

Research Article

Interpersonal Meaning in Public Communication Strategy

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Abstract.

The outbreak of unfiltered and uncontrollable information during the COVID-19 pandemic era has given rise to the phenomenon known as the "infodemic." This phenomenon has caused confusion and instilled fear among the public. The infodemic has made it challenging for people to access accurate, credible, and reliable sources of guidance, resulting in public distrust. In response, governments have taken direct action by establishing COVID-19 Task Forces at national and institutional levels. These task forces serve as the frontline in providing directions and information to the public about COVID-19. To fulfill this role, COVID-19 Task Forces in universities have made efforts to design communication strategies that can earn the trust of the community. This study aims to identify the public communication strategies employed by two universities, namely Universitas Islam Bandung (UNISBA) and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). The focus will be on the use of interpersonal meaning in delivering the message. The research utilizes a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection techniques involve in-depth observation interviews, literature review/documentation, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The data analysis employs interpersonal meaning analysis based on Halliday's framework. The results reveal that each university adopts a distinct interpersonal meaning as their public communication strategy to portray their institutional image.

Keywords: Covid-19 task force, interpersonal meaning, public communication strategy

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the declaration of Covid-19 as a worldwide pandemic, the world experienced a dramatic global health and economic crisis. Governments around the world, together with UNICEF and WHO, have been leading efforts to respond to this pandemic so that its spread can be controlled. Various policies were formulated to anticipate the spread of the virus, such as implementing social restrictions, closing offices and institutions, implementing health protocols, and administering vaccines. However,

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Published 30 October 2023

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 5th Sores Conference Committee.



one thing that could not be controlled at that time was the spread of information. It has been confirmed that during the Covid-19 pandemic era, the numbers of information published in every media reached its highest number of this decades. The information about Covid 19 became the most-searched topic in any searching engines in the world, the most shared topic in every media, and it also became people's daily discourse.

The outbreak of unfiltered and uncontrollable information on the COVID-19 led to what so called "infodemic" phenomenon. This phenomenon resulted in confusion and sparked fear among the public. Infodemic makes it difficult for people to get accurate, credible and reliable sources for guidance, which then leads to public distrust. Moreover, the numbers of Hoax spread in social media is out of control. The Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) itself recorded 1,733 hoaxes related to Covid-19 and vaccines during the pandemic. To overcome this issue, the government took a direct action by forming Covid 19 Task Force, starting from the national level and down until the institutional level. This Covid 19 task forces becomes the front line in giving directions and information to the public about Covid 19. They are also responsible to monitor, coordinate, evaluate and report on the progress of the spread of Covid-19 in their institution and the people surroundings. This responsible demands the Covid 19 Task Force to use the right communication strategy in order to acquire people trust, and to direct people to do the right things.

As institutions that keep doing their services during the pandemic era, universities also take part in overseeing the implementation of health protocols, ensuring the availability of supporting facilities for preventing virus transmission, compiling and coordinating procedures for handling COVID-19. In carrying out this role, COVID-19 Task Force in universities make efforts to design a communication strategies that can gain the trust of the community, so that the goals of the institution can be achieved.

Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the public communication strategies carried out by each university so that problems can be identified and solutions are sought from various aspects. This study will focus on the public communication strategy carried out by Universitas Islam Bandung (UNISBA) which is strong with Islamic values and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) as one of the state universities with "education" atmosphere located Bandung.

In theory, a communication strategy can change human behavior, especially on a larger scale through the transfer of new ideas[1] (Cangara, 2017). The success of a communication strategy can be created when it is supported by all communication elements starting from the communicator, message, channel (media), receiver to the effect to achieve communication goals. optimal [1](Cangara, 2017). In formulating a

strategy on communication planning, it is necessary to pay attention to the following steps: 1) Selecting a communicator; 2) Knowing the target audience/audience; 3) Using the right message; 4) Selecting media and 5) Reviewing its impact [2](Wijaya, 2015).

Byrne (in [3]Brannan, 2005: 2) states that strategy is a pattern based on the goals set and planned, the distribution of resources and the interaction of the organization with the market (general audience), competitors and environmental factors. In line with that,[4] asserts that to implement a communication strategy, we must know the tactical steps of the communication strategy in order to achieve the desired goal. According to [5]Ambarawati and Wirya Darma (2021: 97), a good communication strategy can be done with an operational strategy, a persuasive and educative approach strategy and a cooperative approach strategy. All three can be adjusted according to regional conditions and the character of the people. Public communication is the exchange of messages with a number of people within an organization or outside the organization, face to face or through the media [6] (Muhammad, 2008).

The media used in public communication can be speeches at public meetings or demonstrations, blogs, social networking sites, comment fields on websites/blogs, e-mails, mailing lists, SMS, letters, readers' letters, billboards, banners, or anything else. that can reach the public.

The responsibility for communicating with public during a pandemic is shared by federal, provincial, territorial and local governments. A common plan is needed to ensure consistent, coordinated and appropriate communication. The diversity in terms of its size, geography, languages and culture also requires a multifaceted approach so that the right message is delivered at the right time to the right person in the right format. This could be accommodated by designing interpersonal meaning. Interpersonal communication plays a role in forming and maintaining human relations and social relations, and reflects the role of speakers in communication [7] (see Halliday, 2002) we use language to interact with other people and for various purposes, such as influencing someone's attitude or behavior, or even explaining attitudes or our own behavior, conveying information, or asking someone to do something and so on [8](see Thompson, 2000, [9]Simon, 1997).

Lock (1996:9) explains that interpersonal meaning is the way we act to each other through the formation of language, asking for information, getting people to do something, and offering ourselves to do something, and the way we express ourselves. [10]Matthiessen, and Painter (1997: 5) state that interpersonal meaning views language in terms of its function in the process of social interaction. This meaning is manifested in words through what is called MOOD. The MOOD is realized in a speech function.

[7]Halliday (1994: 69) states that there are four main types of speech functions; namely statements (statements), offers (offers), questions (questions), and orders (command). This speech function can be modified to achieve the purpose of communication.

In implementing a communication strategy to convey messages, there are several aspects that need to be considered in the planning stage, namely the goals and expected effects. [11] Gerot and Wignell (1994:13) explain that interpersonal meaning is the meaning that expresses the attitude and judgment of the speaker (speech deliverer). Therefore, the interpersonal meaning of a discourse becomes one of the indicators of communication strategies that build the institution image.

1.1. Method

The subjects of this research are two universities in Bandung, namely Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) and Universitas Islam Bandung (UNISBA). The object of the study is the public communication strategies implemented by the two university through their Covid 19 Task Forces.

The research method used is qualitative research that focuses on the interpersonal meaning used in delivering messages performed by the Covid 19 Task Force in both universities. To sharpen the results of the study, this study was carried out with a case study approach. Data collection techniques in this study were carried out by conducting observations, interviews, and literature studies. Data was collected from the head of task force in UPI and UNISBA, Head of Institutional Relations of Public Relation Section UPI and PR officer Unisba and Instagram account of both universities.

1.2. Results and Discussion

In implementing the concept of public communication, UPI directs the content of the messages conveyed to be educational. This strategy was chosen by UPI because the UPI Covid Task Force team needs to maintain the image of UPI as an "educational university". This is similar to what was conveyed by dr. Lucky as Head of UPI's Covid Task Force. At UPI, the determination of the media used and the formulation of the message content is carried out in coordination with UPI's Public Relations. Some of the media used by the UPI Covid Task Force team are social media used to spread messages quickly, mass media such as broadcasting messages using Megatron, making banners, as well as online and print media such as newspapers and websites. In the process of planning and formulating the message, according to dr. Lucky, communication between

task force members is done through WhatsApp Group. The group then discusses what will be done and what information will be conveyed.

At Unisba, the implementation of public communication is based on scientific information. The delivery of information is more focused on health messages, especially at the beginning of the spread of the covid virus, starting with the prevention and handling of the covid virus. This strategy is carried out as an effort to maintain the image of Unisba as one of the universities that has a Faculty of Medicine, in which there are health workers who are experts in their fields.

In its implementation, the delivery of messages will go through several stages. The contents of the message to be conveyed will be discussed in a meeting with the leaders and related parties. After that, the items of information to be submitted are formulated for approval from various parties. The Unisba task force will work closely with Unisba Public Relations to convey messages in the form of designs, interesting words, appropriate color choices, so that the content will match the character of Unisba. The form and content of the messages that have been approved are then disseminated to all Unisba civitas in the form of circulars or regulations. In addition, Unisba's PR also creates content on an ongoing basis regarding health protocols that must be carried out for prevention.

1.2.1. Interpersonal Meaning in UPI Communication Strategies

Some of the speeches used in information about Covid in UPI social media are The Health Protocol for the Implementation of UPI UTBK, which is followed by another message in the caption.



Figure 1: Information about Covid 19 on UPI Instagram.

“CalonMaruUPI dua hari lagi, tepatnya tanggal17 Mei, UTBK Gelombang 1 akan dilaksanakan lho! Bagaimana nih persiapan kalian menjelang UTBK – SBMPTN 2022 ini? Jangan lupa ketika mengikuti UTBK, pastikan kamu memakai masker dan mematuhi protokol kesehatan ya! Tetap jaga kesehatan dimanapun kalian berada, tetap semangat, dan semoga berhasil dalam melaksanakan UTBK nanti!”

The speech functions used in the message are diverse, namely question, statement and command. However, the mood type used has not undergone much modification. This is usually done to prevent bias or misinterpretation in the delivery of information.

Table 1.

TABLE 1: Identification of Speech Function in information about Covid in UPI social media.

No.	Sentences	MOOD			
		Speech Function	Mood Type	Typical/ typical	Non- typical
1.	<i>Ketentuan Protokol Kesehatan Pelaksanaan UTBK UPI</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>declarative</i>	Non-typical	
2.	<i>CalonMaruUPI, dua hari lagi, tepatnya tanggal17 Mei, UTBK Gelombang 1 akan dilaksanakan lho!</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>declarative</i>	Non-typical	
3.	<i>Bagaimana nih persiapan kalian menjelang UTBK – SBMPTN 2022 ini?</i>	<i>question</i>	<i>interogtaive</i>	Non-typical	
4.	<i>Jangan lupa ketika mengikuti UTBK, pastikan kamu memakai masker dan mematuhi protokol kesehatan ya!</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>imperative</i>	Typical	
5.	<i>Tetap jaga kesehatan dimanapun kalian berada, tetap semangat, dan semoga berhasil dalam melaksanakan UTBK nanti!</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>imperative</i>	Non-typical	

In addition, the message uses several interjection utterances such as *”lho* and *”ya!”* which shows that the communicator, in this case UPI, intends to eliminate power relations with his readers and build an informal and intimate atmosphere. In fact, the message clearly mentions the target audience, namely *“Mahasiswa Baru”* (New Students) who incidentally have subordinate relations with institutions. Furthermore, in the message, the communicator clearly addresses the target audience, namely *“kalian”* and *“kamu”* which shows equality in their relationship. That way, the image that the institution wants to build towards its target audience is a casual relationship that tends to be informal and intimate. This strategy is expected to be more embracing and invite the target reader to do something.

1.2.2. Interpersonal Meaning in UNISBA Communication Strategies

The statement used in information about Covid in UNISBA's social media is "COVID 19 MASIH ADA! TETAP PATUHI PROTOKOL KESEHATAN" (COVID 19 STILL EXISTS! KEEP FOLLOWING THE HEALTH PROTOCOL), which was then added another message in the caption which read "Pandemi belum berakhir. Mari bersama memutus rantai penularan COVID 19 dengan selalu menerapkan protokol kesehatan" (The pandemic is not over yet. Let's together break the chain of transmission of COVID 19 by always implementing health protocols).



Figure 2: Information about Covid 19 on Instagram Unisba.

The speech function used in the message is generally included in the 'statement' category. The function of speech 'statement' is usually realized in the form of declarative sentences. However, in this speech, the function of the "statement" is arranged with the non-typical mood, namely the imperative. This is done to give a firm and persuasive impression to the reader. In addition to providing information, this message also has a purpose to convince and invite the reader to do what it is told.

The message conveyed by UNISBA also eliminates the use of addressing to its readers, which shows that the target of this message is aimed at a wider circle, namely the UNISBA academic community and the surrounding community. This strategy also shows the existence of power relations between communicators, in this case UNISBA, and their target readers. This power relation strengthens to emphasize the reader's belief, behavior and assessment of the communicator. The social power implied in this message can move others, set others up for action or act together.

TABLE 2: Identification of Speech Function in information about Covid in Unisba social media.

No.	Sentences	MOOD		
		Speech Function	Mood Type	Typical/ Non-typical
1.	<i>COVID 19 MASIH ADA!</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>declarative</i>	Non-typical
2.	<i>TETAP PATUHI PROTOKOL KESEHATAN</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>imperative</i>	Typical
3.	<i>Pandemi belum berakhir</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>declarative</i>	Non-typical
4.	<i>Mari bersama memutus rantai penularan COVID 19 dengan selalu menerapkan protokol kesehatan</i>	<i>statement</i>	<i>imperative</i>	Typical

1.3. Conclusion

Based on the discussion that refers to the research questions in the study, Indonesian Universitas Pendidikan and Universitas Islam Bandung, it can be concluded as follows:

1. In implementing the public communication, UPI directs the content of the messages conveyed to be educational. Determination of the media used and the formulation of message content is carried out in coordination with UPI Public Relations. Some of the media used by the UPI Covid Task Force team are social media used to spread messages quickly, mass media such as broadcasting messages using Megatron, making banners and banners, as well as online and print media such as newspapers and websites.
2. UPI build the interpersonal relation with the public by putting the institution as an "educational university" with an educative atmosphere. In addition, UPI use communication strategies that tend to be casual, informal and intimate, so that they can be more embracing and invite the public to do what is the institution's goal.
3. The implementation of the public communication by Unisba is based on scientific information. The delivery of information is more focused on health messages, prevention and handling of the covid virus. This strategy is carried out more in form of actions since universities that has a Faculty of Medicine, in which there are health workers who are experts in their fields. In addition, Unisba also creates content on an ongoing basis in social media regarding health protocols that must be carried out for prevention.
4. The interpersonal meaning in message conveyed by UNISBA also emphasized the existence of power relations with the community, which positioned the institution as a leader (priest). This strategy shows the image of Unisba as a trustworthy

and reliable institution, which is able to mobilize others, encourage others to make actions together.

Acknowledgement

The researcher expressed gratitude to Head of Institutional Relations of Public Relation Section UPI, Head of Covid 19 Task Force UPI, Vice Rector 2 Unisba, Prof. Dr. Atih Rohaeti Dariah, SE., M.Si, Komunikasi Informasi dan Promosi (Kominpro) Unisba team (Head of Public Relations Unisba, Head of the Promotion and Social Media Section, Head of the Public Relations and Protocol Section, Head of the Documentation and Publication section), M.E. Fuady, M.Si., PhD Cand., and all parties who have assisted the implementation of activities in the research "Interpersonal Meaning in Public Communication Strategy"

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