

The Urge to Hustle: Narratives of Mediated Higher Degree Learning Interaction among University Students during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Article Info

Article history:

Received

April 12th, 2021

Revised

July 19th, 2021

Accepted

July 26th, 2021

Published

July 30th, 2021

Abstract

The COVID19 has fabricated a new way of life with the worldwide social restrictions policy. During the pandemic, Indonesian university students are mostly socially linked through the Internet, altering their prior face-to-face interactions. While being online, students rely on the technology to create their idealized self as a professional. Alterations in the study methods had created drawbacks when students were continuously building their professional identity, thus their hustle. This research aimed to describe students' experiences and efforts while treating the Internet as an invisible technology during COVID19. Data collected via online survey with open ended questionnaires by convenience sampling. Research subjects were 10 international class students of Communication Science at Universitas Brawijaya. Data was being analyzed employing thematic analysis. This study found that students' pressurized effort to hustle and rely more on the self while working to achieve the best mark during the pandemic occurs for two distinct reasons: gradually decreasing trust towards their group members' teamwork motivation and spiraling compulsion to earn other skills as part of their portfolio before graduating. This research confirms that while students are in the process of adapting to the online learning scheme, their trust level towards online information are heightened yet their trust level towards their peers are weakened. Further studies on the implications of rising hustle culture amongst students to the academic life is suggested.

Keywords: covid-19; invisible technology; online learning

Abstrak

Pembatasan sosial secara global akibat COVID 19 menyimpulkan perubahan cara interaksi dalam banyak sisi kehidupan. Selama pandemi, mahasiswa Indonesia terhubung dengan informasi maupun orang lain mayoritas melalui koneksi internet. Perubahan proses komunikasi ini membuat mahasiswa merasa terisolasi dan tertinggal sehingga merasa perlu bekerja lebih keras menyibukkan diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan pengalaman dan upaya mahasiswa dalam beradaptasi menjadikan internet sebagai 'invisible technology'. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui convenience sampling dengan menyebarkan kuesioner terbuka dalam survei online. Obyek penelitian adalah 10 mahasiswa Ilmu Komunikasi kelas Internasional di Universitas Brawijaya. Analisis data dilakukan melalui teknik analisis tematik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa perlu bekerja lebih keras dalam belajar online karena: berkurangnya kepercayaan terhadap motivasi kerja tim dan juga dorongan bertumbuh untuk mengejar pengalaman yang dapat dimasukkan dalam portofolio sebelum lulus kuliah karena perasaan terisolasi. Penelitian lanjutan mengenai implikasi dorongan psikologis untuk menyibukkan diri di kalangan mahasiswa saat pandemi terhadap kualitas kehidupan akademik lebih mendalam disarankan.

Kata Kunci: covid-19; invisible technology; online learning

INTRODUCTION

Implementing remote teaching have become the main response for national disaster of COVID19 pandemic (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic Indonesia, 2020) in Indonesian education field, particularly by conducting online learning. The online learning experienced by Indonesian students is part of mediated communication that taking advances on the Internet as an invisible technology. The research area that will be discussed further on this article is how technology connects with the sense of organization or navigation of everyday life, exclusively on experiences of undergraduate students' personal communication via computer-mediated-communication in online learning. The specific area of interest in this research is the online learning experience of undergraduate students of Universitas Brawijaya international class of Communication Science, including the sense of drawbacks and isolation resulting in the urge to hustle.

Unlike students who are participating in distance learning since the beginning of their study, it is a challenge for the international class of Communication Science students to adapt the transition to almost zero face-to-face interactions as it is uncommon in conventional higher education system as this brought about connectivity issues both in human communication and technological matters. Problems, then, arises, especially ones that linked to mental health. A documentation of pandemic response, especially on the higher degree remote education shift in Indonesia could be served as a future reference for the mitigation of similar pandemic situation.

As many as 68 million young people, including students of higher degree education have experienced migration from conventional face-to-face to online learning strategy (Aljazeera, 2021). The chronology of remote learning in Indonesia as follow, after first documented COVID19 case in Indonesia in March 2020, the Government publish the Presidential Decree number 7 year 2020 about the taskforce acceleration of coagulation COVID19 and the Minister of Empowerment of the State Civil Apparatus Decree number 4 year 2020 about the instruction to work from home (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic Indonesia, 2020) that resulted in the implementation of distance learning and migration from offline to online communication method.

Distance learning might not be a new method of learning, as most of universities in Indonesia have already implement a blended learning in their distance learning programs. However, it has not become the

mainstream method for majority of the institutions. While being forced to conduct distance learning, both students and lecturers experienced shock in online learning due to the varied media literacy skills and poor working or studying environment at home. From the communication perspective, it is important to note that technology affects communication and that the two concepts are interrelated. The human and social dimension of the relationship between technology and communication could be observed from the ongoing online learning method during COVID19 pandemic.

It is argued that machine revolves around human interaction as communication infrastructures (Star & Bowker, 2006) as an invisible technology. It is become invisible as our engagement with the technology communication mostly are based on social arrangements. The interaction process also mainly focus on the content instead of the playfulness of the media and its characteristics. It also depends on the connectivity, and learned as part of group memberships with gradual degree of naturalized familiarity. The technology would construct conventions of practices and embodiment of standards. It has limitations based on the communication features provided on the media, and mostly become visible upon breakdowns.

In order to observe systematically the experiences of Indonesian students in the online learning process during COVID19 pandemic, technology should be seen as an everyday aspects of human interaction (Mansell, 2008). Communication technology works as a part of social fabric, as technology mediated human relationships, including students' peer horizontal or vertical communication process with the lecturers. "Communication does not happen in a vacuum, nor does it happen in homogeneous context or simply by dint of the features of a natural language, but in architectural, urban, technically, and socially shaped ways" (Holmes, 2005).

Mediated communication have begun before COVID19 global pandemic, it is just being forced to the majority of society, including those who are engaged in learning processes in education institutions. Media is never a separate sphere of the society (Hepp, et.al. 2018), thus online learning experienced by Communication Science students of international class in the first year documented, should be seen as a naturalization or adaptation of technology to become an invisible technology.

Invisible technology relies heavily on the communication infrastructures including network connection, hardware and software availability, and individual/collective skills for adjustments to

communal drive migration from offline interaction to online media. "Online media refers to communication where digital content is transmitted from any server to distant receivers via the internet or other digital networks... (Mansell, 2008). In principle, online learning should be comparable with offline learning as it could facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous communication.

The forced migration experienced both by lecturers and students from conventional face-to-face learning to online learning might be involuntary and without clear personal motives. However, it should be seen as a ritual communication. "Ritual views of communication contend that individuals exchange understanding not out of self-interest nor for the accumulation of information but from a need for communion, commonality and fraternity" (Holmes, 2005, p. 123). The migration to online learning as a collective process involves adaptation from all related individuals, apart from difficulties each is being challenged to overcome. One extensive problem in online interaction might be, as online interaction mostly rely on verbal behaviors to establish a sense of co-presence, introvert students might find themselves struggle more in online classes than their extrovert peers.

In a meta research, Yulia (2020) affirms that in Indonesia, online learning is effective to prevent COVID19 spread in education institutions. However, Febrianto, Mas'udah, and Megasari (2020) contradict Yulia's finding by further points out, observing the experiences of students in Madura island, online learning is not beneficia due to the unstable internet access and limited fund to buy quota. Similar research conducted at Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, supports this finding as the learning environment created by lecturers had no optimal supporting media causing students to experience boredom (Limbong, Limbong, & Palimbong, 2021). Students's readiness to engage in online learning process is almost 50-50 (Giatman, Siswati, & Basri, 2020).

Positive impact of online learning is the process of adaptation to the technology to establish communication and to maintain interaction amid the social distancing and restrictions. However, gaps age wise, financial wise, experience wise, and technical skill wise should be accounted for causing difficulties in adjusting to the technological advances prompting the effective online learning system.

Online learning initiates possibility of interconnected globalized world (Luthra & Mackenzie, 2020) by facilitating international class students to

access events or additional courses regardless their location or physical restrictions during COVID19 pandemic. With a higher adaptability to technology, international class students could take more advantages of online learning in comparison with their lecturers as it facilitate further interactions with other students, academic institutions, or professional figures with the spirit of creativity, communication, and collaboration. Therefore, the Government and education institutions also need to build an ideal communication infrastructure to support the online learning method (Giatman, Siswati, & Basri, 2020).

Students' motivation to engage with online learning would be related to the quality of their learning experience. Online learning requires a clear self-direction as it is self-directed learning (Fadilah, Amalia, Mustika & Katisunda, 2021). A common ground found in the statements of the research subjects. The international class students responded in mostly anonymous spirit that they are seeing self as a hardworking students with clear goals for their future: working in an international environment after graduating.

By documenting the experience of online learning after migrated from the dominant conventional face-to-face learning, this research will fill a practical knowledge gaps. Once students are fully equipped and ready for online learning method, the questions ask should be about the adaptation to the invisible technology. It is assumed that with limited asynchronous and synchronous meetings, students would rely more to the additional sources of education materials. This would sign a subdued distrust in their lecturer's instruction, causing a force for the self to hustle in order to reach the best mark and to fill the blanks left by the missing face-to-face interactions and physical learning environments. Most of the previous research focus on the effectiveness of online learning without further acknowledging communication aspects of everyday technology.

The aim of this research is to describe the urge to hustle experienced by the international class students of communication science study program, Universitas Brawijaya, by using invisible technology to construct their professional self-concepts and skills before graduating. Qualitative analysis towards 10 open-ended online questionnaires had been conducted. The research subjects were 10 international class students of communication science undergraduate degree, Universitas Brawijaya, out of 38 registered students as the population. Data was collected via online survey with convenience method. The research questions are:

1. How are students' experience in online learning?
2. How do students experience in online learning forms the urge to hustle

Out of 38 active students being sent the link to fill the questionnaires, only 10 were returned by the end of the data collection deadline. The researchers could not force students to fill in the survey. Therefore, the limitation of this research is that regardless the nature of the survey, the result of this research could not be generalized towards the other international students.

The outline of this article is (1) Introduction sub-chapter presenting area of research, related communication concepts, previous research and the research questions; (2) Methodology sub-chapter describing the research design; (3) Results and Discussion sub-chapter delivering discourses on findings, and; (4) Conclusion drawing.

METHOD

Methodological approach in this research is a qualitative one. In order to collect students' voices, the researcher has conducted an online survey with open-ended questionnaires. Due to the student-lecturer relationship that might obstruct students' responses towards questions formulated, questionnaires serves as the third party connected the researcher to the respondents. The online survey comprised of 17 questions excluding biographical enquiries.

Data was collected via google form link that was opened for 1 month in April 2021. Sampling technique chosen was convenience sampling, by giving the deadline and inviting all 38 registered international class students of communication science, Universitas Brawijaya to fill in the online survey. By the end of the survey period, 10 participated out of 38 contacted.

Focus of this research is expression of involvements, self-concept, and mental health condition during online learning process amid COVID10 pandemic. Unit of analysis of this research is statement collected from each respondents. Data was broken down via qualitative content analysis (Marying, 2000) with thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When analyzing the submitted questionnaires, 4 themes emerged related to the respondents experience and vision as students adapting to the online learning method: (1) stress and isolation lead to the urge to hustle, thus students tend to trust information and content more and to trust their lecturer and peers less;

(2) common self-concept as a hardworking individuals with clear goals; (3) learning communication science as a strategy to work in related field; (4) homogeneous description of professional as hardworking, punctual, and resilience.

Before moving to the narration of the findings, the researcher would like to draw a the profile of the respondents. The biographical summary of the respondents synthesized from the questionnaires as follow: The respondents on this research were taken 7-8 classes in the given semester. The average hours of daily internet access before pandemic COVID19 was 5-12 hours, adding up to on average 8-12 hours in the study from home period. Only 3 out of 7 respondents were familiar with the concept of invisible technology, however majority of the respondents are active internet users. 8 respondents experienced difficulties to smoothly join the online learning due to unstable internet connection and laptop problems. Half of the respondents took other courses other than their formal study. 7 yes and 3 maybe answered the question whether their selves have visions to work in the international working environment after graduating.

Once technology equally mediates human relationships as face-to-face interactions, the communication infrastructures becomes the invisible technology (Star & Bowker, 2006). For most of the respondents, problems arises with the online learning was not about the degree of familiarity with the technology, but about the technological obstacles such as internet connections and computer/laptop specifications. Despite their claims as unaware with the term invisible technology, the respondents communication practice have included computer and the internet as their architectural interaction outlook. This could be seen as their frustration of the unstable internet connection, supporting the claim that as communication infrastructure, invisible technology becomes visible upon breakdowns (Star & Bowker, 2006). As stated by Muthia below:

Yes, [I experience a group dynamic in my class after WFH period as] sometimes I felt that it's too difficult to reach my friends especially my team work, because they were in another country and another island, and they often experiences trouble network. (Mutia)

The claim that the respondents are familiar with the technology, this living in the invisible technology mode is strengthened by statements made by Alanis, Eh Wai, and Aida below:

I connect a little bit more because we still chatted on the group class and we even imagined how we will be when things are back to normal. Because of that I realize that we are going through similar things and we have similar thoughts about this. (Alanis).

Personally, I don't feel that way [I don't feel isolated during study from home period] but for people who actually need to work with people face to face would feel their effort are hindered (Eh Wai).

No, [I don't feel isolated during study from home period] I still can continue to prepare for my professional self by joining free webinars. And as long as I am away from home I can stay focused (Aida).

The feel of isolation and stress were shared with other members of their class, being talked outside their class schedule via mediated communication. Therefore, the problem is not always on the material deliverance from the lecturers but sometimes about their experience working separately from each other. The excessive amount of screen time also added up to the burnout feelings deterring their study process:

Yes [I experienced some stressful situation during online course], less motion and too much screentime [sic] (Eh Wai).

For me, I do my work more [in the study from home period] with my laptop and handphone during online course, and I think it's not good to us in access too often with it. (Muthia)

I work more [in the study from home period], but I understand less. I finally got into the point where im [sic] working just because I have to finish it, not working because I understand about it. (Alanis)

Respondent Diva added that the given assessments and class projects builds up professional portfolio for students before graduating. Teamwork in group projects has become one of the major obstacles in online learning. As stated by Alanis above, some students have been working in autopilot due to the amount of tasks compiled from different classes. This claim is supported by Elvia:

Yes [I experienced some stressful situation during online course] really stressed because some lecturer always want to make me confused and they gave us assignments without understand my condition that we have other assignments to from other course. (Elvia)

It is necessary to separate the online learning process from their daily interaction as class members. Issues with the internet connection did appear in a number of the respondent's answers, supporting claims by Febrianto, Mas'udah, and Megasari (2020). However, the majority respondents have no trouble in digital communication or using online media (Mansell, 2008). The problem was establishing connectivity with their peers and find the right time to schedule discussions.

Yes, [I experience a change in group dynamic in my class after WFH period as] it's kinda hard to work for a group project because it's hard to looking for the right time to discuss it, and the time when we meet in person, the discussion will run faster and smoother. (Brigitta)

The respondents are adjusting well to the online learning, technology wise, as they are socially familiar with mediated communication (Holmes, 2005) with their peers. The difficult situation emerge in navigating new ways of communicating and understanding their lecturer's materials and instructions in a limited time.

[I experienced some stressful situation during online course] I just feel like my learning environment is not in my home. I used to go to UB library to do my assignments, I can find books related to my assignment easily and I can focus there...

[F]or offline meetings i [sic] love group assessment, however now in online meetings i [sic] experience misunderstanding quite many times [so, I would rather work individually]...

I work more [in the study from home period], but I understand less. I finally got into the point where im [sic] working just because I have to finish it, not working because I understand about it. (Alanis)

Troubles in composing emotions or numb feelings was expressed by a number of informants. However, they were being aware of the problem and had sought ways to manage the emotional burden. Diva mentioned that she sought a professional assistance to overcome the feeling, while Alanis tried her best to unwind once feeling too stressful, and Muthia detached herself from her phone and the internet connections on the weekends. Brigitta disclose her home situation as added obstacle in online learning process:

yes [I experienced some stressful situation during online course], i [sic] had a lot of hard time, because i [sic] had my own big family problem, and i [sic] had mid semester test at that time and I [sic] had a lot of panic attack during that time but now i [sic] have something that help me endure it so it's fine now. (Brigitta)

Students' boredom or the lack of creativity for the lecturers to deliver their materials were not an emerging issue as in Limbong, Limbong, & Palimbong (2021) finding. The students as collective are also having better readiness to online learning than in Giatman, Siswati, & Basri's (2020) research.

The urge to hustle experienced by the students were derived from the perception that formal study is enough to give them good portfolio and skill before working as professionals.

Not really, [I dont think that my assessments and class projects as students have enough contributions to build my professional portfolio] I feel like our class projects are focusing more on the theoretical things. It sure does build skills but not a portofolio [sic]. (Alanis)

Not really, [I don't think that my assessments and class projects as students have enough contributions to build my professional portfolio] because i [sic] still need a lot of experience at work, not just a class projects. (Brigitta)

The majority of respondents report that online learning multiplies the amount of time spent for studying and working on the assessments given. In addition, offers from sharing sessions, online seminars, and other capacity building activities held online increase the screen time to deal with the fear of missing out opportunities to lengthen their portfolio as international class students.

A number of respondents welcome opportunities to be internationally connected despite the physical isolation to learn more from other sources and institutions online. The respondents expressed their tendency to take professional figure on social media as a model for their future selves as worker:

yes, [social media or any other social networking platforms construct my vision of future professional self] because most of the professional fellows that i looked up to is pretty active in their social media. (Diva)

Yes [social media or any other social networking platforms construct my vision of future professional self] because it shapes my perception what is supposed to be [sic] a professional. (Denaneer)

Briefly, when learning online, students bank on the information content provided by the online media, yet lacking in trust towards their lecturer and peers as information exchanged tend more to be misunderstood. This sustains Luthra & Mackenzie's (2000) claim that young people advantage more from the online learning situation.

As mentioned before, as communication science students of international class, the respondents perceived their formal study as a pathway to enter professional career, anonymously in an international working environment in Indonesia or abroad. All of the respondents have clear goals and similar self-concept as hardworking individual. One of the respondents, Ivan, stated that he set his vision to work in international organization since he was young and being self-aware to remain consistently in the pathway by joining an international NGO as a manager in his 3rd semester and taking related courses aside from his formal study.

[I am preparing my self [sic] to work in the international environment by joining] By being a manager in an international NGO and taking related courses outside. (Ivan)

For respondent Brigitta, her current problem in the COVID19 pandemic was looking for the opportunities of gaining experience from the actual office, instead of having internship in work from home mode.

Yes [I see myself as a hardworking person], because until this time, i'm still looking for the right internship for me to fill the credit, i don't give up since it's really hard for me to looking for "work from home internship" and study from home didn't change any concept of myself, it's hard at the first place but i used to it now. (Brigitta)

The respondents indicate a clear self-direction, as stated by Fadilah, Amalia, Mustika & Jatisunda (2021), to be successful in the online learning situation. Overall, as mentioned before, the respondents have treated communication science formal study as a strategy to work in related field.

International class students' future occupational references	strategic communication consultan
	marketing communication officier
	SDG communication consultant
	Indonesian embassy staff
	Minister Counselor of Public Diplomacy and Social media Affairs
	Creative department crew
	Presenter
	Muslim traveller and writer
	Youtuber
	Public relations officer

Figure 1. Future Reference of professional occupation seek by the Respondents
(source: author's analysis)

Figure 1. above itemized the professional position targeted by the respondents, and all communication field related. Not only that the respondents demonstrate a consistency in looking self as a hardworking, punctual, and resilience students, but the data also testify to the respondents' capability to tolerate disturbance when adapting to the online learning method.

To sum up, the respondents articulate the smooth adjustment to the online learning process. Aside from the mental health issues related to increasing screen time for synchronous and asynchronous learning process and the sense of isolation caused by lack of physical interactions and activities, the respondents implied insignificant hurdles to use communication technology while learning online. Online learning has proven effective in preventing the spread of COVID19 (Yulia, 2020), thus considering the respondents' experience, the online learning method could be extended for higher education learning during the COVID19 pandemic, as benefit outweighs the drawbacks.

CONCLUSION

This article aims to fill a practical knowledge gap in introducing the concept of invisible technology as regulating element in the online learning process in higher education institution. Due to high self-awareness as learners, the respondents on this research experienced well adjustments to the online learning method after the migration from the conventional face-to-face interaction in physical classrooms. A number of issues had been brought about, i.e. the

stressful situation and the burnout feeling. However, this does not interfere with their goal to pursue an international career and portfolio filling before graduating. The majority of respondents expressed the increasing urge to hustle due to connection issues and misunderstandings, leading to distrust towards other people and to an enhanced trust towards communication content online.

Online learning are leaning towards the treatment of the internet and communication infrastructure as an invisible technology during COVID19 pandemic. The problem now is more about social connectivity rather than technological issues. Deeper analysis especially on the social co-presence amongst students in online learning environment is highly needed to increase the benefit of online learning during COVID19 pandemic to provide quality education for everyone.

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