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The Effects of Incriminating COVID-19 News on the Returning Indonesians' Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as a global pandemic. Governments have urged their citizens to return to their home countries. In the case of Indonesia, some new coverage about COVID-19 which is disseminated by major national media channels has negatively influenced Indonesian travelers' mental condition. Returning Indonesians face anxiety for having been labeled as "virus carriers." This article explores how sensationalism in media reports may affect society's perspective toward returning Indonesian tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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KEYWORDS

COVID-19; business trip; media coverage; policy management; disaster management; public administration

Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the WHO officially declared novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as a pandemic (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). The first recorded case in Indonesia was on 2 March 2020, when two Indonesians were infected after having contacts with several Japanese nationals (Ratcliffe, 2020). By 9 April 2020, cases of COVID-19 were detected in all provinces in Indonesia (CNN Indonesia, 2020). By 4 May 2020, Indonesia has recorded 11,587 cases of COVID-19 (CNN Indonesia, 2020a).

Since the first case was discovered within their territory, the Indonesian government has limited the visit of foreign nationals and advised its citizens abroad to return home. Therefore, a massive number of traveling Indonesians reentered Indonesian border in March and April 2020. However, a new concern emerged among the returning Indonesians. Several news reports in the media with incriminating tendencies have driven people to believe that aside of visiting foreigners, Indonesian returning travelers are seen as the culprits who bring COVID-19 home.

This article follows the works of Wen et al. (2020) and Zheng et al. (2020), which discussed how misleading reports and sensational coverage of COVID-19 caused discrimination against Chinese individuals. In the same direction, we see that prejudice against returning Indonesians have emerged because of misleading media reports. This condition predominantly affects their mental health, next to the concern of getting exposed to the pandemic. Therefore, this article provides insights from Indonesia, as well as joins the works of Wen et al. (2020) and Zheng et al. (2020) as encouragement for related research efforts on travelers' mental health in times of global health crisis.

Media coverage on returning Indonesian travelers

Since the second week of March 2020, the ministry of foreign affairs of Indonesia has urged Indonesian citizens overseas to come home. Indonesians who possess residence permits of other countries are advised to stay where they reside, but those who do not, especially tourists, are urged to return (Yasmin, 2020).

After arriving on Indonesian soil, they must do a self-quarantine for 14 days. According to Johns Hopkins University & Medicine (2020), people who have been exposed and who are at risk of COVID-19 are advised to practice self-quarantine. Two weeks is enough to know whether they turn sick and may infect others. In addition to monitoring if symptoms develop, being in quarantine means someone who might be exposed will not transmit the disease to others, assumingly they stay at home for a minimum of 14 days.

Self-quarantine and social distancing are two Indonesian government's main approach to prevent the contagion of COVID-19. Social distancing, which soon escalated to physical distancing, is principally the state of avoiding, attending or becoming part of large crowds. Citizens are also required to keep a distance from other people about 2 meters (Red Cross, 2020).

Theoretically, along with the urgency to wear masks in public places, these two essential activities are enough to prevent contagion (Talidong & Toquero, 2020). However, the fear spread by the media is inevitable. Due to the rising number of COVID-related deaths, Indonesian citizens began to fear visitors, regardless of their nationalities.

We conducted a small survey to see whether the returning Indonesians have done such preventive measures to combat COVID-19. We sent online questions to 40 faculty members at our university who returned from holiday and business trips in South Korea, India, Singapore and Malaysia within the period of February to April, 2020. The result showed that 40%

of them decided to self-quarantine at home and avoid crowded places, 36% of them decided to wear face masks everywhere they went, including when they only stayed at home, the rest of them suggested to wash hands regularly, exercise routinely and sleep longer. Around 99% believed that social distancing is effective as a preventive measure to prevent COVID-19.

Afterwards, we distributed different set of questions to their spouses, parents, children and neighbors to see whether they felt unsafe around the returning travelers. From 50 respondents, 95.4% agreed that they worried they might get infected or catch COVID-19 symptoms. This fear might also be related to the lack of government monitoring toward foreign visitors and returning Indonesians in February and March 2020. Several regions in Indonesia were also considered late in reinforcing self-quarantine and social distancing policy. People began to see returning Indonesians as virus carriers.

By the second week of April 2020, COVID-19 has infected over 4,000 citizens and caused 400 deaths in the country. News coverage plays a great role in triggering public anxiety and panic in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. In these conditions, people can experience stress, fear, anxiety, and even anger (Wen et al., 2020). The urge to stay at home makes them only follow the news from newspapers, television and internet. Therefore, bombastic headlines such as “Dreadful! There Are More Than 300 Indonesian Citizens Overseas Infected by Corona!” will only raise prejudice against Indonesians who are about to return home (Syahrianto, 2020).

Expected roles of the media during the pandemic

Aside from policy regulating returning Indonesian tourists, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued an additional policy for foreign travelers related to COVID-19. The one month visit visa-free, Visa on Arrival (VOA), and free diplomatic or official visas are all postponed until further notice (Akhlas & Iswara, 2020). The media should play a bigger role in delivering this news to Indonesian society to prevent preconceived ideas about returning Indonesians or foreign citizens who decide to stay in Indonesia during the pandemic.

We believe that since mass media have played a role in affecting people's perception toward visitors to Indonesian soil, the media should not participate in causing excessive syndrome amid the stretching of the war against COVID-19. Media should play a more central role in neutralizing their tone of COVID-19-related news so that people face the present situation without fear (Zheng et al., 2020). We asked a question to our returning Indonesian respondents about whether they worried they might carry COVID-19 to their home environment, 99% of them responded “yes.” They

all felt such anxiety after reading information about COVID-19 on the media.

According to communication media data from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2020), there are 2,011 registered online sites, 674 radio stations, 523 TV stations, and 567 publishers newspapers and magazines all over Indonesia. These media should work together with the government in a better direction of news coverage. The Ministry of Communication and Information has been in coordination with the National Disaster Management Agency and the Ministry of Health. Therefore, any new information and developments about COVID-19 should flow to the media from these doors to avoid public confusion.

Shared knowledge does not always mean the truth, so information producers should pay attention to any narrative they publish to the public (Gilchrist, 2018). Aside from the urgency of being accurate, any COVID-19-related news must be objective and fair. There is nothing more effective than mass media in building opinions and affecting public perspectives.

Conclusion

Biased and incriminating news connecting COVID-19 and returning Indonesians are detrimental to the harmony of Indonesian society as a whole. Indonesians who return from abroad tend to face prejudice and unpleasant treatment. As a result, these returning citizens may experience anxiety next to the risk of getting infected by the virus. This unwanted situation is unnecessary since the Indonesian government has already been socializing self-quarantine and social distancing policy for returning Indonesians.

This article urges the media offices to embrace the need for more responsible ways of doing business. They should provide non-incriminating news reports when informing the effects of COVID-19 to Indonesians abroad, especially the ones who decide to return to their home country. It is better to reduce and avoid sensational headlines and focus on factual information. Indonesian media are also required to keep updates from the Ministry of Communication and Information, Ministry of Health, and the National Disaster Management Agency to deliver factual and useful COVID-19—related news to the public.

Future empirical studies are encouraged to explore the effect of incriminating news toward returning Indonesians on their mental health. In the same vein, an investigation can also focus on how effective Indonesian media socialize the government's COVID-19 social policy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Judul Karya Ilmiah (artikel) :

Jumlah Penulis : 4 Penulis
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 Nama Pengusul : **Mahir Pradana**
 Identitas Jurnal Ilmiah : a. Nama Jurnal : The Effects of Incriminating COVID-19 News on the Returning Indonesians' Anxiety
 b. Nomor ISSN : ISSN: 1532-5024
 c. Volume, nomor, bulan/tahun : Vol.25, No.2, 2020
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 f. Alamat Web Jurnal : https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342024885_The_Effects_of_Incriminating_COVID-19_News_on_the_Returning_Indonesians'_Anxiety
 g. Terindek di Scimago dan Scopus : Jurnal International Bereputasi (SCOPUS Q2, SJR 0,44)

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Bandung, 11 November 2021

Reviewer 1,



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HASIL PENILAIAN SEJAWAT SEBIDANG ATAU PEER REVIEW
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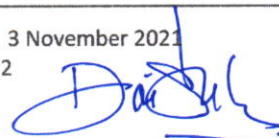
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- c. Kecukupan & Kemutakhir dan data serta metodologi : metode yg digunakan benar pada berita tentang Covid-19, tidak ada data primer.
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