

Usage of social media

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ACADEMIC PAPER

Usage of social media during the pandemic: Seeking support and awareness about COVID-19 through social media platforms

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Social media have become popularly use to seek for medical information and have fascinated the general public to collect information regarding corona virus pandemics in various perspectives. During these days, people are forced to stay at home and the social media have connected and supported awareness and pandemic updates. The present study aims at highlighting the present situation of Indonesian society, where the outbreak position is quite high. The study collects the data from social media users from March and April 2020. The data were also compiled from the secondary sources, like opinions, the literature and scientific articles from reputable journals. The total number of 348 responses were collected from respondents through random sampling technique, and the majority respondents show positive attitudes toward using social media as medical information instruments. The results demonstrate that social media have been used to seek social supports from the respondents' online networks and offline friends, relatives, and colleagues. The study also examines that the usage of social media platforms is perceived as easy and accessible to every individual for sharing, posting, and reacting to any medical information regarding the pandemic. Since people continue work from home, and ensuring the social distance, so, the majority of users have seen family and friends have provided support and attempt to raise awareness by sharing and circulating a range of information within their closed-social network.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In February 2020, people in the society of Wuhan, China faced a new kind of pandemic disaster that largely spread into the world. The virus has rapidly affected hundreds and millions of people in just few months (Duan & Zhu, 2020; Haleem, Javaid, & Vaishya, 2020; Kwok, Lai, Wei, Wong, & Tang, 2020; Lei et al., 2020; Rasmussen & Jamieson, 2020). It infected various people and thousands deaths, which later, the World Health Organization advised for social distancing and quarantine of all the affected areas (Wang, Horby, Hayden, & Gao, 2020). The similar condition goes to Indonesia, the public interactions have been reduced and the government of Indonesia has changed their country policies to go for lockdown, smart lockdown, new normal, and advised for minimum physical

interactions. The present situation in Indonesia is reported that 1,520 people are deaths and over 25,216 are affected, and 6,492 recovered. People with COVID-19 are forced to use social media and digital platforms to contribute their routines¹ (Verawardina et al., 2020). The government of Indonesia has implemented several actions to reduce the physical interactions, such as the closure of universities, government buildings, and public places for the sake of public safety, and suggested to work from home (Djalante et al., 2020). The situation of the corona outbreak also affected the decision-making of management (Al Eid & Arnout, 2020). However, to reduce the physical interaction and get awareness, or update regarding current situation, social media platforms have become significant tool for communication and the continuation for the people's routines. Bailey, Bonifield, and Arias (2018) examined that

online social networking sites are useful to measure and to understand the geographical structure of the social networks.

Social distancing, travel restrictions, quarantine, and closing the business outlets have changed the fabric of society. With people have been forced out of the safety and well-being of their routine, their social media have taken at the center stage more than ever, and to global social networking and discussions (Chan, Nickson, Rudolph, Lee, & Joynt, 2020; Thelwall & Thelwall, 2020). The social media information have a wide effect on the individuals and groups that connect to the online world to seek information for families, friends, and the general public (Mageto, 2019). Previous studies have mentioned that the social media have made panic travelers because of the massive information from not authentic sources (Depoux et al., 2020). The frequency of information about the outbreak of the corona virus, is regularly increasing and more data on the transmission on its route, clinical outcome, including survival rates, which are being collected around the world (Corman et al., 2019; Ranney, Griffith, & Jha, 2020). At a time when we have no other tool in hand to combat COVID-19, other than nonpharmaceutical interventions such as quarantine and social distancing, thus the support of social media would be harnessed and to enhance the needed mobilization of the public and local communities to follow quarantine procedures, quickly decrease the spread of fears and uncertainty, and enhance public trust in public health measures (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020).

Social media can and should be harnessed to support the public health response. For instance, in China during the massive community-wide quarantine, it is particularly important to use social media wisely as social media provide an opportunity to communicate the reasons for quarantine, providing reassurance and practical advice to pre-empt rumors and panic. Moreover, previous research has revealed the importance of social media in medical treatment and information (Galatsatos, Porto-Carreiro, Hayashi, Zakaria, & Christmas, 2016; Sutherland & Jalali, 2017). The social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, have opened up new avenues and set up a new model of the communication channels (Kaur & Manhas, 2018; Ochonogor & Mutula, 2020). Saud, Ida, and Mashud (2020) investigated the activities performed on social media and demonstrated that social media have a progressive impact on individuals. According to other studies, posts, or tweets on themes also contribute to be an interesting public discussion on social media (Dubois, Gruz, & Jacobson, 2020). Apart from that, the exponential use of social media in Indonesia as a source of public information has altered the pattern of social interactions (Lim, 2018). This is due to social media particular characteristics that enable every user to not only share the information but also post their ideas as well. The social media features also allow anyone active to engage and get involved with a wider public outside. Every social media activist can even take on the role of a message distributor (Marshall, 2020). Some experts have, thus, declared that social media are the decisive factor in the intense change of the communication structure, and have been shifted the transition era from the print era to the interactive digital communication (Ahmed, Vveinhardt, & Streimikiene, 2017).

This current study introduces a new function of social media as medical information platforms in the global connected world ranging from Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Line and WhatsApp during the pandemic situation. It might help to the epidemiologists and health communication experts to aware of current updates regarding any medical information in this global world. In this article, we examine the strengths of social media in promoting social support, awareness, and updates of the global situation. We argue that social media provide opportunities to hundreds and millions of users to keep updated and informed about medical information through posts, comments, videos, pictures, and others in their everyday routines. The objective of the study is to share the opinion of public regarding the positive use of social media for medical information, and to provide the map of social media use and access for gaining information, discussing, as well as distributing medial information within the people's closed-network like family and friends.

2 | STUDY METHODS

In this section, we explain the data procedure and collection for this study on social media and pandemic. The present study applied a quantitative research to collect the data through an online survey. A research instrument based on opened and closed-ended questions was prepared to gather the responses. The respondents were targeted and approached through WhatsApp messenger and posted on Facebook via an online google form. The online form was limited to the citizens of Indonesia. The data compiled through primary and secondary data, such as previously published articles, opinion regarding research on COVID-19 special issues from reputable publishers and journals. The data were collected between March and April 2020, and it was started from the city of Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia. The results were coded and first presented in Microsoft excel, and analyzed in SPSS V.25 & Jamovi, which is then presented with frequency distribution tables. It is also to add that there were 36 missing data were also reported, and later on deleted. So, the total number of 348 responses were tested and verified.

The data illustrated the socio-demographic variables like age, gender, formal education, marital status, and area of living. Other tables discusses about the social media and seeking medical information, which shows whether or not the social media platforms are useful for pandemic information. We have categorized social media platforms such as, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Line, and YouTube, and asking how people calculate their average daily use of each platform, and whether or not social media have helped them to aware of the outbreaks and how people are collecting medical information from social media about pandemics, and questioning whether the information gained has changed their behavior or not.

Seeking social support from social media during outbreak is unique and might a new form of communication information for medical treatment, which goes under several variables are; my colleagues are sending me good wishes on social media, my friends are sending me prayers for me and my family, relatives are sending me video and

audio messages inquiring about my situation, many people have sent me medical information related to this virus, my social media friends have shared innovative ways to keep myself busy at home, they also sent me religious texts to remain safe from this virus, few friends have shared their experiences of social distancing and staying at home, online friends have guided me how to boost my immune system, and ensuring social support people sent me messages on social media if I need any kind of help. Hence, these scales and variables were compiled the responses from the respondents.

3 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 briefly demonstrates the sociodemographic status of 348 respondents in the study. The data show around (248) 71.3% are females and (100) 28.7% are males; those who participated in filling online survey questionnaires. The majority of respondents who are using social media to access and seek medical information about the pandemic around 21–25 years, or young people who actively engaged with social media platforms. Moreover, young-adult people age between 26–30 years old and 31–35 years old are also among the active users of social media in Indonesia, even they do not use multiple platforms, only use one or two accounts. People under 20 years old are very rare in accessing information regarding COVID-19 and so do people over 36 years old. The data also show the marital status, which was categorized on the bases of Single, Married, and Divorce; and greater percentage of the population are single (56%), than are married and only a few were divorced.

The use of social media platforms to seek medical information and its impacts does not only occupy by those who live in urban areas,

but also by the people living in rural areas, since the access of mobile internet have been made easy by the Indonesian government. This study have collected respondents who live in urban areas by 57.5% and 42.5% are residents of the of rural or urban outskirts. Additionally, it is important to know the educational background, which is scaled by Master, Bachelor, Intermediate (college level), and Schoolings. The results explains that the majority of respondents hold bachelor education (46%), Master (8.6%), Intermediate or college level of education are (29.3%), and while schooling or have less education scale raised (16.1%).

Table 2 discusses various general variables that indicate how social media is useful to gain or collect information about outbreak situation at the local or global level. Social media have provided many opportunities for the global world to participate and be part of the online community (Sobré-Denton, 2016). Several platforms connected people to people for their online social life like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Line. Medical researchers found that online platforms for COVID 19 pandemic are useful to get current updates on it (Ferrara, 2020). This current study examines the "map" of social media usage for seeking information for COVID 19 in the global world, and as can be seen from the Table 2 above mentioned that the majority (39.7%) of respondents are using WhatsApp as a more accurate and current informative application for these days than other platforms. Meanwhile Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Line are perceived as useful apps for the information sharing and awareness about the pandemics. As respondents regularly use social media mobile applications, which were scaled in hours, we gained the picture that respondent predominantly consumed "up to two hours" (30.7%) on their social media and are active on it. The rests confirmed that they used social media for "up to half an hour" (23.6%) followed by those who used "up to an hour" (13.2%), "up to 1.5 hours" (17%), and "up to three hours" (15.5%). These people stated that they regularly use their social media account(s) for checking daily pandemic updates. This suggest from few studies that presented the average ratio of using social media accounts are beneficial for the learning and news updates (Dong, Du, & Gardner, 2020).

People see social media have benefitted them to various interests, so when we ask their opinion whether "social media have helped to aware of pandemic," the majority of respondents (67.5%) stated agreed that their social media are useful to learn and collect information about the illness. Whereas, a small portion (20.4%) have negative remarks, but others (12.4%) have no opinion regarding social media as a useful tool for general awareness. However, the people are aware that social media are actually helping them in keeping update, and changing their behavior toward precaution and safety of their own and family. When we asked them whether information on social media have changed their behaviors or not, the people confirmed that 34.5% of respondents feel good with the information gained from the social media and have influenced their behavior regarding precautions or safety in the society.

Table 3 discusses the use of social media as social supporting during the outbreak of corona virus in this global world (Figure 1). Various variables were listed in the questionnaire to know the public opinion

TABLE 1 Demographic variables (n=348)

Variables	Categories	Count	Column N %
Sex	Male	100	28.7
	Female	248	71.3
Age	Below 20	19	5.5
	21 to 25	180	51.7
	26 to 30	93	26.7
	31 to 35	42	12.1
	36 above	14	4.0
Marital status	Single	195	56.0
	Married	150	43.1
	Divorced	03	0.9
Area of living	Urban	200	57.5
	Rural	148	42.5
Fomal education	Bachelor	160	46.0
	Intermediate	102	29.3
	Master	30	8.6
	Schooling	56	16.1

Source: survey questionnaire.

Variables	Categories	F	%
Which social media platform is useful for COVID 19 information?	Facebook	65	18.7
	YouTube	16	4.6
	Instagram	62	17.8
	WhatsApp	138	39.7
	Line	67	19.3
Average daily use of each platform	Up to half an hour	82	23.6
	Up to 1 hr	46	13.2
	Up to 1.5 hr	59	17.0
	Up to 2 hr	107	30.7
	Up to 3 hr	54	15.5
Social media helped to aware about COVID 19	Yes	234	67.2
	No	71	20.4
	No opinion	43	12.4
Does social media information for COVID 19 has changed your behavior?	Good	120	34.5
	Moderate	206	59.2
	Poor	22	6.3

TABLE 2 Social media for information seeking during outbreak (n=348)

Source: Survey questionnaire.

on their response to social media for social support. In response to these variables, the majority respondents (38.8%) stated that it is absolutely true that there is corona-virus outbreak. Their colleagues or co-workers were indicated as persons who actively sending good wishes on social media. During these days, the government of Indonesia has banned and restricted public and private offices to work from home, hence, colleagues are sending wishes and guiding their fellows for care and healthy life. The respondents said that friends are sending prayers on social media for them and their family which indicate a strong social ties and care. The respondents (37.4%) said that they have received comments or messages for taking care during a pandemic. Medical researchers suggest that friends or peers are helping in healing or quick recoveries (Hamblen et al., 2019; McPeake, Iwashyna, Devine, Mac-Tavish, & Quasim, 2017). Thus, receiving such information or advice from friends inclined the strong social support which can be seen in Figure 2.

Additionally, social media are perceived as the suitable tool to share videos, pictures and other material for any health or medical information (Galiatsatos et al., 2016). In this outbreak, the respondents' relatives also continue to send, share videos and audio messages inquiring about their health situation. This signifies that other people seems to show their interests and to know about their health condition. Empathy among the respondents' social networks have increased during the pandemic situation, and people feel not alone in facing the hard situation. The result shows that the respondents (35.1%) saw positive to those who have shared and sent video, audio, and pictures to relatives and family members about the pandemic information. In order to get awareness about medical treatment and cure in this outbreak, many people have sent medical information on social media related to this virus; this study, nevertheless, shows that the respondents not only relied on their closed-network's information

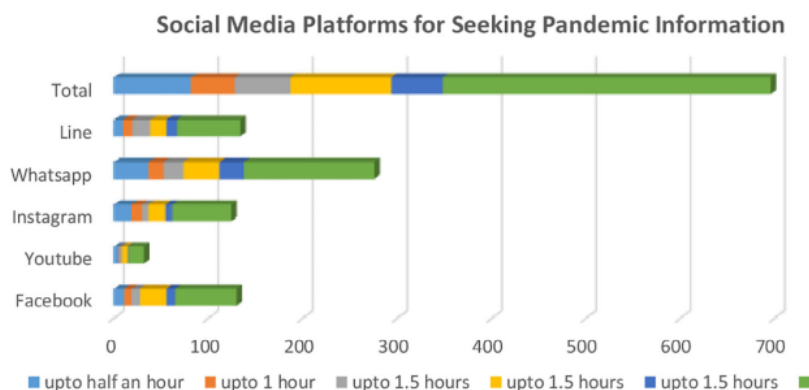


FIGURE 1 Social media platforms for seeking pandemic information

TABLE 3 Social media as social support during outbreak (n=348)

Social media and social support		F	%
Colleagues are sending good wishes on social media.	Absolutely true	135	38.8
	True	112	32.2
	Somewhat true	67	19.3
	Somewhat untrue	21	6.0
	Untrue	13	3.7
Friends are sending prayers on social media for me and my family.	Absolutely true	102	29.3
	True	130	37.4
	Somewhat true	67	19.3
	Somewhat untrue	25	7.2
	Untrue	24	6.9
Relatives are sending video and audio messages inquiring about my situation.	Absolutely true	122	35.1
	True	96	27.6
	Somewhat true	23	6.6
	Somewhat untrue	28	0.8
	Untrue	79	22.7
People have sent medical information on social media related to this virus.	Absolutely true	127	36.5
	True	91	26.1
	Somewhat true	55	15.8
	Somewhat untrue	46	13.2
	Untrue	29	8.3
6 Social media friends have shared innovative ways to keep myself busy at home.	Absolutely true	160	46.0
	True	72	20.7
	Somewhat true	69	19.8
	Somewhat untrue	35	10.1
	Untrue	12	3.4
Social media friends have sent religious texts (Dua, Ayat, Vird-Holy words) to remain safe from this virus	Absolutely true	95	27.3
	True	28	8.0
	Somewhat true	94	27.0
	Somewhat untrue	98	28.2
	Untrue	33	9.5
Social media friends have shared their experiences of social distancing	Absolutely true	145	41.7
	True	65	18.7
	Somewhat true	62	17.8
	Somewhat untrue	58	16.7
	Untrue	18	5.2
Social media friends have guided how to boost my immune system	Absolutely true	124	35.6
	True	52	14.9
	Somewhat true	72	20.7
	Somewhat untrue	76	21.8
	Untrue	24	6.9
People sent messages on social media if I need any kind of help.	Absolutely true	116	33.3
	True	61	17.5

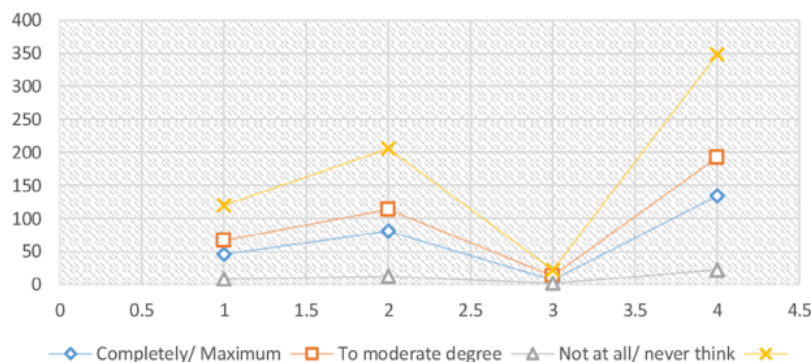
(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Social media and social support	F	%
Somewhat true	49	14.1
Somewhat untrue	84	24.1
Untrue	38	10.9

Source: Survey questionnaire.

Social Media is important during these days to connect with friends / peers



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FIGURE 2 Importance of Social media in pandemics

per se, but they (36.5%) also are collecting and following different social media platforms about medical treatment and precautions.

During the lockdown situation, the main activity that played by the respondents in order to keep them busy in various activities. The respondents admitted that their social media friends have shared innovative ways to keep them busy at home such as updating new information about COVID-19, volunteering to participate in the local discussion, making YouTube videos, and more. The data presents that the majority of the respondents (46%) said that their friends have advised them to do some innovative practices through social media platforms. During this hard situation, the respondents also stated that many social media friends have sent religious texts (Holy words) to remain safe from this virus, and to show a positive response regarding it.

During the COVID outbreak, many social media friends have shared their experiences of social distancing and taking care of this virus on social media account(s). This indicates that social media supports in a pandemic is useful, keeping and sharing people experience the same feeling as others with the disasters. The data in the Table 3 explains that many people (41.7%) are exercising and getting information about social distancing through social media platforms. It is also helpful for the people to be guided by their social media friends on how to boost the immune system, since the main cause of the COVID-19 virus is to weakening of the immune system (Jawhara, 2020; Tufan, Güler, & Matucci-Cerinic, 2020). Accordingly, people are more focused on strengthening the immune system, and results show that people (35.6%) stated that their online friends are

sending some materials which indicate how to keep their immune system strong. Additionally, during this outbreak, it was observed that people sent messages on social media if there is a need for any kind of help. It is obvious from the above statement that social media platforms supported the respondents to care, advice and guide their online friends and networks during these pandemic situations.

Table 4 explains the reliability of the construct, Cronbach alpha α , McDonald's, Mean and SDs, and the added coding description for variable identification. The Cronbach's alpha normally above .60 (Nunnally, 1978), the present study has 0.729 α and 0.658 ω , which explains the reliability of the data on social media as seeking information, social media for updates, social media for coping strategies and social media for social support.

Correlation matrix on Table 5 states that there are relationships between the usage of social media, and promoting social support, learning and gaining knowledge about corona outbreak, and giving awareness and updates regarding the pandemic information. The findings show that the usage of social media was strongly correlated with social support ($r = .450^{***}$, $p < .01$) capacity building are ($r = .488^{***}$, $p < .01$) and learning and knowledge ($r = .512^{***}$, $p < .01$). It is also found that usage of social media has highly correlated with capacity building and learning outcome, which statistically states the respondents are indeed learning about the pandemic through social media platforms. Hence, social media is the best tool to learn, aware, and get support from online spheres, which indeed give greater support for users to communicate with their colleagues, friends, family, and relatives without any hurdle due to social media particular characteristics

TABLE 4 Reliability analysis

Scale reliability statistics				
Scale	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
	2.24	0.355	0.729	0.658
Item reliability statistics				
	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Seeking_Info_1	2.62	1.310	0.686	0.603
Seeking_Info_2	1.50	0.628	0.723	0.652
Seeking_Info_3	2.52	1.312	0.685	0.603
Seeking_Info_4	2.84	1.298	0.676	0.592
Seeking_Info_5	2.85	1.302	0.674	0.589
Seeking_Info_6	2.98	1.349	0.677	0.595
Seeking_Info_7	3.50	1.202	0.734	0.661
Seeking_Info_8	3.01	1.417	0.707	0.634
SM-Update_1	3.64	0.982	0.734	0.663
SM-Update_2	2.95	1.267	0.717	0.642
SM-Update_3	2.04	1.172	0.722	0.649
SM-Update_4	2.84	1.347	0.731	0.655
SM-Update_5	2.49	1.348	0.727	0.652
Cop_SM_1	1.70	0.560	0.732	0.666
Cop_SM_2	1.78	0.503	0.730	0.662
Cop_SM_3	1.63	0.539	0.732	0.669
Cop_SM_4	1.74	0.587	0.733	0.670
Cop_SM_5	1.61	0.534	0.730	0.663
Cop_SM_6	1.73	0.512	0.730	0.667
Cop_SM_7	1.67	0.529	0.732	0.667
SS_SM_1	1.61	0.538	0.731	0.666
SS_SM_2	1.75	0.520	0.731	0.666
SS_SM_3	1.72	0.574	0.733	0.673
SS_SM_4	1.68	0.574	0.732	0.667
SS_SM_5	1.67	0.591	0.735	0.672

Note: Coding description: Seeking_Info shows the general information about COVID 19 and their behaviors, SM-Update, about social media and regular updates from family, friends, or social networks. Cop_SM describe how individuals are coping strategies or information from social media platforms for the pandemic situation, SS_SM explained the social media as social support regarding the information about the pandemic condition in our surroundings.

that enable every user to not only share the information but also get social support from their followers.

4 | DISCUSSION

During each community crisis and pandemic people seek help, information, and stay informed on what is happening around us. The information circulated through the social media is quite useful to get awareness and information regarding the global scenario of the outbreak (Lovari & Bowen, 2020). This study finds

TABLE 5 Correlation matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
Usage social media	—			
Social support	0.450***	—		
Learning and Knowledge	0.512***	0.872***	—	
Capacity building	0.488***	0.921***	0.954***	—

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

that majority of the individuals, who participated in this study, are that of youngsters who interests actively to inform about the outbreak positions through their social media platforms.

Additionally, earlier it is mentioned from previous studies, that social media have many platforms that are useful for users to gain and learn about the present global position. The results shown in Table 2 demonstrate that people using social media, predominantly via WhatsApp application, not only for seeking information regarding the corona outbreak, but also for sharing pandemic updates. Young people are regularly using social media accounts for keeping updates and sharing information which help them to get aware and has changed their behavior toward the illness, their own health, and others' condition in their regular routines.

Social media as social support factor analyzed the best practice during these pandemic situations (Van Bavel et al., 2020). The data presented in Table 3 show that significant contributions of social media as social support parameter with family, online and offline friends, relative, general public, and colleagues. The data also show that majority of the samples are taking care of their families, friends, and relatives for sharing some informative material and suggestions for staying at home. They are sending audio messages, videos, or pictures, and also holy sentences to keep active and safe. People keen to learn about the role of social media friends, and they are also guided and advised for health nutrition guidelines. Their offer to do any kind of help or support is appreciated during such hard times. Research on social support and coping strategies shows that people with high social support will improve the psychosocial health of individuals (Rzeszutek, Oniszczenko, & Firląg-Burkacka, 2017). Additionally, the data was analyzed through the reliability analysis of 25 variables and found that the percentage of reliability is high (0.729) and depicted the validity of the data. The findings of the correlation matrix show that the usage of social media was strongly correlated with the social support ($r = .450^{***}$, $p < .01$), the capacity building ($r = .488^{***}$, $p < .01$), and learning and knowledge ($r = .512^{***}$, $p < .01$). This indicates that the usage of social media has highly correlated with capacity building and learning outcome, which statistically stated that the respondents have learned through social media platforms about the COVID-19 and the related information including healing process, killing their time to keep them busy and stay positive, and to increase their immune system by accessing some innovative information and activities during this hard time.

5 | CONCLUSION

The current focus of corona outbreak and its rapid transmission of information in the world has made people learned and aware of the importance to access and keep updates as well as to follow the subjective guidelines. During these pandemic days where people are restricted to their homes, and families are bound to follow the social distancing and precautions for physical interactions. In the meantime, the usage of social media platforms are perceived as useful for sharing information, learning, increase awareness, and stay connected with the rest of the world. The study concludes that the usage of social media platforms are handy and accessible for every individual to share, post, and gain medical information regarding the corona outbreak. As we know people are working from home, and ensuring the social distance, thus the majority of their regular time have been used up by spending more times on social media platforms not only to stay connected and receive and give social support to their relatives, colleagues, and friends, who cannot be visited due to the physical distance restriction, but also for sociopsychological healing, sharing public information about the virus and illness, and suggestion regarding risk communication sourced from various information available around the world.

5.1 | Practical implication

The current study on social media and pandemics have practical importance in the public perspective fields. The study has carried the information from a diverse range of age, gender, and region in Indonesia. The analysis and results portray that there are many users of social media accounts, which could be useful for the epidemiologists, academicians, and policymakers to suggest their recommendations to cope with the pandemic situation. It can be helpful for medical practitioners to share medical information and precautions for safety and risk communication.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Muhammad Saud has contributed to collect the data from the fields, Musta'in Mashud has prepared the introduction, and Rachmah Ida has prepared the results, argument add discussion in this article.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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ENDNOTE

¹ Reuters. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-indonesia-cases/indonesia-reports-678-new-coronavirus-cases-24-deaths-idUSKBN235146>

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