

The Differences of Perception between Students and Lecturers in Response to the Conspiracy Theories and Hazard of Covid-19

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Abstract

The objectives of the research are to determine the different perceptions of students and lecturers in responding to conspiracy theories, to determine differences perceptions of students and lecturers in responding to the hazard of Covid-19. The research was conducted in August-September 2020. The population in the research were all students and lecturers of Muhammadiyah Metro University. Sampling in the research by using simple random sampling. The total number of students at Muhammadiyah Metro University was 5475 students and participants in the research were 675 students (12.32%). Meanwhile, from 195 lecturers in Muhammadiyah Metro University participated in the research consist of 78 lecturers (40%). Data analysis of the research was conducted by using an Independent Sample t-test. In the second research, data from respondents were analyzed by using Pearson product-moment correlation to analyze the correlation between perceptions of conspiracy theories and the hazard of Covid-19. The results of the research showed that there was a very significant difference in perceptions between students and lecturers on conspiracy theories ($t = 5.483, p < 0.01$). Lecturers have a higher level of education than students, this assumes that the

level of education affects the perceptions of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories that are generally built on irrational thinking and without empirical support tend to be easily trusted to the conspiracy theories. The individuals who have lower analytical skills and lack information support tend to be easily trusted to the conspiracy theories too. However, the results showed that there was no difference in perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19 between students and lecturers ($t = 1.665, p > 0.05$). This result indicates that understanding the hazards of Covid-19 does not depend on the level of education. This research confirms that various Covid-19 conspiracy theories do not tend to reduce individual perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19. The Covid-19 phenomenon has become a world issue as a dangerous pandemic. Based on the belief about these hazards, efforts to anticipate the transmission of Covid-19 can be carried out together by implementing health protocols for all academicians.

Keywords

Covid-19, Hazards of Covid-19, Lecturers Perception, Students Perception, Conspiracy Theory.

1. Introduction

In early 2020, Covid-19 has begun to the pandemic in Indonesia. The Covid-19 pandemic demands that various sectors make changes to adapt to the pandemic situation. One of the sectors affected is the education sector. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in all levels of education starting to carry out an adaptation process and higher education (Basilaia, 2020). Higher education must continue to conduct all of its activities in the Covid-19 pandemic. Pandemics also have a higher hazard than epidemics because Covid-19 is spreading rapidly among humans and in more significant numbers than before. Pandemics have many effects on the processes of cognition, emotions, and human behavior in people's lives, so giving rise to alertness and readiness to anticipate them (Agung, 2020; Muhfahroyin et al., 2020). Based on this pandemic, almost all aspects of life have been disrupted. Health protocols were conducted to make a barrier to Covid-19 virus transmission (WHO, 2020a; 2020b). One of the health protocols is the prohibition of gathering and social distancing wherever peoples stay (social and physical distancing). In line with this, Yanti et al. (2020) stated that the community towards social distancing policies controls the Covid-19 pandemic. Its means is detrimental to activities that gather people in one place, including in the education and learning process.

The Ministry of Education has urged distance learning by utilizing online media for elementary schools to tertiary institutions (PP Muhammadiyah, 2020). This policy was issued to prevent the campus from becoming a new cluster to spread the Covid-19 pandemic. This information is based on the Ministry's primary concern is students' health and safety, lecturers, and staff. Besides, students will increasingly engage in virtual activities (Muhfahroyin and Susanto, 2018). By organizing an online learning process, it is hoped that it can suppress the Covid-19 transmission. Likewise, local governments in Indonesia issue strict rules so that educational institutions are willing to implement health protocols. For example, in Metro City Lampung, the mayor has issued some regulations regarding the rules for the health protocol of Covid-19. District Regulation (Perwali) Number 31 of 2020 contains restrictions on crowding prohibition, one of which is the implementation of online learning at each educational institution in the Metro City. The mayor was announced that there are punishments for people violating the rules (Lampost, 2020). Managers of higher education in Metro are trying to adapt to the direction set by the mayor. The Minister of Education formulated many policies, so the academic activities must to held with the health protocols of Covid-19 (Muhfahroyin et al., 2020; Dhawan, 2020).

Higher education managers need to the attention to the social dynamics of the academic community in higher education before determining new adaptive policies. Not all academicians agree that activities in higher education need health protocol procedures. However, there are some peoples in higher education resistant to conducting academic activities with health protocols. The Directorate General of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education surveyed online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic shows that 89.17% of respondents do not like teaching online learning (jogja.idntimes.com). The study results Zamista et al. (2020) stated that the students who were taking calculus courses, the majority of students did not like learning. Other research found out that students felt bored and did not like the implementation of online learning (Azhari & Kurniawati, 2021; Ningsih, 2020). Some of the research results indicate that the students did not find it interesting to implement online learning. Students' dislike of implementing online education has made it difficult for college managers to implement an adaptive learning process according to the rules of health protocol.

Many factors can influence the peoples in implementing the health protocol of Covid-19, for example, belief in conspiracy theories (Alper et al., 2020; Bierwiazzonek et al., 2020) and perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19

(Yang et al., 2020). So it is necessary to insight how the perceptions of the academic community regarding issues related to conspiracy theories and the hazards of Covid-19. The academic community in the university consists of students and lecturers who have different educational backgrounds. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), a lecturer in an Indonesian tertiary institution must graduate with an S2 degree (master). The difference in education levels allows for different perceptions regarding the issues of the Covid-19 conspiracy and the hazards of Covid-19. Some studies suggest that belief in conspiracy theories can influence education level (Douglas et al., 2017; Georgiou et al., 2020; Prooijen & Vugt, 2018).

Not all conspiracy theories are wrong (for example, the watergate scandal), but most conspiracy theories are built without adequate empirical support (Prooijen & Vugt, 2018). The level of education influences irrational views that are produced without solid practical consent. The lower level of education, which tends to be more irrational, becomes the cause of belief in conspiracy theories. Individuals who have a higher education have more logical reasoning because individuals are more educated and have the opportunity to get complete information (Prooijen, 2014). Belief in conspiracy theories regarding Covid-19 is hypothesized to influence perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19. Individuals who believe in the Covid-19 conspiracy theory tend to ignore preventive efforts to prevent the dangers of Covid-19 (Alper et al., 2020). The perception of the academic community in a university is interesting to research regarding conspiracy theories and the hazards of Covid-19. The research was conducted to know the differences between students and lecturers in perceptions of Covid-19.

2. Methods

The research was conducted by using quantitative methods. The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Metro University. The research populations were students and lecturers at Muhammadiyah Metro University in the Academic Year 2019/2020. The study was conducted in August-September 2020. Sampling in the research was conducted by using a simple random sample. The total number of active students at Muhammadiyah Metro University were 5475 people, participated in the research consist of 675 students (12.32%). Meanwhile, total lecturers Metro Muhammadiyah University were 195 lecturers and participated in the research consist of 78 lecturers (40%). Researchers set the minimum sample size as 10% of the population. Data regarding beliefs in conspiracy theories and perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19 are obtained through Likert scale questions. The level of confidence in conspiracy theories is measured using a moving scale interval from 1–5. A score of 1 indicates the lowest belief in a conspiracy theory, while a score of 5 indicates the firmest faith in a conspiracy theory. Likewise, the perception variable of the hazards of Covid-19 was measured using a Likert scale. A score of 1 indicates the perception that Covid-19 is not dangerous, while a score of 5 indicates the perception that Covid-19 is very hazardous.

In the first study, the data from respondents were analyzed using the Independent sample t-test to know differences in beliefs about conspiracy theories and perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19 between students and lecturers. Independent sample t-test requires that the data distribution of the dependent variable is normally distributed. When the number of subjects studied is more than 30 people, theoretically, the data can be said to have a normal distribution (Chao, 2017). In the second study, data from respondents were analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation formula to know the correlation between beliefs in conspiracy theories and perceptions against the hazards of Covid-19. The data analysis was carried out by using SPSS version 24.

3. Results and Discussion

The total number of students was 5475, while the lecturers were 195 people. The research sample of students and lecturers ranged 10 - 40%, the data descriptions of the research can be seen in Table 1. The graphic of students' belief in conspiracy theories can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. The graphic of the level of lecturers' belief in hazards of Covid-19 can be seen in Figures 3 and 4.

Table 1. The data descriptions of the research respondents

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beliefs in conspiracy theories	Students	665	3.3519	1.05115	.04076
	Lecturers	78	2.7692	.86675	.09814
Perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19	Students	675	4.3067	.78894	.03037
	Lecturers	78	4.1795	.61883	.07007

The researchers used the t-test to know differences in beliefs about conspiracy theories and perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19. The results of the t-test analyzed can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The results of the t-test analysis

Variabel	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig (2 – tailed)
Beliefs in conspiracy theories	0.58265	5,483	105,494	P < 0,01
Perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19	0.127179	1,665	108,204	P > 0,05

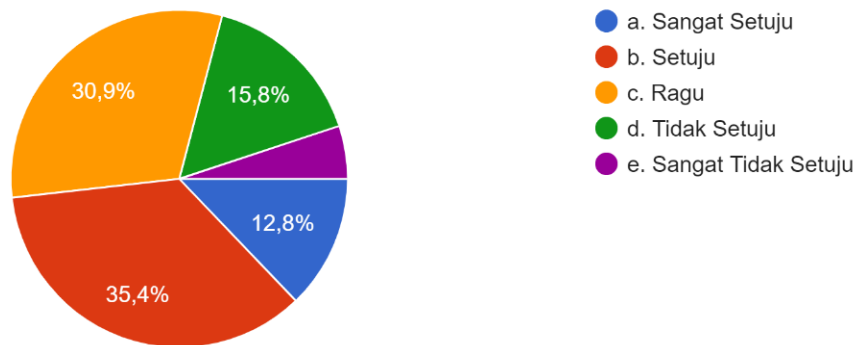


Figure 1. Graphic of the level of students' belief in conspiracy theories.

Information:

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Doubt
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

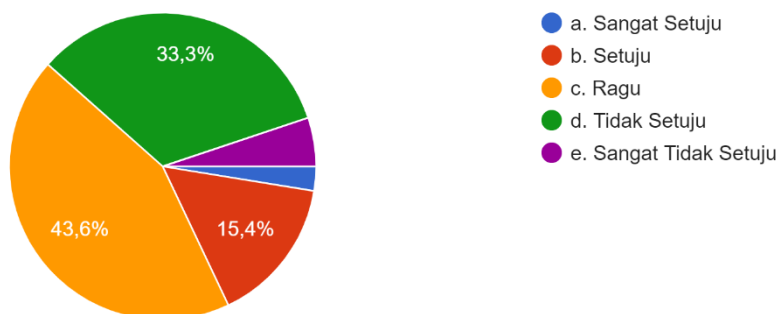


Figure 2. Graphic of the level of lecturers' belief in conspiracy theories.

Information:

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Doubt

- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

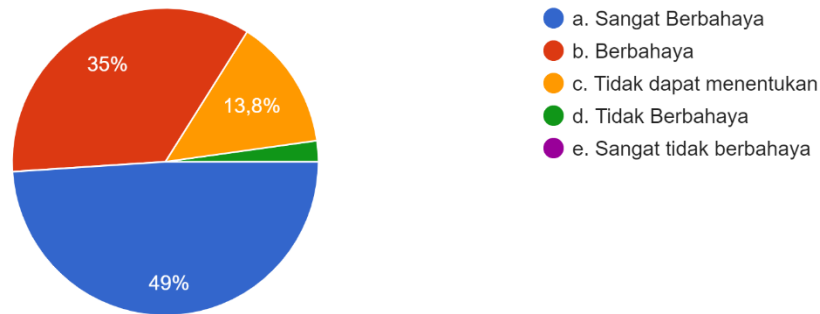


Figure 3. Graphic of the students' perceptions about the hazards of Covid-19.

Information:

- a. Very dangerous
- b. Dangerous
- c. Doubt
- d. Harmless
- e. Very harmless

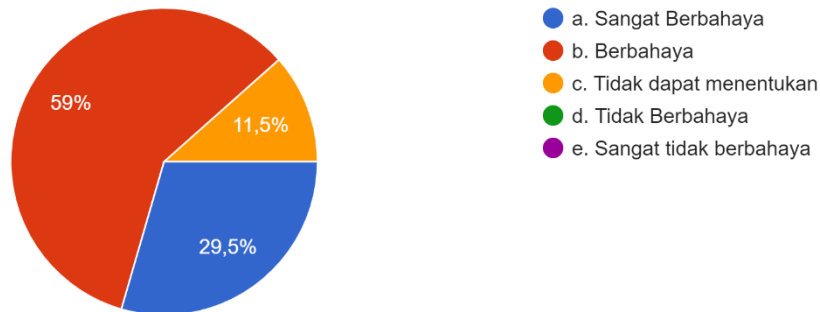


Figure 4. Graphic of the lecturers' perceptions about the hazards of Covid-19.

Information:

- a. Very dangerous
- b. Dangerous
- c. Doubt
- d. Harmless
- e. Very harmless

The data analysis results showed a significant difference in belief about conspiracy theories between students and lecturers ($t = 5.483, p < 0.01$). The study results support some previous research that the level of education affects a person's belief in conspiracy theories (Douglas et al., 2017; Georgiou et al., 2020; Prooijen & Vugt, 2018). Lecturers have a higher level of education than students. This data assumes that the level of education affects belief in conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theories are generally built based on irrational thinking and without any empirical support. Individuals with low education levels tend to have more inadequate analytical skills and less support for information about conspiracy theories. Meanwhile, individuals who have a higher education have logical reasoning. This phenomenon is due to more educated individuals and has complete information (Prooijen, 2014). The research results

are based on the notion that the analytical ability of conspiracy theories is based on the level of education. Poor analytical skills make the events of everyday life seem out of control and difficult to explain. The insight makes individuals compensate with beliefs against conspiracy theories (Georgiou et al., 2019). Conspiracy theories are used as compensation in explaining life because they only require a more superficial rational analysis. As is well known, conspiracy theories are built from pieces of events that are not necessarily related to each other but are believed by conspiracy theorists to be interrelated.

An example is a question about Covid-19, whether Covid-19 is artificial or occurs due to natural factors. The conspiracy theorists that Covid-19 were artificial, linked pieces of information that Covid-19 first spread around China military laboratories. These pieces of information are analyzed to jump to the conclusion that an army laboratory-made Covid-19. This theory's originators ignore the fact that this theory needs to be supported by confirms scientific evidence that the virus is artificial. If it is fake, then further scientific evidence is required that there has been a leak or an attempt by certain people who spread the Covid-19 virus intentionally. Conspiracy theorists used to get their information from non-scientific sources (i.e., social media). Individuals with lower levels of education tend to have difficulty distinguishing fiction from non-science or articles from facts. In effect, conspiracy theorists cannot differentiate whether stories on social media (non-scientific articles) are fact or fiction (Georgiou et al., 2019).

The data analysis results showed no difference in perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19 between students and lecturers ($t = 1.665$, $p > 0.05$). Even though they have different levels of education, they do not create different perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19. This fact indicates that the perception of dangers regarding Covid-19 does not depend on the level of education. Students and lecturers have the same opinion in evaluating whether Covid-19 is dangerous or not. Research by Stanarević, Faletar & Badurina (2016) found that individual perceptions of disease do not correlate with the individuals' knowledge about the disease. This fact confirms that an individual's level of information and knowledge about disease does not affect an individual's perception of the disease. Likewise, at the educational level, individuals who have a lower level of education who may have less knowledge of the disease do not reduce their perception of disease hazards. This perception can happen to individual perceptions in assessing the level of Covid-19 risks. The correlation test results between belief in conspiracy theories and the perception of the dangers of Covid-19 can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of Pearson test

Variabel	N	r	Sig (2 – tailed)
Beliefs in conspiracy theories* Perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19	743	-0,147	p < 0,01

The data analysis showed a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.147$, $p < 0.01$) between belief in conspiracy theories and perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19. Based on the data analysis can be explained that the more believing in conspiracy theories (high scores), the more individuals perceive harmlessness (low scores). The research results confirm that individuals who believe in conspiracy theories tend to underestimate the hazards of Covid-19. This analyzis explains the dangers of conspiracy theories regarding Covid-19. Various Covid-19 conspiracy theories tend to reduce individual responses to the dangers of Covid-19.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in belief in conspiracy theories between students and lecturers ($t = 5.483$, $p < 0.01$). Conspiracy theories built based on irrational thinking and without strong empirical support tend to be easily trusted by individuals who have less education and are less informed about conspiracy theories. However, the results showed no difference in perceptions between students and lecturers about the hazards of Covid-19 ($t = 1.665$, $p > 0.05$). This analysis indicates that the understanding of the dangers of Covid-19 does not depend on the level of education. This research result is confirmed by Stanarević, Faletar & Badurina (2016) which found that the individual perceptions of disease do not correlate with the knowledge. Meanwhile, the correlation test results showed a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.147$, $p < 0.01$) between belief in conspiracy theories and perceptions of the hazards of Covid-19. This result confirms that various Covid-19 conspiracy theories tend to reduce individual perception about the dangers of Covid-19.

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