

Managing Gas Price Policy Communication at Perusahaan Gas Negara Tbk

Adil Wahyudin Anwar *, La Mani

Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jl. K. H. Syahdan No. 9, Jakarta 11480, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author Email: adil.anwar@binus.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how PT Perusahaan Gas Negara (Persero) Tbk managed the communication of gas price increases to industrial and commercial customers in Bogor Area. As declining pipeline gas was increasingly balanced by Liquefied Natural Gas supply, price adjustment required more careful policy communication. A convergent mixed-methods case study was used. Qualitative data came from interviews with the General Manager, Area Head, and Customer Management officers, while quantitative data came from questionnaires completed by 81 customers. The findings showed that PGN's communication was educational, situational, and relational. Email supported formal notification, WhatsApp and telephone accelerated clarification, and direct visits were most important for trust building. Customers rated the process positively, but the logical acceptance of the price increase remained the weakest aspect.

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1. Introduction

Natural gas plays an important role in supporting industrial and commercial activities that depend on stable and efficient energy inputs. In this context, communication becomes particularly important when organizations need to convey customer-facing policies related to pricing, service adjustment, or supply management. Price-related policies are inherently sensitive because they directly affect customer cost structures, operational planning, and perceptions of organizational fairness.

Within Indonesia's downstream gas sector, PT Perusahaan Gas Negara (Persero) Tbk (PGN) holds a central operational role in connecting supply management with customer continuity needs. In a business-to-business setting, the company is required not only to deliver energy services but also to communicate policy changes, manage expectations, and maintain long-term relationships with industrial and commercial customers whose dependence on gas may vary. Accordingly, communication regarding a price-adjustment policy cannot be treated merely as an administrative announcement; it must also address customer uncertainty and the need for explanation.

From an organizational communication perspective, this issue can be examined through Media Richness Theory, which argues that communication media differ in their ability to convey information, provide feedback, and reduce ambiguity, making some channels more suitable for

complex or sensitive issues than others (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Nurjanah et al., 2023). To complement this perspective, the concept of sensemaking explains how stakeholders interpret new or uncertain situations by constructing meaning from available information (Weick et al., 2005). In this study, Media Richness Theory is used as the primary analytical framework to examine channel differentiation, while sensemaking is used as a supporting concept to understand how customers interpret a sensitive price-related policy.

Previous studies have shown that internal communication, organizational change communication, stakeholder engagement, and customer-oriented tariff communication influence how sensitive policies are interpreted and evaluated (Abrantes et al., 2024; Barjaková et al., 2024; Fu & Wang, 2024; Ma et al., 2023; Morehouse & Saffer, 2023; Rahman et al., 2024; Verčič & Men, 2023). However, several limitations remain. First, many studies examine communication channels, stakeholder relations, or policy communication separately rather than in an integrated manner. Second, research specifically addressing communication strategies for sensitive price-adjustment policies in business-to-business energy contexts remains limited. Third, only a few studies combine internal organizational perspectives and customer perceptions using a mixed-methods approach.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions: (1) how did PGN communicate the gas price-adjustment policy to industrial and commercial customers in Bogor Area; (2) how were communication channels differentiated according to communication purposes; and (3) how was that communication perceived by customers? This study contributes empirically by documenting communication practices in a business-to-business energy setting and analytically by identifying recurring patterns in how formal, interactive, and relational channels are used to communicate a sensitive pricing policy.

2. Method

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design within a case study framework. The design was selected because the research problem required two complementary perspectives. First, the study aimed to understand how PGN internally designed and implemented communication regarding a sensitive price-adjustment policy. Second, it sought to provide descriptive evidence of how that communication was perceived by customers. In a convergent design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected within a similar period, analyzed separately, and then integrated to identify convergence and divergence between organizational practice and customer perception.

The case was conducted in PGN Bogor Area within Sales Operation Region II (SOR II). The qualitative component involved three internal informants representing strategic, tactical, and operational levels: the General Manager, the Area Head, and Customer Management personnel. These informants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in preparing, communicating, and following up the policy message, enabling the study to capture organizational intention, implementation logic, and operational communication practices.

The quantitative component used questionnaire data from industrial and commercial customers in Bogor Area. The total population consisted of 272 customers. Questionnaires were distributed to 83 selected customers based on purposive considerations, particularly those who had received communication related to the price-adjustment policy and were therefore considered able to provide relevant evaluation of the communication process. A total of 81 valid responses were obtained and used in the analysis. Because the quantitative component was intended to describe customer perceptions within the case context rather than to produce statistical generalization, the findings are interpreted descriptively.

The questionnaire consisted of 17 items developed by the researcher to capture key dimensions of communication relevant to the study, including channel accessibility, appropriateness of channel use, clarity and consistency of information, responsiveness of the organization, perceived usefulness of direct visits and customer events, acceptance of the policy explanation, and overall communication

effectiveness. These items were treated as descriptive indicators of perceived communication quality rather than as separate latent variables in a causal model.

The quantitative instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.940 for the 17 items. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to map communication patterns and customer perceptions. Qualitative data were analyzed using open coding and axial coding. Through open coding, relevant statements from interviews were identified and labeled, and through axial coding, these codes were grouped into broader categories and synthesized into key themes.

Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings was conducted after separate analyses had been completed. At this stage, the study compared internal organizational accounts with customer perception data to assess alignment between communication strategy and audience experience. To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied source and method triangulation by comparing interview data, questionnaire results, and supporting documentation. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Informants and respondents participated voluntarily, were informed of the purpose of the study, and were assured of confidentiality. The data were used solely for academic purposes.

3. Results and Discussion

The integrated findings do not indicate a single uniform communication approach. Instead, they reveal three recurring patterns in PGN's communication process: explanatory communication, situational channel differentiation, and relational follow-up. These patterns were identified through the convergence between interview data and customer perception data. Accordingly, the discussion below presents the findings step by step before drawing a broader analytical interpretation.

Table 1. Summary of qualitative themes

No	Main Theme	Substance of Findings
1	Communication purpose	Communication was directed to build customer understanding and provide education.
2	Sensitive policy dilemma	Price increase communication requires caution in timing, manner, and channel selection.
3	Channel selection strategy	Channels were chosen situationally according to issue sensitivity and interaction needs.
4	Long-term relationship	Customer relations functioned as relational capital for reducing resistance.
5	Internal organizational readiness	Frontliner capability and internal coordination strongly affected effectiveness.
6	Communication evaluation	Follow-up, feedback, and confirmation of understanding remained necessary after message delivery.

Source: qualitative coding results from interviews with the General Manager, Area Head, and Customer Management personnel.

3.1. Communication as education and sensemaking

The first theme concerns the explanatory character of the communication process. Interview findings indicate that PGN did not frame communication merely as the transmission of a price notice, but as an effort to explain the policy context and its implications for customers. This interpretation is partly supported by customer-side evidence. Customers rated the clarity of price-increase information positively (mean = 4.28), considered information across time and channels relatively consistent (mean = 4.26), and rated direct visits as helpful for improving understanding of company policy (mean = 4.44). These results suggest that customers experienced the communication as more than a purely administrative notification, although this does not necessarily imply full acceptance of the policy itself. This explanatory orientation shifts the communication goal from immediate agreement to informed understanding. It also positions the company not only as a sender of policy messages but as

an interpreter of a changing operational context. In this case, communication appears to have reduced uncertainty and supported customer understanding, even though some reservations regarding the policy outcome remained.

3.2. Situational differentiation of channels

The second major finding concerns the differentiation of communication channels. The quantitative data show that no single channel was dominant in all situations. Instead, channels were valued differently depending on communicative purpose. This confirms the logic of Media Richness Theory, according to which message complexity and ambiguity should shape media choice (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Formal policy information requires documentation and official traceability; urgent clarification requires speed and interaction; trust building requires richer and more personal engagement.

Table 2. Customer preference by communication purpose

Channel	Most Frequently Used	Most Important for Policy Information	Most Important for Rapid Clarification	Most Important for Long-term Trust
Email resmi	71	74	25	53
WhatsApp/ instant messaging	71	56	68	44
Telephone	34	24	60	23
Direct visit	42	41	36	71
Customer event/ gathering	9	19	3	46

Source: processed questionnaire results, n = 81 respondents. Respondents could select more than one channel.

Table 2 shows a clear pattern. Email and WhatsApp were the most frequently used channels in daily interaction, each selected 71 times. When customers were asked which channel was most important for formal information about policy or pricing, email ranked first with 74 selections, followed by WhatsApp with 56. This indicates that customers still associate official policy communication with written documentation. Email therefore functions as an institutionalized channel that provides formality, traceability, and consistency. In sensitive policy contexts, this formal function is important because it reduces ambiguity about what the organization officially communicated and when it communicated it.

A different configuration appears when the purpose shifts to rapid clarification. Here WhatsApp ranked first with 68 selections and telephone second with 60, far above direct visits, email, and customer events. These figures show that interactive and immediate channels become more valuable when customers need fast answers to operational or policy-related questions. This is consistent with Channel Expansion Theory, which proposes that a medium's effectiveness depends partly on users' familiarity with the channel and with their communication partners (Carlson & Zmud, 1999b). In a long-standing business relationship, instant messaging and calls can become highly efficient because both sides already understand each other's routines, terminology, and expectations.

The strongest contrast appears in the trust-building dimension. Direct visits received 71 selections as the most important channel for building long-term trust, followed by customer events or gatherings (46) and email (53). Although email remained relevant, face-to-face interaction clearly carried the highest relational value. This finding shows that communication effectiveness in sensitive policy contexts cannot be reduced to speed or documentation alone. Customers also evaluate the degree of organizational presence, seriousness, and accountability. A visit is more than a channel; it is also a symbol of willingness to explain, listen, and remain engaged even when the message may be unwelcome.

These findings support the argument that PGN's channel strategy was not singular but complementary. Email provided formal legitimacy, WhatsApp and telephone enabled ongoing clarification, and direct visits preserved relational trust. Recent tariff-communication and customer-

response research similarly suggests that effectiveness depends on integrating formal and interactive channels according to customer needs rather than privileging a single medium indiscriminately. In a business-to-business setting such as PGN and its customers, this integrated use of channels is particularly important because message interpretation is tied to both operational needs and long-term account relationships.

3.3. Perceived effectiveness of the communication process

The descriptive means further show that customer evaluation of the communication process was generally positive. Several items received scores above 4.40, indicating strong performance in responsiveness, clarity of contact, and relationship continuity. Yet some indicators associated with policy acceptance remained lower. This pattern suggests that PGN was more successful in managing the process of communication than in securing full agreement with the economic implications of the policy.

Table 3. Selected mean scores of customer perception

NO	INDICATOR	MEAN
1	Coordination with Customer Management ran smoothly	4.60
2	Customers clearly knew whom to contact at PGN	4.46
3	Direct visits improved understanding of company policy	4.44
4	PGN responded quickly to operational or supply problems	4.43
5	PGN responded quickly to questions about price increase	4.42
6	Customers still considered PGN a long-term energy partner	4.41
7	Channels were easy to access when information was needed	4.32
8	Price increase information was clear and understandable	4.28
9	Information was consistent across time and channels	4.26
10	Overall communication on gas price increase was effective	4.09
11	Non-formal activities could improve communication and relations	4.07
12	Customers accepted the policy after explanation	3.95
13	The rationale for the price increase was logically acceptable	3.89

Source: processed questionnaire results, n = 81 respondents.

The highest mean score was recorded for smooth coordination with Customer Management (4.60), followed by clarity regarding the appropriate contact person (4.46), the value of direct visits in improving understanding (4.44), and quick response to operational problems (4.43). These results indicate that customers perceived PGN as communicatively available and organizationally responsive. In other words, the company has succeeded in reducing uncertainty concerning who communicates, through which route, and how quickly the organization reacts. Recent internal communication research suggests that such coordination is vital because the quality of outward communication is strongly shaped by internal alignment, empowerment, and employee engagement behind it (Gehrau et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025; Verčič, 2021).

At the same time, the two lowest scores are especially revealing. The statement that the rationale for the price increase was logically acceptable received a mean of 3.89, and the statement that customers accepted the policy after receiving explanation scored 3.95. These scores are not poor, but they are clearly weaker than the scores for access, responsiveness, and channel usefulness. The interpretation is straightforward: customers generally appreciated how PGN communicated, yet they were less convinced by the substantive economic consequences of the policy. Communication, therefore, mitigated uncertainty and preserved relationship quality, but it could not fully eliminate customer reservations about the policy outcome itself.

This distinction is theoretically important. Communication effectiveness should not always be equated with policy approval. A communication process may be effective when it improves understanding, maintains dialogue, and prevents relational breakdowns even if audiences remain partly unconvinced by the policy substance. In the PGN case, the evidence suggests precisely that kind of effectiveness. Customers still rated overall communication positively (4.09) and continued to

view PGN as a long-term energy partner (4.41), despite their lower acceptance of the price rationale. Recent public relations research helps explain this pattern because relationship quality, stakeholder engagement, and organizational listening can moderate disagreement over a specific policy while preserving legitimacy and long-term cooperation (Ma et al., 2023; Marschlich & Ingenhoff, 2021; Morehouse & Saffer, 2023).

The qualitative findings clarify why this happened. Internal actors emphasized that frontliners had to understand the policy thoroughly before approaching customers. They also highlighted the importance of early warning, internal coordination, and follow-up after formal notice had been delivered. This means that effective policy communication depended not only on the external channel chosen, but also on organizational readiness behind the channel. A well-composed email or a well-timed visit would have limited value if the internal team were unable to answer questions consistently, anticipate objections, or identify customers who required further explanation. Such a finding is consistent with recent studies showing that communication quality depends on message design, strategic internal communication, and readiness during organizational change (Abrantes et al., 2024; Madsen, 2022; Scheuer & Thaler, 2025; Verčič, 2021).

Another noteworthy result concerns the role of direct visits and customer events. The mean score for customer events as a communication medium was 4.33, and non-formal activities as relational support scored 4.07. Although these channels were not the primary means for urgent clarification, they contributed to the broader communicative environment in which sensitive policy messages were interpreted. This suggests that the effect of communication is cumulative. Formal messages are received within a pre-existing relational atmosphere shaped by previous visits, regular contacts, problem handling, and institutional events. When that atmosphere is relatively positive, customers may remain critical of a price increase yet continue the relationship because they believe the company is communicatively accountable and operationally dependable.

These findings are consistent with broader communication research emphasizing the role of internal coordination, stakeholder engagement, and channel selection in shaping how sensitive policies are interpreted. Previous studies have shown that communication effectiveness depends not only on message delivery but also on organizational readiness and relationship quality (Abrantes et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2023; Morehouse & Saffer, 2023). Overall, the finding suggests three recurring patterns in the communication process: explanatory communication, situational channel differentiation, and relational follow-up. These patterns indicate how different communication approaches were combined rather than representing a formal theoretical model. It is educational because communication aims to build comprehension before seeking acceptance. It is situational because channel choice changes according to message purpose, urgency, and ambiguity. It is relational because the effectiveness of communication depends strongly on long-term trust, direct interaction, and post-message follow-up. These patterns contribute to policy communication literature by illustrating how sensitive corporate policy in the energy sector requires a combination of formal, interactive, and relational communication approaches. Accordingly, organizations need a layered communication architecture that combines formal notice, interactive clarification, and relational presence.

From a managerial perspective, the findings imply that companies dealing with sensitive customer-facing policies should not rely on a single communication template. They should prepare an integrated sequence: formal written notice for legitimacy, rapid-response channels for clarification, direct visits for high-impact accounts, and evaluation mechanisms for confirming understanding and collecting feedback. They should also invest in internal readiness, especially in briefing frontliners, aligning talking points, and developing early-warning mechanisms when policy issues are likely to trigger customer concern. Such steps do not guarantee full acceptance of a difficult policy, but they significantly improve the likelihood that understanding, trust, and long-term engagement can be preserved.

The study also has implications for how organizations define fairness in policy communication. In many customer-facing policy contexts, fairness is often reduced to whether the numerical outcome

is acceptable to the recipient. The present findings suggest a broader standard. Customers may still disagree with a policy outcome, yet they can perceive the communication process as fair when they receive timely notice, clear reasoning, access to contact people, and opportunities for clarification. Procedural fairness in communication therefore becomes a strategic asset, especially when distributive fairness cannot be fully achieved from the customer's point of view. In practical terms, this means that communicative fairness should be embedded in policy implementation through standardized explanations, contact responsiveness, and channels for follow-up. In theoretical terms, it means that evaluations of policy communication should distinguish between acceptance of substantive outcomes and trust in the process through which those outcomes are conveyed.

Another implication concerns the sequence of communication. The qualitative material indicates that policy messages are better received when internal actors are briefed early, supporting materials are prepared in advance, and customer-facing staff are aligned around the same explanation. This sequencing issue is frequently underestimated in organizations that focus too heavily on the final message rather than on the preparation that precedes it. Yet in a sensitive policy environment, inconsistency between internal actors can quickly damage credibility. Once different representatives provide different explanations, the problem is no longer only about the policy itself but also about doubts regarding organizational reliability. For that reason, early-warning mechanisms, internal briefing sessions, escalation maps, and message rehearsal should be treated as integral parts of policy communication design. These preparatory steps strengthen consistency across email, telephone, messaging applications, visits, and customer events, and they reflect the logic of strategic change communication in which readiness and message sequencing shape stakeholder interpretation (Abrantes et al., 2024; Madsen, 2022; Scheuer & Thaler, 2025).

The Bogor case also highlights the importance of segment-sensitive communication. Although the present study relied primarily on descriptive statistics, the respondent profile shows that customers came from different business segments and industrial sectors with varying operational dependence on gas. This suggests that channel preference and message sensitivity may differ across types of customers even when the general communication pattern is similar. A manufacturer whose production line is highly sensitive to supply interruption may prioritize rapid operational clarification, whereas another customer may focus more on contract documentation or billing implications. Future managerial practice should therefore move toward more segmented communication planning, in which priority accounts, sector-specific concerns, and previous interaction history shape the communication mix. Such an approach is consistent with recent research on customer-centric tariff design and differentiated customer responses to energy pricing (Barjaková et al., 2024; Nakai et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024; Yuniarto et al., 2024).

Finally, the findings demonstrate that sensitive policy communication should be evaluated as an ongoing cycle rather than as a single transmission event. The cycle begins with internal preparation, continues through formal notification and interactive explanation, and ends with feedback capture and renewed relationship maintenance. When organizations stop at notification, they lose the opportunity to confirm understanding, identify silent resistance, and improve future communication. In PGN's case, follow-up was especially important because customers who did not immediately respond to a formal notice could not simply be assumed to agree or fully understand. This reinforces the need for evaluation tools such as short post-communication surveys, account-level follow-up logs, and structured debriefing among customer-facing teams. In short, communication effectiveness in sensitive policy settings is cumulative, cyclical, and relationally embedded rather than instantaneous.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that PGN's communication of the gas price-adjustment policy in Bogor Area was not limited to formal notification. The communication process combined explanatory efforts, situational use of channels, and relational follow-up. The mixed-methods findings show that email was perceived as most important for formal policy information, WhatsApp and telephone for

rapid clarification, and direct visits for building long-term trust. These findings indicate a differentiated communication pattern rather than a single uniform communication strategy.

The study also shows that communication effectiveness was supported by internal organizational readiness and relationship continuity. Strong coordination with Customer Management, clarity regarding whom customers should contact, and the perceived value of direct visits contributed to positive evaluations of the communication process. At the same time, customer evaluations suggest that effective communication should not be equated with full acceptance of the policy substance, because acceptance of the rationale for the price increase remained weaker than evaluations of responsiveness, clarity, and accessibility.

Practically, the findings suggest that organizations facing sensitive customer-facing policies should combine formal written notification, rapid clarification channels, relational contact, and systematic follow-up. Analytically, the study contributes by identifying recurring communication patterns in a business-to-business energy setting. Future studies may extend this analysis by comparing multiple operational areas, examining differences across customer segments, and exploring more closely how customers balance policy dissatisfaction with continued organizational trust.

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