

Infodemic: COVID-19 in Indonesia

Damianus Febrianto Edo

Jakarta Institute of Social and Political Sciences

The COVID-19 pandemic killed millions of people around the world, including thousands in Indonesia. However, in midst of the pandemic, the many hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation opened the opportunity for distorted public perception of information for Indonesians, transforming a global grief instead into an “infodemic” phenomenon, a disruption of information and truth. In this article, I analyze data and reference materials obtained from books, journals, and research reports from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics in the Republic of Indonesia, as well as newspaper articles related to hoaxes and misinformation on social and mainstream media. Through technical analyses, I conclude that the primary purpose of such disinformation was to confuse and mislead the public, resulting in an infodemic. Finding solutions to overcome this rapid and dangerous development of hoaxes on social media and disinformation on mainstream media should be the primary concern for the Indonesian government or state. Now the Indonesian government must improve effective public communication, so the public to receive information accurately and comprehensively.

Introduction

More than two years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Indonesia, and in midst of it, an information pandemic (infodemic) became inevitable, in which hoaxes, disinformation, and fake news about COVID-19 spread as quickly. Although disinformation is not a new phenomenon, it becomes a serious concern when it occurs among people who need accurate information about COVID-19 from the government to avoid COVID-19 transmission. As a person in the world of communication, I have researched cases of hoaxes, disinformation, and fake news on social media and mainstream media. In the study, I took samples since March 2020 with data and communication theory. Data presented by the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of Indonesia.

This article measures how hoaxes, disinformation, misinformation, and fake news spread across social media and mainstream media without checking and rechecking. Thus, it forms the polarization of information in the community. In other words, people confuse the truth of information. Not only that, the burst of hoax information during the COVID-19

pandemic is undeniable: we see news that there are community groups who reject the bodies of Covid-19 victims. The saddest is also the negative stigma of society against health medical personnel. Medical personnel are shunned and even ridiculed for dealing with COVID-19 patients, disturbing and hindering the due to the stigmas of individuals not sensitive to literacy and the chaos of information circulating on social media.

Furthermore, in cyberspace, William Gibson describes it as consensual hallucinations, in which hostile narratives target feelings, ignite emotions and cause social vulnerability. Information is packaged right or wrong, where facts and truths are difficult to ascertain. The narrative contradicts each other once it becomes a place of mutual slander with hatred on social media. Meanwhile, constructional discussions become illegal goods to be planned. Therefore, the public communication ecosystem is closely related to communication management. As a public official or President though, highlighted by the public, if communication does not run effectively. Effective communication is successful if, the information conveyed is received by the community as a whole. Conversely, inconsistent information impacts the image of a communicator leading to public trust. This could affect the image of President Joko Widodo when conveying information to the public. Inconsistency resulted in decreased public confidence in the government and related state institutions.

Infodemic and Propaganda

Propaganda is a rapidly growing means of communication called the caste of the information society (Castells, 2010). Adam Hodges theorizes the propaganda of the age of fake news, by writing a twenty-first-century version of propaganda aimed at spreading disinformation and sowing ignorance, division, doubt, and fear (Hodges, 2018). Propaganda is easier now than it was in the past since social media optimally has made mass propaganda possible. Social networking sites have a dark and bright side to their own, uncensored platforms, rather than mass media. Therefore, there is a problem in the community with the burst of information that is difficult to ascertain the truth.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of the dangers of information and disinformation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, explaining that disinformation can be harmful to people's physical and mental health, increase stigmatization and lead to community discipline of health measures, and thereby reduce effectiveness and endanger countries' ability to stop pandemics. Public debate has become even more polarized and disinformation even more extreme on topics related to COVID-19, resulting in strengthened hate speech; increased the risk of conflict, violence, and human rights violations; and threatened long-term prospects for advancing democracy, human rights, and social cohesion. Furthermore, there is a phenomenon of conspiracy theories that drag people into the hallucinatory space, so that the public underestimates COVID-19.

Hallucinations of conspiracy theories based on self-justification are not supported by accurate data. Inevitably, society is plunged into information and polarization of information. This infodemic became critical during a pandemic because it uses social media as a propaganda tool to strangle people's minds by redefining truth into its own version. Therefore, a one-sided view emerges without studying empirical knowledge and data. This fatal information-led disruption is a global phenomenon, not just in Indonesia.

Social media without filtering information becomes uncontrolled. In addition, the character of our society that trusts social media information more than official media or the press is a challenge in itself. The challenge for our society is to always link information between facts, hoaxes, or disinformation, so people are not easily provoked by social media information such as Twitter, Facebook, or Youtube. The destructive power of the human mind is even more devastating, it can undermine public trust, and perhaps our mental and psychiatric impact on real human life. In other words, the information consumed on social media has an impact on thoughts and behaviors in physical or real spaces.

Amid a pandemic of a lot of information that is biased confirmation, disinformation, misinformation, fake news, framing even hoaxes circulating need to be strengthened regulations, especially regarding the security of user data and cleaning up robot accounts. The problem is, the power to find the truth, critical and emotional we are less felt, so that problems arise in the community, from cyberspace to physical space. Many people believe in hoaxes, such as fishing in murky water. In other words, pandemics should be a lesson for the public to consume the right information by checking and rechecking, while not spreading information that is not certain the truth.

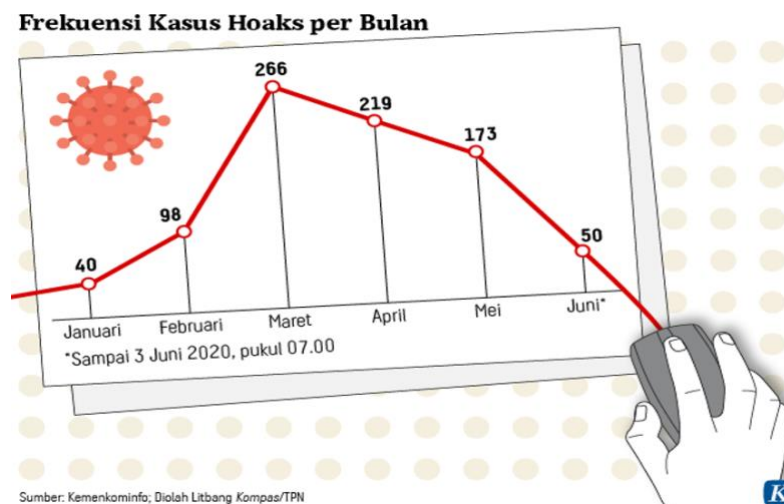
COVID Hoaxes in Indonesia

Almost every day, news about the coronavirus pandemic enters the conversation in the universe of social media, mainstream, newspapers, and TV regarding the death toll due to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in regions throughout Indonesia. Nowadays, the relentless news causes high anxiety and has a direct impact on the information circulating on social media and mainstream media. Finally, the public receives hoax information without checking and rechecking the truth. Thus, some of the fundamentally altered reactions to the pandemic, the perception of transmission causing people to become more conformist and tribalistic about the coronavirus reflect the social shift caused by information literacy on social media.

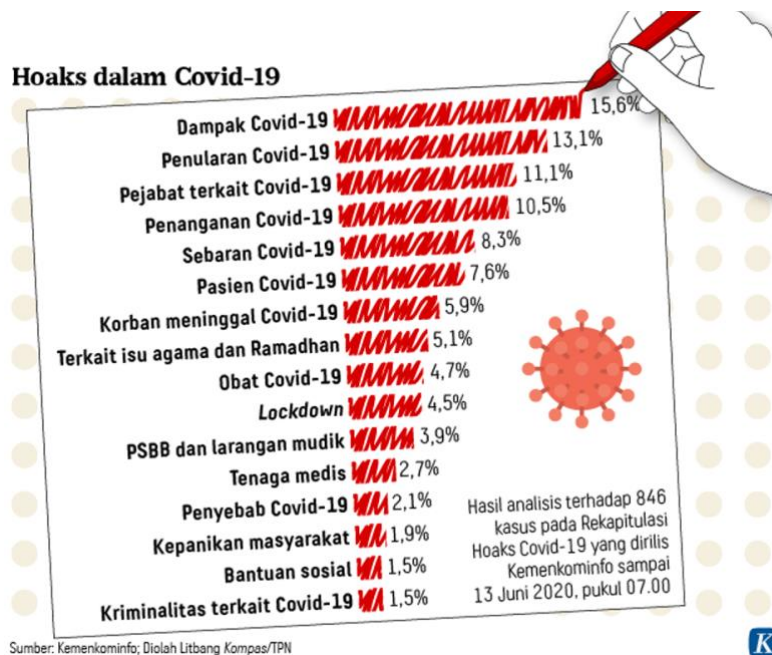
With increasingly sophisticated telecommunication tools, we can access information easily, but there are still many people who are not yet communication literate. In fact, some people believe hoaxes without checking and rechecking the truth first. This is certainly the biggest test due to a lot of information, so the public has difficulty ensuring the truth

amid a pandemic. So many things are out of our control. The key question is how long does the pandemic last? How do others behave, and what will happen, if the covid-19 pandemic eats away at developing countries like Indonesia? So many of us respond and read endlessly on social media, mainstream media, and television. But as long as we focus on questions with unknown answers or circumstances beyond our control. That is, listening to the direction of the Indonesian government and the World Health Organization (WHO) and reading the information in credible media instead of social media.

Data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia daily Kompas.id, hoax Covid-19 in March-April 2020. In March, there were 266 cases of hoaxes spread across various social media platforms and mainstream media. Meanwhile, in April there were 219 cases of hoaxes. Entering May to June there was a decrease in the number of cases of hoax issues (Kompas, 16/6/20). (Picture.1).



Hoax bursts related to patients in hospitals include: "Patients Infected with Coronavirus at Tarakan Hospital" (29/1/2020), "Corona Virus Patients Have Entered Rabaik Muara Enim Hospital" (1/2), "Information on Arrival of Corona Suspect Patients at Mardi Waluyo Hospital in Blitar City" (13/1), "Sanglah Denpasar Hospital Received Corona Positive Patients Secretly" (3/3), "Gojek Partner Suspect corona Escaped from Friendship Hospital" (16/3), "PDP Covid-19 Patient Escaped from isolation room of Embung Fatimah Hospital" (22/3), (aptika.kominfo.go.id). Many types of hoax content related to other COVID-19 patients were identified by the Ministry of Information as incorrect information (Picture.2).



The data above shows many hoaxes after this pandemic by spreading fear among the public and health workers, thus impacting public psychology—for example, fear of leaving the house, fear of close people, and fear of unknown people. Medical personnel, too, are exhausted due to the stigma of society to be kept away from them, leaving a lasting impact on the psychology of health workers.

GlobalWebIndex data published in January 2020 indicates there are 160 million active social media users in Indonesia. They are part of 175.4 million internet users out of 272.1 million people in the country. (Compass, 11/6/2020). YouTube social media is the most popular with 140.8 million users. Social media, Whatsapp (134.4 million users), Facebook (131.2 million), Instagram (126.4 million), Twitter (89.6 million), Line (80 million), Facebook and Messenger (80 million), LinkedIn (56 million), Pinterest (54.4 million), and Wechat (46.4 million people).

Research on Covid-19 hoaxes in Indonesia needs to be done immediately and has been widely reviewed in the national media in Indonesia, and various pandemic hoax research. In other words, pandemic hoaxes spread due to the lack of literacy of Indonesian people and social media that present information, photos, memes, and videos without knowing the truth of the news.

Media carries the power to convey facts and political education to the public. How to tell media stories intersects with public perception, even in the echo chambers of social media. Conventional media spaces with effective storytelling impact the echo chambers of social media and public perception. In this case, the media must give an effort to journalism meaning to the public, by displaying meaningful and effective news. Meaningful journalism takes a new path to the public's understanding of

the content of a message, in which the media constructs a deep, factual reality. The construction of reality by the media has a major impact on public understanding as well as the echo chambers of social media. Our social media full of diatribes, hoaxes, and sensations is eliminated from the public.

For that, media storytelling techniques are needed amid this extraordinarily rapid flow of information, new methods of telling stories by constructing a substantial reality, so that the public is enlightened by the news presented, columns, or opinions displayed by the media. In the efforts of meaningful journalism, the media is always in a position of public interest in the packaging of information, with the bulge of certain aspects, which are close to people's lives. In other words, the construction of an issue or reality must intersect with the public interest, as described by Robert Entman, "Framing Toward Clarification Of a Fractured Paradigm."

The question is whether social media is not connected with symbols that make the atmosphere of discourse taste sensational. But should emphasis or protrusion be meaningful by pouring out ideas, and quality ideas even beyond the discourse of communication itself? In other words, the discourse echoed by the elite is beneficial to the sustainability of the nation and is easily digested in public memory. The elite must show quality discourse and as far as possible avoid the symbol of chaotic communication and sensational conditions. For this reason, the ability of the public to analyze information or discourse, even symbols that are actively embedded, and creative. The activeness of society and the media becomes an important principle that must be done in an interpretive paradigm (in-depth interviews, observations involved). Therefore, information or issues have news value or meaning journalism per the way of life of Indonesian society and the essence of journalism.

Conclusion

Hoaxes, disinformation, and misinformation are inevitable phenomena during the Covid-19 pandemic. The rapid dissemination of information makes people literate on social media and mainstream media. The phenomenon of information speed is likened to a double-edged knife. In other words, it has a positive impact on information if the information is actual, factual, and beneficial to the interests of the community, and it also negatively impacts the spread of hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation.

Communication ecosystems are very important amid uncontrollable bursts of information. Governments as sovereign holders need to manage public information comprehensively with consistent diction between government agencies. The impact of social media that is difficult to contain becomes a fertile field for the spread of hoaxes, once the mainstream media and press as the fourth pillar of democracy should

avoid framing, misinformation, or sensational news that disrupts the information ecosystem.

Therefore, society needs to improve literacy and the importance of reading information carefully, before trusting and sharing it with others. At the same time, avoid debates that reek of hate speech. Only then can hoaxes, misinformation, and disinformation be defeated. The community is spared from an infodemic if it changes from an emotional society to a rational society or a gossip society goes towards a literacy society.

References

- Aptika, Y. (2020). “Kominfo Temukan 1.401 Sebaran Isu Hoaks terkait Covid-19,” *Ditjen Aplikasi Informatika*.
<https://aptika.kominfo.go.id/2020/05/kominfo-temukan-1-401-sebaran-isu-hoaks-terkait-covid-19>.
- . “Pasien Terjangkit Virus Corona di RSUD Tarakan,” *Ditjen Aplikasi Informatika*.
https://kominfo.go.id/content/detail/24054/hoaks-pasien-terjangkit-virus-corona-di-rsud-tarakan/0/laporan_isu_hoaks.
- Bernstein, M. (2002). 10 tips on writing the living Web. A list apart: For people who make websites, 149. Retrieved from <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writeliving>
- Castells, M. (2010). *The Rise of the Network Society*, Second Edition. *Wiley Blackwell*.
- Gibson, W. (2004). *Neuromancer*. Ace.
- Harlow, H. F. (1983). Fundamentals for preparing psychology journal articles. *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*, 55, 893–896. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0043204>.
- Hodges, Adam. (2018). How “Fake News” Lost Its Meaning. *BePress*.
- Kernis, M. H., Cornell, D. P., Sun, C. R., Berry, A., Harlow, T., & Bach, J. S. (1993). There's more to self-esteem than whether it is high or low: the importance of stability of self-esteem. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 65(6), 1190–1204.
<https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.65.6.1190>.
- O'Neil, J. M. & Egan, J. (1992). Men's and women's gender role journeys: A metaphor for healing, transition, and transformation. In B. R. Wainrib (Ed.), *Gender issues across the life cycle* (pp. 107-123). *Springer*.
- Sari, M., & Asmendri, A. (2020). Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA. *Natural Science: Jurnal Penelitian Bidang IPA Dan Pendidikan IPA*, 6(1), 41-53.
<https://ejournal.uinib.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/naturalscience/article/view/1555/1159>.
- Schwab, K. (2017). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. World Economic Forum.
- Skinner, C. (2019) *Manusia Digital, Revolusi Industri 4.0 Melibatkan Semua Orang*. *Elex Media Komputindo*.
- WHO. (2020). Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation. *WHO*. <https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation>.
- Yuniarto, O.T. (2020). Mengenal Karakter Hoaks Covid-19. *HOAKS*.
<https://www.kompas.id/baca/riset/2020/06/16/mengenal-karakter-hoaks-covid-19>.