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## Public's Perception on Social Media towards New Normal during Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia: Content Analysis on Religious Social Media Accounts

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**Abstract:** Religious activities usually bring large numbers of people together in certain places. However, in the current Covid-19 pandemic situation, gathering activities can increase the possibility of a faster spread of the virus. For this reason, this research aims to determine the people's perceptions on the implementation status of new normal on religious-based social media accounts. This research was conducted by using the content analysis research model. The data were collected through purposive sampling technique from the status and comments of some religious Instagram accounts. The data were collected from seven different Instagram accounts. The result showed that most people who follow religious accounts on Instagram disagree with the implementation of new normal. The results of this research can be used as considerations for the government in determining additional policies regarding the application of new normal to achieve the expected goals.

**Keywords:** *new normal, public attitudes, religious activities, Covid-19*

### 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has caught the attention of the people worldwide. It is because the spread rate is fast and may interfere with human health and can even result in death, especially for the elderly and those with weak immune systems [1]. Handling Covid-19 is becoming more difficult because there is not any medicine or vaccine yet to cure the infected [2]. Those who have been infected with Covid-19 have reached 28,649,519 people and the number of death is 919,577 [3]. Besides, the Covid-19 pandemic has also been reported to cause mental health problems, such as insomnia, stress, anxiety, phobia to being exposed to viruses, and depression [4, 5]. Apart from causing health problems, there are also other issues that cause severe social and economic problems. The Covid-19 pandemic has harmed social life, such as the exclusion of people or even specific national races are blamed as the virus spreaders [6]. It certainly disturbs the social order as people will prejudice each other and possibly trigger conflicts and divorce.

Among the problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic conditions are the main issues most people complain about. From an economic standpoint, the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the world economy, thus all countries also receive the same impacts [7]. Economic recovery will take a long time and inactive economic condition will last for years [8]. The effects of this pandemic are felt by all types of businesses, including small and micro enterprises, especially in some countries that have imposed lockdowns [9].

To reduce those negative economic impacts, the Indonesian government has begun to impose 'new normal' so that people can return to their activities by complying with the health protocols. The health protocols include: 1) wearing a mask to cover the nose and mouth when traveling outside of the home; 2) washing hands with soap under running water; and 3) maintaining a minimum distance of 1 meter from others [10]. However, every policy has its pros and cons. For this reason, this research aims to observe people's attitudes towards these government policies.

There are at least three reasons why this research is important to conduct. First, the compliance and commitment of the community in self-isolation and following health protocols have proven to be successful in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic in some countries, including China [11]. Meanwhile, people's attitudes will affect their compliance and commitment [12]. This means that if they respond positively to government policies regarding the new normal, they will automatically follow the government's directions in complying with health protocols and vice versa. Second, public knowledge about Covid-19 is very important in forming people's attitudes. The better public knowledge is, the more positive the public's attitude is to the efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19 [13]. In other words, the results of this research will also show the level of public knowledge on the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, empirically, the decision of the government of a country and public participation in



the Covid-19 handling helps economic recovery by increasing investors' confidence and maintaining stock price stability [14]. Thus, if the public shows positive attitude, it will have positive impact on Indonesia's economy.

This research is limited to examining people's attitudes from the perspective of religious groups. This is due to a large number of gathering activities, such as religious activities, which are one of the potential clusters in the spread of Covid-19 [15, 16, 17]. A research conducted by Aherfi, Gautret, Chaudet, Raoult, & Scola [18] found that the implementation of Purim religious activities by Jews became a cluster for the spread of Covid-19 in France. Likewise, a religious activity involving more than 10,000 people held at the Seri Petaling Mosque, Selangor, Malaysia was also noted to have had a significant impact on the spread of Covid-19 in Malaysia [19]. It is expected that the results of this research can be used by the government as a material for consideration in formulating policies and making approaches to the religious groups, so that the implementation of the new normal program can achieve the expected goals.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Covid-19 disease is a highly contagious and pathogenic viral infection caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) [20]. Some symptoms exhibited by the people infected with this virus include fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, anosmia, hyposmia, and dysgeusia [21]. SARS-CoV-2 is believed to be an abundance of animal coronavirus which then adjusts its ability to transmit from human to human. Because this virus is so contagious, it is spreading rapidly and is growing in the human population [22]. As of February, 14, 2020, 49,053 people have been confirmed positive for the virus and 1,381 people have been reported to have died globally. Since there is no vaccine for this virus at the moment, prevention of infection, early detection of the virus, and identification of successful treatment protocols are the best approaches in controlling the spread of the disease [23].

### **2.2 New Normal Life**

In June 2020, the Indonesian government has implemented "New Normal". The implementation of New Normal provides opportunities for the people to do activities normally so that it can reduce the negative economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, in the New Normal era, everyone are required to adhere to health protocols, such as wearing masks, maintaining distance, and washing hands [24]. In more detail, on 19th June 2020, the Indonesian Government through the Ministry of Health issued a Minister of Health Regulation Number HK.01.07/MENKES/382/2020 concerning health protocols for the community in public places and facilities in preventing and controlling the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Through these regulations, the general principles of health for the protection of individual and public health as well as health protocols must be implemented in all public places and facilities.

## **3. Methods**

This research was conducted by following the neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) method. The purpose of this research is to determine the attitudes of the community, especially those who are active in giving opinions through religious Instagram (IG) accounts. The samples were selected using purposive sampling technique. The sample selection criteria were: 1) the IG accounts reflect recognized religious groups in Indonesia; 2) having more than 500 followers; and 3) actively submitting posts, especially those related to the handling of Covid-19 and the implementation of new normal.

Based on the criteria, several IG accounts were chosen to represent the members of religious organizations from *Muhammadiyah* (MD), *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU), the Indonesian Church Association (PGI), *Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia* (KWI), Perwakilan Umat Buddha Indonesia (Walubi), *Persatuan Umat Buddha Indonesia* (Permabudhi), *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI), and *Majelis Tinggi Agama Konghucu Indonesia* (Matakin). There are seven IG accounts selected as the samples in this research which can be seen in Table 1 below. The data collection in this research was conducted by selecting some statuses and comments from the eight accounts from May to July 2020. The collected data were analyzed using interactive model analysis techniques consisting of three stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification with Nvivo 12 Plus [25].

## **4. Finding & Discussion**

### **4.1 Reasons Why People Agree with the New Normal**

Based on the data obtained, it was found that there are people who agree and disagree with the application of new normal. The number of people who agree with the rule is higher than those who disagree. However, the interesting thing about the finding is the reasons behind the people's agreement and disagreement. The following is an explanation regarding the pros and cons.

The reason for most respondents is the economic situation. When they are expected to stay at home, many of them cannot do their works from home. Thus, during the "Work from Home" program, they cannot do their work and do not earn income. With the implementation of a new normal life, they can go back to their work again. In other words, people have greater hope of being able to work when new normal life has been implemented.

They want to worship together again. Before the implementation of the new normal life, worship activities are very limited. Through the application of new normal life, people can more freely carry out worship activities even though they are still within some limitations or by following health protocols. With the implementation of the new normal, places of worship are reopened and people can carry out worship by following applicable rules to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Indonesia should not obey the direction from WHO and global elites strictly. The last reason found from the data collected is that the public agrees with the application of new normal life because they think that Covid-19 is not real and is just a conspiracy of the global elite and WHO. However, people who agree with this reason tend not to understand the meaning of new normal life and ignore health protocols.

### **4.2 Reasons Why People Disagree with the New Normal**

Based on Figure 2, six main reasons have been found that make them disagree with the implementation of the new normal. The number of Covid-19 patients is getting higher day by day. The reason mostly expressed by people who do not agree with the implementation of a new normal life is a health risk. They consider that the number of people who are confirmed positive for Covid-19 has not shown any signs of decreasing. The reports submitted by the government and the mass media from day to day tend to show an alarming increase. So, it is feared that by giving concessions, the conditions will be even getting worse.

There is not yet a vaccine or a cure for Covid-19. Concerning the health and an increase in the number of positive cases of Covid-19, the next reason presented by the public is the unavailability of drugs or vaccines. Until now, there is no cure or vaccine for Covid-19. So it is feared that applying the new normal will make things worse. Many people break the health protocols. Those who disagree also say that before the implementation of new normal life, there are still many who violate the health protocols. Therefore, if they are given more freedom, they will be even more courageous to violate health protocols which will lead to an increase in positive cases of Covid-19.

Only God Who decides the death and life of humans. Some people refuse new normal life, and they prefer normal life without having to follow health protocols or restrictions. They believe that life or death is in God's hands, not because of the existence of Covid-19. They hope that the government is not afraid of Covid-19 and allow them to return to life as before the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the respondents argue that they prefer to keep working as usual rather than starve to death because they are afraid of Covid-19, which they believe does not exist and is only such kind of global conspiracy.

Covid-19 is only a conspiracy; we should be back to the normal life not new normal. Likewise, those who agree, people who disagree with new normal life and expect normal life believe that Covid-19 is only a conspiracy made by the global elite. So, they hope that the government will ignore the Covid-19 pandemic and impose normal life, not new normal life with all the restrictions through health protocols that are considered detrimental to the community. They do not agree with the term 'making peace with Covid-19. Many people associate the government's statement, "making peace with Covid-19" with new normal life. They think that the government has surrendered and allowed people to return to freedom of activities at their own risk. They consider that the government has given up before trying or fighting Covid-19.

Based on the results of this research, it can be stated that the main reason why people agree with the implementation of a new normal life is because of economic demands. Although staying at home

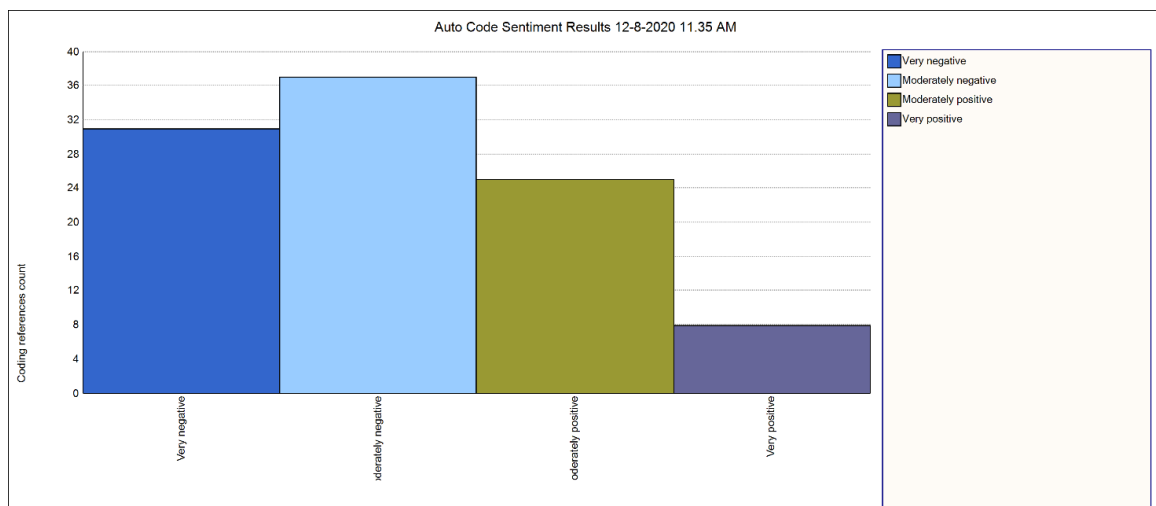
has been empirically proven to reduce the spread of Covid-19 [26], when they stay at home, many of them lose their jobs so they do not have the income to meet their daily needs [27]. Furthermore, these economic pressures have resulted in the prevalence of crime [28], such as in Africa where many people could not afford to buy food even though the State had tried to provide food aid but it was felt that this had not fulfilled their needs [29].

Meanwhile, according to those who disagree, new normal life is not ready to be implemented in Indonesia. They are concerned that the number of patients with positive cases of Covid-19 will increase if the new normal continues to be implemented. It is because they think that when the call to stay at home is enforced by the rules alone, there are still many people who violate it, let alone given leniency. Furthermore, the drug or vaccine for Covid-19 is not yet available. This makes some parties afraid that this new normal life will make things worse.

Next, from the findings that have been previously presented, there are several interesting findings from the results of this research. People who agree with the implementation of new normal life do not necessarily follow health protocols as well as those who do not agree do not necessarily ignore health protocols. So, it can be stated that most people already know and are aware of the dangers of Covid-19. However, at the same time, this also shows that some do not have a sufficient understanding of Covid-19 and new normal life. This is quite dangerous because public knowledge about Covid-19 and new normal life will determine the success of dealing with Covid-19. The results of the research conducted by Elgendy, El-Gendy, & Abdelrahim [30] found that community knowledge and alertness can help prevent the spread of Covid-19. Besides, the knowledge, attitudes, and readiness of medical personnel in handling patients who are positive for Covid-19 also play an important role in pandemic prevention [31]. In other words, the readiness and preparedness of all parties have an important role in handling and preventing the spread of Covid-19 [32].

From the data collected, one of the reasons people do not comply with health protocols is because they do not believe in the existence of Covid-19. Many people still believe news on social media which is still questionable about the Covid-19 conspiracy theory [33]. Their belief in conspiracy theories tends to make them less responsive in taking preventive steps to prevent the transmission of Covid-19 [34]. The results of the research conducted by Islam, Laato, Talukder, & Sutinen [35] found that during the Covid-19 epidemic, those who spread unsure news on social media are dominated by those who want to get recognition, entertain, and experience obstacles in regulating themselves to follow health protocols. Meanwhile, based on the results of the studies conducted by Swami, Voracek, Stiegerb, Tran, & Furnham [36], the ability to think critically can prevent the spread of hoax and conspiracy news.

**Figure 1. Sentiment Result of Religious Social Media Account**



From the following results we can see that in this case the public opinion regarding new normal life still tends to be a lot negative. People who have good knowledge about Covid-19 tend to have a

positive attitude in handling cases and preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus but still do not affect the negative perspective of society regarding new normal life [39]. As noted by Galvin, Li, Malwade, & Syed-Abdul [40], implementation of health protocols can also prevent the spread of other infectious diseases [37, 38].

### 5. Conclusions

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that most people who follow religious accounts on Instagram disagree with the implementation of new normal. The results of this research also show that there are still people who do not understand the importance of health protocols because they believe more in conspiracy theories. Besides, some people still do not understand the new normal and equate it with normal life, thus they tend to ignore health protocols. Considering that religious activities are often carried out by gathering many people, the government should socialize the importance of health protocols and the implementation of new normal life, so that there are no more misunderstandings that can interfere with the efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. However, seeing that this research material is still limited to documents obtained from social media statuses and comments, it is necessary to carry out further research using an instrument in the form of a questionnaire and taking a larger number of research samples, so that the results become more valid and can be generalized.

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