University Students Behavior in Searching and Disseminating COVID-19 Online Information

Perilaku Mahasiswa dalam Mencari dan Menyebarkan Informasi Covid-19 di Media Sosial

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Abstract

Various accesses to information of COVID-19 can be reached through the internet. The internet, which can be used by anyone, anytime, and anywhere, pervades the boundary of people's dimensions of life, time, and space. Social media is the platform used by internet users to search for information about COVID-19. From the perspective of technological determinism, technology determines and shapes human life. This research attempts to analyze the use of social media for searching for information regarding COVID-19 and aims to comprehend the use of social media for searching for information regarding COVID-19 among Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta's students. The research is essential to map out student's behavior in searching for information regarding COVID-19. The research found that students were digital natives that used social media for searching for information about COVID-19. The students were digitally literate in using social media to search for information regarding COVID-19 by verifying information before disseminating it on their social media account.
Keywords*: COVID-19; social media; digital natives; university student.*

Abstrak

Beragam akses terhadap informasi tentang COVID-19 dapat diakses melalui internet. Internet menembus batas dimensi kehidupan pengguna, waktu, dan ruang, yang dapat diakses oleh siapapun, kapanpun, dan dimanapun. Media sosial menjadi platform yang digunakan oleh pengguna internet untuk mencari informasi tentang COVID-19. Dalam perspektif determinasi teknologi, ada premis bahwa teknologi bersifat determinan atau menentukan dalam membentuk kehidupan manusia. Penelitian ini berusaha untuk mengkaji tentang bagaimana pemanfaatan media sosial dalam pencarian informasi tentang COVID-19. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pemanfaatan media sosial dalam pencarian informasi tentang COVID-19 di kalangan mahasiswa Universitas Muhamammadiyah Yogyakarta. Penelitian ini memiliki urgensi untuk mengkaji tentang perilaku mahasiswa dalam mencari informasi COVID-19. Temuan penelitian ini adalah bahwa mahasiswa merupakan digital native yang menggunakan media sosial untuk mencari informasi tentang COVID-19. Mahasiswa terliterasi digital dengan baik dalam penggunaan media sosial dalam pencarian informasi tentang COVID-19 dengan melakukan verifikasi informasi, sebelum menyebarkan informasi di akun media sosial yang mereka miliki.
Kata Kunci*: COVID-19; Berita E-Sports; Framing Entman; Interseksionalitas; Ketimpangan Identitas*

Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has transformed how individuals interact. The internet has become a new digital room that creates cultural space and provided multiple easiness to users. Various accesses towards various information and entertainment from the entire world can be accessed through the internet. The internet has pervaded the boundary of users' dimensions, ranging from life, time, to space, and makes the aspects reachable by virtually anyone, anytime, and anywhere.

Furthermore, the presence of the internet indirectly contributes to the emergence of the new generation: generation ne(xt). This generation is deemed by many as the new generation raised and nurtured by an interactive digital cultural environment. Unsurprisingly, most people of the generation tend to seclude themselves (desocialization), communicate personally, grow up with video games, have more leisure time to listen to radio and television, and computer literate (Ibrahim, 2011).

Looking at the pervasiveness of the internet and technology, McLuhan argued that the relation of technology, media, and society could be defined as technological determinism. From the perspective, human life is shaped and determined by technology. McLuhan (West & Lynn H, 2007) often called this perspective the media ecology theory, and it argues that the media environment, coupled with technical, technological, and mode of information, including communication codes, plays a significant role in people's life.

Media ecology has three assumptions. Firstly, the media affect humans' actions and behavior in society. The first assumption highlights the situation in which human is inseparable from media. Media is the current necessity, and it pervades deeply into human life. The existence of media affects human life and society. Secondly, the media fix perception and organize experience. The second assumption shows how humans are directly affected by the media. Media has significant power in influencing people's views of the world. Lastly, media ties the world collectively. The third assumption of media ecology theory shows that the media chains the world as a whole. The global village is the denotation of how media make systems of politics, economy, society, and global culture bonded into one (West & Lynn H, 2007).

The presence of technology profoundly affects the different sides of human lives. Human has a symbolic relationship with technology. It means that although humans create technology, technology turns its direction back to humans. According to McLuhan (Griffin, 2003), media technology has revolutionized society because modern society has depended highly on technology. Furthermore, public order has been shaped based on people's skills in using technology.

Media convergence, which occurs through social media, is the manifestation of the revolution above. The function of media convergence as information and media (Terr, 2004) is to improve the thought process based on technological and computerized systems and to carry the media users to pass across the communication network. The objective of convergence, therefore, is content management, which aims to manage any content, ranging from figures, information, to audio, to be accessed and consumed easier in any type of technology and media. Media convergence thus eases the audiences to not only access and produce but also consume information independently. Shadia's research on video-on-demand pointed out precisely the advantages mentioned by how influential media convergence in this era (Pradsmadji & Irwansyah, 2020)

In Indonesia, as shown by "We Are Social," the number of Indonesian internets

and social media users is relatively high. There is a 15-percent internet penetration that accounted for 38 million users. Of the total population, 62 million people have been registered on Facebook, and, on average, Indonesian internet users spend almost 3 hours to surf and be connected on social media through their cell phones (Nasrullah, 2015).

Apart from "We Are Social," other findings regarding social media, teenagers, and health issues are worth mentioning. Concerning researchers and society in general, Setiadi demonstrated that social media as the product of information and communication technology has transformed how people communicated in society and any field, ranging from marketing communication, political communication, and learning communication. This transformation should not only be seen as a shift from conventional to digital and model of communication but also in effectiveness (Setiadi, 2015). Social media and technological development also affect communities in society. For example, Amalia and Sukmono demonstrated how social media bring dynamics to cyberspace (Amalia & Sukmono, 2019), and Sukmono and Junaedi showed that a more participatory movement was initiated by more diverse communities, including religious-based organization, such as Muhammadiyah (Sukmono & Junaedi, 2019).

Among adolescents, social media use has actuated a new identity. A study by Ayum found that recently teenagers have been more open in social media by showing their identities. It can be seen from their reason for openness, which can be called a will to exist, by uploading their current activities and disclosing their images implicitly in social media (Ayun, 2015). However, the trend is not necessarily negative. The development of social media was also used positively by the younger generation. One of them is Muhammadiyah younger generation that established writing-oriented online media to contribute to the development in the digital era (Sukmono & Junaedi, 2020)

As regards education, social media is likely to be developed as learning media regarding COVID-19 for university students. The reason is that social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace, has been a trend and seemingly a basic need for anyone (Husain, 2014). Husain's research regarding social media as learning media at school showed that social media could be an alternative to be exhausted for education word. This is because not only do most students, teachers, and other individuals have social media account, but also many of the students try to log in to social media more than once in a day. For supporting the learning-teaching process, this media should be used effectively to vary the process. This method, at the same time, can prevent students' tendency to use social media excessively. By making social media learning media, their time for only surfing can be transferred to more educational activities. Furthermore, apart from being more attractive, social media can be accessed anytime and anywhere through cell phones and not limited during classroom time (Husain, 2014). It indicates that social media is likely to be used as a medium to exchange information regarding COVID-19.

On the other hand, research regarding social media and health was done by Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse. Their research aimed to identify socio-demographic and health factors related to social media use in the United States. The result showed that only 69% of mature citizens in the US reported having internet access. Among the users, 5% participated in an online group, 7% were active in blogging, and 23% used social media. Their research concluded that in the US, the growth of social media is not distributive enough to age-group. Consequently, health communication programs that used social media should consider the age group of the targeted population. This step is essential to ensure that the message reaches the audience. This research also showed

that new technologies represented by social media could alter communication patterns in the United States (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse, 2009).

In the context of health, social media has been one of the media for searching for health information. Rosini and Nurningsih found that social media that can be used for searching and communication purpose is WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube by using cell phones and PC in the house as devices for accessing. Social media users often received health information through social media. However, they rarely communicate it back or forward it to other users (Rosini & Nurningsih, 2018).

Against the background, the research analyzes how social media can be used to search for information regarding COVID-19. The research aims to comprehend social media use in searching for information regarding COVID-19 in the students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY). The reason for UMY is that the university has applied online learning since 2016 so that the students can be considered familiar with digital media. The research is essential because it is expected that it can result in a recommendation for social media management in spreading information regarding COVID-19.

Method

The research is descriptive-quantitative. The descriptive method is a method to describe and analyze a research result, but not for drawing a more extensive conclusion (Sugiono, 2012). In this research, data were collected by a survey. A survey is a study of a big or small population that focuses on the sample taken by the population in question. The aim is to find relative events, distributions, and relations between sociological variables and psychology (Sugiono, 2012). In descriptive research, the data was collected by disseminating questioners to students. The data was then organized and analyzed in the form of narrative and infographic. The data collection method is a technique or method that can be used by the researcher to collect data. In quantitative research, usually, data was collected through questioners, interviews, and documentation (Kriyantono, 2008).

In light of that, a survey was conducted on UMY's students. A questionnaire is a list of question that needs to be filled by the respondents. Sometimes, it is merely called a form. The forms are disseminated to find complete information on a problem without feeling worried if the respondents did not provide an accurate answer in proportion to reality (Kriyantono, 2008). Data gathered was organized descriptively to answer the research question.

The research used percentage analysis. Percentage analyses is a method to find the tendency of the frequency of the respondents' answer and phenomena in practice. The step is useful to analyze the size of the proportions of each answer in each question. As a result, the answers can be more straightforward to be analyzed. This would show the patterns and tendencies of the respondents' answers. In this research, a percentage analysis was used to analyze the questionnaire given to UMY's students regarding social media use in finding and distributing information of COVID-19. The data resulted from the questionnaires was measured through percentage-descriptive analysis that transformed the percentage of each sub-variable to qualitative and quantitative sentences. The result can then be considered as an interpretation of the research. The data display of the research was manifested in numbers, percentages, and infographics that would be narrated in the next section.

Results and Discussion

The research studied 129 UMY's students randomly. In terms of hometown, 98 students (76%) are not from Yogyakarta Special Province (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta/ DIY), while the rest, 31 students, come from DIY. It showed that most respondents are comers. In the middle of the pandemic, in which physical distancing imposed the government to restrict transportation access, students that are not from Yogyakarta were faced with the dilemma of going home. Social media then was one of their feasible options to obtain current information in supporting their inference in any future activity.

In terms of social media use, 70 respondents (54,7%) had used social media for around 5 to 10 years, while another 52 respondents (40,6%) used social media for more than 10 years. Only the other 7 respondents used social media for less than 5 years. Social media use was measured with how long the respondents hold their ownership of social media account. As part of millennials, the students in this research have been seemingly familiar with social media. Thus they can be called digital natives.
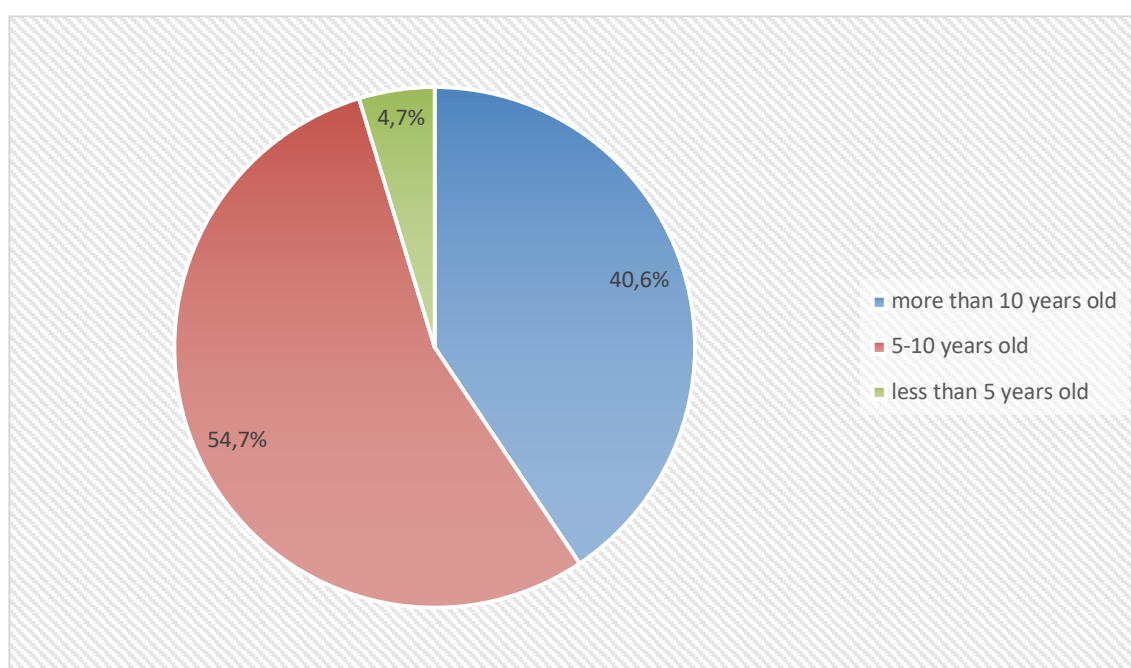

Figure 1. Social media ownership period

The types of respondents' social media were also various. However, generally, the pattern showed that they have more than one platform. Instagram was the most popular social media, with 120 respondents (93%), followed by YouTube, with 84 respondents (65%). Line and Twitter came next with 79 respondents and 73 respondents, respectively, while Facebook and Pinterest were the second from the last and the least with 47 respondents (36%) 22 respondents (17%), in turn.

As regards the daily portion of social media use, 93 respondents (72,1%) used social media for more than 3 hours per day. Eighteen respondents (14) answered between 2 and 3 hours per day. Another 15 respondents (12,4%) used social media between 1 and 2 hours, while the rest 3 confessed that they only used social media for less than 1 hour per day. This data showed how intense social media use in university students.
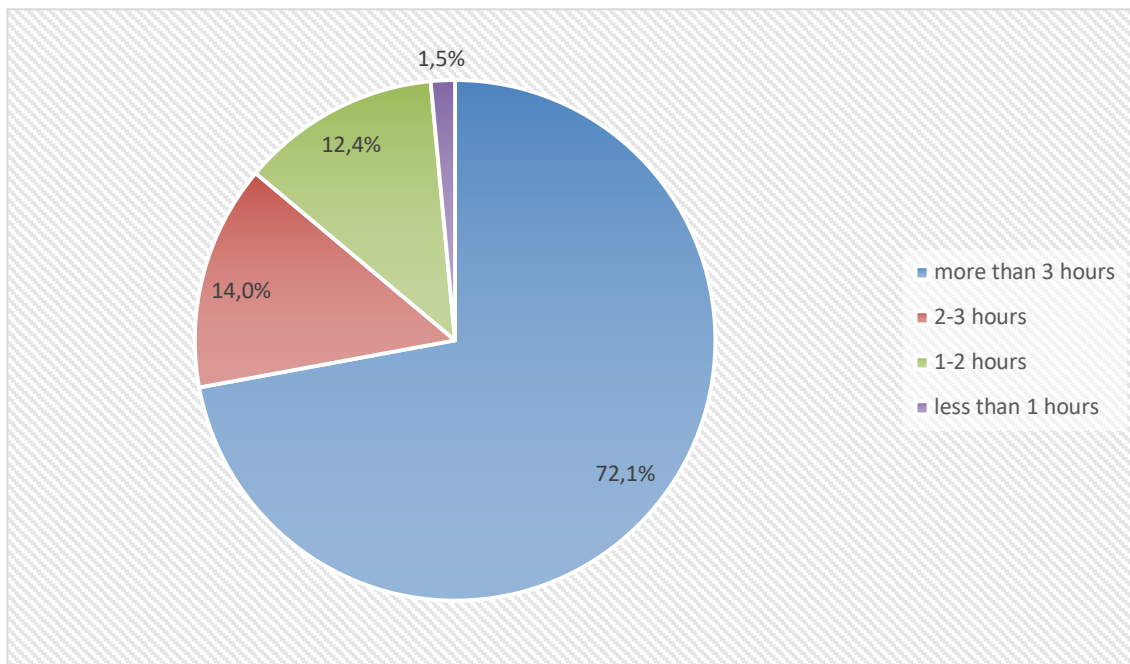
Figure 2. Daily Use of Social Media

The high intensity of social use of the students was directly proportional to the use of social media for searching for information about COVID-19. Around 37 respondents (28,7%) used social media for searching for information of COVID-19, while the respondents that combined social media and mass media by putting more proportion to social media as the source of information of COVID-19 accounted for 44 people (43,1%). On the other hand, the respondents that combined social media and mass media with a balanced proportion were 43 students (33,3%). Only 5 respondents (3,9%) that combined social media and mass media by giving more proportion to mass media. All respondents always used social media to look for information about COVID-19.

The high intensity of social media use for searching for information on COVID-19 can be elaborated into the source of the social media account. Sixty-three respondents (48,8%) said that the information from the mass media's social media accounts was moderately reliable while 27 respondents (20,9%) said the inverse, that the social media accounts of mass media were slightly reliable. On the other hand, 24 respondents (18,6%) said that the social media account of mass media institutions were reliable. Only 9 respondents (7%) believed that information from the mass media's social media accounts was very reliable. The rest 6 respondents (4,7%) said that information from social media accounts of mass media institutions could not be relied on in dissemination information of COVID-19.

Concerning information of COVID-19 from social media account of government institutions, such as the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management, COVID-19 Task Force, and other related ministries, the institutions mentioned were relatively trusted by the respondents. It can be seen from the following data. Thirty-eight respondents (28,1%) strongly trusted information of COVID-19 from social media account of governmental institutions, 43 respondents (33,6%) trusted the information, and another 38 respondents (29,7%) trusted moderately. Only 11 respondents (8,6%) said that information of COVID-19 that comes from the government was slightly trusted and even cannot be relied on. This result showed the high trustability of governmental institutions in disseminating information regarding COVID-19.

However, the information from the social media accounts of religious institutions, including their Disaster Management Organizations, were also quite trustable as reference for information of COVID-19. Fifty-three respondents (41,1%) said that they moderately trusted information of COVID-19 from social media accounts of religious institutions. Forty-three respondents (33,3%) trusted the information, and 18 respondents (14%) thoroughly trusted it. Only 15 respondents (11,6%) said that the information was less trusted and did not trust the social media accounts of religious institutions in terms of COVID-19.

Regarding information dissemination, 61 respondents (61,3%) answered that they shared information of COVID-19 they obtained from social media accounts that they followed on their social media accounts. However, 35 respondents (27,1%) answered that they were reluctant, and 33 respondents (25,1%) did not share the information. Furthermore, the intensity of the respondents in sharing information of COVID-19 on social media was directly proportional to their behaviors in checking and verifying information of COVID-19 before disseminating it through sharing, retweeting, or reposting. Ninety-six respondents (74,4%) said that they always checked and verified the information of COVID-19 before spreading it to their social media accounts. Twenty respondents (15,5%) sometimes checked and verified first, and only 13 respondents (10,1%) did not check and verified the information before sharing it on their social media. The data showed a high level of respondents' literacy of digital media among students investigated.

Concerning data display, 70 respondents (52,7%) agreed that infographic is the most informative form. Another 42 respondents (32,6%) argued for video, and 13 respondents (10,1%) opted for text. The rest 4 believed that pictures were the most representative type of information of COVID-19.

The advancement of digital technology has brought about a massive transformation, especially in terms of forms and functions of media. For example, previous media mostly communicated one-way while now it is interactive. Also, previously, the individual audience was only a consumer but now can act as the producer of information. The situation needs a comprehensive understanding of media (De Abreu, Mihailidis, Lee, Melki, & Mc Dougall, 2017), not to mention that the use of the internet is seen as a necessity lately. With that in mind, students' behavior in using social media to search for information of COVID-19 should also be understood not only as consumers but also as producers of information. Through social media, the users can share information on COVID-19 they obtained.

The generation raised when the internet culture had been born is usually called digital natives or millennials. Ibrahim (2011) said that this generation is deemed as the future generation that is raised in the interactive and new digital media culture. They tend to desocialize, communicate personally, and be computer literate. It can be seen from the result of this discussion that said that 93 respondents (72,1%) used social media for more than 3 hours per day. It indicates that the students investigated were digital natives. Although they can be called digital natives, the students did not abandon mass media as one of the sources of information. Moreover, they combined mass media with social media as their sources of information of COVID-19, although the proportion of social media is more massive than the mass media. It showed that the convergence of mass media and social media had been a natural phenomenon for the students.

Information about COVID-19 that was produced by social media accounts of governmental organizations, such as the National Board of Disaster Management,

COVID-19 Task Force, and other related ministries, were trusted more by the respondents. It also happened to religious institutions, including their Disaster Management Organization. The institutions were also relatively trusted by the respondents. Concerning their behaviors in sharing the information, 61 respondents (61,3%) claimed that they would share the information of COVID-19 they obtained from social media account they followed on their social media accounts. The high level of participation of the respondents in sharing information of COVID-19 on social media was directly proportional to their behaviors in chacking and verifying information of COVID-19 before disseminating them through sharing, retweeting, and reposting. Ninety-six respondents (74,4%) said that they always check and verify their information of COVID-19 before sharing it on their social media. This high number showed they are literate in terms of digital media.

It is worth mentioning that the result of the present research contradicts the previous research that showed that social media users 'often' receive health information through social media, but they 'rarely' forwarded the information to other users (Rosini & Nurningsih, 2018). The present research showed that the millennials actively shared health information related to COVID-19 to other social media users. Indeed, not only did they share the information, but they also checked and verified it before sharing the information. Among students, it showed that they had a high level of digital media literacy. They can sift valid information and prevent hoaxes of COVID-19. According to the respondents, the most informative display of COVID-19 was infographic. It showed that as digital natives, the students prefer visual information. It indicates that graphic data is easier to understand on their small gadgets.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the students investigated were digital natives that used social media to look for information regarding COVID-19. However, despite being digital natives, the students did not abandon mass media as a source of information. They combined social media and mass media, although the proportion for social media was more prominent, as the source of information for COVID-19. The students were digitally literate, especially in terms of using social media to search for information on COVID-19 by verifying the information before sharing the information on their social media accounts. With this in mind, the students can be a collaborative partner of administrators of the government's social media accounts, as well as mass media and social-religious institutions. Collaboration became vital in social media. The research recommends that the social media accounts of governmental institutions, mass media, and social-religious institutions collaborate with university students in spreading information regarding COVID-19. As digital natives, university students were literate digitally to sift information of COVID-19 before spreading it to other social media users.

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