

# COVID 19 NARRATIVE DECONSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA MEME

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**ABSTRACT.** The phenomenon of memes about COVID-19 spread through social media is interesting to study more deeply. Using Ferdinand d'Sausurre's semiotic analysis, the researcher explored several memes related to the government's appeal to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as wearing masks, maintaining distance, washing hands, and reducing mobility. The analysis results show community reconstructs or deconstructs the texts submitted by the government as a form of protest, satire, and joke as an appeal to always masks in every activity. People make memes by wearing masks from underwear (loincloth and bra), tires for motorized vehicles, and coconut belts. In terms of keeping a distance, people make a meme of a barber lengthening his shaving machine with a wooden stick to keep it away from the shaved one. Other narratives built by the community through these memes indicate resistance from the community against the COVID-19 narrative built by the government.

**KEYWORD:** deconstruction, meme, social media

## INTRODUCTION

The global phenomenon of Covid-19 has become a very extraordinary event in the lives of the world. Covid-19 impacts the health of the world's citizens and has also penetrated all lines of world life. Covid-19 has forced the world community to adapt to a new lifestyle. There was an unfamiliar phenomenon of virus transmission from epidemic to the pandemic as the level of the most dangerous disease outbreak globally, including in Indonesia.

Through the Covid-19 Task Force ([covid19.go.id](http://covid19.go.id)), the government released the latest data on May 26, 2022; as many as 6,053 million people were exposed, 5,894 million recovered, and 156,556 thousand people died. In dealing with this phenomenon, the Indonesian government has taken various measures to prevent, treat and reduce the impact of Covid-19.

As an element of the state that regulates all aspects of national life, the government has made various efforts—starting with prevention and treatment and providing assistance for elements of the nation's children affected by the ferocity of Covid-19. The government stipulates various legal regulations, handbooks, technical instructions, and other regulations.

In prevention efforts, the government always uses various means of communication in disseminating health protocols to avoid diseases caused by exposure to Covid-19. The implementation of socialization has started from the center to neighborhood units, health institutions, educational institutions, community organizations, communities, community groups to community individuals. In addition, the government has also prepared information on Covid-19 through several mass communication media, television, radio, print media, social media, billboards, banners, pamphlets, and others.

The public must remain educated about the development of Covid-19 cases and effective handling to deal with this disease outbreak. Therefore, the government reminds the public to use masks correctly, wash hands with soap, maintain physical distance, reduce mobility, avoid crowds and vaccinate.

These social restriction rules were issued openly as a form of the movement's campaign against Covid-19. Public awareness is the main thing to stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The public responds to the narratives built by the government in various ways. In general, people follow based on the needs of the community itself. However, specific individuals or communities create several other phenomena due to government regulations in handling Covid-19. The community presents a narrative that is different from the narrative set by the government by replicating and duplicating messages in the form of memes distributed through social media.

### **Deconstruction of Social Reality**

Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher (Setiawan, 2018), initiated the concept of deconstruction. Etymologically, deconstruction means unraveling, releasing, and opening. This term is one of the critical concepts of postmodernism (Setiawan, 2018). According to Sarup (2003), deconstruction aims to dismantle western metaphysical traditions such as Husserlian phenomenology, Saussurean structuralism, French structuralism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Sutisno, 2017).

Deconstruction includes paying attention to hidden symptoms intentionally found, such as untruths, side characters, women, and so forth (Sutisno, 2017). Deconstruction provides for finding something different. In addition, intellectual exploration can occur without being bound by rules that are considered universally applicable (Sutisno, 2017).

The following is the difference between non-deconstructed and deconstructed readers. Non-deconstructed or conventional readers identify the correct meaning, the final meaning, referred to as the optimal meaning. On the other hand, the reader of deconstruction suffices with continuous disassembly as a process without the need to find a final meaning (Sutisno, 2017).

In deconstruction, starting to read can be random without having to initiate. Even Derrida Al-Fayyadl, (2006) precedes it from a footnote. From these readings, several discourse units hit a dead end. Deconstruction attempts to destroy the notion that a literary work, both a story and a character, only has one meaning and a dominant judgment with absolute truth (Sutisno, 2017). Al-Fayyadl, (2006) reveals that deconstruction exists to accommodate multi-meaning concepts and the emergence of new meanings and judgments with sufficient evidence to support them. A text always has a double face about the meaning and a conclusion (Sutisno, 2017).

### **Meme as Representation of Ideas in Social Media**

In 1976, the term meme was first introduced by Richard Dawkins in his book entitled *The Selfish Gene*. According to Dawkins, we need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit imitation. "Mimeme" comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'.

Dawkins states that the word meme comes from the Greek word *mimema* in which the smallest designation of a cultural unit is similar to a gene, a form of cultural transmission through the replication of ideas, which penetrate human cognition (Gumilang, 2018).

Dawkins argues how memes are described as a unit capable of reproducing as if genes that develop by multiplying from one body to another through sperm and eggs, while memes here mean that memes can reproduce from one thought to another through the process of imitation. Dawkins provides examples of memes such as tone, word associations, beliefs, dress styles, and technological developments (Gumilang, 2018).

Moreover, Sperber (Gumilang, 2018) argues that "meme as a cultural replicator." Based on Sperber's statement, memes as replicators are symbols and associations that exist in the human mind and are used to replicate a specific form of culture or culture that can spread from one generation to another.

In Indonesia, the term meme has been popular since its appearance on the website *yeahmahasiswa.com* in 2009, which features various memes about parodies and satire on students' daily lives, such as thesis, final project, and grade point average (Allifiansyah, 2016). The meme phenomenon

then develops in a broader direction. Netizens or internet users then replicate this meme into various variations that discuss several topics, including contemporary politics. Not only that, but netizens also share this meme through social networks and sites on the internet (Allifiansyah, 2016).

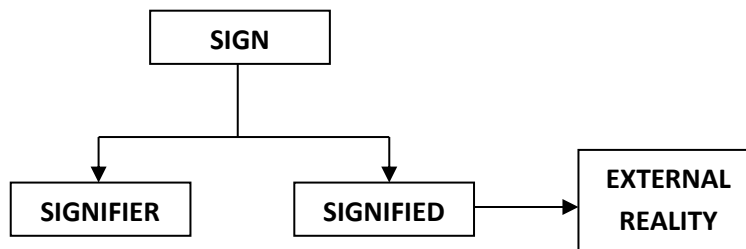
## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the object of studying the text, photos, graphics, and images related to COVID-19 on the internet. The data was collected by documenting various writings, photographs, graphics, and pictures about COVID-19 on the internet.

The research object was collected based on the category of health protocols set by the government, namely wearing masks, washing hands, and keeping a distance. From the documentation, nine articles, photos, graphics, and images were selected, which were then analyzed using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis.

According to Saussure (Sobur, 2001), language is a sign system, and each sign consists of two parts, namely the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the material aspect of language: what is listened to, written, or read. A sign is a mental picture, thought, or concept (Sobur, 2001).

### Semiotic analysis model of Ferdinand D' Saussure



Source; Sobur, 2001.

## DISCUSSION

### Covid-19 Narrative Deconstruction in Social Media

Through the Covid-19 Handling Task Force, the government has established several provisions to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The regulation is informed to all Indonesian people through various media. Such as television, print mass media, social media, pamphlets, brochures, and directly face-to-face with the nation's citizens.

The provisions set by the government in reducing the spread of Covid-19 are firstly, always use a mask in every activity; secondly, keep social distance in communicating with anyone, avoid crowds, and avoid gathering places; thirdly, wash hands with soap because it has been scientifically proven that the use of soap will destroy the virus. Next, keep our environment clean. The last is to study and work from home and also vaccinate against covid-19.




Figure 1: One of the pamphlet/leaflet models is used by the government in disseminating the behavior of maintaining health to avoid Covid-19.

The narration presented by the government received various responses from the community. One of them is wearing other attributes than it should be. The public responds through writing in the form of satire or jokes to messages conveyed by the government, which are then uploaded or published on social media.


Conceptually, people's behavior in redesigning or rewriting the narrative conveyed by the government attempts to deconstruct the primary reality into a new reality or another reality. Then the new reality is socialized, disseminated, or share through mass media and social media. Making a replication or other model of the main narrative of Covid-19, then spreading it through mass media and social media is called a meme.

In Ferdinand D'Sausurre's semiotic analysis, the meme developed by the community is a sign. The sign, according to D'Sausurre, is composed of two parts, namely the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the material aspect of language: what is listening to, written, or read. Signs are mental images, thoughts, or concepts.

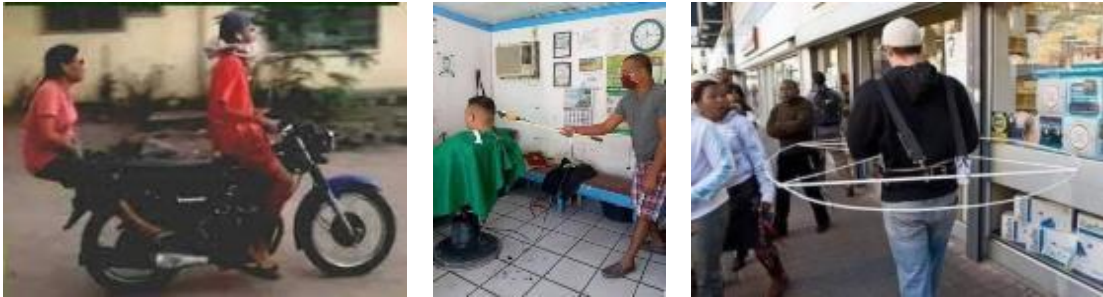
### 1. Deconstruction Wearing a Mask Properly

<b>SIGN</b>		
		
<b>SIGNIFIER</b>	<b>SIGNIFIED</b>	<b>External Reality</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of underwear (loincloth and bra) as a mask.</li> <li>- Mask is made of motor vehicle tires.</li> <li>- The mask is created from an old coconut belt.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A new mask model.</li> <li>- Another mask model.</li> </ul>	<p>Masks can be made from any material, not necessarily from materials that the government has determined in terms of health requirements.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People must use masks made to health standards; masks must be worn correctly, and masks help cover the nose and mouth. On the other hand, another reality that the community wants to show through the meme is that people have difficulty or cannot afford to buy or obtain masks that meet health standards. Wearing a mask makes it difficult to consume foods such as "smoking." People outsmarted it or made other models of masks, which continued to wear masks and could also "smoke" or consume food and drinks.</li> <li>2. Reconstructs the message conveyed by the government. In the new construction, the public shows that wearing a mask and covering the mouth and nose is very important regardless of the material.</li> </ol>		

## 2. Deconstruction of Keeping a Minimum Distance of One Meter

SIGN		
		
SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED	EKSTERNAL REALITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The words "Let me just wear a mask, you just stay at home wearing a negligee."</li> <li>- The text is affixed to the back of the tailgate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Form of attention</li> <li>- A request form</li> </ul>	<p>Only people who work outside the home wear masks—no need to wear a mask at home.</p>
<p>Even though it is in the form of satire, the meme affixed to the back of the truck wants to remind the public that working outside the home or mobilizing still wears a mask. Moreover, those at home wear a mask but wear a negligee. The phrase 'stay at home wearing a negligee' satirizes the government's narrative that 'always wear a mask.' Activities at home without interacting are enough to wear a negligee.</p>		


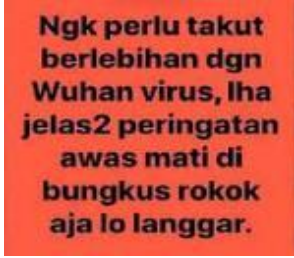

## 3. Deconstruction of Keeping a Minimum Distance of One Meter

SIGN		
		
SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED	REALITAS EKSTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The motorcyclist sits on top of the motorcycle's gas tank, and the passenger sits on the back of the motorcycle to show a considerable distance from the common habit of motorcycle riders carrying guns.</li> <li>- Barbers increase the length of their shaving machine by attaching it to a wooden stick so that it is far from the person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- create a strange distance</li> <li>- Keep physical distancing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use assistive devices for making a strange distance</li> <li>- and also use assistive devices to physical distancing.</li> </ul>



<p>being shaved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- person makes a circular device around his body to keep people away from him.</li> </ul>		
<p>The community reconstructs the government's narrative to keep a distance when interacting with other people with various memes. For example, three memes show how people react to keeping their distance. In the first meme of riding a motorcycle, it became difficult to maintain a minimum distance of one meter. The call for social distancing has become impossible, considering that the space for drivers and passengers to sit is less than one meter. While the mobility of the community is very much using two-wheeled motorized vehicles. For some people, social distancing is complicated to implement. In the second meme, someone shows that they still carry out their work activities even though they have to keep their distance. With the help of a wooden stick, the worker lengthens the shaft of his shaving machine. This meme wants to show that maintaining a minimum distance of one meter in certain professions or occupations becomes challenging to do. Meanwhile, the demands for the cost of living require people to continue working to support their lives and their families. The third meme shows someone's creative actions to stay at least one meter away from other people. It is just that it annoys other people who are within reach of the tool. As a satire for the government, it is not easy to maintain a distance in public spaces, considering that everyone has a different level of need in accessing public spaces.</p>		

**4. Covid-19 narrative deconstruction as a deadly virus**

<b>SIGN</b>		
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">    </div>		
<b>SIGNIFIER</b>	<b>SIGNIFIED</b>	<b>EXTERNAL REALITY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Text: "Relax, do not be afraid of Corona. Remember!! We are alumni of the 2012 apocalypse.</li> <li>- Text: " There is no need to be too afraid of the coronavirus; in fact, warnings about the dangers of death on cigarette packs were ignored."</li> <li>- Text: "Nothing is crueler than covid-19 compared to the neighbor's more successful child."</li> </ul>	<p>Do not be afraid</p>	<p>Do not be afraid of covid-19 because there is something more dangerous than covid-19.</p>
<p>The government's narrative that COVID-19 is so deadly has been reduced to commonplace. According to society, other things are the most dangerous and deadly. The three memes each construct another reality that is more dangerous than COVID-19. Constructing this other reality means deconstructing the government narrative about the dangers of COVID-19. Even though the meme is invalid, as the first meme, are there any alumni of the 2012 apocalypse? Is not that just a phenomenon that gets much news but never actually happens? Likewise, in the third meme, can comparing with neighbor's children cause death and exposure to covid-19? Also not proven. It is just that the narrative built in the meme wants to remind all levels of society that fear of COVID-19 is normal. The message to be conveyed is that being cautious is better than being paranoid.</p>		

## 5. Narrative Deconstruction about Reducing Mobility and Working from Home

SIGN		
SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED	REALITAS EKSTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The text: "contagion of corona can die, not infected also die. You still have to work to feed your wife and children."</li> <li>- The text: "obey to corona, then the children and wife are starving!!"</li> <li>- The inscription: "The country cares, we must not die from the virus. However, the state has forgotten that we can die of hunger."</li> <li>- The text: "do not be panic about the corona, afraid that if your wife does not eat."</li> </ul>	Responsibility	Covid-19 is not a barrier to making a living.
<p>During the Covid-19 period, people's mobility was limited, including work. The community strongly opposed this. Some memes written on the back of the truck illustrate that people are against the ban on working outside the home and limiting people's mobility. If people are prohibited from leaving their homes to work, where do they pay for their living? People want to show a sense of responsibility in providing for their respective families through these memes. In the second meme, it is evident that the form of deconstruction of reality by the community is "The country cares, we must not die because of the virus" this is a narrative built by the government. However, the following phrase, "But the state forgets that we can die of hunger," shows a striking narrative of resistance to deconstruction to remind the government that hunger can also be a disaster that leads to death.</p>		

## CONCLUSION

Memes as replicators are symbols and associations that exist in the human mind and are used to replicate a specific form of culture or culture that can spread from one generation to another. The construction of memes in social media displayed by the public becomes another narrative as a form of protest, satire, or jokes against the big narrative conveyed by the government regarding Covid-19. The government builds a narrative that to overcome or overcome the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it must follow the government's recommendations. The meme can be interpreted as a deconstruction of the Covid-19 narrative from the government. People want to protest against the government, but policies can not be completely implemented in certain parts of government.

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