Youth Responses Towards Internet Memes of Covid-19 Protocols

Mundi Rahayu

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Malang, Indonesia
Corresponding author. Email: mundi@bsi.uin-malang.ac.id

ABSTRACT
Internet memes as digital items with particular purposes and circulated via internet by many platforms has played important roles in online communication. In the context of Covid-19 pandemic, online communication is important channels that people use to communicate each other. In mitigating the pandemic, socializing the covid-19 protocol through internet memes is a breakthrough. The internet memes discussed here is a series of internet memes on covid-19 protocols, presented in East Javanese language. Therefore, it is important to find out young people's response towards internet memes of Covid-19 Protocols. This study aims at exploring the responses of young people towards internet memes of Covid-19 protocols that circulated in East Java, Indonesia. This is a qualitative research with cultural studies perspective. The data are collected through google form circulated online among young people, especially university students. The internet memes used as the object of study is presented in the questioner that the respondents have to give comment. There are 142 respondents filling the questioners. The study shows that young people are mostly interested in the internet meme presented. It also shows that most of the youth agree and follow the Covid-19 protocols as campaigned in the memes.

Keywords: Covid-19, East Javanese, internet meme, response, youth

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the real threat for human beings since the first case was found in the city of Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. It brings new challenges and opportunities for public health and people living in many countries. As the world's fourth most populous country, Indonesia faces the biggest challenges in dealing with the pandemic. One of the crucial aspects in dealing with this pandemic is communication. With the diverse culture and languages, communicating Covid-19 is the real issue. The present article discusses the young people response on memes of the Covid-19 protocol presented in local language and culture. In Indonesia, most of the information of the Covid-19 pandemic is presented in the Indonesian language, with an abundance of related terms are presented in English, even the trending term of Covid-19 itself is an English word (covid19.go.id). The researcher argues that with the various ethnic and local culture and language, it is vital for the Indonesian Covid-19 task force, especially at the local level, to use local language and culture in disseminating the information related to the Covid-19 to reach people at the grassroots level. The local language and culture enable the communication of the protocols of Covid-19 reaches people at a broader scale and involving local participation and aspiration, which is essential for mitigating the pandemic.

There have been many studies responding to the issue of Covid-19 pandemic worldwide, such as the study by Wang, Cheng, Yue, and McAleer (2020) about university's contribution in fighting against the epidemic in China, and the study by Cheung, Ho, Cheng, Cham, and Lam (2020) on medical staffs safety, the study on how China government controlling mass population movement during pandemic, the study by Song and Karako (2020) on the health of international migrant workers, and the study on the information presented in real-time to fight a public health emergency. The studies on communication of Covid-19 have not addressed the memes as the communicative tools for campaigning the Covid-19 protocols and its response. For that reason, the present research presents the discussion on meme as the campaigning tool for Covid-19 protocol and young people's response on the memes. This study is conducted

in East Java, with the memes of Covid-19 protocols containing local Javanese language and culture. The power of the memetic seems to be important in an era of growing user engagement in digital media. The digital visual items enable us to present complex ideas within a short phrase or image (Shifman, 2014). For that reason, the present study focuses on the question; how do people respond to the memes of Covid-19?

The writer argues that communicating Covid-19 involves the complex of ideas, textual practices, and communicative strategies. Communication strategies in curbing the spread of Covid-19 is important aspect in the dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. In the visual digital age, many multimodal communication and information are circulated through the internet and social media. The use of memes as the means of communicating the Covid-19 protocol with local language and cultural content, provides a space for young people at any level to grasp and understand the protocols that is important to prevent the spread of the virus.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Internet memes in digital culture

The term meme was firstly coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976. The term 'memes' refers to 'imitator that disseminate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which is called imitation.' The term is then broadly discussed and contested by many. Internet memes, according to Shifman, is a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and stance, created with awareness of each other, and circulated, imitated, and transformed via the internet by many users (Shifman, 2014). The definition provided by Shifman conveys a comprehensive perspective on internet memes as digital items with particular purposes and circulated via internet by many platforms. For instance, the study of internet memes related to brand development is done by Sharma (2018). In her research, Sharma explores how brands influence Indian netizens through the use of internet memes. Sharma's study uses netnography as a method to analyze the behavior of Indian Facebook users (Sharma, 2018).

However, not only focusing on the form of digital visual items, Wiggins (2019) conveys a more robust perspective of memes. He highlights the capacity for digital messages to present an argument visually. The outlook in the internet memes presents and challenge the understanding of ideology, the audience, the identities constructed or negotiated, in which media narratives are incorporated into the message. In other words, the critical aspects of the internet memes lie in their construction, curation, consumption, and discursive power. Wiggins' ideas note the roles of internet memes as a vehicle of visual argument. One of the essential aspects of internet memes is a participatory culture. In the participatory elements of the memes, Shifman analyses the importance of participating in generating and diffusing internet memes, which connect to race, ethnicity, gender, and power. It is because memes serve as alternative ways of expression for marginalized groups, and to what extent they reflect existed power structures. Related to participatory culture, a study by Ross and Rivers states that internet memes are a contemporary phenomenon that covers the discourse of language, society, and digital communication (Ross, & Rivers, 2017).

Internet memes as a language show that memes constitute shared spheres of cultural knowledge (Shifman, 2014). As a language, internet meme enables us to convey complex ideas within a short phrase or image. As shared symbols, the memes lead into a secondary layer of language. This secondary layer is complementing and sometimes replacing its regular uses. Therefore, under Shifman's concept, elaborating the memetic language need the skills and understanding of subcultural standards (Shifman, 2014). As a symbol, the language of internet memes needs to be understood in its various forms. Boudana's study examines the iconic photographs with the characteristics of circulation, repetition, and recycling across media platforms. The icon then reaches the emblematic indexicality. This phenomenon provides a paradox of the more an iconic photo is circulated and recognized as iconic, the more it may become devoid of its original significance or values. It shows that the iconic photos have the potential to become multiple memes. The concept says that images turn to be cultural objects spreading through replication and mutation (Boudana,. Frosh, & Cohen, 2017).

Another critical aspect of internet meme is that it is involved in the digital culture as a space that links online and offline interactions Wiggins (2019). As space, the digital culture functions as a locus to express ideas, exchange and have influence and negotiate a particular issue. In this space, discourses emerge as a consequence of human interaction. This concept of space discourses in internet memes is examined by Soh (2020), focusing on the political protest in Singapore after the 2017 presidential election. The political memes, as discussed in the analysis, enable people to communicate political dissent indirectly in humor (Sobande, 2019). Besides, Sobande's study shows that digital remix culture lets people express how they think about politics and society in creative ways that requires the internet. The digital remix culture is in the form of internet memes, a culture that politicians, policymakers, and others need to pay serious attention to and learn (Sobande, 2019).

3. METHOD

This study is a qualitative research, which focuses on the response of the respondents on the internet memes on Covid-19 protocols. This study was conducted in East

Java, with the questions circulated online among students of university. The East Java as the locus of study is important to be noted, due to the cultural content of the memes is East Javanese culture. There have been 147 people filling the questionnaires with most of them are young people, aging from 18 up to 28 years old. The respondents are 99 females and 48 males, studying at undergraduate study and one of them study at postgraduate. The data collection was taken last semester, in the May-June 2020, when the issue of Covid-19 protocols was considered as a relatively new ideas circulated among people, which should be campaigned to make many people familiar with. The data were the classified and interpreted with the social critical theories. The social critical theories are used in cultural studies in which it explores deeper on the opinion toward a popular text and language, as what have been done by Hoogervorst (2014). The analysis also applies the Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA). The text analyzed here are the text of memes and the response (open ended questions). The memes as the data presented are taken from the Instagram of the Covid-19 Taskforce of Malang city, and circulated through WhatsApp and Facebook. There are four (4) memes with the theme of Covid-19 protocols used in the questionnaires.

Fairclough's CDA is developed through the media discourse that is derived from functional systemic framework developed by M.A. K. Halliday, and the discourse theory by Foucault (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough (1989) theoretical framework of CDA is based on three levels of analysis: text, discourse practice and social practice. Text involves the micro level, discussing diction, wording, and syntax of the text. At the mezzo level, discourse practice relates to how the text is constructed, interpreted, and distributed, or in other word, production and consumption of the text. The relationship between text dan community is mediated through the discourse practice, in which a text is produced and consumed. Macro level of analysis discusses social practice that concentrates to the discourse relation with ideology and power (Fairclough, 1989; 1995).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Internet Memes on Covid-19 Protocols

There are four memes under the theme of Covid-19 protocols, with the East Javanese language and cultural content that were presented in the questioners. The first two memes are related each other, showing the things people have to prepare in facing the corona virus outbreak. The memes were created based on the flyer of Covid-19 protocols from the Indonesian ministry of health in responding to the Covid-19. The meme is presented in a panel with six boxes. The panel heading says "Ayo podo Iling lan waspodo," (Let's remember and vigilant) inviting the readers to remember and be aware

of the outbreak of Covid-19. The statement is presented in East Javanese language, with East Javanese dialect. From the language, it is obvious that the text is produced in the context of and targeted to the audience of East Javanese people, especially people in Malang, Surabaya and surrounding areas.

Along with the local language, it also uses picture of a globe map in the first box, showing the five continents of this planet. This map expresses that this Covid-19 is a global issue, not only happen here in Indonesia. It also implies that there is a connection between the local and global on the issue. The first box functions as the introduction, starting with the phrase: "Usume corona ker" (Hey, this is the season of corona). Using East Javanese language with Malang dialect, it uses the address "ker." The word "ker" is inverted word of "rek," addressing young people (arek means boy) in equal position. The inverted language or Boso Walikan is the unique Malang style inverted language. The dialect of Boso Walikan Malangan is practiced among young people in Malang city and surrounding since before Indonesian independence. As Hoogervorst's study, the inverted language used in the interaction of young people, strengthens the identity as Malang people (Hoogervorst, 2014). Each box consists of the main text with the biggest font in blue color, and the supporting texts with smaller font in red color. The background is in dusty pink color, so the text is clearly presented and readable. All the text is presented in East Javanese language. The text in the first box says, "Usume korona ker. Ojo Gupuh Ojo Bingung. Opo meneh nggupuhi opo mbingungi. Iku jenenge jancuk," written in three different font size. The biggest font is the phrase "Ojo Gupuh ojo Bingung" (Do not be panic, nor confused) in dark blue color font showing that this is the main idea of the text.

The box 2, says "Iki lho ker. Urutane kebutuhanmu. Gawe ngelindungi awakmu. Gak usah mbanyaki, nggak usah mbiyak mbiyakan rebutan. Gak usah njancuki." The biggest dark blue font shows the main idea. "Urutane kebutuhanmu" (The order of your needs) showing the main idea of the text. This is an instruction for what they have to prepare. Everybody necessity is shown, not based on what each people need that may differ each other. Instead, the necessity is formulated for the sake of protecting your body. All of the text implied that it presented the daily discourse, something familiar in people daily lives. The sentence is presented in imperative sentence, showing that the speaker (Covid-19 taskforce or government) is the agent who has power to determine what people have to do and to obey. The speaker of the text delivers the instruction in imperative sentences, on any detail things, in informal language. The informal language gives the sense of familiarity and equality. So, it is proven from the text that the government posits itself not as the one in higher structure but as the equal position with the audience, the people. This positioning through the language as symbolic communication is effective in

influencing people, lessening the feeling of being instructed (Johannessen, & Van Leeuwen, 2018).

The box 3 says "iki sing paling gampang tapi paling penting. Wisuh gawe sabun." The highlighted sentence is "number one, washing hand using soap" with the comment "iki sing paling gampang tapi paling penting" (this is the easiest but the most important one). Washing hand is considered as something easy to do daily for anybody. People think that they have wash their hands, but that is not enough for the pandemic times. The way people wash hands do not guarantee the hygienic way when they do not use soap. There is another requirement for the right handwashing, that is "when and how often" people have to wash hand. This text also applies the informal register and taboo is the characteristics of the informal language that implies familiarity and close relation among the communicators (Hoogervorst, 2014; Johannessen, & Van Leeuwen, 2018). Box no. 4 says, "Blonyohi Hand sanitizer" (Use hand sanitizer). This implies the main idea, the use of hand sanitizer as the second option of washing hand. Because hand sanitizer is in high demand, and it is rare at the market nowadays, it is suggested not to take great effort to find the hand sanitizer. So, it is better to wash hands with soap under the running water. The additional sentence at the smaller font, is meant to be joking "ojo keminter nggawe dewe" (do not think you are smart enough to make the hand sanitizer). The word choice that implies jokes, gives impression of the informality and the unseriousness. So, the serious and unseriousness is combined in the text. The tense in serious instruction is reduced with the jokes.

Box no. 5 says. "Nggaweo masker" (Wear mask). As we get the information from WHO and other health institutions, wearing mask is a must to prevent the virus contagion. However, this instruction is negotiated with the fact that the mask is also rarely found at the market. This fact is expressed in a joke "masker iki yo wis angel golekane, dibadhok dhemit palingan" (the mask is also rarely found, it must have been eaten by ghost). The word choice "dibadhok demit" strongly shows the anger because of the mask scarcity while it is badly needed by many people. "Dibadhok," Javanese word, is synonymous with "dimakan" (eaten) but the word is harsh and informal. In addition, the word is combined with "demit" (ghost), so "dibadhok demit" showing that they do not have any idea of the mask scarcity and they are angry so they just say "it might be eaten by ghost." This sarcasm is intended to protest the mask scarcity amidst the high demand of the mask, and the government's policy for people to wear mask. So, there is a contradictory condition, a pledge to wear mask and there is no mask available. And people just make it a satirical joke, it must have been eaten by ghost.

The last box in this panel says "Ojo lali Ndungo" (do not forget to pray), but it is followed by an additional sentence, "pasrah oleh, ndungo wajib, tapi ngupaya yo perlu" (you may surrender, but praying is a must, and it is necessary to take action). This statement gives the idea that the last action is to pray to God after some efforts or action. But there is an additional sentence "Ojo mung ndungo thok. Ojo pasrah" (Do not only pray, do not give up). Surrender does not mean give up. This last advice is praying to God after all people have done. This is a bit contradictory each other, in which people are asked to pray to God for their safety, but this is not enough. It is not enough to only pray to God. This confusion is based on the reality in society, where some people think to obey God and ignore the health information, because of the flooding information that is confusing and intimidating to common people.

4.2. Young People Response to the Meme of Covid-19 Protocols

Young people have their own language that sometimes not understandable for other people. In East Java, the inversion language (Boso Walikan) is the language code used by young people (Hoogervorst, 2014). This kind of language is commonly used by young people in Malang and surrounding. Besides the local language, the memes also use local East Javanese culture in the expression as mentioned above. To understand young people's response to the memes, the data are presented in Table 1. Most of the audiences were impressed in many ways to the memes of Covid-19 Protocols. The memes are considered as interesting, creative, informative, unique, understandable, and persuasive. The data said that young people are mostly interested in the youth language like Boso Walikan. The data also implied that communication using local language and local culture are easily understood by young people at any levels, whether the young people in higher education or lower education. The information in the memes can be understood by the audience. This can be compared to the data of Table 2. The information on the understanding level of the message of memes Covid-19 can be seen in the Table 2. Most of the respondents say that the message in the memes is easy to understand. The one who said it is very difficult and difficult to understand the message were the students coming from Kalimantan and North Sumatera, who did not get the idea of the memes Covid-19 because of not knowing the language. But they are able to grasp the message through the pictures of the memes.

Table 1. The impression on the memes of Covid-19 Protocols

Response	Number	%
creative	21	16,9%
informative	25	20%
interesting	55	44,3%
Persuasive	6	4%
understandable	41	33%
unique	44	35,4%

Table 2. The level of understanding the message in the memes

Response	Number	%
Very easy to understand	33	26,7%
Easy to understand	58	46,6%
average	31	24,7%
difficult	1	1%
Very difficult	1	1%

Table 3. The following the message on the Covid-19 protocols

Response	Number	%
Yes. All of them	75	60,1%
Yes. Part of them	46	37,1%
No	3	2%

Table 4. The social media used in the last one month

Response	Number	%
Twitter	73	49,7%
Facebook	60	40,8%
Instagram	124	84,4%
WhatsApp	136	92,5%
YouTube	117	79,6%
Google	113	76,9%
Line	17	11,6%
Telegram	12	8,2%

As the follow up of the understanding, and testing the persuasiveness of the memes, the data of Table 3 show that most of them following the Covid-19 protocol, following completely by 75 persons, and 46 persons following part of the protocols, and only 3 person who did not. Those who do not the whole protocols, in a follow up interview, are caused by the condition and situation in which they do not need to follow, for example they did not go out, or rarely go out of home, so that they did not wear mask. Or, the other reason is that they think there is no infected person in his/her surrounding. The social media played important roles in building young people understanding on the information of Covid-19. They find out the information on Covid-19 mostly from social media. From the data on Table 4, WhatsApp was the first social media that most people used, followed by the other social media like Instagram, YouTube, and google. The social media is the most effective channels for communication for the people nowadays, especially young people, including young people living in Malang and surrounding areas. This implies that social media, visual message have connected each other in building new ways of communication. Without understanding and familiarity on these relations, communication will fail.

5. CONCLUSION

The memes on Covid-19 protocols are important materials for communicating the Covid-19 pandemic mitigation. The success of the campaigning through the appropriate media contributes to the faster pandemic mitigation. The involvement of young people's language and logic, as shown by the internet memes of Covid-19 proves that the languages are more absorbed by people at any levels in society, not only limited to the educated or particular groups. The local language and culture are the important cultural knowledge that we (the instructor, the communicator, and government) have to build and develop in our mass communication.

Learning from the memes under discussion and the youth response to them, we can conclude that the use local East Javanese language and simple pictures with the two-colour fonts are effective tools of communication. The East Javanese language with slang words builds communication as informal, and the jokes gives a sense of familiarity and closed relation. In doing so, the speaker or the communicator posits themselves as in an equal position with the addressee, young people in East Java. The equal position between message senders and receivers is an important aspect to build effective communication for grassroots and young people. The kind of communication showed in the meme's shreds of evidence the ideology of equality in communicating and mitigating the pandemic. The ideology of equality is emphasized as one of the ways in reducing disaster, including the epidemic.

Through the ideology of equality, communication can be done in smooth ways, avoiding misunderstanding and offending. Although the communicator places themselves as having the power to determine and formulate many actions, this is well accepted and understood by the people or the message receivers. Thus, it reduces horizontal or vertical clashes that might happen otherwise. Through the visual images of memes, the messages of Covid-19 Protocol delivered in relaxed and amusing ways, in addition to the East Javanese language, which provides the words and diction unique to young languages commonly used in an informal context. The taboo, swearwords, and the youth language, as Hoogervorst stated, convey the characteristic of intimate settings among friends. The language also showed the position of the text producers, the government or the Covid-19 taskforce, who have power to build the discourse of pandemic.

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