

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN PADANG CITY IN ATTRACT NEW STUDENTS IN THE TRANSITION FROM PANDEMIC TO ENDEMIC 2022 ERA

Diego¹, Elva Ronaning Roem², Sarmiati³

¹Department of Communication Science, Universitas Andalas (diego@soc.unand.ac.id)

²Department of Communication Science, Universitas Andalas (elvarona@soc.unand.ac.id)

³Department of Communication Science, Universitas Andalas (sarmiati@soc.unand.ac.id)

ABSTRACT. After the PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) period, Indonesia is entering a transition era from the end of the Covid-19 pandemic to being endemic. Endemic is a disease usually endemic in a certain area, starting to predict the magnitude of the case. The endemic cannot be said to be a mass of virus disappearance, but judging by the lack of a virus infection rate by humans. The endemic transition era that is currently happening has brought down the interest of prospective students to study at private campuses in the city of Padang. The research will be carried out with the theme of communication strategies for private universities in the city of Padang to attract new students during the transition from the Covid-19 pandemic to the 2022 Endemic. The purpose of this study is to describe the communication strategies of private universities in the city of Padang in attracting new students during the endemic transition and the obstacles that private universities face in attracting new students during the endemic transition era. This research is analyzed by using the concept of communication strategy. The research method in this research is descriptive qualitative. This research was analyzed using Miles and Huberman analysis technique. The results of this study indicate that using social media platforms and websites is the main promotional tool used in promoting new student admissions. The use of above-the-line media is still being used but is not the main tool anymore, given the implementation of social distancing by the Government.

KEYWORDS: Endemic Transition, Covid-19, Communication Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the announcement of positive cases of COVID-19 infection in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, many social changes have occurred. The Government has made various efforts to slow down the rate of virus transmission so that the number of infected victims does not increase. As we already know, the implementation of PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) signed by President Joko Widodo through Government Regulation No. 21 of 2020 regulates large-scale social restrictions in response to COVID-19, which allows local governments to restrict the movement of people and goods. enter and leave their respective areas as long as they have obtained permission from the relevant ministry¹.

After the enactment of the PSBB, Indonesia entered a new normal era. According to the Head of the Expert Team for the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19, Wiku Adisasmita, the new normal is a behavior change to continue to carry out normal activities by adding health protocols to prevent transmission of COVID-19. Based on this description, several lifestyle changes need to be implemented by the community to stay healthy and still carry out routine activities. After entering the new normal era, Indonesia is also entering the process of transitioning to endemic.

¹ Results of the Demographic Survey on the Impact of Covid 19 – Badan Pusat Statistik 2020

<https://www.bps.go.id/publication/2020/06/01/669cb2e8646787e52dd171c4/hasil-survei-sosial-demografi-dampak-covid-19-2020.html>

President Joko Widodo is preparing for a transition toward the Covid-19 endemic in six months because corona cases have continued to decline. The implementation of the transition from pandemic to endemic directly or indirectly has a significant impact on various sectors of people's lives. One of the sectors directly affected by this transition period is the world of education. The teaching and learning process (PBM) is completed online until the end of 2020. It was done based on the Joint Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture, Minister of Religion, Minister of Health, and Minister of Home Affairs number 01/KB/2020 concerning learning methods in higher education in all zones must be implemented online.

With the enactment of this decision, the world of education, especially in the city of Padang, experienced a decrease in work productivity due to restrictions on on-campus activities. All activities related to the Tridharma of Higher Education activities are carried out online. This results in a high level of public consumption of the internet while the income received every month tends to decrease.

In this era of transition to endemic, public universities in the city of Padang do not seem to experience very significant obstacles considering the high public interest in being able to study on "red plate" campuses. But what about private universities in the city of Padang? Based on the researcher's initial interview with the promotion team for new student admissions at a private university, the number of students who have registered as prospective new students has shown a decline.

The number of private universities in the city of Padang based on data from LLDikti Region X is seven. The universities are Bung Hatta University, Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatra, Ekasakti University, Dharma Andalas University, Taman Siswa University, Baiturrahmah University and Putra Indonesia University YPTK. The seven campuses competed fiercely to capture the interest of new students to study at their respective campuses. In recruiting prospective new students, private universities have strategies and try to be different from other private universities. Transisi endemi merupakan suatu proses dimana periode dari pandemic menuju kearah endemic dengan sejumlah indikator. Beberapa wilayah di Indonesia mulai memasuki masa transisi dari pandemic menuju endemic. Pemerintah mengklaim bahwa penularan Covid-19 di Indonesia sudah berkurang secara signifikan. Data satgas Covid-19 mencatat angka kasus berada dibawah 1.000. Tetapi pemerintah tidak terburu buru untuk melakukan masa transisi menuju endemic ini. Dan Pemberlakuan Pembatasan kegiatan Masyarakat (PPKM) masih terus diterapkan meskipun terjadi penurunan kasus harian covid-19²

To attract prospective new students' interest, a precise communication strategy is needed so that the campaign used can run optimally and on target. Private universities are required to be more creative in developing their strategies so that they can appear "different". According to Middleton in Cangara (2014), communication strategy is the best combination of all communication elements ranging from the communicator, message, channel (media), and receiver to influence (effect) designed to achieve optimal communication goals. Based on this definition, it can be analogized that in attracting prospective new students to study at private universities, each campus needs to maximize all elements of communication so that they can get a large number of prospective new students.

The seriousness of the efforts made by private universities to attract prospective new students in this new normal era certainly needs to be increased. This is due to the decline in public interest in studying during this pandemic. This is reinforced by the researcher's initial interview with one of the students' parents, who plan to send their children to college next year, considering the deteriorating family economy in 2020.

² <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1590419/indonesia-mulai-transisi-dari-pandemi-covid-19-menuju-endemi>

This study looks at the large decrease in the number of new student applicants at universities in the city of Padang due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers feel the need to reveal what strategies are used by private universities to survive during the current economic turmoil. Private universities are educational institutions that still have to be running, considering the large number of human resources working on these campuses.

With the communication strategy, the promotion team at private universities can choose various approaches that have been well planned so that the output obtained can be predicted well, and the various obstacles that will be faced can be maximally reduced. A good communication strategy will find solutions for private universities to get out of the declining interest in prospective students to study in the 2020-2021 academic year. The declining public attention to registering as prospective new students in the transition to the endemic era shows great concern for parents about COVID-19.

Based on the background that has been discussed, The aims of this research are: 1) To describe the communication strategy of private universities in attracting new students during the pandemic transition to endemic in 2022; 2) To describe the constraints of private universities in recruiting new students during the pandemic transition to endemic in 2022.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communication Strategy

A communication strategy is planning to deliver messages through various elements of communication such as frequency, formality, content and communication channels so that the messages conveyed are easily accepted and understood and can change attitudes or behavior following the purpose of communication.

According to Effendy (2011), a communication strategy is planning that is effective in delivering messages so that it is easily understood by the communicant and can accept what has been conveyed so that it can change a person's attitude or behavior.

Meanwhile, according to Kulvisaechana (2001), communication strategy uses a combination of communication facets, including the frequency of communication, communication formalities, communication content, and communication channels.

Communication strategy is an amalgamation and planning of communication (communication planning) and communication management (communication management) to achieve a goal. To achieve this goal, the communication strategy must show how its tactical operations must be carried out because the approach (approach) can be different at any time, depending on the situation and conditions. Strategi komunikasi erat hubungan dan kaitannya antara tujuan yang hendak dicapai dengan konsekuensi-konsekuensi (masalah) yang harus diperhitungkan, kemudian merencanakan bagaimana mencapai konsekuensi-konsekuensi sesuai dengan hasil yang diharapkan atau dengan kata lain tujuan yang hendak dicapai.

Communication strategies must be arranged systematically to change the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of the audience or target. According to Arifin (1994), so that the message can be conveyed effectively, the communicant needs to determine the steps of a communication strategy. To achieve positive results in the communication process, the communicator must create a common interest with the audience, especially in messages, methods and media. To equate these interests, the communicator must

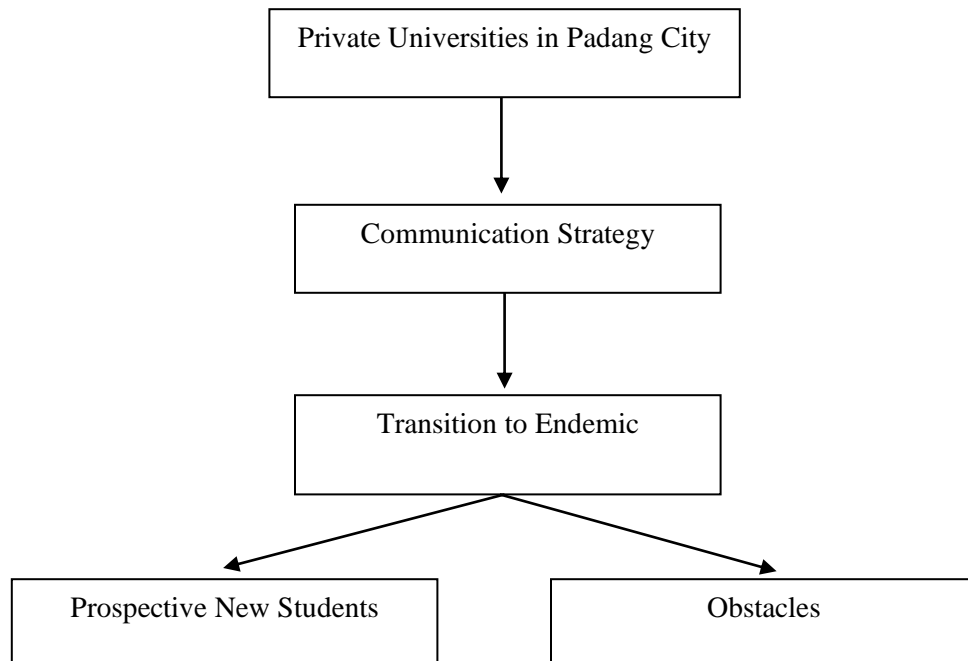
understand the audience's mindset (frame of reference) and field experience (field of experience) in a precise and thorough manner. The first thing that the audience must understand is the personality and physical condition, such as 1) audience knowledge about the subject matter, 2) audience knowledge of receiving messages through the media, and 3) audience knowledge, especially the vocabulary used. Second, the influence of the group and society and the values and norms within the group are different; the third situation of the group in which it is located.

2.2 Transition to Endemic

Endemic is a disease that usually occurs in a certain area. According to the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), endemic refers to the presence of a continuous outbreak of a disease in a population over a specific geographic range, such as a region, country, or continent. There are several indicators that a pandemic could be endemic, including increasing public immunity against the virus. In addition, the natural infection rate has decreased so that the number of patients and deaths due to the virus has decreased.

2.3 Framework of Thinking

This study seeks to map the problems faced by private universities in the city of Padang during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this era of pandemic transition to endemic, student interest in studying began to decline. To overcome these problems, private universities need to make more efforts and accurate communication strategies to attract the interest of prospective new students who will study.

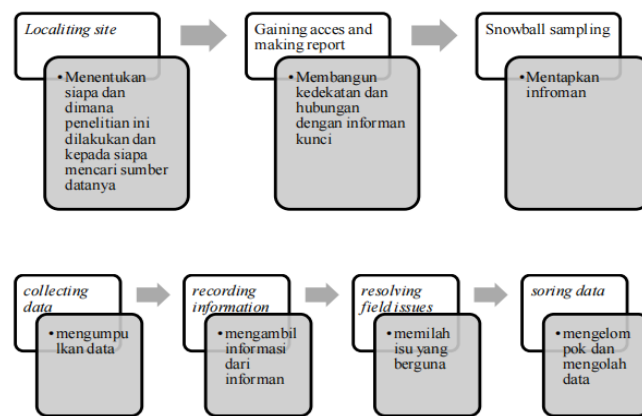


3. RESEARCH METHOD

Researchers used a qualitative approach. In qualitative research, the data collected is generally in the form of words, pictures, and mostly not numbers. Even if there are numbers, their nature is only as a support. The data includes interview transcripts, field data notes, photographs, personal documents, notes, and other notes. This includes a description of the situation. Written descriptions or narratives are very important in a qualitative approach, recording data and disseminating research results (Danim, 2002: 61). In this study, researchers used qualitative research methods because researchers wanted to examine in-depth the communication strategies used by private universities in attracting new students in the new normal era.

The process of qualitative research takes a long time in the research setting, whether in the family environment, school, household, or certain places where data related to the research can be collected. Although some researchers use tools in data collection, the data collected needs to be supported by a deep understanding of the meaning of the data obtained. The researcher then reviewed the recorded material by involving his insight as a key instrument for analyzing it (Danim, 2002: 60).

The researcher uses a descriptive type of research. Kriyantono (2010:69) suggests that this type of research aims to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and characteristics of a particular population or object. This descriptive qualitative research was carried out to describe the communication strategy of private universities in the city of Padang in recruiting new students to report on research activities step by step. Starting from observing the process of accepting new students at private universities in the city of Padang, then interviewing sources to preparing research reports.



Picture 3.1: Research Flow

Informants are considered to know best about what we expect, or maybe he is the ruler that will make it easier for researchers to explore the object or social situation under study (Sugiyono, 2012: 217-218). In this case, the informants were obtained when the researchers were in the field with clear criteria for the identity of the informants that had been set before going to the field (Afrizal, 2014:141).

The informants in this study were the Chancellor and the new student admissions team at 3 private universities in the city of Padang, namely Bung Hatta University, Dharma Andalas University, and Putra Indonesia University YPTK.

In this study, the data based on the source is divided into two, namely primary and secondary data. According to Kriyantono (2007:43), primary data acts as a key informant, namely the main informant who knows many main issues, so it is hoped that the research objectives can be answered properly. Meanwhile, according to Pawito (2008:41-42), secondary data complements primary data; researchers must be careful in selecting secondary data to follow research objectives and needs. In addition to being complementary, secondary data is also very helpful for researchers when primary data is limited or difficult to obtain.

The primary data in this study are the results of interviews with informants obtained by researchers based on predetermined criteria. The data were obtained from conducting in-depth interviews and field observations. The number of informants used as data sources in this study was 14 people. In comparison, the secondary data in this study are books or other literature relevant to this research.

To obtain primary data, researchers conducted in-depth interviews. Mulyana (2008: 180) says that an interview is a communication between two people who want to obtain information from someone else by asking questions based on a specific purpose. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. According to Esterberg in Sugiyono (2011:317), semi-structured interviews aimed to determine the problem more openly, where the interviewees were asked for their opinions and ideas. In this semi-structured interview, the researcher prepares the structure of the questions to be asked to the informants but does not rule out the possibility that several new questions will develop by taking into account the development, context and situation of the interview.

During the interview process, the researcher allowed the informants to answer the questions the researcher asked by telling them in as much detail as possible. The researchers conducted this semi-structured interview to see the communication strategy of private universities in the city of Padang in attracting new students in this era of transition to endemic. In a narrow sense is a research process observing situations and conditions. Researchers will observe the process of new student admissions carried out by the selection team for new student admissions at private universities in the city of Padang.

This study uses the Miles and Huberman data analysis technique called the interactive model, where activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and take place continuously until complete so that the data is saturated (Sugiyono, 2011:246-252). Researchers tested the validity of the data by triangulating the data. Triangulation is a technique of collecting different data sources by examining the evidence from these sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes (Cresswell, 2010: 285). The researcher used the source triangulation technique. Pawito (2007:99) mentions that in the triangulation of sources, researchers compare data obtained using certain methods with data obtained from

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Communication Strategy of Private Universities in Recruiting New Students in the Era of Transition to Endemic

In undergoing the transitional era to endemic as it is now, many of our social routines have changed, and the application of social distancing is a must to prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus so that the pandemic does not increase again. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia took this step by applying strict sanctions if there were people who did not implement health protocols in their activities. One concrete action the government takes is conducting an online teaching and learning process for all educational institutions. With this teaching and learning process, educational activities are carried out by students and students independently at home and then monitored by educators through certain applications.

In the city of Padang, online learning activities in the world of education are also not spared. This has resulted in campuses in this city being closed for an undetermined deadline. These changes, of course, did not go without problems; various complaints emerged as feedback from people who felt "locked up" at home. Correlate with this phenomenon, changes in the strategy of private universities in attracting new students, of course, change as well. The promotion of new student admissions that was previously done conventionally began to transform. It is undeniable that private universities in the city of Padang have concerns about the decline in the number of new student applicants considering the worsening economy.

In the face of social transformation, as it is now, private universities must make strategic changes so that current prospective students do not discourage their intention to take a leave of absence until things return to normal. Based on the researcher's interviews with high school students who had graduated when they went to the field, some students decided to take a year's leave not to go to college first due to the declining income of their parents, as quoted from the following interview:

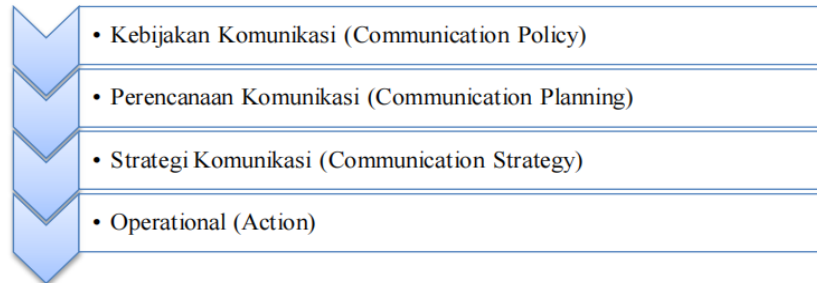
“I did not go to college this year as my parents suggested. My father informed me that our family's economy was deteriorating, so my parents did not have enough money to send me to college. I just obeyed what my parents said because we came from a simple family. Inshaallah later, when our economy improves, and COVID-19 ends, my father will send me to university.”

Undeniably, the current economic situation is indeed experiencing a decline due to the spread of COVID-19 transmission. Universities in the city of Padang anticipate these concerns by packaging good promotions and offering tuition fees to attract prospective students to register. Various tools in a good communication strategy are implemented in promotional items so each university can appear different from existing competitors.



Picture 4.1 Dharma Andalas University Admissions Poster 2022

Communication strategy is part of a larger definition in communication planning. In communication planning, elements of communication strategy play an important role so that the plan's implementation can run well and minimize the obstacles that will occur. With the communication plan, a good communication strategy will be determined to attract the interest of prospective new students through the intermediary of various parties. The target party in the communication strategy is not only the prospective new student but also the family or funder of the prospective new student. As we know, the funders from students are parents and relatives with qualified economic capabilities, so they are considered capable of preparing large tuition funds. According to Cangara (2014), communication strategy is the third element in the general communication planning model, as shown in the following figure:



Picture 4.2 The description of Communication Planning from Policy to Operation

In this research strategy, the authors analyze the communication strategy of private universities in Padang City in attracting new students in the transition to endemic 2022. In the context of communication planning, the transition to the endemic era is a new phenomenon faced by society and changes the pattern of life being lived. Private universities must pursue new and different communication plans so prospective new students can register in their respective places.

According to Cangara (2014), there are two types of communication planning, namely strategic communication planning and operational communication planning. Strategic communication planning is a communication plan that refers to a communication policy that applies alternatives in achieving long-term goals and is the basic framework for short-term operational planning. What is meant by operational communication planning is planning that requires action in the form of activities designed to achieve goals. Then, operational communication planning is divided into two types: communication infrastructure planning and communication program planning. Communication infrastructure planning is usually called technical planning or physical planning because it involves the procurement of communication tools, while what is meant by communication program planning is planning that leads to knowledge resources which include knowledge, skills, organizational structure and program preparation about what communication activities will be carried out.

This research that has been done from the definition of the type of communication planning is classified as operational communication planning. This can be seen in what has been done by the new student admissions team at a private university in the city of Padang, which not only carried out a mature promotion strategy but also targeted promotional activities both above the line and below the line. Then, in the operational communication planning that the private university has carried out, they categorize their actions by planning the communication program. This is following the results of interviews that the author conducted with resource 1:

“At the promotion team meeting that we have held, we carry out promotional activities that must touch all circles in society, both parents of prospective students and prospective students themselves. So we do not do promotions that are only pegged to one mass media. We also think

this is an optimal effort to attract prospective students, considering that we have many competitors. We cannot be half-hearted in promoting new student admissions.”

In terms of approaches to communication planning, Cangara (2014) suggests two approaches: a comprehensive rational planning approach and a disaggregated planning approach. The comprehensive rational planning approach is based on a general policy that formulates the goals to be achieved as a unit, based on a complete, comprehensive and integrated set of goal specifications and accurate forecasting and is supported by an information system. Meanwhile, in the disaggregated planning approach, the planning approach that considers the parts of the general policy directly related to the prioritized elements or subsystems and the selected planning approach in its implementation is easier and more realistic. In carrying out university promotions for prospective new students, the communication planning approach is disaggregated because the promotions are directly aimed at the individual and the intended individual circle. The policies adopted by the university in general and the new student admissions promotion team, in particular, hold a comprehensive meeting regarding what steps will be taken so that the promotion remains interesting and unique:

“In the new student admissions meeting, the elements involved, of course, are all representatives of the study programs within our university plus the leadership and the foundation. So, all input from the team will be accommodated and then discussed so that the most appropriate steps can be chosen. Not to forget, we also ask for input from parties outside the campus but who are competent so that the promotions carried out become more attractive and eye catching.”

The application of strategy in communication planning returns to the elements of communication, namely who says what, to whom through what channel and what effects. Therefore, the strategy carried out in communication planning must begin with the following steps:

1. Selecting and Implementing Communicators

The communicator is the source and control of all communication activities; therefore, if a communication process does not work well, then the main error comes from the communicator because it is the communicator who understands the arrangement of messages, chooses the right media, and approaches the target audience. In this study, the communicators are private universities that have recruited prospective new students to enter and study in their place. Universities must improve their achievements yearly so that people have more confidence in the credibility and quality of the concerned parties.

2. Messaging Techniques

In compiling the message to be conveyed, the communicator will polish the message to make it as attractive as possible, eye-catching and arouse curiosity. Since the media used has limited space, the message must be packaged briefly, concisely and clearly. In addition, the message is also equipped with a tagline that makes it interesting to read. This is as shown in the following image



3. Receiver (Communicant)

The communicants of the intended message of this communication strategy are prospective new students and parents or funders of the prospective new students. For this reason, the message conveyed must be separated into two, messages for communicants for prospective new students and messages for parents or funders. The communicant of the message is very important to be persuaded properly and continuously so as not to change his choice of competing universities.

4. Media and Communication Channels

The media chosen by the communicator is to use all lines, both above the line and below the line. The university uses advertisements in major mass media in the city of Padang above the line, such as the Padang Express Daily and the Singgalang Daily. As for below the line, private universities use campaigns on online media such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Besides that, Communicators also use brochures and billboards on protocol roads, as shown below:



Picture 4.4 Admissions Billboard for new students at Dharma Andalas University

5. Effect

The effect can be used as a benchmark for whether all the communication strategies are successful. Whether or not the number of prospective new students registering can be used as a benchmark and evaluation for next year's new student admissions campaign. In the evaluation, the university again held a comprehensive meeting so that each section could report the obstacles they encountered. In the meeting, the obstacles were accommodated to find the most appropriate solution so that it would not happen again.

4.2 Obstacles of Private Universities in Recruiting New Students

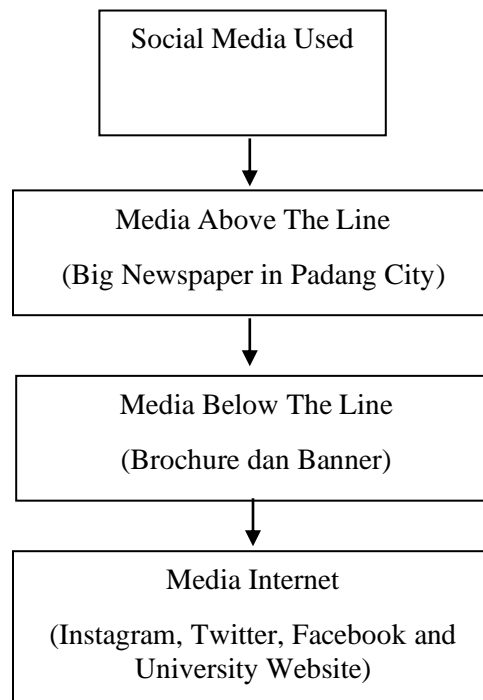
Constraints in every implementation of a communication plan are commonplace. However, if these obstacles become very large, disrupt team performance and cause big losses, this must be anticipated early on. Based on the results of the researcher's interview with resource 3, it was obtained information that the obstacles faced were:

“At yesterday's new student admissions, the obstacles were not so many because the team that worked was a team that had experience from year to year in new student admissions.

The obstacle we face is the difficulty of reaching prospective new students directly due to the COVID19 pandemic. However, face-to-face interpersonal communication is important because, in this communication, we can see the expressions of prospective new students.”

Another obstacle is the use of social media platforms full of disturbances and hoax news due to the rapid flow of irresponsible information. The number of hoaxes circulating in the community decreases the effectiveness of new student admissions promos. Another obstacle is the COVID-19 pandemic spreading in the city of Padang. The high transmission rate of this virus has resulted in a decrease in the interest of prospective new students to study in 2022, which is exacerbated by the decline in income and economic activity from parents or the fund holders of prospective new students. This has quite a serious impact in the form of a decrease in the number of registrants at each private university in the city of Padang.

Based on the research that the author did on the communication strategy of private universities to attract interest and acceptance of prospective new students during the transition from the Covid-19 pandemic to endemic, it can be concluded in the form of a model as follows:



Picture 4.5 Communication Strategy Model in New Student Admission at Private Universities.

5. CONCLUSION

In accepting prospective new students during the transition from the Covid-19 pandemic to the Endemic era, private universities in Padang City need to increase promotions to attract people who want to take lectures. Promotion during this pandemic prioritizes using the media. In accepting prospective new students during the transition from the COVID-19 pandemic to this endemic, private universities in the city of Padang need to increase promotions to attract the interest of the public who want to take lectures.

Promotion during this pandemic prioritizes using social media platforms rather than conventional methods, considering the social distancing imposed by the government.

The use of above-the-line media is in the form of major newspapers in the city of Padang, such as Singgalang Daily and Padang Ekspres, while below-the-line media uses brochures and billboards. Meanwhile, internet media uses Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and university websites. In carrying out promotions during the transition from the COVID-19 pandemic to this endemic, universities must strengthen the team on the social media platform line. The promotional posts must be updated regularly every day, and the number of registrants must be monitored at all times on the website. The communication strategy must consider the community, which is the main goal of the target market. If the strategy is not appropriate, the interest will also decrease.

REFERENCE

Afrizal. 2014. *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Jakarta : Rajawali Pers.

Cangara, Hafied. 2014. *Perencanaan & Strategi Komunikasi*. Jakarta : Rajawali Pers.

Danim, Sudarwan. 2002. *Menjadi Peneliti Kualitatif*. Bandung : Pustaka Setia.

Kriyantono, Rachmat. 2012. *Teknik Praktis Riset Komunikasi*. Jakarta : Kencana Prenada Media Group.

Pawito. 2008. *Penelitian Komunikasi Kualitatif*. Yogyakarta : PT. Lkis Pelangi Aksara.

Sugiyono, 2009. *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif dan R&D*. Bandung : Alfabeta.

http://ews.lldikti10.id/pt/rekap_pt/08/12

<https://dikti.kemdikbud.go.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Panduan-Penyelenggaraan-Semester-Gasal-2020-2021-di-PT.pdf>

<https://www.bps.go.id/publication/2020/06/01/669cb2e8646787e52dd171c4/hasil-survei-sosial-demografi-dampak-covid-19-2020.html>