Symbolic Interactionism of New Students in New Normal Times: Looking Glass Self through Virtual Class

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the interaction with verbal and non-verbal symbols and how the mind and self of new students in the new normal period in personal reflection about themselves through virtual classes. This research is qualitative research with a descriptive research type and uses a constructivist paradigm. Data collection techniques in this study were interviews and literature studies. The theory used is symbolic interactionism theory and computer-mediated communication. The results of the study show, in the context of this mind, most of the informants also started interacting with the two phases, only that they started with the language phase first, namely through chat forums or the Whatsapp (WA) conversation application. Furthermore, in the conversation phase, the informants, after feeling comfortable interacting through text conversations in the WA group, held online forums and actively talked in the video conference. In the context of self-informants, they have realized they have become part of the community, so they constantly combine "I" and "Me".

Keywords: Symbolic interactionism; virtual class; Computer-mediated communication

INTRODUCTION

After three years of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia has not stopped. Since being confirmed for the first time in early March 2020, this pandemic has changed the order of life in society. Almost all countries urge their citizens only to do activities outside the home if there is an urgent need. These changes certainly also have a broad impact on many sectors. Recently, through the PPKM Emergency rules, the government divided priorities which people had to do activities and work from home or the office, namely 100% work from home for the non-essential sector, 50% work from home for the Essential industry and 100% Work from Office for the Critical/Vital sector.

The education sector is included in the non-essential category which requires 100% work and activities from home. The social distancing policy was taken to suppress the spread of Covid-19, the 2020 Ministry of Education and Culture Circular Letter concerning preventing the spread of Covid-19 in educational environments. In the circular, the Ministry of Education and Culture provides instructions for holding distance learning and learning from their respective homes

(Study from Home/SFH) using technology and internet media. Furthermore, this policy is known as online learning.

Universities, as modern organizations, must be able to adapt to various situations. Effective online learning started in March 2020. In this case, students must independently actively participate in lectures and update information about which platform to choose for online learning, giving assignments/quizzes and providing lecture material. This learning technique usually adjusts to the lecturer's policy for each subject, but universities also typically have their system for online learning. Platforms that can be used including Video Conferencing, Zoom, Webex, telephone or live chat, Google Classroom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp groups. The Sultan Agung Islamic University, Semarang, provides an online learning device/system called Sinau Online (Learning Mobile System) and SIM Unissula. However, this system is certainly not 100% optimally used by lecturers because it is still something new, so the tools commonly used for face-to-face learning (virtual class) are the Zoom and Google Meet platforms.

According to Mustofa (cited in Lubis et al., 2021), online learning is a learning activity using the internet network or other electronic devices. In a Covid-19 pandemic situation like this, online learning methods are seen as a solution to continue face-to-face teaching and learning, even through virtual classes.

The impact of this change was felt by students, especially new students for the 2020 batch. New student admissions were carried out online. From registration, introduction to campus culture or what is commonly called speak, to learning activities are carried out online. Inevitably, thiss change in the pattern of lectures has also forced students to do things according to the demands of the current situation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though it is not easy, new students inevitably have to adapt. Quoted from the online portal muda.kompas.id, one of the complaints is that they cannot meet and get acquainted directly with new friends on campus. They are only met in virtual classes through various platforms. Besides virtual classes, they usually only communicate via the WhatsApp group for new students. For some students, finding friends online is not easy (Jasmine, 2020).

In conditions like this, social interaction often cannot be carried out optimally, as stated by Aridarmaputri et al., (2016) that social interaction is a social relationship that has a dynamic nature between individuals with one another, individuals with groups, or groups. With other groups as needed. Social values will be easier to obtain than relationships made through digital technology or virtual classes (Rasyida, 2020). Online and distance learning require the help of capable and easily accessible technology. In addition, students must also be ready to adapt to changes in learning arranged by schools and universities. Its role and effectiveness have greater power than a laptop or computer (Nugrahani cite in at Rahman et al., 2022). Basically, humans interact with each other all the time. They share meanings for specific terms and actions and understand events in certain ways. Society arises from conversations related to individuals (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The negotiation process, especially for new students with the world around them, also comes through communication. They understand and deal with objects in their environment through social interaction. An object can be any aspect of a person's reality. The only condition for something to become an object is that someone must be named or represent it symbolically.

Symbolic interactionism seeks to understand social life, which is formed through cues conveyed through words or speech verbally to communicate, and non-verbal symbols are signals transmitted not through spoken words but through body gestures, appearances, eye contact, etc. Therefore, in this limited situation, previously able to interact in natural "face to face" now only exists in cyberspace (virtual class), the process of symbolic interactionism among new students needs to be seen as an exciting study to study. Departing from this, the research problem

formulation is how is the symbolic interactionism of new students in the new normal era: looking glass self through virtual class? This study aimed to understand interactions with verbal and non-verbal symbols and how the minds and self of new students in the new normal period reflected personal feelings about themselves through the virtual class.

METHOD

This research is a study with a qualitative approach to the type of descriptive research. Descriptive research methods can be interpreted as problem-solving procedures that are investigated by describing the state of the subject or object in study which can be in the form of people, institutions, communities, and so on, which are currently based on visible facts or what they are (Nawawi, 2012). This study uses a constructivist paradigm by examining how new students' symbolic interactionism is in the new normal era: looking glass self through the virtual class. A qualitative approach can produce an in-depth explanation of writing, speech and or behavior that can be observed from an individual (Putra, 2021).

This study determined research subjects based on a purposive sampling technique. The criteria for being the subject of this study were new students of batch 2020 at Sultan Agung Islamic University Semarang who had only taken part in online learning since the start of college, joined WhatsApp/Telegram groups as a medium of interaction outside of lectures and came from several different regional backgrounds. The data collection technique in this study is to use primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interview techniques via text conversations, and Whatsapp voice notes based on a list of questions prepared beforehand. Interviews were conducted with 5 informants according to the above criteria. Then secondary data is collected supporting data from books, journals, the internet, and previous studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has opened a new civilization, especially in education. Advances in technology have also contributed to the educational journey in Indonesia, and video conferencing platforms have also sprung up. Applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex and Microsoft Teams make organizing online learning easier. Most universities in Indonesia are also accelerating to adapt to the pandemic by developing a Mobile Learning System or what is often known as the Online Learning System (Spada), as well as Sultan Agung Islamic University, which has developed this platform with its Sinau Online.

In general, the process of interaction and communication through virtual classes is still something new for students. For the class of 2020, or what is jokingly known as the "corona generation", computer-mediated communication or in terms of Computer-Mediated Communication is a must because the prohibition on crowds and maintaining distance must be obeyed. So online learning is the solution during a pandemic. However, online learning has dramatically reduced social interaction between students. Interaction is a reciprocal process in which the reactive behavior of other parties influences a group. In the process of influencing this behavior, direct or indirect physical contact can occur (Zanki, 2020).

The absence of direct physical contact since the beginning of entering lectures makes a big difference for new students, and they must try to exchange meaning in virtual space. They must have their way of expressing themselves and understanding other individuals. Until this research was done, class 2020 students had undergone online lectures for almost 3 semesters. The following is the data of informants or sources in this study:

Table 1
List of Respondents

Respondents	Student Name	Batch Year	Origin
1	**Damarjati Dimara**	2020	Kota Semarang
2	**Salsabilla Aisha**	2020	Kota Salatiga
3	**Nurom Mufid**	2020	Kab.Jepara
4	**Arvinda Anjani**	2020	Kab.Banjarnegara
5	**MA Alghiffari**	2020	Kab.Tegal

From the perspective of Mead (cited in at Zanki, 2020), humans are motivated to act based on the meanings they give to other people, events/events and objects. This meaning is created through the language used by humans when communicating with other parties, namely in the context of interpersonal communication or interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication or self-talk. The theory of symbolic interactionism assumes that humans are social products. Meanwhile, Blummer (cited in at Mahestu, 2012) states that symbolic interactionism is a process of interaction to form meaning or significance for each individual. In line with Blummer, Scott Plunkett also stated that symbolic interactionism is how we learn to interpret and give meaning to the world through interactions with other individuals (Mahestu, 2012).

Most of the informants stated that the interaction process through online learning had many obstacles. First, from a technical perspective, namely frequent internet signal disturbances, especially among those living in rural areas. Second, it feels awkward when you are in a virtual class with the camera activated, so the initial interaction feels stiff. Third, feel free to ask questions because the situation for speaking is different from offline lectures. Fourth, there needs to be more motivation to study because students have much less direct interaction.

According to Blumer (in Zanki, 2020), symbolic interaction theory focuses on three main communication principles: meaning, language, and thought. First, meaning is based on the theory of symbolic interaction. Meaning is not inherent in objects but develops through social interaction between humans. Therefore, meaning is in the context of family and community relations. Meanings are formed and modified through interpretive processes carried out by humans. Second, Language. As humans, we can name things. Language is a source of meaning that develops widely through social interaction, and language is also referred to as a tool or instrument. Regarding language, Mead stated that social life and human communication are only possible if we understand and use the same language. Third, Thought has implications for the interpretation we give to symbols. The basis of Thought is language, which is a mental process of converting meanings, names, and symbols. Thought includes imagination, which can provide ideas even about something unknown based on known knowledge. An example is thinking (Jacon in Zanki, 2020).

Meanwhile, if you look at the premise of symbolic interactionism theory, there are 3 essential things as previously described. The main premises in this theory include mind, self and society. For George Herbert Mead, individual thoughts and images are developed through social processes. This study aims to see how the minds and selves of new students in the new normal period reflect on personal self-esteem through virtual classes.

Mind
According to Mead (in Zanki, 2020), the mind develops within the social communication and cannot be understood as a separate process. This process involves two phases: the conversation

of gestures and language. Both presuppose a social context in two or more individuals interacting (Jacon in Zanki, 2020). In the context of this mind, most of the informants also started interacting with these two phases. They started with the language phase first, namely through chat forums or the Whatsapp (WA) conversation application. For example, informant 5 tries to be active in the chat in the WA group by commenting on developing chat themes and starting private chats by choosing comfortable friends. Informant 5 tries to start a conversation by asking about lecture assignments. Meanwhile, informant 3 was more active when a chat theme matched his skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, this is mainly done in the conversation phase after the language phase has passed. This means that after they feel comfortable interacting through text conversations in the WA group, they slowly find other individuals they feel comfortable interacting. Furthermore, they held an online forum and actively chatted via video conference. Then through a question-and-answer session during online learning in the virtual class, several active informants responded to the lecturer as wand representedir thoughts. According to Mead, the mind develops within social communication and cannot be understood as a separate process. This process involves two phases: the conversation of gestures and language. Both presuppose a social context in which two or more individuals interact (Zanki, 2020).

Self

Self is defined through interaction with others. Self refers to the reflective personality of the individual. The self is a human entity when he thinks about who he is. In order to understand the concept of self, it is essential to understand the self-development that is only possible through role-taking. For us to see ourselves, we must be able to take on the role of someone else to reflect on ourselves. Taking this role is an essential part of self-development. This mental picture is what Charles H. Cooley calls the looking glass-self and is socially constructed.

In the interaction process for self-development through virtual class, informant 3 considers himself in real life to be someone with a social soul. However, the opposite is true for interactions in virtual space. He is not too active to start interacting. He observes more. He is not trying to start if no one opens the chat through the chat forum. Meanwhile, informant 2 was reluctant to start interacting because he still felt awkward speaking in public, even though it was only through virtual class. Informant 5 revealed that the atmosphere for interaction was arid and stiff, but he tried to adapt as time went on. Explaining self-concept and role-taking through virtual space is sometimes more difficult than in real life.

According to Mead (in Zanki, 2020), the self is developed through several stages: First, the preparation stage of meaningless imitation. Second, the play stage occurs when playing a role, but it needs to be a unified concept in self-development. Third, the game stage is the stage of self-development. Self is a function of language. An individual must be a member of a community before self-consciousness forms it. Self is a continuous process that combines "I" and "Me". Therefore, in self consists of two parts, namely "I" and "Me":

a. I – active self is an impulsive tendency of the individual, is spontaneous, and is also an aspect of human existence that is not organized. As described by informant 3 that to start as an individual who has become part of the community by sending a link to his podcast work to the WA group. Then, many positive responses were received from other students, so many asked about his profile. That way, he does not need to introduce himself actively anymore because many already know about him through his podcast work.
b. Me – is the self that is the object of our contemplation or is a self-image that is seen through the self-mirror of the reactions given by others.

c. According to Mead (2020), the action begins in the form "I" and ends in "Me". "I" provides the driving force, while "Me" provides direction. "I" is creative and spontaneous, available for societal changes. Therefore, the concept of self is strong and comprehensive to understand how humans function in society and the function of society itself. The concept also simultaneously shows the relationship between the individual and society (Kartono, 2003).

According to Meltzer (2003), there are 3 (three) implications of personality (selfhood), namely:
a. Self-possession makes the individual of society in miniature; humans can engage in interaction, and they can see themselves in a new light.
b. The ability to act toward oneself makes possible an inner experience that does not need to reach overt expression; humans can have a mental life.
c. An individual with himself can direct and control his behavior (Kartono, 2003).

Society
Society or society is formed through coordinated interactions between individuals. According to Mead, the interactions that occur in humans occupy the highest level compared to other creatures. This is due to the use of various significant symbols, namely language. Although sometimes humans respond automatically and without thinking about other human gestures, human interactions are transformed by their ability to form and interpret directly using conventional symbol systems.

Human communication has meaning in symbolic gestures and does not require immediate responses. Humans have to interpret each movement and determine their meaning. Because human communication involves interpreting and assigning meaning, this can happen when there is consensus on meaning. Symbol meanings should be shared with other humans.

Shared meaning always occurs through role-taking. In order to complete an action, the doer must put himself in the other person's position. Behavior is seen as social not only when it responds to others but also when it is incorporated into the behavior of others. Humans respond to themselves as others respond to them, and thus they share the behavior of others in an imaginary way (Zanki, 2020).

CONCLUSION
The study results show that, in the context of this mind, most of the informants also started interacting with these two phases. It is just that they started with the language phase first, namely through chat forums or the Whatsapp (WA) conversation application. Furthermore, in the conversation phase, then in the conversation phase, this is mainly done after the language phase has passed. This means that after they feel comfortable interacting through text conversations in the WA group, they slowly find other individuals they feel comfortable interacting. Furthermore, they held an online forum and actively chatted via video conference. Then through a question and answer session during online learning in the virtual class, several active informants responded to the lecturer and represented their thoughts. Then through a question and answer session during online learning in the virtual class, several active informants responded to the lecturer and represented their thoughts.

In the context of self-informants have realized that they have become part of the community, so they continue to combine "I" and "Me". Even though the interaction process is not as easy as when interacting through direct physical contact, several obstacles can hinder the communication process.

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