From Individual to Social Identity: Shifting in Women Travelers' Blogs During the Pandemic COVID-19

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Abstract. This study aims at exploring how women travelers shift the way they construct identities in the blogs during the pandemic COVID-19. As a meaningful activity for the travelers, travel blogging is a form of expression to share travel experiences, personal thoughts, travel tips and reviews, which represents the identities of the traveler blogger. Travelers, in this pandemic time, are experiencing changing situation that asks for adaptation in their life. The changing paradigm is undoubtedly presented in the content of their blogs. Studying how the language of the blogs is used to construct the shifting identity is of interesting topics to discuss within the COVID-19 context. Thus, this study is intended to explore the identity shifts of traveler bloggers in their blogs. Data are collected from three blogs of women travelers which are analyzed by using discourse analysis method. The shifts are indicated in the way travelers construct and negotiate their identities in their blogs dealing with the pandemic COVID-19. Future research is directed to compare the potential shifts occurring in the blogs of different gender regarding the COVID-19 context.

Keywords: Identity shift · traveler blogs · COVID-19

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited travel activities. People who have traveling hobby, especially abroad will be greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who usually can travel whenever they want to go, during this pandemic cannot freely carry out these activities. This change in situation requires travelers to be able to refrain from staying at home or not traveling for a while, especially if it is abroad. To adjust to this changing situation, travelers need to find other alternative activities so that they are not too bored by staying at home. There are many alternative activities that can be done, especially in this digital era. Among these activities are virtual tours which are mostly organized by travel agents or tourism institutions [1]. In addition, travelers who like to share their travel experiences can still continue their activities by writing on blogs, of course not by sharing real time traveling activities.

There have not been many previous studies related to COVID-19 and traveling that focus on travel blogging activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several other studies that discuss the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and traveling activities include discussing the impact of traveling activities on the spread of COVID-19 [2–4], traveling trends after COVID-19 [5, 6] and the perception and motivation of traveling after COVID-19 [7–13]. Meanwhile, other studies on travel blogging that are relatively interesting are those associated with the construction of identities built by traveler bloggers as has been done several times by previous researchers [14–23]. Therefore, reviewing the identity of traveler bloggers after the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the focus studies that needs to be done.

This paper aims to complement the findings of previous studies by examining the shifts in identity presentation that have occurred among traveler bloggers since COVID-19. Identity shift presented by travelers can be seen from the language used and the themes posted in their blog content. From the pattern of language used before and after COVID-19, it shows a difference. In addition, the themes they wrote in the blog content during COVID-19 also change which can be seen from the images uploaded in their blog content. This is inseparable from the construction of roles positioned by travelers which is reflected in these changes. Shifts that occur are of course influenced by the ongoing context and situation, in this case, it is the COVID-19 pandemic. By studying this topic, it is expected that will enrich the references related to traveling and blogging with accompanying identity discourse.

This paper is based on the argument that changes and shifts in people's attitudes and behavior related to this pandemic also occur in travel blogging practices, where the physical activity of traveling is very limited during this pandemic. Shifts that occur in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic are from the presentation of individual identity as a traveler to a social identity that shows the role of traveler bloggers in society. This happens because of the traveler's awareness of changing situations that make them need to adapt in presenting their blog content. The awareness to construct and negotiate the identity they show in blog content is not without intention.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Identity Shift

Identity is an important social category for a person because it determines who he is and how he is defined [24, 25]. Identity can change, as research suggests that individual mediation of self-presentation can change a person's self-image [26, 27]. Such changes in turn shift identities that previously existed. The shift in identity is related to a new culture where there is an adaptation process that changes personal values, thought constructions, and one's behavioral repertoire [28]. However, the shift that occurred did not completely eliminate what was previously there. For instance, the identity that shifts when a person changes his or her role from being an ordinary worker to a leader does not necessarily make him lose all his abilities, knowledge and work perspectives, and what he has is a provision which is then developed more maturely when he assumes a new identity and role [29].

In the context of digitalization, identity shift is related to how a person presents himself in virtual spaces and this influences individuals to sort out their attitudes when dealing with audiences [30]. In this regard, the internet as a medium has facilitated its users to develop a personal identity. Furthermore, identity formation in cyberspace is characterized by identity governance and social identity construction that involves self-disclosure and recognition from others [31]. Such identity formation and shifting has influenced people to internalize the traits and attitudes they present when they are online. In addition, the positive reaction received by someone with his virtual identity, further strengthens the new identity that is formed and applied in life [32]. However, identities formed through such internet media are often considered fake and actually have an impact on an identity crisis [33]. In fact, it opens up opportunities for problems such as cyberbullying, harassment to fraud [34].

2.2 Social Media

Basically, there is no single absolute definition for a transformative concept like social media [35]. However, in this paper, social media is defined as a product of communication technology that fundamentally changes the pattern of communication on the internet into an interactive dialogue that is carried out on a separate platform [36]. It means that social media plays an important role in building and improving the quality of online audiences which is useful in information exchange activities [37]. The features offered by social media are not limited to social networks that facilitate information and social interaction in cyberspace, but also services such as content production to photo and video sharing activities [38]. On the basis of its sophistication and novelty, social media is also referred to as new media [39], which has five important characteristics in the form of openness, participation, conversation, connectedness and community [40, 41]. These characteristics then become the characteristics and advantages possessed by social media.

Along with its development, social media has manifested in several forms of platforms that have great potential in supporting not only basic human needs but also professional activities [42]. One of the professional activities supported by social media is traveler's blog. In the context of Goffman's view of social interaction on platforms such as blogs, blogging is considered a 'performative act' that presents the author himself with the provision of fulfilling expectations that often contradict the author's authenticity. It is possible that a blogger places himself as a traveler, not a tourist, so that the written perspective is considered biased and tends to be a mere tourist discourse functioning as tourism promotion [43]. For this reason, traveler's blogs are sometimes present to fulfill such interests and compete to produce the most interesting traveling blogs so that they can invite readers and influence their decisions to travel [44]. Thus, social media in the form of traveler's blogs, plays an important role in tourism promotion as well as being a medium that forms social identity.

2.3 COVID-19

COVID-19 is a disease that has become a pandemic and is caused by a virus with pneumonia symptoms called SARS-CoV-2 [45, 46]. This viral disease that first appeared in

Wuhan, China at the end of 2019 has claimed many lives, and has even disrupted people's mental health [47]. Based on the impacts presented by COVID-19, countermeasures were carried out, such as the emphasis on human mobility through the lockdown policy [48, 49], and the application of health protocol to the administration of the vaccine deemed most effective [50]. Along with the development of the virus that continues to mutate, preventive efforts through vaccines will continue to be carried out by developing vaccine variants to provide optimal protection for the community.

However, the COVID-19 disease which has become a pandemic not only threatens health, but also affects various aspects of life, such as socioeconomic [51], politics [52], psychological [53], to the realm of lifestyle which has shown significant changes after the COVID-19 pandemic occurred [54]. One of the lifestyle cultures that is also affected is the tourism sector. It is known, in the early days of the pandemic, there was a decrease in the number of tourists visiting because of social restrictions [55]. However, adjustments in the midst of such a crisis were also made, for example through digital tourism innovation to the new normal of tourism which requires the application of health protocols in every tourism activity carried out. Such things in turn make tourism sustainable. Sis, as well as traveler bloggers whose work is actually increasing along with internet users who are also high during the pandemic [56]. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic will not only have a negative impact but also have a positive impact, especially in relation to tourism and traveler bloggers.

3   Method

This article describes the shift in the identity of female travelers in their travel blogs that occurred during COVID-19. This topic is relatively interesting to study because every language that is expressed cannot be separated from the discourse on the identity of the language user. Moreover, in this COVID-19 situation, the spread of the virus is very fast and easy to move so that mobility and activities involving crowds should be avoided as much as possible. Of course, this will affect the traveling activities of travelers which will also have an impact on the blog content that is shared. This study focuses on the discourse of traveler identity which is represented in their blog content. Thus, the unit of analysis studied is the forms of language used in the form of words, phrases, sentences or images related to self-identity (pronouns, adjectives, personal nouns).

Since the data of this study are the forms of language used by the traveler bloggers, this study is designed by using descriptive qualitative method. The data are taken from three travel blogs authored by three women travelers who frequently traveled independently by themselves. These three blogs are selected purposively by following criteria: (a) the blog can be assessed publicly and freely without any privacy issue; (b) the blog is written by Indonesian women who frequently travel independently and categorized as backpacker or budget traveler; (c) the blog is still active after COVID-19 and provides the intended data. These criteria are used since there are still debates discussing the ethics of the use of travel blog as research data source. Travel blog is an open data when it is shared and can be accessed by everyone for which the consent is not required.

Since the data needed for this study are taken from blogs, they are collected using the documentation method through several steps. Firstly, the travel blogs which meet

the aforementioned first two criteria are collected. Secondly, those potential blogs are surveyed whether each blog is still actively posting travel-related topics after COVID-19. Then, the selected active blogs are read to see whether they provide the required data or not. Finally, three blogs of three Indonesian women independent travelers are used as the source of data in the study.

After the required data has been documented, the next step is to analyze the data. This data analysis process uses the discourse analysis method following Bosangit et al., [57]. This way of analysis is considered the appropriate method to analyze the data in order to get the answers of the proposed questions. The data obtained were analyzed linguistically to find dominant patterns and themes that reflect traveler identity from blog posts before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. From these dominant patterns and themes, they are categorized and compared to see changes or shifts in identity presented by traveler bloggers in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Then data containing recommendations, suggestions, invitations and hopes in the COVID-19 pandemic discourse are also analyzed to find out what roles are being constructed and negotiated by the travelers.

4   Findings and Discussion

4.1   Language Patterns of the Blogs

Changes that occur related to covid-19 in traveling activities can be seen from the changes that appear in the blog content of travelers. The blog content of female travelers that was posted before COVID-19 has a tendency to show a traveler's personal identity or individuality related to traveling experiences that have been or are being carried out. The identity of the traveler as an anti-mainstream individual, as an independent individual, as a mountain climber or as a solo traveler with hijab are some examples of identities that are often presented in traveler blog content. These individual identities generally appear in blog content posted by travelers in expressing their ideas related to traveling activities. Meanwhile, during the covid-19 pandemic, several changes were found in the presentation of identity that appeared in their blog content. The travelers wrote travel content accompanied by the COVID-19 pandemic discourse which showed the social identity being presented. Among them are their social identity as part of an Indonesian traveler who must refrain from traveling abroad, identity as global citizens who must take care of each other by following health protocols in every activity outside the home, and identity as part of a citizen who obeys the rules.

> *I do have a hobby to explore new places and learn a lot of cultural differences as well as local history. I don't know why when I'm traveling it's hard to stop. Want to continue to explore, want to find a new city, want to find what's hidden in this unspoiled place. (TB.2)*

Linguistically, some patterns that appear in expressing their identity are the use of function words and phrases which show identity construction. The individual identity they show can be seen from the use of the first-person singular pronoun either as a subject or for possession. In addition to the use of pronouns, adverbs and phrases are also used

which reflect the individual identity of the traveler. First person singular pronouns such as I, and me in the subject position are often found in sentences used in blog content that emphasize the individual identity of the traveler. Meanwhile, the possession pronoun that appears is like in my goal, my plan or my guts which also shows the individuality of the traveler. "Personally" is an emergent adverb that is used to emphasize the individual idea that is being expressed. While the phrases used are verb phrases such as exploring new places and fond of traveling. Other phrases that are used to show individual identity are noun phrases such as a *hijaber* girl and the prepositional phrase "like me".

> *What so called a jilbaber or hijaber girl who loves traveling like me, having fun while traveling is not a big problem. Even dry skin ignores it for the sake of achieving the desire to travel anywhere on this earth. When I come home, dry and dirty skin is normal. (TB.1)*

The words and phrases used to present social identity are the first-person plural pronoun "we", the second person plural pronoun "you" is either in the subject position or in possession. Meanwhile, the use of phrases that show the involvement of the traveler as part of a particular community or group can be seen from propositional phrases such as "including me" and "so am I" with the position of the first-person pronoun as the object. Noun phrases such as "everyone" and "me and the people" also show the social identity of travelers as part of a community or community group. This shift in the choice of words and phrases used in expressing the idea of a traveler is evidence of a shift that occurs in showing the identity that is being presented.

> *Wow, 2021 really seems to have passed very quickly, yes, many things have been passed and thankfully we are still given healthy blessings so that we can still survive until now. (TB.3)*

The language used by travelers reflects what they are thinking when expressing ideas in blog content. This is because the value embedded in speech cannot be understood separately from who is saying it, as well as the person who says it cannot be understood separately from the social relations he has [58]. The use of pronouns that change from singular first-person pronouns to plural third person pronouns certainly implies a certain message and purpose. In the context of travel bloggers, this can be seen as a form of traveler strategy a.k.a blog writer to attract an audience (cite here). The findings in the travel blogger study state that the motivation of travel bloggers is to want to be a source of inspiration or what is known as a travel influencer. Meanwhile, after the COVID-19 pandemic, their social identity as part of the world's citizens raises awareness of the importance of playing a role in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. It comes with a message that confirms that they are in the same boat. This awareness is represented to show followers or blog visitors taking care of each other and reminding fellow citizens of the world. The choice of words used by traveler bloggers in expressing their ideas cannot be separated from the awareness they have. Therefore, their identity as travelers and also citizens of the world can also be seen from the language used in their blog content.

4.2 Themes of the Blogs

The shift in the identity of the travelers can also be seen from the themes they post either before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme that shows this shift can be seen from the images uploaded in blog content posted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The image data shows that in the three travel blogs, there are themes related to the individual activities of travelers when traveling. From Fig. 1, it can be seen that the theme conveyed by the traveler is solo traveling using a backpack, which is also commonly known as backpacking. This theme shows an identity construction that is presented by the traveler as a solo backpacker as well as a hijab backpacker.

Meanwhile, the theme that appears in the picture uploaded on the blog during the COVID-19 pandemic is Fig. 2. In this figure, it can be seen that the theme presented is related to health protocols in cycling during the pandemic. The theme of cycling during a pandemic shows the existence of a social identity construct presented by travelers as part of a global community experiencing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This identity construct is a form of solidarity among global citizens. Especially in the Indonesian context, cycling is being done by many people as an activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The themes displayed in the images uploaded by travelers are related to the ideas they want to convey in their blog content. Image is a form of language; it can even be called a text. In a text, of course, there is a message that the text maker wants to convey, and in the context of this study, the traveler as the image maker represents himself in the uploaded image. Changes in themes that appear in blog content before and after the COVID-19 pandemic of course adjust to the intentions conveyed by travelers. The difference that occurs is related to the changing context of the message. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the theme of blog content showed the construction of individual identities as temporary travelers during the COVID-19 pandemic, social identities were represented. It can be said that what the traveler's intent to convey is reflected in what they post, including the images. In addition, the use of images in their blogs show that they want to provide the visual experience of the message being conveyed or shared. The images are also more attractive for blog visitors to read through the content.

The shift in roles positioned by travelers before and the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be separated from context. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, traveler bloggers presented themselves more as travelers. Travelers who write on blogs cannot be separated from

Fig. 1. Theme posted before COVID-19

Fig. 2. Theme posted after COVID-19

the identity construction that is being built. Traveler bloggers in writing and sharing their blog content actually have an awareness that what is conveyed in blog content will be seen and read by visitors or their blog followers. It is this awareness that allows travelers as a single character in the narrative of their blog. Of course, this makes travelers consciously choose what they want to share and what blog visitors don't want to know. Thus, the discourse of identity construction that accompanies their blog content is closely related to what kind of identity they want to build. It means that the role identity that was built before the COVID-19 pandemic is more likely to influence blog visitors, especially female visitors, to follow in the footsteps of travelers who go traveling independently.

Meanwhile, in the blog post after the COVID-19 pandemic, the context that accompanies the posted content presents the discourse on negotiating the identities of travelers. This negotiation discourse positions the traveler bloggers between their identities as independent travelers and as members of global citizens. As independent travelers and residents of the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, these bloggers need to negotiate both by playing the role of travel influencers. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel influencers can influence blog visitors to join together to reduce the spread of the virus. In this way, the discourse that accompanies the identity of the role of traveler bloggers during the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted to identity negotiations.

5   Conclusion

It turns out that COVID-19 can raise different awareness for blogger travelers. This awareness is reflected in blog content so that blog followers and visitors can see the social identity and role that travelers have, not just personal or individual identities. This paper confirms the previous finding that the traveler's narrative is an important part of the identity construction process. This identity construction is accompanied by shifts and negotiations. Methodologically, the data used in this study enriches the existing literature on the topic of identity shift. However, this research is not without limitations. This is related to gender issues where the data source in this study only focuses on blogs owned by female travelers. Therefore, to get a more comprehensive and in-depth picture, further studies are needed with a gender difference perspective.

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