious barrier, especially in peripheral areas such as Basirih, Alalak, and Sungai Lulut. Low internet penetration and limited social media use result in

- unequal and delayed access to policy information. The heavy reliance on digital media is not complemented by inclusive alternative strategies for vulnerable groups.
2. The dominance of top-down communication with technocratic language reinforces the distance between government and citizens. Policy information highlights technical aspects—such as dredging data or pump quantities—without contextualizing them in citizens' daily lives, thereby hindering public understanding and reducing engagement.
 3. Lack of inter-agency integration, such as among BPBD, PUPR, and Kominfo, leads to inconsistent messaging and delays in information dissemination, resulting in fragmented public understanding.
 4. Limited public dialogue spaces hinder meaningful community participation. Policy socialization tends to be informative and one-sided, without room for feedback or evaluative involvement. Local communities that could serve as educational and advocacy partners have not been systematically engaged in policy formulation and implementation.

This phenomenon reflects the absence of a participatory communication approach, as proposed by Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical communication theory and William Dunn's (2018) policy communication perspective, both of which emphasize transparency and reciprocal interaction between government and citizens. The dominance of linear communication patterns results in policies that are less adaptive to community needs, weakening collective disaster mitigation efforts.

For improvement, a collaborative and adaptive communication ecosystem must be developed. This can be achieved by involving local communicators (RT leaders, religious figures, youth), integrating agencies in crafting citizen-friendly narratives, utilizing analog media to reach non-digital areas, and establishing thematic communication forums at the neighborhood level. Through such strategies, policy communication can serve not only as a tool for information dissemination but also as a medium of public empowerment in building resilience against flooding.

3. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the communication strategy for flood management policies in Banjarmasin City is still dominated by informative and technocratic one-way approaches. The city government has utilized various communication channels, both digital and conventional, to disseminate policy information. However, the effectiveness of such communication has not been optimal in fostering public understanding, awareness, and active participation. Low levels of citizen involvement in policy planning and evaluation, the limited availability of public dialogue spaces, and the dominance of media framing oriented toward government legitimacy have become major obstacles in realizing transformative policy communication.

The findings also indicate that policy communication has not fully adopted participatory principles, as emphasized in the two-way symmetrical communication theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and the community-based development communication approach (Servaes, 1999). To enhance the effectiveness of flood management policies, it is necessary to reformulate communication strategies that are more inclusive, adaptive to community needs, and grounded in horizontal dialogue among government, media, and local communities. This is crucial for promoting collaboration, strengthening collective awareness, and ensuring that public policies are genuinely rooted in the needs and aspirations of affected citizens.

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