

Fighting Against Hoax During Infodemic by Volunteer of Kim Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

The battle towards COVID-19 become a challenge during pandemic. It is caused by the overflowing information that is called as phenomenon of infodemic. Infodemic could make the condition of pandemic getting worse. It makes people, decision maker, and medical officer confused to find reliable sources and guidance. This research is about to describe the fighting the hoax at grassroots level by volunteer using a method of case study by doing some interview to three notable KIM volunteer. The Result show that there are three roles played by KIM towards information such as Verify Information in Conversations Group, Education Against the Stigma, and Supporting the Implementation of Health Policy. Also, the credibility of the communicator is the key for being moderator among the government and the citizen.

Keywords: *infodemic, COVID-19, Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat (KIM)*

1. INTRODUCTION

The battle against hoaxes gets a serious challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic. The WHO calls a phenomenon called an infodemic or information overload – some are accurate and some are not – which makes it difficult for people to find reliable sources and reliable guidance when they need it. In every outbreak, information tsunamis are common but this infodemic is more challenging. Now with social media, the phenomenon goes on very strongly. Information moves faster and farther. The challenge is not just to make sure people are informed; it also ensures people are informed to act appropriately [1].

The expansion of the COVID-19 infodemic that makes this coronavirus outbreak different from the 2003 SARS outbreak, H1N1 or bird flu (2009), MERS (2012), and Ebola (2014). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, it appears that the dis/misinformation pandemic has run parallel to the spread of the virus, from fake coronavirus cures, false claims and dangerous health advice, to wild conspiracy theories [2].

Infodemic could make the condition of pandemic getting worse due to several aspects. It makes people difficult, those who makes people confused, decision maker, and medical officer to find reliable sources and guidance when they need it. This condition could affect prevalence of anxiety, depression, and emotional outcomes as part of the pandemic response. People has

led to the exponential production of information in social media, and there is no quality control about it. So that, infodemic has access to increased and perpetuate misinformation [3].

As a global symptom, Infodemic could happen in Indonesia. Teluma said it was like a huge flood of information, whether it is accurate or not which makes people hard to find reliable sources and guidance when they need it to overcome Covid-19[4]. According to the data of COVID19 Infodemics Observatory has showed that Indonesia produces ten thousand to hundreds of tweets about COVID-19 in a day. The highest number is 114.000/each day in March, 15th 2020. Although the number of tweets which is produces is high, but it doesn't support by the reliable of news. There are still a few tweets about reliable facts and lot of tweets about unreliable facts.

Infodemic mostly about rumours. In his study, most of the rumours is about disease, transmission, and death cases of COVID-19, followed by intervention which is focused on prevention actions, and controlling the infection. There is some information about consuming garlic, keep your throat warm, avoid spicy food, and consume vitamin C and D to help prevent any disease. In addition, there are also information about chlorine spray can help preventing of COVID-19 infection. The last one, when the government runs vaccine program, there are disinformation and hoax about side effect of vaccine; which is about the possibility of COVID-19 illness after

vaccination, risk of death after vaccination, and the other hoax information about vaccination is a way to put small chip in to humas body so that could be controlled by any country.[5]

Fighting over the hoax in Indonesia have been done by organizations through some programs. The actor leader to this movement into two big groups; who is the government as a policy holder citizen and for the citizen, government stakeholders, private sector and civil society elements [6]. And for the strategy, the government should make variation movements, such as preventive steps which is like literacy media campaign in to more assertive ones like fact checking, site blocking, and the implementation of UU ITE (law) to pull down the hoax maker [7], [8], [9]. Besides that, the actor leader from non-government focused on education, both formal which is done by Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia (Mafindo), a non-profit organization that dedicates their selves to prevent spreading of hoax) [10] [11] or conducted that has been done in learning [12].

A series of activity that have been done by the actor leader to fight the hoax need to be optimized. Some activities are still formal and have not touched the main problem [6]. Therefore, this study aims to look at a practice of resistance to hoax at the community level that is carried out primarily by themselves. The activity was carried out by the Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat, an information agency in rural area which is formed by and for communities oriented to information services and community empowerment. The practice during activity of KIM is broadly divided into two important things. First, it becomes a bridge to communicate between citizens and the government that allows two-way communication that is top down and bottom up [13]. Second, related to this research is information empowerment where KIM plays a role to campaign and improve information literacy at the community level [14], [15]. Related to this research issue, during the pandemic KIM also moved to carry out various activities against hoaxes that are increasingly endemic so that this study tries to see their role with a focus on KIM in Surabaya.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a case study method about an effort to fight hoaxes at the grassroots level. The uniqueness of this research is shown by two aspects, namely carried out by actors who come from the residents themselves, namely the Community Information Group volunteers in Surabaya and carried out in the context of a pandemic situation where there is an infodemic phenomenon or a flood of information. The data was obtained through an in-depth interview process with representative informants. In practice, there are three key informants with levels of activity and reputation in KIM Surabaya, namely Aminulloh (KIM Mojo), Tri Eko Sulistyowati

(KIM Bahari Sukolilo Baru), and Anis Sofyan (Chairman of the Surabaya City KIM Forum). Data mining is also carried out through observations on volunteer digital activities to strengthen research results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Role of KIM Volunteers at Fighting Hoaxes during pandemic

Infodemic has become a reality during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Surabaya, where this research is taking place, the flood of information resulted in significant impacts as expected; create confusion in making decisions, make noise and panic among residents, and even disrupt health policies. Responding the conditions, the volunteers of KIM Surabaya play various roles to fight the impact of this infodemic.

B. Verify Information in Conversations Group

During the Covid-19 pandemic, conversation groups became the most common places for spreading hoax in the community. Various information shared in WhatsApp groups; such as food that can be an alternative medicine to ward off covid, covid 19 as an artificial disease conspiracy, and symptoms and even die after getting the vaccine. The information Volunteers do the verification of information. There are various ways to do. Some people did it directly sharing confirmation links in conversations, some approached it personally by private conversation, sometimes they even did face-to-face meetings when it is necessary.

In this condition, the volunteers play the role as verifier of information. There are various ways such as sharing a link which is included confirmation, through a private conversation approach, sometimes also communication in face-to-face meeting in person.

Tri Eko Sulistyowati, Volunteer KIM from Bahari Sukolilo Baru doing a role as mediator in their Whatsapp Group if there is a rowdy situation. She usually doing a verification with send a link to confirmation the hoax that has been spread. She use official sources from the government, or media online which has credibility such as detik, kompas, for verify the news. According to her, during pandemic there are lot of people who become impromptu speaker or experts which is like to share information and giving analysis when they don't have ability for that.

Living in coastal environment with a poor educated characteristic become a challenge. She admitted the risks that she dare to confirm the false information. She thinks that it's part of her duty become a volunteers towards information. The pros and cons always occurs' there are people who called her pretentious and stooge by the government. Her experience become a key for her to do

the actions. She knows when she comes up to the group, to share an official source link to straightening out the hoax and never rush to give a respond in a group, also always be patient towards various reactions.

Do not rush to give any respond is a key to straighten out the fake news. Aminulloh, Volunteer of KIM in Mojo, choose to use a private communication approach to respond people who likes spreading fake news. In his place, like the other one, people who likes to spread a hoax news are usually around 50-ages who are still have low information literacy. This condition makes him to approach them in private communication, so that they will not feel humiliated and delete their information by themselves.

He admits that in urban areas makes it easier to fight hoax. The literacy level of the society is better who makes them easier to understand the characteristic of hoax. Even, they have been build awareness to remind each other. Verification can be done with the other people if the volunteer towards information is not available yet. But, a role of the volunteer is still central where people can not find the official source. Some people are asking in private about the news whether it is hoax or not. For context of information, KIM has an important role so that people more believe to KIM than the other organization such as RT.

Sometimes, the rowdy situation can't be done in virtual, volunteer of KIM needs to meet them in person face-to-face to explain the condition. Anis Sofyan, the leader of forum KIM in Surabaya admitted that verification in person, explain the situation directly is necessary. A meeting in person can't be avoided because the news that is spread in social media can affected in real life. As coordinator volunteer of KIM in Surabaya, usually held an socialization to volunteer KIM in village level.

C. Education Againsts the Stigma

Infodemic is a challenge about the knowledge, especially when there are some phenomenon around. Two crucial things are confusion to find the right information which is reliable in the society. So that, the volunteer of KIM give an education about two things; sharing an official guidelines and align empathic cultures to fight the stigma of COVID-19 Sufferers.

Aminulloh from Mojo district village said that the knowledge of the society to handle COVID is not good. She found that there are still lot of people who not understand to handle it. Not only the residents, but also some of the Leader of Neighborhood Pillar (RT), Society Group, there are still people who have not been perfectly understood. Some people know that COVID-19 for Delta version are contagious, but they don't know how to prevent it because of the coordination and education. Amin predicted that from 117 RT in Mojo, maybe only

30% that they really understand about it. So that, the education of citizen in Mojo is carried out consistently. Since the beginning of COVID-19, Volunteer of KIM in Mojo shared how to handle COVID-19 from the authorities in the village, the government, of search by themselves in official website of surabaya.go.id.

The challenges also faced by Tri Eko Sulistyowatu, At first, she also must explain about COVID-19. The level of information literacy are very low, that makes her work hard to explain about COVID-19 to the society. For people who lives in coastal area, a news that carries religious names makes them more believable. In infodemic, we also see a conflict between religion and science. The people admit that them, the family, or closest friends were exposed.

Once, when people know about COVID-19, the problem still continued. For example, information about vaccine is also denied by them. Lot of messages are spreading about the effects of vaccine are scared them. The education is keep continued although they denied it. As before, vaccine became a necessity. Vaccines become various requirements needed to enter some public places such as malls and workplace agencies. Finally, residents do the vaccine because of the requirements that must be done to carry out the activities carried out.

The most crucial problem that has been written down in the introduction is how the action in social. The one of the big problem in pandemic is the stigma. According to Tri, people who affected with COVID as considered as something haram, dirty, scary, can't be seen. It makes people do not have any empathy, care, and they should be ostracized. This is a tremendous psychological impact on the family. Aisyiyah said, a women's community organization, she moved to educate by direct action. Not only said that the sufferer should be helped, he collected funds from those who wanted to buy groceries and put on the fence of the house to avoid meetings. The help is needed because survivors cannot leave the house to move to avoid transmission.

For her, educating people about stigma is really needed to be shown in action, not only talking. That way slowly but surely works. The survivors are moving to educate and help others. Their experience feels social reactions, uncomfortable loneliness and being alone when exposed to covid19. They don't want what they're going through to happen to anyone else. As much people who are affected, empathy is growing. If there are symptoms they immediately do self-isolation while other residents immediately move to help provide food.

Education to foster empathy must indeed be done with continuous actions. Aminulloh in Mojo Village experienced the same thing where initially people infected to Covid-19 avoided by residents, even ostracized. According to him, this is not a matter of citizen concern but knowledge only because the citizens

of Surabaya are still very communal and have solidarity. For that socialization about covid continues to be done at the same time as providing assistance to exposed residents. These two ways are effective to resuscitate and move people to help each other when there are other residents affected by Covid-19.

D. Supporting the Implementation of Health Policy

One of the impact of Infodemic is people can't make a decision to live serenely. At the same point, it could interfere the government policy like people who don't obey the health protocol or refuse to get vaccinated. In this context, the volunteer of KIM is moving towards to clear the false information and help the society directly.

This movement also done by Anis Sofyan with COVID-19 task force, he conducted socialization and implementation the health protocols. He followed the activities of the covid-19 roving group to implement the curfew protocol by visiting coffee shops around the region. Later covid began to have an impact on business people because of the lockdown so that affected to the businessmen. Therefore, often the ordering by the task force experienced rejection. To deal with this problem, Anis was asked to negotiate with business owners and customers. This method is more effective and able to avoid conflict because KIM volunteers can speak as citizens, not as corporate government, so the dialogue can occur. Emotional approach by using social language to help the negotiation process.

For implementating the health protocols, KIM as social volunteers who are uphold the policy are very helping. In the other place, Aminulloh help to uphold the health protocol in mosque. He was asked by the COVID-19 task force to take a role as mediator for the socialization which is hold by three pillars among, the leader in the village, BABINSA (the guard officer) and also the citizen. There are still many mosques that is still opening like the usual before pandemic. This process takes time to explain the problem. So that, the volunteer of KIM as mediator is really helping them to communicate with the citizen so that the activity in the mosque can be reduced at the peak of COVID Case in July 2021.

Being moderator to connect the communication between government and the citizen takes place in various policies such as vaccination. This role and challenge is experienced by Tri Eko Sulistyowati in Nelayan Sukolilo Village. Most Americans rejected the impact vaccination from the overflowing of hoax about the impact after being vaccinated. He helped Community Health Cara, which is a health-care unit at the sub-district level, to go around door to door inviting residents to follow the vaccination along with the Health-Care officer and the government Officer, but the residents actually hid

away. Once there was a quota for vaccines for up to 300 people, only 50 people came to get the vaccine. This number continues to grow one of them thanks to the effort to pick up the ball. Residents need to be explained in detail, even convinced and wooed to follow vaccinations.

E. Discussion: Credibility is the key

The result of the research is about the role of the group toward information which is can be imagined. In the previous study, a role as volunteer towards information has been done before pandemic. The data shown that the condition could maket he volunteer of KIM done their role because of their credibility, It is said by Anis Sofyan, A leader of KIM Forum in Surabaya that there are lot of various respons of the citizen when the volunteer give verification or education to them, the volunteer considered to have credibility so that the message can be accepted but also there are some volunteer who usually makes rowdy condition because the information which is given is not officially true or minor information.

The credibility of the communicator is the main empowerment process that is determined by several aspects. The proficiency factor is needed when the communicator can explain and carry out what he wants to convey[16]. Also there are some indicators of professionalism, honesty, objectivity, and dynamic (liveliness)[17]. KIM volunteers who became informants in this study were able to carry out their roles because they fulfilled various roles. Aminulloh, for example, has been acting as a KIM volunteer for several years voluntarily. He was respected by the citizens because of his consistency until it was very popular among citizens as an "anti-hoax police". Similarly, Tri Eko Sulistyowati is very well known for several years to volunteer in various social fields. According to him, information volunteers will be respected when not only talking but also moving to set an example.

Credibility is also not something that is occurs from the communicator's side only, but also from the citizens. The process of empowering the delivery of information to mobilize community participation should be principled community cooperation and participation, not on much information learned[18]. This research shows how information volunteers at the grassroots level have the opportunity to help the fight against hoaxes because it is carried out in by people who not only have credibility but also closeness to citizens. Efforts to combat hoaxes are no longer top down and ceremonial as described at the beginning but are dynamic and interactive between citizens with initiatives from KIM volunteers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates KIM's various roles as information volunteers at the citizen level during pandemics. At least three of their roles are in fighting hoaxes in times of the overflowing information's. the main KIM volunteer becomes a verifier of information in WhatsApp parsing groups in various ways. They provide direct confirmation links within the group, use private conversation lines to correct them to avoid offending, or meet in person to explain through face-to-face communication. Second, KIM volunteers conduct education to solve two knowledge problems, namely about disease treatment procedures and crucially to educate to fight the stigma given to survivors. During pandemics, survivors are stigmatized and ostracized. They educate citizens both by socializing and setting a direct example. Third, KIM volunteers not only socialize but also help the authorities. For example, helping the Covid Task Force implement protocols such as curfew restrictions or helping health centers travel door to door inviting citizens to vaccinate.

All of these roles can be carried out because KIM volunteers who become informants are considered to have credibility. They have built a reputation in the eyes of citizens over the years and that's what facilitates the process of the fight against hoaxes. These findings also indicate proposals for further research to explore the perspective of citizens about the credibility of KIM volunteers in the future.

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