



The Digital Era Challenge: Unraveling Hoaxes and Strengthening Social Media Ethics

Fairizal Rahman¹

¹Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kediri, email: fairizal.rahman@iainkediri.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore the challenges arising in the digital era, including the proliferation of hoaxes and ethical considerations in social media interactions. The research methodology employed is a qualitative approach through literature review analysis. Findings from this study highlight that the phenomenon of hoaxes often emerges on social media platforms, where content can be easily and rapidly disseminated without undergoing factual verification processes. Therefore, social media users need to be equipped with mature analytical skills and discretion in consuming content. Additionally, social responsibility is also crucial in the use of social media, both towards oneself and others. The conclusion of this research emphasizes the necessity for caution in disseminating information on social media to avoid the spread of misinformation or potentially harmful content.

Keywords

Hoax, Social Media, Digital Era

Submit : 20 February 2024

Accepted : 30 March 2024

Publish : 30 April 2024

Abstrak

Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi tantangan yang muncul di era digital, termasuk persebaran hoax dan pertimbangan etika dalam berinteraksi di media sosial. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis studi pustaka. Temuan dari penelitian ini menyoroti bahwa fenomena hoax seringkali muncul di platform media sosial, dimana konten dapat dengan mudah dan cepat disebarakan tanpa melalui proses verifikasi faktual. Oleh karena itu, pengguna media sosial perlu dilengkapi dengan keterampilan analisis yang matang serta kebijaksanaan dalam mengonsumsi konten. Selain itu, tanggung jawab sosial juga menjadi hal penting dalam penggunaan media sosial, baik terhadap diri sendiri maupun terhadap orang lain. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menekankan perlunya kehati-hatian dalam menyebarkan informasi di media sosial guna menghindari penyebaran informasi yang salah atau bahkan berpotensi merugikan orang lain.

Kata kunci

Hoax, Media Sosial, Era Digital.

INTRODUCTION

The development in the digital era has brought about numerous changes, particularly with the advent of the internet and social media platforms that offer freedom, extensive reach, and broad access to its users. The digital era can be characterized as a period where information can be easily accessed and exchanged electronically through digital devices. Hence, this era is often referred to as the information age. Digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and various other electronic gadgets connected to the internet have become indispensable tools for individuals in today's digital era. The presence of such technology allows individuals to access information from anywhere and at any time without being constrained by spatial or temporal limitations (Haris, 2016). Moreover, this phenomenon has also opened the doors for individuals to rapidly and easily share information with others worldwide, creating more interconnected and global relationships. In other words, the digital era has influenced various aspects of life, ranging from communication, work, learning, to social interaction, and serves as a primary driver in the global social and cultural transformation.

The digital era is inherently intertwined with the significant presence of social media as a platform for easy, extensive, and limitless information dissemination. Social media refers to a new

form of media involving interactive participation from users (Manning, 2014). Social media offers opportunities for users to engage in dialogue, form social connections, build communities, and swiftly share information with instant feedback. Moreover, with the advent of mobile devices facilitating access to social media anytime and anywhere, it has become an inseparable aspect of modern life, playing a crucial role in shaping the social, cultural, and communicative dynamics of this digital age.

The pervasiveness of social media in contemporary society has ushered in a new era of communication and interaction. While these platforms offer a plethora of benefits, they also raise a complex array of ethical concerns that demand careful consideration. In this essay, we will explore the multifaceted nature of social media ethics, delving into issues of privacy, misinformation, and algorithmic bias.

Privacy remains a paramount concern in the social media realm. Users willingly share personal information online, often without fully comprehending the extent to which this data is collected, analyzed, and utilized. This raises concerns about potential misuse of personal information, particularly in the context of targeted advertising and surveillance practices (Acquisti et al., 2015).

Misinformation poses a significant threat to social media's integrity. The rapid dissemination of false or misleading information can have far-reaching consequences, influencing public opinion, undermining trust in institutions, and even inciting violence (Tucker et al., 2018). Social media platforms have a responsibility to implement measures to combat misinformation, such as fact-checking initiatives and user education campaigns.

Algorithmic bias refers to the discriminatory outcomes that can arise from the algorithms used by social media platforms to curate content and personalize user experiences. These biases can reinforce existing social inequalities, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and perpetuating stereotypes (Noble, 2018). Addressing algorithmic bias requires a multifaceted approach that involves transparency, accountability, and ongoing evaluation of algorithmic processes.

The convenience, speed, and versatility offered by social media platforms have increased their popularity and widespread use among various segments of society for various purposes. According to data presented by We Are Social and published on dataindonesia.id, the number of active social media users in Indonesia reached 191 million people in January 2022. This figure represents an increase of 12.35% compared to the previous year, where the number of active social media users

reached 170 million people. In terms of individual platform usage, WhatsApp tops the list as the most popular social media platform currently, with a user percentage of 88.7%. Followed by Instagram with 84.8%, Facebook with 81.3%, TikTok with 63.1%, and Telegram with 62.8% (Mahdi, 2022). This indicates the significant dominance and penetration of various social media platforms among the Indonesian population, reinforcing their role and impact in various aspects of daily life.

WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook are three of the most widely used social media platforms. Each of these platforms allows users to both consume and produce various forms of media content, including text, images, and videos. Users of these platforms can play dual roles as both consumers and producers of media content, sharing it with others within their social networks. The widespread accessibility and ease of use of these social media platforms have led many users to heavily rely on them for fundamental social needs such as communication and interaction. The pervasive nature of social media has integrated it into the fabric of everyday life, shaping how individuals engage with one another and access information.

The convenience, openness, and widespread access to interaction and communication through social media platforms mark a positive phenomenon facilitated by the advancement of this technology. These advantages have prompted diverse users, consisting of individuals with different backgrounds and interests, to actively utilize them. However, behind the benefits brought about, negative consequences also emerge as a result of the openness and accessibility possessed by social media. Behaviors that exceed limits and become excessive, possibly due to easy access and lack of supervision, pave the way for the emergence of digital crimes such as cybercrime. Additionally, the phenomenon of cyber bullying also arises as a problem, where individuals use this platform to engage in online intimidation or harassment against others. However, perhaps the most concerning is the rapid and widespread dissemination of fake news or hoaxes through social media. This poses serious risks to the truth of information and can lead to confusion and distrust in society. Therefore, although social media provides a platform that expands interaction and communication, it is important to understand and address the associated risks of its use.

The spread of hoaxes, which mainly occurs on social media platforms, refers to the dissemination of false news or misleading information (Junita & Gischa, 2022). These hoaxes are

generally created intentionally, either for serious purposes or merely for entertainment. Sometimes, hoaxes are produced as jokes or humor, while in other cases, they may be designed to influence or manipulate public opinion. What makes the spread of hoaxes even more problematic is the fact that they can easily be disseminated, both intentionally and unintentionally, by individuals who do not verify the authenticity of information before spreading it. In the context of social media, messages or content can spread quickly and widely because of users' ability to share information directly without any external filtering process. This allows hoaxes to spread massively without adequate fact-checking or editorial evaluation (Juditha, 2018).

The Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law) has clear provisions regarding the dissemination of harmful and potentially damaging information, particularly in the context of electronic transactions and sensitive social issues. Article 28 paragraphs 1 and 2 of the ITE Law explicitly prohibit individuals from intentionally and unlawfully spreading fake or misleading news that could cause harm to consumers in electronic transactions. Additionally, the ITE Law also prohibits the dissemination of information aimed at inciting hatred or hostility towards individuals or specific groups based on categories such as ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations (SARA). Violations of these provisions can result in serious legal consequences, including a maximum prison sentence of six years or a fine of up to one billion rupiah, as stipulated in the ITE Law. This underscores the importance of complying with the law and maintaining integrity in the use of electronic platforms, as well as emphasizing individual responsibility in disseminating information responsibly according to principles of fairness and truth (Arjanto, 2022).

However, the spread of hoaxes remains rampant due to the low literacy of users regarding the news and information they receive, allowing hoaxes produced by "individuals" intentionally to be easily disseminated widely and unrestrictedly by people who immediately trust the information they receive without any selection and searching for primary sources of trusted news. This indicates the low social responsibility of users for the information they spread and the impact that can result from the dissemination of such information. So this research explains the challenges of the digital era through a description of how to manage hoaxes circulating in society and how to strengthen social media ethics.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method using a literature study approach. In this qualitative research, the data produced is in the form of written words based on observations. The research was conducted by collecting both primary and secondary literature sources related to hoaxes and social media literacy, which were then analyzed and abstracted to obtain comprehensive information, which in turn produced knowledge that could lead to conclusions (Darmalaksana, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the infographic as presented on Kompas.com, the trends of hoaxes in 2022 revolve around three main topics: the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccinations for children, and the 2024 presidential election. First and foremost, there is a prevalence of hoaxes concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains a significant concern for global society. Hoaxes regarding the origin of the virus, false treatments, and claims about vaccine effectiveness are commonly circulated. Additionally, misinformation about vaccines for children is a prominent issue, with inaccurate or misleading information proliferating across various social media platforms. As the 2024 presidential election approaches, hoax dissemination trends also begin to intertwine with politics, including misleading information about candidates, false policy claims, and efforts to influence public opinion. With these trends in mind, it becomes crucial for the public to enhance their digital literacy and ability to discern accurate information from misinformation, as well as to avoid being swayed by unverified claims (Tim Cek Fakta, 2022). Detik.com, a prominent online news platform, has introduced a dedicated section specifically addressing false information or hoaxes. This section, titled "Berita dan Informasi Hoax Terkini dan Terbaru hari ini" regularly features news related to the spread of hoaxes in society. This phenomenon underscores the prevalence of the creation, dissemination, and consumption of hoaxes among the public. It indicates that efforts to combat the spread of false information are becoming increasingly crucial in the context of digitalization and globalization of information.

According to MAFINDO (Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society), even media outlets verified by the press council and with clear addresses and editorial structures are not immune to hoax attacks (Ariwibowo, 2022). Data compiled by MAFINDO in January 2022 showed that there

were 179 hoax contents circulating, which marked a 31.6% increase compared to December 2021, which recorded only 136 contents. It's known that the highest distribution channels for hoaxes are social media platforms, with Facebook being the primary channel, followed by Twitter and WhatsApp. Hoaxes can come in various forms such as satire/parody, misleading content, counterfeit content, fake connections, false content, and manipulated content, conveyed through text, photos, videos, graphic images, or a combination of these forms.

Hoaxes, defined in the KBBI as fabricated news or information, whether disseminated through traditional media or social platforms, have become a pervasive issue in contemporary society. The ramifications of hoaxes, irrespective of their forms and intents, extend beyond mere misinformation, instigating detrimental effects on both the general public and individuals targeted by such deceitful narratives. Firstly, hoaxes breed societal unrest, fostering an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear regarding the authenticity of circulated information. Individuals are often left grappling with distorted realities, unsure of what to believe amidst a sea of falsified claims. This climate of uncertainty not only erodes public trust in media sources but also exacerbates existing social divisions, fueling animosity and distrust among different societal factions. Moreover, hoaxes have the insidious capability to incite hatred and prejudice against specific groups or individuals, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and deepening societal rifts. The dissemination of false narratives, deliberately crafted to manipulate public opinion, engenders a culture of mistrust, where verifiable facts are increasingly questioned and disbelieved. Consequently, the proliferation of hoaxes not only undermines the integrity of information but also threatens the very fabric of societal cohesion and trust. Beyond the societal realm, perpetrators of hoaxes face legal repercussions, including hefty fines and imprisonment, underscoring the severity of their actions and serving as a deterrent against future instances of misinformation dissemination. Thus, the detrimental impacts of hoaxes reverberate far beyond the dissemination of false information, permeating societal discourse and necessitating concerted efforts to combat their proliferation and mitigate their deleterious effects.

According to information reported on kompas.com, the dissemination of false information, commonly known as hoaxes, evidently has the potential to harm an individual's mental well-being, a finding derived from studies conducted by psychologists. The negative effects arise due to the anxiety that emerges as a result of receiving and believing in false news. Moreover,

psychologists believe that the consequences of the spread of these hoaxes can reach a level where individuals require psychological therapeutic interventions. This is caused by the persistent and prolonged feelings of anxiety, fear, and perceived threat resulting from the consumption of fake news.

Upon further examination, the prevalence of hoax dissemination up to this day can be attributed to the low awareness among media users regarding the importance of media literacy and the lack of social responsibility among social media users for what they access and redistribute through their personal accounts on social media platforms. Media literacy refers to an individual's ability to access, analyze, and evaluate media messages, as well as to send them back through the media (Setyaningsih, 2017). Insufficient understanding of media literacy can lead individuals to uncritically accept the information they receive, making them more vulnerable to the spread of hoaxes. Furthermore, indifference to social responsibility in disseminating information can exacerbate this issue, as it may lead to the rapid dissemination of unverified information without considering its impact on society as a whole.

Media literacy involves more than just media usage; it requires a deep analytical ability towards presented messages, prudence in media usage, and caution in receiving information. Media, especially social media, has transformed the information landscape by providing easy access for users to seek and disseminate information. However, it's important to note that this convenience doesn't always correlate with the truth or credibility of the disseminated information. Everyone, regardless of their background or credibility, has the ability to be both senders and receivers of media messages. Therefore, it's crucial for every individual to develop critical abilities in assessing the truth and credibility of the information they encounter, as well as considering the impact of the information they convey or consume.

Therefore, when we cannot control the content disseminated through the media and the type of messages conveyed through it, it is important for us to regulate our behavior as social media users. This reflects the level of responsibility we must hold as individuals participating in the use of social media. In addition to merely using the platform, we also have an obligation to ensure that what we consume, access, and share on social media aligns with the values and ethics

we uphold. This is an integral part of maintaining the integrity and positive impact of our presence in the online environment.

Social responsibility involves more than just self-awareness; it is the responsibility to act while considering its impact not only on oneself but also on others within society. This responsibility encompasses behaviors and public communications that can influence the perceptions and actions of others. For instance, when sharing information or opinions on social media platforms, we have a responsibility to ensure the truthfulness and accuracy of that information, so as not to mislead or harm others. Furthermore, social responsibility also includes ethical aspects, especially in the use of social media. This involves writing polite and considerate messages, creating responsible content, and engaging respectfully with other users on the platform.

The widespread digital transformation affecting various aspects of life, including journalism, brings numerous issues and challenges. This shift is not only about the trend of readers moving from print to digital media but also involves media companies' efforts to adapt by providing fast, practical, and more accessible platforms. The digital transformation phenomenon has also led to negative practices such as cloned journalism, issue twisting, centralization of news around the capital, prioritizing sensationalism over truth, and delivering incomplete and fragmented information. These conditions require collective attention and action (Hakim, 2019).

The correlation between media literacy skills and the dissemination of hoax news is 0.431, indicating a "moderate negative relationship." This means that even if an individual possesses good media literacy skills, they are still susceptible to spreading hoax news, either intentionally or unintentionally (Retpitari, 2022).

In the absence of responsibility for our public social media posts, the spread of misinformation becomes remarkably facile, leading to its rapid dissemination and resharing. Thus, it becomes imperative for every social media user to assume social responsibility and recognize that despite acting in a personal capacity, their content is essentially public.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between hoaxes and the responsibility of social media users is highly complex and relevant in the current digital social context. The dissemination of hoaxes is often triggered by a lack of media literacy among social media users and a shortage of awareness regarding their social responsibility toward the information they access and redistribute through

their personal accounts. This social responsibility becomes crucial because whatever we share on social platforms can easily be consumed by thousands or even millions of people. Therefore, it is important to ensure that whatever we share is true and not misleading, especially when the information pertains to public interest. Social responsibility not only entails awareness of the impact of the information we disseminate on ourselves but also on others. This means we must exercise caution in selecting and verifying information before spreading it, as well as considering its impact on society as a whole. By understanding and implementing social responsibility in the use of social media, we can help prevent the spread of hoaxes and ensure more accurate and beneficial information for everyone.

REFERENCE

- Acquisti, A., Brandimarte, L., & Loewenstein, G. (2015). Privacy and Human Behavior in The Age of Information. *Science*, 347(6221), 509–514.
- Ariwibowo, S. (2022, Mei). *Hoaks dan Media Periode 16 – 22 mei 2022*. <https://mafindo.or.id/2022/05/26/hoaks-media-periode-16-22-mei-2022/>
- Arjanto, D. (2022, January 24). Amar Hukuman dalam UU ITE bagi Penyebar Hoaks: Bui Maksimal 6 Tahun dan atau.. *Tempo.Co*. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1553520/amar-hukuman-dalam-uu-ite-bagi-penyebar-hoaks-bui-maksimal-6-tahun-dan-atau>
- Darmalaksana, W. (2020). Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka dan Studi Lapangan. *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung*. <http://digilib.uinsgd.ac.id/id/eprint/32855>
- Hakim, L. (2019). Jurnalisme Islam di Tengah Transformasi Jurnalistik Digital. *Jurnal KOMUNIKASI ISLAM*, 9(2), 3014–3338.
- Haris, A. R. (2016). Issues In Digital Era. *Faculty of Information Management Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Perdana Campus 40150 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328528038_Issues_In_Digital_Era
- Juditha, C. (2018). Hoax Communication Interactivity in Social Media and Anticipation (Interaksi Komunikasi Hoax di Media Sosial serta Antisipasinya). *Jurnal Pekommas*, 3(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.30818/jpkm.2018.2030104>

- Junita, F. D., & Gischa, S. (2022, March 22). Hoaks: Pengertian, Ciri-Ciri, Jenis, dan Contohnya. *Kompas.Com*. <https://www.kompas.com/skola/read/2022/03/22/180000369/hoaks-pengertian-ciri-ciri-jenis-dan-contohnya>
- Mahdi, M. I. (2022, February 25). *Pengguna Media Sosial di Indonesia Capai 191 Juta pada 2022*. <https://dataindonesia.id/internet/detail/pengguna-media-sosial-di-indonesia-capai-191-juta-pada-2022>
- Manning, J. (2014). *Definition and Classes of social media. Encyclopedia of social media and Politics*. Sage Publications.
- Noble, S. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How social media exacerbates inequality and undermines democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Retpitasari, E. (2022). Dampak Pemahaman Keagamaan dan Kemampuan Literasi Media Terhadap Sebaran Berita Hoax di Komunitas Surabaya Mengaji. *Jurnal Mediakita Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam*, 6(2), 183–195.
- Setyaningsih, R. (2017). Model Literasi Media Berbasis Kearifan Lokal pada Masyarakat Kampung Dongkelan Kauman Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. *Komuniti: Jurnal Komunitas Dan Teknologi Informasi*, 9(2), 118–125. <https://doi.org/10.23917/komuniti.v9i2.4520>
- Tim Cek Fakta. (2022, January 5). Tren Hoaks 2022: Omicron, Vaksinasi Anak, hingga Pilpres 2024. *Kompas.Com*. <https://www.kompas.com/cekfakta/read/2022/01/05/174814882/tren-hoaks-2022-omicron-vaksinasi-anak-hingga-pilpres-2024?page=all>
- Tucker, J., Barbera, P., & Allcott, H. (2018). What is misinformation? *Science*, 360(6392), 398–403.