How Geneneration Z Trust in Sources of Information Related to Covid-19

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Abstract—The pattern of media consumption in Indonesia has recently become more complex with the advent of the internet. Generation Z or Gen Z is the most technologically literate group of people today and is the youngest generation with an age range of 10-24 years. The aim of this study is to determine the components of media literacy among university students in the context of personality development in accordance with Islamic values which is called *tabayyun* in seeking information. This study uses a qualitative method with a net-ethnographic approach by distributing a questionnaire to more than 100 university students in many cities in Indonesia. From the result of the questionnaire, 20 students then are asked to join a focus group discussion (FGD) to sharpen their asnwer in the questionnaire. From this research, it is known that Gen Z accesses digital media or online media as their main source of information. According to the Gen Z, the news portals that can be trusted are *Tempo.id, Kompas.com* and *Tirto.id.* The main reason is that Tempo and Kompas tend to be outspoken in their reporting. Another reason is because both of them are reputable media so that they can be trusted.

Keywords—Gen Z, Sources of information, Covid-19

I. INTRODUCTION

We're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic. That was the statement of Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of World Health Organization (WHO) in Munich in the middle of February 2020 [1]. This statement was made regarding fake news or hoaxes that spread faster and easier than the corona virus itself. At that time, the government had not announced any corona cases in Indonesia but hoaxes related to COVID-19 had spread through various information channels.

As of mid-October 2020, according to the Indonesian Minister of Communication and Information, Johnny G. Plate, there were 1,197 findings of the COVID-19 hoaxes spread across several digital platforms with details; Facebook 1,497, Instagram 20, Twitter 482, and YouTube 21. From that number, 1,759 hoaxes that have been taken down or blocked with the details: on Facebook 1,300, Instagram 15, Twitter 424, and YouTube 20 [2]. Based on the data, it can be seen that the COVID-19 hoaxes are spreading on social media, not in mainstream media.

The dissemination of information on social media which is more massive and tends to be difficult to control has obscured the information or news that is disseminated through the mainstream media. While on the one hand they maintain and maintain the credibility of the news, on the other hand, social media arbitrarily spreads information that cannot be justified.

II. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method by distributing questionnaires in the early stages and then conducting interviews through focus group discussions (FGD).

This study explores in depth by first distributing questionnaires to Gen Z or post-millennials, namely students at various universities in Indonesia. From the results of the questionnaire obtained, 10% of student respondents were selected who stated that they were willing to take part in FGD activities. In qualitative research, FGDs tend to be used as a triangulation method such as member checking, but FGDs can also be used as a research tool itself [3].

To gain the more comprehensive and accurate result, the study used data collection techniques through triangulation method which was done by conducting observation, focus group discussion and documentation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In seeking information, Gen Z prioritizes digital media over other mediums. The reason is because of the practicality in accessing the source of the information. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted on hundreds of Gen Z in Jakarta who claim that digital information is more accessible and understood and equipped with images and videos that are interesting to them [4]. This reason is also in accordance with the results of research which shows that students tend to use digital media to get information about entertainment and light news [5].

Meanwhile, the mainstream media that can be trusted according to Gen Z is *Tempo.id, Kompas.com*, and *Tirto.id* on the grounds that the media tends to be outspoken in its reporting. Another reason is that both media are media that

famous and reputable so that they tend to be trustworthy. This is not surprising because for getting information about current affairs or verifying the information they get from social media or digital media, students will check it in the mainstream media [5]. While the choice of Tirto.id as a new online media in Indonesia is because the media uses infographics in publishing information and news, more independent and tends to be critical. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted on Gen Z in Jakarta which found that Gen Z likes information which is accompanied by images and videos [2].

In addition, Gen Z also accesses Instagram which is created by news portal accounts such as *Tirto.id, Kompas, Tempo, CNBC, CNN* and *Fox Report*. This is closely related to the development of digital or online journalism that began to use multiplatform to disseminate its journalistic work. Currently, news portals have official social media accounts such as *Instagram* and *Twitter* and even *TikTok*. Thus, when accessing social media, it could also mean that Gen Z accesses news portals through its social media accounts. The merger of digital media and mainstream media is not detrimental but is believed to complement each other between these two types of media [6].

According to one informant, looking for information on social media is more interesting because people are more expressive based on data, the information is broader because it depends on their perception, so it is more actual. Professional media, however, remains superior to social media or ordinary people who display information regularly because their cognitive resources are limited by various activities in their daily lives [7]. On the other hand, respondents in a study on the level of student trust in the mainstream media showed that mainstream media is more organized and has an organized process so that the information that are disseminated has been verified [5].

Meanwhile, news aggregators such as *LINE Today, Google, Yahoo, Bing* or other search engines that work based on artificial intelligence are also sources of information which are accessed by informants. According to them, the existence of news aggregators is very saving time and effort in updating information. In this pandemic situations, search engines have higher access than before [8]. This makes it easier for Gen Z to access and disseminate information in every activity [4]. But then, the fact shows that social media such as *YouTube* and *Twitter* often provide direct access to very abundant content and possibly to strengthen rumors and doubtful information [9,10]. In terms of media interests, the presence of this type of media causes the hegemony of multinational companies that penetrate the media business [11].

Regarding information about covid-19, one of the informants said that he prefers to access official websites such as the government's website or trusted news sites. Another informant choose to compare various news from various sources or to verify and check and recheck the information. These results are in accordance with the outcome of research conducted in Portugal which showed that the public seeks

information from professional media. This is shown by the level of public trust in the media that increased sharply during the pandemic which can be seen from the information that television accessed increase to 92 percent, digital newspapers 65 percent, social media 65 percent and search engines as much as 57 percent compared to before.

The advanced attention to the news about Covid-19 is not surprising. The result of study in the U.S. showed that at the beginning of the pandemic, adults' interest in reading information from the media increased by 62 percent while attention of college students to covid-19 news rose from 66 percent to 95 percent [6]. On the other hand, if they found questionable information on social media or from other sources, mainstream media remains the primary reference for verification.

Sometimes informants verify information on television. The assumption is that if it has been aired on television, then the information conveyed is certainly trustworthy. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted by the Nielsen Institute in America which showed that in the first four weeks of the outbreak of covid-19 cases in the world, television experienced an increase in viewership by 60 percent. Similar trends occur in Europe which shows that the number of television viewers increased by 14 percent at the beginning of the pandemic as reported by the European Broadcasting Union.[7] While the results of research in Portugal showed that television media became the most trusted medium for information related to covid-19 followed by digital newspapers [8].

However, the informants also don't trust the mainstream media entirely. They say that not all mainstream media is true. For example, Kompas once made news that did not match between the title and its contents, although it was later on corrected. In addition, the phenomenon of journalists receiving bribes also raises bias in the news. According to research that was conducted on undergraduate students in Nigeria, it was revealed that although they believe in the mainstream media but there remain doubts about the mainstream media. The reason is because of the control of the media owner, which causes the media to become a mouthpiece for its owner. The impact is the reduced freedom of media journalism [5].

On the other hand, information related to Covid-19 that is always changing also degrades the credibility of the mainstream media. For example, when there are differences in data related to the number of patients and the number of case developments that vary between the media and the government. In addition, information related to changing policies related to lockdowns, schools and online lectures, as well as other policies related to the public also decrease the credibility of the mainstream media. A good example can be seen at the peak of information searches on the internet and social media platforms in China that preceded the peak incidence of COVID-19 cases in 10-14 days. This suggests that searches on internet networks and social media have a strong correlation [10].

An important note from the informant is that the larger the media, the more accountable the content, the better the branding, the more controllable the media by the public. This is in accordance with the results of research in Nigeria that showed that respondents' exposure to mainstream media and digital media is a prediction of informant perceptions about both media [5].

One of the informants stated that the media was like a human, the information still had to be filtered with each other's views. Other opinions state that journalists also have certain motivations, such as during the presidential election they are divided into two groups. In addition, many journalists also ignore journalistic ethics. Therefore, the structure and characteristics of each mainstream media and digital media affect the choice of the audience in seeking information from both types of media. This indirectly affects their assessment of the reliability levels of both types of mediums [5].

IV. CONCLUSION

From this research it is cocluded that Gen Z entrust digital media or online media as their main source of information especially related to covid-19. In addition, Gen Z in this study also confide social media as reliable source in providing as much information as possible. The most widely used social media are Twitter and Instagram.

Meanwhile, the source of information related to Covid-19, according to informants, is the same as the source for other types of information, which is news portals, especially reputable mainstream media. If they find doubtful information on social media or from other sources, mainstream media remains the primary reference for verification. Sometimes they verify information by looking on television. The assumption is that if it has been aired on television, then the information conveyed is certainly trustworthy.

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