
Communication Management in Local Government: Crisis Communication Strategies and Public Relations

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Abstract

This article discusses the vital role of communications management in the local government context, focusing on crisis communications strategies and community relations. This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of local government communication practices in dealing with crises and in establishing good relationships with local communities. Research methods involve interviews with public relations practitioners and stakeholders and online surveys to gather community views. The research results show that local governments have positively tried to convey information, respond quickly, and listen to citizens' views during crises. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in technology such as virtual meetings and text messaging. These findings provide valuable insights into communication management practices in local government and their implications for building transparent and responsive government.

Keywords: *Communication Management, Regional Government, Crisis Communication Strategy, Public Relations, Responsive, Transparent.*

Introduction

Effective communication management in local government has many important and relevant aspects. Understanding why communication management is essential in the local government environment (Mardiyah & Salma, 2021; Jualina et al., 2022). The first thing is the point of Transparency and Accountability. Good communication management allows local governments to be more transparent in their duties. This transparency helps build public trust because citizens can see how policies are made, how public funds are used, and the results achieved. Accountability is also increased because local governments must be accountable to the public for their actions and decisions (Mistar & Dewi, 2017; Saraswati & Afisi, 2022).

Research conducted by Rahmawati (2018) and Sulistiani & Wijaya (2021) emphasizes that matters related to good decision-making taken by regional leaders are crucial for giving focus and developing their role. Effective communication helps local government officials make better decisions. They can collect input from various parties, including citizens, stakeholders, and experts, so the policies are more evidence-based and benefit society. In unpredictable situations, this requires good action in overcoming crises because crises can occur anytime, such as natural disasters, emergencies, or social conflicts. Good communication management is essential in dealing with these situations. With effective communication, local governments can provide accurate information, coordinate responses, and reduce confusion and panic among the public; this follows the results of research conducted by Ulfa et al. (2019) and Najib (2023).

According to research by Hidayat et al. (2023), crisis communication management in the tourism sector in the province of Bali made use of the roles of many stakeholders to build resilience in the industry. A significant part of disaster management efforts, particularly with the Covid-19 pandemic, is communication crisis management. During medical emergencies, information must be delivered quickly and accurately. Bali Province needs cooperation in the crisis communication management process between authorities, traditional elements, and religious components.

Apart from this, it can also be used to form positive public opinion. Local governments need to build a positive image among citizens and stakeholders. With good communication, they can provide information about achievements, initiatives, and policies that benefit Society (Cheng & Lee, 2019). This helps build public support and supports the success of government programs. Good communication will create effective public relations in various social sectors in the long term. Local governments must establish good relations with the community, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and the media. Effective communications management helps build and maintain these relationships, which is essential for supporting government goals and achieving collaborative solutions to complex problems (Kahardja, 2022; Graham et al., 2015).

Legitimacy and legitimacy are also crucial for local governments to pay attention to because the community gives legitimacy to local governments to govern and make decisions on their behalf. Good communication helps maintain this legitimacy, while poor communication can threaten government legitimacy (Bakker et al., 2018; Tian & Yang, 2022). Therefore, communication management is the key to maintaining community support. The points mentioned above have the main objective, namely operational efficiency because effective communication can also increase the operational efficiency of local governments. With good communication between departments and government units, resources can be better allocated, projects can be executed more smoothly, and bureaucracy can be managed more efficiently (Huang et al., 2016; Wulandari, 2019). In order to achieve all these goals, communication management in local government must be based on the principles of professionalism, transparency, fairness, and openness. It is crucial to ensure that local governments can function effectively and provide good services to their communities. The following is a picture of crisis communication to make it easier to understand:

Crisis communications hub



Figure 1. Crisis Communication Hub

Source: Medina & Diaz (2016)

Based on the image above, it can be seen that the Crisis Communication Center is a unit or team dedicated to managing and coordinating communications in emergencies or crises

MINISTRATE

involving specific organizations or entities, such as governments, companies, or other institutions. The Crisis Communication Center aims to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies or crises by providing accurate information and managing the reputation and image of the organization. Here are some of the essential elements of a Crisis Communications Center:

1. **Coordination**
The Crisis Communications Center serves as a coordination center where various sections or divisions within an organization work together to deliver consistent and accurate messages to all stakeholders, including the public, media, employees, and others;
2. **Situation Monitoring**
The Crisis Communications Center carries out active monitoring of emergencies or crises. This may include monitoring social media, news, and other sources of information to understand the latest developments and respond promptly;
3. **Message Drafting**
The team at the Crisis Communication Center is responsible for formulating messages to be conveyed to various stakeholders. These messages must be clear, accurate, and solution-oriented;
4. **Contact with Media**
The Crisis Communications Center interacts with the media to provide appropriate information and manage media coverage during a crisis. This involves reporting information, answering questions, and designing press conferences.
5. **Contact with Stakeholders**
Besides the media, the Crisis Communication Center communicates with other stakeholders, such as authorities, business partners, and the general public. This aims to provide relevant information and minimize uncertainty.
6. **Planning and Drills**
Most organizations serious about crisis communications management have contingency plans and regularly conduct crisis simulation drills. The Crisis Communications Center is involved in planning and coordinating this exercise to ensure readiness to deal with real situations.
7. **Evaluation and Learning**
After the crisis ends, the Crisis Communications Center evaluates to understand what worked and needs improvement. The results of this evaluation can be used to improve preparedness to face future crises.

Crisis Communication is vital in maintaining an organization's reputation and integrity in difficult situations. They must operate quickly, coordinate well, and remain focused on providing correct information, maintaining calm, and overcoming crises effectively (Chen, 2009; Liu & Levenshus, 2017).

For example, when COVID-19 occurred, the poor crisis communication of local governments during the pandemic was apparent. First, there needed to be a delay in conveying important information to the public. When the pandemic hit, there was an urgent need to provide updates as quickly as possible on the spread of the virus, preventive measures, and regulations to be followed. However, in some cases, local governments may need to provide this information quickly, causing confusion among citizens.

The messages conveyed may be unclear or ambiguous. Society needs firm guidance on what to do in crises like this. Lack of clarification about rules, steps to follow, or relevant health information can confuse citizens and impact their ability to comply with required measures. In

addition, coordination between various levels of local government or government agencies can be less effective. This can result in ambiguity and contradictions in the messages conveyed to the public. This lack of coordination can make it difficult for residents to understand the applicable regulations and guidelines.

Transparency in the delivery of information may be lacking. The public wants to know about the development of the pandemic, the number of cases, vaccination rates, and actions taken by the government. Lack of transparency in providing data or adequate explanations can create suspicion and distrust among the public. There needs to be more clarity in considering the community's specific needs. Each community has different needs, such as vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, or those who do not have easy access to information. Pay attention to these needs to ensure some people have sufficient access to the necessary information.

The most important thing is that spreading false information and hoax news is a severe problem. If local governments do not provide reliable sources of information, people may seek information from invalid sources. This could jeopardize efforts to deal with the pandemic and increase the level of confusion in society. In a pandemic like COVID-19, poor crisis communication management can create uncertainty, confusion, and a lack of public trust in local government. Therefore, it is essential to have effective crisis communications management to maintain trust, ensure good understanding, and enable citizens to take appropriate action.

In several sectors, such as preparedness for natural disasters, health policy and health crises, security crises, leadership and coordination, and public relations management, our local government still needs a better index in various regions. In this journal article, these problems can be examined more deeply, using appropriate research methodology, to identify potential improvements in local government communication management.

Method

The research method used in this article includes a qualitative approach through a multiple case study, where the author investigates two different local governments as research subjects. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with government officials, public relations practitioners, and other key stakeholders and through analysis of policy documents and official communications. In addition, online surveys were also used to gather views from local communities about the effectiveness of local government communications in crises. These data were then analyzed thematically to identify communication strategies that function and the obstacles faced in crisis communication management and public relations in local government.

Result and Discussion

Crisis Communication Strategy in Local Government

Analysis of local governments' crisis communication strategies can include several elements. This research data was taken from an interview with one of the Heads of Village:

MINISTRATE

Table 1. Results of Interviews with Village Heads Regarding Crisis Communication Strategies in Their Area

Question	Answer
How does your village government plan communications during crises?	We have a crisis communications plan that we have put together with our crisis management team. This plan includes the communications protocol, key messages, and communications channels.
How do you prioritize critical messages that citizens must convey during a crisis?	We carry out risk analysis and consider our citizens' primary needs and interests. Our key messages focus on safety and citizens' steps during the crisis.
How do you communicate with the media during a crisis? Is there a specific strategy for interacting with the media?	We have a communications team whose job is to liaise with the media. We provide regular press conferences and updates for the media. We also respond quickly to requests for information from the media.
Are there efforts to ensure that the information disseminated to citizens is accurate and does not cause panic?	Yes, we take great care in verifying information before sharing it. We work closely with authorities and experts to ensure that our information is accurate.
How do you ensure that the messages you convey reach all levels of society, including those who may be challenging to reach?	We use a variety of communication channels, including social media, text messaging, and direct communication with our district leaders to ensure our messages reach all residents, including those who may be challenging to reach.
How do you manage a situation where misinformation or fake news spreads during a crisis?	We have a team tasked with tackling fake news and misinformation. We are working with the media to provide clarification and correct information.
Was there an effort to listen to community input and concerns during the crisis?	We listen to residents' input and concerns. We have open lines of communication, including online forums and face-to-face meetings with residents to hear their views.
How do you evaluate the success of a crisis communications strategy's success after the crisis?	We carried out a comprehensive evaluation involving all parties involved in crisis management. We identify what is working well and areas that need improvement.
Does your village government have a plan to improve preparedness to face the next crisis?	Yes, we continually update our crisis communications plans and conduct regular training and simulation exercises to improve our preparedness for crises.
What is the role of the village head in crisis communication in your village government?	As village head, I ensure that key messages are conveyed clearly and that communication runs smoothly. I also play a role in providing moral support to residents and leading our crisis management team.

Source: data proceed

In this interview, the village head described a comprehensive approach and focused on preparedness and response in dealing with crises at the village government level. He explained that the village government had a well-prepared and rehearsed crisis communications plan, which included developing key messages, communicating with the media, and monitoring fake news. The village head also emphasized the importance of openness, transparency, and listening to input from the community during the crisis. Additionally, he noted the vital role of village heads in providing moral support to residents and leading crisis management teams. Overall, this interview reflects awareness of the importance of effective crisis communication management in maintaining the security and welfare of communities at the village level, as well as a commitment to continue improving preparedness in facing future crises.

This interview also highlights the role of the village head as a leader in crises. The village head is an administrator, an effective communicator, and a moral leader who can provide direction and support to his residents. An understanding of the importance of clear, accurate, and consistent communication in crises becomes apparent in this interview. The village head emphasized that key messages focused on safety and steps that residents should take are the top priority in communications during the crisis. This reflects awareness of the urgency and responsibility in conveying information that can influence citizens' decisions and actions in emergencies.

The interview above shows that this also reflects the importance of understanding the local context in crisis communication management. The village head emphasized using various communication channels, including direct communication with regional heads, which can be more effective in reaching all levels of society at the village level. This interpretation suggests that crisis communication strategies must be adapted to the unique characteristics of each region, taking into account citizens' different needs and interests. It also highlights the importance of an inclusive approach to communications, enabling all citizens, including those who may be challenging to reach, to receive critical information in crises.

Analysis of local governments' crisis communication strategies can include several elements. The following are strategies used by resource persons in managing crisis communication:

1. **Crisis Communications Center**
Local governments may have crisis communications centers serving as central command during emergencies. It is a place where information is collected, processed, and disseminated to various stakeholders. This strategy helps in effective coordination in dealing with crises.
2. **Consistent Messages**
Effective crisis communications strategies include consistent, repetitive messages. Local governments must ensure that critical messages such as evacuation instructions or health protocols are always emphasized in every communication.
3. **Openness and Transparency**
Local governments need to communicate openly and transparently about crises. This includes providing clear information about the latest developments, available resources, and actions being taken.
4. **Multiplatform Communication**
This strategy involves using multiple communication channels, including official websites, social media, text messages, and press conferences. The aim is to reach various social groups and ensure that information reaches them most effectively.

5. Consultation with Experts
In crises involving specific areas such as health or the environment, local governments can consult experts to provide accurate views and information in their communications.
6. Media Management
Managing relationships with the media is essential. Local governments must be prepared to provide information to the media and respond quickly to inquiries. This also includes tackling fake news or inaccurate information.
7. Personnel Training
Personnel involved in crisis communications must be well-trained and skilled in communicating with empathy and poise. They must be prepared to handle difficult questions and stressful situations.
8. Evaluation and Learning
Once the crisis is over, an evaluation should be conducted to understand what went well and what needs to be improved in the crisis communications strategy. The results of this evaluation can help in improvements for the next crisis.

Local governments that are successful in crisis communications usually combine various elements in their strategy and have well-organized and tested plans. Speed, accuracy, and coordination in communication are essential factors in effective crisis management. Meanwhile, interviews with Public Relations Practitioners and Policy Stakeholders are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Results of interviews with Public Relations Practitioners and Policy Stakeholders

Questions for Public Relations Practitioners	Answer
How do you design an effective crisis communications strategy for local government?	We start by identifying potential risks and threats that may arise. Then, we plan the key messages, communications teams, and communications channels to use in a crisis. The plan also includes staff training in crisis management and communications.
How do you ensure that critical messages during a crisis are delivered quickly and accurately?	We have a crisis communications center that is active during emergencies. We have a sophisticated news monitoring system and communications team ready to respond at a moment's notice. Key messages are prepared in advance and updated as the situation develops.
What role does social media play in your crisis communications strategy?	Social media is a significant communication channel. We use social media platforms to provide the latest information, respond to citizens' questions, and clarify fake news when necessary. We also strive to maintain positive relationships with our followers through social media.
How do you measure the success of your crisis communications strategy?	We use a variety of metrics, including the number of interactions on social media, the level of public participation, and feedback from the community. We also conduct post-

MINISTRATE

	crisis evaluations to identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.
How do you ensure that messages during a crisis remain consistent and aligned with local government values and mission?	Our crisis communications guide includes key messages and values to emphasize. Our communications team is trained to adhere to these guidelines and communicate following the local government's vision and mission.
Questions for Stakeholders	Answer
How do local governments usually communicate with you during crises?	We usually receive updates via electronic mail or text message. Local governments also hold direct meetings with us if necessary. Communication during this crisis has been quite effective.
How do you assess the local government's response to previous crises?	Overall, local government has responded well to previous crises. They provide necessary information and engage in dialogue with stakeholders.
How do local governments typically respond to input or concerns from the public during a crisis?	Local governments usually respond by listening to our input through meetings or specific communication channels. They also respond to concerns via social media and email.
Do local governments communicate quickly during crises?	Yes, local governments have responded quickly in crises. They usually provide timely updates.
How do you see the role of social media in communication during the crisis by local governments?	Social media is an essential channel for communication during a crisis. They enable local governments to provide information directly to the public and respond quickly to questions or concerns.

Source: data proceed

Crisis communications management in local governments is integral to their preparedness to deal with emergencies. When the researcher spoke with an experienced public relations practitioner, he explained how important careful planning is. They routinely identify potential risks and threats that may arise and plan the key messages and communication strategies that will be used. Additionally, their communications team is specially trained in crisis management and ready to respond quickly. During the interview, we also discussed the role of social media in their communications strategy. Social media is considered an essential tool, allowing them to provide information quickly to the public and respond to questions and concerns efficiently.

Several stakeholders who frequently interacted with the local government during the crisis indicated that they felt that the local government had responded quickly and effectively. They also appreciate the regional government's efforts to maintain open and responsive communication. Stakeholders felt the local government listened to their input through various communication channels and took concerns seriously. One of the things they highlighted was the role of social media in communication during a crisis. Social media has become an essential channel in establishing relationships between local governments and stakeholders, allowing essential information to reach them quickly.

MINISTRATE

This entire process focused heavily on consistency in the messages delivered throughout the crisis. The communications team has a well-crafted crisis communications guide that includes key messages and values to emphasize. This reflects their determination to ensure that the messages delivered during the crisis are consistent with the values and mission of local government. In conclusion, effective crisis communications result from careful planning, social media engagement, performance measurement, consistency in messaging, and the ability to respond quickly. Stakeholders felt that this practice had built trust and effectively responded to previous crises. Continuous evaluation and learning are also essential parts of efforts to improve crisis communication management in the future.

Community Relations in Local Government

Public relations practices in local government refer to how local government interacts with the public, media, and other stakeholders to understand, build, and maintain positive, mutually beneficial relationships. Public relations practices in local government are essential in ensuring transparency, public participation, and public trust in government. The following are the results of interviews with sources regarding Community Relations in the Regional Government under whose authority:

Table 3. Interview Results Regarding Community Relations in Regional Government

Question	Answer
How does your village government build relationships with the community and other stakeholders?	We establish relationships through various communication channels, such as public meetings, online forums, and open dialogue. We also listen and respond to input from residents and collaborate with local community organizations.
What steps have been taken to increase public participation in the decision-making process in village government?	We held open meetings, publicly announced our plans, and designed surveys to hear residents' views. We also have an online portal to receive input from residents.
How does your village government ensure transparency in policies and budget use?	We publish budget plans and financial reports regularly. The public can access all information related to budgets and policies via our official website.
How does the village government's communication strategy deal with conflicts or differences of opinion with community groups or other stakeholders?	We strive to listen carefully to all parties involved and seek fair and sustainable solutions. Open and honest communication is critical to resolving conflict.
What does the village government do in response to requests for information from local or national media?	We maintain good relationships with local and national media. We provide journalists with accurate and timely information and are prepared to respond to requests for information on short notice.
How does your village government manage and respond to sensitive issues that may arise in communications with the community?	We strive to be sensitive to issues that may be sensitive, such as social justice and human rights. We work closely with relevant stakeholders and strive to provide clear and accurate information.

MINISTRATE

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the community relations strategies implemented by the village government?	We carry out regular evaluations of our communications and public relations programs. We use performance indicators and feedback from the community to assess our success.
What concrete steps are being taken to build strong relationships with local community organizations?	We are actively involved in activities organized by local community organizations, providing financial and technical support and supporting local initiatives.
How do you ensure that village government messages reach all levels of society, including those who may be challenging to reach?	We use a variety of communication channels, such as social media, text messages, and face-to-face meetings with regional heads to ensure our messages reach all residents, including those who are hard to reach.
What is the role of the village head in community relations practices in your village government?	As village head, I ensure that effective community relations practices are implemented. I also serve as a moral leader and supporter, ensuring positive relationships with the community and other stakeholders.

Source: Data Proceed

Interviews with village heads reveal an approach highly focused on effective communication, transparency, and public participation in local governance. The village head highlighted the various efforts made by the village government to build positive relationships with the community. This includes holding open meetings, online forums, and surveys to listen to and accommodate citizen input in decision-making. Village governments also provide easy access to budget and policy-related information through their official websites, demonstrating a commitment to transparency.

The results of this interview further emphasize the critical role of village heads in community relations practices in village government. The village head is not only an administrative figure but also a moral leader who plays a role in providing support to the community. Rapid response to media and requests for information from local or national media is also an essential focus in public relations practice. The village government also demonstrated a willingness to deal with potentially sensitive issues appropriately and strive to maintain open and honest communication in resolving differences of opinion or conflict.

The village government's determination to build strong relationships with the community and other stakeholders is increasingly visible. They have designed various communication strategies to increase public participation, ensure transparency, and manage conflict wisely. In addition, village heads are essential in ensuring that good community relations practices are implemented effectively within their village government.

The following are several critical aspects used by village heads in community relations practices in the regional government under their authority:

1. Transparency and Openness

Local governments must communicate openly about policies, budgets, and decision-making. Transparency is the foundation of good public relations; stakeholders expect easy access to government information.

2. **Public Participation**
Good public relations practices include encouraging the active participation of citizens in the decision-making process. This could include holding public meetings, surveys, online forums, or other mechanisms to hear citizen views and input.
3. **Effective Communication**
Local governments must communicate effectively to convey clear and relevant messages to the public. This includes using social media, websites, press conferences, and other communication channels.
4. **Conflict Management**
In community relations practice, local governments must be able to manage conflicts and differences of opinion with various stakeholders, including community groups, businesses, and non-governmental organizations. Effective communication can relieve tension and reach a good solution.
5. **Crisis and Emergencies**
When a crisis or emergency occurs, public relations practices are essential in providing correct and timely information to the public. Coordination with the media, crafting crisis messages, and reputation management are essential aspects in this regard.
6. **Measurement and Evaluation**
Good public relations practices involve measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of communications and interactions with the public. This can help in continuous improvements in local government communications and relations.
7. **Cooperation with the Media**
Good relations with the media are essential. Local governments need to adopt open and transparent practices with the media, provide access to journalists, and respond quickly to questions.
8. **Public Education**
Public relations practice sometimes involves public education campaigns explaining specific policies, regulations, or programs to the public.

With adequate public relations practices, local governments can build trust, increase public participation, and better respond to community needs and expectations. This practice can also help local governments face crises or conflicts more efficiently and effectively (Olsson, 2014; Neely & Collins, 2018). The results of the online survey to the public are presented in the following image:

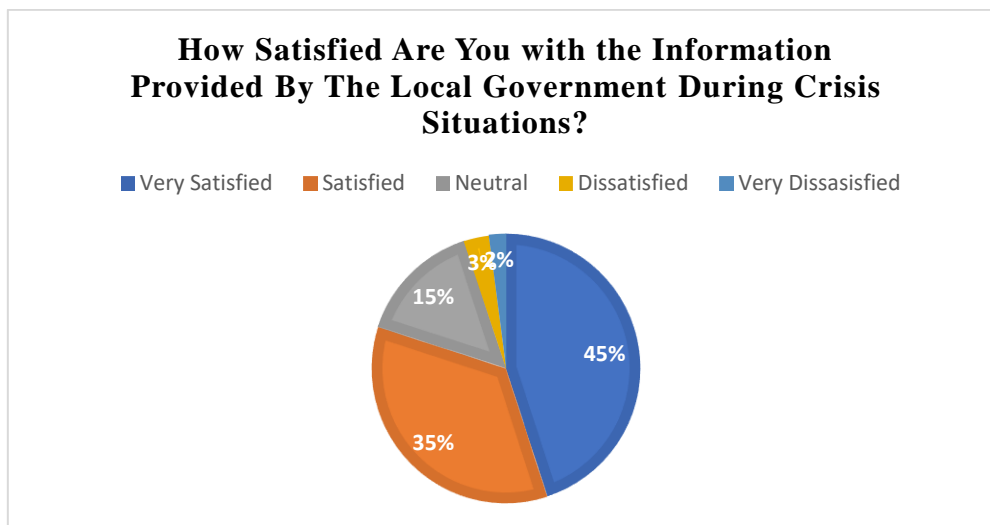


Figure 2. Question 1 in Online Survey
Source: data proceed

Do You Feel That The Local Government Listens To The Views And Concerns Of Residents During Crisis Situations?

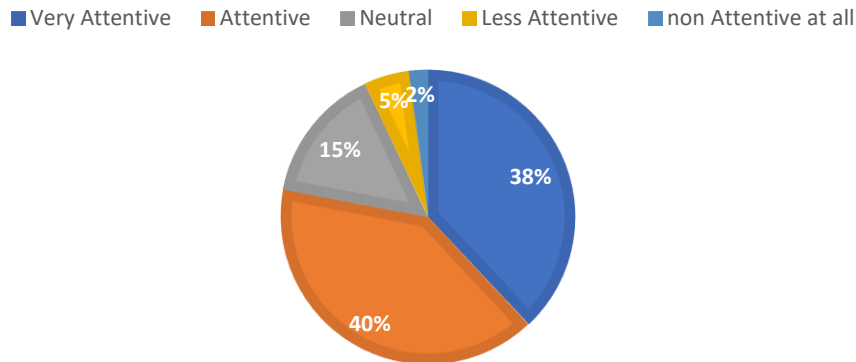


Figure 3. Question 2 in the Online Survey
Source: data proceed

In Your Opinion, How Can The Local Government Improve Their Communication During Crises?

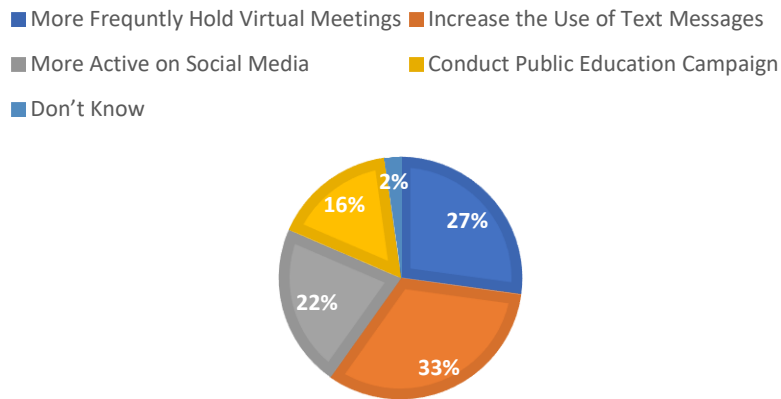


Figure 4. Question 3 in the Online Survey
Source: data proceed

From the results of this survey, most local people are satisfied with the information provided by the local government during the crisis, with 80% of respondents feeling satisfied or very satisfied. The fast response also received positive assessments, with 65% feeling that the local government's response was fast or swift. In addition, most respondents (78%) felt that local governments listened to citizens' views and concerns during crises.

However, on the other hand, this survey also shows that there is room for improvement. Some respondents suggested increased use of virtual meetings, text messaging, and activity on social media as steps to improve communication during the crisis. This suggests that local governments have an opportunity to strengthen their crisis communications management further and meet the expectations of local communities.

Conclusion

This research has explored essential aspects of communication management in local government, especially in the context of crisis communication strategies and public relations.

The results of interviews and surveys show that local governments have taken positive steps in maintaining the quality of communication during crises, such as conveying information well, responding quickly, and listening to the community's views. However, there is still potential for improvement, particularly in using virtual meetings, text messaging, and activity on social media to improve communication during the crisis. This point underscores the importance of effective communications management in building community trust, increasing public participation, and ensuring local governments are ready to face challenges that may arise in emergencies. This research provides a basis for continuing to improve communication practices in local government to support responsive and transparent government.

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