

## Perspectives of the Dawan Tribe on Disaster Communication Campaigns Using Natoni

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### ABSTRACT

The utilization of various local wisdoms in disaster mitigation efforts has been widely implemented, including in South Central Timor Regency. However, the effectiveness of these methods in delivering disaster communication messages—specifically in terms of practicality, reliability, and message strength—has not been thoroughly examined. This study aims to explore the perceptions of the people of West Timor, particularly those living in disaster-prone areas, regarding the effectiveness of Natoni as a medium for disaster communication campaigns. This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a case study method. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews and participant observation. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model. The findings show that the Dawan community has a positive perspective on the use of Natoni as a folk medium for disaster communication campaigns. Natoni can be utilized as a platform to embed disaster education messages within its performances. The Dawan people of West Timor view Natoni as an effective folk medium for conveying disaster education messages. Natoni is considered powerful in delivering messages due to its integral role in sacred traditional rituals, making the messages more trusted and adhered to by the community. Academically, this study emphasizes the importance of researching traditional media as an effective tool for disseminating development information, particularly in rural areas with limited technological access. Practically, the study reinforces previous research that local wisdom-based folk media possesses the reliability to convey development messages in rural communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to natural disasters. Its geographical location at the intersection of three major tectonic plates—Eurasian, Indo-Australian, and Pacific—and its position along the Pacific Ring of Fire make it vulnerable to various natural disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, and floods (Hutagalung et al., 2022; Lestiyono, 2024; Rahma, 2018). This situation calls for effective disaster mitigation strategies to minimize the impacts, especially in rural communities, which are often the most vulnerable groups.

Rural communities typically face limited access to modern, technology-based information (Mahsin et al., 2023). This limitation extends to limited access to disaster-related information or early warnings through digital platforms. Therefore, it is imperative to adopt communication approaches that are inclusive and socially and culturally relevant. One effective approach is to use local wisdom as a form of grassroots media that can serve as a communication tool, particularly in disaster preparedness (Thulla et al., 2022; Suryani & Riani, 2022).

Local wisdom encompasses the values, knowledge, and practices passed down through generations within a community. This wisdom includes different strategies, traditions, and practices for dealing with life's challenges, including basic needs. As a guide to life, local wisdom is often reflected in customs, cultural practices, and social interactions that emphasize harmony with the environment and the community. It illustrates the community's ability to adapt and develop creative solutions appropriate to the local context, making it a critical asset for cultural identity and sustainable livelihoods (Andung, Letuna, et al., 2023; Dorongsihae et al., 2022).

Rural communities commonly utilize traditional communication channels not only for cultural rituals but also for sharing information among community members. These channels play a vital role in maintaining social connections and disseminating practical information for daily life (Madhubhashini, 2021; Safitri et al., 2022). Folk media, which often embodies local wisdom, holds significant potential as a traditional medium for disaster communication. It can effectively deliver mitigation and emergency response messages as part of a culture ingrained in the community's everyday life (Prasanti & Fuady, 2017). Therefore, folk media is a cost-effective yet powerful tool in disaster communication campaigns, because it is in accordance with the culture and habits of the people who use it. In this study, a disaster communication campaign refers to the process of conveying messages to the community to inform, persuade, and encourage behavior change aimed at reducing disaster risk (Bender, 2022).

Local wisdom-based folk media for disaster communication campaigns can take various forms, including traditional games, vocal arts, folklore, specific sound patterns, or ancestral knowledge of natural signs as early indicators of disasters (Damayani et al., 2022; Syuryansyah & Habibi, 2024). For example, the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar community uses local wisdom in the form of traditions, customary prohibitions, and laws to conserve nature and prevent disaster risks (Putri et al., 2024).

East Nusa Tenggara, especially the regency of South Central Timor, is one of the regions prone to natural disasters (Andung et al., 2024). However, the local communities possess a rich cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, utilized as grassroots media (Andung & Nope,

2017). In disaster management, the Dawan people of South Central Timor typically employ traditional media such as Koa (a chain of calls or shouts) and Natoni (traditional speech) (Andung et al., 2024). Natoni is a traditional art form of the West Timorese community, performed by groups that use figurative language in their communication (Andung, Messakh, et al., 2023).

In disaster mitigation, folk media—particularly Koa—has been widely adopted across rural West Timor as an effective communication tool, especially during crises. However, the use of Natoni, specifically Natoni Lasi, as a medium for disaster education has not been fully optimized. Despite its potential, Natoni Lasi has yet to be leveraged to its fullest extent in conveying critical information and fostering awareness about disaster preparedness and response within the community.

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of grassroots media in disaster mitigation. A study in Cianjur District found that traditional games could accelerate trauma recovery among children affected by natural disasters (Nugraheni et al., 2023). Another study in Lampung reported that integrating disaster risk reduction education into local wisdom-based curricula promoted environmental awareness among students, thereby reducing disaster risks (Intansari et al., 2023). In Pangandaran, West Java, research claimed that disaster risk reduction communication strategies rooted in local wisdom were highly effective for the local community (Damayani et al., 2022).

These findings suggest that grassroots media based on local wisdom is an effective disaster communication strategy for rural communities. However, previous studies lack detailed insights into the actual effectiveness of these grassroots media and fail to capture the perspectives of local communities regarding their use. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on understanding rural communities' perceptions of local wisdom-based grassroots media. In this context, the present study seeks to elucidate the novelty of the research contributions it offers.

Disaster communication refers to a comprehensive series of processes involved in conveying disaster-related messages from one individual to another, with the primary aim of enhancing preparedness and resilience in the face of potential disasters (Haddow & Haddow, 2022). Additionally, other scholars define disaster communication as a multifaceted set of activities undertaken by various stakeholders in regions characterized by vulnerability to disasters, aimed at building the capacity necessary for effectively mitigating diverse disaster risks (Kar & Cochran, 2019). Furthermore, disaster communication encompasses the systematic dissemination of information throughout all critical phases, including pre-disaster, during the disaster, and post-disaster, which is conducted by individuals, groups, or organizations to other individuals or communities (Andung, Messakh, et al., 2023). Based on the aforementioned definitions, it is evident that disaster communication is both crucial and urgent in fostering community awareness regarding the threats posed by disasters. Furthermore, disaster communication serves a vital role in enhancing community capacity, enabling individuals and groups to become better prepared and more resilient in the face of various disaster threats that may arise in their surroundings. By effectively disseminating information and promoting

understanding, disaster communication empowers communities to take proactive measures, thereby mitigating risks and improving overall safety and preparedness.

This study adopts Stuart J. Sigman's Social Communication Theory (SCT), which offers a distinctive perspective on the role of media in communication processes. Unlike traditional views that regard media as pre-existing tools for communication, SCT views media as entities shaped by communicative interactions. In this framework, media are not merely channels for delivering messages but dynamic elements molded by the social interactions between communicators (Paterno, 2020).

SCT emphasizes that meaning is not determined by the media or the message alone but emerges from the communication process itself. Media and messages are mutually constitutive and evolve through real-time interactions between individuals. Sigman asserts that a thorough understanding of communication requires a focus on the interactional process rather than on external variables such as culture, cognition, or social structure that influence communication.

This study aims to explore the perceptions of the West Timorese community, particularly those in disaster-prone areas, regarding the effectiveness of Natoni as a medium for disaster education. The research focuses on understanding the community's perspectives on the practicality, reliability, and messaging power of Natoni when infused with disaster education content.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a constructivist research paradigm, emphasizing how social actors shape their social realities in daily life (Jamil et al., 2022). In line with this paradigm, the research adopts a qualitative approach. The chosen method is a case study (Krampen & Krampen, 2016). The recurrent disaster situation experienced by the community in the research site is an interesting case to study. This study is a single case study. The research was conducted in Kualin and Toineke villages, Kualin District, South Central Timor Regency. The research period lasted three months, from July to October 2024.

The primary data collection techniques were in-depth interviews and participant observation. As recommended in case study research, multiple data sources were used, involving expert informants such as community leaders, key informants among local community members, and supporting informants, including village government officials. A total of 15 informants were selected, adhering to the principle of data saturation.

The application of the principle of data saturation in this study encompasses several critical components. Firstly, it ensures the attainment of data saturation, as evidenced by the observation that during the interview with the fifteenth informant, no new information or themes emerged, thereby indicating that the data collection process was sufficiently comprehensive. Furthermore, the principle of data saturation is bolstered by the maximization of data variation. Throughout the data collection phase, informants were deliberately selected to represent a diverse array of community members, including government officials, community leaders, informal village leaders, and local residents. Additionally, gender and age representation were integral to this research to ensure a rich diversity of data and information.

To ensure the credibility of the research data, triangulation was employed, both in terms of sources and methods. Data obtained from one informant were cross-checked with others, and data were considered valid if they were mutually corroborated. In addition, interview data were compared with observational data to identify similarities and unique aspects.

The collected data were processed and interpreted using the interactive data analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman (Ayuningsasi et al., 2024; Rijali, 2018) this process includes four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction involved summarizing and organizing the data into specific concepts, categories, and themes in line with the research objectives. All interview data were transcribed during this stage. The data presentation stage involved the systematic coding of information. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on emerging themes and categories relevant to the research objectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Natoni* is a form of traditional art practiced by the community, carried out in a group of people using figurative language in the form of customary expressions. These messages are exchanged in a reciprocal manner during specific ceremonial events, whether in government activities or other cultural rituals in the community of West Timor, particularly in South Central Timor. In practice, there are two categories of *Natoni*: those related to natural issues with ancestors, and those related to social issues, referred to as *Natoni lasi* (Andung, Messakh, et al., 2023).

Although *Natoni* is a form of traditional ceremony resembling a performing art, it has the ability to convey specific messages in line with the intentions and objectives of the communicator, in this case, the *atonis*. Community leaders believe in the effectiveness of *Natoni* in delivering developmental messages beneficial to the community, including those related to disaster issues. As articulated by several informants:

"*Natoni* is essentially a traditional ceremony. However, if one wishes to engage the elders to incorporate messages aimed at encouraging the community to protect the environment, this is entirely feasible. Such messages could be conveyed during the traditional ceremony or at related events, such as community outreach activities" (In-depth Interview, P11, community leader).

"Although *Natoni* is primarily a traditional event, community leaders can utilize it to communicate various moral messages. For instance, when hosting guests from outside, the speakers will convey messages of hope and gratitude to government visitors. The content of these messages can be tailored to meet specific needs. Thus, while *Natoni* is traditionally a ceremonial occasion, it can now serve a broader purpose" (In-depth Interview, P8, community leader).

This aligns with research conducted in Gorontalo, which emphasizes that traditional arts preserved within indigenous communities—manifested through literary works, vocal arts, and dance—are employed by the community as traditional media. These art forms serve not only as a means of cultural expression but also as vital instruments for communication and education.

Furthermore, the people of Gorontalo actively utilise these traditional art forms as tools to disseminate information related to community development (As'adi, 2020). By integrating cultural practices with contemporary issues, the community fosters a deeper understanding of development initiatives among its members. This approach not only reinforces cultural identity but also enhances community engagement in the development process.

To incorporate disaster education messages, the utilization of *Natoni* must be carefully prepared. According to P5, a government official from the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) of South Central Timor Regency, and corroborated by several community leaders (P1, P6, P8, and P11), the performance of *Natoni* for disaster education is carried out in the following steps. First, the government, either through BPBD or the village government, prepares the topic for public education. For example, the main message could be about preserving the environment, such as prohibiting tree cutting, or the importance of reforestation or greening efforts. Second, community leaders are gathered, consisting of a communicator or *Natoni* narrator, typically referred to as an *atonis*, who is accompanied by several individuals (usually 6 to 8 people) known as *na he'en* (the communicants). These communicants will play a role in connecting and completing the speaker's statements, which are usually conveyed in sentences that resemble a puzzle. Third, the government officials, as the initiators of the *Natoni* performance for disaster education, will explain the core message to be conveyed within the *Natoni*. Fourth, the community, as the audience for disaster education, is gathered at a specific venue, such as a village hall or community center. Fifth, the *Natoni* performance begins, where the *Natoni* communicator will translate the core messages of disaster education into traditional narratives using figurative language.

The use of *Natoni* as a popular medium for disaster education in the community is perceived as practical. As stated by P1 and P10, *Natoni* does not require modern technology. It is always available whenever needed because it is part of the community's daily life. This medium is present within the community, and its language is familiar to the daily lives of the residents. Therefore, when disaster education messages are embedded within it, they help provide a better understanding for the community. During the *Natoni* performance, all village residents can receive concise yet profound and valuable information (Istiyanto, 2013; Rahmawati, 2014).

The practicality of *Natoni* is closely related to the timing of its performance. According to most informants, *Natoni* can be performed as part of the festivities of an event. As a popular medium, according to P7 and P10, it is especially effective during national holiday celebrations, such as National Education Day or the commemoration of Indonesia's Independence Day on August 17th. As some informants noted:

"We can request people to perform *Natoni* during traditional ceremonies or significant events like the August 17th celebration. During the commemoration of August 17, all the inhabitants of the village gather for almost a month. It is usually held at the sub-district office" (In-depth interview, P7, community member).

"The most appropriate moment for a *Natoni* performance to educate the community would be during celebrations in the village or sub-district" (In-depth interview, P10, community leader).

The selection of the timing for a *Natoni* performance during national holidays is based on several reasons. First, it allows for a broader reach. During national celebrations, such as Indonesia's Independence Day, people from various neighboring villages usually gather throughout the day, especially in the evening. Second, there is an economic consideration. The cost of disaster education and socialization through formal meetings is much higher than using *Natoni* performances. Moreover, these performances are often held during the Independence Day celebrations, making it even more cost-effective. Additionally, this moment is ideal as the community needs entertainment after months of working in the fields. As one informant (P8) mentioned, "... although *Natoni* has cultural elements, it can also entertain us, the community." Thus, *Natoni* performances serve not only as a medium for communication but also as a source of entertainment for the people. It is widely known that folk media, especially in the form of performance arts, primarily functions as entertainment for the community (Arifuddin, 2017).

The community also perceives *Natoni* as a reliable communication tool for disaster education. As previously explained, community leaders possess the ability to interpret or convert disaster education messages into customary language that is familiar and understandable to the community, especially those with limited proficiency in Indonesian. In this context, *Natoni* can integrate cultural values into specific messages according to the conditions and needs of the local population. Therefore, folk media is seen as a highly effective alternative communication channel for any communication program targeting rural communities (Yemer, 2020).

For the Dawan ethnic group in West Timor, *Natoni* is inherently part of their ritual ceremonies. *Natoni* is considered a sacred customary practice. As expressed by several informants:

"*Natoni* is a tradition. It contains messages and customary advice for the community. So, it is very sacred" (In-depth interview, P6, community leader).

"Since ancient times, our ancestors have used *Natoni* with great care because it is considered sacred."

We should not violate the messages conveyed in *Natoni*" (In-depth interview, P11, community leader).

From these two informants' perspectives (P6 and P11), it can be understood that the community messages conveyed through *Natoni* hold a significant level of sacredness. Because of its sacred nature, messages delivered through *Natoni* are expected to elicit a higher level of compliance from the audience compared to other communication channels. This is because information through this traditional medium is directly conveyed by community leaders, who are regarded as authority figures in daily life (Wardyaningrum, 2018). Furthermore, the community believes that the information shared through *Natoni* is sacred and must be fully

implemented and obeyed. This belief undoubtedly strengthens the power and motivation of *Natoni* to be maximized as a folk medium for disaster education, socialization, and outreach.

The community's adherence to the messages conveyed through *Natoni* is supported by several informants:

"Here, the community still values tradition and culture, so they will definitely follow what is said in the *Natoni*. In my opinion, if disaster education is done using *Natoni*, they will be more likely to believe and obey. *Natoni* is our tradition, the Dawan people's tradition" (In-depth interview, P9, community member).

"If *Natoni* is used, it's good, because it's related to tradition, and people like to listen to it. *Natoni* is part of our culture as Timorese people. If we want to conduct outreach, people will definitely listen more" (In-depth interview, P5, community member).

"*Natoni* is our culture as Timorese people, so it would be better to use things related to our culture to make the community more obedient" (In-depth interview, P2, community leader).

From the statements of P9, P5, and P2, it can be understood that the delivery of disaster education messages through *Natoni* is highly appropriate to the life context of the Dawan community in West Timor. Moreover, since the *Natoni* performance is based on cultural values, this folk medium becomes a more effective instrument for persuading the local community compared to other types of media, including electronic media (As'adi, 2020). In line with this, research findings (Syarifuddin et al., 2023) indicate that the use of folk media (such as traditional games) led to an increased knowledge of disaster mitigation among students who survived the eruption of Mount Semeru. This further strengthens the position of folk media as an alternative communication tool that is just as effective in conveying educational messages to communities about disaster mitigation.

A summary of community perspectives on *Natoni* as a tool for disaster mitigation campaigns is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Community perspectives on *Natoni* as a medium for disaster information campaigns**

Interview statements of participants	Category
P1 " <i>Natoni</i> is a traditional event. It should not be performed casually outside of cultural rituals"	Negative
P2 " <i>Natoni</i> is our culture as Timorese people, so it would be better to use things related to our culture to make the community more obedient"	Positive
P3 " <i>Natoni</i> can only be conveyed by the elders. Many young people are starting to lack understanding of it".	Negative
P4 " <i>Natoni</i> can convey any message. It greatly depends on the person delivering it and whether they are capable of doing so".	Positive
P5 " <i>Natoni</i> is part of our culture as Timorese people. If we want to conduct outreach, people will definitely listen more"	Positive



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P4 " <i>Natoni</i> can convey any message. It greatly depends on the person delivering it and whether they are capable of doing so".	Positive
P6 " <i>Natoni</i> is a tradition. It contains messages and customary advice for the community. So, it is very sacred"	Positive
P7 "We can request people to perform <i>Natoni</i> during traditional ceremonies or significant events like the August 17th celebration"	Positive
P8 "...while <i>Natoni</i> is traditionally a ceremonial occasion, it can now serve a broader purpose"	Positive
P9 "In my opinion, if disaster education is done using <i>Natoni</i> , they will be more likely to believe and obey. <i>Natoni</i> is our tradition, the Dawan people's tradition"	Positive
P10 "The most appropriate moment for a <i>Natoni</i> performance to educate the community would be during celebrations in the village or sub-district"	Positive
P11 "We should not violate the messages conveyed in <i>Natoni</i> " (In-depth interview"	Positive
P12 " <i>Natoni</i> carries a very strong message because it is a traditional event"	Positive
P13 " <i>Natoni</i> can effectively convey messages about environmental preservation"	Positive
P14 "I have not yet witnessed any <i>Natoni</i> used for extension. So far, it has only been used to welcome guests and for traditional events"	Negative
P15 "I am not yet sure whether <i>Natoni</i> is suitable for use in community outreach. It seems more appropriate for conveying traditional messages".	Negative

Based on Table 1, it can be understood that the majority of the community has a positive perspective on the reliability of *Natoni*. They also perceive *Natoni* as a folk medium that has a high potential for use as a tool in conducting information campaigns on disaster mitigation.

Folk media, such as performing arts, folklore, or customary rituals, not only serve as a communication channel but also strengthens the identity and solidarity of the community

(Hudayana, 2021). This approach allows the messages to be more relevant and contextual, thereby encouraging active community participation in development processes.

In the context of disaster mitigation, particularly in reducing various crisis threats, especially those caused by natural factors, traditional media is indeed well-suited. In rural areas, people have an emotional connection to the values and cultural rules passed down through generations. Moreover, access to internet-based technology is still limited in these rural areas (As'adi, 2020).

However, the use of folk media such as *Natoni* as a communication tool for disaster communication campaigns is not without challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the process of passing down this performance art to the younger generation. As nearly all informants stated, the youth in the villages are increasingly drawn to the advances in technology. "Many young people are starting to understand less about *Natoni*" (In-depth interview, P1, community leader). The younger generation's interest in preserving and maintaining local cultural heritage is dwindling. This has become a challenge in efforts to preserve these ancestral traditions (Ayatullah et al., 2024; Tadius et al., 2023).

Another challenge is the impact of technological advancement. People in rural areas, including those in more remote regions, are beginning to feel the effects of digital technology. The rapid development of technology, accompanied by the growing internet penetration in rural areas, can threaten local cultures (Poroë et al., 2022). This challenge could also undermine traditional communication practices based on folk media, including *Natoni*.

When this research is examined academically using Social Communication Theory (Paterno, 2020; Sigman, 2013), several arguments can be developed. First, folk media (*Natoni*) is formed through the communication process itself. Traditional media in the form of folk performances is adapted to convey disaster messages. The performance process is modified to present information on disaster mitigation. This indicates that folk media is formed and evolves through the social interaction and communication that occurs within the community.

Second, *Natoni*, as a folk media optimized for disaster education, does not merely deliver information but also allows the community to build shared meaning around the disaster messages. This process enables the messages embedded in *Natoni* to be better understood and internalized by the community.

Third, SCT recognizes that communication always occurs within specific social and cultural contexts. Folk media, in this case, *Natoni*, is rich with local cultural values. Therefore, it is used to deliver disaster messages in ways that align with local norms and practices. This makes disaster education messages easier to accept and understand in a way that feels more natural and relevant to the community's lived experience.

Fourth, SCT emphasizes the importance of participation in the communication process. In the context of disaster education, folk media through *Natoni* allows for active community involvement in communication. Through this folk performance, the community is not merely a receiver of messages but can also participate in the creation of those messages, especially the narrators (Atonis). This can strengthen their understanding of the disaster messages and increase their collective sense of responsibility in facing disaster threats.

SCT also suggests that media in social communication can function to form and reinforce collective identity. In the context of disaster education through *Natoni*, it can help strengthen the social and cultural identity of the community in terms of how they face disasters. By using media that is familiar and accepted by the community, disaster messages are more likely to be received and interpreted within the cultural framework of the community. This strengthens social solidarity, where the community feels more united in the collective effort to reduce disaster risks.

The findings of this research have both academic and practical implications. Academically, the study shows that research on traditional media in society is increasingly relevant for optimizing these tools as reliable aids for disseminating development information, especially to rural communities with limited technological access. Practically, this research reinforces previous studies (Damayani et al., 2022; Intansari et al., 2023) showing that the utilization of folk media based on local wisdom is strong and resilient in delivering development messages in rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

The Dawan community in West Timor perceives *Natoni* as a folk media in the form of a performance art that is highly effective in embedding community messages for disaster communication campaigns purposes. This is made possible by the reliability of *Natoni* in conveying both informational and educational messages to rural communities. Additionally, the delivery of disaster education messages through *Natoni* is perceived as having greater strength and adherence. The community's compliance with the messages delivered through *Natoni* is stronger compared to other communication channels because *Natoni* is viewed as a sacred and revered ritual. Due to this perception, the community believes that the messages conveyed through *Natoni* also carry a sense of sanctity that must be heard and acted upon. The recommendations of this study include that the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) of South-Central Timor should more actively campaign for disaster literacy by utilizing the potential of folk media, particularly through *Natoni*. For the people of South-Central Timor in general, it is recommended to continue preserving the sustainability of *Natoni* as a folk media that serves as an effective communication tool for disaster management, particularly for risk reduction purposes.

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