

COVID-19 Health Information-seeking Behavior in Timorese Society: A Phenomenological Study

Mas'amah¹, Juan Nafie², Christian J. Bale Lembang³, Apris A. Adu⁴, Sarci M. Toy⁵, R. Pasifikus Christa Wijaya⁶, Indra Yohanes Kiling⁷

¹Assistant Professor and Vice Dean, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia, ²Assistant Professor, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia, ³Lecturer, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia, ⁴Associate Professor and Dean, Faculty of Public Health, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia, ⁵Assistant Professor, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia, ⁶Assistant Professor, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia, ⁷Assistant Professor, Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to determine the media used in obtaining health information about COVID-19 and the reasons for choosing the media. The theory used is Information-seeking Behavior. This research is qualitative with the phenomenological method. The informants were 38 people who were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. Data collection was carried out utilizing in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The data analysis technique is Creswell's data analysis in phenomenological research. The results showed that the media used to find health information about COVID-19 were printed mass media (newspapers, magazines, and tabloids), electronic media (television, radio), and internet media. Meanwhile, choosing the media was due to the ease of accessing existing media and the diversity of information obtained.

Keywords: Information-seeking Behavior, Health Information, COVID-19

Introduction

Nowadays, we live in the digital age, marked by the emergence of three technologies: computers, communication, and multimedia¹. Along with this progress, information is not limited to text, numbers, and images but is more varied in audio-visual information. The development of this communication technology allows people to get information very easily. Moreover, the use of mass media does not require special expertise so that anyone can access it.

A survey has found that Indonesians spend an average of 5 hours each day consuming content, both

through conventional media and the internet. The study found that television viewing duration was still high: 4 hours 53 minutes per day, 3 hours 14 minutes per day to access the internet, 2 hours 11 minutes per day for listening to the radio, 31 minutes per day spent on reading newspapers and 24 minutes per day spent on reading the magazine². Observing the data above, nowadays, people get abundant information from various media. The current state of information flow that the world community feels, including Indonesia and people in East Nusa Tenggara, is related to COVID-19.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 is a virus that attacks the respiratory system. COVID-19 can cause minor respiratory system disorders, severe lung infections, and death. Data shows that as of January 2021, the number of positive tested Indonesians for COVID-19 was 1,1 million cases, 897 thousand people recovered, and 30,581 people died. Meanwhile, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in NTT until January 2021 was 5,212 cases, 2,726 recovered, and 147

Corresponding author:

Mas'amah

Assistant Professor and Vice Dean, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Nusa Cendana University, Adi Sucipto Street, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia 85001, E-mail: mas'amah@staf.undana.ac.id

died³

There are much accessible communication media on Timor Island, such as newspapers, radio, television, films in cinemas, and the internet. This condition makes Timor Island people quite exposed or deliberately exposes them to information related to COVID-19. The purpose of this study was to find out what media are used to obtain health information about COVID-19 and the reasons for choosing the media.

Method

This type of research is qualitative, a research procedure that produces descriptive data in written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. The method used is phenomenology⁴ to know the world from those who experience it directly or are related to human experience's natural properties and the meaning attached to it. The informants in this study were 38 natives of the island of Timor who was selected by applying the purposive sampling technique^{5,6}. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and observation. This research's data analysis technique was Creswell's data analysis technique in phenomenological research⁷. The data validity test was carried out by extension of participation, the persistence of observation, triangulation, analysis, negative cases, reference adequacy, member checking, detailed description, and auditing to ensure consistency and validity of data and information.

Main Themes Result

The media used: information stream by my palm

This theme observes types of media used to seek information about COVID-19. The development of communication technology makes various kinds of information freely accessible to almost everyone. Based on the in-depth interviews conducted, it was known that all informants had heard of COVID-19 from various communication media. Before the awareness about COVID-19 emerged, most health information came from passive, one-way media, such as television and newspapers. However, the thirst for information cannot be quenched by merely sitting and waiting. Petrus stated that:

"I have heard the news about this coronavirus, I first watched it on the television, but after that, I also tried to find information about this virus from other media, such as radio and others".

In line with the previous informant's opinion, Maria revealed that:

"I have indeed got the information about this coronavirus, as far as I can remember; I heard it for the first time on television. However, until now, I realized that I got the information not only from television but yeah for the first time, I knew about it from television."

Primed by COVID-19 news on television, curious informants use the internet to get more information about COVID-19, the following statement of informant Irma:

"YouTube is where I usually get the information. You can find any information through YouTube and also from the usual links shared by my friends. So much news is shared from electronic media, but sometimes there are hoaxes too."

The same thing was also stated by an informant named Farhan, who said that:

"The media I use most often is my cellphone to surf on the internet because when I rely on the internet, the information I get is more diverse and detailed."

It can be seen from the findings of the interview above that informants used various types of media to obtain information related to COVID-19. The informants actively search for health information by any means at their disposal. Social media and video platform became first picked choice for any informant that have the internet access.

Information Validation vs. Easiness of Access

In the research results presented in the previous section, it can be seen that the informants mainly used online media aside from television to obtain information related to COVID-19. In this regard, this study also aimed to determine the reasons why the informants chose the media. Participants mostly like video media because of the variety of content. Moreover, video platform offers the ease with which they can switch sources when

the current watched content is long, dull, and boring. Following the results of an interview conducted with Irma:

“...YouTube is where I usually get the information. You can find any information through YouTube and also from the usual links shared by my friends. So much news is shared from electronic media, but sometimes there are hoaxes too. I chose Youtube because it is faster to get the information and understand what the news stated. The thing is, Youtube is more convenient for me because the news presented is not too long and convoluted”.

Other informants also state easiness of access as the main benefit of internet-based communications. An informant named Carlos stated that:

“...I know information about the coronavirus from television, but then I also try to find information using a cellphone, because using a cellphone is easier to access the internet”.

However, finding valid health information cannot easily be done by only depends on Social Media. Television is considered the best source of official health information because the Indonesian Government is always updating COVID-19 related news by television broadcast daily. The researcher interviewed an informant named Fordalina, who said that:

“...Because through television, we can find out how the development of the coronavirus occurs and how to prevent it, its development, ways to overcome it such as maintaining distance, wearing masks. That way, we can immediately see recommendations for avoiding the coronavirus. Yes, because through television we can find out more details about the corona virus’s development through medical personnel.”

Then, an informant named Maryam said that:

“I get all the information about the coronavirus from television because I think the information from television is official. My mother trusts TV more than cellphones. My mother’s cellphone cannot access the internet, so she watches TV.”

Based on the interview results above, it can be concluded that the informants involved in this study had various reasons when determining the selection of media to obtain information related to COVID-19. Social media offers quick and easily accessible health information; however, it came with a huge cost. Informants must actively and constantly filter disrupted information. Those who want officially trusted health information will wait for the Indonesian Government to broadcast it on television.

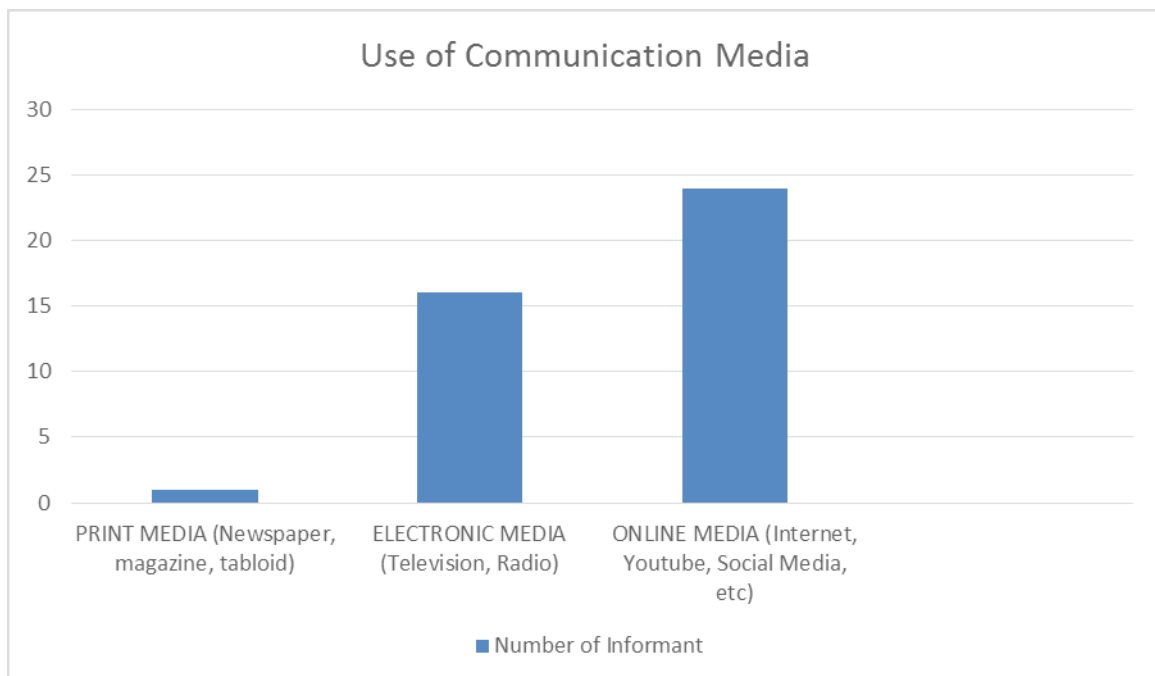


Figure 1. Use of Communication Media to Seek Information about COVID-19

Discussion

Media Use and COVID-19 related information

The concept of information-seeking behavior theory explains that information-seeking behavior consists of several features, namely: Starting, Chaining, Browsing, Differentiating, Monitoring, Extracting⁸. These six features relate to each other to form various information-seeking patterns, although not in regular stages. Figure 1 shows which media categorizations are most often used to find information about COVID-19 through the statements of informants obtained by researchers through interviews. Researchers have reduced these interviewees' statements in several media, including print media, electronic media, and online media. Based on observations, informants mostly use Online Media to get information about COVID-19. The social media often used are Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and YouTube.

Starting, consisting of activities that trigger information-seeking activities. Starting is the stage, the initial reference to information seeking or the initial introduction of the information obtained. The informants' initial reference obtained information from television. The social restriction also gives more time for television interest and screentime in COVID-19 pandemics⁹.

Chaining, the activity of following a series of citations, quotations, or other forms of reference among other documents. Chaining is important in information-seeking behavior, where chaining is characterized by linking previously obtained information. The research informants conducted chaining by looking for news related to COVID-19 in online media, watching more news on television, YouTube and searching for other related information from the internet. Video platforms like YouTube were already used previously for findings health information, such as immunization¹⁰.

Browsing, managing, wandering but with a little direction in areas that are considered to have potential. Browsing is an activity of finding information by searching more towards the direction to be observed. Researchers asked an informant named Yohanes, "Are you trying to find deeper information about

the coronavirus? How?" Yohanes replied, "*Looking for and watching more news on youtube about the coronavirus*". A similar statement was also expressed by an informant named Yoshy, "*Yes, I am trying to find deeper information and use the internet more, namely by searching through google and youtube*". Based on the answers given by all the informants, the researcher sees that Browsing for seeking information uses online or internet media.

Differentiating, sorting, using characteristics in information sources as a benchmark for checking the quality of content/information. Differentiating, in this case, is an activity to distinguish the information received and filter information. Marleny stated that "*I get the most information about the coronavirus from television media on the Metro tv, TVone, I-news, and TVRI channels*". Based on this explanation, Differentiating, sorting, or checking the quality of information on news disseminated through television news channels related to COVID-19.

Monitoring, observing progress by concentrating on a few selected sources. Monitoring, for example, several news titles selected according to COVID-19, followed by news developments presented by the media every day, monitoring is carried out starting from the headlines presented, monitoring news or information development.

Extracting, systematically digging at one source to extract material/information deemed important. At this stage, many sources of information related to COVID-19 use online media because informants find it easy to access, anytime and anywhere.

Reasons for Choosing the Communication Media Used

The public can enjoy various mass media, such as print media, electronic media, film, and internet media. Mass media itself can be interpreted as a tool that can convey information quickly and simultaneously to a wide audience spread out in various places simultaneously. Mass media widely known to the public consists of print media, electronic media, and online media¹¹. Due to the dissemination of information from the mass media, currently, there is much information related to

COVID-19 in various mass media such as printed mass media, electronic media, and internet media.

Timor Island community has a wide opportunity to freely choose various media to get the information they need regarding COVID-19, which currently hits the entire world. Based on the results of interviews in the field, it is known that the people of Timor Island use a variety of media when looking for information about COVID-19. When choosing the media to be used, informants were motivated by reasons for obtaining information. When someone uses mass media, they are motivated by information motives, entertainment motives, personal identity motives, and integration and social interaction motives¹².

Information is data that has been processed or has meaning¹³. There are important characteristics that must be possessed by information, such as relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and completeness. Apart from obtaining information, the informants in this study argued that the media used was the media available at home, namely television. Informants use this media to get information about COVID-19 through television because they do not subscribe to newspapers, magazines, or tabloids at home. Meanwhile, the cellphones that are owned do not have internet facilities. Even though the informant only relies on television media to get information about COVID-19, the informant thinks that the information he has obtained is sufficient to meet his needs. Television has a powerful power to convey messages. After all, this media can present an impression as if it is experienced by itself with a wide reach simultaneously, where the delivery of the message content is also live between the communicator and the communicant¹⁴.

Another reason that was found in the field was when informants chose to use internet media such as YouTube or other social media. The informant admits that he/she prefers internet media because the information obtained can be more numerous and varied and accompanied by deeper reviews. This opinion is consistent with the interactive characteristics of the internet, where unique features emerge in the technology, offering unlimited possibilities in processing and disseminating news¹⁵. Furthermore, through these mass media, Timor Island's people can fulfill their various needs, including cognitive

needs, affective needs, personal integration needs, social integration needs, and escape needs.

Conclusions

The media used to obtain information about COVID-19 is through printed mass media (newspapers, magazines, and tabloids), electronic media (television and radio), and online media (internet, youtube, social media). The reason for choosing the media used is to obtain information, take advantage of existing media at home, and obtain the diversity of information content.

Suggestions

This research certainly has weaknesses and limitations. Therefore, it is recommended for further researchers to conduct similar research using a different approach or method so that the results obtained are more diverse. It is strongly recommended to comply with health protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The public is also expected to be smart in using the media, especially social media, by not sending scary posts, and the information must be filtered before sharing.

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Ethical Clearance: This study was carried out after obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee on the Nusa Cendana University in September 2020.

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