

The New Normal Way in the Post-Truth Politics: Reinterpreting the Concept of New Normal in Indonesian Mainstream Daily Newspaper

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ABSTRACT

The term “the new normal” emerges in the time of the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic in 2019 (Covid-19) in Indonesia and other various parts of the world. The terminology is interesting to study since it opens up various perspectives that head off to several important areas of people’s lives such as social, economic, political, and cultural. More importantly, when the terminology is framed in hoax news, the disruptive situation may continue to the heating arguments during the pandemic. The new normal way in this paper is considered as a political strategy used by policymakers to “normalize” an understanding that previously became something frightening namely “infection” which implicates to certain meaning by a set of protocols or strategies that are massive and patterned. By using the term “the new normal”, it is as if the existence of a scary and a terrible virus becomes “neutralized” and “normalized”. The present paper describes the normal way which was introduced by the Indonesian government in mainstream newspapers, Kompas, published in late May 2020 to early August 2020. The discussion and the findings of the problem found out that the normal way was propaganda used “to accustom” as well as “to legitimate” that the discourse of Covid-19 is a part of and at the same time to live together with the virus which makes it a no longer scary entity. In the post-truth political view, this situation is a reversal of facts which becomes the agenda of cultural transformation in creating a new state of “new equilibrium”.

Keywords: *New normal, post-truth, politics, upside-down, legitimate*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the term echoed by the mass media lately about new normal has led to various interpretations and experiences in surfing cyberspace. What does the word new normal mean? This opens a new perspective in the meaning of discourse in the discourse of the Covid-19 pandemic that has been rolling since the end of 2019 to the present. This term is repeatedly articulated with various kinds of references and different meanings but leads to a new activity which is considered a renewal of a series of self-isolation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The term new normal is actually a term used as a means of legitimacy in making public opinion with a series of new activities that will be initiated concerning a step or action in addressing a discourse. Where did the term new normal come from? The term new normal is not something new that has been issued by the government or power holders. This term is a tool to legitimize, perpetuate and maintain an entity so that it continues to be implemented and obeyed together, aka mutually agreed. We already have the terms New Order, New

Colonialism, and others which point to the same thing, namely legitimacy.

The definition of new normal according to the Government of Indonesia is a new order to adapt to COVID-19. A linguist from the University of Indonesia has defined the term as, “The language has given the Indonesian term, namely New Normality. The word normal is a noun in English, so it becomes New Normal. The language then makes the equivalent to normal. Because normal is an adjective, therefore it becomes New Normality” [1]. According to the linguist, the term new normal is not correct. It should be new normality that denotes the new habit and activity adapting the current habit during the pandemic.

According to Ahmad Yuriyanto, Spokesperson for Handling COVID 19 Indonesia, what is meant by new normal is the new order, habits, and behavior based on adaptation to cultivate a clean and healthy lifestyle. This new order is a form of power holder propaganda to run a system of formulation of things previously considered unnatural and contrary to the rules. In the new order, these things are considered normal and formal. Therefore, the term new normal is a form of

normalization of an order of faith that was previously considered strange and contrary to general rules [2].

Meanwhile, the term new normal has been defined as a change in behavior to continue carrying out normal activities but with the addition of implementing health protocols to prevent transmission Covid-19 [3]. From these definitions, the term new normal eventually leads to a new habit. This new habit was previously unusual. But in the new normal, the unusual becomes a habit and even an obligation [4], [5].

This working paper will investigate the term new normal which was initiated by the government and WHO (World Health Organization) as the holder of power, both locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally. By using the post-truth view of the postmodern discourse, this paper seeks to describe the terminology and at the same time the use of the term new normal in newspaper reporting and how the media form opinions on these terms in an attempt to legitimize this new normality. Mainstream media coverage is the main source of analysis in which this newspaper, Kompas, is the point of information arrows that are directly aimed at the public at large.

1.1. New Normal in Post-Truth Era

In the post-truth era, new ways of relating to public opinion have surfaced, and alternative media have become increasingly existent. Traditional journalism methods are being overtaken by the emergence of new communication channels such as personal blogs, YouTube, instant messaging channels such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook Chat, or social media networks such as Snapchat or Twitter. Today, a simple Tweet can mobilize the masses and produce unimaginable results. The obvious problem in understanding the digital information society is the extent to which the correctness of information gets the right place and portion in the overall context of social life [6], [7], [8].

The information society is inherent in every stage of society itself. Every social community has needs and demands for communicative-informative action. However, the dynamic development of human history places communication in the context of an industrial information society which is triggered and assisted by technology that can compress the limitations of space and time. The information society is a society that sees the production, process, and distribution of information as part of all socio-economic activities [7], [8], [9]. Information in this context can be interpreted as a part of the "capitalist system". The constellation of capital and information is seen more as a process of commodifying daily information. This means that society sees that economic-social capital is based on information. Thus, information has become a commodity. That is why, in post-industrial societies —

which is characterized by much of the commodification of information — commodities are primarily located in the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge [9].

The process of commodification of information in the contemporary information society is aided by information technology. Information technology and media ultimately affect performance and communication patterns [10], [8]. One of the characteristics of the dynamics of information technology is the convergence feature. That is what makes information produced as much as possible, to get as much profit as possible, even though there are also many information producers who in processing their production rests on lies to achieve certain goals. Post-Truth can be understood in the context of its historical emergence, through its popular forms and responses, such as rumors, conspiracies, hoaxes, fake news, fact-checking, and bubble filters, as well as through its various effects - not least where discourse panics about it [7], [10], [11].

New normal is a condition that was previously unfamiliar which has become a new standard referring to the Lexico by Oxford version of the new normal. To make it easier to understand this meaning, Lexico provides some examples of using the new normal in sentences:

- (1) A lot of labor economists are telling me this is frankly the new normal. [3]
- (2) Many economists say that the current conditions are the new normal. [3]

From the two example sentences given above, the new normal is put forward by people who have expertise in a field to inform that society is preparing to face and enter a new phase. For example, the government is preparing a new normal through health protocols to adapt which has become the new standard during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is related to how to control the coronavirus and not be infected by it. For transmission to occur to a minimum, efforts are needed to continue to break the chain of infection utilizing new adaptations. This is the government's effort to 'make peace with Corona' by adapting a new one which is called the new normal. Thus, the new normal is a state where some dramatic change has occurred because of an event. This makes people have to be able to adapt to situations rather than lamenting what happened. Everything is done by doing new habits that are trying to be used as a new foothold in carrying out new habits or norms amid a pandemic storm.

In the context of the new normal in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, countries that want to relax physical distancing towards this phase must follow several provisions required by WHO (World Health Organization). The new habits that we adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic, including wearing masks,

maintaining distance, washing hands, staying at home a lot, etc., are not new. This habit has been carried out by people during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918-1919 ago. Then, what is new with these habits? The Oxford Dictionary of English explains that “The new normal” is a previously unfamiliar or atypical situation that has become standard, usual, or expected. This means that a situation that was previously unknown or unusual, then (now) has become the standard, has become commonplace, or even expected.

Then what kind of “New Normal” concept will we enter and when is the time? The government itself will still issue a formula which will become a benchmark for areas that can apply new normal life. This formula is related to the rate of spread of the virus. It is because without clear parameters, people like to do experimenting with the risk of thousands, even millions of human lives. An interesting piece of writing is created by Yuval Noah Harari. Israeli historian who serves as a professor in the Department of History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who scored a best seller through the books *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014) and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2015), in the Financial Times, discusses what will happen after the pandemic. Harari did not mention normal life, but the core of his discussion is the prediction about the era of “normal life” which is currently being buzzed a lot [11].

Harari in his writing tries to answer the question “what kind of world will we live in once the storm passes?”. He believes the storm (this corona pandemic) will pass. Humanity will be saved. Even though many have died, most of us are still alive. But those who “survive” through the storm will enter and inhabit a different world. He said the term “emergency” will be a keyword in a new era that is different later. Harari predicts that there will be many short-term emergency actions that will decorate the future order of human life. That’s the nature of the emergency. One of them is an accelerated historical process. “Decisions that in normal times can take years to be passed will be passed in a matter of hours. Technology that is immature and even dangerous, the button is pressed to be used, because the risk of doing nothing is greater. When everything is done through the online channel, the death of society’s bond is awaiting.

In essence, Noah Harari said that the Covid-19 pandemic would have huge consequences - not only in the health sector - but also in economics, politics, and arts. And all of that depends on the choices made later when entering a busy era called “new normal”. The wrong policy is taken, will make humans repeat a dark history (Spanish pandemic 1918-1919) [11]. The flood of information in the digital revolution era has had several social impacts. The community’s problem is not how to get news, but a lack of ability to digest correct information. The credibility of the mainstream media, which has always been undermined by the interests of

elites and owners, forces the public to seek alternative information. The problem is that alternative mediums like Facebook don’t always stream the right news. In 2016, Oxford made the word post-truth the “Word of the Year”. The number of users of the term post-truth in 2016 is increased by 2000 percent when compared to 2015. There is a reason why the curve for the use of the word post-truth soared in 2016 [11], [12], [13].

The Oxford Dictionary of English defines the term post-truth as a condition in which facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs [4]. The post-truth condition culminates in a political moment driven by emotional sentiment such as Brexit and Trump’s election. In this situation, hoax information has a much bigger influence than the facts. Apart from being marked by the spread of hoax news on social media, the post-truth era is also marked by media and journalism indecision in the face of false statements from politicians. The case during the 2016 US presidential election is proof that the more often the media broadcast fake news about Donald Trump, the more popular Trump’s name and his lies are spreading widely. It is no secret that trust in journalists and news providers in America has dropped in recent years [11], [12]. According to this journalist and political communication expert, public reasoning is too lenient and is easily manipulated by false information. The responsibility of literacy should be the main task of experts and the media, to create a civil society that can drive democracy [8], [9], [10].

2. METHOD

This study uses a post-truth approach as a thoughtful way of analysis. Post-truth describes how a text is constructed by a thought based on the oppositional relationship of meaning from a basic phenomenon that is interpreted oppositely from actual reality. Meanwhile, it is similar to deconstruction which uncovers a meaning that seeks to obtain the final meaning of the thought that is expected and that the discourse that surrounds it can no longer be refuted. By using this approach, the meaning that arises from mass media coverage that has an element of hoax or which is not a hoax in Indonesia is expected to be revealed and the content of the opposite meaning or hidden meaning (upside down) is also determined.

The mainstream newspaper in Indonesia was chosen for this study, namely Kompas. Kompas was chosen based on the assumption that this newspaper represents the aspirations of the public on a national and non-regional scale, and its slogan Independent and reliable reinforces the argument that this newspaper is free from hoaxes. News coverage in Kompas is sorted according to the following two categories: (1) personal and private matters, and (2) general and public matters. These two things become the framework for implementing the

protocol which is used as a reference for the habits of the people before the pandemic and during the pandemic.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The New Normal Way in Indonesian Mainstream Daily Newspaper

Online media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Google, YouTube, Instagram, and others, are starting to transmit a new model of political communication. Social Media technology has influenced political communication norms in general, particularly on Indonesian political activism. Media that is strategic enough for the battle arena, namely twitter through political hashtags and Facebook with various fake news [11], [13], [14]. Through these online media accounts, users can become part of the production, consumption, and distribution of content without obstacles [14]. Besides, increased opportunities for individual political communication impact network relationships with other like-minded people and help organize into collective action. The maturity of political communication will also affect public political engagement [14]. Initially, the nature of the role of the media was used as a trajectory of political communication between the government and citizens. The majority of Indonesians obtain political information through various types of media use, both traditional and digital [14], [15], [16].

The political information obtained has a strong effect on Post-Truth [10]. Jatmiko [10] says that citizens' attitudes towards politics may change because individual perceptions of the condition of national politics are usually shaped by media sources. The mediated political discourse can penetrate interpersonal political discourse and change individual interest in politics so that citizens can influence evaluations of state democracy; influence public judgment [8], [9], [10], [11]. More specifically, today's political conditions are increasingly being supported by advances in information technology [9]. The transformation of political communication between the government, political parties, and citizens has changed a lot digitally and its movement has become faster [8], [10], [16]. Ease of access to political communication and the influence of people's lives through post-truth discourse seem to have a positive influence on political interests [16].

The increasing frequency of political leaders and the spread of alternative facts in online media in recent years has led to the emergence of political movements that rely on emotional appeal or data-less opinion rather than fact-based policy discussions [6], [10], [11]. Online social media reshapes controversial communication and mobilizes individuals to participate in social movement activities [16].

Based on the criteria set in the framework of this research, research data from mainstream newspapers in Indonesia show the following instances:

Table 1. Some instances of activities before pandemic and in the new normal phase

No/criteria	Before pandemic	New normal
Religious-Activity	Without physical distancing	With physical distancing
Entertainment	Open without Safety Protocol	Open with Safety Protocol
Social Interaction	Without Social Distancing	Social Distancing
Education	Face to Face Meeting	Online Meeting
Business and Economic Life	Without COVID 19 Protocol	With COVID 19 Protocol

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced most Indonesians to study and work from home. Although there are still those who still have to do activities outside the home. How did this affect their changing habits and lifestyle? Grab data released Tuesday (6/5/2020), shows changes in people's habits in various aspects of life. The influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on people's lifestyles. Here are some changes in people's habits in several aspects [4], [12], [6]:

- (1) Traffic: For the first time apart from the Homecoming season, many streets in big cities are quiet and lonely
- (2) Shopping Partners: In the delivery of food and goods now play an important role so that people can still shop even though many people stay at home.
- (3) Food: There was an increase in food purchase transactions or food orders. There have been changes in food consumption during the pandemic. Also, there was an increase in Food Order transactions by 4 percent and an increase in the amount of food ordered in one order (basket size) by around 7 percent.

3.2 Turning Upside Down of the New Normal Way

At least, political discourse based on lies is framed in two ways. First, concentrate on the media, namely journalism. Framing the problem is done by looking at fake news as the main culprit that is perfectly packaged. In this case, fact-checking is made difficult to maintain the quality of the fake news that is disseminated.

Second, framing the problem with a focus on the media, namely on communication technology. It can be done by considering the media as dominant in the context of that era, not the content as the main cause. In other words, understanding the role of media domination shapes public opinion - not only content but the entire structure of affective public discourse - so that society feels the severity of the current chaos [10], [15], [16].

Post-truth politics, as has been highlighted earlier, ought to be understood as a predicament in which political speech is increasingly detached from the factual infrastructure [7], [9]. Consequently, people’s ability to react to political events and to engage in a democratic process of opinion-formation is compromised. This definition differs in particular from those that equate post-truth with the death of expertise [6], [9]. It should also be taken into consideration that people must be much more precise regarding the role of emotions in the production of post-truth. Defending truth might involve as much emotion as violating it [7], [8], [11].

The most powerful examples of post-truth politics as a style available to individual politicians are cases in which unequivocal lies about things that technically anyone could verify are used – notwithstanding perhaps not always consciously – for various political determinations towards both oppositions and one’s followers [8], [10]. This can mean, for example, repudiating something apparent, slight, or seemingly uncontended or making up an event that never happened [7], [8], [10], [11].

Such prerogatives, as has been argued, do not predominantly challenge to persuade or sway. On the contrary, their main impression is the construction of misunderstanding, annoyance, and incomprehension. Commandeering thoughtfulness is the key here and has little to do with letting the best dispute conquest. Contemptibly false assertions seek to make ‘normal’ political argument and critical examination of dogmas impossible. They easily direct devotion away from the details of rules and can form public discourse even when being contradicted. Countering such play-dirty-to-win plans has proven thought-provoking [9], [10], [15], [16].

In the new normal, the general situation is reversed from the previous habit. This can be indicated by a drastic change in people’s way of life and habits than in the pre-pandemic era. Is this a demanding protocol or is it a conspiracy trying to destroy the previous order? Most likely this is an attempt by the State on a large scale to change the order that was considered to be commonplace as it was before to become uncommon. Meanwhile, things that were not common before were considered normal during a pandemic. Some things that can be considered from mass media coverage are as follows:

Table 2. Some activities before pandemic, during pandemic, and in the new normal

No/activities	Activities before pandemic	Activities during pandemic	New normal
Social distancing	Without social distancing	Keep away from the crowd	Practicing social distancing
Washing hand	Washing hand is not necessary	Always wash hands after touching something	Always wash hands after touching something at least 20 second
Praying activities	Practicing physical distancing	Closing the prayer places	Opening the prayer places with safety protocols
Restaurant service	Dine-in	Closing the restaurant and take away service	Opening restaurant/dine-in with safety protocols
Car driving	No Physical distancing	Physical distancing and stay home and/or work from home	Physical distancing, wearing the mask during working in the working places, and applying safety protocols
Sterilization of the germs	Sterilization is not necessary	Sterilization is a must	Sterilization is a must before and after any activity in the public and the private places like homes, praying places, traveling spots, restaurants, and other public places

From the table above, it can be seen that all systems of life that originally did not apply the provisions of health protocols have changed and even been strengthened to apply health protocols. This indicates that a pandemic has brought about significant changes in people's lives, including the cycles of the economy and social life in general. From a social point of view, these steps are normal and normal activities. However, when reading in terms of post-truth, this is an attempt to stem the people power that questions about the existence of COVID 19 which is not transparent in its communication to the public, either through spokespersons for the acceleration of handling COVID

19 or by government mouthpieces, namely the mass media.

Kompas daily newspaper, which has a slogan of being independent and reliable, is thus not value-free. The slogan has a double meaning. As an independent institution, Kompas also needs to ask why it is always affiliated and a mouthpiece for the government which is neutral and impartial. On the other hand, the byword seems to also wash hands when there is chaos by the news it causes, then Kompas will soon be able to remove it with a trusted slogan because here it will strengthen its image as an independent institution that does not necessarily defend the people, but also does not protect the government. Thus, it can be said that Kompas is very neutral to gain popularity and public trust.

Reversing facts is also an effective strategy in minimizing public chaos. Reversing facts in post-truth is an attempt to negate reality by covering it up with other facts. Other facts can be obtained from a variety of other news sources or can also throw ideas that can influence public emotions. It is unfortunate when the post-truth political culture becomes more dominant and shifts the strategic role of social media. Admittedly or not, this nation still has many problems that can be commodified by certain individuals or groups to be exploded through viral on social media. Many ways have been done to stem the hoax storm in this post-truth era. Efforts are made both in terms of service providers (platforms), government, as well as initiatives from non-governmental organizations (religious, mass organizations, academics, etc.) [15], [16].

In terms of epistemic validity, most scholars (and others) tend to – at least implicitly and performatively-subscribe to some form of ‘everyday realism’ when it comes to facts in the abovementioned category. A skeptic might argue, nevertheless, that the types of factual truth just described are mostly irrelevant. The verities they contain are so ‘modest’ that nothing interesting follows from them. Such argument needlessly deprecates the political role of factual truth. It assumes facts should be capable of directly dictating policies lest they are doomed to irrelevance.

Facts themselves become meaningful only through the process of exchanging opinions about them. Such an agonal understanding of facts has nothing to do with the liberal market place of ideas, which is sometimes evoked as a process that leads to ‘the truth’ in the public sphere. Nor is the truth about sharing a set of values in the sense of post-historical liberal consensus. Instead of being distilled from the plurality of perspectives, truth invites different arguments and makes possible the expression of different viewpoints [6]. Factual truth stands at the beginning of the processes of agonal deliberation, of encouragement, and advice. Opinions depend on a minimal pulverized of common truths so that they can be thoughts about something, that is,

different perspectives on something shared and not subjective urges or predispositions [6]. Thus, denying facts means undoing the basic supportive infrastructure of democratic politics [6], [9], [10].

Thus in the real post-truth era, the biggest mistake of democracy is to free various opinions to grow in such a way without any corridor of truth. This is what the writer will see as an upside-down era. In this era, all possibilities are the opposite of what they should be. One of the static nonsense in the post-truth regime is the absence of a relationship with facts, reality, and truth between political rhetoric. The majority of the public is considered a weak audience because it is prone to gobbledygook. This condition is used as a vehicle for undermining or even abolishing the idea of truth [6], [9]. A population that conforms to beliefs and opinions is planned, produced, and managed by predictive analytics driven by strategic communication to ensure that the narrative being constructed conforms to the audience's preconceptions, prejudices, and most pressing desires as closely as possible so that almost ensure the success of group discourse [10], [11], [16].

In the post-truth era, power lies with the most outspoken and influential people on social media. Therefore, many politicians try to attract celebrities and public figures to promote themselves in society. The construction of charm that is spread by iconic figures is expected to be able to create the illusion of widespread opinion [9]. Besides, there are concerns about media organizations and journalists seeking, rather enjoy, fake news spread by post-truth politicians and partisan groups, especially through social media platforms [11], [16]. The sensational of the discourse of lies is the key that is always fought over by the media crew to gain maximum profit.

The narrative packaging which is full of interests and manipulation is then consumed by the Indonesian people at large. Emphasis on negative events and coverage of intense political competition often results in cynicism and malaise and leads to negative attitudes towards political institutions [16]. The lack of media literacy in Indonesian society will worsen this condition. Post-truth attracts emotion and is more than just facts and evidence. Fake news and conspiracy theories can go viral in a matter of hours, creating alternative realities and serving propaganda purposes. Post-truth is a threat to democracy [6], [16]. Geopolitics in the era of fake news is also complicated because post-truth disrupts a fundamental element of diplomacy and international politics, namely communication [15], [16].

4. CONCLUSION

New normal is a term which generates multiple connections and interpretation. It is by its nature becomes socially, philosophically, and psychologically culture-bound. Socially, the notion invites an insight that

people's way of life has been dramatically changed and turned into some different new form of habits. Philosophically, this term becomes a platform for the new method of practicing the new protocols of people's everyday way of life. And psychologically, it is consciously exercised to have a new standard of safety and healthy living.

In the new normal era during the pandemic, news coverage in newspapers can be interpreted as double-edged. This cannot be separated from the relationship between newspapers and the market and also the position of newspapers as the mouthpiece of the government. Kompas as the largest mass media in Indonesia has an independent and reliable slogan that can be interpreted as double. At least the things that were rolled out by Kompas have a double standard as mass media. On the one hand, the slogan cannot be separated from its philosophy as a public-based mass media and close to the community. On the other, Kompas is an independent institution that is not affiliated with the government. However, this is also an advantage for Kompas to continue to publish neutral and impartial news.

By being impartial, Kompas has positioned itself as an independent institution that can quickly attract public sympathy because it does not take sides. However, this can also be interpreted as Kompas' effort to avoid public censorship so that this newspaper is not seen as a mouthpiece for the government that can stand alone. Keep in mind that this kind of position is not safe because Kompas will quickly be able to annul any news that is not in his favor. Instead of being impartial, Kompas saved itself from getting too far from the chaos caused by the news coverage and the domino effect of mass media coverage in general.

During the pandemic and the enactment of the new normal, none of Kompas' reports cornered certain parties. However, Kompas became not independent because its impartiality resulted in the spread of news that tended to be neutral and not too harsh. This is what is called a double-edged knife. On the one hand, this mass media is safe in the eyes of the government, but on the other hand, it is suspected of being the mass media as the mouthpiece of the government that plays it safe and does not want to get into trouble.

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