

COVID-19 and Public Information Behavior

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ABSTRACT

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The Covid-19 pandemic has changed people's information behavior. It is supported by increasing internet utilization to meet information needs through mass and social media. The media is expected to be able to provide objective, valid, and accurate information so it will not create public anxiety about the pandemic. However, the circulating information related to COVID-19 is making people even more anxious. Even though the need for information during a pandemic is a primary need to be fulfilled. The implications of the availability of information about COVID-19 and the need for health information from the community determine how people carry out information behavior. This study employs a literature review with research and scientific articles as the collected data source. The results showed that based on the review of several studies regarding public information behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of the internet plays a crucial role in the distribution of information about case developments, handling guidelines, implementation of health protocols, and vaccinations. On the other hand, social media also plays a role in the growth of fake news, making the audience need clarification to determine the correct information quickly.

1. Introduction

Information plays several vital roles, whether in work or daily life. The audiences are simultaneously faced with challenges to grasp the right and needed information in their workplace and daily life, such as entertainment, education, etc. (Wilson, 2006). Of the variations and the number of existing social media, the audiences look for and use the information to fulfill their basic need: reducing uncertainty (Lin et al., 2016). Appropriate information behavior enables someone to feel comfortable and reduces anxiety and stress.

Amid digital technology development, the skill and behavior of searching for information based on new media are required (Dinet et al., 2012). Wilson (2000) defines the behavior of searching for information as an individual's intention to search for information to accomplish several objectives. In searching for information, an individual interacts with the analog or digital information system.

However, there needs to be more discussion of the rapid development of the digital system. It is related to the information's inundated information, validity and reliability (Skarpa & Garoufallou, 2021). In the digital canal, one of its primary characteristics is dispersal which means that every single individual can act as a consumer, distributor, or producer of information (Martin Lister et al., 2009). The implication that arises from this facility is that it is vulnerable to cases of misuse of information and even massive circulation of false information, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic in China in November 2019 has been widely spreading to almost all the countries in the world (Wahidah et al., 2020). Various policies were made by the government in order to control the spread of the virus. The government had to be obliged to self-quarantine those exposed to this virus, to apply strict health protocols in all activities, even to the extent of limiting all activities or regional quarantine (read: lockdown) ((Juaningsih et al., 2020). This COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all sectors, including health, social, economic, and information and communication. It is

difficult to be denied that the internet has become an essential source of information in the field of health communication during the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu, 2020). Based on this background, this article describes how people's information behavior relates to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Method

It is a qualitative study. The data were collected through a literature study. A literature study is a data collection that is related to the problem of the research. The research was carried out on theory and written sources previously published in several books and journals related to people's information behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were analyzed through three steps: (1) editing: re-checking the collected data, particularly in terms of the comprehensiveness, clarity of the meaning, and conformity of the meaning between one another; (2) organizing: organizing the obtained data with the framework; (3) finding: carrying out further analysis towards the results of data organization by using predetermined principles, theories, and methods so that the conclusions were found based on the formulated research problems. The data validity of this present research was accomplished through the triangulation of sources.

3. Result and Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's information behavior. It is supported by the increase in internet utilization to fulfill information needs through mass and social media. The media is expected to be able to provide objective, valid, and accurate information so it will not create public anxiety about the pandemic. However, research conducted by Wilda Rezki Pratiwi & Asmah Sukarta (2020) shows that the circulating information related to COVID-19 makes people even more anxious. Even though the need for information during a pandemic is a primary need to be fulfilled. The implications of the availability of information about COVID-19 and the need for health information from the community determine how people carry out information behavior. Several studies examine the information behavior of the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, Skarpa & Garoufallo (2021) studied people's behavior in searching for information about COVID-19 in Greece amidst some restrictions. The data were collected through Google Forms questionnaires delivered through email, Facebook Messenger, and Viber application to around 3000 receivers, and 776 complete questionnaires were obtained.

Based on the conducted data analysis, the study showed that most individuals (93,3%) spend 2 hours per day gathering information about COVID-19. Orderly, television (71,3%), electronic press (63,0%), and news sites (68,2%) are the most general information enjoyed by the respondents. The younger respondents spend less time compared to the old to keep them up to date with the disease. For the respondents, television and the internet are the most available source of information to attain information. In order to grasp accurate information, people tend to prioritize the official organization-based source of news.

Most respondents state that they frequently watch television many times a day. The data analysis showed that the duration or frequency of watching television among older respondents is higher than younger ones. This is in line with the finding that older people reduce internet use to obtain health information. Television has become the most comprehensive source of information about COVID-19. Sources of information from the internet (such as blogs, personal pages, etc.) and social media Facebook are preferred by 43.1% and 41.8% of respondents, respectively. Interestingly, social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, etc., have never been of interest as a source of information about COVID-19.

Second, research conducted by Fajri & Nusantara (2022) examined the information behavior of people in Indonesia concerning how they search, verify, utilize, and disseminate information related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The method used in this research was a mixed method, quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative data collection method was carried out by interview and literature study, while the quantitative method was carried out by surveying 400 respondents spread throughout Indonesia with various professional backgrounds.

The results of the study showed that most respondents follow the information about COVID-19 through social media networks with the consideration of the freedom to produce and distribute

messages in the form of writing, images, and videos. In terms of information behavior, people have good information behavior related to fulfilling their need for information about COVID-19. This can be seen from 91.5% of respondents who stated that they consistently access information related to COVID-19 from social media, chat applications, electronic media, and others. The types of information needed are COVID-19 statistics (21.9%), COVID-19 news (13.7%), and mapping of areas infected with COVID-19. The findings showed that the community urgently needs updated information related to COVID-19. Therefore, the government, media, and COVID-19 activists are trying to optimize various digital platforms to disseminate accurate and credible information related to COVID-19.

Third, research by Sharma et al., (2022) examined the information behavior of medical staff at a particular hospital for treating COVID-19 patients in the North India region. This was a cross-sectional quantitative method using a semi-structured questionnaire to collect the data that experts have validated with the value of $r = 0.92$. The sample was determined through purposive sampling. The questionnaire was distributed using online links to reduce contact.

Out of 250 participants in this study, the response rate was 81% (203). For 123 (60%) respondents, social media is a source of access to information during the pandemic. The most accessed social media applications are WhatsApp 82 (40%) and Facebook and Instagram 67 (33%). Social media has both a positive and negative impact on respondents' mindsets, as 147 (72%) agree that social media networks help further enhance their understanding, whereas 178 (88%) stated that it creates fear and panic.

Based on those three studies in 3 countries, it can be concluded that during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played an essential role in disseminating information about the virus, including various guidelines and policies issued from time to time for information and awareness of implementing health protocols. The ease and convenience of using social media through mobile devices are why some participants prefer them as a source of information about COVID-19.

However, disseminating information on the internet and social media networks has become a breeding ground for fake news (Dreisiebner et al., (2021). On the other hand, Veglis et al., (2020) did a qualitative content analysis of 25 articles from mainstream Greek media websites and five mainstream online English news during the first wave outbreak of COVID-19. It was found that about 30% of the articles misrepresent the topic, as well as provide information that tends to be misleading. The existing articles need to include more accurate information in their contents. Such facts make it difficult for readers to detect the presence of false information. For this reason, the attitude of not readily believing in any content presented, confirming, and verifying are information behavior that every media user must carry out.

4. Conclusion

Public media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply increased for various purposes, including education, work, and fulfillment of health information. The review of several studies regarding public information behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the use of the internet (especially social media) plays a crucial role in distributing information regarding case developments, handling guidelines, implementing health protocols, and vaccination. On the other hand, social media also plays a role in the growth of fake news which makes the audience need clarification to determine the correct information quickly.

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