



## Case Study: Postruth Construction During The Covid 19 Pandemic

Edy Subali<sup>(1)</sup>, Enie Hendrajat<sup>(2)</sup>

*Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November, Indonesia*

*E-mail: <sup>(1)</sup>edysubali@gmail.com, <sup>(2)</sup>enie@mku.its.ac.id*

Received: 21 March 2022; Revised: 12 May 2022; Accepted: 20 May 2022

### Abstract

Postruth has many constructs, one of them is digital technology that causes social change, such as Post truth. As a new form of truth, post truth must be known to the public in the current era of disruption. This study aims to propose post truth as one of the constructions of transhumanism. To make it easy to understand, the research took case studies in cyberspace related to Covid-19 in Indonesia. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method is used to analyze post truth on Instagram social media. The results show that post truth as a construction of transhumanism has several arrangements. First, there is a post truth agent, namely the implementing party or subject who does post truth, this shows that the existence of digital technology makes humans have an ambivalent identity. Second, momentum, in this case of the covid pandemic and hot issues (disputes between regional leaders as the time for discourse to appear), momentum is the key that post truth can occur. This shows that technology is used to understand how we co-create human experience. Finally, people who concentrate on digital technology and cyberspace currently operate with the logic of surveillance capitalism, meaning that everything is measured by the number of clicks, engagement, and the duration of the audience watching. This shows the power of technology can be used to control the human mindset. We believe that these results have the potential to cause bias in the truth of information to the public, so this study suggests that public authorities should take all the necessary measures to enhance the literacy public to mitigating the negative impacts caused due to the post truth.

**Keywords:** Construction; Covid 19, Post truth;

### Introduction

Covid-19 is not the first deadly pandemic that has been faced by Indonesia. In 1918, the world has been suffered from Spanish flu including Indonesia which infected up to 200 million people worldwide. (Rivando, 2020). Both of the pandemics caused a large number of casualties. However, the Spanish flu happened after First World War when Indonesia was still a colonized country of the Dutch East Indies. Therefore, its infodemic was presented solely by the government at that time. It was different from covid-19 that happened after Indonesia got its independence. A lot of sources presented their versions as a part of the disruption era. Thereby, it raised some versions of truth that need to be supported and recognized as the single truth. This is called "post-truth" (McIntyre, 2018).

Post-truth is an era when the truth is based on sentiment and belief, instead of using facts and rationality. It is not only a concept of true reality but also the existence of truth (McIntyre, 2018). As a consequence, information can be seen as the "truth" as long as a large group agrees with it. This kind of phenomenon happened during the covid-19 pandemic. There were some accounts on social media that provided information. For example, some accounts on social media tried to educate people on how to deal with this pandemic. One of them is dr. Tirta's. His words suddenly became a consensus because of his massive followers who actively shared them with larger communities. Postruth research is important in the era of the pandemic, as an effort to minimize social anxiety during a pandemic in the era of disruption

Tirta Mandira Hudhi or dr. Tirta is a medical graduate of Gadjah Mada University who owns a shoe treatment business. Taken from Kompas Daily, he no longer practiced as a doctor since 2019 (Azhari, 2020). However, when the covid-19 outbreak occurred in Indonesia, he emerged as a covid-19 educator and volunteer. The society which is represented by the media treated his statements as the main source to re-post it on their Instagram accounts as if he were an authorized person who has the right to provide the information. Sadly, the credibility was unknown because it was just a hypothesis from a person who graduated from a medical school. This situation matched Karl Popper's concept of falsification: truth is a temporary hypothesis, law, or theory. It can be seen as "truth" as long as there is no error in it (Popper, 2008)

Hence, this is such an interesting phenomenon to analyze as a part of social changes towards the post-truth era when researches are almost being related to the media and internet, including Lewandowsky's post-truth misinformation (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). His research showed that post-truth tends to be the new mass media era, especially on social media, after the 2016 US presidential election between Trump and Clinton. In line with this, Irawan conducted post-truth research about Lambe Turah Instagram account. The results showed that Instagram accounts with millions of followers have the potential to create post-truth (Irawan & Fridha, 2018). Both studies proved that the post-truth phenomenon on social media is easily done by the post-modern society. It means research on dr. Tirta's Instagram needs to be done as a part of post-truth in Indonesia. The other research related to him and the new pandemic were seen as commodities: an influencer like dr. Tirta can act in persuasive communication (Alam, 2020).

Bell's cyber culture theory states that social media and human behavior support each other in the post-modern era because humans produce and take the information at the same time (Bell, 2006) This assumption is proven by Shelton in his research. It showed that the pandemic did not only reveal the inadequacy of infrastructure and data sets, in general, to solve pressing social problems, but also a more general shift towards the disposition of post-truth in contemporary social life (Shelton, 2020). However, as revealed in the study, it is wrong to say that the centrality of the data is the

opposite of the greater post-truth apparatus because basically the two are interrelated and produced together. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of post-truth research to make people being aware of the process of radical social change and its implications.

Several previous studies focused on the form of sentences or utterances as the center of post-truth research. However, this study will focus on the form of post-truth about infodemic in Indonesia as a democratic country where the freedom of speech is guaranteed by law and tend to create post-truth among its citizens. Thus, it was not only about written utterances or sentences but also on the momentum of the writing. Therefore it has the potential to produce a truth post rooted in the emotions of society.

## Literature Review

### Post-Truth Phenomena

The incidence of misinformation in 2016 prompted the Oxford Dictionary to nominate "post-truth" as the term of the year (Flood, 2016). Like postmodernism, post-structuralism, and other "post" terms, the concept of post-truth has the consequences of the notion that there was an era of truth and it once dominated belief and became a decision-maker in society (McIntyre, 2018). Since the beginning of human civilization, lies, and manipulation had been a part of political beliefs and discourses. In the Ancient Roman Republic, for example, populist speeches in the senate were more concerned with agility and rhetoric than data accuracy. Even in the modern era, hoaxes and sentiments had been fueled the greatest tragedy in history: Nazi propaganda in World War II.

As a concept, post-truth began to be discussed along with the development of the internet and new media which challenged the domination of mass media as information channels. The concept of "post-truth" is the golden age of the online mass media when they become dominant, determine the right and wrong, and curate the things which need to be known or ignored.

With this assumption, post-truth -such as climate denial (Lewandowsky et al., 2017) in the case of climate change- makes it hard to see how strong physical signals are given by reality. It can be identified as a rational strategy to pursue political goals. One implication of this view is the politics of post-truth can be stopped when it has limited effectiveness. It happens once the public realizes the ulterior motives of some political acts

and the difference between propaganda and the actual policies.

Social media like Instagram is one of the examples. It strengthens people's prejudice and beliefs although it may contain hoaxes and disinformation. One factor that helps to spread hoaxes is how people love to share "some news" without checking its credibility. Online information which has a lot of engagements is not the most accurate one. Instead, it confirms someone's prejudice and emotional reactions. Everything is measured by the number of clicks, engagements, and duration of watching it which encourages people to provide "comfortable" and easy information to digest.

### **Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis**

Fairclough builds a critical discourse analysis (CDA) model that contributes to social and cultural analysis. It combines the tradition of textual analysis, namely the meaning of language in a closed space with a wider community context (Fairclough, 2013). Fairclough understands CDA as the tension between two assumptions of language use: a language is structured and socially structured. The basis of his idea is a multifunctional linguistic theory embodied in Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. It states that every text has a national idealistic function through representations of this world and someone's experiences (Paul & Handford, 2012). Also, text produces social interactions between participants in discourse. It displays interpersonal functions. Finally, the text also has a textual function: text unites the separate components into a whole and combines them with conditional contexts, for example by using deixis.

By using the idea of multi-language functionality in text, Fairclough operates the theoretical assumption that text and discourse are socially structured. Thus, language usage is always simultaneously composed of social identities, social relations, and a system of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1992). The ideational functions of language form interpersonal knowledge function systems to create subjects or social identities or the relationship between both of them. It implies that each text contributes, at least, to make the three aspects of culture and society. It also defines that both identity of the relationship and knowledge can emerge together. Although, one aspect is being considered more important than the other.

Therefore, critical discourse analysis means an analysis of the connection between the concrete use of languages and wider social-cultural structures. This terminology becomes a connector between special events such as a TV documentary and a total structure of a discourse order nor its modifications, constituents, genres, and even its discourse.

### **Materials and Method**

This research applies Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method which begins with textual, discursive, and social practice analysis. The method fits the post-truth analysis because Fairclough argues that language, written and spoken, causes some social groups to compete with each other to make social changes (Fairclough, 1992). Post-truth is one of the social shifts that occur when people's opinions go along with their sentiments.

Identity and social relations are also the keys to the post-truth phenomenon. A critical discourse analysis explains the text and its connection to social change explicitly because it implies a constructed social identity that serves to create social relations.

CDA considers the use of text in a statement that represents a speaker's social identity to find patterns that caused a social movement. The utterances and statements of dr. Tirta on his Instagram feeds was grouped and analyzed. His speeches have become a trigger for his followers to contest the truth from the government. Here is the framework of Fairclough's CDA: The analysis of texts analyzing the forms and contents of dr. Tirta's utterances:

1. The analysis of discursive practice → à analyzing the relationship between the text and its social practices.
2. The analysis of social practice → à analyzing discursive events outside dr. Tirta's text and context.

First, the data was obtained from downloading dr. Tirta's Instagram TV on October 1, 2020 at 12.30 pm with the caption "Perbedaan data Pemprov Jatim dan Pemkot Surabaya". Words from dr. Tirta were linguistically analyzed to look for its ideological contents and patterns of his identity. Second, text production and some comments from netizens would be observed and analyzed as a part of the discourse practice. Third, the impact of the discourse spoken by dr. Tirta on social and cultural changes in Indonesia would be analyzed.

**Results and Discussion**

On October 1, 2020, dr Tirta uploaded to his Instagram account @dr.Tirta a video that exposed the difference in data regarding community adherence to health protocols for covid-19 from Pemerintah Provinsi Jawa Timur and Pemerintah Kota Surabaya. His comments in the video are transcribed below:

These utterances contain ideas that the data has been manipulated and misused by the East Java provincial government. It was submitted to President Jokowi during a visit to the Grahadi, Surabaya on June 25, 2020. The text conveys an ideology that the East Java provincial government 'attacks' the Surabaya city government led by Tri Rismaharini. On the other hand, the Surabaya city government decided to use its budget for the swab-free-program for Surabaya's residence. Fairclough stated that the ideology of discourse can be seen not only in the text utterance but also from the speakers as well (Fairclough, 2013).

As a person who was a graduate from one of the top universities in Indonesia, dr. Tirta gained 2 million followers on Instagram. It makes him an Instagram celebrity (celebgram). Thus, it legitimates his words, so that a lot of people will believe in him. Apart from that, his bold and ambitious personality made him a media headline when he scolds President Joko Widodo in one of his posts which fits the criteria of the ideal figure in Indonesia like Najwa Shihab. A post by dr. Tirta entitled #Indonesiaterserah on November 14, 2020, got a lot of engagements from 2.4 million

Tabel 1. Text Analysis

Text	Interpretation	Explanation
Surabaya ora salah apa-apa, dari awal mereka berjuang sendiri-an	Surabaya had no mistakes and was struggling alone without any helps from the provincial government of the East Java	The Mayor of Surabaya (Risma) was blamed by the central government because of Surabaya's status as a black zone regarding covid-19. She was seen as someone who did nothing to solve the problem.
Jokowi nggak tau apa-apa.	Jokowi didn't aware of the data manipulation.	Jokowi was neutral in this case. He did not take any sides with either the East Java provincial government or the Surabaya city government

Text	Interpretation	Explanation
Data bulan Mei diubah oleh pemprov menjadi bulan Juni lalu diseraahkan ke Pak Presiden, lalu presiden marah ke Bu Risma. Pemprov juga mengganti lokasi yang awalnya Jatim menjadi Surabaya Raya	The data in May was changed into June. Then, it was submitted to the president by the East Java provincial government. Moreover, they switched the locations from East Java into Surabaya Raya. As the result, the president became angry with Risma.	Data manipulation occurred.
Ayo pemprov Jatim klarifikasi!	Dr. Tirta asked the provincial government to clarify the data to Jokowi	Dr. Tirta forced the East Java provincial government to clarify the manipulation to the president.
Bu Risma memilih diam, memilih untuk mengakhiri drama. Bu Risma dibully se-Indonesia dan akhirnya menggunakan anggarannya sendiri untuk swab gratis. Se-Indonesia hanya Surabaya yang gratis.	Risma remains silent, even though she was bullied by people throughout Indonesia. They were deemed unable to work to control the spread of covid-19 in Great Surabaya. Risma shows the real work through the free-swab-program for the people in Surabaya	The Surabaya city government was responsive without extending the data manipulation problems

viewers. This number is way bigger than @satgascovid19.id as a government official accounts for covid-19 on the same date. They only got 106 viewers, although both of them explained similar information. It shows that the community is more attached to the speaker who supports prejudice and stimulates emotional reactions than formal institutions.

The post of dr. Tirta was a reaction to the news about Surabaya as a black zone and the way Tri Rismaharini as the mayor of Surabaya kneeling in front of dr. Sudarsono (Kompas.com 29 June 2021). He was

disappointed with the people who use covid-19 as a political weapon. He felt strange and wanted to investigate the incident which caused Risma to be falsely accused. The things that he did trigger extraordinary reactions from the community, especially for people who live in Surabaya.

After the investigation, he published it on his Instagram account. As expected, he got numerous comments that mentioned President Joko Widodo (@jokowi) and Najwa Shihab (@matanajwa and @najwashihab) to hold a more proper investigation regarding data validity. Besides, some comments were tagging the governor of East Java, Khofifah Indar Parawansa (@KhofifahIP), and the mayor of Surabaya Tri Rismaharini (@tri.rismaharini). A total of 10900 comments supported dr. Tirta's investigation although there were no official investigations yet by the authorities. The public seemed to think that his statements are true. It can also be concluded that the majority gave their supports to Tri Rismaharini and showed disbelief in Khofifah Indar Parawansa.

As the social practice dimension, the account of dr. Tirta has succeeded in making the public believe that there had been data manipulation by East Java provincial government. It happened because East Java and Surabaya's residents, in particular, needed an infodemic related to covid-19 as their guidelines in the new normal era. It means that the institutional practice of new media (Instagram) has created reconstructional information or the post-truth era. Such a shift in information changed the concept of public truth similar to the Gutenberg revolution (the invention of the mass printing in 1440) when people got more attracted to emotions and prejudices than objective facts. However, it does not mean that the new concept of truth is inferior, or more inaccurate than it was before. Through this dimension, something which is described as "real" is not important anymore to society. In the real world, there are no clarifications or discussions about this from the East Java provincial government as stated by dr. Tirta. Because of the huge number of responses and viewers of this account, large mass news media such as Kompas made a story that dr. Tirta is a hero (Azhari, 2020). It can be inferred that dr. Tirta's statements through his account were reposted by @aslisuroboyo made the public have trust in dr. Tirta than the provincial government of East Java.

## Discussion

Fairclough's CDA analysis on @dr.Tirta

show the construction of a post-truth on the flow of information media in Indonesia. Dr. Tirta's role is similar to Trump's during the 2016 US presidential election, conveying sentiment discourse to the public as indicated by Lewandowsky (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). The difference lies in proving the data. Trump's discourse can be proven as a lie by the public. Meanwhile, the discourse of data manipulation during the pandemic in East Java has no scientific evidence. Although it is not scientifically proven, this discourse has created public doubts regarding covid-19 infodemic by the time public opinion "covid-19 data can be manipulated" emerged in some online media such as jakarta.suara.com on September 2, 2020 (Ariefana, 2020). The unproven truth but that has received public sympathy is what McIntyre calls a post-truth phenomenon (McIntyre, 2018). Infodemic covid-19 is needed by the community as a means of education and information. However, the disruption such as dr. Tirta puts people in a situation where they have to choose which one is the trustworthy media or party. In other words, it can be said that dr. Tirta is an agent of post-truth.

Public trust in this discourse can not be separated from the right momentum. Tirta posted this in early October when the issue of Governor Khofifah Indar Parawansa's alleged dispute with Mayor Tri Rismaharini emerged. In May, Indonesia's mass media was filled with the feud between two leaders related to their different opinions on the PSBB and the PCR car (Putri, 2020). According to Prayitno, it started from the 2018 East Java gubernatorial election when Risma became Khofifah's opponent (Putri, 2020). People may think that there is still a rivalry between them. So, Tirta exploited the public's anxiety and rage through his post. As the consequence, it triggered prejudice and stimulate emotional reactions. Momentum is a part of how post-truth runs. It takes advantage of previous sentiments (McIntyre, 2018).

Finally, the analysis of the covid-19 infodemic on social media shows the failure of mainstream media such as Jawa Pos, Kompas and Tempo failed to attract public attention by providing information that the public like. Those media keep focusing on checking the data and restrain themselves from publishing it unless it is accurate or becomes viral on social media. In this case, Tirta did the publication

via Instagram first. He received positive responses from the public. Then, other mainstream media followed him and chose the same topic, otherwise, most Indonesian would not get interested. It happens because the internet currently operates with the logic of surveillance capitalism. Everything is measured by the number of clicks, engagement, and duration of the audience watching. It gives more incentive to provide information that is "comfortable" and easy for people. These findings indicate that the covid-19 infodemic has the potential to give a post-truth phenomenon because it is in an era of disruption when people are consuming the covid-19 infodemic with not considering much on the truth (Shelton, 2020).

## Conclusion

CDA analysis of dr. Tirta's speech finds post-truth construction in infodemic covid-19. Three things create this situation: first, dr. Tirta is a post-truth agent; second, the covid pandemic and hot issues (a dispute between the two regional leaders as the trigger for the emergence of discourse); third, the internet community is currently operating with the logic of surveillance capitalism. The post-truth construction in the covid-19 infodemic has the potential to erode people's belief in Indonesia about the dangers of covid-19.

## References

- Alam, S. (2020). *PERAN INFLUENCER SEBAGAI KOMUNIKASI PERSUASIF UNTUK PENCEGAHAN COVID-19 THE ROLE OF INFLUENCER AS PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION FOR COVID- 19 PREVENTION*. 8(2), 136–148.
- Ariefana, P. (2020, September). Siapa Pria Bernama Tito, Pembongkar Manipulasi Data COVID-19? *Suara Jakarta .Com*.
- Azhari, J. R. (2020). Cerita Dokter Tirta, Influencer yang Terjun Langsung Lindungi Tenaga Medis dari Covid-19. *Kompas.Com*, metropolitan.
- Bell, D. (2006). An Introduction to Cybercultures. In *An Introduction to Cybercultures*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203192320>
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (second edi). Routledge.
- Flood, A. (2016). *Post-truth' named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries*.
- Irawan, R. E., & Fridha, M. (2018). *Critical Discourse Analysis of Lambe Turah Instagram Account as Post Truth Era Inauguration: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Lambe Turah Instagram Account on Second Nyonyah Edition*. 260(Icomacs), 185–188. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icomacs-18.2018.45>
- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. (2017). Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the "Post-Truth" Era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 6(4), 353–369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2017.07.008>
- McIntyre, L. (2018). *Post Truth*. The MIT Press.
- Paul, J., & Handford, M. (2012). *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Routledge.
- Popper, K. (2008). *Logika penemuan Ilmiah* (P. & S. A. S (ed.)). Pustaka Pelajar.
- Putri, B. U. (2020, May). Rivalitas Politik Dibalik Silang Pendapat Risma-Khofifah. *Tempo. Com*.
- Rivando. (2020). Belajar dari Pandemi Flu Spanyol 1918. *Kompas*.
- Shelton, T. (2020). A post-truth pandemic? *Sage Publication*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720965612>