

MEDIA AND PUBLIC TRUST TOWARDS COVID-19 INFORMATION

KEPERCAYAAN PUBLIK PADA MEDIA TERKAIT INFORMASI COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Mass media is one of the leading sectors in handling COVID-19. Amidst current health emergency, public trust towards the information conveyed by the mass media is the key to successful mitigation. Various types of news regarding massive COVID-19 reports in several media channels have the potential to cause information bias which ends in pros and cons. Insustantial debates in varied media are counter-productive to the efforts of various parties in educating the society to avoid misinformation. Based on this, it is important to know the media that are references and that gain public trust in seeking information. This study examines the level of public trust in information about COVID-19 in the mass media, both old and new media, using an online questionnaire methodology on May 3, 2020, which was given to 60 respondents. The results show that the respondents' level of faith in television is higher, but its consumption by viewers is much lower than that of online media (news sites and social media). The results showed that viewers still deemed television a reliable reference for information. From these data it was found out why the media are rarely used by the people but are able to gain high trust in the eyes of the public. The results of this study are expected to provide an overview of the attitudes and behavior of the community in understanding COVID-19 information so that relevant parties can make appropriate policies in the perspectives of media and communication.

Keywords: COVID-19, media trust, online-offline media, literacy, television, new media.

ABSTRAK

Media massa menjadi salah satu sektor andalan dalam penanganan COVID-19. Di tengah keadaan darurat kesehatan saat ini, kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap informasi yang disampaikan media massa menjadi kunci keberhasilan mitigasi. Berbagai jenis pemberitaan terkait pemberitaan masif COVID-19 di beberapa saluran media berpotensi menimbulkan bias informasi yang berujung pro dan kontra. Perdebatan nonsustantial di berbagai media kontraproduktif terhadap upaya berbagai pihak dalam mengedukasi masyarakat agar tidak salah informasi. Berdasarkan hal tersebut, penting untuk mengetahui media yang menjadi referensi dan mendapatkan kepercayaan masyarakat dalam mencari informasi. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana tingkat kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap informasi tentang COVID-19 di media massa, baik media lama maupun media baru, dengan menggunakan metodologi kuesioner online pada 3 Mei 2020, kepada 60 responden. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat kepercayaan responden terhadap televisi lebih tinggi, namun konsumsinya jauh lebih rendah daripada media online (situs berita dan media sosial). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mereka masih menggunakan televisi sebagai referensi informasi yang dapat diandalkan. Dari data tersebut menarik untuk diketahui mengapa media jarang digunakan oleh masyarakat namun mampu memperoleh kepercayaan yang tinggi di mata masyarakat. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan gambaran bagaimana sikap dan perilaku masyarakat dalam memahami informasi COVID-19 sehingga pihak terkait dapat mengambil kebijakan yang tepat dalam perspektif media dan komunikasi.

Kata kunci: COVID-19, kepercayaan media, media online-offline, literasi, televisi, media baru.

INTRODUCTION

Since it was established as a global pandemic by WHO on March 11th, 2020, the government has implemented several strategies to prevent the massive spread of the COVID-19 virus, for example forming the COVID-19 Response Acceleration Task Force, implementing public health standards, temporarily closing offices and schools, and determining the health emergency status and large-scale social restrictions (PSBB). Nearly all strategies implemented demand radical changes of behavior, and it often contrasts with the normal habit of the Indonesian people all their life. It is not an easy task for the people and the government of Indonesia as the legal authority.

Mass media plays an important role in social engineering for changing people's behavior patterns (*behavior modification*) by using the effects of mass media against the user's psychology. Cultivation theory and hypodermic needle theory are used for explaining the influence of mass media on the user's attitude and behavioral changes (*behavior effect*) (Rakhmat, 2003). From the perspective of media, cultivation theory states that mass media exposure (especially television) could influence someone's perception of the world. The higher the intensity of media exposure is, the stronger someone's tendency to equalize the reality delivered by the media with the social reality is. It is therefore deemed that media users will perceive everything showed by the media as the actual reality (Junaidi, 2018).

Compared to the beginning of the announcement of the first positive case of the coronavirus on March 2nd, 2020, the reports and the spread of information related to COVID-19 have greatly increased. However, the more varied media consumed by the public as the source of information, the more varied the perceptions built related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The public perception towards the news by a certain media determines their level of trust against what is delivered by the media. The perception is obtained from an individual's past experiences, and it will influence each decision and the behavior in the future.

One of the indicators of a successful strategy applied by the government in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 is the people's level of trust towards the information delivered by the government through several media channels, both old version of media (television and newspaper) and the new version of media (social media, web government official website, news site, etc). The public perception should be built consistently, competently, fairly, objectively, with empathy, and sincerely; besides, the messages that are being delivered should be understandable and delivered by trusted people and trusted channels or media (Idris et al., 2020).

Trust is a consequence of various understandings towards social behavior. It can be made as a predicting instrument (predictor) for the public involvement and participation (Putnam, 2001); it is, therefore, important to identify how far the public trust is on the COVID-19 information conveyed by the government as the success predictor of mitigating the current health emergency. Trust involves an individual or public expectation (trustor) against the ones who deliver the message (trustee).

Trust on information delivered through media channels is emphasized on the trustee credibility, namely Indonesian government. Media with its information framing capacity plays a crucial role in constructing public perception against the credibility of information and the authority of people who deliver the information; without public trust, mass media will not be able to function as social control.

Trust is an individual expectation against the positive outcomes that possibly occur from the interaction with other individuals, groups, or institutions, including mass media. In general, the negative perceptions against media result in an individual distrust towards media and the decline in the consumption of news from the relevant media (Indrajaya & Lukitawati, 2019).

A trust is an important variable for the effect of media; trust in media becomes a guideline in observing and evaluating information delivered by a media. Trust becomes the key concept of modern people that functions in risky decision-making; therefore, trust is considered as an

important basis of social order and the foundation for social cohesion (Tsfati, 2003).

The important function of media as the social agent is selecting and delivering the information needed by the public. The media trust illustrates the relationship between the public, in this case, the media users and the authorized people or the actors who deliver the information. An emphasis on public trust against media can be seen from the selectivity and credibility of information delivered by the media. Trusting a media means taking a risk of trusting the choice of information that is being presented. Specifically, the media trust covers four dimensions, namely trusting the choice for a topic, trusting the choice for facts, trusting the accuracy of descriptions, and trusting the journalism values (Strömbäck et al., 2020).

In marketing, trust against a certain product will form a positive behavioral intention to the product, and it will lead to a higher positive buying intention. The intention is a stage of connotative attitude consisting of three components, namely cognitive, affective, and connotative. This stage forms someone's tendency to do the intention to buy (Lau & Lee, 1999). This process shows how the relationship is between user trust and loyalty towards a product. Loyalty is shown through buying patterns or the use of a product repeatedly (Rafiq, 2008). If media is seen as a product, trust in media will be directly proportional to the users. Consumer loyalty in media users should be shown by the frequency of visits or the use of media as a reference for information.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a study conducted by Dwi Ajeng Widarini, et al., cooperating with *Universitas Prof. DR. Moestopo Jakarta*, and the Press Council, mentioned that the Internet development has shifted the public trust in the information presented by the Mainstream Media (MSM). This is caused by the increasing and intense consumption of online news media so that the people make the media a crosscheck tool against the information they receive (Widarini, 2019). The result of this study was published in November 2019.

A study by Dwi Ajeng, et al., highlighted the consumption and public trust against media

in general. It is in contrast with a study conducted by Feri Ferdinan Alamsyah, et al., in 2018 on the level of public trust on a certain issue, namely the news on a blasphemy case done by the ex-Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama. The result of this study showed that, for certain issues, a majority of respondents realized that information delivered by mass media, both online and offline, had a bias with a tendency of benefiting one of the parties.

Both studies conducted by Dwi Ajeng Widarini and Feri Ferdinan Alamsyah showed the same result that online mass media became the top reference for seeking updated information and as a crosscheck for certain issues. This explains how the consumption of online mass media increases significantly from time to time and it can defeat the conventional media.

This study aimed at exposing the relationship between the level of media trust and media consumption pattern in seeking information in relation to COVID-19 during the pandemic era and at identifying whether there was a significant difference or not between public trust consumption against media before and after the current pandemic. The result of this study was expected to be used as a consideration in conveying information through a media platform with a high level of public trust. Further, the result was expected to be able to give inputs that could enrich the study on media trust in further research.

From the explanation above, it is interesting to investigate how public trust affects the information related to COVID-19 in the mass media, both online and offline media. This study shows the relationship between the level of media trust and the consumption pattern of media in seeking information related to COVID-19 during the pandemic situation. The expected outcomes can be used as a consideration in delivering information through a media platform that has a high level of public trust. Furthermore, this study is expected to be able to give inputs that will enrich the study related to media trust in the next studies.

METHOD

This study has two investigated objects, namely the consumption pattern of media and media trust. It was aimed at knowing the respondent's trust toward the COVID-19 information the respondent's consumption pattern of media during this pandemic era. Furthermore, this study would analyze if those two variables were relevant.

This study used a quantitative method with a correlational descriptive questionnaire design. A population is a general region consisting of objects/subjects with a certain quality and characteristic determined by the researcher to be studied and concluded (Sugiyono, 2007). The population of this study was the people who accessed mass media, both offline and online, to seek the COVID-19 information.

Meanwhile, the sampling technique was a simple random sampling done by taking a sample from the population randomly without considering the level or position of the population members. Sampling was performed in a day randomly through social media by using an online questionnaire known as *Google docs* from May 3rd to 4th, 2020. The total sample that had been collected was 60 respondents. The research instruments used in this study was a list of questions consisting of (1) Questions related to the respondents' characteristics. (2) Questions related to the respondents' understanding of COVID-19. (3) Questions related to the use of media in seeking information related to COVID-19. (4) Questions related to the frequency of media users in seeking information related to COVID-19. (5) Questions related to the respondents' responses against the news media related to the COVID-19 reports.

This study used ordinal variables which showed the rank or order. Theoretically, a research variable is also defined as an attribute or value of people, objects, or activities that have a certain variation determined by a researcher to be studied and concluded (Sugiyono, 2007).

This study consisted of two variables; independent variables (X) were the affecting variables or the causes of changes or the emergence of dependent variables. The effect

can be both positive and negative. Meanwhile, the dependent variables (Y) are the affected variables or the effect due to independent variables. The relationship between the two variables is shown in the figure below:



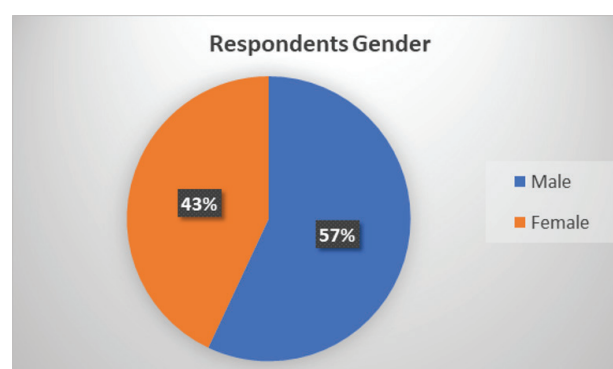
Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 1 The relationship between the two variables.

The collected data were analyzed using the frequency distribution to arrange the collected random data into the data that were classified into the predetermined variables and cross-tabulation as the instrument of descriptive analysis for finding out the relationship between the two different variables. The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS program (Statistical Program for Social Science).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the result of calculation of the collected 60 respondents, the total number of male respondents was higher than that of the female respondents. The total number of the male respondents was 34, while the total number of the female respondents was 26.

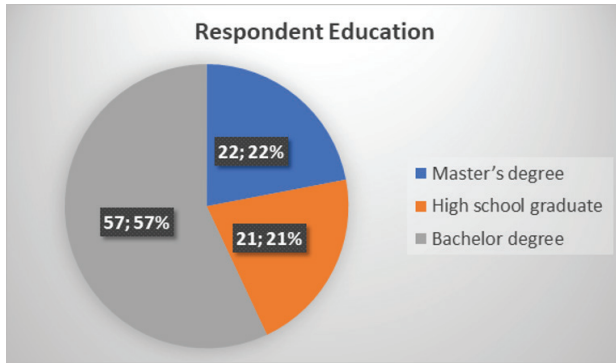


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Figure 2 Percentage of respondents' gender

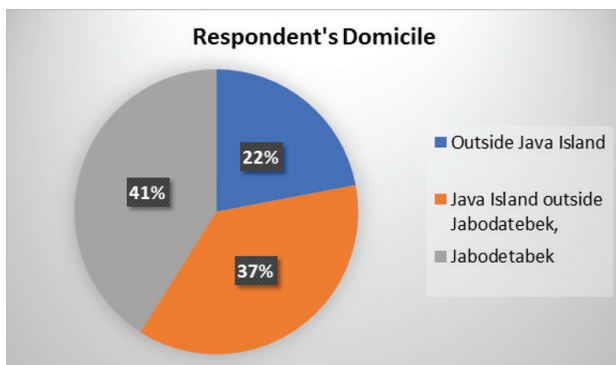
Most of the 34 respondents have a diploma or bachelor's degree as their educational background. Meanwhile, the total number of

those with master's degree background was 13, and the total number of respondents who were senior high school graduates was 12.



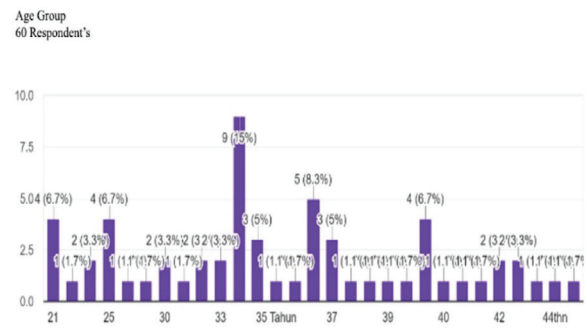
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Figure 3 Respondents education

Based on the respondent's domicile, the respondents were spread throughout several regions in Indonesia (Jakarta, Bandung, Cimahi, Depok, Bekasi, Cirebon, Indramayu, Tangerang, Bogor, Sumedang, Tasikmalaya, Tegal to Balikpapan in East Kalimantan, and Makassar and Mamuju in Sulawesi Island. To facilitate the data collection, the author classified them into three categories of domicile, namely Jabodetabek, Java Island outside Jabodetabek, and outside Java Island.



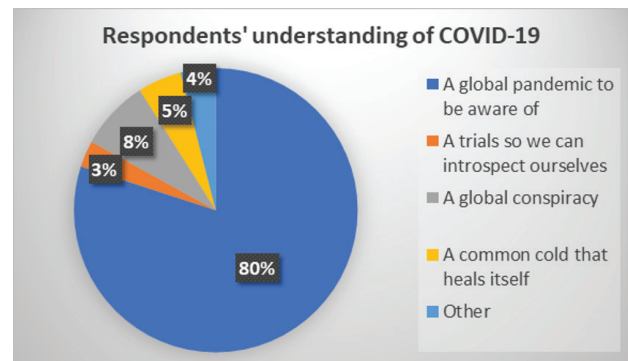
Source: from primary data, 2020
Figure 4 Respondent's domicile

Meanwhile, for the respondent's age, the range was from 21 years old to 48 years old, with the respondent's average age of 34 years old.



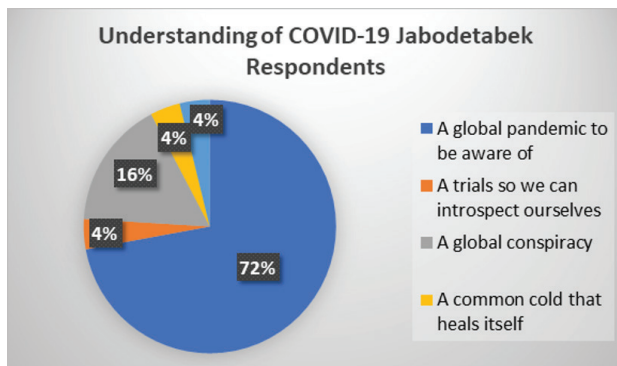
Source: from primary data, 2020
Figure 5 Respondent's age group

Most of the respondents understood that COVID-19 is a global phenomenon that should be alerted. Even so, some of them had various understandings. For example, they stated that the COVID-19 situation was a test of life, that it was a global conspiracy, and that they considered COVID-19 as a common flu.

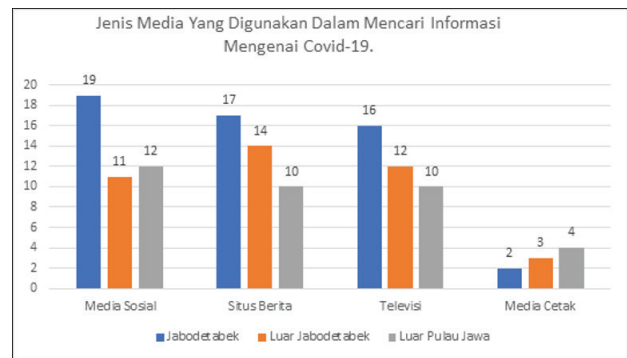


Source: from primary data, 2020
Figure 6 Respondents' understanding of COVID-19

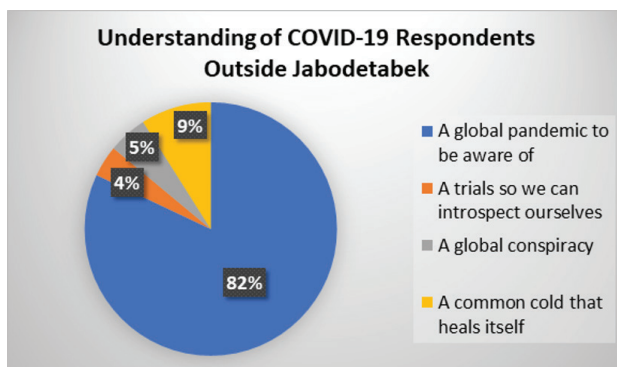
When the data related to the respondents' understanding of COVID-19 were classified according to their domicile, it was found that the respondents who lived in Jabodetabek and outside Jabodetabek had a more various understanding. Meanwhile, the respondents who lived outside Java Island tended to have a similar understanding.



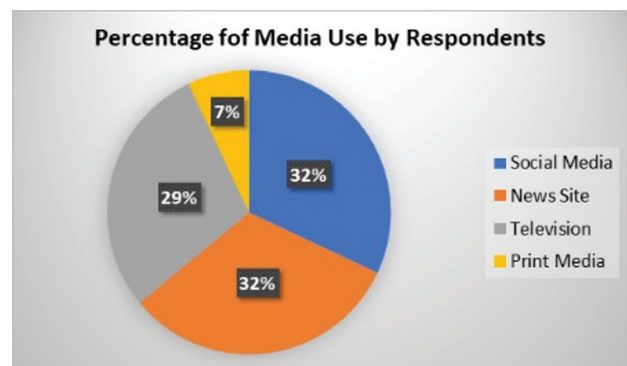
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Figure 7 Understanding of COVID-19



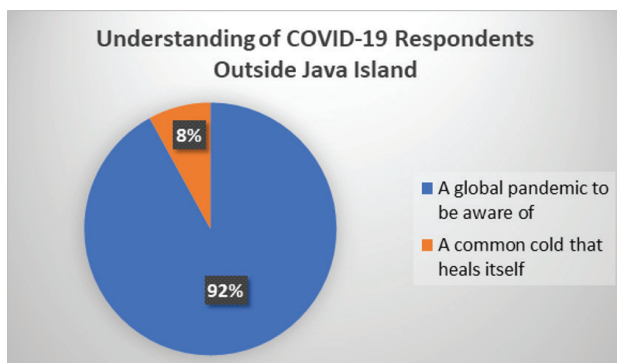
Source: from primary data, 2020
Figure 10 The media used to find information by respondents.



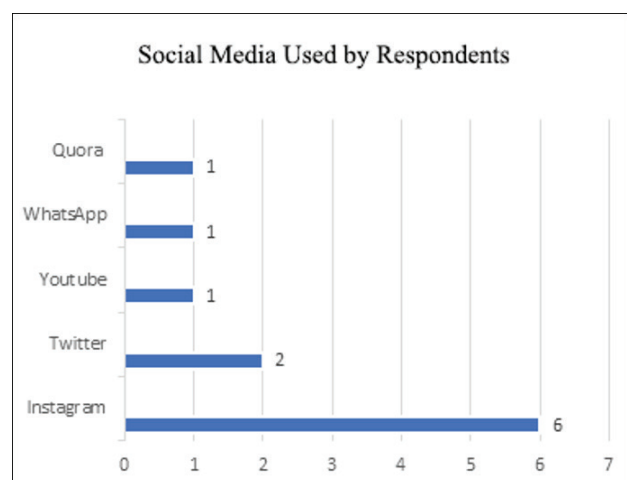
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Figure 8 Understanding of COVID-19 respondents outside Jabodetabek



Source: from primary data, 2020
Figure 11 Percentage of media use by respondents.

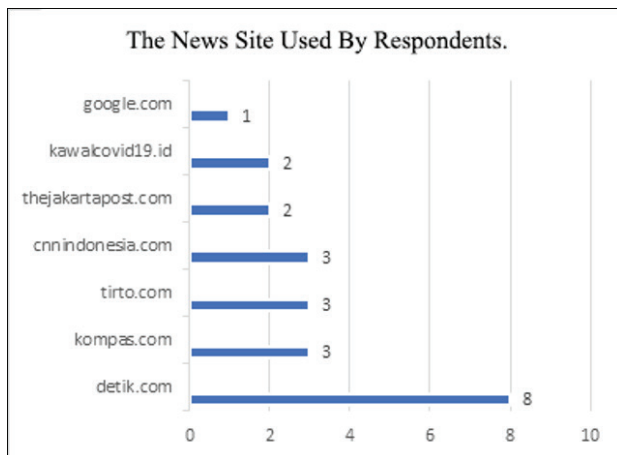


Source: from primary data, 2020
Figure 9 Understanding of COVID-19 respondents outside Java Island



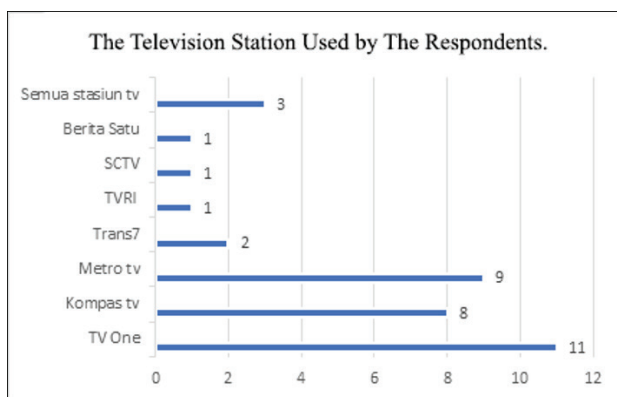
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Figure 12 The social media used by respondents.

The collected data showed that the respondents on average used more than one media channel in seeking information related to COVID-19. They also combined several media platforms to find out the updated information related to COVID-19. Social media was the most frequently used by the respondents in seeking news and updated information related to COVID-19.



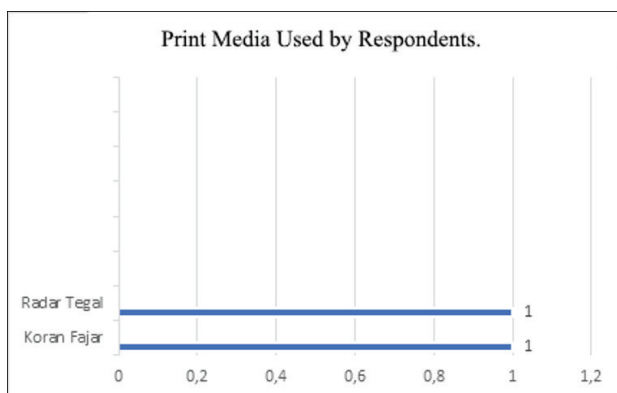
Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 13 The news site used by respondents.



Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 14 The television station used by the respondents.

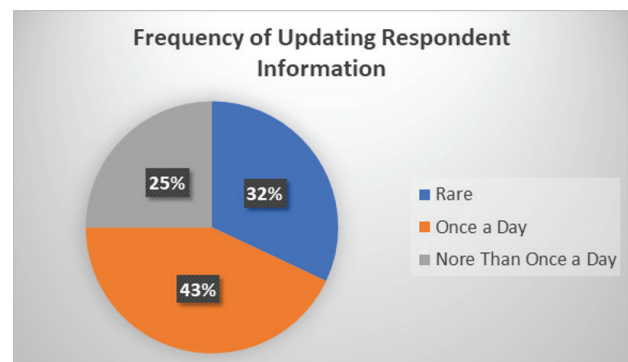


Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 15 Print media used by respondents.

The collected data showed that most of the respondents updated the information related to COVID-19 only once in a day. They tended to purposely spare their time for several hours at a time for browsing on both the Internet and social

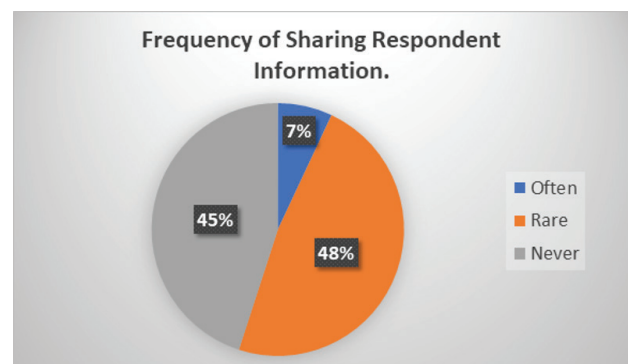
media or watching the news from television stations.



Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 16 Frequency of updating respondent information

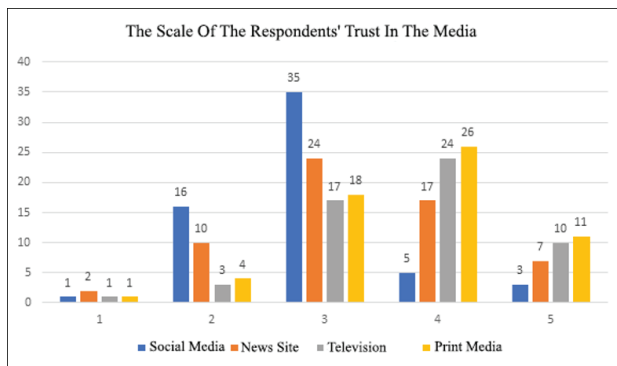
Meanwhile, in the activity of using social media, the majority of the respondents rarely shared news or information related to COVID-19. This indicates that the respondents tend to use the information they have for personal consumption.



Source: from primary data, 2020

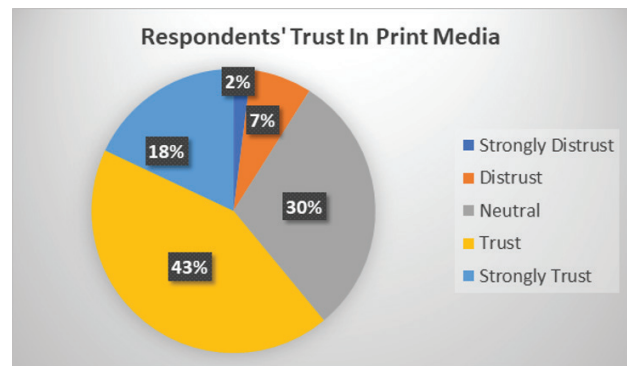
Figure 17 Frequency of sharing respondent information.

The author set a scale of 1 to 5 for observing the respondents' trust level toward news and information related to COVID-19 that they received through media. The meaning of this scale is as follows: 1-strongly distrust, 2-distrust, 3-neutral, 4-trust, 5-strongly trust. Each of the media would get an assessment from the respondents. The result showed that the respondents tended to trust news and information from mainstream media, such as news broadcasting in a television station and printed media like newspapers. Meanwhile, trust in social media and news sites was categorized as low.



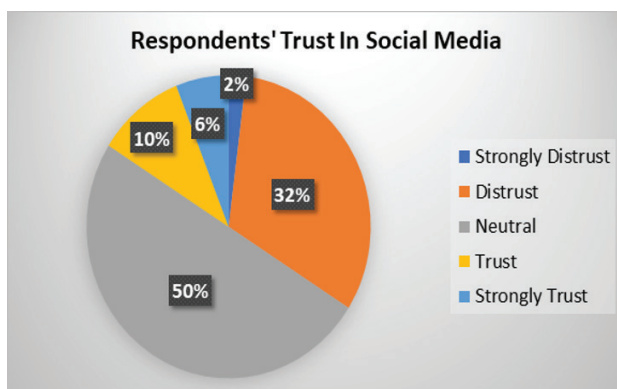
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Figure 18 The scale of the respondents' trust in the media



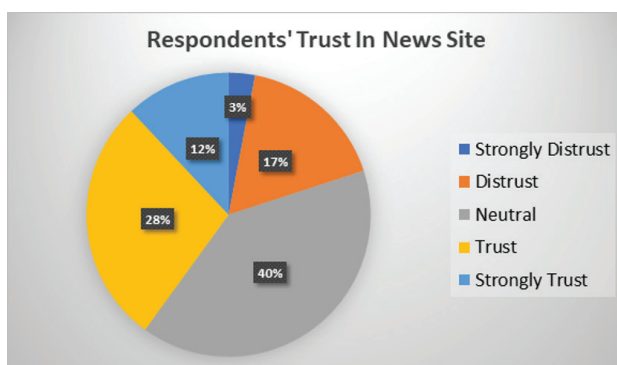
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Figure 22 Respondents' trust in print media.



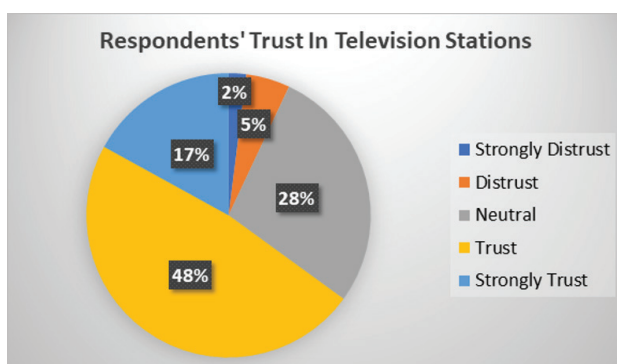
Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 19 Respondents' trust in social media



Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 20 Respondents' trust in news sites.



Source: from primary data, 2020

Figure 21 Respondents' trust in television stations.

From the result of the study conducted, it was found that most respondents considered that COVID-19 was a global pandemic that should raise alerts. Yet, the various understandings were found in the respondents who lived in Jabodetabek and Java Island outside Jabodetabek. The most thought-provoking is that some respondents considered that COVID-19 was a common flu that could be gone as the time went by; the percentage of total respondents who responded in such a way tended to be similar with the total respondents who considered that COVID-19 was a part of a global conspiracy. From these data, there are two assumptions that can be explored further. first, the indication that information that is delivered by the government and the relevant parties related to the COVID-19 mitigation is ineffective, and it is not fully received by the public. Second, the literacy level of the users of social media needs to be analyzed further.

The respondents' understanding related to COVID-19 is inextricably linked to the massive information outbreak that they receive from the media they use. From the study above, it was found that the biggest media consumption by the respondents in seeking COVID-19 information was social media and news sites of 32%. Meanwhile, printed media was only consumed by 9 respondents or only 7% of the total respondent, and they only use 2 newspapers, namely Fajar Makassar and Radar Tegal.

Several previous studies state that the printed media has entered the declining stage due to the emergence of new media, especially social media. The report by tirto.id stated that the dissemination of newspaper copies in 2015

experienced stagnant conditions, and it was even declining day by day (Zuhra, 2017). It is in line with the finding by Nielsen Consumer & Media View showing that the personal purchase of newspapers in 2017 decreased by 20%. In the same year, the total number of readers of online media increased by 6 million people, while the total number of readers of printed media was only 4.5 million people (Aria, 2017). These data are also in line with the report by Edelman Trust Barometer in 2018, mentioning that public trust towards mainstream media was drastically declining as the social media platforms, online news media, and search engine (a characteristic of new media) were rapidly developed (Databoks, 2018).

From the collected data, the social media was frequently visited by the respondents in seeking information related to COVID-19 was Instagram. It is inversely proportional to most studies stating that social media with the highest number of users in Indonesia was Facebook. One of them is a report by Dwi Ajeng Widarini, et al., stating that the total active users of Facebook these days reaches 1.3 billion users (Widarini, 2019). Meanwhile, the result of the study above, no one of the respondents used Facebook as a reference for getting information. These data indicate that Facebook is not a social media that becomes a public reference in seeking news and information related to COVID-19. It is in line with the same study mentioning that Facebook is a social media that is least trusted by the public (Widarini, 2019). Meanwhile, the news site that was frequently visited by the respondents was *detik.com* and the frequently watched television stations was TV One surpassing Metro TV and Kompas TV that are also channels for news.

Even though social media and news sites became the frequently used media in seeking information related to COVID-19, the respondents' trust level against those two media was categorized as low. The trust level toward social media only reached 10% of the respondents, while online news sites reached 28%. These data were inversely proportional to the respondents' trust level against offline media. Their highest trust level against the information

presented in the television station reached 48%, followed by printed media with a trust level of 43%.

The different information quality and news in the mainstream media and online media are considered a factor causing the trust level between the two media to have quite far differences. The implementation of traditional journalism makes the credibility of information in mainstream media higher than that of online journalism. Credibility and objectivity in traditional journalism are supported and warranted by a gate-keeper or information filter. The data collected through news coverage were processed and filtered, and it finally became 'news'. An editor controls the news content and checks the facts. Therefore, for mainstream media, the credibility of releasing news is the credibility of the media itself (Widodo, 2010).

Online journalism has a different tendency. The speed and actuality of information become a priority in online journalism. Eventually, the practice of this kind of journalism will bring to some problems related to journalism ethics. The problems are collecting news that needs ethical considerations in keeping the informant's privacy, news release whereby the intensity of competition for online media to be the first to air the information while the event is still developing and the key facts have not known yet, and the news presentation whereby, in online media, the separation between editorial staff's importance and media business often deviate since the main goal is to survive among the media industry competition or the business importance is more dominant (Lasica, 2001).

The explanation above shows that the media consumer with journalism products is different from other media consumers, such as entertainment media, advertising, etc. According to Matthias Kohring and Jörg Matthes in *Trust in News Media*, it is mentioned that trust in news media does not refer to other forms of communication media, such as advertisement and entertainment. It indicates that the strict practices of journalism, such as credible informants, covering both inside principle, separation of facts and opinions, and other

journalism ethics, implemented by news media become an important key in achieving public trust (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

The interesting result of the study was that the respondents' trust level against their media reference in seeking news and information related to COVID-19 was inversely proportional to the total media that they frequently use. From the study above, it was found that even though the biggest respondent's media consumption was from online media, namely social media and news sites, their trust level against information that is presented is categorized low.

This leads to an idea related to the tendency of people to consume information from unreliable sources or media. The ideas contrary to the theory of consumer loyalty related to the trust of a product (media) are directly proportional to the total users. In addition, negative perceptions of the product (media) result in individual or public distrust of the media, which will lead to a decrease in the consumption of the relevant media news.

The result of this study showed there was a shift in media consumption pattern performed by people before and during the COVID-19 pandemic era, whereby before the pandemic, the people used online news media as the reference media and a crosscheck against the information they had just received (Widarini, 2019 and Andung et al., 2019). Meanwhile, in this pandemic situation, people use conventional mass media (television, newspaper, and radio) as the reference media and as a crosscheck related to the COVID-19 information, especially those that spread on social media.

The data from Edelman Trust Barometer (2018) also mentioned that 40% of the respondents globally chose to delete their social media account and not to use social media anymore if the information in it is not reliable anymore. In other words, without trust, they choose to delete their social media or not use social media anymore (Edelman, 2018). When considering the result by the researcher and the one by Edelman, both have a contradictory idea, whereby the result by the researcher found that the respondents choose to consume information

from social media more than other information media instead of deleting their social media account.

The contradiction found in this study, i.e., the respondents consume media that they do not trust, proves that the media consumption pattern has minimum relevancy to media trust. Consumer loyalty is marked by the behavior of using or buying a product or service provider repeatedly, having a certain disposition or tendency to a positive attitude to the product (Istanto, 2007).

This phenomenon can be explained through the selective exposure theory stating that there is a cognitive motivation that happens in an individual due to media exposure, which is the result of predisposing mechanism. This condition is the effect of strong cognitive motivation for individuals that are exposed to media. This predisposing mechanism is triggered by a bias due to the abundant or excessive information availability (Westerwick, 2014). Information availability refers to a different proportion between pleasant and unpleasant information (Wibowo, 2020).

This phenomenon shows that the consumption pattern of media has minimum relevance with media trust. One of the factors is that trust is not the only motivation of someone to consume information provided by the media. To put it simply, the referential function of information is not the only thing that stimulates media consumption (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005). Many motivations are found underlying media consumption besides trust.

In a theory of uses and gratifications, it is said that, basically, the media users are filled with certain motivations. If these motivations are met, user satisfaction is directly met. A motivation to gain satisfaction is influenced by individual subjectivity with the assumption that if an individual accesses the media, he/she will gain the intended satisfaction (Arifin, 2013). Gaining accurate and objective information related to a certain event is one of the motivations to consume media. When there are other motivations in consuming media, the trust towards media becomes less relevant. As long as

the action to get the need is required, consuming information from unreliable sources is a quite rational action (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005).

The finding by Yariv Tsfati and Joseph N Cappella (2005) mentions that people who consume information through media that they do not trust are motivated by the needs for strong cognition, enjoy the information from several points of view, like to discuss or argue about a certain issue, and get satisfied from the process of thinking. People with the need for strong cognition in consuming information media are not influenced by their trust towards a certain media.

It is undeniable that the media has an important role in forming public trust towards the government. In this epidemic emergency condition, media plays a role as the spokesman between the government and the people through the updated news and important information related to the mitigation and the prevention that can be performed individually. Media has a specific perspective in delivering news. It is related to the editorial staff's policy to adapt to an ideology, importance, and the media preference itself. Hence, public trust towards releasing news by media related to the mitigation of COVID-19 by the government also influences the public perception of the government's image.

The low public trust level against the government can be seen as the effect of media consumption with negative public perception. From the result of a study on public trust against media related to COVID-19 news above, it is found that the frequently consumed media is from social media. Even though the consumption level is high, the public trust towards information in social media is significantly low. This study is in line with a study by Dwi Ajeng Widarini, et al., mentioning that social media is not the public reference in seeking news and information (Widarini, 2019).

Another researcher, Merlyna Lim, states that the environment of online media in Indonesia tended to not be balanced (Lim, 2012) making the perception against the information in online media tend to be negative. It is also similar to the result of a study conducted by S. Kunto

Adi Wibowo and Ira Mirawati stating that the heavy users of social media tend to be skeptical towards the political condition in Indonesia, for instance, their distrust against the policy made by the government and other state institutions (Wibowo & Mirawati, 2013).

Public trust towards the government is also influenced by the government's ability in delivering the information directly. Non-substantial arguments are often shown by the authorized holders in media. It is started from the use of unfamiliar terms in a society, such as a pandemic, lockdown, relaxation, PUM, PUI, homecoming, or the activity of returning to hometown, etc. The non-substantial arguments eventually arrive in society in the form of misleading information. It is caused by people's low literacy levels. The data from UNESCO in 2016 through *The World's Most Literate Nations* placed the literacy level in Indonesia at the 60th rank out of 61 investigated countries (Hutapea, n.d.). Meanwhile, the report of the reading literacy activity index issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019 also showed that the national literacy was still low (Solihin, 2019).

Literacy itself covers an individual competency in processing information. This can explain how people's understanding of COVID-19 is varied. The study above showed various understandings found in the respondents who live in Jabodetabek and Java Island outside Jabodetabek. The interesting thing is that some of the respondents think that COVID-19 was a common flu that can be gone as time goes by. The total respondents who responded that way was similar to the total respondents who considered COVID-19 a part of a global conspiracy.

The two things above related to the non-substantial understanding and arguments about COVID-19 were associated with the people's literacy competence in responding to information from the government through several media channels. This indicates that information delivered by the government and the relevant parties related to the mitigation of COVID-19 is not effective yet and it is not fully accepted by the public.

Much information that is missing from the

substance eventually results in bias and cognitive dissonance among the people. This cognitive dissonance is marked by an uncomfortable feeling that motivates someone to do certain actions tending to be contrary to the belief and knowledge she/he has (West & Turner, 2008). This explains the phenomena that many people do not follow the health protocol amid the COVID-19 pandemic, such as staying among a crowd, not wearing a mask, traveling to another city, and the like. Meanwhile, they are aware that their actions can make them infected with COVID-19 and become a carrier that harms their family and the people around them.

The explanation of the aforementioned research results state that this condition was the effect of a strong cognitive motivation for individuals exposed by media. The theory of selective exposure mentions that cognitive motivation happens in individuals as the effect of media exposure is the performance of the predisposition mechanism (tendency).

This predisposition mechanism is triggered by bias due to the effect of the availability of abundant or excessive information (Westerwick, 2014). The availability of information in the difference between the proportion of pleasant and unpleasant information (Wibowo, 2020).

CONCLUSION

From the result of the study, it can be concluded that the total users of media cannot make the media a reference in seeking reliable information. It is proven by the result of the study conducted by the author, whereby the majority of the respondents use online media (social media and news sites) in seeking COVID-19 information. However, the respondents' trust level against both of the media platforms tends to be low if it is compared to the trust level against offline media, such as television and printed media. This study can be a reference for the government and the relevant parties in mitigation COVID-19 to deliver more information through media that has a high public trust level, namely television and printed media. Also, programs that can improve people's literacy awareness are needed.

Another finding related to the respondents' various understandings of COVID-19 is directly proportional to the various types of media they consume for seeking information and news related to COVID-19. These various understandings can be an obstacle in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic because, in this study, some respondents equalize COVID-19 with common flu that can be eliminated as the time goes by, and they even consider it as a global conspiracy.

Meanwhile, the last finding shows a significant association between negative perceptions towards the COVID-19 information in media and public skepticism against information and government policy related to the COVID-19 mitigation. Nevertheless, due to the limited data, it is expected that these hypotheses can be tested further in the future studies.

The result of the discussion above also finds out that the communication strategy implemented by the government for mitigating COVID-19 is restricted by several factors. They are (1) the people's tendency in consuming unreliable media causes a skepticism attitude against the information and appeal delivered by the government and authorized people for COVID-19 mitigation. In the current health emergency condition, the government should be stricter in supervising information spreading in social media. A severe sanction is required for people who intentionally spread a hoax and other provocative information that can influence the government's credibility in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. (2) The people's low literacy level causes much information being missed from the substance that eventually results in a senseless debate that consumes much time and energy. The government, in issuing policies, should consider the people's literacy level, such as decreasing the complicated terms and not using the extended sentences or those with multiple meanings.

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