

Re-thinking disaster communication: Community radio as an act of participatory disaster communication

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Abstract

One of the consequences of greater access and spread of communication technologies is that communities now expect and demand interaction, including in disaster communication. Local communities actually have the local capacity to answer demands in the form of local media. Unfortunately, this capacity tends to be ignored and people easily assume that the supremacies of social media can answer all challenges of disaster communication. Jalin Merapi (Jaringan Informasi Lingkar Merapi) is an information network in the Merapi circle, which was established as an attempt to effectively respond to the Merapi eruption. This paper focuses on the Jalin Merapi as a case study, in order to capture how community radio took important roles in fulfilling needs for rapid and accurate information in responding to the 2010 Merapi eruption. The Jalin Merapi, as a community-based information network, developed collaboration with five community radio stations and local communities. They were involved as reliable information sources, mediators, and verifiers. Because they were being run by individuals who were also part of the local community, community radio stations had close relationships with the communities and accurately represented local content. However, community radio stations have the disadvantage of limited coverage. In Jalin Merapi, therefore, the community radio's advantages were combined with social media's capabilities in a media convergence. Furthermore, since community members had various levels of technology adaption, the community radio stations played another role as mediators of bottom-up participation in the Jalin Merapi's media convergence. The combination successfully spread information about refugees' real needs within and outside the local communities. This paper will further explore community radio stations' roles in disaster communication by emphasizing principles of voluntary participation, collaboration, and media convergence to respond to a disaster.

Keywords: *community radio, community participation, disaster communication, jalin merapi*

I. Introduction

Effective circulation of accurate information in disaster communication can be a vital form of assistance to survive, particularly to control panic and be a reference for effective aid based on the affected communities' real needs (BBC, 2012; Birowo, 2009; Tanesia, 2007; WHO, 2001). Disaster victims frequently become frustrated due to a lack of relevant information (Kanayama, 2012: 31). This is increased by the difficulty in choosing the right medium in order to exchange information in disaster communication (Kodrich and Laituri, 2005: 43). Telecommunication infrastructure, such as telephone

lines, is likely to be either damaged or overwhelmed with incoming and outgoing traffic. Additionally, news and information provided by mainstream media is typically unbalanced. They are more likely to take side with certain parties for their own economic interest or exaggerate disaster information to promote their program ratings. Therefore, empowering community members to assist themselves, through access to accurate information and mechanisms to connect with others, is a fundamental need.

Indonesia is considered one of the most vulnerable countries with a high risk of natural disasters. It is vulnerable to earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods, landslides, droughts and cyclones. The 2010 Merapi volcano eruption was one of the biggest natural disasters in Indonesia, with 353 casualties, 350.000 refugees, and an affected population of 1.335.885 residents (Mei et al., 2011: 4). On average, Mt. Merapi erupts every four years, and the 2010 Merapi eruption was regarded as an extreme explosion, which occurs periodically every 50 – 150 years (Bachtiar, 2014: 77, Mulyaningsih, 2014: 29).

Because of the liveliness of the Merapi volcano, Merapi communities have consciously been building their disaster capacities through various training in disaster management. Regardless of adequate levels of community preparedness, absence of information and delayed warnings have been an historical problem since the 1994 Merapi eruption. In the 2010 Merapi eruption, authorized contingency plans were not able to cope. As a result, affected communities were instructed to evacuate three times, based upon the expansion of the safety zone from 10 kilometres, to 15 kilometres, and further to 20 kilometres. At this point, the extension created panic and local authorities were overwhelmed by the scale of the affected areas and number of refugees. It was chaotic when the refugees were asked to re-evacuate without any information about how to and where to re-evacuate. This led to distrust and demands for alternative information sources, particularly from their inner social networks. Local communities in Merapi, therefore, developed their indigenous knowledge, organizations, and communication systems to reduce the risk of information delay (Birowo, 2010: 18). At present, participatory disaster communication mostly relies on internet-based communication; but community radio's roles, nonetheless, cannot be ignored in disaster communication because of its adhering relationships with affected communities and its basis of community participation. Hence, this paper investigates the community radio's roles in developing and supporting the Jalin Merapi network as a community-based information network in disaster response.

II. Literature Review

Publications by media scholars such as Ewart and Dekker (2013), McIntyre et al. (2005), Perez-Lugo (2004), Sellnow et al. (2002), and Spence et al. (2009) provide a strong theoretical base for understanding radio as the most reliable and accessible means for information seeking both during and after a crisis. Despite radio's viability in a disaster, Spence et al. (2009: 156) find that many radio stations, on the contrary, have weak definitions of their public responsibilities in disaster management and coordination. They tend to simply rebroadcast interviews and news content from other stations (Spence et al., 2011: 227). Similarly, Birowo (2009: 6) stresses that commercial radio is frequently stuck in its original format of entertainment and not ready to be a news radio when a disaster occurs. However,

smaller stations, such as community radio, in general have stronger ties to the local community and have a greater sense of community responsibilities during a disaster (Spence et al., 2009: 154).

Community radio is not restrictedly defined as a physical radio station; instead, it is an agent for social change, cultural development and democratisation (Servaes, 1999: 260). Similarly, Kanayama (2012: 31) defines community radio as a public space in which people meet, exchange opinions and express thoughts. Fundamentally, it has responded to the need for communication at the grass-roots level, and has become a medium for social, cultural and political change by encouraging and enabling public participation (Birowo, 2006; Berque, 1992; Carpentier, Lie, & Servaes, 2007; Day, 2009; Hindman & Coyle, 1999; Kidd, 1992; Valenzuela, 1992).

A. Community Radio as a localized and cultural-based communication capacity in disaster communication.

Communication capacity, combined with the communities' knowledge of their own surroundings, is significantly important in responding to a disaster; especially because there is always a possibility that institutional focus may be insufficient in extreme events (Ewart & Dekker, 2013: 368; Hindman and Coyle, 1999:12; O'Brien, 2008: 234). Thus, in order to effectively build localized communication capacity in disaster response, it is crucial to start the process with recognizing the pre-existing capacity of local communities (Adebowale and Bhullar, 2009: 137). Similarly to local wisdom, forms of local communication capacity are often latent or unacknowledged. Carpentier et al. (2007: 225), Day (2009: 73), and Servaes (1996, cited in Birowo, 2006: 5) argue that communication capacity can be found in the form of community radio, which is developed based upon local context to strengthen the internal identity of a community. This argument is clearly explained by Day (2009: 47) who states that:

“Community radio stations that create channels of communication for their communities can contribute to each of these foundations of community and strengthen the sense of community, and ties to which of these bases contribute”

Some scholars, such as Birowo (2009: 10), Hindman and Coyle (1999: 10-11), Kanayama (2012: 31), and Moody (2009, cited in Ewart & Dekker, 2013: 376) identify that community radio can be a key source of detailed, timely, and important localized information to assist survivors in the emergency-response stage. It also can provide a means of surveillance, reconnecting family members and broadcasting personal messages concerning the safety of specific individuals. This particular information is important in the absence of similar advice via other media. This ability is mainly determined by the fact that community radio members are part of affected communities, so they can understand the reality faced by the victims and can voice victims' interests accurately (Birowo, 2009: 10; 2010: 21; Day, 2009: 59).

Another determining factor that makes community radio different from other radio is its close attachment to local culture. Cultural identity in programs of community radio has the biggest impact on its listeners and, in general, it aims to strengthen cultural identity and express culture in the forms of traditional music, storytelling, customs, and traditions (Berque, 1992: 127; Valenzuela, 1992: 150). The

consistency of local culture's involvement tends to increase the enthusiasm to participate in community radio's programs. Furthermore, community members are able to express themselves in an authentic manner - according to their own tradition, customs, and cultures by using their own languages – over community radio.

Regarding crisis communication theories, Fronz (2012: 70-72) finds that none of the crisis communication theories agree that socio-culture differentiation affects the crisis communication process. On the contrary, Servaes (1996: 217) argues that a participatory approach emphasizes local communities' cultural identities. Therefore, it is important to recognize the communities' cultural roots as part of strategies to encourage community participation. This paper emphasizes that socio-cultural aspects should be considered in promoting participatory disaster communication; and the preservation of traditional culture is successfully provided by community radio. By engaging community radio in disaster communication, it has an important function in engaging the capability of local communities to develop their strengths based on their own resources, and simultaneously considering indigenous knowledge and culture.

B. Community radio encourages participatory disaster communication.

Community radio has been used in Indonesia for the stages of early disaster warning, emergency response and recovery in some natural disasters, such as the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, the 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta, forest fire in Central Kalimantan, flood in South Sulawesi, and the 2010 Merapi eruption (Birowo, 2009: 2; Tanesia, 2007: 73). Before the 2010 Merapi eruption, community radio provided information about aid, health, missing persons, survivors, and trauma healing through live reports, shared information via Short Message Service (SMS) and quoted articles from the printed media. However, Tanesia (2007: 75) claims that these particular communication activities, which were performed by community radio, were inadequate because they only provided limited participation. Moreover, community radio mostly referred to information that was published by mass media; meanwhile, the news content of mass media could be often incorrect and too general to be quoted.

Community radio provides means for affected communities to respond to and engage with each other during a disaster. As a requirement to implement the capability, it emphasizes community members' active participation to maintain the information exchange process (Hindman and Coyle, 1999: 21). Similarly, Hochheimer (2002: 319) emphasizes the capacity of community media as community-based participatory media to support localized issues, as below:

“...[C]ommunity-based participatory media...provide substantial hope that people can best make decisions affecting their own futures if provided the contexts within which to establish media for themselves to address their own problems as they construct them”.

Unlike mainstream media, the mechanism of voluntary participation actually has been applied on nearly all levels by community radio, particularly when community members are given an active role in determining program content (Birowo, 2006: 18; Day, 2009: 59; Hindman and Coyle, 1999: 13;

Hochheimer, 2002: 323; Valenzuela, 1992: 151). Carpentier et al. (2007: 225) highlight that the participation of community members is mainly encouraged by discussing relevant topics; thus, community radio empowers community members by signifying that their statements are considered important enough to be broadcasted. Community radio, moreover, establishes an equal relationship, dialogue, and horizontal communication with its listeners. These principles develop a strong sense of community ownership, eventually encouraging community members to be more willing to contribute to participation in the disaster communication process as well (Day, 2009: 77; Hindman and Coyle, 1999: 20). Hence, community radio can be referred to 'an act of participation in disaster communication' (Servaes, 1999: 260).

III. Methodology

This paper specifically explores community radio stations' roles in the context of Jalin Merapi in the 2010 Merapi eruption. Selection of this case is based on the consideration that Jalin Merapi is a well-proven representative case to capture the capacity of local communities to provide, share and verify information in the 2010 Merapi eruption (BBC, 2012; OCHA 2013; Reuters, 22 November 2010). This case study has been conducted using grounded theory for its practicality when present explanations/theories of crisis communication and community radio are inadequate to explain the roles of community radio in disaster communication (Salkind, 2010: 548).

This qualitative case study of Jalin Merapi was performed in 2014 at four sub-districts (Cangkringan in Sleman district, Dukun in Magelang district, Kemalang in Klaten district, and Selo in Boyolali district) surrounding the Merapi volcano. In addition, the community radio stations that triggered Jalin Merapi are located in these particular areas. Data was collected by conducting 33 in-depth interviews with representatives of community radio stations in Jalin Merapi, Jalin Merapi audiences, Jalin Merapi volunteers, and Combine Resource Institution staff. The selection of the interviewees was performed through snowball sampling based on their credibility, their knowledge of community radio's roles in disaster management, their voluntary participation in the Jalin Merapi network, and their experiences as listeners of Jalin Merapi information.

Interviews were semi-structured and conducted with an interview guide, which consisted of open-ended questions. It was aimed at addressing different themes in interview questions with each category of participant. Participants from Combine Resource Institution staff were interviewed regarding the establishment of Jalin Merapi and the involvement of community radio stations in Jalin Merapi; participants from community radio stations in Jalin Merapi were interviewed regarding their involvement in Jalin Merapi and their approaches to disaster communication attempts; participants from Jalin Merapi volunteers were interviewed regarding media selection in the process of information providing, sharing, and verification in Jalin Merapi; and participants from Jalin Merapi audiences were interviewed regarding their experiences of Jalin Merapi media selection and its effectiveness.

IV. Findings and discussion

This paper particularly focuses on five community radio stations that were involved in Jalin Merapi during the 2010 Merapi eruption, which are Lintas Merapi FM, MMC FM, K FM, Gema Merapi FM, and Lahara FM. Before the establishment of Jalin Merapi, these community radio stations realized that they had social responsibility in disaster management and disaster education. This finding supports Spence et al.'s (2009) argument that community radio has a greater sense of community responsibility in a disaster. The responsibility can be easily observed in the community radio's programs as the community radio stations in Merapi, practically, insert disaster knowledge into their regular programs. Normally, they broadcast information about the geological activity of Merapi and community capacity building for eruption response in the form of public service announcements, talk shows, and local government's disaster programs. Despite fluctuating information demand, the community radio stations continuously broadcast disaster information on every stage of the Merapi volcano. In the alert stage of Merapi, they intensively broadcast information about evacuation and updated information on Merapi to meet the increased need for information.

A. Cultural engagement as a means of inspiring trust.

The Merapi volcano is located in the middle of the Java island of Indonesia and is frequently considered as the "heart" of the Javanese cultural environment. Local communities surrounding Merapi homogeneously embrace Javanese culture in their daily lives. They are closely engaged with Javanese traditions, use the Javanese language as their daily language, have close kinships, and practice mutual communal aid (BPPTKG, 2014). For generations, Merapi people have developed their indigenous wisdom as well as cultural, psychological, and emotional relationships with the Merapi volcano which very much affected by Javanese culture.

The community radio stations strongly emphasize cultural engagement as a means of inspiring trust in disaster communication. The characteristic of cultural content has been embodied in the internal values of community radio stations. In general, community radio's content is related to local issues, such as traditional entertainment, music, local culture empowerment, the local economy, agriculture, local governance, local education and disaster management. As their commitment to cultural identity, the community radio stations frequently use the Javanese language in their program content and radio taglines. Community radio 'speaks' to community members in their language, regarding the real problems they face and how to solve them. The usage of local language had been proven to successfully establish audiences' familiarity with the radio's content and radio's recognition as local media. It also has a significant role in building trustworthiness within the Jalin Merapi network for its authenticity in providing and sharing locally-based information. This is supported by Berque (1992:126) and Valenzuela (1992: 151) who argue that local language is a key factor for mutual understanding, because community members tend to identify themselves with it.

The community radio stations also considered local beliefs in the process of disaster communication. There has been historical contradiction between the community members and the government

regarding evacuation time, and this frequently caused many casualties in an eruption, particularly because the government could not force community members to evacuate. Similarly to previous eruptions, the community members, mostly, refused to evacuate in the 2010 Merapi eruption, either because they thought that Merapi had not erupted yet or its eruption would not affect them, based on their local knowledge. Most of the community members believed that an eruption must always be preceded by earthquakes, lightning, and strange behavior of wild animals. They also believed that an eruption did not mean harm, but would provide them with more fertilizer and material for a prosperous livelihood. The community radio stations applied this 'irrational' approach by emphasizing that the Merapi volcano needed the community members to evacuate in order to give it space to 'work' to improve its nature. By performing this, community members somehow felt that the process itself respected their personal beliefs and tended to feel that it is part of their life. This approach was more likely to work, as it was consistent with the community's belief that they had to live in harmony with nature. Community radio, hence, is not restricted to functioning as a communication tool/ channel, but is also part of the communication capacity itself by emphasizing local characteristics and local culture to encourage participation.

B. Spectrum and regulatory issues that led to the establishment of Jalin Merapi.

Despite its capacity for information providing and sharing local information, community radio stations only cover limited areas, due to Indonesian regulations and the characteristics of broadcasting transmission. The Indonesian government regulates that community radio's exposure only covers areas within a radius of 2.5 kilometres from its transmitter. It means that the regulation also defines listeners of the community radio stations. Unlike most commercial radio stations that specifically serve listeners based on demographic identities or preferences in music genres, the community radio stations do not specify their audiences. They target all community members without any differences in demographic identities in their coverage areas. The community radio stations are located at hamlet level; hence, it means that its exposure is limited to certain nearby communities at the hamlet level, which is one level below the village as the lowest level of formal administrative authorities in Indonesia.

The broadcasting of community radio in Merapi, in fact, may travel three to five kilometres depending on terrain characteristics in the surroundings. Therefore, definition of their receivers is restricted to the communities where their signals can be received; consequently the number may vary depending on the density of population. For example, K FM can cover 7 – 8 villages (out of 372 villages in Magelang district) which consist of approximately 75 hamlets, meanwhile Gema Merapi FM can cover 8 hamlets (out of 1212 hamlets in Sleman district). In addition to the limited coverage, personal media preferences of community members further reduce the exposure of community radio. If the communities needed to deliver important information to a wider audience, hence, the community radio stations would be insufficient.

The community radio stations in Merapi realized that they would not be able to reach every member of a community by being a single actor in disaster communication. It needs a circular observation and response to gain a full understanding of what is really happening in the Merapi volcano. On the other

hand, a formal disaster response is performed based upon administrative areas of districts; whereas disaster occurrence does not recognize administrative borders. Each community radio station claimed that it actually had developed effective mechanisms of information sharing within its own local community. However, based on the consideration of getting reliable information within the surroundings of Merapi and to share information from community radio stations with a wider audience, they agreed to get involved within the Jalin Merapi network. Therefore, Jalin Merapi was established in 2006 to connect community radio stations in all districts surrounding Merapi based on an agreement of mutual need for local information and a community-based network. These become the determining basis in Jalin Merapi as a community-based information network.

Jalin Merapi initially engaged three local community radio stations: K FM in Dukun-Magelang (north-eastern part of the Merapi volcano), Lintas Merapi FM in Deles-Klaten (south-western part of the Merapi volcano), and MMC FM in Selo-Boyolali (north-western part of the Merapi volcano). In the 2010 Merapi eruption, Jalin Merapi engaged two other community radios. They were Gema Merapi FM in Cangkringan-Sleman (south-eastern part of the Merapi volcano) and Lahara FM in Salam-Magelang (north-western part of the Merapi volcano). By involving the last two radio stations, Jalin Merapi successfully connected all districts to form a circular response in the Merapi slope.

C. Cross-platform strategy in participatory disaster communication.

As a solution to the limited coverage of community radio, Jalin Merapi developed a cross-platform strategy to share information that used to be restricted to being heard by limited groups, with a wider audience. As a community-based information network, Jalin Merapi strictly stressed that media selection had to be built upon the communication behaviors within the targeted community. Jalin Merapi did not necessarily eliminate pre-existing community-based information mechanisms and introduce a new platform as a solution to information problems. Instead, Jalin Merapi combined the community radio stations' capabilities into a media convergence, which was selected based on existing media within the local communities. Since the 1990s, radio communication, particularly Handy-Talkie (HT) and Citizen Band radio (CB radio) has existed as the local means of disaster communication, albeit having limitations because it only covers one-to-one point. Instead of ignoring the pre-existing communication capacity, the community radio station engaged the benefits of radio communication.

The media convergence has been established since the 2006 Merapi eruption. Previously, Jalin Merapi utilized some communication tools such as radio communication, Jalin Merapi's website, Yahoo Messenger, Shoutbox, live audio streaming and SMS gateway. In the 2010 Merapi eruption, Jalin Merapi broadened the participation by engaging social media to reach a wider audience. It became a media convergence that consisted of fourteen traditional and new communication technologies: website, telephone, SMS Gateway, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), radio communication, Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, e-mail, shoutbox, Google docs and Google maps. All processes of information providing, sharing, and verification were conducted through the media convergence. A strategy of cross-posting was specifically performed to ensure that all information was accessible

through various media options. Community members, henceforth, could participate through their own media preferences, which might be different among the Jalin Merapi audience.

D. Participation in disaster communication.

The community radio stations in Jalin Merapi emphasize that community involvement is an important basis on which to survive. This is supported by Kanayama (2012: 31-33) and Servaes (1999: 260) who argue that voluntary community participation by the community they serve, has been a main objective of community radio, a central focus of community radio's activities and a basis for community radio's survival. Therefore, the community radio stations always encourage the participation of community members to establish a sense of belonging and ensure the acceptance of community radio within the community.

Community radio stations in Jalin Merapi create their programs through the radio broadcasters based upon the communities' feedback. Compared to commercial radio, the community radio programs are usually more flexible and can be modified based on community members' requests. This approach is traditionally known as the "patchwork quilt" as community radio always tries to combine the special interests of the public within its programs (Kidd, 1992: 177). The community radio stations also frequently invite the community members to broadcast information about their experiences in previous Merapi eruptions. Trust in community radio stations' alignment to genuinely voice the community's interests successfully drives the participatory mechanism to be sustainable in any situation including a disaster

D.1. Participation in information providing

In the 2010 Merapi eruption, the community radio members, who were part of the affected communities, provided information about the refugees' condition, their numbers, locations and needs; information about evacuation locations, and information about the needs of volunteers. This information was based on their personal observations and was partly provided by the refugees who were not community radio members. Participation levels may be different among refugees, mainly depending on their access to be able to participate. The refugees, mostly, provided information by means of face-to-face conversations, SMS, phone calls, and radio communication. Additionally, Jalin Merapi volunteers and community radio members actively gathered information from those who could not access communication technology. In this communication process, the community radio stations acted as mediators for information providing by refugees.

Another important role of community radio in assisting volunteers in disaster response has not been widely discussed in the literature of community radio. As locals, community radio members have knowledge of local hazards. In the 2010 Merapi eruption, the community radio stations assisted in providing information about local hazards to Jalin Merapi volunteers. They guided volunteers and donors to identify areas which were safe to be explored, especially when they were gathering information or distributing aid to refugees. This particular role is important to protect volunteers from being the next

victims, as is likely to happen in the disaster response stage, because they are mostly outsiders who do not recognize the local conditions and potential local hazards they may face, and especially when the volunteers are civilians with insufficient training in disaster management.

In disaster response, aid distribution becomes an unavoidable responsibility in order to help the communities. Social networks owned by the community radio became an advantage in establishing an effective mechanism to provide appropriate aid for local needs in the 2010 Merapi eruption. In disaster response, donors tend to assume that general aid is required by all refugees, whereas each evacuation barrack might require different aid. The aid potentially is not appropriate to fulfill the real needs of refugees and for local conditions within the affected area. This is mainly caused by the absence of dialogue mechanisms to mediate between the affected communities and other stakeholders. For the refugees (as the internal network of community radio), Jalin Merapi became an alternative channel in providing information about refugees' real needs. On the other hand, Jalin Merapi became very useful in providing detailed information about identifying types of aid and the quantities that were required by certain areas in Merapi for potential donors (as the external network of community radio). Regarding aid distribution, Jalin Merapi successfully provided information to establish direct connections between refugees and potential donors, which has been simply ignored by conventional mass media.

D.2. Participation in information sharing

Community radio's roles are not limited to providing information from local sources, but it also simultaneously shares timely, localized, accurate information about Merapi, and simultaneously 'bridges' official information to be more accessible for the community members. Basically, the shared information was similar to the information that was provided by community members in the 2010 eruption, such as visual observation of the Merapi volcano and lahar, information about refugees' condition, numbers, locations and needs; information about evacuation locations, and information about the needs of volunteers.

In addition to information that was provided by refugees and community radio members, Jalin Merapi also shared official information that was released by government agencies and radio communication users. Merapi people, including the community radio members, share a mutual knowledge to distinguish reliable information sources based on the type of Merapi hazards. Regarding official information about Merapi activities, they totally relied on and shared information from the Agency for Research and Development of Geological Disaster Technology (Balai Penyelidikan dan Pengembangan Teknologi Kebencanaan Geologi – BPPTKG) as the only scientific authority to release official information about the Merapi volcano. This is analogous to Hindman and Coyle (1999:18) who argue that community radio stations also function as "a command post" in transmitting information from public officials.

Regarding reliable information about a lahar as a secondary Merapi hazard, Jalin Merapi only shared information from radio communication users. They usually directly observe river banks and provide updated information through their internal networks, including the community radio stations. Furthermore, community radio stations shared information about early warnings from the authorized

agency, and information about lahar potential from the communities of radio communication to wider audiences in the 2010 Merapi eruption.

D.3. Participation in information verification.

The role of community radio in information verification is hardly discussed in previous studies of community radio. In the verification process, the community radio members had important roles as verifiers. As the locals, they knew exactly what was really happening in their surroundings and had personal relationships to fill in the “blank spots” of information surrounding the Merapi volcano. Based on personal relationships, community radio members could check the information’s accuracy with someone they knew who lived in the area associated with the information. Moreover, Jalin Merapi’s Facebook accounts also became channels for verification among Jalin Merapi volunteers. Any indecisive information, which was previously provided or shared in the Jalin Merapi network, would be shared in the Facebook groups. It was usually information about false demands for aid or rumors about a Merapi eruption. Accordingly, the volunteers, who were located in particular areas associated with the information, would verify the information by direct observation or asking refugees in their evacuation barracks. Additionally, the community radio personnel became contact-persons on Jalin Merapi’s website so people could call them to ask about their families and for information verification. In principle, community radio members extended the verifiers’ network with their personal relationships, so it could encompass all areas surrounding the Merapi volcano. The Jalin Merapi also applied similar verification mechanisms to counter misleading news from national television stations about Merapi’s condition.

IV. Conclusion

Instead of fully relying on governmental responses, local communities need to build community capacity in disaster response, promote a local “voice” and encourage the ability to be critical in a “bottom-up” way and serve the interests of local communities. Therefore, Jalin Merapi developed collaboration with community radio stations and local communities as reliable information sources and direct verifiers in order to strengthen community capacity in disaster communication. The Jalin Merapi itself is a network that connects the community members with wider audiences through the community radio stations. It, in principle, does not interrupt the ways community members communicate with each other. This principle was constructed based on each community’s characteristics, such as the local culture, levels of communication technology adaption, media preference, daily communication behaviour, and levels of trust among community members. These characteristics have been strategically embodied in community radio’s unique characteristics. Therefore, community radio has important capacities in simultaneously involving local characteristics in participatory disaster communication processes. The community members, on the other hand, can actively participate in disaster communication based on their own capacities, their local knowledge and their real communication behaviors.

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