



COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE NEI-DT FOUNDATION IN BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST THROUGH A COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTHCARE SERVICE PROGRAM

STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI YAYASAN NEI-DT DALAM MEMBANGUN KEPERCAYAAN MASYARAKAT MELALUI PROGRAM LAYANAN KESEHATAN BERBASIS KOMUNITAS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the communication strategy employed by the NEI-DT Foundation in building community trust through a community-based healthcare service program in Tritunggal Hamlet, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The study is motivated by the importance of organizational communication strategies in enhancing public participation and program legitimacy within rural communities characterized by limited access to information, geographical constraints, and community-oriented social structures. Adopting a constructivist paradigm, this research employs a qualitative approach using an intrinsic case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis involving seven informants, including foundation representatives, community leaders, and program beneficiaries. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the foundation's communication strategy involves identifying community characteristics, developing simple and contextually relevant messages, utilizing a combination of digital and traditional communication channels, and engaging local leaders as communication intermediaries. Program information is disseminated through village heads, neighborhood leaders, women's community groups (PKK), social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, and mosque loudspeaker announcements. The study further demonstrates that the communication pattern reflects the Two-Step Flow of Communication model, in which community leaders function as opinion leaders who mediate organizational messages before they reach the wider community. Community trust is cultivated through the social legitimacy of local leaders, interpersonal communication, direct experiences with program benefits, and the consistency of services provided by the foundation. The study concludes that the effectiveness of community-based organizational communication strategies in rural settings is determined not only by message content and media utilization but also by the organization's ability to establish interpersonal relationships, adapt communication practices to local cultural contexts, and actively involve community leaders within the communication network. This research contributes to the advancement of community-based organizational communication studies by providing empirical insights into trust-building processes in rural community development programs.



Keywords : Communication Strategy, Community Trust, Community Communication, Opinion Leaders, Rural Communication.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis strategi komunikasi Yayasan NEI-DT dalam membangun kepercayaan masyarakat melalui program layanan kesehatan berbasis komunitas di Dusun Tritunggal, Banyuasin, Sumatera Selatan. Penelitian dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya strategi komunikasi organisasi dalam meningkatkan partisipasi dan legitimasi program sosial pada masyarakat pedesaan yang memiliki keterbatasan akses informasi, kondisi geografis tertentu, serta struktur sosial yang masih berbasis komunitas. Penelitian ini menggunakan paradigma konstruktivis dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus intrinsik. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi non-partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen terhadap tujuh informan yang terdiri atas pihak yayasan, tokoh masyarakat, dan penerima manfaat program. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi komunikasi yayasan dilakukan melalui identifikasi karakteristik masyarakat, penyusunan pesan yang sederhana dan relevan, pemanfaatan kombinasi media digital dan tradisional, serta keterlibatan tokoh lokal sebagai mediator komunikasi. Informasi program disampaikan melalui kepala dusun, ketua RT, kelompok PKK, media sosial WhatsApp dan Facebook, serta pengumuman menggunakan pengeras suara masjid. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pola komunikasi yang terbentuk mengikuti *Two-step Flow of Communication*, di mana tokoh masyarakat berperan sebagai *opinion leader* yang memediasi pesan organisasi sebelum diterima oleh masyarakat. Kepercayaan masyarakat terbentuk melalui legitimasi sosial tokoh lokal, komunikasi interpersonal, pengalaman langsung menerima manfaat program, dan konsistensi pelayanan yang diberikan yayasan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan strategi komunikasi organisasi berbasis komunitas pada masyarakat pedesaan tidak hanya ditentukan oleh isi pesan dan penggunaan media komunikasi, tetapi juga oleh kemampuan organisasi membangun hubungan interpersonal, menyesuaikan komunikasi dengan budaya lokal, serta melibatkan tokoh masyarakat sebagai bagian dari jaringan komunikasi komunitas. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada pengembangan kajian strategi komunikasi organisasi berbasis komunitas dalam konteks masyarakat pedesaan.

Kata Kunci : Strategi Komunikasi, Kepercayaan Masyarakat, Komunikasi Komunitas, *Opinion Leader*, Komunikasi Pedesaan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication strategy plays a crucial role in determining the success of community-based social programs, particularly in rural communities characterized by distinct social, cultural, and geographical conditions compared to urban societies. Within the context of community development, communication is no longer understood merely as a process of information dissemination, but also as an effort to foster social relationships, legitimacy, participation, and public trust toward organizations implementing development programs. The World Health Organization emphasizes that the success of community-based programs is strongly influenced by community engagement, interpersonal relationships, and an organization's ability to establish communication that is responsive to local social conditions (World Health Organization, 2024). Communication strategy is defined as the planned and systematic use of communication to achieve organizational objectives through the integrated management of messages, media, audiences, and social relationships (Hallahan et al., 2007).

In practice, organizations implementing community-based programs frequently encounter communication challenges, including limited access to information, low levels of community participation, cultural differences, and distrust toward external actors. These conditions indicate that communication strategies cannot be applied uniformly but must be adapted to the social structure and



interaction patterns of the target community. Effective communication strategies prioritize audience understanding, communicator selection, message design, and the use of appropriate communication channels as key elements in strengthening relationships between organizations and their publics (John Middleton, 1980). Research on community-based communication strategies has continued to expand across various fields, including social development and public health programs. Previous studies have shown that the involvement of community leaders enhances the effectiveness of communication in village-level stunting prevention programs (Yunus et al., 2021). Likewise, the selection of credible communicators and communication media that align with community characteristics significantly influences the success of participatory health programs (Saputro & Nurhayati, 2025). Furthermore, peneliti Stover et al. found that community-based communication strategies involving local social networks have a significant impact on the success of community development initiatives (Stover et al., 2024).

Despite these developments, most previous studies have primarily focused on health communication, health promotion, or governmental communication initiatives. Research specifically examining the communication strategies of non-governmental social organizations in building community trust through community-based programs remains relatively limited. In addition, many studies continue to position communities as passive recipients of messages rather than active participants within social communication networks that influence program outcomes. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of the community-based healthcare service program implemented by the NEI-DT Foundation in Tritunggal Hamlet, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra. Tritunggal Hamlet is a rural area with limited access to public services and communication infrastructure. Under such conditions, program dissemination cannot rely solely on digital media but requires interpersonal communication approaches and the involvement of local leaders who possess strong social legitimacy within the community.

Based on preliminary observations, the foundation's communication strategy incorporates a combination of interpersonal communication, group communication, digital media, and traditional communication channels. Program information is disseminated through the hamlet head, neighborhood leaders (RT), women's community organizations (PKK), WhatsApp and Facebook social media platforms, and public announcements delivered through mosque loudspeakers. This approach suggests that the effectiveness of organizational communication at the community level depends not only on message content but also on the organization's ability to adapt its communication strategy to the community's social structure. The phenomenon further indicates that communication strategies in community-based programs cannot be separated from the process of building social trust. In rural contexts, trust in development programs is more likely to emerge when communication is mediated by social actors who possess interpersonal closeness, cultural legitimacy, and strong social ties within the community. This perspective is consistent with the concept of community engagement, which positions public participation, social relationships, and interpersonal communication as fundamental elements of successful community-based initiatives.

Against this background, this study aims to analyze the communication strategy employed by the NEI-DT Foundation in building community trust through its community-based healthcare service program in Tritunggal Hamlet.

This study offers three main contributions. First, it focuses on the communication strategies of a non-governmental social organization within the context of rural community development. Second, it integrates interpersonal communication, group communication, and digital communication within a community-based communication framework. Third, it demonstrates that the effectiveness of organizational communication strategies at the community level is strongly influenced by the social legitimacy of local leaders and the closeness of interpersonal relationships embedded within rural social.



2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as a subjective construction shaped through individual experiences, social interactions, and interpretations within specific social contexts. The constructivist paradigm is considered appropriate because the study does not seek to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of communication strategies. Instead, it aims to understand how the communication strategies implemented by the NEI-DT Foundation are interpreted, experienced, and enacted in the process of building community trust in a community-based healthcare service program in Tritunggal Hamlet, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2024).

This study employs a qualitative approach because it seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of communication phenomena through the exploration of experiences, social practices, interaction patterns, and meanings constructed by actors involved in community-based programs. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for examining complex social realities that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurements or statistical analysis alone (Tracy, 2020).

The approach was selected to provide a contextualized understanding of how organizational communication strategies are implemented within rural social structures characterized by distinctive cultural values, geographical conditions, and communication practices. Through a qualitative inquiry, the study is able to explore the perspectives and experiences of foundation representatives, community leaders, and program beneficiaries, thereby revealing how communication processes contribute to the development of trust within the local community. Furthermore, the qualitative approach enables a comprehensive examination of the interactions, relationships, and social dynamics that shape the implementation and acceptance of the community-based healthcare service program in Tritunggal Hamlet, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra.

This study employs an intrinsic case study design. The method was selected because the research focuses on an in-depth exploration of a specific case, namely the communication strategies of a non-governmental social organization in building community trust through a community-based healthcare service program. An intrinsic case study enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon within its real-life context and to examine the complex interactions between organizational communication practices and the surrounding social environment (Yin, 2024).

Tritunggal Hamlet was selected as the research site because it recorded the highest level of participation in the NEI-DT Foundation's healthcare service program during 2024, with 338 beneficiaries out of a total population of 1,245 residents. Furthermore, the area exhibits distinctive social characteristics, including a hierarchical social structure, limited access to formal healthcare services, and a strong reliance on local leaders as primary sources of community information.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that involves the deliberate selection of individuals based on their relevance, experience, and direct involvement in the phenomenon under investigation. The study involved seven informants, consisting of the Executive Director of the NEI-DT Foundation, a healthcare program facilitator, a communication and publication officer, the hamlet head, a neighborhood leader (RT head), and two beneficiaries of the healthcare service program. This composition was intended to capture diverse perspectives from organizational representatives, social intermediaries, and community members as recipients of communication messages. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide developed based on the concepts of communication strategy and the Two-Step Flow of Communication model. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and reliability (Clarke, 2024).

In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was conducted to examine organizational communication practices, the use of communication media, and the dynamics of social relationships between the foundation and community members. Document analysis was also undertaken using administrative records and supporting documents related to the healthcare service program. These



documents served to complement and validate findings obtained through interviews and observations as part of the data triangulation process (Morgan, 2022). Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the final stage, empirical findings were interpreted in relation to communication strategy concepts and the Two-Step Flow of Communication framework to explain how organizational messages were mediated by local community leaders before being received and interpreted by the broader community..

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the NEI-DT Foundation's communication strategy for building community trust began with the identification of the social characteristics of the Tritunggal Hamlet community. Prior to determining the communication approach for its community-based healthcare program, the foundation mapped the demographic, cultural, and social activity patterns of local residents. Interview data revealed that the majority of program beneficiaries were older adults, housewives, and children, while working-age men were less involved due to their daytime plantation activities. According to the Foundation's Executive Director, the most active participants in healthcare services were individuals aged over 40 years. This statement was supported by the hamlet head, who confirmed that most participants consisted of women, children, and elderly residents.

In addition to social and demographic characteristics, the foundation identified geographical conditions as an important factor in designing its communication strategy. Tritunggal Hamlet has limited access to formal healthcare facilities, requiring approximately 30 minutes of travel under inadequate road conditions. Consequently, residents place high value on healthcare services that are accessible, nearby, and supported by clear information regarding service schedules and locations. These findings suggest that organizational communication strategies begin not with media selection but with audience mapping to understand community needs, social conditions, and access barriers.

The study further found that the foundation's communication messages were informative, educational, and persuasive in nature. Information disseminated to the community included service schedules, healthcare locations, available medical examinations, and the benefits of free healthcare services. Educational messages focused on topics such as hypertension, diabetes, healthy eating habits, and hygienic lifestyles. A program physician explained that healthcare activities were not limited to medical examinations but also incorporated health education regarding healthy living and dietary practices. One beneficiary stated that the community highly appreciated the program because it provided free access to a variety of healthcare services that were otherwise difficult to obtain.

The findings also reveal that communication messages were adapted to local community characteristics. The foundation employed simple and direct language and, in certain situations, used the local Javanese dialect to facilitate understanding among elderly residents and rural community members. Such linguistic adaptation reduced communication barriers and enhanced audience comprehension. This finding highlights that effective communication depends not only on message content but also on the organization's ability to adapt messages to local cultural and linguistic contexts.

One of the study's major findings is that information dissemination followed a Two-Step Flow of Communication pattern. Information regarding healthcare services was not communicated directly from the foundation to residents. Instead, it was first delivered to village heads, hamlet heads, neighborhood leaders (RT), women's groups (PKK), and community leaders before being relayed to the broader community. The Executive Director explained that communication was initiated through village and hamlet authorities before reaching residents. Likewise, RT leaders stated that information received from the hamlet head was subsequently distributed to households within their respective neighborhoods. One beneficiary reported that they first learned about the healthcare program through the hamlet head.

These findings demonstrate that community members tend to place greater trust in information conveyed by local figures possessing social legitimacy than in information communicated directly by



organizations. Within rural communities, local leaders function as opinion leaders who mediate organizational messages before they are accepted by the public. The roles of hamlet heads, RT leaders, PKK members, and religious leaders are particularly important because they maintain close interpersonal relationships, strong social networks, and high levels of credibility within the community.

The study also found that the foundation employed a combination of communication channels. Digital media included WhatsApp and Facebook, while traditional channels involved announcements through mosque loudspeakers. In addition, interpersonal communication was conducted through door-to-door visits and informal word-of-mouth interactions among residents. According to the hamlet head, program information was typically shared through WhatsApp and Facebook groups and subsequently announced through mosque loudspeakers. RT leaders added that residents without mobile phones or social media access were informed directly through personal visits.

The use of multiple communication channels illustrates that digital communication in rural settings does not replace traditional communication but rather complements it. Interpersonal communication remains the most trusted form because it facilitates direct interaction, clarification of information, and stronger social relationships between communicators and community members. These findings suggest that community-based communication strategies require flexibility in media use according to social conditions and levels of technological accessibility.

The effectiveness of the foundation's communication strategy was reflected in increasing community participation in healthcare services. During the initial stages of program implementation, some residents expressed skepticism and questioned the foundation's motives for providing free healthcare services. A program physician noted that several residents questioned the foundation's relationship with mining companies and the purpose of the healthcare initiative. However, once communication was facilitated through trusted community leaders and residents experienced the direct benefits of the program, participation increased significantly. Internal foundation data show that the healthcare program reached 634 beneficiaries in total, with Tritunggal Hamlet accounting for 338 beneficiaries, representing approximately 53.3% of all program participants in 2024.

The Executive Director further explained that community members eventually began actively requesting information about future healthcare service schedules from both foundation staff and local leaders. This finding indicates that trust was not built through formal media campaigns but through direct experience with program benefits, service consistency, and the credibility of local leaders involved in the communication process. The results underscore the importance of interpersonal relationships and social legitimacy in fostering public trust toward organizations.

Despite the effectiveness of the communication strategy, several communication barriers were identified. The first concerned communication infrastructure limitations, particularly power outages that disrupted telephone signals and internet access. The hamlet head explained that digital communication became ineffective whenever electricity outages occurred. The second barrier was related to age, particularly among elderly residents who experienced hearing and visual impairments that limited their ability to receive health-related information. Program physicians also noted that age-related sensory limitations affected communication effectiveness among older beneficiaries.

The study additionally identified cultural and linguistic barriers. Differences in language use between healthcare personnel and local residents occasionally hindered the effective transmission of information. Another challenge stemmed from occupational factors, as many residents worked in plantation sectors and were unable to attend healthcare services according to scheduled times. One resident explained that participation often declined during harvest seasons because community members prioritized plantation work.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the NEI-DT Foundation's communication strategy for building community trust relies on an integrated combination of interpersonal communication, group communication, digital media, and traditional communication channels adapted to the social structure of rural communities. Communication effectiveness is influenced not only by message content but



also by the social legitimacy of local leaders, interpersonal proximity, direct community experiences with the program, and the organization's ability to adapt its communication strategy to local social and geographical conditions.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the NEI-DT Foundation's communication strategy for building community trust was not implemented through direct mass information dissemination but through communication processes adapted to the social characteristics of a rural community. This finding suggests that community-based organizational communication strategies require a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, and geographical conditions of the target community before communication messages are delivered. In the present study, the identification of community groups, including older adults, housewives, and residents with limited access to healthcare services, indicates that the foundation conducted audience mapping as an integral component of its communication strategy. According to Middleton (2019), effective communication strategies begin with a thorough understanding of audience characteristics so that messages, media, and communicators can be tailored to audience needs. The findings further indicate that community based communication strategies should consider not only demographic factors but also occupational patterns, geographical conditions, and local cultural contexts as part of the communication planning process.

The study also reveals that communication messages were designed to be simple, relevant, and responsive to the immediate needs of community members. Information concerning healthcare schedules, available medical examinations, and the benefits of free healthcare services was communicated using accessible language and, in some situations, the local Javanese dialect. The use of local language and interpersonal communication demonstrates that the effectiveness of organizational communication depends not only on message content but also on the communicator's ability to adapt messages to the cultural context of the target audience. These findings are consistent with Source Credibility Theory developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951), which posits that message acceptance is strongly influenced by the credibility of the source and the extent to which messages align with recipients' experiences and needs. Within rural communities, the use of local language and cultural familiarity strengthens message legitimacy, thereby increasing the likelihood that organizational information will be accepted and understood by community members.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that the dissemination of healthcare program information followed the Two-Step Flow of Communication model. Information originating from the foundation was not transmitted directly to community members but was first communicated to village leaders, hamlet heads, neighborhood leaders (RT), women's community groups (PKK), and other local community figures before reaching residents. This communication pattern indicates that local leaders function as opinion leaders who mediate organizational messages prior to their acceptance by the broader community. The findings support the theory proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz (1955), which argues that public messages become more effective when mediated by individuals who possess social influence and strong interpersonal relationships within specific communities. In the context of this study, hamlet heads, neighborhood leaders, and PKK representatives functioned not only as information disseminators but also as providers of social legitimacy for the healthcare program implemented by the foundation.

At the same time, this study offers an extension of the Two-Step Flow of Communication framework within the context of rural communication. While previous studies, such as Zheng, Song, and Zhang (2022), examined opinion leaders within the context of social media influencers and digital communication environments, the present study demonstrates that opinion leadership in rural communities remains deeply rooted in local social structures and interpersonal relationships. Communication influence is not generated through digital popularity but through social legitimacy, cultural proximity, and long-established social relationships embedded in everyday community life. These findings suggest that the Two-Step Flow of Communication remains highly relevant in the



digital era, particularly in rural communities that continue to maintain community-based communication structures.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the foundation implemented its communication strategy through a combination of digital media, traditional media, and interpersonal communication. WhatsApp and Facebook were utilized to accelerate information dissemination among community leaders, while mosque loudspeaker announcements, door-to-door communication, and informal word-of-mouth interactions were employed to reach residents with limited digital access. These findings indicate that digital communication does not replace traditional communication in rural settings; rather, the two operate in a complementary manner. In this context, organizational communication can be characterized as a multi-channel communication strategy involving the simultaneous use of multiple communication channels adapted to the characteristics of the target community. This finding supports Manyozo's (2012) argument that community-based development communication requires the integration of modern media and interpersonal communication to ensure effective message delivery within local communities.

The study also found that the effectiveness of the foundation's communication strategy was reflected in increasing community participation in healthcare services. During the initial phase of implementation, some residents expressed skepticism toward the foundation's activities. However, after communication was facilitated through trusted local leaders and community members began experiencing the direct benefits of the healthcare program, participation levels increased substantially. This finding suggests that community trust is not established solely through persuasive communication but through social experiences, interpersonal relationships, and consistent organizational performance. The findings are consistent with Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes that social trust emerges through reciprocal relationships, repeated interactions, and social networks developed within communities (Putnam, 2000). In this study, community leaders functioned as bridging social capital, connecting the foundation with local residents and facilitating a more effective trust-building process.

Despite the overall effectiveness of the communication strategy, several communication barriers were identified. These included limitations in communication infrastructure caused by power outages and internet disruptions, physical limitations among elderly residents that affected information reception, language differences between healthcare personnel and community members, and scheduling constraints arising from plantation-based occupational activities. These findings suggest that community-based communication strategies in rural areas require greater flexibility in media utilization, stronger cultural adaptation, and more intensive interpersonal communication than organizational communication strategies commonly applied in urban settings. Therefore, the effectiveness of organizational communication in rural communities is highly dependent on an organization's ability to adapt its communication practices to the social structures, cultural values, and geographical conditions of the local community.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the NEI-DT Foundation's communication strategy successfully builds community trust through a community-based approach that integrates interpersonal communication, local opinion leaders, digital media, and traditional communication channels. The findings reveal that trust is developed through social legitimacy, interpersonal relationships, direct experiences of program benefits, and consistent service delivery. The dissemination of information follows the Two-Step Flow of Communication model, in which local leaders act as opinion leaders who mediate organizational messages before they reach the community. The study also demonstrates that effective communication in rural communities requires adaptation to local social, cultural, and geographical conditions. Theoretically, the findings confirm the continued relevance of the Two-Step Flow of Communication in rural contexts and highlight the importance of social legitimacy and interpersonal networks in community trust-building processes.



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