

## **ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION REGARDING TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION DIGITALIZATION POLICY IN INDONESIA BASED ON SOCIAL REALITY THEORY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The migration policy of the Indonesian government from analogue to digital communication technology for terrestrial television illustrates how government actions in conveying policies intersect with public and private interests. Using Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality, this paper highlights the importance of communication between three stakeholders, i.e., the government, television broadcasting companies, and the public, particularly in policy formulation and implementation. To conduct this study, we used a qualitative method involving in-depth interviews with ten informants, representing the three communication actors. The findings of this study show that since the policy was formulated until its implementation, communication between the government, private sector, and the public has not been effective because the government, broadcasting stakeholders, and the people do not have the same meaning construction about the terrestrial television digitalization policy. Policy implementation often experiences obstacles and delays, failing to meet the initial target, due to changing strategies and regulations. In conclusion, we argue for the need to integrate the principles of good governance into any government communication and policy implementation.

**Keywords:** Government Communication, Television Digitalization Policy, Terrestrial Digital Television, Social Construction of Reality.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Indonesian government's policy on the digitalization of terrestrial television started in 2007, triggered by the inclusion of a clause on Analogue Switch Off (ASO) within the draft of the Broadcasting Law. The content of this draft further steered dynamics among broadcasting stakeholders (Ismail, Sari, & Tresnawati, 2019) concerning the pros and cons of the ASO stage. Two years later, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kemkominfo) published a roadmap that stated that the ASO stage was to be completed in 2018 (Gultom, 2018).

As the ASO policy was included in the draft of the Broadcasting Law, the Indonesian government, through Kemkominfo, has therefore presented the policy in meetings with broadcasting stakeholders to create implementing regulations, which include two

ministerial regulations, i.e., Permenkominfo No. 07/PER/M.KOMINFO/3/2007 on Terrestrial Digital Broadcasting Standard for Fixed Television in Indonesia and Permenkominfo No. 39/PER/M.KOMINFO/10/2009 on Basic Framework of Terrestrial Digital Television Broadcasting for Free-to-Air. In 2011, another ministerial regulation, Permenkominfo No. 22/PER/M.KOMINFO/11/2011 on the Implementation of Terrestrial Digital Television Broadcasting for Free-to-Air, was canceled by the Supreme Court (MA) over a plea from the Indonesian Local Television Association (ATVLI), addressing the lack of transparency of the government in issuing the regulation.

Similarly, controversy surrounding the digitalization policy of terrestrial television has also been documented in Australia, wherein digitalization was vested with interests and power relations. Studies argue that the digitalization policy contradicted the pro-market, deregulatory and competition-oriented reforms undertaken under the Howard's government (Tate, 2015). In Indonesia, behind the regulation of broadcasting digitalization, there is a process of mutual influence between agents and structures, according to the structuration theory proposed by Giddens (1986), illustrated by an intense tug of war between the interests of the public, capital owners and the government. The policy on multiplexing restriction is also one of the main obstacles in analogue to digital transition. The old players in television broadcasting have been given enough opportunities to win the 'beauty contest' to become multiplex operators. The Indonesian government's terrestrial television digitalization policy from 2007 to 2018 occurred with uncertainties and without sufficient time to address some of the highly technical issues about television digitalization (Maulana, 2019; Rahayu, 2016; Dwita, Sjachro, Hidayat, & Sjafirah, 2021).

Furthermore, studies by Abikanlu (2020), Rozgonyi (2019), and Thamae (2015) examines the implementation of terrestrial television digitalization policies in several countries. With a critical paradigm, these three researchers criticize television digitalization policies that are full of content and political as well as economic interests in Nigeria, Europe, Australia, and Lesotho.

To realize a practical analogue-to-digital television migration in Indonesia, it is fundamental for the government and television broadcasting stakeholders to have a common construction of meaning regarding the terrestrial television digitalization policy. According to the theory of social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated that people construct the meaning of societal concepts based on interactions with one another. Therefore, if there is adequate interaction between people, they will have the same construction of the meaning of societal concepts. Interaction with stakeholders is vital in the formulation of government digitalization policy. It ensures that the government and stakeholders are on the same page during the meaning-making process of the policy, so that the resulting policy would receive a good response and full support from television

broadcasting stakeholders who, in the end, would reap tremendous benefits from it. The partnership between the government, the private sector, and the public can be effective if the communication process between the three runs well. To be effective, the communication process between these three pillars must show a 'two-way affair' that prioritizes timeliness and accuracy (Silalahi, 2004).

Government communication is a significant factor in the continuity of public services. It aims at realizing good governance practices. In this case, the government acts as a communicator that distributes various information to the public and invites the public to utilize public resources actively. The slow development of digital public broadcasting in Indonesia is due to the absence of a national policy on digital migration in broadcasting and the lack of a detailed policy directing digital innovation, as also shown in the case of the digital interface of public radio broadcasting (Aprilia & Nurchotimah, 2022; Masduki, 2019).

There are several studies on government communication, including those conducted by Hyland-wood, Gardner, Leask, & Ecker (2021); Anaszewicz & Dobek-Ostrowska (2013); and Uribe (2013). These researchers studied government communication in conveying policies in the process of policy making and policy implementation. These three studies highlight government communication by reviewing literature studies and making comparisons about government communication in several countries.

Regarding the digitalization policy, the communication approach of the government from the policy formulation process to its implementation is a process that is still ongoing at the time of writing this article. Therefore, we used a case study method to analyse the communication approach of the government about this policy. Many previous studies have examined terrestrial television digitalization policy regarding regulations, techniques, human resources, and business management (Li, 2014; Sjachro, Fitri, Amdan, Yusanto, & Khoerunnisa, 2023; Rozgonyi, 2019; Citra, 2018; Liu & Chuang, 2015; Sutanto & Alatas, 2015).

However, there is no study yet on how the communication approach of government in disseminating the terrestrial television digitalization policy affects the meaning construction of the policy by broadcasting stakeholders and the general public. Thus, this research is essential to complement previous studies to reveal how communication is constructed and embedded among actors within Indonesia's digitalization policy context.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research uses a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative case study method. Case study research examines a case to understand a phenomenon through the meanings affirmed by the people involved in it (Hadi, 2020). The case studied in this research is the communication approach of the Indonesian government in conveying terrestrial television digitalization policy.

By using the theory of social construction of reality and the concept of government communication, we analyse the communication of the Indonesian government regarding the programmes on terrestrial television digitalization. Government communication can be defined as all activities of public sector institutions and organizations aimed at conveying and sharing information that aims to present and explain government decisions and actions, promote legitimate interventions, defend recognized values, and help maintain social ties (Pasquier, 2012).

The concept of social construction of reality proposes that individuals, as well as groups, who interact with each other within a social system, over time, create concepts (mental representations) of the actions of each other and that people become habituated to those concepts and, thus, assume reciprocal social roles. During the process, a particular social phenomenon (in this case, a policy) is given meanings and embedded in society. Also, good governance literature helps frame the critical aspects needed for the government to convey its messages clearly to different stakeholders. This includes, among others, transparency, efficiency, rule of law, and public acceptance.

In theory, government communication is a basic prerequisite for democracy. Political and media freedoms can be powerful drivers that ensure that government communication is more people-focused. Government communication that is transparent, accountable, participatory, that develops joint steps and leverages work already done for other sectors will make a useful contribution to building government professional communication capacities that truly serve the community (Sanders & Maria, 2013).

The executive arm of government also includes the government departments and civil servants working within them. Communication between citizens and government is a key measure of democracy. Government communication determines the interaction between government and society, government and media, and media and society (Young, 2007). Government communication is about building relationships with the public, which implies that government communication is not just about managing public opinion for electoral gain (Swanson, 2001).

We used both primary and secondary data, which were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. We selected individuals to be interviewed as per the research objectives using a purposive sampling technique. The informants in this study were divided into three categories: the government, the private sector, and the public. Informants from the government were narrowed down to individuals who understood and were part of the process of making and implementing terrestrial television digitalization programmes. Informants from the private sector were members of terrestrial television broadcasting institutions, including leaders and practitioners of television broadcasting. Informants from the public were individuals who

owned a television at the time of the interview, were still using analogue television broadcasts, cared about broadcasting, lived in border areas with other countries, and/or lived in ASO stage 1 areas (Table 1).

The observation was carried out directly on the process of communication implementation. We participated in several campaigns held by the Ministry, both offline and online seminars, observed the communication through the Facebook page of Siaran Digital Indonesia, Instagram @siarandigitalindonesia, and the official YouTube channel of Siaran Digital Indonesia, and participated in a writing competition on the theme of terrestrial digital television organized by Kemkominfo. Documentation was also compiled by collecting news clippings and mass media articles, the Ministry's annual reports, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission's terrestrial digital television blueprint, and television digitalization books.

Table 1. *In-depth interview participants*

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Description</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| Informant 1         | Member of the Analogue to Digital TV Broadcast Migration Task Force, Kemkominfo          |
| Informant 2         | Sub-Directorate of Broadcasting and Technology Feasibility, Kemkominfo (2017–2019)       |
| Informant 3         | Secretary General of the Indonesian Private Television Association (ATVSI)               |
| Informant 4         | Chairman of the Indonesian Local Television Association (ATVLI)                          |
| Informant 5         | Chairman of the Indonesian Digital Broadcast Television Association (ATSDI)              |
| Informant 6         | Network television practitioner  |
| Informant 7         | Local television practitioner  |
| Informant 8         | Tanjungpinang resident, concerned about broadcasting, still watches analogue television. |
| Informant 9         | Lives in the country's border area, still uses analogue television                       |
| Informant 10        | Lives in ASO stage 1 area, still uses analogue television                                |

The research was conducted over a two-year period, from 2020 to 2022, starting with pre-research data collection through observation and documentation, followed by in-depth interviews. Data validation techniques were carried out using two types of triangulation: (1) by cross-checking different sources using the same data collection technique and (2) by using different data collection techniques for the same source.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Government Communication by Kemkominfo**

In this study, government communication refers to an external communication carried out by the Indonesian government through Kemkominfo regarding terrestrial television digitalization policy. In general, a three-way communication involving the government, the public, and the private sector is needed to propagate government policies, their implementation and how they relate to the interests of the society and the business sector. In response, the two latter parties will provide a critique of the policy. This whole communication dynamics is further influenced by broader political, economic, socio-cultural, regulatory, and geographical contexts, which should be considered.

Unlike public communication in Government Public Relations (GPR), this study does not review the aspects of image, reputation, and branding but the construction of meaning by the government, the private sector, and the public about the policy of digitalizing terrestrial television in Indonesia. Government communication about terrestrial television digitalization policy is carried out using all communication channels that are considered relevant, not only the national mass media. The process of government communication by Kemkominfo in conveying programmes on the digitalization of terrestrial television is carried out by a working group (*pooja*) and a special task force on ASO. Communication is carried out only at a specific time according to the target time the policy is implemented, and the implementer is not part of the GPR team.

### **Government Communication in the Policy-Making Process of Terrestrial Television Digitalization**

The government's communication with stakeholders regarding the process of making regulations that would govern the analogue to digital television migration policy is often criticized. According to television broadcasting stakeholders, the resulting programmes are not transparent and consistent but only benefit certain parties. In particular, stakeholders hold the opinion that communication between the government and the private sector was not satisfactory. The following quotes explain this point in detail:

"Questions from the television industry regarding the government's role in protecting the business interests of existing stakeholders and providing benefits for those who migrate were never answered by the government. When making regulations, our ministers were invited to meetings [for hearings], but the regulations were different. The result is chaos; the policy does not work anymore. So government communication is not transparent" (Informant 3, semi-structured interview, 2020).

"Since 2007, if I'm not mistaken, there has been a public campaign [on digitalization]. However, the communication built by the government at that time was inconsistent. There was no clear blueprint" (Informant 4, semi-structured interview, 2020).

"The role of the government to communicate effectively with the industry and the wider community is needed. At this stage, the communication clash is [between the government and] the industry, not with the public. The public will want to embrace this new technology. If offered a clearer broadcast, which is better in quality, would you say no? There are also more channel choices. So, [what we find here is] ineffective communication between government and industry, for various reasons and interests" (Informant 5, semi-structured interview, 2020).

In the era of democratization, the public demands that the government builds a communication strategy that can provide active and affirmative efforts to disclose and disseminate information to the public, as well as run campaigns on relevant activities. This includes information on policies and policy plans, communication as a policy instrument, and communication in the policy-making process. Communication in the policy-making process is carried out so that policies do not harm stakeholders. Policies must be based on a rational foundation of thinking so that no party feels victimized (Hidayat & Al-Faqih, 2018).

In the policy-making process regarding the digitalization of terrestrial television, the government has involved television broadcasting stakeholders, as quoted below.

"Actually, in formulating the policy, we have involved all stakeholders from the beginning, both TV operators with local network scale and larger institutions. When the Ministerial Regulation was made, we also invited all stakeholders to be involved. It's just that we don't know why when we determined the MUX operator, suddenly, there was dissatisfaction from some local TVs. No local TV won during the auction in the MUX implementation process" (Informant 2, Semi-Structured Interview, 2020).

"Before there was a Job Creation Law that regulates ASO, the government had already conducted a public campaign. So in previous years, the approach continued even though it was not too intensive. But communication is still ongoing. But because of the conditions at that time, the communication was more persuasive, so more communication was delivered to stakeholders about the benefits of digitalization. Well, at the same time, when we do the insistence, of course, not all stakeholders will participate. Frankly, if we look at it now, there is a fragmented trend regarding the readiness of broadcasters to embrace digitalization" (Informant 1, semi-structured interview, 2022).

## **Government Communication in the Implementation of Terrestrial Television Digitalization Policy**

Government communication with stakeholders on terrestrial television digitalization policy in 2020 was carried out through press releases during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Indonesian government made efforts to accelerate digitalization through Kemkominfo's public announcement and the enactment of the Job Creation Law in 2020. Article 60A of the Job Creation Law stipulates that broadcasting operations must transit from analogue to digital technology within 2 (two) years from the enactment of the Law.

After the Job Creation Law was passed on November 2, 2020, the government tried to convey information to the public about the terrestrial television digitalization policy. The communication mode was different from the mode used in previous years. The Covid-19 pandemic changed the form of government communication from face-to-face to the use of online media. The pandemic seems to have accelerated the capacity of government and society to adopt digital platforms and catalyze digital transformation, as documented elsewhere (Irawan et al., 2022). Broadcasting stakeholders were informed about the policy through meetings and discussions using the Zoom meeting application. Meanwhile, a public campaign was done through online seminars, disseminated through the official YouTube channel of Kemkominfo, namely Siaran Digital Indonesia.

The Indonesian Digital Broadcast YouTube link also contains online seminars and recorded talk shows to provide enlightenment on terrestrial digital television. It is not enough just to provide information through online seminars and online talk shows, so the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology also holds writing, digital content, theme songs (jingles), and short film competitions, all of which raise awareness about terrestrial television digitalization (Dwita, Sjuchro, Hidayat, & Sjafirah, 2022).

In addition to holding online seminars, information to the public is delivered through television media channels. Indonesian television broadcasts the Indonesian digital broadcast mascot (MODI) on the upper left corner of the screen. The tagline 'Clean, Clear, Sophisticated' and public service advertisements on how to get digital broadcasts were advertised daily on television (Figure 1). The creative team of each television broadcaster initiated the form and content of the public campaign on digital television.





*Figure 1: Indonesia's digital broadcast mascot named MODI*

*(Source: <https://siarandigital.kominfo.go.id/> )*

The following quotes provides more information about the public campaign on digital television carried out by television broadcasters:

"We made this public service announcement ourselves, independently, on our initiative. It was not an official request from the Ministry of Communication and Information. According to the government, public campaigning is our obligation, and we have done it. Until now, no letter has asked us to make digital television advertisements, but it is the initiative and awareness of the Broadcasting Institution itself" (Informant 6, semi-structured interview, 2022).

"The public announcements we made to help the government were not intended for face-to-face campaigns due to pandemic conditions [Covid19]. Only a few times we held dialogue broadcast programmes with the Regional Indonesian Broadcasting Commission and the Ministry of Communication and Information, along with advertising promos on television" (Informant 7, semi-structured interview, 2021).

The Minister of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia, Johnny G. Plate, on July 6, 2020, announced the acceleration of the digitalization of national television through a press release. He stated that the government is accelerating the digitalization of broadcasting, especially terrestrial television systems, in line with the priorities of Kemkominfo in accelerating national digitalization.

"In the next few years, the Ministry of Communication and Information is working to accelerate national digitalization very seriously, through (1) completion of equitable and quality telecommunications and informatics infrastructure development, (2) development of human resources or digital talents with sufficient and sustainable quantity and quality, (3) completion of primary legislation in the fields of telecommunications, informatics, and data protection, and (4) strengthening international collaboration in the field of the digital economy and

cross-border data flows" (Press Release No. 80/HM/KOMINFO/07/2020 Monday, July 6, 2020, Regarding Acceleration of National Television Digitalization).

There are several reasons behind this: First, television digitalization is part of the national digitalization priorities. Second, Indonesia's broadcasting needs to catch up with the global digitalization process of terrestrial television systems. Therefore, in terms of national policy direction, the President has launched the acceleration of Indonesia's digital transformation. Third, in terms of public interest, the television digitalization process must be accelerated to produce optimal quality broadcasting for the benefit of all Indonesian people. Fourth, in terms of broadcasting industry interest, technology disruption requires television industry players to adjust business patterns to align with the digital era's development. Fifth, regarding added value in frequency management, with the acceleration of digitalization, frequencies can be reorganized and utilized to provide other services, especially public services and fast internet. Sixth, in terms of international relations, if Indonesia delays the move toward ASO resolution for too long, it will potentially cause problems with neighboring countries, especially in border areas.

Many people were surprised by the press release from the Minister of Communication and Information because they had yet to receive sufficient information about terrestrial digital television. Some of the informants we interviewed said they had never heard of terrestrial digital television even though the area where they live is included in stage one of the migration of analogue to digital technology.

"People know about digital television only at the level of discourse, not at the details of how it will be implemented and used. Without public engagement, a lot of information will eventually be lost and go without continuation. About two or three months ago, I just found out about the migration from analogue to digital television. But that was just a discourse. The true meaning of digital TV is still not understood by many people. People think that digital television implies a pay-to-watch scheme. Those who ask about digital television are actually already using cable television. This means that most people do not understand what exactly the government means by terrestrial digital television. Discourse is presented, but not in technical detail. I found out about digital television from an online news story that I stumbled upon by accident, but there was no further information afterward. There are more people who don't know than those who do. And it's only about general info, not detailed. Very limited information" (Informant 8, semi-structured interview, 2021).

According to one interviewee, there has yet to be any communication from regional agencies.

"The central government should involve relevant agencies in the regions [for public communication] if involving community participation is difficult. Public campaigns have been on this, but little information has reached the public. It seems that the government does not intentionally conduct official communication. It didn't even reach the relevant regional officials, let alone the general public. I only got hearsay from a private contractor who sells electronics. He said that television has now turned digital. The business owners or those who own electronic shops educate us about it. But we don't understand" (Informant 9, semi-structured interview, 2021).

"I have never heard of digital television. Because here, people generally already have subscription-based TV. There should be a public campaign for us, especially if we can get a free set-top box and watch digital television without paying a monthly fee. Moreover, the lower middle class has had a challenging economic situation during the pandemic. They will reject the idea of buying a set-top box or digital television. There should be cooperation with local governments to provide information about this" (Informant 10, semi-structured interview, 2021).

### **Social Construction of Reality Regarding Government Communication Approach in the Television Digitalization Policy**

As many studies have asserted, language is the most critical system in building a social reality. The implication of the social construction theory in this research is that social reality requires human interaction. *Construction is social* because it requires collaborative, not individual, action. Anything in the social world happens due to the words and/or actions of people speaking and interacting together (Berger & Luckmann, 2013).

In this study, the construction of social reality by the stakeholders in the digitalization policy is analysed to determine the importance of language in communicating a policy. Through language, a reality can be constructed. Conversation in communication is important in maintaining the constructed social reality, which requires interaction between people. Consequently, the construction of the meaning of terrestrial television digitalization policy must be interactive because it requires collaborative efforts, not a single action taken by the government. For this reason, the participation of all stakeholders in the implementation of ASO in Indonesia is required.

Smooth communication and interaction between the government and society positively impact the legitimacy of the state. In conveying messages, the government is required to build credibility, attractiveness, and equality in responding to the needs, expectations, and feelings of the public in such a way that the public can be influenced to follow the government's goals and objectives (in this case, so that policies can be

implemented). In communicating with the public, the government also needs to build a sense of openness by following the principles of completeness, clarity, accuracy, and brevity, which are relevant in the post-reform era, where transparency and openness are the priorities of good governance (Kamil, 2018).

Interactions between government, civil society, and other stakeholders must involve compelling language and communication. The reality of communication built on the principles of good governance will create a social reality that is agreed upon and implemented by the government, stakeholders, and the wider community.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Government communication in conveying programmes regarding the digitalization of terrestrial television in Indonesia is carried out by a special analogue switch off (ASO) task force at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. When the policy-making process was carried out, the government and the private sector did not have the same construction of meaning regarding the policy of terrestrial television digitalization. Government communication is often considered non-transparent by stakeholders, so the implementation of digitalization programmes experiences obstacles.

Government communication during the implementation of programmes on the digitalization of terrestrial television was carried out using various strategies according to the situation and conditions. Before the regulations governing ASO were stipulated in the Job Creation Law, information was conveyed through advertisements on television. After the regulations on ASO were stipulated in the Job Creation Law and due to the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, information was conveyed through online seminars, social media handles of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, and campaigns on television. However, there are still people who do not know about this policy because the information is not shared with the regional government.

Furthermore, the government should carry out intensive communication and interaction with stakeholders so that there is a common understanding of the policy at the initial stage. The government should also coordinate and cooperate with local governments, so that information reaches the public for effective policy implementation.

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