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COVID-19 MYTHOLOGY AND NETIZENS PARRHESIA IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CORONAVIRUS MYTHS ON SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

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ABSTRACT

Social Media is a new media of information flow gateway that can be accessed by the public, easily and freely. Social Media is an interactive information technology which not only can netizens access information, but they can also make news (information, comments, etc.) and share it on the internet. Easy access to information has caused ideological effects on society. This research aims to examine the ideological effects of the myths about COVID-19 on social media. The data collection was done through observation and distributing questionnaires online on social media. The data sources were from WhatsApp and Coronavirus cases reported online Indonesia. Researchers used Barthes' mythological theory to answer the research objectives. The results of this research indicated that the spread of myths related to COVID-19 by netizens on social media had caused ideological effects on society, for example, the public refused the coronavirus victims to be buried in public burial because of the corpse considered to infect the residents. This research contributes to the media effects theory development, which can be a policy for the government in fighting against Coronavirus, and netizens who use parrhesia on social media which can contain untrue myths

INTRODUCTION

The relationships Various media in the world have reported the news about the dangers of Coronavirus pandemic. The media has reported that this virus has infected 86,584 people in 86 countries and killed 2976 people, and the highest number is in China, as many as 2761 or nearly 80% other than in China. The countries whose citizens have become the victims of Coronavirus are Iran with

43 people, Italy with 29 people, and South Korea with 16 people. Meanwhile, six people died on the Diamond Cruise ship (gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com).

The media also reported the origin of the virus originated from bats and snakes of the krait and cobra type. Viruses can move from animals to humans that are in the same area. This corona is thought to have originated from the famous Wuhan Market which sells a wide variety of animals, one of which is a bat. The news about Coronavirus not only mentions the number of victims but also displays data in the form of graphs, charts, tables, figures, etc., to convince the world of the dangers of Coronavirus that can spread and take many victims in a short time.

Coronavirus is widespread throughout the world which originally started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The world community is becoming frightened by information spread on the media (television, internet and social media) about COVID-19 cases (infected and dead victims). China is experiencing a crisis, and cases have arisen all over the world that have pushed various global actions and reactions to fight the virus (Jamal & Bidke, 2020). The COVID-19 case that began in December 2019 prompted the Chinese government to take strategic actions to reduce the spread of the virus, which is to limit meeting activities, reduce travel inside and outside the country, and close the Coronavirus source areas. Various countries take preventative measures, one of which is limiting flights to China (Bloomberg News, 2020).

Jabbour and Jabbour (2020) state that so far cybersecurity is considered as the biggest threat on the internet world, but the spread of COVID-19 is more dangerous which can affect the world economic, political and socio-cultural order. Information technology, for example, smartphones with the availability of social media applications (WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube), become the new media in broadcasting COVID-19 information very rapidly throughout the world.

The world has been invaded with limitless information about the dangers of the COVID-19 epidemic. Anytime, anywhere, media users are presented with news about Coronavirus when they read the news online through their smartphones. Social media, e.g., WhatsApp, has a role as mass media (television and online media press) that presents a variety of information, both information shared from other media or news in private. The access to information is obtained not only from TV and mass media online but from social media as the new media. The reporting of the danger of Coronavirus continues to hurt society which can cause changes in views, attitudes, and behaviour. The free information flow from social media makes internet users no longer distinguish between factual and mythical information (hoaxes).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parrhesia

Foucault uses the term *parrhesia* by referring to the use of that term which was first discovered in Greek literature, specifically on the works of Euripides

(480 to 407 BC). Since the end of the fifth AD, antique Greek literature also developed this term. Furthermore, at the end of the fourth century and during the fifth century AD, the term was also found in the patristic manuscript of Ioannes Khysostomsm, 345 to 407 AD (Foucault, 2018).

Foucault (2018) defines parrhesia (derived from the word *parrhesiazesthai* which means *to say everything*) as the person who states everything that he thinks; they do not hide anything, yet open their heart and mind entirely to others through discourse. Parrhesia can mean speaking freely and speaking as it is, based on what is in mind. People can use parrhesia to convey something about what they think to others so that people can understand what is believed by those who use parrhesia. The use of parrhesia can also indicate the speakers' psychological state and what they are talking about. Parrhesia users are called *parrhesiastes*, they make sure that the messages delivered are true, and the collocutors understand and trust the meaning of the messages. The speakers, as parrhesiastes, use the most straightforward words and forms of disclosure so that they can be understood and accepted by the collocutors.

According to Sauter and Kendall (2011), parrhesia was an ancient political practice that had been used in Greek times, and freedom was an important condition for parrhesiastes, and at the same time, to defend freedom, being self-form, and regulate others. The Bakkhai story (407-406SM) is one example of the use of parrhesia. It is said that one of the Pantheos servants, a shepherd, and concurrently a king's messenger, provided information about the panic and chaos that plagued the community due to the madness of the girls of Dionysus. Someone can use parrhesia to convey the truth. However, there was an old tradition of rewarding the messengers in using parrhesia when they brought good news, and punishing them when they delivered bad news. Initially, this king's servant felt fear to convey this painful news to Pantheos. Finally, he asked permission from the king to use parrhesia by reporting everything he knew. This method was done so that the king was not angry with him. Then Pantheos would not question if what he was talking about was the truth (Foucault, 2018).

The people can use parrhesia as a necessity, and should not be allowed if the people get the right reports, especially those that are urgent and report it to the leader (King), even though the parrhesia used will hurt the leader. However, parrhesia can be used as long as it is for the State's benefits. The government (the King) also issues regulations on the consequences received by those who use parrhesia if the parrhesia conveyed is a lie.

MYTHOLOGY

Barthes (1957) used the term *mythology* to conceptualize modern myths. The word mythology comes from a combination of the words *mythos*, the true mythical thinking, and *logos*, the rational-scientific thinking (Danesi, 2004). Mythology is a term used by Barthes to develop his semiotic theory. Mythology is a modern myth, incorporating the *logos* aspect (rational or scientific thinking). The concept of myth in Barthes's semiotics is anything or

story that is rationalized so that the myth is considered a natural or true thing (Kaharuddin & Hasyim, Arafah, *et al.*, 2020).

Barthes (1952-1980) developed the Saussure semiology by dividing into two levels or systems of meaning. First is the general meaning accepted in the basic conventions of society, and second is the creation of certain meanings (additional meanings) called objects of the first system. Myth is a signifier system at the second level that creates new objects (new meanings) which are different from the first system (Supriadi *et al.*, 2019, Hasyim, *et al.*, 2020). Barthes said that the signified (concept) in the first system was the element that formed the myth (Barthes, 1957).

Barthes has explained the theory of myth in *Mythologies* (1957). This book consists of two parts. The first part contains articles which were mostly published in the magazine *Les Leures Nouvelles* between 1954 and 1956, and the second part contains the theory of myth. In the first part, the myth discusses the views or general opinion in French life at that time. For example, an article entitled *Le Monde où l'on catche* (1957), tells the myth of wrestling which said that wrestling was a show, whereas in general wrestling is one of the branches of sports which relies on physical strength yet more than the spectacle conveying moral messages about *good and evil*. *Good and evil* moral messages are part of audience satisfaction. Satisfaction emphasizes *good and bad* conflicts packaged in wrestling performances.

According to Barthes (1957), myth is a communication system and a way of conveying messages (1957). Myth is a way of interpreting or telling a message (Hasyim *et al.*, 2020; Akkase & Hasyim, 2020). Myth as a sign system is formed by the signification process of the signifier, signified, and sign (Maknun *et al.*, 2019). Myth is formed in two levels, namely the linguistic system (language), and the myth (Hasyim *et al.*, 2019). Myth is formed as a sign system by taking the semiotic system at the first level as the foundation. The second level signifier system creates new meaning (myth). Myth is a sign system, built based on the linguistic system and semiology (myth) system.

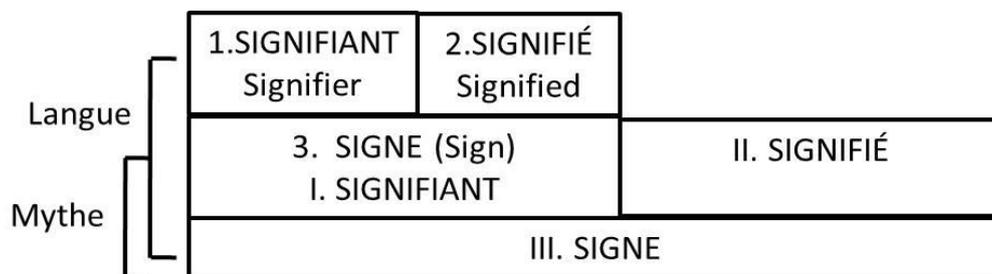


Figure 1. The Sign Map by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1957)

The Barthes mythology (1957) illustrated by giving an example taken from the front cover of Paris-Match magazine, which is a photograph of a black soldier saluting the French flag, among white soldiers. The sign is built on two levels.

At the first level, the signifier is *the photograph of a young soldier, dressed in a French uniform, saluting the French flag*. The signified of the signifier is *the black soldier saluting the French flag*—the relation between the signifier and the signified forms the sign at the first level. Then, the sign system at the first level becomes the signifier at the second level as the myth system, which is *the black soldier saluting the French flag*, and the signified is an empty signified which then filled with the concept of the great French empire without any discrimination in saluting the French flag.

According to Barthes (1957), myth functions to distort, deform, and naturalize meaning. Meaning of the result of the relation between the signifier and the signified at the first level is distorted to construct the new meaning at the second level. Therefore, the myth, the sign at the second level means or refers to something else that no longer refers to the sign meaning at the first level. The first sign functions as the referent system (Hasyim, 2020). The sign distortion functions to change the shape with a concept, motivated by social culture or the mythology maker ideology. Myth has the function to naturalize the concept as a system of ideas into a sign-using society. Myth is the common views (opinions) which are constructed, and in the naturalization process that common views are believed to be a natural thing and become the dominant meaning (power).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research object was the myths related to COVID-19 on social media, spread by netizens. We used observational data collection method for conducting the observation of the COVID-19 myths which spreads on social media, and also online questionnaires using Google Form, and we distributed them via WhatsApp as well as WhatsApp groups. We also observed the COVID-19 myths on online news media, such as CNN Indonesia and Kompas.com, the national web portal in Indonesia, and the official website of the Indonesian government that reported the development of coronavirus cases, <https://covid.19.go.id>. The observations conducted on those media aim to connect the myths on media with those on social media, i.e., WhatsApp. The most dominant data about myths related to COVID-19 is the rapid test.

We collected the questionnaire data on social media, specifically WhatsApp (individuals and groups), using Google Form. There were 128 respondents who answered the questionnaires.

Age	%	Education	%	Occupation	%
15-25	35	High school	15.6	Civil Servant	20.6
26-35	21.9	Diploma	3.9	Lecture	17
36-45	15.6	Undergraduate	33.6	College/University Student	28
46-55	20.33	Graduate	32.8	Student	30.5
> 55	7	Postgraduate	14.1	Entrepreneur	3.9

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Besides, to distribute questionnaires online, the data collecting was also done by visiting cafes that had implemented health protocols (keeping distances, wearing masks, and providing a place for handwashing with the soaps). The café visitors filled out the questionnaires that had been sent via WhatsApp and sent the answered questionnaires right away.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Rapid Test Myth

Based on the results of data analysis, netizens use social media as a source of information and as the media for sharing information. WhatsApp is a social media that is considered communicative and interactive where netizens can easily receive information, and they can make their own news, comment on the information received, and share it to other social media. The research results prove this that states in which netizens get information every day about COVID-19 through internet media, namely 49% from social media, 29% from the Internet, and 22.9% from television, and netizens who are using applications to obtain information from online news media are 41.6 %, as well as social media (26% from WhatsApp, 10% from Facebook, and 5% from Twitter).

The reasons why netizens prefer to use social media are that they can interact directly, create their news, modify the message contents, and share them to social media. The potential for the emergence of myths about COVID-19, created and shared by netizens on social media, can occur because of the two-way communication on social media which is increasingly easy (Prasuri *et al.*, 2020). This is indicated by the information frequency about COVID-19 in the media, which is received every day. There were 74 respondents stating that they received information about COVID-19 every day, and took place whenever and wherever they were. Hogan and Strasburger (2018) say that the presence of social media has changed the model of interpersonal communication. Social media makes it easy for people to communicate virtually while sending videos and pictures.

Pharresia by netizens which can be in the form of reporting against COVID-19 can lead to untrue myths or hoaxes. This research results indicate that 45.9% of myths or hoaxes are spread on social media. The myths conveyed by netizens as a form of parrhesia on social media related to COVID-19 contain moral messages which provide advices and suggestions to internet users. However, not only the parrhesia conveyed are following the facts (true), but there are also some containing false myths.

The rapid test myth is one of the myths that spread on social media. This is also strengthened by the news broadcasted on television about people's actions who do not want to take the rapid test, and based on our research results show that respondents consider the government's rapid test program is not a solution to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19. The myth related to rapid test spread on social media is Corona Virus Accidentally Inserted into the Body

through Rapid Tests. This myth is circulating on the media. There is also a mythical message delivered as follow:

"WHAT A MESS! FAILURE! DISASTER! IS THIS REGIME DOING IT ON PURPOSE?"

*These are a couple of AI news because there is a Media link responsible for the information, namely **Vivanews**,*"

"This regime intentionally creates the Red Zone in each region in order to make the people unable to flare up and unable to create any movement."

"Everytime there is somebody who is positive, then it must be declared as the Red Zone, so that people who were previously negative are strived to be positive by inserting COVID-19 into the body through Rapid Test under the pretext of health test."

An online media, *Pikiran Rakyat* (depok.pikiran-rakyat.com, 2020), has reported that there has been information circulating on Facebook and also chain messages via WhatsApp, saying that Coronavirus is intentionally introduced into the body through the rapid test. The information claimed that the action was intentionally done to create a Red Zone so people cannot move. Based on the search of *Pikiranrakyat-depok.com* which was quoted, according to the COVID-19 Treatment Spokesperson, Achmad Yurianto, stated that the information could not be accounted for or that was a hoax or myth, and the information spread on Facebook and WhatsApp social media were information that could not be justified.

The information comes from an information link on the media stating, "What a mess! The Chinese Rapid Test Tools Make Negative People Turn to be Corona Positive". Based on the investigation, actually this report reviewed the differences in the results of the Coronavirus rapid test between the rapid test method and the PCR swab test results on the people of Banjar Serokadan, Abuan Village, Bangli Regency, Bali. Still, there are netizens who spread the information by stating that Coronavirus is intentionally introduced into the body through the rapid test.

The second myth related to the rapid test is the circulation of chain messages on social media entitled "Sudden Rapid Test". These chain myth messages uploaded on social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) have been shared more than 900 times, and liked more than 400 times (tempo.co.id, 2020).

Here is the chain myth message:

SUDDEN RAPID TEST

Please **pay attention** to yourself and your family.

If you are suddenly caught in a sudden **rapid test** operation,

*Suddenly there comes an Officer who **requires** you to take the Rapid Test, then the things to pay attention to are their **gloves**.*

*If those gloves are the only one they wear, **and they never change them**, and then they touch the person/patient in the Rapid Test, then this is where the vulnerability of **virus transmission** because we do not know, and even the Officers do not know, whether the person/patient they touched before us (previously) was **reactive, positive, or negative**.*

*Thus, the **contagion** is not because we are in public places, but it is when the Rapid Test is carried out in mass or groups, and the Officers **do not change their gloves!** (it could happen)*

*Therefore, in order to be safe, you have the right to ask the Officers to **change their gloves**, and if they are not pleased, you may **refuse** the rapid test (you have the right) for the sake of your safety and health.*

Stay healthy!

Mayit beuseful

#Repost

Media Tempo.co.id (2020) has reported and verified the myth messages by saying that the chain myths have been circulating on WhatsApp groups of the residents of Semarang, Central Java. Responding to the chain messages, the Head of the City Health Office of Semarang, Abdul Hakam, emphasized that every officer of the City Health Office of Semarang, in conducting swab test or rapid test to patients, is certain to comply with the standard operational procedure related to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Every patient examined by the field screening team who carried out a mass test should have met the health protocol requirements, such as washing hands before and after the test. Layered equipment is worn to protect the hands to the eyes, from gloves that cover up to the arms, and to wear special glasses coated with face shield or protector. Based on the Tempo's fact checking, the contents of the chain message, about the Coronavirus rapid test officer who does not change their gloves above, is a myth (hoax).

Ideological effects of myths on society

The rapid test myths circulated on social media causing ideological effects on society. Our results show that 37% of respondents are not sure the rapid test program can break the chain of COVID-19 transmission, 24.2% disagree, 8.6%, strongly disagree, 23.4% agree, and 6.8% strongly agree.

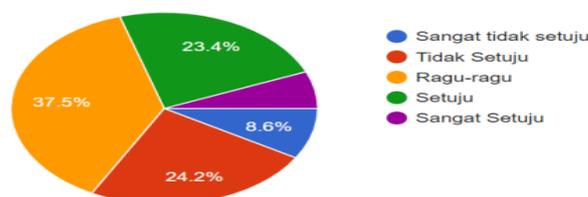


Figure 1. Respondents' attitude toward the rapid test program
(Translation: *Sangat tidak setuju* = Strongly disagree; *Tidak setuju* = Disagree; *Ragu-ragu* = Not sure; *Setuju* = Agree; *Sangat setuju* = Strongly agree)

The ideological effects of the COVID-19 myths rising people's attitudes and behavior in responding to various steps taken against COVID-19. One proof of the ideological effects of the COVID-19 myths is public dissatisfaction with the various steps taken in handling the Coronavirus pandemic. Our results show that 52% of respondents say they are dissatisfied with the various efforts made in dealing with COVID-19, 37% are satisfied, 6.2% are very dissatisfied, and 4% are very satisfied.

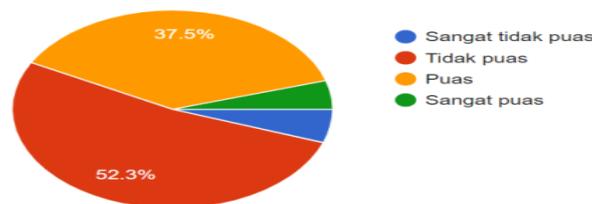


Figure 2. Satisfaction level towards the COVID-19 treatment
(Translation: *Sangat tidak puas* = Very dissatisfied; *Tidak puas* = Dissatisfied; *Puas* = Satisfied; *Sangat puas* = Very Satisfied)

The myths of COVID-19 which spread on social media contain moral messages that are considered a knowledge (truth) that must be carried out. These myths produce common opinions or common views in society, which later the society act and behave in accordance with these common views.

Based on the mythical theory analysis on netizens parrhesia related to COVID-19, then the main function of myths is to create common views in society, which then these common views become an everyday culture. One example is the rapid test. Society always avoid taking rapid test when the COVID-19 treatment officers are carrying out the rapid test. Kompas.com (Maichel, 2020) reported that as the attitudes and behaviors of rejection of the rapid test, people chose to evacuate to an island. The media stated the headline, "Fear of Rapid Test, Residents Choose to Evacuate to an Island". Kompas.com informed that the medical officers from the Public Health Center of Malawei, together with the TNI-POLRI joint-officers, visited the residents in Kompleks Perikanan (Fisheries Block) Jembatan Puri, Sorong City, West Papua. The arrival of the officers was to examine 55 residents who had previously refused to take the rapid test. Dozens of these residents made contact with two positive patients from the Ijtima Ulama Gowa cluster. Both were a husband and a wife with the initials MA and B. The Head of the Public Health Center of Malawei, Alviana Martaudang, said his party was trying to

persuade those 55 residents to take the rapid test. However, only 24 representatives who arrived. Some residents in the complex turned out to have fled to an island in Sorong for they were afraid of taking the test. Some residents had left their homes, went to an island to avoid the medical staff from taking the rapid test. Only a few of the residents who took the rapid test.

Based on the Barthes myth theory, the myth messages via social media conveyed by netizens contain multilevel meaning. The first level, called language, is denotation messages, speech, or netizens parrhesia delivered as the first language. The second level is the myth language. The myth language is a language system that has become common views in society which is then regarded as a universal truth. The myth language is manifested through people's attitude and behavior toward a view. The changes in people's attitude and behavior for the myths related to COVID-19, especially the myth of rapid test, are the ideological effects of myths that arise in which common views have become collective or universal thinking in society.

CONCLUSIONS

This research results in a conclusion with a question: *How to distinguish the truths and the myths (hoaxes) uttered by netizens on social media?* Factual and mythical (hoax) information has no clear boundaries, therefore mythical messages (hoaxes) are also considered to be a truth or a common view in society. The ideological effects of myths emerge common views which can be in the form of lies (myths) and real truths. When limiting the truth of a message (information) is difficult in society, then an untrue thing can become a reality, and vice versa, that a true thing can be a myth (hoax).

Social media is a new media, and a gateway for various messages and information which hardly have been distinguished between the myths (hoaxes) and the truths. Sign is something (language, message, picture, video, etc.) which can be used to construct and spread a myth.

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