

# COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE VILLAGE HEAD IN IMPROVING THE POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE VILLAGE GOVERNMENT OF GUNUNG TUA TONGA, PADANG BOLAK DISTRICT, NORTH PADANG LAWAS REGENCY

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**Abstract.** This study aims to analyze the communication strategy of the Village Head in improving the positive image of the village government of Gunung Tua Tonga, Padang Bolak District, North Padang Lawas Regency, as well as to identify the obstacles faced in implementing the communication strategy. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation with informants consisting of the village head, village officials, the Village Consultative Body (BPD), and the community. The data analysis technique uses an interactive model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, as well as testing the validity of the data through source triangulation. The results of the study show that the communication strategies implemented by the Village Head of Gunung Tua Tonga include the use of print media such as leaflets and invitations, the utilization of social media such as WhatsApp Groups, and direct communication through regular meetings and community activities. In addition, collaboration with the BPD and village officials is also an important part in conveying information to the community. These communication strategies have proven to be able to improve the positive image of the village government through information transparency, persuasive communication, and community involvement. However, in its implementation, there are several obstacles, such as differences in community perceptions, limited understanding, and the potential for miscommunication. To overcome these obstacles, the village head applies a dialogical approach, mediation, and increases the intensity of direct communication with the community. Based on Leadership Communication Theory and Image Formation Theory, it can be concluded that the success of building a positive image is highly influenced by the effectiveness of communication carried out by the leader.

**Keywords:** communication strategy, leadership communication, positive image, village government

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental element in the administration of government, particularly at the village level, which plays a strategic role as the front line in public service delivery and community development. Effective communication enables governments to convey policies, align public understanding, and foster citizen engagement in governance processes (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2012; Porumbescu, 2016). The success of a village government is therefore not only determined by the policies it produces, but also by how those policies are communicated to the community. In this context, the village head as a leader has a central role as the main communicator who is responsible for conveying information, building trust, and encouraging community participation in village development (Men, 2014; Van Wart, 2013).

However, in practice, various communication problems are still frequently encountered between the village government and the community, such as a lack of information transparency, limited space for public participation, and misunderstandings in message delivery. These challenges can weaken public trust and influence perceptions of government performance,

potentially leading to the formation of a negative institutional image (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2012). In fact, a positive image is a crucial asset for governance, as it contributes to legitimacy, strengthens public trust, and enhances the effectiveness of development programs (Carpenter, 2010; Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012).

Gunung Tua Tonga Village, Padang Bolak District, North Padang Lawas Regency, represents a community with diverse social and economic characteristics. Such diversity requires communication strategies that are effective, inclusive, and adaptive so that information can be distributed evenly across different segments of society (Norris, 2011; Yang & Holzer, 2006). However, based on observed phenomena, there remains a communication gap between the village head and the community, which has the potential to influence public perceptions and the overall image of the village government.

From the perspective of Leadership Communication Theory, communication is at the core of the leadership process, where leaders are expected to deliver messages clearly, build trust-based relationships, and foster participatory two-way communication (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Meanwhile, Image Formation Theory suggests that institutional image is shaped by public perceptions, which

are influenced by information exposure, personal experiences, and continuous interaction with the institution (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Therefore, the communication strategy of the village head plays a crucial role in shaping and enhancing the positive image of village governance.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the communication strategy of the village head in improving the positive image of the Gunung Tua Tonga Village government and to identify the obstacles faced in implementing such strategies. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of communication studies, particularly in the field of leadership communication, and practically as an evaluative reference for village governments in improving communication effectiveness with the community.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication strategies of the Village Head in improving the positive image of the village government, as well as the obstacles encountered in the process. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for exploring social phenomena contextually and interpreting meanings based on participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This method allows the researcher to capture complex communication dynamics within the village governance context.

The research was conducted in Gunung Tua Tonga Village, Padang Bolak District, North Padang Lawas Regency. The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling techniques, in which informants are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). The Village Head served as the key informant, while village officials, members of the Village Consultative Body (BPD), and community members were selected as supporting informants. The selection was based on their direct involvement in the communication processes within village governance.

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to directly examine communication activities conducted by the village head, while in-depth interviews were employed to obtain detailed and rich information from informants (Patton, 2015). Documentation served as supporting data in the form of archives, photographs of activities, and official village documents. The use of multiple data collection techniques enhances the comprehensiveness of qualitative findings (Yin, 2018).

The data analysis technique uses an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, which are conducted simultaneously and continuously throughout the research process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This model enables researchers to systematically organize, interpret, and draw meaningful conclusions from qualitative data.

To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing data obtained from various

informants such as the village head, village officials, and the community. Triangulation is an important strategy in qualitative research to enhance credibility and minimize bias by cross-verifying information from different sources (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018; Patton, 2015).

In this study, the triangulation used is source triangulation, which involves comparing data from informants with different roles, such as the village head as the key informant, village officials and BPD members as supporting informants, and the community as recipients of information. The implementation of triangulation is carried out by comparing interview results regarding communication strategies with the perspectives of different stakeholders, as well as examining community perceptions of communication effectiveness and the image of the village government.

Furthermore, the data are strengthened through direct observation of communication activities such as village meetings and social interactions, as well as documentation in the form of archives or evidence of activities. Through this triangulation process, the researcher is able to obtain a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies of the village head.

Thus, data triangulation enables the researcher to ensure that the findings are valid, consistent, and reliable in explaining how the positive image of the village government is constructed within the community (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Communication Strategy of the Village Head in Improving the Positive Image of the Village Government of Gunung Tua Tonga, Padang Bolak District, North Padang Lawas Regency**

The research was conducted at the Gunung Tua Tonga Village Office located in Padang Bolak District, North Padang Lawas Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation to obtain comprehensive information regarding the communication strategies used by the Village Head in building a positive image of the village government. The data were then analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques to draw meaningful conclusions. This multi-method approach is consistent with qualitative research practices that emphasize data triangulation to enhance the credibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The discussion focuses on two main aspects: (1) the communication strategies implemented by the Village Head in improving the positive image of the village government, and (2) the obstacles encountered in implementing these strategies. The findings indicate that communication plays a central role in governance, particularly in ensuring that policies, programs, and activities are clearly understood by the community. This is in line with previous studies which highlight that effective communication is essential for increasing transparency, accountability, and public trust in government institutions (Moynihan et al., 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014).

Based on the interview results, the Village Head actively involves village officials, including the Village Secretary,

Heads of Affairs (Kaur), and Section Heads (Kasi), in planning and implementing village programs. In addition, the Village Consultative Body (BPD) is also involved as a strategic partner in decision-making processes. This collaborative approach reflects participatory leadership practices, which have been shown to enhance communication effectiveness and strengthen community trust (Van Wart, 2013; Yang & Holzer, 2006).

Furthermore, the role of the village treasurer as a “guardian of financial integrity” contributes significantly to building a positive image through transparent and accountable financial management. Transparency in governance has been widely recognized as a key factor influencing public perception and trust (Kim & Lee, 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014).

The findings reveal that the communication strategies implemented by the Village Head of Gunung Tua Tonga are effective and have received positive responses from the community. These strategies include the use of print media such as leaflets and invitations distributed in public spaces, the utilization of social media platforms such as WhatsApp Groups, and direct communication through meetings and community activities such as gotong royong. In addition, regular face-to-face communication is conducted to facilitate dialogue and exchange ideas with the community. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that the integration of traditional and digital communication channels enhances information dissemination and community engagement (Porumbescu, 2016; Men, 2014).

The involvement of the BPD and the use of regular meetings also demonstrate the importance of two-way communication in governance. Two-way communication allows leaders to not only deliver information but also receive feedback from the community, thereby fostering mutual understanding and participation (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). The positive response from the sub-district (Kecamatan), particularly in supporting programs such as PKK, further indicates that the communication strategy has been effectively implemented and recognized by external stakeholders.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Leadership Communication Theory, which emphasizes that effective leadership is closely linked to the ability to communicate clearly, build relationships, and influence stakeholders (Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). The Village Head’s approach reflects persuasive, transparent, and participatory communication, which are essential elements of effective leadership communication.

In addition, the findings are also aligned with Image Formation Theory, which suggests that the image of an institution is shaped by public perceptions influenced by information, experiences, and interactions (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). The consistent use of clear communication, transparency, and community engagement by the Village Head contributes to the formation of a positive image of the village government. This supports previous research indicating that effective communication strategies play a significant role in shaping public perception and institutional reputation (Carpenter, 2010; Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Thus, the results of this study reinforce the argument that leadership communication serves as a key mechanism in building a positive government image. The integration of various communication channels, active stakeholder involvement, and transparency in governance practices collectively contribute to strengthening public trust and enhancing the overall image of the village government.

### **Obstacles Faced by the Village Head of Gunung Tua Tonga in Implementing Communication Strategies**

In carrying out duties within any institution, various obstacles inevitably arise in implementing communication strategies. The efforts undertaken by the Village Head of Gunung Tua Tonga in governance highlight the complexity of communication processes at the village level. These challenges are important to examine, as they influence not only the effectiveness of communication but also the overall image of the village government. Previous studies have emphasized that communication barriers are common in public sector organizations, particularly in local governance contexts where diverse community characteristics exist (Kim & Lee, 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014).

One of the primary obstacles identified in this study is the difference in perspectives or perceptions among community members. Each individual possesses unique experiences and viewpoints, which influence how information is interpreted. These differences often arise due to unequal communication experiences between the village head and the community. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that variations in perception and background can hinder effective communication and create gaps in understanding between leaders and citizens (Yang & Holzer, 2006; Men, 2014).

Furthermore, misunderstandings in communication emerge as a significant challenge. Ineffective message delivery or lack of clarity can lead to misinterpretation, which may trigger conflict or reduce public trust. As highlighted in Leadership Communication Theory, leaders are required to deliver messages clearly and foster mutual understanding to ensure effective communication (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). When this is not achieved, communication becomes less effective, thereby limiting the ability of leaders to mobilize community participation and support (Moynihan et al., 2012).

Another obstacle identified is the variation in educational background and the level of community participation. Limited understanding among some community members can hinder the acceptance of information, while low participation reduces the effectiveness of two-way communication. Previous studies have shown that limited access to information and differences in socio-economic backgrounds can significantly affect public engagement and trust in government communication (Porumbescu, 2016; Norris, 2011).

In response to these challenges, the Village Head of Gunung Tua Tonga applies several strategies to overcome communication barriers. One of the key approaches is the use of open dialogue and mediation. Through direct communication, discussions, and regular meetings, the village head seeks to clarify information, align perceptions, and resolve misunderstandings. This approach is consistent with participatory communication models, which emphasize dialogue, inclusiveness, and collaboration as essential

elements in effective governance (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Van Wart, 2013).

Additionally, the village head often repeats explanations and ensures that information is delivered clearly to all community members. This effort reflects the importance of message reinforcement in communication processes, as repeated information can improve understanding and reduce ambiguity. Strengthening communication through meetings and social interactions also allows for feedback from the community, which is crucial in building mutual trust and improving communication effectiveness (Men, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are closely related to Leadership Communication Theory and Image Formation Theory. Leadership Communication Theory emphasizes that effective leadership depends on the ability to communicate clearly, build relationships, and facilitate two-way communication (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). The obstacles identified in this study, such as differences in perception and limited participation, illustrate the challenges leaders face in achieving these communication objectives.

Meanwhile, Image Formation Theory explains that the image of an institution is shaped by public perceptions, which are influenced by the quality of information and interactions experienced by the community (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Communication barriers such as misunderstandings and lack of transparency can lead to negative perceptions of the village government. Conversely, when these barriers are effectively addressed through clear, consistent, and participatory communication, a positive image can be established. This finding supports previous research indicating that communication effectiveness is a key determinant of institutional reputation and public trust (Carpenter, 2010; Kim & Rhee, 2011).

Thus, the results of this study demonstrate that obstacles in communication strategies not only affect the leadership communication process but also have a direct impact on the formation of the village government's image. Therefore, the ability of the village head to identify, manage, and resolve communication barriers is essential in maintaining leadership effectiveness and building a sustainable positive image within the community.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research and discussion regarding the communication strategy of the Village Head of Gunung Tua Tonga in implementing communication strategies, it can be concluded that the communication strategy applied has been successful in improving the positive image of the village government and has received positive responses from the community. The approach taken includes the use of print media by distributing brochures directly or placing invitations in shops, as well as utilizing social media such as WhatsApp groups. In addition, collaboration with the Village Consultative Body (BPD) in activities such as meetings, community service (gotong royong), and other programs has strengthened the effectiveness of communication. The Village Head also utilizes mass media, both within and outside the village, to ensure that information and government programs are widely disseminated to the community. However, in its implementation, the Village

Head of Gunung Tua Tonga also faces several challenges in carrying out communication strategies. Like any organization, obstacles arise in the execution of government programs, which require proper handling to maintain stability and effectiveness. One of the main challenges is the need for mediation and communication discussions regarding existing constraints and information. To address these challenges, collective discussions are conducted involving not only the village head but also village officials, sub-district authorities, and community leaders. Through this collaborative approach, communication barriers can be minimized, enabling the village government to maintain effective communication while continuing to build and sustain a positive image within the community.

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