

The role of social media in optimizing the healthy lifestyle movement “GERMAS” during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) demands community participation to overcome the spread of the pandemic. The social movement such as the healthy lifestyle movement (GERMAS) plays an important role to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission. Meanwhile, the infodemic of false news has caused misinformation and disinformation. Raising the community's health literacy will lead people to participate in the GERMAS social movement. This study aimed to explore the use of social media to improve health literacy concerning the healthy lifestyle social movement called “GERMAS”. This research was conducted in Yogyakarta by reviewing related documents and literature, and collecting primary data. Primary data collection was done through online surveys, focus group discussions, and an in-depth interview. There were 461 respondents, with 449 respondents who filled out online surveys, 11 people who participated in the focus group discussions, and 1 person who was interviewed. The study showed that WhatsApp was the most widely accessed source of information about COVID-19 (83%) and health protocols (82%) after television. In addition, WhatsApp has become the main source of information about GERMAS (73%). The credible source of information was very important to help the community during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ‘false news’ infodemic. Various stakeholders provided information related to the COVID-19 and how to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition, Yogyakarta health officers developed a communication network through WhatsApp groups from the provincial to sub-district/village levels (community leaders) that were used to share information on a regular basis to the public. Additionally, community leaders were able to ask health officers questions related to COVID-19 issues and prevention. Unfortunately, the lack of “think tanks”, and bureaucratic ties made this network unable to function optimally. In conclusion, social media has an important role in optimizing the GERMAS program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media management and good cooperation between the government and private agencies are important keys for optimizing GERMAS during the COVID-19 pandemic era.

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1. Introduction

Since March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a global pandemic due to the public health emergency of international

concern (PHEIC) known as the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). Accordingly, the President of the Republic of Indonesia has designated the following events as national disasters.¹ The COVID-19 is very easily transmitted from sick people to healthy people, so the number of positive cases every day continues to increase. Currently, there are positive cases of COVID-19 in all provinces in Indonesia (34 provinces). The occurrence of this pandemic does

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not only have an impact on the condition of public health. The COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on various problems, namely the status of public health, economy, education, and socio-cultural conditions of the community including the stigma about COVID-19 that causes discrimination, security disturbances and other concerns.²⁻⁵

Various efforts have been made by the government to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. There have been many health education and campaigns concerning using masks, physical distancing, and washing hands with soap. One of the efforts that can be done to overcome and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 is to maintain clean and healthy lifestyles. The clean and healthy behavior program is part of the Healthy Lifestyle Movement called the "GERMAS" program.

Since 2016, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia has implemented the GERMAS program. The program aims to encourage healthy lifestyles among the community. All stakeholders are encouraged to support the GERMAS social movement which consists of healthy diet (consuming fruit and vegetable 5 portions a day), physical activities (30 minutes a day) as well as regular health check-ups.

The optimization of GERMAS nationally has been started since 2017 through the Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2017.⁶ The implementation of this activity is conducted in a multi-sectoral manner, specifically for the prevention and control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). In this COVID-19 pandemic era, people tend to become physically inactive due to the physical distancing campaign increasing the incidence of NCDs.⁷ It is necessary to expand the implementation of GERMAS to prevent the long effect of COVID-19 related to unhealthy daily behaviors such as sedentary life style.

Meanwhile, currently there has been an infodemic involving 'false news', namely the flow of information related to health whose credibility cannot always be guaranteed.⁸ Therefore, health literacy becomes very important to practice a healthy lifestyle and health protocols to deal with COVID-19.⁹ Health literacy is the ability of individuals or communities to access information, understand, and analyze health information with the ability to

choose healthy life choices in their daily lives.¹⁰ The high level of health literacy enables the community to participate in the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS to prevent and control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Thus, efforts to improve health literacy in the community are needed. However, the health literacy should be adjusted to the results of the assessment of community needs related to health literacy.⁹ The condition of health literacy affects the use of information from professionals and experts. People with low levels of health literacy tend to use information and media with low levels of trust in information sources.¹¹⁻¹² The process of health literacy improvement is not limited to the health education and campaigns. Healthy public policies are very important to enforce the health literacy improvement.⁹ Healthy public policies and healthy lifestyle campaigns are the social engineering to help people practice healthy choices. Thus, policy study concerning the social movement GERMAS is important to be applied. Meanwhile, the social media is one of the potential communication channels to improve health literacy on the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS. This study was conducted to examine the role of social media for optimizing the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS during the COVID-19 pandemic in Yogyakarta. This paper is the first publication of the research titled: The policy study on the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS in the COVID-19 era in Yogyakarta.

2. Method

This study was conducted using mixed methods with explanatory design.¹³ The quantitative data had been collected through online surveys followed by qualitative data collection method by using focus group discussions and an in-depth interview.

Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta was chosen as the study site. Respondents were Yogyakarta community members who were age 18 years old and above. The Yogyakarta community was identified as people who live in Yogyakarta for at least six months when the study was performed. Online surveys used a Google form, whereas the information of those surveys was spread through WhatsApp and Instagram on March 2020. A total of 461 respondents participated in this

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Characteristics	N	%
Sex		
Male	91	20.3
Female	358	79.7
Age		
18 – 20	9	2.0
21 – 30	77	17.0
31 – 40	122	27.0
41 – 50	118	26.0
51 – 60	114	25.0
>60	9	2.0
Occupation		
Formal workers	238	5.0
Informal workers	36	8.0
Student	22	5.0
Others	153	34.0
Education		
Postgraduate	81	18.0
Graduate	157	35.0
D1/D2/D3	45	10.0
Senior high school	144	32.0
Junior high school or less	22	5.0

study (from both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods). There were 449 respondents who voluntarily filled out the online survey provided, 11 people who participated in the focus group discussions and 1 person who was interviewed.

The study was conducted during Feb – May 2020. According to the sample size calculation, the minimum sample of this study was 376 people. Fortunately, 446 respondents were involved in this survey. Quota sampling was applied by inviting the Yogyakarta community to complete the online survey within the certain period of time until reaching the minimum number of samples.

A written informed consent was mandatory for each respondent before filling out the survey. Additionally, the qualitative study was applied using purposive sampling. The focus group discussion and in-depth interview participants were Yogyakarta community members who had adequate information related to the policy and implementation of GERMAS during COVID-19 pandemic. They were health officers from provincial and district level, health promotion organization, provincial development board officer, community empowerment bureau, community and family welfare, social officers, educational officer, universities representative, as well as community

leaders. The focus group discussion and in-depth interview guideline were developed by the researcher team according to the survey results.

Qualitative data were recorded and made into verbatim transcripts. Data were analyzed descriptively, by conducting open coding. Source triangulation was applied as the trustworthiness strategy. Furthermore, an ethical clearance for this study was issued by the Medical and Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing Universitas Gadjah Mada (KE/FK/0310/EC/2021).

3. Result

Most of respondents were female (79.7%), from the formal worker group (53%) and have a high level of education background (Table 1).

The formal sectors include lecturers, teachers, employees, village officials and civil servants. Most of respondents (46%) had expenditure IDR 3.000.000 – 6.000.000. This survey was conducted to measure public access to media related to health information and information about the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS. Figure 1 showed that the majority of respondents choose WhatsApp (74%) and television (73%) as channels for searching health information. Meanwhile, the least chosen media was newspapers (3%).

Health information was not limited to COVID-19. Television provides many information sources related to health from public campaign and also from private business promotions. Television, radio, and newspaper provide information under control of the management team or owners. Meanwhile, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook allow everyone to produce and share information, including health information. It is not easy to control the credibility of the health information that is shared through social media.

The same results are shown in the sources of information about health protocols for the prevention of transmission of COVID-19, as seen in Figure 2. Most of the respondents obtained information about the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS from WhatsApp (66%) and television (60%). Meanwhile, the least chosen media was newspapers (20%).

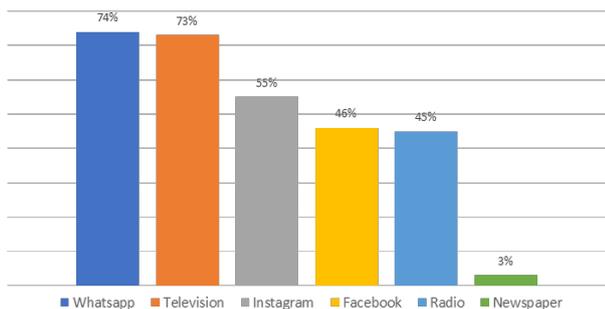


Figure 1. Health information channel for the community (respondents allowed to choose more than 1).

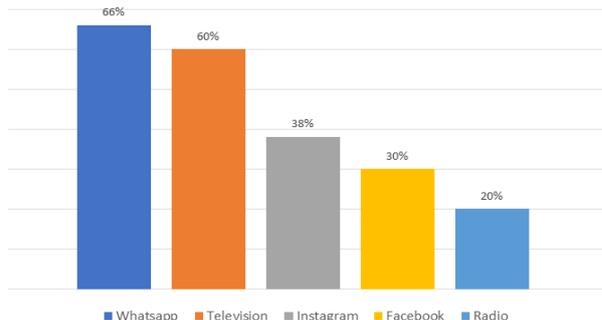


Figure 2. Source of information about the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS (respondents allow to choose more than 1).

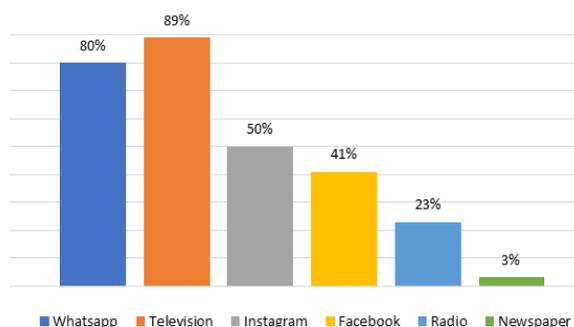


Figure 3. Sources of information related to COVID-19 (respondents allowed to choose more than 1).

The survey results also showed that television (89%) is the main source of information to get information about COVID-19. However, WhatsApp (80%) was the most preferred source of information for respondents to get information about COVID-19 (Figure 3). Meanwhile, the least chosen media is newspapers (3%).

Respondents were also exposed to health information and information related to COVID-19 and its control strategy through printed media such as posters, banners, leaflets, et cetera. Besides, health cadres and local leaders also spread health information especially related to COVID-19 and health protocols through community meeting forums. The physical distancing policy forced the traditional community meeting forum to change to virtually conducted meetings.

In line with the survey results, the qualitative data showed that there was a massive health education from the health officers and other

stakeholders through social media to spread the health information related to COVID-19 and the prevention efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic lead to new ways of communication methods and strategies. Fortunately, most of people have a smart phone and WhatsApp, which were very useful for coordinating and spreading information concerning health and COVID-19 prevention.

“There were 188 new WhatsApp groups of community leaders in Yogyakarta for spreading health information and discussing about the COVID-19 and related health. The members of the groups are more than 3,000 people...” (In-depth interview, Health officer, male, 48 y.o).

“...a total of 800 empowerment and family welfare leaders joined in four WhatsApp group for discussions related to health. It just started when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us...” (Focus group discussion of stakeholders).

“The health education via WhatsApp has reached out to 6,000 – 9,000 people. We communicate with each other. They were sharing enthusiasm” (Focus group discussion of stakeholders)

The same results are seen in the results of this research survey, in which the informants said that a communication network for the prevention of COVID-19 had been formed through the WhatsApp group. The communication network is coordinated by the health office of the Yogyakarta Special Region. The communication network was used to spread health messages to the public in various forms such as images, videos, and writings. In addition, WhatsApp was used to discuss and receive reports, and complaints of lack of compliance from the public regarding COVID-19. The provincial health office initiated the WhatsApp groups of the community members. Besides, they built the communication network with other government and private agencies to support the dissemination of information and handling of COVID-19.

Basically, various stakeholders were involved in the program for the COVID-19 prevention and control. They were coming from public, private, and non-governmental organizations. As an educational city, Yogyakarta has many educational institution including large and small universities. Universities through community services actions have been conducting various activities to help Yogyakarta communities better deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. They are providing services, health promotion, prevention, health education by using various communication channels including social media.

“We performed webinars, and created healthy life style messages through Instagram...” (focus group discussion)

‘...using WhatsApp to reach out to the community and share health information such as GERMAS...’ (focus group discussion)

One informant said that there were obstacles faced in managing the communication and education network to the public through WhatsApp. The main

obstacle experienced by informants was the absence of clear regulations governing multisectoral roles in implementing the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS program. This resulted in no clear division of roles for each agency. Another challenge that becomes an obstacle is the lack of "think tanks" in managing existing WhatsApp groups.

4. Discussion

This study showed that most of the respondents were female, have high level of education background, age 31-50 years old, have high level of expenditure and work at the formal workplaces. WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook were the most-used social media platforms for looking for health information including GERMAS. Besides, respondents also access television, community meeting, radio and other communication channels to improve their knowledge on health. Television was the primary channels used by respondents to get information related with COVID-19. Meanwhile, WhatsApp was the primary communication channel for health information and GERMAS. On the other hand, various stakeholders in Yogyakarta such as universities and health offices developed many kinds of health promotion medias to improve community health literacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they applied WhatsApp groups as the communication channels for delivering health messages and coordination.

WhatsApp played an important role in the implementation of the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS program for the COVID-19 prevention and control in Yogyakarta. The COVID-19 pandemic prevention policies recommend people to practice physical distancing to avoid the COVID-19 transmission. Previously, the Yogyakarta community preferred to use the traditional community meeting as the main communication channel to improve their health literacy. Since the number of COVID-19 patients among Yogyakarta’s communities increased, the local government issued the regulation regarding restrictions on community activities including community meetings. Virtual meeting was the potential alternative to communicate among community members. In addition, most of community’s members have a smartphone and use the WhatsApp application. WhatsApp is versatile

and user-friendly. Furthermore, this study showed that WhatsApp was the main choice for the source of information about health, the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS program and about COVID-19 in Yogyakarta. In addition, WhatsApp was not only used as a source of information, also WhatsApp was used to disseminate information widely, coordinate with other relevant agencies and discuss health issues in the community, especially regarding the prevention of COVID-19. One of the advantages of WhatsApp was the ability to discuss and coordinate many people in one group at the same time.¹⁴ This feature is known as the WhatsApp group. In this study it was also found that WhatsApp was used to disseminate health information and education in various forms such as images, writing, audio messages, or in other forms. This could have a positive effect on the education provided. Picture and text educational messages using WhatsApp can be an effective effort to increase knowledge.¹⁵

In addition to communication and education networks through WhatsApp, it was also used for question and answer discussions with the community. This means that WhatsApp acts as a social media that allows users to interact, meet online to share information, knowledge and opinions.¹⁶ The results also showed that Instagram and Facebook as social media were widely chosen and used by respondents as sources of information. Instagram and Facebook had the advantage that they allow users to share information in the form of text, visuals or audio visuals to other users and get feedback from other users. It allowed Facebook and Instagram users to interact, share and respond to each other. This makes social media a useful tool in health programs. Social media that enables user engagement could be a cost-effective tool to provide social support for individuals participating in health programs.¹⁶ The use of social media could also be useful in making the communication and education process more efficient, inexpensive and convenient for the people who access it.¹⁷

The results of this study encourage the public health activists to consider the potential applications of social media for improving community's health literacy regarding GERMAS. The social movement

GERMAS will succeed when policy makers empower all related stakeholders for hand-in-hand enabling of all people to practice a healthy lifestyle.

The survey in this study was conducted online by using Google Form and spread through social media. The reach of this survey depended on the network of researcher team, and only targeted to Yogyakarta communities who use smartphone / gadgets. These was the limitations of this study.

5. Conclusion

WhatsApp was potentially the best media to use as a vehicle to convey information and education to the public in optimizing the healthy lifestyle movement GERMAS. The number of WhatsApp users made WhatsApp one of the main social media that is easily accessible to the public. In addition, the WhatsApp group feature that allows users to discuss with other users in large numbers is an advantage to spread health messages widely and quickly. Hence, WhatsApp is a modern answer to the challenge of opening the communication channels to improve health literacy, especially for the social movement on health.

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Conflict of interests

The research team in this study consisted of six people. Members of the research team are lecturers and researchers at universities in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. All members of the research team are not employees or staff of the Yogyakarta Special Region Government

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