

Indonesian and Vietnamese Information Seeking Behaviour Related to COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Southeast Asia countries had been among the worst-hit countries by COVID-19. The misinformation was spread along with the increasing number of cases. This study aims to describe how Indonesians and Vietnamese behave in seeking information related to COVID-19.

Materials and Methods: The study used a cross-sectional design with purposive sampling technique (n=167). Targeted population was limited to 18 – 59 years of age. An online form was shared via WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram of each contributor. Data collected includes sociodemographic data (age, gender, marital status, educational background, occupation, and residences), and data on information seeking behaviour. Data was analysed using SPSS V.20.

Results: Almost 95.70% of Indonesians and 89.20% of Vietnamese accessed the online information. A 75.68% Vietnamese and 46.24% Indonesians shared information with others, 59.14% of Indonesians and 20.3% of Vietnamese stated that they discussed the information with health workers.

Conclusion: Both countries have implemented proper online-based information. However, a good mass communication strategies were needed to protect people from the misinformation.

KEYWORDS:

Information seeking behaviour, COVID-19, Indonesian, Vietnamese

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus diseases – 2019 (COVID-19) is a global issue to date. This pandemic had hit more than 200 countries.¹ As of September 23 2020, COVID-19 has caused up to 1 million deaths worldwide. WHO since March 2020 declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.² The data on cases and victims of COVID-19 distributed in various countries shows that COVID-19 has become a global issue and impacts international activities.³ This declaration is also based on the fact that this coronavirus is a new virus that can easily transmit among humans worldwide.⁴

Southeast Asian countries had been among the worst-hit countries. As of September 23rd 2020, there were 6.3 million confirmed cases in this region, ranks the 2nd highest in the world after the American Region with nearly 16 million confirmed cases.² In Indonesia, until September 22, 2020, there were 248,852 confirmed cases, with deaths rate hitting 4%². Stay at home, quarantine, increasing the capacity of health services and website www.covid19.go.id page are some steps in responding to the pandemic.⁴⁻⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic was first time confirmed in Vietnam on January 23rd, 2020. However, the Vietnamese Government's fast response had made Vietnam becoming one of the countries that have significantly reduced the spread of this virus. The combination of actions namely an early lockdown, the spread of the health information widely, encouragement in health declaration, regulating the use of masks in the wider community had been the effective ways to cope with this deadly virus in Vietnam. Previously, Vietnam was also the first country to be free from the spread of SARS in 2003.⁵

Steps to make health information "viral" in the community carried out by the Vietnamese Government including a video about preventing COVID-19 which resulted from a collaboration between the Vietnamese Ministry of Health and musicians, watched by more than 30 million people on YouTube. Songs with the theme of preventing COVID-19 were also broadcasted on local and international television. In addition, text messages via cell phones were also being carried out intensively.⁵ Vietnam had done mass testing and provided clear information to the public. These were effective to reduce the spread of COVID-19.^{7,8}

The study of Saud, Mashud, and Ida (2020) showed that online platforms such as social media were platforms for people to seek and collect information related to the coronavirus pandemic from various perspectives. This study revealed that the platform was easily accessible. In every crisis in a community and a pandemic, everyone tried to look for help, information, and stay informed about what was happening around them. Therefore, seeking health information were becoming more active in these times.^{6,7} However, the use of social media to seek information related

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Table I: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondent (N=167)

Category	IND (%) N=93	VIET (%) N=74	n (%) N=167
Age			
20–34	82 (88.17)	69 (93.24)	151 (90.4)
35–54	11 (11.83)	1 (1.35)	12 (7.2)
>55	0	4 (5.4)	4 (2.4)
Gender			
Female	73 (78.5)	52 (70.3)	125 (74.8)
Male	20 (21.5)	22 (29.7)	42 (25.2)
Educational Background			
Primary school	34 (36.6)	0	34 (20.4)
Secondary school	38 (40.90)	3 (4.1)	41 (24.6)
Degree/Diploma	5 (5.4)	69 (93.2)	74 (44.3)
Postgraduate	16 (17.2)	2 (2.7)	18 (10.77)
Occupation			
Medical	34 (36.6)	49 (66.2)	84 (50.3)
Non-medical	59 (63.4)	25 (33.8)	83 (49.7)
Residences			
Urban	68 (73.1)	49 (66.2)	117 (70.06)
Rural	25 (26.9)	25 (33.8)	50 (29.94)

Table II: Distribution frequency of information-seeking behaviour of Indonesian and Vietnamese

Classification	Indonesia (IND) n (%) N=93	Vietnam (VIET) n (%) N=74
Information accessibility		
Easy	80 (86.02)	68 (91.89)
Difficult	13 (13.98)	6 (8.11)
Internet Use		
Yes	89 (95.70)	66 (89.20)
No	4 (4.30)	8 (10.8)
Frequency of seeking information*		
Frequently	63 (67.74)	50 (70.42)
Moderately	13 (13.98)	15 (20.27)
Infrequently	17 (18.28)	9 (11.3)
Tendency to sharing information		
Yes	43 (46.24)	56 (75.68)
No	50 (53.76)	18 (24.32)
Discuss with the health workers about COVID-19		
Yes	55 (59.14)	15 (20.3)
No	38 (40.86)	59 (79.7)

*Based on the frequencies of seeking information daily, weekly, or monthly. Daily access refers to frequently, weekly access refers to moderate access, and monthly access refers to infrequently.

to Covid was also correlated to shallow capability to assess information captiously.⁸ Thus, government roles in providing accurate information on social media was crucial, not only to solve information overload but also decrease the conflicts among levels of governments.⁹

During the pandemic, both in Indonesia and Vietnam, the governments decided to assert strict restrictions for citizens who hanging around outside their homes. Indonesia took large-scale social restriction policy even though the effectiveness of its implementation was questionable in some provinces.¹⁰ While Vietnam decided to implement a partial lockdown on April 1, 2020 that made the public dependent on online sources of health information.¹¹ Online platforms (i.e. government websites and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp group) were mostly used to seek information related to the pandemic.^{9,10} Our study aims to

describe the behaviour of seeking information related to COVID-19 among Indonesian and Vietnamese in response to the pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used a quantitative research approach with purposive sampling technique. Data was collected through an online survey. The research instruments were based on opened and closed-ended questions that were prepared to gather the responses. Furthermore, the form was transferred into google form document and the shareable link was spread out. The expected respondents were Indonesian and Vietnamese in age group between 18 – 59 years old. The respondents were targeted and approached through WhatsApp messenger and recruitment information was posted on Facebook and Instagram of each contributor.

The data was collected between May and July 2020. Data collected includes sociodemographic data (age, gender, marital status, educational background, occupation, and residences), and data on information seeking behaviour. The results were coded and first presented in Microsoft Excel and analyzed in SPSS V.20, presented with frequency distribution tables. There were 52 respondents from other countries and which were later on deleted. A total of 167 responses were tested and verified. Seventy-four (74) respondents were from Vietnam, and 93 were from Indonesia.

RESULTS

Table I describes the socio-demographic data. The age group of 20-34 years were dominated (90.4%), 74.8% were female, 44.3% were graduated the degree/diploma, 50.3% of respondents worked in the health sector and 70.06% of respondents lives in urban areas.

Table II explains the details about the information-seeking behaviour of both countries. The accessibility was mainly easy (86.02% IND, 91.89% VIET). Almost all of the respondents used online sources of information (95.7% IND, 89.20% VIET). Vietnamese tend to share to others, compare to Indonesians, but only 20% of them discuss the information with health workers.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that most respondents access online information sources in terms of COVID-19. As many as 95.70% of respondents from Indonesia and 89.20% from Vietnam depended on online information sources during this pandemic, even more than half (67.74% IND, 70.42% VIET) of respondents stated that they accessed the internet almost every day to find information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding was similar to a study in Taiwan that showed that most people used the internet as a primary source of information for COVID-19.¹²

The social situation that had changed significantly during the pandemic had made the use of online-based information crucial.¹²⁻¹⁴ Nasir, Baequni, and Nurmansyah (2020) revealed that the increase of COVID-19 cases was followed by an increase in misinformation in the community, especially about facts related to COVID-19, its transmission, and prevention. Therefore, providing precise and accurate information was a major responsibility of the Government to avoid misinformation in society that could spread fear and panic, resulting in adverse mental health and psychological well-being.¹³⁻¹⁵ It was evident that during COVID-19 pandemic, the high number of mental health problems related to constant exposure to social media.¹⁶

Lesson learned from the Vietnamese Government was the success of controlling the pandemic through a high level of preparedness and a host of coordinated efforts to provide accurate and credible information to the public about epidemic risks and ongoing infection control measures. Vietnam put a proactive communication strategy from the start of the pandemic through the use of online platforms (websites), simple text messages, easy-to-use applications for

the public, the use of influencers in society as an extension of information from the Government, and pandemic awareness campaigns.¹⁷

The results showed the response of the Indonesian and Vietnamese of online platform based information. More than half (53.76%) of respondents from Indonesia stated that they would not share the information they got from the internet directly to others, on the contrary, most Vietnamese people would share that information (75.68%). Possible reasons for this are that the Indonesian people were becoming more critical and wanted to analyze the information they got and afterwards share it with others. The second reason is that people tended to be careful about hoaxes that might be contained in the information, so they chose not to share this information with others before knowing the authenticity of the information. The information overload could lead to unverified information sharing.¹⁸ On the other side, Vietnamese people have official information resources on websites. Therefore, in order to spread outstanding issues about COVID-19, people tended to share this information.

Misinformation from COVID-19 occurred on social media massively. Government has taken steps to handle this hoax quickly, by forming a special team to eradicate hoaxes. However, this misinformation continued to spread in the community.¹⁴ A study by Apoke and Omar found that predictors of false information sharing related to COVID-19 were passing the time, socialization, information seeking, and information sharing.¹⁹ Besides, the avoidant behavior of news could also lead to misleading information.²⁰ A study conducted in Italy suggested that health institutes could manage misinformation circulation by using Google Trends because they could observe the most searched information and thus predicting human behavior and misinformation.²¹ Moreover, a study suggested that health promotion using social media might result in larger traction compare to using confronting approach that commonly used in mass media promotion.²²

Nasir, Baequni, and Nurmansyah (2020) found out there were 11 misinformation topics that were relevant to the context of Indonesian society, such as this virus could not live in the Indonesian climate, the virus was a biological weapon, this virus spread through the air, turmeric made the body susceptible, unable to hold your breath for 10 seconds if you infected with this virus and some other information related to the prevention of COVID-19. From the data of this study, it is revealed that there were groups who still had a misunderstanding about COVID-19 and its prevention in Indonesian society.¹⁴

Even though these two countries respondents' state the ease of access to information related to COVID-19, several things needed the public's attention after reading information online. Practising in filtering relevant and reliable information before it was distributed, was an important education for each individual during a pandemic.

Some things that became the focus of the Vietnamese people when searching for information related to COVID-19 were updated news on the pandemic (76.0%), information about

disease symptoms (63.9%) and updated news on the outbreak (61.0%).¹⁴ From the information obtained, only about 60% of Indonesians chose to discuss this information with health workers, while the rest chose the opposite. In contrast, only 20% of the Vietnamese people chose to have discussions with health workers. The reason for this issue most likely was that Vietnamese people only talk to healthcare workers when there are signs of suspicion of COVID-19 infections. In addition, to the reputable websites that had been made available to the public, the Vietnamese Government also provided hotline numbers if anyone suspects that they were infected with COVID-19. Therefore, people discuss mainly through hotlines if they had problems related to COVID-19. This consumption of information related to COVID-19 online could be beneficial to reduce worry and improve preventive behaviours.²³

Health workers have an important role in the community as the frontline of human resources who face a high-risk contact with infected patients during a pandemic. Health workers are public references who can be accessed and asked about the validity of information from mass media since people tend to access mass media more than the sources provided by organizations or associations to seek information about COVID-19.²⁴ Therefore, health workers must be equipped with the right knowledge about this pandemic to build public trust in health workers' capabilities. This study implies the importance of proper, progressive and constructive mass communication. Good mass communication is a step to convey accurate and reliable information to the public. As revealed by our respondents in this study, it appears that in general, the governments of the two countries already have special formulations for mass communication. Open communication ensured public understanding of and support the government response, facilitating government-citizen cooperation. Even after the pandemic has ended, it is imperative that people guarantee reliable information.

There were several limitations of this research. The vital shortcoming was the sample size that most likely happened in an online survey. People tend to ignore the announcement about an online survey and not interested to fill the form. Also, the design of this study was a descriptive study. It was an urge to do different approach to gather the optimal sample size in the future study and modify the design to get better result to date. However, our study offers unique data about information seeking behaviour between two groups namely Indonesian and Vietnamese. Since the COVID-19 was an emerging disease in the early 2020, so there had not been much research in this issue at that moment, and our study offers the update of this issue in both countries as a lesson learned for further action to control the pandemic through an online-based information.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that in general, both countries had practised good strategies in delivering online-based information, due to the greater dependence of the community during the movement restriction and partial lockdown. Access to information is also wide open in society. Websites related to COVID-19 had also been provided by the

governments and can be accessed at any time. However, effective mass communication measures need to pay attention to the Government in conveying information so that the public is protected from the misinformation and unreliable news during a pandemic.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Conflicts of interest have not been disclosed by any authors.

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