

## Leadership Rhetoric in Public Communication of the Regent of Sumbawa for the 2021-2024 Leadership Period

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyse the form and effectiveness of leadership rhetoric in the public communication of the Regent of Sumbawa, Drs. H. Mahmud Abdullah, especially in delivering Mo-Novi's flagship programmes in the 2021-2024 leadership period. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and case study method, this research refers to classical rhetoric theory (ethos, pathos, logos) as well as public communication theory according to Denis McQuail. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation. The results show that the ethos aspect is quite strong formally, especially in terms of bureaucratic credibility and direct involvement of the leader. However, symbolic and emotional approaches that can strengthen public trust have not been optimally utilised. The pathos and logos aspects have also not been fully effective, because the communication patterns used still tend to be one-way, technocratic, and less in accordance with the socio-cultural characteristics of local communities. These findings indicate the importance of strengthening public communication strategies that are more adaptive, dialogic, and oriented towards emotional approaches so that leadership rhetoric can increase public understanding and participation in regional policies.

**Keywords:** leadership rhetoric, public communication, Sumbawa Regent, flagship programme

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### INTRODUCTION

In an era of governance that emphasises transparency and public participation, public communication has become a central aspect in building relationships between local leaders and the public. Leadership rhetoric, as one of the key components in public communication, reflects a leader's ability to convey messages, build public trust, and influence acceptance and support for policies taken. The effectiveness of rhetoric in the context of local government is largely determined by the leader's ability to understand the diverse local socio-cultural characteristics, as is the case in Sumbawa Regency.

This research focuses on the leadership rhetoric of Drs. H. Mahmud Abdullah, Regent of Sumbawa for the 2021-2024 period, especially in conveying the Mo-Novi flagship programmes which are the identity of regional development. This programme requires a strong rhetorical strategy in order to be understood, accepted, and supported by the community. However, the results of initial observations and media monitoring show that the communication approach used tends to be technocratic and one-way, with a lack of direct interaction and adaptation to the local context.

Academically, Denis McQuail's (2010) public communication theory and Aristotle's classical rhetorical framework (ethos, pathos, logos) form the basis of analysis in assessing the communication patterns of regional leaders. A number of previous studies have shown that effective leader communication not only conveys information, but also builds emotional resonance and trust among audiences (Hart & Daughton, 2020; Resticka et al., 2024; Putri & Nugroho, 2020). However, empirical studies on the application of rhetorical principles by regional leaders in Indonesia are still limited.

Therefore, this research aims to explore and analyse how leadership rhetoric is built and practised by the Sumbawa Regent in delivering public policies. The focus of the research is directed at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of rhetoric, particularly how the elements of ethos, pathos, and logos are realised in his public communication. This research also seeks to understand the implications of these rhetorical strategies on public understanding and support. Through a qualitative approach with a case study

method, this research contributes to the discourse on local leadership communication, community participation, and public policy effectiveness in the decentralisation era.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to describe in depth the practice of leadership rhetoric in the public communication of the Regent of Sumbawa for the 2021-2024 period. The research location focuses on Sumbawa Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, with the research implementation time taking place between February and May 2025.

The subject of this research is the Regent of Sumbawa, Drs. H. Mahmud Abdullah, as well as a number of informants consisting of local government staff, community leaders, and local journalists who have a direct understanding of public communication carried out by regional heads. Data collection techniques include: (1) in-depth interviews with key informants, (2) documentation in the form of online news archives, and (3) literature study of relevant literature on public communication and leadership rhetoric.

Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing in accordance with the interactive analysis technique from Miles and Huberman. Data validity was obtained through triangulation of sources and techniques. Researchers also cross-checked the data from interviews, documentation, and literature studies to ensure the credibility of the information.

Using classical rhetorical theory (ethos, pathos, and logos) and Denis McQuail's theory of public communication, this study analyzes the extent to which the rhetoric of the Regent of Sumbawa can be categorized as effective in communicating public policy and building relationships with the local community. Using classical rhetorical theory (ethos, pathos, and logos) and Denis McQuail's theory of public communication, this study analyzes the extent to which the rhetoric of the Regent of Sumbawa can be categorized as effective in communicating public policy and building relationships with the local community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Leadership Rhetoric in Public Communication by the Regent of Sumbawa

In the context of Drs. H. Mahmud Abdullah's leadership, the application of classical rhetoric can be seen through three main dimensions: ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic).

1. Ethos (Credibility and Integrity of Leadership)

The credibility of the Regent of Sumbawa is demonstrated through his direct involvement in a number of community activities and the delivery of policies through official channels. Based on the results of interviews, the community tends to view the Regent positively in terms of his integrity and concern for strategic regional issues. However, this credibility has not been fully transformed into a persuasive communication style, as it still comes across as bureaucratic and top-down.

2. Pathos (Emotional Closeness and Empathy)

The emotional connection and psychological relationship between leaders and the community have not been fully established. Although the regent often attends public events, his communication style is considered to lack empathy or emotional closeness. In fact, in a society with a paternalistic culture, nonverbal symbols and verbal empathy are very important for creating psychological closeness.

3. Logos (Structure and Clarity of Message)

The logic and structure of arguments in regents' speeches are generally well organized when written. However, in oral delivery, the use of technical language that is not adapted to the literacy level of the community causes distortion of the message. This results in low public understanding of the meaning of the policies being conveyed.

### **Public Communication Strategies and Their Effectiveness**

The communication strategy implemented includes the use of conventional and digital media, but it has not been optimal in reaching grassroots communities. The one-way nature of communication has also been an obstacle to establishing two-way, dialogical communication. The use of formal language and the lack of participatory forums have limited the ability to absorb the aspirations of the community.

### **Relevance of Findings to Theory**

Field findings show that only some of the ethos principles have been successfully implemented in practice. In terms of pathos and logos, there is a discrepancy between theory and practice. This indicates that leadership rhetoric strategies need to be adapted to local socio-cultural characteristics in order to be more effective in building public understanding and support.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study concludes that the leadership rhetoric applied by the Regent of Sumbawa during the 2021-2024 period has made an important contribution to shaping local government public communication, especially in building the image of leadership in the eyes of the community. The aspect of ethos, which is related to the credibility of leaders, appears to be quite strong in terms of bureaucratic experience, commitment to programs, and direct involvement in government activities. However, this credibility has not yet been fully applied symbolically through an emotional approach or expressions of local culture that could strengthen the psychological closeness between leaders and the community. The dominant one-way communication style and limitations in creating interactive forums have resulted in the ethos not being optimally utilized in building affective public trust.

Meanwhile, the pathos and logos aspects of leadership rhetoric reveal a number of obstacles. Pathos, or the emotional element of communication, remains weak, as reflected in the lack of symbolic language, expressions of empathy, and efforts to build emotional connections that touch the hearts of the public. Messages are often normative and technocratic in nature, failing to address the psychosocial dimensions of the public. In terms of logos, the logical structure in written documents is adequate, but in verbal communication, messages are often disjointed and difficult for grassroots communities to understand due to the use of administrative terminology and rushed or poorly articulated delivery. Although the government's public communication strategy has maximized the use of digital media, according to McQuail's theory of public communication, the communication process has not yet touched on the dialogical and participatory aspects. Therefore, a more inclusive and communicative communication strategy is needed to bridge policies with the social reality of society more effectively.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and analysis in this study, the researchers suggest that the Regent of Sumbawa and the local government develop a more adaptive, participatory, and culturally-based public communication strategy. The communication style used in conveying flagship programs should not only rely on formal structures or digital media, but also consider the social context of the local community. The use of easily understandable language, emotionally resonant narratives, and familiar local symbols will enhance the effectiveness of the message while fostering a stronger connection between the government and the community. Additionally, active community participation should be expanded through informal forums and public dialogues, ensuring that communication is not one-sided but open to constructive feedback.

Local governments are also advised to form special communication teams consisting of cross-sectoral elements such as traditional leaders, academics, and communication practitioners to help formulate communication strategies for policies that are in line with the socio-cultural characteristics of the community. These teams can play a role in crafting public messages that are more narrative, touch on affective aspects, and stimulate collective participation. Additionally, regular evaluations of the effectiveness of

communication strategies should be conducted, including assessing community responses and identifying challenges encountered on the ground. For future research development, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on the influence of symbolic communication and rhetoric on community involvement in development, particularly in rural areas. Thus, the rhetoric of leadership applied is not only a tool for political persuasion but also a strategic instrument in strengthening the legitimacy of government and the sustainable success of public policy.

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