

## **The Role of Influencers During the Covid-19 Pandemic on Social Media Instagram: a Study from Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesia needs appropriate media and communicators to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus hoax. Therefore, as a social media with several users, Instagram has given birth to massive influencers to disseminate information digitally. The existence of influencers on Instagram social media can have an impact on anyone, including their followers. Influencers upload content by inserting educational and socializing messages. This study explores the role of several influencers on Instagram to help the government prevent the spread of the covid-19 virus hoax and to measure the effect of educational content, information and socialization posted by influencers in educating their followers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research uses a quantitative method with an explanatory survey type and also uses an interview method. The number of respondents in this study was 165 and the number of informants was 15 who were followers of influencers. The results show that the role of influencers has an impact on their followers based on the content they upload and the information they write on their Instagram social media. The influence of influencers on their followers during the COVID-19 pandemic is very useful for the community and also for the government. The most viewed and responded to educational content on Instagram influencers contains the importance of hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers, the use of masks when leaving the house, and education about the importance of social distancing. The influencer uploads that received the most reactions from the audience were educational socializations according to SOP when leaving the house, and several influencer uploads that went directly to the field to help each other prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

**Keywords:** *Influencer, Social Media, Education, Instagram, Covid-19*



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### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is a need for all social beings. With communication, everyone is able to convey what they think, feel, and expect. Technology that develops all the time indirectly shapes the community as users and recipients of information. This thinking makes a change in the communication process between individuals or groups. One embodiment of communication technology is that many social media are used in the communication process and also disseminate information (Tosepu, 2018).

The presence of social media with many and active users such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Youtube presents the latest communication model, namely through influencers. Social media continues to experience development accompanied by media convergence. Media convergence is characterized by the unification of telecommunications, information technology, and broadcasting services. Media convergence does not only talk about technological developments, but also influences ideologies in the industrial, cultural and social fields which are marked by changes in the way of seeking information, and subsequently influences changes in lifestyle, career, business, culture and joints of life (Adhrianti, 2016).

The communication process on social media today has changed views and gives everyone the opportunity to voice, opinion, and content, so that it makes influencers more creative. Social media influencer is a term that refers to a person's ability to disseminate information to their followers on social media (Elli, 2017).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of influencers is needed in providing the information that the public needs. As stated by the WHO (World Health Organization), coronavirus is a global pandemic. Indonesia has the highest number of positive patients, with 1,252,685 cases on February 8, 2021 (Covid19.go.id). According to the Population Research Center of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), three aspects trigger COVID-19 cases to increase in Indonesia first. Many people do not follow government recommendations, such as not worshipping in congregation crowding in public places. Second, external, where people consume information from media that are not credible on the internet. Third, institutional statements where the government's statement was not transparent from the start (Republika.co.id, 2020).

Information obtained on social media related to Covid-19 has the power to change people's behavior, as well as make lifestyle changes and solutions to health problems that may be experienced during this pandemic. For example, information about how to prevent being infected with Covid-19 by keeping a distance, avoiding crowds and always wearing masks, as well as trying to ease concerns about Covid-19 by accessing or creating social media contexts about the effectiveness of the handwashing movement using soap to kill the Covid-19 virus. Information that continues to hit the community will have a great opportunity to influence people's behavior, for that information about Covid-19 must be taken into account how the behavioral response of the population in relation to public health interventions and communication dynamics. (Matteo Cinelli, 2020).

In the context of COVID-19, influencers have a great influence in persuading their followers by inserting appeals to their followers via Instagram regarding the importance of healthy living and changing lifestyles by implementing physical distancing, working from home, wearing masks, washing hands and following government advice. The presence of influencers is one of the best alternatives whose information and education messages directly to the public regarding COVID-19. So far, the role of influencers that is often studied is to introduce a product and invite consumers to give products, but in this study, influencers have a positive role in helping the Government during the Covid-19 Pandemic by providing information sharing as socialization and education material in pandemic situation. Influencers will provide education and will also provide an understanding of the dangers of COVID-19 through posts in the form of written content, photos and videos as well as live streaming facilities that are used by influencers to communicate interactively with their followers. Influencers are those who are considered to have credibility, can be trusted and are easy to reach because interactions (comments and responses) can occur (Evelina & Handayani, 2018).

Instagram is a social media platform that is often used to post visual messages. Instagram provides messages that are picture in nature. It can provide users with a visual overview without having to come or see in person (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). One popular indicator of whether a photo is on Instagram is seen from the number of likes and followers. The more likes it gets, the greater the chance for the photo to enter the explore page of all Instagram users, including those who are not followers. However, the number of followers gives the most significant share in making a famous uploaded photo. The more followers they have, the greater the chance for

other users to like with the many users who see the photos or videos that have been uploaded. Summary of Instagram users in Indonesia in 2020 can be seen in the Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Data on Instagram active users in Indonesia

The data disclosed by Hootsuite explains the high number of Instagram users in Indonesia, which is 63 million people with a percentage of 50.8% for gendered Instagram users. Women and 49.2% were men. With the growing number of users, Instagram can be a means for influencers to optimize education and information about COVID-19.

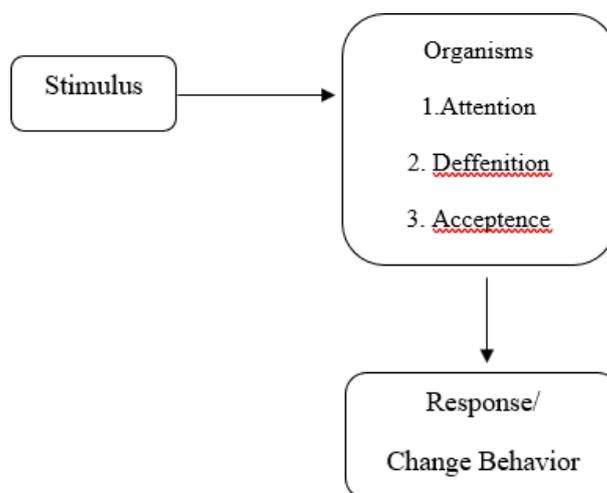
## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Stimulus-Response Theory

Theory Stimulus and response theory is the oldest linear communication theory. Stimulus theory is a communication process that runs in one direction. The stimulus-response communication model is an apparent learning principle, where the effect is a reaction to a particular stimulus. Thus, one can understand the relationship between messages on the media and audience reactions (Djamal and Fahrudin, 2011; 69). The main elements of this theory, according to Djamal and Fahrudin in Broadcasting Basics, namely:

- a. Stimulus (message)
- b. Receiver (organism)
- c. Effect (response)

The basic assumption that can be seen from the theory that the mass media has a direct and direct effect on the communicant. It can also be said that communication is a process of action and reaction. All forms of messages conveyed both verbally and non-verbally can cause a response. This theory illustrates that the response generated is greatly influenced by the quality of the stimulus (stimulus) given. How a response can emerge is also very much tied to the individual of the communicant himself. To understand how television commercials generate a response, researchers use the Theory of Communication Stimulus Organism Responses put forward by Malvin De Fleur (1970), which can be described as presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Organizational Stimulus Theory of Malvin De Fleur's Response

The stimulus that is conveyed to the communicant may be accepted or may be rejected. Communication will occur if there is attention and understanding from the communicant. This communication capability is what continues the following communication process. After the communicant processes and accepts it, there is a willingness to change attitudes.

### **Uses And Gratification Theory**

Herzog put forward uses and Gratification theory in 1944. Hamburg Blumer and Elihu Katz first introduced year usefulness and satisfaction theory in 1974 in their book *The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives and Gratification Research*. This theory says that media users play an active role in selecting and using the media; in other words, media is an active part of the communication process. Media users try to find the best media sources to meet their needs. Uses and Gratification theory assumes that users have choices to satisfy their needs (Nasrudin, in Khoriyah Siti Aimmatul (2016: 18).

The origin of the creation of the theory Uses and Gratification, namely several researchers who examine psychological and social-psychological needs. This study examines how social and psychological factors, including the need for activation, interact to produce different lifestyles and media use patterns. This study identifies four types of lifestyles whose members differ significantly on various variables, including newspapers, news magazines, and cable tv gratuities. People who have a high need for activation have lifestyles that involve more significant exposure to media sources of public affairs information than a lower need for an active invasion lifestyle that is less cosmopolitan? The results show that the roots of media use are much more profound than previously believed. Theory Uses and Gratification focuses on the use of media content to obtain gratification or fulfillment needs.

The model uses and gratification shows that the main problem is not how the media changes the nature and behavior of the audience. However, the media would appear to meets the personal and social needs of the audience. So, it depends on active audiences, who deliberately use the media to achieve specific goals (Unde, in Khoiriyah, Siti Aimmatul 2016: 21). Regarding needs,

people usually refer to the need hierarchy presented by Abraham Maslow, which distinguishes five sets of basic needs as follows:

- a. Physiological Needs.
- b. Safety Needs.
- c. Love Needs.
- d. Esteem Needs.
- e. Self-Actualized Needs.

Needs are categorized as cognitive, affective, personal integration, social integration, and escape. Concerning the use of media, various types of needs are defined by Katz as follows:

- a. Cognitive Need  
The needs that related to the information, knowledge, and understanding of the environment. It was based on a desire to understand and master the environment and satisfy the curiosity and impulse of inquiry.
- b. Affective Needs  
The needs that related to affirming an aesthetic, enjoyable, and emotional experience.
- c. Personal Interactive Needs  
The needs that related to getting confirmation about credibility, trustworthiness, stability, and individual status. It was based on desire and self-worth.
- d. Social Interactive Needs  
The needs that related to maintaining constant contact in the social environment-life. It is based on a desire to be affiliated.
- e. Escapist Needs  
The needs that related to avoiding stress, tension, and a desire for diversity.

The approaches described by Rahmad Kriyantono in Unde (2015) describe the model Uses and Gratification as in the following Figure 3. Using this model, the researcher tries to find the relationship between the variables being measured. Often only examining some of the components in the image above. Antecedent includes individual variables consisting of demographics such as age, gender, psychological factors, community, and environmental variables such as organization, social system, and social structure. Motives can be operationalized in various ways, such as cognition (the need for information), diversion (the need for release from pressure and entertainment), and personal identity (namely the use of media content to reinforce or highlight something important in the audience's own life or situation). Media use consists of the amount of time spent in various media, the type of media content consumed, and the various relationships between individual media consumers and the content of the media as a whole. Media effects can be operationalized as an evaluation of the media's ability to provide satisfaction.

### **The Credibility Source Theory**

The theory put forward by Hovland, Janis and Kelley are the Source Credibility Theory in the book *Communication and Persuasion* (1953). The assumptions are that people will be more likely to be persuaded when the communicator or the person delivering the communication message shows

himself to be credible. In other words, communication sources with high credibility will be more effective in changing someone's opinion than sources of low credibility.

Talking about credibility in the study of communication science is not something new because, in the fourth century BC, Aristotle used the term "ethos" to refer to the personal traits that influence audiences. Furthermore, Aristotle said that: persuasion is achieved because of the personal characteristics of the speaker, which when he delivers his speech, we consider to be trustworthy. We trust good people faster than others. It generally applies to any matter and applies when there can be no certainty and divided opinion. It is not valid, the temporary opinion of the rhetoric writer, that the personal kindness expressed by the speaker is not affected by the strength of his persuasion. On the contrary, his character can almost be called the most effective persuasion tool he has (Rakhmat, 2005: 255., In Winoto, 2015: 2).

According to Hovland (1953), source characteristics play a role in influencing the initial acceptance of the message recipient but have a minimal effect in the long run. Hovland calls the long-term effect from the source the sleeper effect. For example, based on the theory of credibility and resource attractiveness, a campaign to prevent the spread of the HIV/AIDS among students will be more accepted if it is delivered by credible sources such as health authorities than if it is delivered by peers (peer group). Thus, this theory confirms that a source that has high credibility can influence the message recipient in terms of the initial receptivity of a message. The use of high credibility sources results in more attitude changes than sources with low credibility (Morissan, 2014: 17). The aspects of communicator credibility, according to Percy & Rositter (1997: 293, in Suri, 2017: 34), are commonly known as VISCAP, which consists of:

- a. Visibility is the level of a person and is admired by the wider community.
- b. Credibility can describe as the consumer's perception of the relevant expertise, knowledge, and experience a person has regarding the advertised product and consumer confidence and provides unusual and objective information.
- c. Attractiveness is an excellent physical appearance or attractive non-physical character that could support an image and generate interest in the audience by listening to advertisements.
- d. Power is charisma emitted by sources to influence consumers' thoughts, attitudes, or behavior because of these statements or messages.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method uses quantitative methods with explanatory survey types. This study aims to determine the relationship or causal effect between two variables. Researchers make a hypothesis as an initial assumption to explain the relationship between the variables studied, the data collected using a questionnaire as the main instrument in collecting data then analyzed and processed using the SPSS version 21.0 application.

The population in this study are followers of several influencers on Instagram. Given the limitations of the researchers in terms of time, cost, and energy, the researchers will only take part or representatives of the population. Population is a generalization area consisting of objects/subjects that have certain qualities and characteristics determined by researchers to be studied and then drawn conclusions (Sugiono, in Suryaningsih Ni Putu Eka Putri 2012:55).

The sample is part of the population whose characteristics are considered capable of representing the population. In this study, the researcher used the sampling technique used in this study was non-probability sampling. From the total population, researchers distributed questionnaires from November to December 2020 as many as 188 respondents who gave responses. However, only 165 respondents met the criteria for respondents in this study.

The criteria determined in this study are as follows:

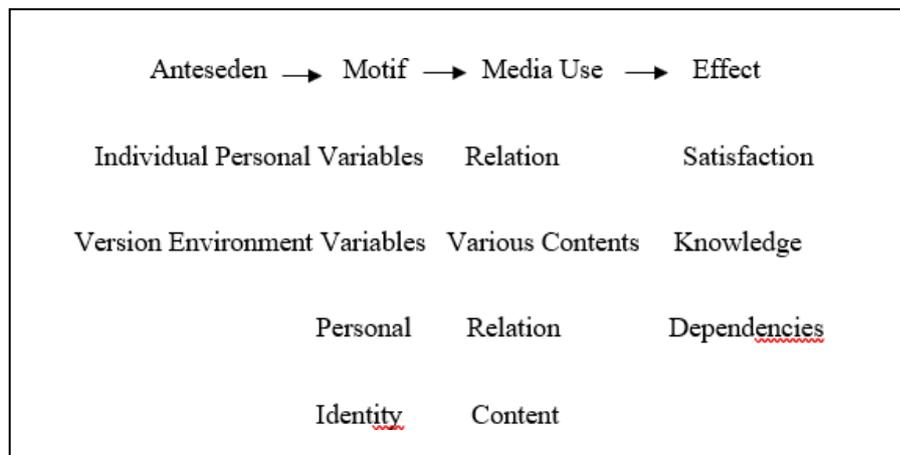
1. Instagram Active User. (Using Instagram account more than 5 years)
2. Using Instagram as a medium of information related to covid-19.
3. Become a follower on Instagram influencers according to the research subject (@rachelvennya, @awkarin, @dr.tirta and @dr.erche\_idrus).
4. Actively view educational content about covid-19 and health protocols and then provide feedback such as views, watches, likes or comments on influencer posts.

This study also uses an indirect interview method to some of the followers of several influencers on Instagram as a research instrument. Data collection is done by taking a sampling of influencer followers, who represent their respective categories. The interview process with several respondents through direct messages on the Instagram application, there were 15 respondents from Influencer followers who were selected as research subjects. The research subjects consisted of 2 celebrity influencers, 1 macro influencer and 1 micro influencer. The reason for using 2 celebrity influencers is because they want to test the popularity aspect of the influencer and choose 1 macro influencer for the reason of wanting to know how much power and credibility the influencer has. The reason for choosing 1 micro influencer is because micro influencers can indirectly help the role of macro influencers, such as being able to provide information and education to remote communities that are difficult to reach by macro influencers.

This study aims to explore the role of several influencers on Instagram to assist the government in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Indonesia. This study is also to measure the effect of educational content, information and socialization that have been posted by influencers in providing education to followers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The questions asked were related to their active use of the Instagram social media application, their reasons for seeking information about covid-19 on Instagram, how long did it take them to access Instagram to read information about covid-19, why follow these influencers, what things did they get look at influencer content during the covid-19 period, and whether the content that has been uploaded by influencers is able to change the behavior of their followers to be more aware of the importance of health protocols and apply in the new normal. Data collection is done by taking samples from influencer followers, who represent their respective categories.

The influencers who are the subject of this research consist of 2 celebrity influencers, namely Rachel Vennya and Karin Novilda who are Instagram Celebrities with the number of followers on their @rachelven account which has 5M Followers, with 1.2 K posts on Instagram and Karin Novilda or @awkarin has 6M followers. with 7K posts. Macro influencer, dr. Tirta Mandira Hudhi, is a credible influencer in this context because he is an influencer who has a doctor and business background. Doctor Tirta with Instagram account name @dr.tirta has 2.2M followers, with 3K posts on Instagram. Micro Influencers as the subject of this research are dr, Idriyanti Idrus, Sp.KK, MKes who have 18.3 K followers who are health influencers.



**Figure 3.** Uses and Gratification Theory Model

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After researching literature reviews and indirect interviews with influencer followers, these influencers indirectly influence their followers positively. The results show that the role of influencers has an impact on their followers based on the content they have uploaded and the information they write on their Instagram social media. Even though influencers do not target the number of posts they have to make per day about education and socialization at the beginning of the pandemic, their content is very crowded with likes and positive comments.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rachel Vennya and Awkarin's accounts updated almost daily about their social activities to help people avoid the coronavirus. Rachel Vennya's content is more about an invitation to donate and set aside money by opening a fundraiser to fight the coronavirus on Kitabisa.com at the end of March 2020. Within a week, the funds have collected around 7 billion. From the fundraising results by Rachel Vennya, which was published through her Instagram account, she donated Indonesian Red Cross Society to buy all the basic needs of health workers to avoid the coronavirus outbreak. At that time, PPE (Personal Protection Equipment), which functioned to protect users from viral and bacterial infections, was still very few, so the results of this donation were very useful in procuring PPE for Doctors and Health Workers. The PPE used at that time was in the form of medical masks, eye protection, face shields, medical gowns, medical gloves, head covers, and protective shoes.

Unlike Rachel Vennya, Karin Novilda, who had an Instagram account @awkarin at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, was very busy because of her social actions. Karin prefers to go directly with volunteers to disinfect several public facilities such as places of worship, schools, and entering small alleys. This social activity was shared by Karin on her Instagram account and received positive reactions, getting hundreds of thousands of likes and comments. Every content uploaded by Karin always invites millennials to volunteer like her. For her, the more they help each other to fight COVID-19, the pandemic will end soon, and the chain of virus spread will be cut quickly.

The Macro influencer in this study was Dr. Tirta with an Instagram account @dr.tirta. In the early days of COVID-19, Doctor Tirta joined the Covid-19 Task Force, and he was trusted by Indonesian National Board For Disaster Management as a volunteer to educate the public and socialize directly with the community. While dr. Tirta provided education in the community; he also documented it and published it on his Instagram account. dr Tirta's educational content that is

widely watched and responded to contains the importance of washing hands and using hand sanitizers, content about using a mask whenever to go out of the house and to public places, and content that provides education about the importance of social distancing. Getting lots of reactions and viewers is when disseminating education about complying with the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) when leaving the house, and several uploads of influencers who go directly to the field to help each other prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. It is not limited to give education about COVID-19, but dr. Tirta has uploaded many photos and videos of the impact of the pandemic, such as on health and the country's economy, which is very declining. Apart from being a doctor, dr. Tirta's background is a businessman, so he also often creates content so that his followers affected by the downturn in the economy can open a business to continue their life and maintain health as they have been educated to follow health protocols.

Turning to Micro Influencer, namely dr. Eche Idrus who is doing more or less the same activities on Instagram social media with dr. Tirta. Doctor Eche also often provides education about COVID-19 and also informs about the experiences of patients who have recovered, as well as providing the latest information about hospitals that can be responsive in dealing with corona in certain areas. The influencer always uses positive words that invite them to persuade their followers to always follow the direction and education that have been shared. Influencer will usually share content in the form of interesting videos and photos with good quality so that their followers are more interested and always give more attention every time they post. The followers of the influencer said, they are inspired by the things those influencers say and do.

The influence of influencers on followers during the covid-19 pandemic is generally considered useful for the community and also the government because Instagram social media resonates with younger age groups, and they are also more likely to follow influencer recommendations. Aspects of influencer credibility as communicators to provide education to followers on Instagram during the COVID-19 pandemic according to Percy & Rositter (1997:293, in Suri, 2017:34) commonly known as VISCAP which consists of:

- a. Visibility, is the level of a person and admired by the wider community, meaning that the influencer has a large number of followers. As explained earlier, the mega influencers or celebrity influencers in this study are Rachel Vennya with 5 million followers and Karin Novilda with 6 million followers.
- b. Credibility describes the consumer's perception of the relevant expertise, knowledge and experience possessed by a person regarding a topic. This means that influencers must have knowledge of COVID-19 and have a background as a health expert. As explained earlier, the macro and micro influencers in this study are @dr.tirta, and @dr.erche\_idrus who have a medical background and can provide information and share education about COVID-19.
- c. Attractiveness, good physical appearance or attractive non-physical characters can arouse the interest of the audience to listen. As has been explained, the influencers in this study have attractiveness in terms of physical and non-physical appearance. It can be seen in the large number of photo and video uploads, having good likes and comments from followers on the physical appearance and character of the influencer.
- d. Power, namely the charisma emitted by the resource person so that it can influence the thoughts, attitudes or behavior of consumers because of the statement or message. This means that influencers when providing educational content about preventing covid-19, followers can listen well, provide feedback on the content and follow directions from influencers to always practice healthy lifestyles and carry out health protocols as decided by the Ministry of Health.

The concept of healthy living behavior in influencer educational content on Instagram is the same as the concept of healthy living behavior according to Becker which describes health behavior into three domains, namely:

- a. Health knowledge includes what a person knows about ways to maintain health such as influencer knowledge about the infectious covid-19 and knowledge about related factors.
- b. Second, attitude towards health is an opinion or assessment of matters related to health care, such as carrying out health protocols, namely using masks according to SOPs, always washing hands with soap or hand sanitizer, maintaining a distance of at least 1 meter and staying away from crowds or crowds.
- c. Third, health practices for healthy living are all activities or activities of a person in order to maintain health, such as diligent exercise, eating healthy and nutritious food, diligently taking vitamins and continuing to carry out activities during the new normal period while still following health protocols.

In this case, Followers already know and understand very well that there is currently a disaster that has hit all of Indonesia and even the world, so Followers have made efforts to comply with health protocols. In addition to complying with health protocols such as washing hands, using masks and keeping a distance, there are factors that influence healthy living behavior, namely food and beverage factors consisting of breakfast habits, choosing the type of food, food portions and food hygiene.

Behavioral factors towards personal hygiene consist of bathing, cleaning the mouth and teeth, cleaning hands and feet, and cleaning clothes. Behavioral factors for environmental cleanliness consist of room cleanliness, house cleanliness, home environment cleanliness, school environment cleanliness. Behavioral factors towards illness and disease consist of health maintenance, disease prevention, treatment plans and health restoration. The balance factor between rest and sports activities consists of lots of rest time, activities at home and regular exercise.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of education and socialization of influencers on social media Instagram is positive and influential. Because followers often see educational content on Instagram influencers, influencers provide education about the importance of washing hands or using hand sanitizer, influencers provide education about the importance of wearing masks every time they leave the house and to public places and facilities, influencers provide education about masks that should be used / appropriate with SOPs when leaving the house and going to public facilities, and influencers providing education about the importance of Social Distancing behavior in public places and facilities.

The role of influencers in making people aware of health protocols through Instagram social media is considered successful and has a positive effect, because people answered that they realized the importance of living healthy and following health protocols because they often saw educational content shared by influencers, and the role of influencers in educating the public through social media Instagram is very helpful for the government to reduce the spread of the corona virus and is very helpful for living life during the COVID-19 pandemic and the new normal.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

Influencers who are responsible for educating using Instagram social media are expected to be more active and creative in disseminating information and also education because people who implement health protocols and change behavior in the new normal are people with the intensity of accessing covid information on Instagram 31-60 minutes per day. The government in collaboration with influencers must play a more active role in campaigning for health protocols

through social media, not only through Instagram social media but also other social media so that the spread of education can be spread evenly in all aspects.

To further researchers, in order to change the research method by conducting direct observation of people's behavior, because the data collection method using a questionnaire does not guarantee the honesty of a respondent, it is possible that the answers given by the respondent are not in accordance with their behavior.

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