

Media Ecology Activism

The Media Coverage of COVID-19 and its Responses

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Abstract

The dynamics of media coverage in the early days of COVID-19 played a role in disseminating information to the public. Taking with media ecological perspective, this phenomena could be describe with more detail. How society exposed by media, and otherwise. This paper use netnography method regarding the dynamics of the media environment in COVID-19. Reporting with seven selected online news media headlines and two feeds on social media which impacted massively to the public. The data took during February-April 2020 where plethora of vaccine information growing fast among the country. Based on the data, trying to examine how online mainstream media and social media could impact the environment dynamically.

Keywords: *Media Ecology, COVID-19, News, Hoax, Digital Public Sphere*

INTRODUCTION

Tracing the initial appearance of Corona is very important. Corona is a disease caused by a contagious virus. Corona has emerged from a wild animal trader in a market in Wuhan City, the capital of Hubei, China. The 55-year-old man is known to have had a prolonged fever for two weeks with respiratory problems without a known cause. Almost simultaneously several people are experiencing the same symptoms. Then after being investigated, it was known to have been infected with Covid-19 (Jayani, 2020). This event takes place at the end of 2019 in December. It was feared that it would quickly spread to other regions, several countries immediately decided to close the international airport. Such as in Taiwan, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, United States, and India (CNN Indonesia, 2020). Within four months, the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly to more than 200 countries on different continents and then increased mortality drastically in the United States and Western European countries (Bhattacharyya, et al., 2020).

In Indonesia alone, the first cases were found in two Indonesian citizens (WNI) on 2 March, 2020, who had a history of interacting with Japanese citizens who had been infected with Covid-19 (Indonesia.go.id, 2020). Through Nextrain.org data, 13 samples were reported by Indonesia which the Global Initiative then compiled Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) where other countries had collected samples for later research (Jayani, 2020). Indonesia's delay in reporting Covid-19 data can cause delays in other sectors, such as the economic, social, and education sectors, in dealing with Covid-19 before finally becoming a world-wide epidemic or known as a pandemic.

The presence of the media in presenting the Corona issue is very noisy. Even the politicians make the media's presence even busier in the news. Like some politicians who have responded to the arrival of Corona in Indonesia, it is impossible or even Indonesians are

immune to Corona which will be discussed in this paper. Then the emergence of several cases by influencers in Indonesia with their social media channels that are considered to be spreading misinformation about Covid-19. The confusion that arose from the public gave rise to hoaxes that continue to exist. As in the confusion of information, the media play a role in it.

Understanding the development of the media in reporting on the Covid-19 issue, this paper tries to elaborate further by using an analysis of Media Ecology. How does the media situation develop to influence the surroundings in reporting information? Either the information is something close to it or even far beyond the country's territory. Media Ecology which is then interpreted as a broad but interconnected scope. The study of different personal and social environments created by the use of different communication technologies (Griffin, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This study was using nine selected uploads from seven online news media headlines, one Youtube video upload from the @duniaMANJI account, and one Instagram upload from the @jrksid account. Data collection took place in the period February-July 2020. The research method used was netnography. Netnography adapts common participant-observation ethnographic procedures to the unique contingencies of computer-mediated social interaction: alteration, accessibility, anonymity, and archiving (Kozinets, 2010). The author conducts a discourse study through the title / content contained in the table below using the perspective of Media Ecology by Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan & Fiore, 2005).

Table 1. Nine Selected Headlines/Titles

No	Headline/ Content	Media Brand	Media Type	Upload Date
1	"Rapat di DPR, Ribka Tjiptaning Bercanda Korona 'Komunitas Rondo Mempesona'"	Detiknews.com	Online News Media	February 3, 2020
2	"Indonesia Bebas Corona, Menkes Terawan: Semua Berkat Doa-Doa"	Wartaekonomi.co.id	Online News Media	February 15, 2020
3	"Kelakar Menhub: Kita Kebal Corona karena Doyan Nasi Kucing"	Republika.co.id	Online News Media	17 February 2020
4	"Menkes: Virus Corona Penyakit yang Bisa Sembuh Sendiri"	CNN Indonesia	Online News Media	March 2, 2020
5	"Jokowi: Tak Perlu Takut Berlebihan dengan Virus Corona"	Katadata.co.id	Online News Media	March 6, 2020
6	"Suspect Corona di Cianjur yang Meninggal Ternyata Positif Covid-19"	Tirto.id	Online News Media	March 15, 2020
7	"Ungkap Corona Masuk RI Sejak Januari, Pakar UI: Pemerintah"	Detiknews.com	Online News	April 20, 2020

	Menyangkal Terus”		Media	
8	“Gara-gara bangga jadi kacung WHO, IDI dan RS seenaknya mewajibkan semua orang yang akan melahirkan dites CV19. Sudah banyak bukti jika hasil tes sering ngawur kenapa dipaksakan? Kalau hasil tes-nya bikin stress dan menyebabkan kematian pada bayi/ibunya, siapa yang tanggung jawab?”	Instagram account @jrxsid	Social media	13 June 2020
9	“Bisa Kembali Normal? Obat Covid 19 Sudah Ditemukan!! (Part 1)”	Youtube channel @duniaMANJI	Social media	31 July 2020

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The coverage of the media in Indonesia regarding Covid-19 was initially international news reporting on the development of Covid-19 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and Italy, which reportedly experienced a significant spread. The news in other countries is preparing to face Covid-19, both with the policy of temporarily suspending international airports to locking down on a national scale. In contrast to Indonesia, in reporting in the media to stakeholders who still question Corona's existence. In Indonesia, with a very high actor power, the media is reporting about Covid-19 to political figures who have popularity in the media. It was crowded in the audience when journalists reported politicians' responses who were considered not serious and took Coronavirus easy. Such as Twitter tweeted by the Minister of Economy, Political, Law, and Security (Menkopolkam) Mafud MD on 15 February. Then the response of the Minister of Transportation, Budi Karya Sumardi, to an educational seminar at a university in Yogyakarta.

News in early 2020, there was news about the early arrival of Corona in Indonesia. When Health Minister Terawan Agus Putranto and President Joko Widodo initially gave information not to panic in the face of Corona. Then there was a difference of opinion at the beginning of the news regarding the Cianjur patient's case was suspected of being negative after the Corona Swab but turned out to be positive (Narasi Newsroom, 2020). The news stated the difference in information from the central and regional governments of West Java.

At the beginning of the Corona coverage, many countries imposed a national lockdown. This was then carried out by the government by enacting Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB). On 31 March, 2020, the president signed Government Regulation Number 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating the Handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Each region does not apply the PSBB simultaneously, it is adjusted to the capacity of the region, either at the provincial or district/city levels. This limitation takes into account epidemiology, threat magnitude, effectiveness, resource support, technical operations, political, economic, social, cultural, defense, and security considerations.

Information about Covid-19 is scattered both on the news media and on social media. The public is looking for information about a new virus that is rapidly spreading. Divergent information distribution competes with Covid-19 transmission. This information's speed also coincides with the public's response to be more aware of the Coronavirus. The ease of information obtained by the public is also directly proportional to the effect of exposure given by the media regarding the issue of Covid-19 itself. The emergence of news that gives the identity of being infected with Corona has an impact on the social response around the place where he lives (CNN Indonesia, 2020). The emergence of fast journalism has an impact on the inaccuracy of reporting on areas affected by Covid-19.

The National Cyber and Crypto Agency (BSSN) National Cyber Security Operations Center (Pusopskamsinas) recorded 88,414,296 cyberattacks that had been carried out in Indonesia from 1 January - 12 April, 2020 (Kompas, 2020). When the PSBB was implemented, it also impacted those who worked from home and accessed all their activities online. Digital data vulnerability amid a pandemic can hijack personal data and malware (Putri, 2020). The excitement of the digital world today has greater potential in the spread of fake news, fake articles, and irresponsible treatment (Putri, 2020). Protection of personal data and access from hackers can only be anticipated by using a licensed application or accessing news through an official website. Because the digital legal instruments in Indonesia are still not capable of protecting the individual sphere, digital access departs from the personal.

The spread of misinformation give misperceptions in the public. The hurried corps of health workers in the Semarang Regency were rejected by residents neighborhood (Amali, 2020). Disseminating the identity of patients 01 and 02 to the public so that residents and their families are affected (CNN Indonesia, 2020). This conflict should be review of the Journalistic Code of Ethics that applies in Indonesia regarding the protection of the victim's identity to the public.

Influencers: The idea of conspiracy theory

A musician's reporting case has emerged because uploads on his social media accounts are deemed to raise unrest and lead to conspiracy issues. On 16 June 2020, I Gede Ari Astina account or known as JRXSID to be reported by the Bali Indonesian Doctors Association (IDI). It considered to spread hate speech and defamation on social media.

The second case also arose from a musician who is also Youtuber, Anji, he was reported because of his content regarding the discovery of the Coronavirus herbal medicine with someone who claims to be Professor Hadi Pranoto. The suspicion of spreading fake news through social media occurred on 3 August, 2020. Anji said he was sorry and gave his explanation via his Instagram account @duniamanji. Meanwhile, Hadi Pranoto, as the resource person in Anji's uploaded video, continues to convince the existence of the Coronavirus herbal medicine. Both Hadi and Muannas (case reporters on the alleged spread of lies) are still investigating the truth of the case.

Knowing the second case above, both from Jerinx and Anji's case, as an influencer in the public influences giving his opinion to the public. The issue of the conspiracy carried out by IDI as well as the procurement of Coronavirus herbal medicine, whether proven or not the truth is confusing the public. IDI is an association of doctors in Indonesia while Corona medicine is still being debated in the international health world. Seeing this phenomenon with

the concept of Global Village given by Marshall McLuhan, that what is one's business in another region has become a business for a group of people in a different area. Global Village makes the distance between regions meaningless. Jerinx and Anji's opinion posts are put on their social media accounts. However, because it can be accessed by the public and has the potential to influence public opinion, personal opinions on social media are under the spotlight by other parties who feel disturbed and then report suspected fake news or defamation.

The media have a role in the distribution of information during the public. Through media convergence, the same information can be accessed through various types of platforms such as official social media accounts by media companies, print, broadcasts can be YouTube or television channels. Journalism activities in its movement can provide changes regarding truth to the public. Kovach and Rosenstiel, through their book *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know And The Public Should Expect* (2001) quoted by Harsono (Harsono, 2010) that the essence of journalism is the discipline of verification. Conducting balanced reporting as a method and not a goal. Because balance can distort if it is considered as a goal.

According to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index (Borders, t.thn.), Indonesia is ranked 119th out of 180 countries in the press freedom index. This happened because, during the second term of Joko Widodo's presidency, there were still threats to press freedom. One of them, when there was an attack on journalists in the 2019 general election. Even so, the Press Council notes that the Press Freedom Index in Indonesia has increased in the last four years, namely 2017-2020 (Annur, 2020). The calculation takes into account six factors, including education of press personnel, equal access for vulnerable groups, freedom of establishment and operation of press companies, public broadcasting institutions, independence, and legal certainty, judiciary, and freedom to practice journalism. The increase in the press freedom index also coincided with the rate of information flooding as well as the large number of fake news that appeared amidst digital information. Digital media is very vulnerable to hoaxes and unbalanced information (Putri, 2020).

In looking at the phenomenon of media agglomeration, it adds to the amount of information that is increasingly scattered in the public. However, instead of being said to be media convergence, it has become media divergence. Mainstream media owners in Indonesia make media a commodity (Nugroho, Putri, & Laksmi, 2012. Riset kerjasama antara Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance dan HIVOS Kantor Regional Asia Tenggara, didanai oleh Ford Foundation.). Media concentration is carried out by mergers and acquisitions through various platforms that are only owned by a few large media owners. This greatly affects the diversity of information as well as the homogeneity of the media news point of view. Coupled with the increasing number of online media portals on the internet which also add references to access to information to the public.

In *BLUR: How to know what's true in the age of information overload* by Kovach and Rosenstiel (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010) said what can be called the "way of skeptical knowing" is to know the source of the news with the evidence-based on data. The public as audiences or readers of information media must have the ability to carry out this verification. The public also has the same provisions as the media in understanding facts about events. The confusion that occurs can be avoided if there is adequate literacy in an environment. The

capacity to absorb news as information will certainly be perceived differently by everyone, but the facts are not.

Social Media is The Message

Social media in the digital era is an undeniable medium. Data obtained through Hootsuite (Riyanto, t.thn.) shows that social media users in Indonesia reach 59%, namely 160 million out of a total population of 272.1 million, with the order of the five most popular social media, namely YouTube, Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The average time spent accessing social media was 3 hours 26 minutes per day. This is an opportunity as well as a challenge for the Indonesian people in accessing information.

In facing the era of social media, the challenge faced is the emergence of a skeptical view as clicktivism (click activism) which is faced with real media activism (lim, 2011). Likewise, with the infodemic (WHO, WHO, t.thn.), unstoppable information, whether accurate or not, which makes it difficult for the public to access the truth of the information that can be trusted and can be followed.

Media ecological activism responds to the existence of a social media environment as both a challenge and an opportunity in dealing with the flood of information and hoaxes that spread across the internet. Media as an ecologist can provide space for discussion to the public to obtain valid and relevant information about Covid-19. To overcome this infodemic, WHO technical risk communication and social media continue to monitor information circulation flow. Hoax in circulation has been attacked back with evidence-based information. The backlash was carried out by equalizing the media, namely creating social media accounts such as Weibo, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and websites. The Covid-19 Handling Task Force also does the updated information through the website, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Likewise in the case of Jerinx and Anji's handling, through the *Covid-19 Medical Misinformation Policy* (htt6) by Google regarding the uploading of content containing denial of Covid-19 and other forms of disinformation. Facebook, through its platform, has also uploaded a regulation to reduce advertisements that eliminate vaccines with the *preventive health tool* (htt7).

MEDIA ECOLOGY: MEDIA AS THE ENVIRONMENT

There have been several previous studies on media ecology, such as media relations with the public through local information delivered by Public Television (Atika, 2020). The relation between the media and the public in obtaining information is able to bridge the information gap along with the development of the media. The delivery of information is getting shorter, such as instant messaging also has a broad impact on society (Dessy Dwi Lestari, 2020). These two studies explain that the existence of media ecology in the modern era is still relevant.

Media ecology, a preparadigmatic science (Nystrom, 1973). It is presented as a perspective, "meta discipline" (Nystrom, 1973), which is broadly defined as the study of complex communication systems as environments. When tracing further, the media ecologists provide their respective perspectives in exploring media ecology. However, three

big figures always become a benchmark in understanding media ecology, they are Marshall McLuhan, Walter J. Ong, and Neil Postman. Here's a further explanation.

Its presence in the 60s successfully changed the perspective of media studies. Marshall McLuhan described the media ecology that dates back to the tribal age era, where the sense of hearing was the dominant one at that time. Folklore culture, word of mouth from generation to generation, is the most popular communication. Then, after discovering the phonetic alphabet in 2000-1500 B.C., it begins the literate age so that the eyes become the dominant sense receptors. The ability to read and understand letters and numbers continued to develop until it gave birth to the print age. Where is found the printing press is widespread. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan states that this era was very influential. Because it can print the exact text in large quantities. This is so extraordinary that it is called by McLuhan the forerunner of the industrial revolution. This is also the era of the industrial revolution where many factory machines began to be found. Until then in 1850 the Telegraph was born, a sign that the electronic era had begun. However, it is precisely in this electronic era that McLuhan maintains that it is the era of retribalizing the human race (Griffin, 2012). A time where the media takes us to borderless space can penetrate a country's territory or even a continent. This is known as Global Village (Griffin, 2012), "a worldwide electronic community where everyone's business and all are somewhat testy". That one's business becomes someone's business on the other side of the world. This keeps repeating itself, until the emergence of the digital age. Where the entire media is handled electronically and all are integrated. All information is getting more personalized, and the tribal era is getting stronger. Everyone knows each other what everyone is doing. And everyone becomes everyone's business.

McLuhan observed that the existence of the media is no longer just a medium. It goes beyond that. It is more than an inanimate object giving a message. But the medium itself is interpreted as a message. The medium is the message. How the medium can change the message. The media that are present are not merely a means of delivering information, information technology tools, and gadgets. It is like a living thing because it can have a tremendous impact on the environment. This is related to the participation and awareness of the audience in processing information through existing media. McLuhan said, "have an irresistible force when invisible" (McLuhan & Fiore, 2005).

Neil Postman: A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything

In the 1950s, when Postman was pursuing his doctoral studies at Columbia University's Teachers College, he attended a lecture from Marshall McLuhan in New York City (Anton, 2011). Postman has a research focus on education and media, which sees the development of television as a media fallout. In comparison, questioning the American education curriculum's readiness that time in the face of the onslaught of television media culture (Postman & Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, 1969). In contrast to Ong and McLuhan, Postman was quite loud in voicing the media's existence to face the continuous technological developments and offer the idealism of his time (Anton, 2011). Then he increasingly focused on voicing cultural biases about technology and education

(Anton, 2011). Postman often criticizes television that is developing in culture in the United States. Through his book *Amusing ourselves to death* (Postman, 1985).

Media ecology understands how the media affects human perception, taste, and value, how humans interact with the media, whether it blocks or becomes an opportunity for humans to survive. He emphasized that the term ecology is a study of the environment, a complex message system about how humans think, feel, and behave (Postman, Media Ecology Association, t.thn.). Because when dealing with the medium, it is not considered an environment, but it is only interpreted as a machine, even though it has implications that are often implicit and informal.

Media ecology...is concerned to understand how technologies and techniques of communication control the form, quantity, speed, distribution, and direction of information; and how, in turn, such information configurations or biases affect people's perceptions, values, and attitudes...such information forms as the alphabet, the printed word, and television images are not mere instruments which make things easier for us. They are environments—like language itself, symbolic environments—within which we discover, fashion, and express our humanity in particular ways (Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*, 1979)

CONCLUSION

The emergence of Covid-19 in 2019 shocked the government, public, and media. Media plays a very important role in connecting information related to Covid-19 to the public from the ministry of health, the Covid-19 officer unit, and whoever is authorized in handling it. From the perspective of media ecology, the media crowd in Covid-19 coverage is described as an environment. Media and society become an environment while they can influence one another. The reciprocity between media and society enhance the power of media.

The media plays a role in clarifying the truth to the public when figures, politicians, or influencers provide confusing information. The flood of information is inevitable with the ease of managing digital information production. Jerinx and Anji's case is a form of information flood where the truth of the information is not easily traced directly so that it is interpreted through a conspiracy theory or an inventor of the covid-19 herbal medicine who claims to be a professor. The validity of information about Covid-19 is needed for public acuity in obtaining news, especially regarding Covid-19. As has been done by the WHO and the Indonesian Covid-19 Task Force through social media platforms and official websites. Regulations by social media parties such as Google with the Covid-19 Medical Misinformation Policy and Facebook with preventive health tools to reduce advertisements that encourage the elimination of covid.

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