

The Meaning of Covid-19 Memes on Instagram Account @poliklitik

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ABSTRACT

Since March 2021, Indonesia has become one of the countries affected by the pandemic covid-19. The number of infected with the Covid-19 virus is increasing day by day. The information that is continuously received by the public regarding the Covid-19 case makes people restless and stressed. Meme is a tool to express a person's emotions in written forms equipped with pictures that are considered to represent certain feelings and intentions wrapped in humour, but there is a message behind memes. This study aims to investigate the meaning of what is contained in memes as well as the response of what is shown in the column comments, using the Pierce's semiotics-pragmatics approach (Hoed, 2014). The data were memes with the theme of covid-19 in the @poliklitik Instagram account. The results of this study indicate that the meaning of memes on the @poliklitik Instagram account relates to criticism, especially to criticize government policies in dealing with covid-19 in Indonesia. The audience's responses included rejecting, supporting, and neutralizing.

Keywords: Meme, covid-19, semiotics-pragmatics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since early March 2020, Indonesia has become one of the countries affected by the pandemic COVID-19. Until nowadays, the government has continued to undertake various efforts to stop the virus ranging from work from home to applying health protocol. However, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 is still counting. The amount of information that is received by the public regarding covid-19 makes people more anxious and stressed. So they move to the information that can defrost the atmosphere and entertain like memes that have become a tool for communication in this all-digital era. So they move to the information that can defrost the atmosphere and entertain like memes.

Knobel and Lankshear (2007) reveal that the term meme is widely used by internet users to describe an idea that is presented through writing, images, and various other cultural units. Furthermore, Shifman (2013) stated that making memes can be used as a channel for social criticism. Besides being useful as a critique of social, forms a meme is also found as a form of participation of the community to criticize the policies created by the institutions of government when facing issues of particular as covid-19. In this case, many things can be criticized through a meme, including the government in

stopping the covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. There are many pros and cons in response to or who try to be neutral with a policy that is created.

The characteristics inherent in the meme phenomenon for decades have recently been revived by internet users, who use them to describe the cultural products they create and distribute themselves. The process of transmitting ideas and cultural forms that have taken place, comes in different forms along with the presence of internet technology. Supported by the presence of platforms that make it easier for people to share and process information such as websites, blogs, and social media, almost everyone with internet access can process digital information and create their own media.

Lately, a lot of memes have popped up discussing the Covid-19 cases that are being experienced around the world. The creators have made memes criticizing various government policies that were not appropriate in dealing with covid-19. Memes have become one of the most popular media and made criticism easier to understand, easier to remember, faster to develop, and to the point. Memes are also used as a diversion from the anxiety that people feel due to this pandemic.

According to Purwaningrum, Saifullah, and Sudana (2020), the emergence of memes is usually motivated by an event or phenomenon, the packaging of memes is also wrapped with humour and speech that is quite intriguing, but the implied meaning of a meme is certainly satire and criticism. Drawings and writings in memes are funny or entertaining and often make people smile when reading the meme. However, sometimes the message or meaning in memes doesn't always reach the readers perfectly, thus, readers have difficulty understanding the meaning contained in a meme, because the images and writings in memes sometimes do not match it can even be lost, mixed, or even changed due to the influence of each person's ideas and the ideas are different (Andriani, 2015). The language used was non-formal language. Sometimes the readers have difficulty due to inappropriate images and text.

Based on the description above, in this study, the researchers view that there are signs contained in memes that need to be studied to reveal the meanings contained in them. In addition, in linguistics, efforts to understand meanings must be understood thoroughly. This means that both visual and verbal images must be related to each other so as to produce a complete meaning. Through Peirce's semiotic-pragmatic study, this research is expected to reveal the meanings implied in the memes, especially the signs contained in the memes are presented in the form of visual images and verbal words. Then the researchers relate it to the netizen's comments in the comments column as a response.

There were previous studies that could be used as a reference to complete this proposal. Ilham (2017) discussed the new culture of memes with the emergence of Indonesian meme comic fan pages using semiotic analysis. This study used an interpretive qualitative approach by conducting in-depth observations and analysis of the object to be studied, namely Indonesian comic memes. The result of this research is that memes that develop memories of signs in the form of icons, indexes or certain symbols.

Research conducted by Juditha (2015) observed memes on social media using Charles Peirce's semiotic theory (signs, objects and interpreters) which concluded that there is a close relationship between signs, objects and interpreters. The meme sign (image) built by netizens responded to the feud between Lulung and Ahok. The object (meaning) generally contains scorn, innuendo and netizen's dislike of Lulung and is packaged in the form of satire (humor). Meanwhile, the interpreters or attitudes (thoughts) of meme creators and netizens tend to be the same. Where netizens generally accept and agree with the contents of this meme and support each other and label Lulung as a person who deserves to be disliked.

Furthermore, Purwaningrum, Saifullah, and Sudana (2020) discussed memes in their research as a reflection of critical thinking in cyberspace. By using multimodal

theory, pragmatic semiotics, freedom of expression, and critical thinking. They concluded that through the appearance of memes, netizens tried to express, argue, and criticize the government's policy on moving the capital city. In the end, the findings from this analysis describe the patterns of opinions, comments, and critical thinking in cyberspace. The last is a study from Sudrajat and Putri (2015) studying memes on Instagram, a selfie photo combining texts and sentences to make meme.

The focus of the problem in this study is that researchers intend to investigate what meanings and signs are built in memes as a form of citizen criticism of government policies. From the focus of this research, this research should be able to explore signs with the right analysis and describe the results of the analysis so that the correct meaning related to the COVID-19 memes is obtained and the meaning behind netizen comments in the comments column of social media.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used qualitative descriptive methods and pragmatic semiotics intending to describe the meanings and signs that appear in a COVID-19 memes. Semiotics is a science or method of analysis to study signs. Signs are tools used in trying to find a way in this world, in the midst of humans and with humans. According to Sobur (2001), semiotics, or in Barthes's terms, semiology, basically is designed to study how humanity (humanity) interprets things (to signify). The data source in this study were memes with the theme of covid-19 in the Instagram @politik social media account. Data collection was conducted from March 2020 to December 2020. The author used Peirce's thoughts to describe the signs and meanings of the meme. Wibowo (2011) explained that Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory is often called the "Grand Theory" because his idea is comprehensive, a structural description of all markings. Peirce identified through the three signs as representative. The three signs are icons, symbols, and indexes. There are three stages in interpreting signs. The representation aspects are received by the five senses, then informed through cognition in the form of objects, and finally interpreted as desired (Hoed, 2014). The icon is defined as a sign that resembles an object, a significant symbol that appears as a habit. Then the index, defined as a sign, appears to cause and effect.



Figure 1 Compilation of memes taken from the account of media Instagram @poliklitik.

Merriam (2002) confirms that data analysis is a process of giving meanings to the data collected. The stages in analyzing the data were referred to carry out this study.

1. Data Collection

The first step is to collect three data as needed. The data collected is the data in the forms of memes in the @poliklitik Instagram account.

2. Data Reduction

Reducing data means summarizing, choosing the main things, focusing on the things that are important. So that the reduced data provide a clearer picture and makes it easier for researchers to collect data. These data were selected and adapted to the theme of this study, so that not all data can be analyzed. In this study, it was focused on the theme of memes about covid-19 contained in Instagram social media.

3. Data Presentation

After data reduction, the next step in data analysis is displaying data. Miles and Humberman (1984) stated that the most frequently used to present data in qualitative research is narrative texts. Furthermore, the reduced data can be analyzed and can also be presented in a narrative form.

4. Data verification

After that, the next step in data analysis is drawing conclusions and verification. Conclusions are drawn to answer the problem formulation as formulated.

2.1. Messages in Meme

In Figure 2 (meme 1), according to the significant element of Pierce, the meme above uses a caricature of two people. In the meme, the creator inserts dialogue.

- One:** The virus outbreak is spreading, Sir, will this city be locked down?
- Two:** Slow down baby, take it easy just let it flow..
- One:** no, no, no, no, wait a minute..



Figure 2 Meme 1.



Figure 3 Meme 2.

While the object elements in that meme were two people who were having a dialogue using masks. One of them resembled a caricature of Mr. Jokowi wearing glasses, as the President of Indonesia. While the other one was a member of the Jokowi presidency.

As for the interpretant of the meme, the President, who was being invited to discuss the virus outbreak in Indonesia, was getting more and more widespread, and suggesting that this city or this country should be locked down. But the answer from the President meant “later on, slowly, let this virus just flow”. It is assumed that this virus would disappear and there was no need to rush to close the city. The answer was also a fragment of a song lyric from an Indonesian band. In the meme, members of the president answered by continuing the lyric from the song the President had just sung, as if this was just a situation not to worry about.

In Figure 3 (meme 2) there were two pictures above and below, the top picture had a sign that resembled s the object of someone wearing official clothes by raising their hands, and there was a saying “this year our city is out of the list of the 10 most congested cities in the world according to the On The Spot version.” The utterance meant that the city was once the 10 most congested cities in the world. It was no longer the most congested. The image below was represented through images of the coronavirus and floods. In the picture, there was the word “punten” which seemed to be spoken. This word implied that traffic jams in this city were reduced, but “punten” in Sundanese meant “excuse me” floods and the coronavirus still hit and became a never-ending problem.

In Figure 4 (meme 3) there were two images. In the above image, there were bird icons, a clean beach, fresh air, and the words, “during the pandemic, air pollution decreases”. The statement described the air condition during the pandemic where air pollution decreased due to the implementation of work from home or other policies



Figure 4 Meme 3.

that forced people to stay at home and not go out of the house, causing the streets to become deserted and reducing air pollution caused by motorized vehicles. However, in the image below, there were a fish icon and a mask beneath the sea and interpreted that pollution was indeed reduced in the air but the sea was dirty with masks due to a large amount of mask wastes being wasted as a result this coronavirus pandemic.

2.2. Netizens' comments in the comment column at @poliklitik

The emergence of memes with the phenomena made it easier for memes to spread rapidly, especially on social media, especially Instagram. Uploading memes on social media could provoke various reactions from netizens. Various responses from netizens indirectly created an open discussion space on the internet network. Because this was where anyone had the right to comment and assume without limits (Purwaningrum, Saifullah, and Sudana, 2020). Here are some conversations of citizens in the comments column after the emergence of memes criticizing government policies.

The comment column above was a form of discussion space following the emergence of memes about a government policy in overcoming the problem of the pandemic in Indonesia. A free and open discussion space allowed netizens to freely express their opinions regarding these policies. Some support, reject, criticize, or neutralize. For example, the comment “I mean, the admin underestimated Mr. Anies. In fact, people have been freed from the imagery of Ebong Cs. Semarang flood, Kalimantan flood, Nganjuk flood, all of which were caused by Mr. Anies.” This speech indirectly criticized the policies that had been made. Netizens blamed Anies, who is now the governor of DKI Jakarta as if this was all Anies Baswedan’s fault. As for the comment that “When humans pollute nature, nature will be angry with humans” the speech implied that we as humans should not do anything inappropriate to nature,



Figure 5 Warganet’s comments in the @ poliklitik’s Instagram account.

such as throwing away mask waste. And comments that did not take sides or are neutral to anyone, such as the example of “confused whether to be sad or happy at the current condition” (Netizen).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the memes that have been displayed and analyzed, it can be concluded that the meaning contained in memes can be different, depending on the phenomenon that is happening. The memes created with the theme of covid-19 is an expression of netizens caused by the government’s policy in dealing with covid-19. Netizens are free to express their opinions which are wrapped in a light and funny way. In addition, in this case, memes are used as a tool to criticize government policies in dealing with covid-19 in Indonesia. Memes were created as a way to express netizens’ views on government policies. Through the comments column, it can be seen from various netizen comments that there are netizens who support for, reject, or are neutral about the government policies.

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