OPINION LEADERS AND HEALTH INFORMATION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT. The outbreak of the pandemic covid-19 massively shocked the entire world, including Indonesia. Since its first findings of infected people, there has been a tremendous amount of information exposure related to health information and how to prevent the spread of this deadly virus. These exposures are overwhelming, and many hoaxes have also emerged. The people are in doubt about all this information and rely on opinion leaders to validate this information. Opinion leaders are individuals who take the lead in influencing other people's opinions. Opinion leaders are crucial in Lazardfled's 'two-step flows' theory in 1944, which emphasizes that mass media has no direct influence on the general public. Instead, ideas often flow from radio and print media to opinion leaders and of them to the less active part of the population. This article used a systematic review research method for analyzing research articles that have been published before. The article focuses on research results and their implications because it aims to map findings and draw conclusions regarding opinion leaders in Indonesia during the pandemic. The search was conducted on Google Scholar by limiting the search results to articles published in the 2020-2019 time frame, where 41 articles were analyzed. Results found from the research that articles underlined the significant roles and strategies of opinion leaders in this pandemic era. Various opinion leaders pointed out in most articles included religious leaders, community leaders, traditional leaders, social media influencers, and politicians. These opinion leaders are actively involved in preventing the spread of Covid-19 as educators, motivators, influencers (persuasion), and role models. They generally convey two categories of messages: educational messages related to Covid-19 and non-educational ones such as motivational ones.

KEYWORDS: Opinion Leader, health information

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 not only shattered the stability of the existing system but also made significant lifestyle changes. The uncertainty of information and the number of hoaxes that arise add to the chaos of the current situation. The dominant hoax circulating is about Covid-19. Some of the hoaxes that came out were that Covid-19 was just a global elite conspiracy, and there was information that drinking alcohol could cure covid-19. A worrying hoax is that vaccination can cause paralysis and death (Sari et al., 2021). The public is exposed to various information, but the truth, especially regarding health and the pandemic, is confusing and dubious. Exposure to Health Information is almost the main news in every media. The public is overwhelmed with digesting various health information in preventing occurring COVID-19, and this causes anxiety.

The Central Statistics Agency shows that most respondents are worried or very worried about the conditions and news regarding COVID-19 (Pratama & Herieningsih, 2020). This anxiety was also followed by an increased search for health information in 2020. Figure 1 shows the high number of searches for information on covid 19 in 2020. There was a sharp increase in March 2020, and people's bias toward the situation began to decline over time.
With excessive exposure to information, people finally look for an opinion leader who can validate the truth of information. This phenomenon is the critical role of opinion leaders in disseminating information. The survey results also show that people seek more information through the websites of health associations or doctors than the official government websites during the Covid-19 crisis. This finding is in line with the international trend that the public has high trust in health experts in this Covid-19 pandemic (Bagaimana Opini Publik Terhadap Covid-19 Di Indonesia? Ini Risetnya – Universitas Padjadjaran, n.d.). The role of opinion leaders is crucial at this time. People seek health information through their leaders' choice to validate what they should do regarding health information related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opinion leaders are individuals who take the lead in influencing other people's opinions about innovations (I. W. Putri, 2018). Opinion leaders are crucial in Lazardfled's 'two-step flows' theory in 1944. This theory emphasizes that mass media has no direct influence on the general public. However, ideas often flow from radio and print media to opinion leaders and of them to the less active part of the population. This assumption challenges the popular notion of a powerful direct media effect on the public, one of the most influential ideas in communication research from the 1940s to at least the 1960s. (Maurer, 2008). However, it does not mean that public opinion does not have the same role.

There is a finding that discussion networks are concentrated but relatively inclusive, and the theory of 'two-step flows' has explanatory power in online public forums. Moreover, opinion leaders have a more substantial influence than content creators (Choi, 2014). This statement proves that the theory of 'Two-Step Flows' is still quite relevant in this digital era. However, the types and characteristics of a person who can be called an opinion leader become more varied. Thus, more varied, they seem to have more or less the same traits.

Opinion leaders' traits and characteristics are considered necessary, including competence and trustworthiness. They are trusted because they have particular and validated expertise. Credibility and characteristics have a significant and positive effect on opinion leadership, and opinion leadership has a significant and positive effect on interaction intentions and intentions to follow suggestions (Hartini & Hanafi, 2021). Then an opinion leader tends to evaluate and synthesize information without bias. They generally have the power of reference for the community because they have the same perception. They usually have a higher educational status and are often the first to acknowledge the pertinent information and apply it to their personal lives (Solomon, 2007).

Opinion leaders can be identified through four characteristics: high external communication, high accessibility, good socio-economic status, and rapid innovation adaptation (Rogers, 1995). In addition, new factors accurately describe opinion leadership, namely 'Inspiring', 'Trusted', 'Educated', 'Mediator', and 'Experienced' (I. W. Putri, 2018). However, there is also a finding that the role of personality traits, and public individuation, in advancing our understanding of opinion leadership is also

Figure 1: Public Interest in Covid 19 Information
Source: Google Trends

![Google Trends Chart](image-url)
significant (Chan & Misra, 2013).

The importance of opinion leaders for the Indonesian people at this critical time is because society needs opinion leaders who can provide direction on attitudes and behaviour to act informally in specific ways. For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, news often appeared that there was public disobedience to the implementation of the PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) recommended by the government and the public's indifference to self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic (Santosoa et al., 2020). However, on the other hand, people who comply depend on accurate information. They need information related to how to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, related to vaccinations, related to procedures for offline activities and information on how to self-isolate procedures for those affected.

This phenomenon has attracted the attention of academics to conduct various studies related to COVID-19. This research trend explores every aspect of life from economic, social and political issues, including studies that touch on the role of opinion leaders in disseminating health information. Based on the explanation above, this research is interested in examining various studies that refer to the identification and importance of opinion leaders in these transitional periods. This study aims to present a literature review on the role of opinion leaders regarding health information during the COVID-19 pandemic and to see the limitations of the previous literature, which became the research gap of this study. Furthermore, the trend of data collection methods carried out during the pandemic is dominated by online media data (A. K. Putri & Wahyunengseh, 2021), so this research explores what methods are used in literature studies regarding the role of opinion leaders.

METHOD

This article uses a systematic review research method, which is a systematic method for analyzing research articles that have been published before. This method consists of several focuses and objectives of analysis (Cooper, 2017). The article focuses on research results and their implications because it aims to map findings and draw conclusions regarding opinion leaders in Indonesia during the pandemic.

Data collection (articles) was carried out by searching for relevant articles using several keywords such as "opinion leaders and Covid-19", "celebrities and Covid-19", "influencers and Covid-19", "religious leaders and Covid-19", "friends and Covid-19", and "family and Covid-19". In addition, the keyword "Covid-19" is also combined using the keywords "Covid-19 prevention" and "Covid-19 information". The search was conducted on Google Scholar by limiting the search results to articles published in the 2020-2019 timeframe.

Keyword search results yielded 52 journal articles without filtering journal type and accreditation. The following process is a manual check to see the article's relevance to the research objectives. The result is that 41 articles are ready to be analyzed. The data analysis technique is a thematic analysis by first reading the research results and then creating several themes. The themes are the types and roles of opinion leaders, perception leaders and opinion leaders' responses related to Covid-19, the messages conveyed, and the strategies used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of data analysis show that there are four types of opinion leaders who are actively involved in informing and educating the public regarding Covid-19, namely the government, religious leaders, community leaders, social media influencers, and celebrities. The government, in the context of this research, is the government at the lowest level in the government system in Indonesia, such as village
heads (Hidayat et al., 2021; Prasetyo et al., 2020; Rakhman & Prihantoro, 2021).

Meanwhile, religious leaders are opinion leaders who are most often involved in the Covid-19 education process. The research findings found that the religious leaders involved consisted of clerics, priests, and religious organizations. These organizations are Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) (Abdullah, 2020; Hakim & Aziz, 2020; Khairil, 2021; Prawoto et al., 2020; Rachmawati et al., 2022; Rahvy & Ridlo, 2021; Simon et al., 2021; TAQIYYUDDIN, 2021; Telhalia & Natalia, 2022; Widyawati & Lon, 2021). However, most articles discuss information and prevention of Covid-19 from the perspectives of the Islamic religion of the Christian religion. Finally, community leaders in question are figures who get a higher position and more trust from the community. For example, several studies have found the role of traditional leaders (Yasa, 2020), heads of neighbourhood associations (RT), heads of neighbourhood associations (RW), and cadres of the Family Empowerment and Welfare Organization (PKK) (Rosidin et al., 2020).

The research findings also found that social media influencers (SMI) also played a role in educating the public. However, most SMIs involved in the education process are existing SMIs, such as dr. Tirta Mandira Hudhi, Arief Rosyid, etc. There are two reasons that social media influencers educate, namely work (part of the Covid-19 task force communication team) (Alam, 2020) and daily conversation (as a strategy to gain followers) (Rizali Rakhman et al., 2021).

The opinion leaders above are different from several previous studies which state that opinion leaders in the health sector are people who influence because they have more knowledge or experience related to health information, such as doctors, pharmacists, patients, and health educators (Kim et al., 2017; Sismondo, 2015). However, opinion leaders have a significant influence on others. They are seen as having higher non-health knowledge than followers, which is still one of the characteristics of opinion leaders (Weimann, 2008).

Every opinion leader, especially religious figures, has a different perception regarding Covid-19, but, in general, these perceptions are divided into two categories, namely believing and not believing that Covid-19 is real. Opinion leaders who do not believe in Covid-19 tend to be resistant and uncooperative with policies issued by the government, such as a ban on worshipping in houses of worship. Several factors cause opinion leaders not to believe in Covid-19. These factors include ignorance, not having access to knowledge, a strong belief that God created living things for the interests and needs of its people, so there is no need to be afraid, and inaccurate information (hoaxes) (Muchammadun et al., 2021), and invisible Covid-19 (Rosidin et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, opinion leaders who believe in the existence of Covid-19 tend to be more cooperative by inviting the public to obey the policies made by the government, including the policy to worship at home. However, they stated that there is no need to panic because the virus can be prevented (Hakim & Aziz, 2020; Rosidin et al., 2020), which is part of the disaster.

The following finding is that opinion leaders use different strategies in educating the public depending on the type of opinion leader. Religious leaders use quotes from the holy book to educate the public and use moments of worship to convey this information. For example, pastors convey information related to Covid-19 during church sermons during services (Bahrudin et al., 2021), and scholars convey it when giving lectures both in houses of worship (Khairil, 2021). This moment effectively conveys messages related to Covid-19 because this is a sacred moment and loyal individuals tend to listen to every message conveyed by religious leaders. Therefore, if the opinion leader conveys a message in line with government policy, the public will tend to comply with the existing policy. However, not all religious leaders have the same perception as the government regarding Covid-19.
Social media influencers (SMI) use a different strategy than religious leaders. They tend to share information that is contextual to the handling of COVID-19. This strategy is because the education process is part of the job that requires them to convey information following the request of the Covid-19 task force. However, each SMI uses different message packaging techniques. For example, Dr Tirta presents scientific information sourced from journal articles, or Arief, which provides information based on community needs and conveys it in simple language (Valdez & Dhani, 2021). In addition, several SMIs are also intensively conducting education by inviting the public to succeed in government policies such as vaccination by using specific hashtags. Political figures also use the same strategy, conveying contextual and relevant information about Covid-19.

Messages are an integral part of the strategy to communicate to the public. Data analysis found several categories of messages conveyed by opinion leaders, namely educational messages related to Covid-19 (3M, vaccines, healthy living, and not doing stigma) and non-educational messages. Educational messages are given in line with the role of opinion leaders.

Meanwhile, non-educational messages are given in line with their roles as motivators, influencers, and role models. For example, some examples of non-educational messages conveyed by opinion leaders are tests from God, so people have to pray a lot so that this epidemic will disappear soon (Hakim & Aziz, 2020). Alternatively, messages of persuasion so that people can comply with government policies (Adeni & Hasanah, 2021) or invitations not to stigmatize Covid-19 victims because God did not teach that way (Munip et al., 2021). Finally, in providing role models, opinion leaders provide concrete examples such as using masks in public, providing hand washing facilities, holding worship at home, and others.

Based on the explanation of the research findings above, this article finds that opinion leaders have a role in preventing the spread of Covid-19. Each opinion leader has a different strategy in carrying out his role as an educator, motivator, influencer, and role model. However, no previous studies have examined the effectiveness of this role using the scientific method. Therefore, future research should examine the effectiveness of the role of opinion leaders.

**CONCLUSION**

In health communication, opinion leaders have an essential role in educating the public. The opinion leaders are usually individuals who are believed to have more knowledge and experience related to a disease. The same is true in the context of Covid-19. The government is working with opinion leaders to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Religious leaders, community leaders, traditional leaders, social media influencers, and politicians are opinion leaders actively involved in preventing the spread of Covid-19 as educators, motivators, influencers (persuasion), and role models. In general, they convey two categories of messages: educational messages related to Covid-19 and non-educational ones such as motivational ones.

In addition, opinion leaders use different strategies to convey the message, such as using a religious approach or teaching to explain the Covid-19 phenomenon conveyed during religious activities. Not only that, but some opinion leaders also use strategies in the form of using different languages and presentations. However, there are no articles that scientifically measure the effectiveness of the role of opinion leaders. Therefore, future research should measure the effectiveness of the role of opinion leaders in educating the public regarding health information.

This study has several limitations, namely the limited number of articles, so it cannot generalize the
use of opinion leaders in Indonesia. In addition, the articles analyzed rarely use quantitative methods, so they cannot measure the effect size of the influence of opinion leaders.

REFERENCES


