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Case Study in Covid-19 Infodemic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has been declared as pandemic by WHO. Indonesian government late to give official statement that made public believe in hoax, rumours, gossip, even propaganda that they got from social media and passed from one group to another. As we know, too much information or shortage of information could lead to confusing messages that eventually increase public distrust towards official statement. Consequently, people resort to social media as the only source of information. As a mass-self communication channel, the credibility of information from this source is problematic. Castell's mass-self communication made this circle become infodemic that hamstring public trust to government. In this research, we do comparative case study on how countries (China and South Korea) tackle communication problems during the pandemic. This research is significant because it could be a reference model of crisis communication strategy when the country faces a pandemic Relying on mass media analysis and literature review, we find that China's government uses power to control information circulation while South Korea's generates public's participation in social media. Indonesia as a democratic country could use this experience to gain public's trust by doing Coomb's SCCT for crisis situation. Doing this, Indonesia is expected to be more prepared to for the crisis communication in the future.

Keywords: COVID-19, infodemic, crisis communication, case study

ABSTRAK

COVID-19 telah dinyatakan sebagai pandemi oleh WHO. Pemerintah Indonesia terlambat memberikan pernyataan resmi yang membuat publik percaya pada hoax, rumor, gosip, bahkan propaganda yang mereka dapatkan dari media sosial dan diteruskan dari satu kelompok ke kelompok lain. Seperti kita ketahui, informasi yang terlalu banyak atau kekurangan informasi dapat menimbulkan pesan yang membingungkan yang pada akhirnya meningkatkan ketidakpercayaan publik terhadap pernyataan resmi. Akibatnya, masyarakat menggunakan media sosial sebagai satu-satunya sumber informasi. Sebagai saluran komunikasi massa-mandiri, kredibilitas informasi dari sumber ini bermasalah. Komunikasi massa yang dilakukan Castell membuat lingkaran ini menjadi infodemik yang melemahkan kepercayaan publik kepada pemerintah. Dalam penelitian ini, kami melakukan studi kasus komparatif tentang bagaimana negara-negara (China dan Korea Selatan) menangani masalah komunikasi selama pandemi. Penelitian ini penting karena dapat menjadi model referensi strategi komunikasi krisis ketika negara menghadapi pandemi Mengandalkan analisis media massa dan tinjauan pustaka, kami menemukan bahwa pemerintah China menggunakan kekuatan untuk mengontrol peredaran informasi sementara Korea Selatan menghasilkan partisipasi publik di media sosial. Pengalaman ini bisa dimanfaatkan Indonesia sebagai negara demokrasi untuk mendapatkan kepercayaan publik dengan melakukan SCCT Coomb untuk situasi krisis. Dengan begitu, Indonesia diharapkan lebih siap menghadapi krisis komunikasi di masa mendatang.

Kata Kunci: COVID-19, infodemik, komunikasi krisis, studi kasus

INTRODUCTION

Corona virus disease (COVID-19) has been trending in mass media and social media lately (Mazrieva, 2020). Netizen has been terrified and flooded with facts and hoaxes. All kind of information travel faster than the virus itself, messages broadcasted toward groups, group members forwarded to another group and so on. After corona virus outbreak in Wuhan, mask price in Indonesia, especially type N95, was raised 70% (Liputan6.com, 2020). Indonesian already questioned this situation since there was no formal information or mitigation acts about COVID-19 in Indonesia. Netizen was speculated whether Indonesia didn't have adequate tools to detect COVID-19, Indonesian treat COVID-19 as *masuk angin*, or that was true that the virus would die in tropical climate. Then Ma'ruf Amin, Vice President of Indonesia, in his opening speech for Islam Congress in Bangka Belitung jokingly said Indonesia was protected by prayer so the virus would not enter the country and put on the news that went viral (Setyaningrum, 2020). Two days later, Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia, with Agus Terawan, Health Minister of Indonesia, confirmed two persons in Depok was infected by COVID-19 (Mazrieva, 2020). Right after President's statement, demand of mask and hand sanitizer was skyrocketed as its price reached half million Rupiah (Kusuma, 2020). Government took control by making regulation for pricing and cooperated with police to catch mask and hand sanitizer hoarder (Ikhsan, 2020).

What happened in Indonesia also happened globally when people uncertain about which information was true or which was false, people would be confused, anxious, or even panic that made people could use this situation for political or economic profit (CNN Indonesia, 2020). WHO (2018) define infodemic as rapid spread of information of all kinds, including rumours, gossip, and unreliable information as they spread instantly and globally through internet. Even with managing epidemic manual in 2018, after WHO declared COVID-19 as pandemic to highlight the importance of countries to respond the outbreaks (BBC News, 2020), what happened was there was moral panic that lead to racist towards Asians as COVID-19 first outbreak was in Wuhan, China (Horton, 2020a). Corona virus named as COVID-19 to prevent negative perceptual bias, condused, irrational, anxious, fearful, suspicious, xenophobic that lead to extreme behaviour; this effort learned after MERS (Middle Eastern) and SARS lead to infodemic and harm certain industry due to financial loss (Hu, Yang, Li, Zhang, & Huang, 2020). In mass media theory, even how media coverage could lead into moral panics, like how US media called COVID-19 as China virus or Wuhan virus leading non-Asian negative reaction towards Asian (Jakovljevic, Bjedov, Jaksic, & Jakovljevic, 2020).

This infodemic happened globally and blame-game between China and United State in mass media clearly shown political interest instead of showing positive news that would

bring hope to audience in this pandemic situation (Vandenbrink, 2020). This COVID-19 shown us how media within technology has greater power to construct reality with the interaction between audience and the media (Altheide, 2013). Exposure to bad news made people felt enough and searching for another type of information like entertainment and tutorial in social media. To counter misinformation, hoax, gossip, propaganda, or bad news, organization used social media like TikTok to raise awareness about hygiene, they made content about how to wash hands, who needs to use mask, cough ethics, etc (hitekno.com, 2020) even Minister of Health made Twitter thread about Corona in Indonesia, but the effort made netizen felt misguided because they thought Minister of Health did not give clear data (hitekno.com, 2020b).

This case was shown new characteristic in new media when people under panic they would forward any information they got. All the comments in social media shown they suspicious of people would take advantage of this situation, especially when they have political or economic interest. As explained by Castells (2013) mass-self communication era, people could be producer or consumer of content in social media. User has autonomy that provided by technologies of communication to generate content that relevant with their belief (Castells, 2013). In this case, fear was an ultimate reason that lead to cognitive constraints. Indonesian government considered late in crisis communication which lead to this panic and distrust, but due to prevention and efficiency Dany Amrul Ichdan, presidency expert, stated Indonesian government could not exposed address or identity of the patient (Patricia, 2020).

Every country has different problem and Indonesia is one of diverse country with different condition that should be treated differently, Joko Widodo in interview with Najwa Shihab explain why government need time to act upon this pandemic situation (Shihab, 2020). Media owner use cultivation theories to raise critics towards how Indonesia government handle this pandemic, these kinds of information would lead public to doubt government method because it was not fast enough or government not care enough to public welfare.

On March 1, 2020, South Korea became one of the countries most infected with Covid-19 in the globe. The dissemination of information affecting the spread of the corona virus has also occurred very quickly. South Korean government has been criticized for causing social confusion for failing to communicate information accurately and effectively about Covid-19. However, the South Korean government managed to resolve the crisis by guaranteeing its citizens and recognizing the government is responsible for the spread of the corona virus (Abidin & Lee, 2020).

It is different in China, since the first possible epidemic case was reported in Wuhan, the government has used WeChat as a social media to report more cases every day. The Chinese government is considered successful in controlling the spread of the virus by quarantine. In addition, China is also able to reduce infodemics in the form of fake news, hoaxes and disinformation as a good step to reduce confusion and panic. Tencent as the parent company of WeChat helps to effectively filter false information and rumors (Hua & Shaw, 2020). This study would compare how other country handle COVID-19 which claimed success.

METHOD

This research use case study to investigate new media communication in COVID-19 case. The objective in this research is to identify causal mechanism of social process in this pandemic outbreak. Last time global pandemic happened in the world was 2009 when social media was not commonly used (Baenanda, 2019), now in new media there was different characteristic when infodemic become a 'thing' globally. New media could be characterized as digital, multimedia, networked computer that allowed interactive graphic interfaces (Lister & et Al, 2010). In industry revolution 4.0 where this COVID-19 happened, information moved faster and global which could lead into moral panic because we could compare our situation with others.

This study uses sources based on scientific journals, news in mass media, documentation and social media observations. The technical analysis of data is explanatory by explaining a phenomenon that is mutually bound. As this research would observe about COVID-19 infodemic case, research would be done in historical-comparative research which data examined on events or conditions in the historical past and/or different societies in media coverage. Researcher choose two countries in Asia because cultural background with two different perspective; China with authoritarian ways and South Korea with democratic ways.

The primary data analysis technique used is content analysis. In this research, the author categorizes the qualitative information obtained from mass media and other secondary sources to further classify, summarize, and tabulate data. The data classification process will be guided by author's interpretation of theoretical framework used.

RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In this infodemic situation we could see how overflowing information could lead to psychological threat like fear, panic, distrust, and even xenophobia (Jakovljevic, Bjedov, Jaksic, & Jakovljevic, 2020). Bad news travel faster than hope in one-way communication, in this

social media characteristic, panic and hysteria spread faster than raising hope (Bursztajn, 2020). In psychiatric point of view, psychological aspect related to:

> *1. the uncertain incubation period of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus and its possible asymptomatic transmission cause additional fear and anxiety; 2. the government's initial downplaying of the epidemic's severity eroded public trust in the government's decision-making transparency and competency; 3. the unprecedented large-scale quarantine measures in all major cities, which confine residents to their homes, are likely to have a negative psychosocial effect on residents; 4. the reports of shortages of medical protective sup-plies, medical staff, and hospital beds* (Dong & Buoy, 2020).

Lack of formal information resources from authority made hoax, misinformation, rumour or propaganda circled faster in social media. As stated in introduction, news about Ma'ruf Amin jokes could be classified as misinformation. Misinformation is dissemination of false information that believed as truth (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). This situation also used for economic and political interest, like to avoid decline in foreign tourists (Rizky, 2020) also raise mask and hand sanitizer selling price (Hidayat & Redaksi WE Online, 2020).

After government release official statement via mass media, public could choose any kind of information that make sense to them (Flore, Balahur, Podavini, & Verile, 2019). This situation was aligned with Katz and Blumer's Uses and Gratification Theory where public could choose media consumption based on their needs (Nabi & Oliver, 2009).
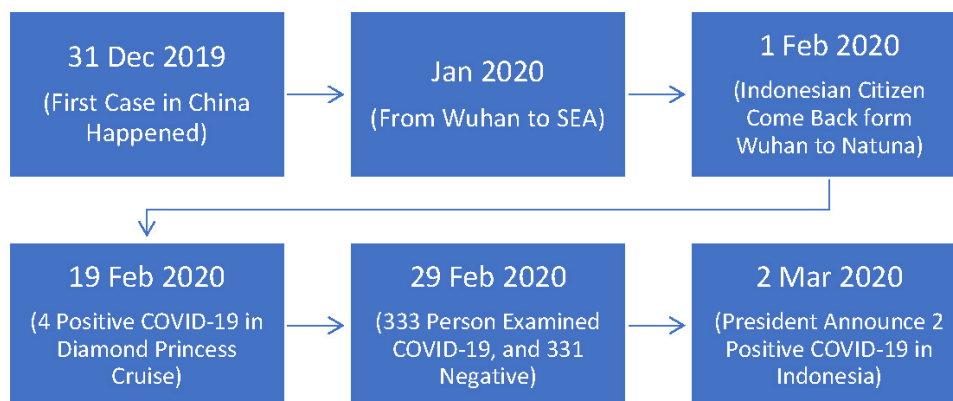

Figure 1. COVID-19 Timeline in Indonesia

We Are Social (Kemp, 2020) found that Indonesia spend 07.59 hours a day using internet and 3.26 hours dedicated to scroll in social media and Indonesia was the third largest Facebook advertising audiences after India and US. Thanks to Palapa Ring Project as an internet backbone in Indonesia, west to east Indonesia can access internet and use social media. Social networking sites (SNS) or social media has nodes or relation between members of the network which provide power to sharing, organizing, and finding content (Resources, 2018). This is how infodemic happened rapidly in Indonesia, people believe their information was true, passed to group and another group. Even the mass media keep updating bad news which made public distrust government even more. Social media become public sphere where public could give opinion in their account that consumed by public and given place or spotlight in mass media online platform, this mass-self communication could lead to infodemic.

This situation could be avoided in two approach that could be example of how government use social media to control infodemic. China as first country that COVID-19 outbreak used media control via their WeChat platform. South Korea used public participation to control public opinion. Both countries have already handled pandemic in their country before, China with SARS and South Korea with MERS.

Table 1. How China and South Korea Handle Infodemic

China	South Korea
Affected SARS in 2009	Affected MERS in 2015
Wuhan lock down	Mass examination using drive-through system
Use smartphone apps to monitor people with COVID-19 (Knight, 2020)	Use smartphone apps to monitor people with COVID-19 (Knight, 2020)
People in Wuhan given courage to make vlog about their daily activities during lockdown	COVID-19 patient travel track updated in town website
Censorship thorough communication infrastructure like WeChat fast-checking to control infodemic	Mass media briefed twice a day

Source: Sokolov (2020) and Ramadhan (2020)

Table above shown that after face pandemic, they made risk management and crisis communication that matched each country characteristics. Video blog or vlog was used to fulfil demand for first-hand information about COVID-19 suspects' daily activities (Sokolov, 2020). Even with two different approach, China and South Korea both used technologies and

internet to gain public awareness. Not only used to make public updated about the disease, but also tracked people with COVID-19 travel history. User could compare their travel log with COVID-19 patient to identify potential transmission (Knight, 2020). This could ensure public they should or should not go to hospital.

This transparent communication effort as a new tool to tackle fake news and conspiracy theories contained political or economic interest. In Indonesia, netizen keep asking for clear data about which place suspected with the virus to avoid the, but as stated in introduction, there was implication if they expose the information transparently and with diverse needs from Sabang to Merauke, government need time to make decisions (Patricia, 2020). The fear about economic state could be collapse from panic attack made government took a precious time away in the crisis time. Compared to South Korea and China, Indonesia lack of transparency and open about information made public participation lower as well as citizen's trust (Iswara, 2020).

Indonesian government could learn from both countries in how they use internet to control infodemic. Official statement should use mass media, but after presidential election in 2019, public have known that ownership in mass media made one side news coverage based on political power in the ownership. Public would choose media with similar political view based on media ownership. This infodemic in COVID-19 situation has been surprise, threat, and short response time that could define as crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). In this crisis situation, ideally media owner put public forward their personal or corporate interest, this empathy would lead to sustainable profit (Bursztajn, 2020).

Crisis communication was needed to gain renewal and reconstitution by avoid threat bias in research and embrace opportunities embedded in COVID-19 (Heath & O'hair, 2009). In this situation, government already have done image restoration theory by acknowledge that this communication failure was government responsibility. Government also responsible for COVID-19 patients' privacy after first and second case whom town mayor discloses patient's data without any concern. Instead of underlined government unclear communication, government used new media to create dialogue between panic public and organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). After gave clear indicator about COVID-19, health minister could use social media not only to post update but also communicate with public.

Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory or SCCT made for organizational reputation theory, but in bigger scope, this theory still relevant for response strategy to manage crisis. This theory advises to protect impacted publics with two types of message content; *instruction information* to educate how public protect themselves, and *adjusting*

information that helps publics cope with psychological threats (Austin & Jin, 2017). After that, government could take reputation management either deny, diminish, rebuild, or reinforce to defend their reputation. President's willingness to do interview with Najwa Shihab helped public to aware government and national situation. Experts also highlight that Indonesian government needs to be more transparent to make public understand the situation and the vision of current policies (antaranews.com, 2020).

Government has done instruction information with their self-quarantine policies and how to stay safe in this pandemic situation (Shihab, 2020). Second phase to adjusting information has been done by governor like Ganjar Pranowo, governor of Central Java where the largest population that work in metropolitan like Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Tribun Jogja Official, 2020). Ganjar Pranowo using social media to reach public's awareness why they should not celebrate Ramadhan in Central Java. Austin and Jin (2017) identified challenges and opportunities in crisis communication using social media. Social media could be used for two ways symmetrical communication, but government may lose control in heavily citizen-generated content which contain rumours, misinformation, and negative opinions and emotions. Perry, Taylor, and Doerfel as stated in Austin and Jin (2017) wrote organizations that engage publics in proactive discussion before, during, and after crisis could make resilience between communicator and public. In this case, health minister could use interactive display instead of press conference to update public about COVID-19. Following China and South Korea, Indonesian Communication and Information Ministry made application named PeduliLindungi to track and watch COVID-19 suspect (Pertiwi, 2020). Johnny G Plate, Minister of Communication and Information, said this application developer would delete user's data after COVID-19 ended to ensure public about privacy policy (Maharani, 2020).

Infodemic could be handled either by controlling the media like what China does with strong censorship to prevent hoax and misinformation, or transparent communication that South Korea does to control public perception and trust to government. Since Indonesian was an active user of social media, government could use peripheral strategy to persuade public to gain their trust again by using Coombs' SCCT (Levy, 2018). Application like PeduliLindungi would be used by public with good digital literacies, but Indonesia just finished internet infrastructure to east part of Indonesia that implicate extra effort from ministry to educate via social media or message blast to people in Eastern Indonesia about what and how to use this PeduliLindungi application. This situation different from China and South Korea where internet spread evenly in entire country, this might indicate government need to give extra effort to gain digital literacies to fill knowledge gap in megapolitan city like Jakarta and small city that just install internet infrastructure like Eastern Indonesia.

Government could also brief media owner to take responsibility to create positive news in this pandemic to avoid distrust and conspiracies. In psychiatric point of view, this infodemic should be defended by communal resilience, hope, and empathy (Bursztajn, 2020). If mass media could not be controlled by government, using community to spread positive news like raising hope in social media should be done against bad news for the sake of people welfare.

Public with good digital literacies might find it hard to differ which information to trust which is not. In this crisis situation, clear information from authority could help public whether they have good digital literacies or not. Even though public could choose which media they believe, trusted source like government clear information, maybe information about governments' vision towards public policies, would help government easier to control the public. Public with low digital literacies should be educated with key opinion leader to understand current situation and how to survive during infodemic.

In 2016, Turn Back Hoax was built by online community as a information checker. Started as Facebook group, they made official website to fight against hoax. Turn Back Hoax classified information as hoax, incitement, or slander. Now Indonesia also has MAFINDO.org, cekfakta.com to check the truth. As happened in China, WeChat integrate hoax fast-checking with social media could be adopted in Indonesia to prevent second wave of infodemic. This effort could be done to gain public's trust and prevent misinformation that lead into moral panic.

CONCLUSION

Infodemic in the midst of pandemic is more dangerous than the virus itself. South Korea which is a democratic country, implements Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Where, South Korea has succeeded in providing information that educates the public to protect themselves from Covid-19 and also provides positive information that helps calm and gives people a sense of security from fear, and provides transparent information. Meanwhile, China as an authoritarian country prefers a strategy to control pandemic information by conducting strong censorship to prevent hoaxes and misinformation by using the WeChat application.

If government is reluctant to give transparent and open crisis communication in golden time, public led by misinformation or hoax become fear and distrust. This research shows that too much information or shortage of information could lead to public distrust towards official statement. Since social media has been mass-self communication channel, every country should prepare for crisis communication in further pandemic situation that match

their public's characteristic. In Indonesia, as social media user grew rapidly, official statement could publish in social media or town website. Information checker such as turnbackhoax.id could collaborate with WhatsApp of Facebook as fast-checking tools.

SUGGESTION

This research was done from virus outbreak until lockdown in Indonesia with time span February until April 2020, writer suggest to enhance this research with an phenomenological aspect from government to handle crisis situation and social network analysis in social media to trace how netizen handle fear in social media to counter political interest in mass media.

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