

## Research Article

# Virtual Communication Culture in the Post-Pandemic Era

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The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the form of communication the public carries. Changes in people's communication culture in the use of virtual new media against the uncertainty in the pandemic era have caused the excessive circulation of messages and information, thus creating disinformation and misinformation through the internet and social media. This study aims to analyse changes in community communication in the post-pandemic era in a virtual space and mediated by new media in line with the increasing use of new media in the pandemic era. This research uses qualitative descriptive research methods, namely research that explores or photographs social contexts that will study. The data sources used to support this research are some of the previous research and related research obtained from the results of literature research. The results showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed individual habits in society, forming a new culture of communication mediated by new media for media dependence.

**Keywords:** new media, media dependency theory, digital literacy, COVID-19.

## 1. Introduction

The condition of the COVID-19 pandemic, which spread rapidly in all parts of the world and lasted for an extended period, has impacted significant changes in the form of communication carried out by the public. The urge to communicate has moved individuals to adapt to the technology they use to communicate.

We focus this research on the behaviour of Indonesian netizens during the period 2020 to 2021. We obtained research on the use of new media from the results of a literature review of several communication journals during the pandemic.

Humans, as social beings, require interpersonal relationships with others. One of the abilities possessed by social beings is communication. Communication is a place for

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individuals to form a community and understand each other. Every individual has communication needs with others, and they do it face-to-face. Face-to-face communication is when two or more people can see each other while communicating.

Face-to-face communication is often more effective than other types of communication. It is because individuals can see and directly absorb nonverbal symbols and symbols as well as the interlocutor's body language. Face-to-face communication makes individuals understand one another better than other mediated communication.

The state of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many individuals to isolate themselves, limit communication, shift to new types of activity, focus on personal feelings, and lead to anything that can intensify the alienated nature of existence. In a climate of pandemic and isolation, the notion of human social nature can be substantiated by conditions of permanent psychological discomfort. The essential instrument to overcome this is communication, which finds its reality and existence in the digital age.

Communication has always been a tool for storing and sharing information and primarily a condition for reproducing the system, even sociopsychological and culturally. As a result, changes in the communication system will affect this level. It means people who engage in communication, respond to reality, and actively seek other forms of interaction in virtual spaces.[1]

Limitations in the pandemic era have made people switch from face-to-face to virtual communication. All activities previously generally carried out offline have become very dependent on the internet in the concept of remote activities, including corporate organizations and educational institutions. One example is the condition that virtual meetings have become commonplace since the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as companies return to their offices post-pandemic, many continue to use a mix of office and remote work. (Hybrid)

With the impact of internet technology as a new media, people can fulfill all their needs ranging from the need to get information, socialize, and entertainment. The internet creates a social media environment favored by the public. Social media makes life in the real world transformed into a virtual world. In this place, individuals can freely communicate and share information with many other individuals without the barriers of cost, space, and time.

According to Pieter Lydian, the head of Facebook Indonesia, in an interview published by Media Indonesia [2], the pandemic has fostered an online community. Based on the Digital Trends report, a survey conducted by Facebook with YouGov shows that more than 140 million people in Indonesia joined active groups over the past month. Currently, Indonesia's population is 267.7 million people. In addition, Social-Hootsuite

data in January 2021 revealed that internet users in Indonesia grew by 15.5 percent or by 27 million people during the pandemic. Meanwhile, active social media users increased by 6.3 percent or 10 million.[3]

This condition is related to media dependency theory, which states that one factor that encourages individuals to use media to produce dependence on the media is its motive.[4] Ball Rokeach, in this theory, states that as the rate of change in society increases, it becomes more and more difficult for individuals to survive well in modern society without relying on the media for information. Media power depends on the interdependence of individuals, media, and social systems for goals and resources.[5]

However, on the other hand, changes in public communication culture in the virtual use of new media against the reason of uncertainty in the pandemic era have caused excessive circulation in disseminating messages and information, thus creating disinformation and misinformation through the internet and social media. The high involvement of individuals in virtual spaces also causes the anonymity of digital interactions in the context of an evil mentality, resulting in negative consequences and anxiety on social media.

This study aims to analyze changes in public communication in the post-pandemic era that are connected in a virtual space and mediated by new media along with the increasing use of new media in the pandemic era. This study will also discuss the impacts and challenges of further cultural communication through new media and the appropriate solutions to deal with them.

## 2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research method that explores or takes pictures of the social context that will be studied in depth. Sources of data used to support this research are several previous studies and related research obtained from the literature review results. This type of research is because researchers want to describe in a more concrete and in-depth manner what will be observed in the field to understand the phenomenon of cultural change in public communication mediated by new media in the post-pandemic era.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Information search is a conscious effort to obtain data to meet one's insight needs, which refers to the position of the media user audience as active searchers.[6] When

faced with something serious or risky, individuals seek as much accurate information as possible to escape the uncertainty they face.

The conditions of uncertainty during this pandemic made the community play the role of active seekers in using media, especially new media, to meet their needs. The concept of people's dependence on social media as new media relates to the dependency theory by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976). This theory describes that the mass media influence individuals because these individuals rely on the media to achieve their daily goals. This theory assumes that the media, audiences, and society are interdependent in an organic structure.

There are six aspects of people's dependence on media, especially social media, namely: 1) personal understanding, 2) social understanding, 3) personal action orientation, 4) social action orientation, 5) solitary game, and 6) interaction game, which each refers to the goals to be achieved by the individual in using the media.[6]

During the pandemic, someone uses the media, especially social media, as a new media to maintain their social relationships with other people. This media dependence is an effort made by individuals to get interactive social satisfaction through interpersonal communication they create through the media in a virtual space when their everyday interactions in the real world are limited and risky.

In addition, the dependence on media by individuals during the pandemic is also an effort to meet cognitive needs in the form of up-to-date information as insights they will get while using the media. People, as media users, try to understand their community by relying on online media. For example, they use social media as their source of news information or virtual meetings as a medium for exchanging information and discussing.

In the context analyzed in this study, the media focused on "new media" as a virtual communication medium, a new communication culture for society in this post-pandemic era. In its sense, New Media is a medium that provides digitization, convergence, interaction, and network development related to messages created and received in it. The ability to hold this interactivity allows users to have options on what information they want to receive, control the information they will produce, and manage the choices they want.[7]

Interactivity delivered in the media is a concept that focuses on understanding new media. The presence of new media goes hand in hand with the emergence of community phenomena and virtual identities in virtual spaces. The rise of this phenomenon provides broad access for users to explore the area in new media. It shows the existence of their identity, which may even be different from their identity in the real world.

All media have unique features. Media is not only an evolutionary part of what existed before but also has a different logic in each existing channel. Most individuals live their lives as a result of social media.[8] This reality is what we may find along with the ongoing pandemic era so far.

Social media is an interactive communication channel allowing two-way interaction and feedback. Social media provides a means of contact for most people with individuals and organizations. Social media changes the paradigm of communicating in today's society. Communication is not limited to distance, time, and space. It can happen anywhere, anytime, without having to face to face. The practice and realities of social distancing in conditions during and post-pandemic have generated broad trends concerning virtual spaces. All of these trends at various levels are driven by the need to negotiate ongoing uncertainties and the need for rapid action required by society.

COVID-19 has changed the way we work. The concept of working from home is not new, as freelancers and digital nomads worldwide have been working remotely, regardless of their physical location, for over a decade. However, this pandemic phenomenon has created a significant increase in remote work with the emergence of start-ups and advancing the digital arena in terms of the nature and extent of what can be achieved even still maintained in the current post-pandemic era.

People increasingly use social media and involve it in their lives. It refers to the percentage increase in the use of social media during the pandemic presented in the introduction, showing that the intensity of social media involvement in people's daily lives, especially in Indonesia, is increasing in various aspects. During the pandemic, there is a tendency for society to turn into an information society, which McQuail defines as a society that relies on information and communication networks electronically and utilizes most of the resources they have for information and communication activities. [9] In other words, the information society is a society based on digital data.

These conditions indicate contrast or change in social life, especially concerning community interaction. Today, the reality of society is gathered on the connections built through social media. The abundance of information and opportunities for interaction and direction for further information development is facilitated in social media. It indicates that in the communication culture of today's society, social media is not only functioning as a medium of entertainment but also an alternative to obtaining information to fulfilling people's daily lives.

The transmission of information and the conditions in which people are constantly connected in obtaining information about ongoing events, individual needs, and world situations lead to significant societal changes. In fact, since the pandemic era, social

media has begun to be recognized as a source of information that facilitates the public in dealing with health warnings. In addition, public communication is also increasingly dependent on virtual or online communication that is essentially used to coordinate information in crises that occur, as revealed in previous research.[10]

The pandemic brought technology as a reliable facilitator and changed society's technology function. Some examples of changes in society's virtual communication culture are shown by the number of uses of digital communication technology. For virtual meetings, such as voice and video calls, online board games and video games, or watching events in a virtual shared mode which is perceived as a form of social support between individuals during and post-pandemic.

The main difference between the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the previous epidemic situation is in the technological tools that are the key to contrasting the issue with the last condition. The technology available today allows people to stay in touch with others innovatively. The increased use of online tools around the globe during isolation has successfully expanded all major digital platforms and social media. This condition creates a unique situation where digital technology functions for communication and virtual meetings are used instead of meaningful face-to-face relationships.

However, not only bringing in an innovative solution with all the conveniences offered but this change in the culture of public communication. Using new media also severely impacts the dependence on the existing channel, namely society's addiction to the internet, which increased during the pandemic and lasted until post-pandemic. According to the explanation in previous research [11], Internet addiction is a condition in which individuals cannot control their desire to use the internet. The existence of this addiction is reclassified into several types, such as cybersex addiction, net compulsions, cyber relational addiction, addiction to information overload, and addiction to computers and games.

It is an adverse risk for consistent media involvement in people's daily lives, which is relatively high in influence during the pandemic. People are accustomed to using social media to interact and communicate. During this crisis, virtual communication using the internet (new media) as mediation is a basic need for people to stay connected. In the long term, this involvement is difficult to leave or even reduce in intensity for individuals even though they have entered the post-pandemic adjustment era.

In addition to the internet dependence experienced by the community, the amount of uncontrolled and unlimited information during the pandemic also creates a negative impact. That impact is no less risky, namely the emergence of a culture of doing anything to get viral—for example, the culture of spreading hoaxes which are getting higher during

the pandemic. There is a tendency to include elements manipulated and modified in such a way by individuals to get a response to meet their need for attention so that it becomes viral among the public.[12] Including the spread of hoax information related to COVID-19, whose validity has not been determined but has become a trend and caused much concern for the public.

The culture of seeking sensation through communication mediated by new media via the internet seems to be a characteristic of people's behaviour during and after the pandemic. This condition can be seen in the rise of fake news and the birth of irresponsible gossip accounts that spread and got considerable attention from social media users during the pandemic.

This harmful impact is deliberately manipulated to get the interest of the audience to participate and interact by discussing news with assumptions that have been formed in such a way through opinions built on the hoax. Even though the information is not necessarily understood and accepted by others, it attracts more and more arguments that are poured into discussing the confusing information. This hoax culture will become a national problem that can cause conflict and political instability and disrupt existing development after the pandemic.

Thus, in welcoming the virtual communication culture of a society in the post-pandemic era mediated by this new media, public awareness is needed in the form of digital literacy, which helps suppress negative influences that may be obtained during this new media. Digital literacy itself is defined as the ability to understand and use information in various formats (text, images, audio, video, and animation) taken from multiple sources presented through electronic devices. Digital literacy uses technology to find information, transform that information as input for thought, and disseminate enriched information through digital platforms.

Shopova emphasized that digital literacy was chosen as a technical skill and knowledge for individuals to develop long-term learning activities and contribute generously to society since the COVID-19 pandemic. [13] These are the critical skills needed in today's situations and conditions, covering various types of literacy, such as information, computer, media, communication, visual, and technological. This digital literacy can help people take advantage of information sources connected to digital technology and prepare themselves to face today's technical challenges.

Not only building knowledge access skills, but digital literacy also builds critical thinking skills in digital technology. Thus, digital literacy can be interpreted as an individual's ability to apply functional skills on digital devices like finding and sorting information, thinking critically and creatively, collaborating with others, communicating

effectively, and still paying attention to electronic security. The application of digital literacy provides opportunities for interaction, literacy of interesting reading sources, various reference materials, communication, and problem-solving.

## 4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the habits of individuals, forming a new culture of communication mediated by new media. It shows contrast or change in social life, especially regarding community interaction. Today, society's realities meet through the connections made through social media. During the pandemic, some people use the media, especially social media, as a new medium to maintain social relations with others. Thus, this media dependence can be said to be an individual's effort to obtain satisfaction from social interaction. The concept of people's dependence on social media as a new media is related to the dependency theory of Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, that media affects individuals because these people rely on media to achieve their daily goals. In the face of this new communication culture, digital literacy is needed to help people utilize information resources related to digital technology and prepare for today's technological challenges.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the writing or publication of this article.

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