

News virality in disaster communication: An encoding–decoding study of community reception in Sumber Mujur, Mount Semeru

Radius Setiyawan*¹, Agus Budiman¹, Holy Ichda Wahyuni¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: radiussetiyawan@um-surabaya.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how local communities interpret news about the Mount Semeru eruption on social media. It argues that disaster news constructs meaning through language, visuals, and framing, rather than merely conveying facts. Media portrayals often dramatize disasters, creating a gap between media representations and local experiences. While existing studies tend to focus on media production or textual analysis, this research positions affected communities as active agents in meaning-making. In doing so, it addresses the limited scholarship on community-based disaster reception in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with residents of Sumber Mujur Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency, East Java, following the eruption (January–February 2022). The analysis is guided by Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding framework to explore how communities interpret and respond to disaster news. The findings identify three decoding positions. First, a negotiated reading of the "Rumini died beside her mother" report, where the event is accepted but the emotional framing is questioned. Second, a dominant-hegemonic reading of the "house intact from the eruption" report, interpreted through religious values as a symbol of hope despite its simplification of the disaster. Third, an oppositional reading of the "Semeru lava can cause a tsunami" report, which is rejected as hyperbolic, geographically inaccurate, and potentially panic-inducing. This study demonstrates that community reception is not passive but actively negotiates media meaning within local socio-cultural contexts. It extends encoding–decoding theory by grounding it in disaster communication at the community level in Indonesia, and highlights the importance of context-sensitive, non-exaggerative, and victim-centered reporting.



I. INTRODUCTION

Disaster is an event or series of events that threatens and disrupts the lives and livelihoods of communities, caused by natural, non-natural, or human factors, resulting in loss of human life, environmental damage, property loss, and psychological impacts (Setyorini, 2023). Rather than merely physical events, disasters are also socio-cultural phenomena that place human experience and interpretation at the center of analysis (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). Because humans are the central focus of analysis, all matters related to humans, including their perspectives and actions, become points of attention, particularly those related to responses to natural disasters. Several studies on human reactions to natural disasters employ a cultural interpretive approach that positions humans as the central focus, as they are capable of giving meaning to, creating, and using the various symbols they encounter.

Studies on disasters, media, viral culture, and the post-truth phenomenon are widely discussed in the literature. However, these strands are often examined separately, resulting in limited understanding of how disaster information is simultaneously produced, circulated, and interpreted by affected communities (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). The relationship between the four concepts becomes significant only when we ask how disaster news is produced, circulated, and understood by the directly affected community. In the case of the 1994 Mount Merapi disaster in Yogyakarta, Schlehe found that the meanings attributed by Yogyakarta residents to natural disasters were highly plural and inseparable from morality, religious practices and teachings, customs, economic interests, and existing socio-political conditions (Schlehe, 2007).

These meanings are continuously negotiated and contested. This indicates that disaster meaning is not fixed, but shaped through ongoing socio-cultural interpretation. Chlehe's findings are based on explanations of the political significance of nature in Java, historical accounts of Mount Merapi's volcanic eruptions, perspectives of residents living around Merapi and their ritual activities, and government responses. In addition to the 1994 Mount Merapi disaster, Aceh has experienced other disasters. Earthquakes and tsunamis that occurred in this disaster-stricken region were generally triggered by undersea earthquakes that caused vertical displacement of the seabed. The impacts caused by tsunamis were substantial, destroying everything in their path, including buildings and vegetation, and resulting in loss of human life (Power & Leonard, 2013).

Beyond material-related aspects, media conspiracies also emerge through the exploitation of events in disaster areas. The media play a vital role in providing information during disasters. At times, the media can act heroically; however, in other instances, it can create public anxiety through reporting infused with particular interests (Vasterman et al., 2005). Media representations are not neutral, as they construct meaning through symbolic and narrative elements that shape how events are understood by the public (Fatim et al., 2024). Such practices may create a gap between media representations and the lived realities of

affected communities, leading to misinterpretation and disinformation (Buoncompagni, 2024). Consequently, the information received by the public is incomplete, leading to disinformation in the public reception of disaster information (Prajoto, 2013).

At the end of 2021, Mount Semeru erupted, causing widespread destruction and loss of life in Lumajang, East Java. This disaster received extensive media coverage, particularly on social media, where information circulated rapidly and often virally. In this context, disaster information was not only reported but also reshaped, contested, and reinterpreted by the public. For example, a viral video showing a man kicking offerings at the eruption site generated widespread public debate and conflicting interpretations. Some audiences framed the individual as a volunteer, while others questioned his identity and intentions. This case illustrates how viral disaster content can trigger multiple interpretations and competing narratives within society. When this disinformation emerged, many operators appeared to frame the information. In this context, communities utilized new opportunities to participate in crisis management by observing disaster phenomena (Palen & Hughes, 2018).

These developments reflect the growing role of digital media in enabling communities to act not only as information consumers but also as producers and distributors of disaster-related content. The rise of sharing culture on social media facilitates the rapid spread of information, often based on subjective interpretations (Cohen, 2014). Consequently, the meaning of disaster news becomes increasingly shaped by participatory and networked communication processes. To understand this phenomenon, this study employs Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework, which conceptualizes communication as a dynamic process where meanings are produced and interpreted differently by audiences. Hall (2020) argues that audiences may adopt dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions depending on their socio-cultural contexts.

Previous studies on disaster-related content on social media largely rely on data-driven approaches, such as sentiment analysis or virality mapping (Gardiner et al., 2023). While these approaches effectively capture patterns of information distribution and public sentiment, they tend to reduce audiences to data points and overlook how affected communities actively interpret, negotiate, and contest disaster meanings. Therefore, a critical gap remains in understanding disaster communication from the perspective of community reception, particularly in the Indonesian context where socio-cultural dynamics strongly influence meaning-making. Existing research has not sufficiently examined how communities directly affected by disasters interpret viral news and construct their own understanding of truth.

Hall explains that meaning in a message is not singular and is not always symmetrical between encoding and decoding processes, as audiences may interpret messages from dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions shaped by their socio-cultural contexts (Bloom & Reenen, 2013). From a semiotic perspective, media messages function as systems of signs and symbols through which meaning is constructed rather than directly

transmitted, requiring active interpretation by audiences (Tawakkal et al., 2021). Several previous studies on viral disaster-related content on social media have primarily employed data- and text-based approaches. For instance, Niles et al (2019) analyzed textual features and posting patterns to explain mechanisms of information dissemination and virality during crises, while (Yetimoğlu & Karahan Adalı, 2025) used algorithm-based sentiment and discourse analysis to map emotional dynamics in public conversations. While these approaches are effective in identifying patterns of distribution and emotional trends, they tend to overlook the semiotic dimension of media messages and the interpretive role of audiences. Consequently, they remain limited in explaining how affected communities actively interpret, negotiate, and assign meaning to disaster news within their own social and cultural contexts.

However, most studies on disaster reporting on social media remain dominated by data-, text-, and algorithm-based methods, such as sentiment analysis, public emotion mapping, or viral content distribution. These methods often treat the public as aggregated data or statistical indicators, thereby reducing the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of affected communities to simplistic positive or negative emotional trends. Consequently, the socio-cultural dynamics, negotiation of meaning, and critical perspectives of local communities regarding disaster reporting remain underexplored, especially among those directly experiencing disasters. This reality highlights a research gap in media and disaster scholarship in Indonesia, particularly regarding how affected communities actively interpret, affirm, or contest media-generated meanings in crises.

The novelty and urgency of this study work in tandem to enrich disaster communication and media studies. Specifically, this study aims to examine local community perceptions of news coverage of the Mount Semeru eruption disaster, analyze how communities decode viral disaster-related news, and reveal how communities re-encode such information within the context of their social and cultural experiences. By achieving these objectives, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship among media, affected communities, and the construction of disaster information truth in the era of social media.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with inductive approach for analysis. The analysis was based on interviews with informants and drew on scholarly sources, including scientific articles, news reports, and websites (Moleong, 2021). The analysis was carried out by recording field findings, then sorting and classifying them into predetermined categories, and constructing a descriptive narrative to interpret the research results by identifying patterns and relationships. This study examined individual perceptions using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory. The way individuals select, organize, and interpret stimuli through their senses forms representations that carry subjective meanings. Perceptions were analyzed by interpreting interview data and relating these findings to the encoding-decoding framework.

The use of the encoding–decoding framework is particularly relevant to this study because it conceptualizes communication as a dynamic process in which meaning is not passively received but actively interpreted by audiences. In the context of disaster communication, especially in viral social media environments, messages are often reinterpreted based on local experiences, cultural values, and situational contexts.

This study focuses on (a) local community perceptions of Semeru disaster news coverage, (b) how communities decode such news, and (c) how they re-encode it. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with residents of Sumber Mujur Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency, East Java, conducted between January and February 2022 following the eruption. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on criteria including direct experience with the disaster, active engagement with mass and social media, and the ability to provide reflective interpretations of disaster information. Access to informants was facilitated through local community leaders and volunteers acting as gatekeepers. A total of 13 informants including residents, community leaders, and volunteers participated in the study. This number was considered sufficient as data saturation was reached, indicated by the absence of new thematic variations in the final interviews.

This sampling approach prioritized depth of experience and interpretive capacity rather than statistical representation, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how affected communities interpret, negotiate, and reconstruct meanings of viral disaster news.

Table 1. Local community informant data in the Mount Semeru slope area

No.	Informants	Gender	Age (y-o)
1	MA (Local Resident)	Male	45
2	SM (Neighborhood Head)	Male	47
3	KA (Emergency Elementary School Teacher)	Male	44
4	NL (Village Elder)	Female	23
5	SF (Local Volunteer)	Male	44
6	SJ (Village Elder)	Female	42
7	AH (Local Youth)	Male	37
10	FZ (Qur'an Teacher)	Female	28
11	RL (Local Volunteer – Public Kitchen)	Female	38
12	AT (Mlijo/Local Resident)	Female	39
13	VR (Head of Tourism Awareness Group)	Male	27

This study employed qualitative data analysis techniques following Miles and Huberman, which consist of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and abstracted data obtained from in-depth interviews, in line with the research focus. At this stage, the data were coded inductively by identifying recurring statements, meanings, and patterns related to how informants interpreted disaster news. These initial codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories. The next stage is data

display, which involves organizing and presenting the reduced data in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or tables to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships. In this study, the displayed data were structured to compare different interpretive responses among informants, particularly in relation to their acceptance, negotiation, or rejection of media messages.

The final stage is drawing conclusions and verification, in which the researcher interprets the findings to derive consistent meanings and patterns, while rechecking the data to ensure validity and accuracy. At this stage, the identified themes were further interpreted using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework, allowing the researcher to classify the findings into dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional decoding positions. These categories were not predetermined rigidly but emerged through an iterative process between empirical data and theoretical interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The media play an essential role in the pre-disaster phase, during disasters, and in the post-disaster period. Before a disaster occurs, the media can serve as a means of education on preparedness and disaster literacy, including what to prepare, how to prevent disasters caused by human factors, and how to provide first aid to disaster victims. On the other hand, the media can also contribute to misinformation in disaster reporting. As a result, this situation creates public confusion regarding the disaster information system itself. Instead of receiving comprehensive information, the public often receives disaster-related information whose accuracy remains questionable. In this discussion, the researcher elaborates on the potential of mass media in responding to disasters and on local community responses to viral news about the Semeru disaster.

Negotiation of News Coverage on Rumini's Death Beside Her Mother

The news about Rumini, which went viral after the eruption of Mount Semeru on social and electronic media, received a mixed response from the local community. This story gained public attention after being widely reported by a number of mainstream national media outlets such as Kompas.com, Liputan6.com, and CNNIndonesia.com. During the encoding process, the media constructed a narrative of Rumini as someone who chose to stay at home to accompany her elderly and immobile mother, until she was eventually found dead in her arms. This narrative represented the disaster through a human-interest frame that emphasized sacrifice, familial affection, and personal tragedy, thus generating a strong emotional appeal for a wide audience.

Despite the dominant media narrative, interviews indicated that not everyone in the local community accepted this version of events. For example, informant MA (45), a resident of Jajar Kuning, stated that the media's depiction did not match his experience during the evacuation. MA noted that Rumini was actually found in a prone position under the bed, not hugging her

mother as widely reported, and that the 'hugging' scene belonged to another victim whose video had circulated. This illustrates a gap between the media narrative and eyewitness accounts.

“Rumini’s position was not actually embracing her mother, but rather she was lying face down beneath her mother, who was on the bed. The ones who were actually embracing were Rumini’s neighbors, namely a grandmother, a mother, and her child, because Rumini’s relative (brother-in-law) was skilled at editing videos, which attracted public attention,” said Mulyana, a resident of Jajar Kuning (MA/Table No. 1).

A similar view came from AH (37), a Jajar Kuning resident, who said the media story missed key facts about what happened. AH said that during the evacuation, Rumini's mother was in the kitchen, while Rumini was at the front of the house near the door.

“Rumini was not as reported by the media; at the time of evacuation, she was not embracing her mother. Indeed, Rumini died together with her mother, but they were not embracing. Her mother was in the kitchen, while Rumini was right at the front door,” said AH, a resident of Jajar Kuning (AH/Table No. 7).

In contrast, informants SF (44 years old) and KA (44 years old) stated that media coverage was judged to be consistent with the conditions they knew. For them, the narrative was a true representation. This difference in response shows that the public does not simply accept or reject information. Instead, they engage in a process of interpreting it. This process is influenced by their familiarity with their experiences, social position, and access to knowledge about disaster events.

Theoretically, these findings indicate that public reception of Rumini’s news coverage operates within a negotiated decoding position. Audiences accepted the dominant framework that Rumini and her mother died due to the eruption while simultaneously revising specific details based on their empirical experiences and local knowledge. This aligns with Stuart Hall’s argument that audiences do not simply occupy dominant or oppositional positions but often engage in negotiated readings when media meanings conflict with lived realities (Hall, 2020). This negotiation is closely linked to Hall’s concept of “frames of knowledge,” which encompass social experience, background knowledge, and subject position. Informants directly involved in the disaster possessed experiential authority that enabled them to critically assess and adjust media representations. This demonstrates that audience interpretation is shaped by proximity to events and reinforces the view of audiences as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients.

At the same time, this negotiated reading reflects the influence of media logic and power relations in disaster reporting. Mainstream media tend to prioritize emotionally compelling narratives with high news value, often simplifying complex realities into symbolic representations of suffering. As suggested by Pierre Bourdieu, such practices are shaped by the dynamics of the media field, where competition for attention encourages the production

of emotionally resonant content (Harrison, 2022). This dynamic also resonates with Chouliaraki's concept of the "spectacle of suffering," in which victims are represented through emotional narratives that prioritize audience empathy while marginalizing structural context. In the Indonesian context, similar patterns have been identified by (Pribadi, 2018) who argues that the commodification of victims' suffering can reduce them to objects of representation.

Furthermore, this finding highlights that audience interpretation is not only shaped by experience but also by how messages are communicated and framed. This aligns with studies on climate change communication, which emphasize that effective public engagement depends on context-sensitive, audience-oriented, and culturally relevant communication strategies (Putri et al., 2025). In this case, the gap between media framing and lived experience prompted audiences to negotiate meaning rather than fully accept or reject it. Thus, the negotiated reading observed in this case is not merely an individual interpretive variation but reflects the intersection of media production logic, audience experience, and power relations in meaning-making. This finding underscores the importance of reception studies in disaster communication, particularly in revealing the tension between media narratives and the lived realities of affected communities

Dominant-Hegemonic Position in News Coverage of an Intact House After the Mount Semeru Eruption

In addition to viral coverage of Rumini, news about a house remaining intact despite being struck by the Semeru eruption also trended on Twitter. The house, known to belong to a resident named Wagiman or Mr. Roh, was described as having undergone a miracle: it remained standing firmly. It was unaffected by the Mount Semeru eruption. Based on a video uploaded by the TikTok account @.awick35, it was stated that the area surrounding Mr. Roh's house was severely damaged, including a truck buried by Semeru lahar flows near the house. The encoding of news about Mr. Roh's house, as reported by Indonesian media outlets and widely circulated, exemplifies journalistic event framing. Disaster journalism concerns not only reporting newly occurring disasters but also ethical considerations in news production and presentation, the support of victims in recovering from trauma, and the fostering of empathy for those directly or indirectly affected. Alongside technological development, misinformation has proliferated on social media platforms following disasters. In facing such situations, journalists must act professionally and clarify the truth for the public (Poluan et al., 2021).

News coverage of Mr. Roh's house remaining intact after the Mount Semeru eruption became an interesting issue to analyze, as it elicited diverse responses from the local community. Some informants confirmed the accuracy of the news as reported by the media. One of them was FZ (28 years), a resident of Jajar Kuning, who stated that the Semeru eruption did not damage the house. According to FZ, this condition aligned with her field knowledge and reflected a personal assessment of the homeowner as a good individual within the community.

"Mr. Roh's house really is intact. He is loyal, not stingy, and always recites the Nariyah prayer. That is why the miraculous event occurred: the interior of his house was not touched by ash. In addition to Mr. Roh's house, Ustadz Syafrudin's house in Kamar Kajang Village remains intact. However, there was only thin ash on the terrace," said Mulya, a resident of Jajar Kuning (FZ/Table No. 10.)

"Similarly, NL (23 years), a resident of Jajar Kuning, considered the news that Mr. Roh's house remained intact accurate, as reported by major media outlets. "It is indeed true that Mr. Roh's house remained intact after the Semeru eruption, because the viral news on major media outlets reported it that way," said NL (NL/Table No. 4).

In addition to NL, who confirmed the event based on media information, SF (44 years), also a resident of Jajar Kuning, expressed a similar view. He stated that the existence of an intact house after the Semeru eruption was indeed actual, particularly because the news had spread widely and gone viral across various media platforms. This perspective demonstrates the strong influence of media legitimacy in shaping public trust in disaster information

"Mr. Roh's house remaining intact is indeed true, as reported by the media," said SF (SF/Table No. 5).

The accuracy of the news regarding the intact house also received responses from SM (47 years), a resident of Jajar Kuning. He explained that the house's condition was more likely due to geographical factors, namely its position on higher ground compared to neighboring houses. Meanwhile, SJ, a village elder, emphasized that the house's intact condition was unrelated to any specific religious practices attributed to the homeowner. These views demonstrate local community efforts to rationalize media coverage by linking it to logical and empirical factors.

"It remained intact because Mr. Roh's house is located slightly higher than neighboring houses, and there was a rock that diverted the lahar flow away from his house," said SM (SM/Table No. 2).

"It was not because he had special religious practices that his house was saved. He was often still working at sunset prayer time and sometimes did not pray, so it is impossible to say he had special practices," said SJ (SJ/Table No. 6).

Media coverage of Pak Roh's intact house during the Mount Semeru eruption was constructed as a narrative of "miracle," contrasting sharply with the surrounding destruction. The image of the standing house functioned as a powerful symbolic element with high news value, making it easily viral and widely consumed. This reflects a broader tendency in disaster reporting to simplify complex realities into symbolic and emotional narratives (Tierney et al., 2006). Theoretically, this finding indicates the dominance of a dominant-hegemonic decoding position. Some informants fully accepted the meaning offered by the media, linking it to the credibility of mainstream media and religious beliefs about the "virtue" of the house owner. In Stuart Hall's framework, such acceptance occurs when media meanings align with internalized

frames of knowledge, leaving little room for resistance (Hall, 2020). In a religious social context, disasters are understood not only as natural events but also as moral and spiritual phenomena, making the “miracle” narrative socially plausible and legitimate.

This interpretation is closely related to the role of cultural symbolization, where meanings are constructed through shared beliefs, rituals, and collective understanding within a community (Suryadi & Maghfiroh, 2025). In this sense, the “miracle” narrative does not merely function as media representation but resonates with existing cultural frameworks that connect natural events with moral and spiritual significance. This hegemonic reading also reflects the role of media logic and power relations in meaning production. Drawing on Bourdieu, the attention economy and media competition encourage the production of dramatic, visually compelling, and emotionally resonant narratives (Harrison, 2022), often at the expense of structural explanations such as geographical conditions or risk mitigation. Thus, the dominance of this meaning is not solely the result of individual belief, but emerges from the interaction between media production logic, socio-cultural frames of knowledge, and power relations that shape what is considered legitimate within society.

Oppositional Community Responses to News Claiming the Semeru Eruption Could Cause a Tsunami

The final phenomenon concerns circulating reports claiming that the Mount Semeru eruption could trigger a tsunami, including one that could reach Japan. This information appeared in several media outlets following the Semeru disaster. News about the potential tsunami following the eruption prompted public concern, as communities have limited capacity to process viral disaster news. From such perspectives, post-truth attempts to disseminate information that resonates with public beliefs to promote particular versions of truth (Ulya, 2018). Community reactions to such information vary widely, as individuals no longer focus on factual verification but rather on truths that align with their own beliefs. In response to reports that the Semeru lahar could cause a tsunami, community responses were diverse. Many immediately believed the information without verifying facts, prioritizing dramatic narratives over accuracy. This news became an interesting case for analysis, as it elicited various local community responses to viral disaster news.

In responding to this news, most informants rejected the accuracy of claims that the Mount Semeru eruption could cause a tsunami. Informants VR, RL, and AT, residents of Jajar Kuning, stated that the news did not align with their understanding of and experience of the conditions. Nevertheless, while the majority rejected the information, some residents believed it and responded with anxiety and panic. These findings indicate that unverified disaster news can trigger varied emotional responses among affected communities.

“News about a tsunami is clearly untrue. There is no evidence that the Semeru eruption caused a tsunami. Officers and volunteers have educated residents, especially older people who felt afraid and panicked by the tsunami news. That information is disturbing,” said VR (VR/Table No. 13).

Although many informants expressed critical views, some particularly older individuals accepted the tsunami-related reports and responded with anxiety. This indicates how media dramatization can shape emotional responses, especially among audiences with limited media literacy (Dabas, 2022). From an encoding–decoding perspective, this case reflects a more complex reception dynamic. Unlike the “miracle” narrative, which aligned with local belief systems and was predominantly decoded hegemonically, the tsunami narrative generated a mix of oppositional and negotiated readings. While some audiences accepted the message due to perceived media credibility, others rejected it as inconsistent with their geographical knowledge and lived experience.

This divergence demonstrates that decoding positions are contingent upon the interaction between media framing and audience frames of knowledge. When media narratives contradict empirical realities, audiences are more likely to adopt critical or oppositional stances. This finding is consistent with audience reception studies showing that individuals actively interpret media messages based on their experiences and socio-cultural contexts, leading to varied and sometimes conflicting meanings (Daar & Gunas, 2025). At the same time, the persistence of partial acceptance among certain groups highlights the role of structural factors such as media literacy and access to reliable information. Theoretically, this finding reinforces the argument that disaster reporting is shaped by media logic that prioritises sensational and speculative narratives over contextual accuracy. Such practices shift public attention from recovery and risk understanding toward emotional consumption, echoing the broader dynamics of disaster commodification.

Thus, audience reception in disaster contexts is not fixed but varies across social groups and interpretive capacities. This underscores the importance of disaster education and media literacy, particularly through the role of local authorities and community actors in mitigating misinformation and its psychosocial impacts during crises.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined how local communities interpret news about the Mount Semeru eruption through Stuart Hall’s encoding–decoding framework. The findings demonstrate that disaster reporting is not interpreted uniformly. The Rumini case reflects a negotiated decoding position, where dominant media meanings are accepted but adjusted based on local experience. The “intact house” narrative illustrates dominant-hegemonic decoding, as audiences accept media representations that align with religious and cultural beliefs. In contrast, the tsunami claim generates oppositional decoding, as it contradicts local knowledge and lived experience. These patterns confirm that disaster news does not merely transmit

information but actively constructs symbolic realities that shape public understanding and response.

Theoretically, this study contributes to communication research by extending the encoding–decoding framework into the context of disaster communication in non-Western societies. It demonstrates that decoding positions are shaped not only by media texts but also by lived disaster experience, religious belief systems, and local knowledge structures. This highlights disaster contexts as critical sites where media meaning is actively negotiated, rather than passively received. Practically, the findings underscore the need for more ethical, contextual, and responsible disaster communication. Media organizations should prioritize verification, proportionality, and sensitivity toward affected communities, rather than relying on dramatization and sensational narratives. Strengthening media literacy and community-based disaster education is also essential to reduce misinformation and its psychosocial impacts during crises.

This study employed a qualitative approach that enabled in-depth exploration of meaning-making processes. However, it is limited to a specific geographical context and a relatively small number of informants. Future research should expand the scope by incorporating comparative studies across regions and involving multiple stakeholders, such as journalists, policymakers, and disaster response actors. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between media production, dissemination, and reception in disaster contexts. Overall, this study offers both theoretical and practical insights by positioning affected communities as active agents in interpreting disaster information, thereby contributing to more grounded and socially responsive models of disaster communication

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