

Communication in Indonesian Social Media: Avoiding Hate Speeches, Intolerance and Hoax

Ahmad Sultra Rustan¹

Abstract

This research explores the consequences of online conformity in terms of how people respond to fake news. The study aims to see whether the readers of the misinformation are more inclined (a) to have a negative or positive opinion of fake news; (b) to support or oppose the fake news story by targeting the story itself or its author; and (c) spread a fake news story through social media. This study was conducted within a four-month period. The study employed an experimental research design, applying an inter-subject experimental design for three treatment groups. One group was exposed to a fake social media news post that was supported by positive comments from other users. The second group was shown the same fake social media news post, but this time, the comments with it exposed it as fake news. The third group was again shown the same post, but this time with comments that critically attacked both the fake news and its poster for promoting it. A total of 60 respondents were systematically sampled from 180 population, determined based on Raosoft ($p=0.05$), and a response distribution of 50%. Attitudes to the fake news story were assessed using three elements on a five-point Likert scale. The gathered data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Results show that there was a greater tendency to intend to spread a fake news item when it is accompanied with comments that support the news article compared with comments that are critical of the content and optionally its author. Moreover, the research suggests that warnings from organizations about inaccurate news may not change people's attitudes or reduce their willingness to spread a piece of fake news as powerfully as reading the critical comments of other consumers.

Keywords: *Social Media, Hoax, Intolerance, Communication,*

Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has been an exponentially growing field in recent years, especially as it helps people to store, share, and receive information easily. Social media is one ICT tool that has shaped out current modes of conversation and engagement, including the relaying of news stories (Waszak et al., 2018). The impacts of social media impact are unavoidable, especially as nobody can prevent us from spreading the information we want to share, regardless of whether it is true or not. This has profound effects for human society, and we

¹Dr. State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Parepare, Indonesia; Email: ahmadsultrarustan@iainpare.ac.id

should remember that our society cannot be isolated from modern life, particularly social media. People find it easy to communicate news through social networking platforms because of their large populations of users, and many frequently share and monitor news items through it.

Unfortunately, the social networking boom represents a doubled-edged sword. On the one hand, anybody can use social media to read information, communicate with friends and relatives, engage with a company, or post interesting information of their own (Aldwairi & Alwahedi, 2018; Watson, 2020). Despite the many positive opportunities offered by social media, however, recent events have revealed an undeniably dark side to it (Baccarella et al., 2018). While informatics and social media can combine to foster confidence and openness (Papadopoulos et al., 2016; White, 2020), the sad reality is that many actors use social media to disseminate hysteria (Hardalov, Koychev & Nakov, 2016).

Fake news can be easily spread through social media, so in order to reduce its effect on the real world, a comprehensive evaluation is desperately needed. In many ways, news is being conveyed to people through social media, but it is regrettable that many of these headlines will create confusion in an otherwise functional society. Hoax news is used to manipulate culture or policy development through the use of multiple bots to exploit a common sentiment among people (Jang, 2018; Khairuddin, et al., 2019). Lazer et al. (2018) define digital disinformation as false data that is intentionally distributed for the purposes of misleading people. In fact, this definition overlaps with the one offered by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) as “news articles that are purposive,” and this has been examined from a range of angles and become a subject of public discussion. The exponentially rapid rise of social media has seen the amount of bogus news increase considerably in recent years. Fake news can be irritating, frustrating, and disturbing, and it is everywhere. The influence it can have on both individuals and culture is also profound (Reyes et al., 2018).

These days, some 143 million Indonesians have some sort of Internet connection (Puspitasari & Ishii, 2016). Most industries have also started using social networking to promote their business practices in a new form of advertising (Chang, Shen & Liu, 2016), and social media is a crucial resource for disseminating marketing messages. A typical Indonesian now uses social media for 203 minutes each day. Of the 360 million people in Southeast Asia, 130 million (or 36%) of them are daily Facebook users. YouTube (43%) is the most commonly used social media platform, followed by Facebook (41%), WhatsApp (40%), Instagram (38%), and Twitter (27%)

(Carley et al., 2016; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Ibrahim, 2012). About 130 million social networking users in Indonesia use Twitter, representing roughly 6% of the platform's global users. Indonesia also has the largest number of Facebook users in Southeast Asia and the fourth largest worldwide, behind Brazil, the U.S., and India. Indonesians still regularly use Facebook through corporate networks and virtual networks. Some 27% of the online shops in Indonesia sold something based on Facebook details, while 31% of people purchased something based on Facebook advice. As for demographics, Facebook is more popular with mature adults in Indonesia. Data in 2016 revealed that 94.2 percent of Indonesians aged 30–35 regularly used Facebook, compared to 80.9 percent of Indonesians aged 16–19, so older Indonesians are more likely to use this social networking platform.

We face immense challenges in human life, and the problems are not limited to one thing. There are many aspects to this, and globalization is one of them. Globalization has emerged from a culture that is alien to Indonesia, and it is a uniform global means and a facilitator of a cycle of liberalization. At the root of globalization is how it spreads globally without hindrance from borders, bringing new elements of thinking, culture, knowledge, and technology. Globalization can also be seen as a process that has spread knowledge and innovation all around the world in our daily lives. This phenomenon has been strengthened by the increasingly advanced shipping industry, as well as the data and networking technologies and practices that have reached the global market. The major changes being made in the world of technology and connectivity due to globalization are significant because of the simplicity of trading and communicating between nations. It can be viewed as a system in which the boundaries of a nation are growing weaker. Consequently, with this increasingly sophisticated technology, we can be close to someone who may be geographically far removed from us. That has all been enabled by the advent of the Internet, which we have benefitted from for a long time, and the more recent development of social media.

Much like with Facebook, the Instagram community in Indonesia is the fourth largest in the world, with more than 56 million users in April 2019. Unlike Facebook, though, Instagram is more popular with younger users. More than 73% of Indonesians aged 16–25 use Instagram, compared with only 55.8% of those aged 30–35. Instagram is therefore a very active social network in Indonesia, as is the case with other social media platforms. A study by Ipsos revealed that up to 81% of Instagram customers use the platform to learn more about the products they

like. In addition, 76% of them reported having purchased a brand item based on something they saw on Instagram. Instagram is also a critical marketing platform for small companies according to the same report. What is more, up to 52% of Indonesian small business owners prefer to refer clients to their official Instagram accounts rather than their websites, and up to 82% of Indonesian small and medium-sized companies often communicate directly with consumers through Instagram messages.

In Indonesia, the growing number of internet users cannot be separated from infrastructure development, and it is easy to obtain a smartphone or other handheld device. Another reason is that now that there are more makers of such devices, the prices are lower. There is also an increasing interest in exploring the use of ICTs to increase transparency, enhance the provision of services, and increase the public's engagement in decision-making processes. This focuses on the mechanisms and processes through which ICT can support interactions among people, governments, and public entities, and it has been sparked by a demand from citizens for reform in the political milieu. This is an area of research called eParticipation, and the use of ICT by elected officials is now growing in importance due to the potential of creative ICT-based solutions for enhancing the partnership between lawmakers and the public.

Social media is a descriptive term for a platform that helps disseminate user-generated content, thus encouraging cooperation, conversation, and social interaction. This Internet-based technology enables the exchange of information and contacts to add value for the users. Politicians are also using the power of social networking to serve their specific political agendas. Social media can facilitate policy making, promote citizens' engagement, improve information sharing, and strengthen transparency and accountability. Although social networking programs are a positive development for policymakers, others focus primarily on mainstream media because of the limited Web visibility that they serve. Politicians who prefer not to use social media for political purposes may do this because it presents more barriers to achieving their goals than constructive possibilities. The social media market in Indonesia has immense potential for the success of every company, although it can be difficult to set up a company in Indonesia.

The goal of this research is to further study disinformation and fake news. It does, however, take a step back from previous work because it does not seek to examine the consequences of exposing bogus facts as false news. Instead, it studies the results of a more common frequent phenomenon where users are simply told by other users that something is conveying inaccurate

news. More specifically, this research examines how people react when are exposed to fake news that other users either support or reject as misinformation and how they can recognize this through analysis. Due to the fact that many discussion threads include false news, there is little interest in correcting misinformation in detail and more interest in making simple statements that either support or assail the story and its author, and alack of research in many aspects of these simple statements is evident.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated communication through social media in Indonesia, specifically with the aim of avoiding hate speech, intolerance, and hoaxes. More specifically, it investigates whether the readers of the misinformation are more inclined (a) to have a negative or positive opinion of fake news; (b) to support or oppose the fake news story by targeting the story itself or its author; and (c) spread a fake news story through social media. This study aims to shed some light on how other consumers can have an effect in terms of preventing fake news from circulating online.

Hypotheses

- H₁: When exposing people to a fake news story where users dispute the material through comments, they are less likely to accept the fake news than if it would have been accompanied by supportive user comments.
- H₂: When a fake news article has been exposed through critical user feedback about the content, users tend to write positive remarks themselves more than when the fake news is supported by users' comments.
- H_{3a}: Once a false news story has been revealed by user comments accusing it of inaccuracy, people are less likely to share the content than when it has user comments that endorse the material.
- H_{3b}: Upon revealing the fake news story to a user community and accusing the poster of disseminating false facts, people are less likely to share the fake news story through user comments or leave user comments clearly labeling the news as fraudulent.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed an experimental research design. For this purpose, the researcher applied an inter-subject experimental design for three treatment groups. One group of participants was exposed to a fake social media news post that was supported by positive comments from other users. The second group was shown the same fake social media news post, but this time, the comments with it exposed it as fake news. Finally, the third group was again shown the same post, but this time with comments that critically attacked both the fake news and its poster for promoting it.

Research Participants, Sampling Procedure, and Ethical Considerations

A total of 60 respondents were systematically sampled from a total population of 180 students at an Indonesian university. The sampling size was determined based on the use of free online software from Raosoft (see <http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>) with a margin of error of 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and a response distribution of 50%. This study was also guided by the following research ethics considerations. First, data privacy and informed consent forms were approved by the university ethics committee, and these were signed by the participants of the study. Second, an orientation on the purposes of the study was given to the participants by the researcher prior to administering the instruments. Thirdly, the anonymity of the respondents and the institution was strictly observed by never mentioning their names.

Research Instruments

Attitudes to the fake news story were assessed using three elements on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating absolute disagreement and 5 indicating absolute agreement with statements like “My impression of the Facebook post was fine” and “My impression of the Facebook post was one of fun” (Colliander & Marder, 2018). The average responses to the three elements were used to populate a table.

Stimulus Development

The research applied a role playing model in which participants were exposed to one of three behavioral posts inserted in the survey device, with them imagining that it had been posted on

Facebook by a distant acquaintance. In order to maximize the relevance of the results, the researcher decided to use actual instances of fake news. To this end, an internet search was conducted to find known items of fake news. Finally, a Facebook post from a group was identified. Three criteria were set for choosing a fake news post: a) the post needed to identify an incident or topic that was significant and understandable to a typical Indonesian at the time of analysis; (b) it must be inaccurate; and (c) an ordinary person may reasonably identify it as false. A screenshot of the article was taken as the basis of this study's fake news story. Three separate sets of feedback for it were then generated. Images were distorted and descriptions were modified to replace real personalities with fictional, unidentifiable facsimiles. First, instrument tests were carried out with three sets of four observations each, with the participants being involved through Facebook. When asked if the posts looked like actual Facebook posts, they all agreed. Likewise, all participants found the numerous commentaries to be representative of actual comments online. Furthermore, all of them considered the comments intended for group 1 as endorsing the article, while they perceived the comments for groups 2 and 3 as being critical of the post. When asked which set of comments was the most critical of the poster (from groups 2 and 3), both respondents suggested that group 3's comments were the most critical. The stimuli were therefore deemed suitable for use in the research.

Procedure and Data Analysis

This study was conducted within a four-month period. The data gathering lasted for one month. However, before the formal data gathering began, the university authority's approval and permission to undertake the study was sought in the first week. Every iteration of the scenario was accompanied by questionnaire items to quantify the hypothesis variables. The participants were randomly assigned to different situations (N=60). Every iteration of the scenario was accompanied by questionnaire items to calculate the hypothesis variables. The research's ethical considerations were strictly followed by the researcher at all times. After gathering the students' responses, they were coded and subjected to data cleaning and statistical analyses over a one-month period. The gathered data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Finally, the results analysis, interpretation, and the writing of a report were performed over the course of a month.

Results and Discussion

An external regression test was applied before examining the dependent variables. The respondents were asked “Were the Facebook comments positive or critical of the post?” The responses to this query were then calculated on a binary (i.e., supportive/critical) scale. Only those who answered the question correctly (N=60) had their responses checked when the theories were eventually evaluated.

According to H₁, after reading one of the two sets of comments that were critical of the content, the sensitivity to detecting fake news should be stronger, so a one-way ANOVA with a Scheffe post-hoc check was used. The findings revealed that the thresholds for the postal attitudes in groups two and three were dramatically lower than in group one. H₁ was therefore empirically supported. When evaluating H_{3a} and H_{3b}, the same approach was used for the group that was subjected to comments indicating the news story as false (i.e., group 2). There was a lower expectation of spreading the fake news story when compared to the group that was shown comments endorsing the fake story (i.e., group 1), and this expectation was lower still for group 3. The results showed that the thresholds for both categories were significantly lower than was the case for group one. H_{3a} was therefore endorsed empirically. However, group three’s response did not differ substantially from that of group two, so H_{3b} was only partly accepted. The mediums, standard deviations, and p values for the ANOVA analyses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Mean for attitudes towards post and intention to share

Variables	Group 1 Mean	Group 2 Mean	Group 3 Mean
Attitude towards post	2.18	1.65 *	1.83**
Intention to share post	2.00	1.58*	1.63**

*= Significantly lower than group 1 at $p = .001$

**= Significantly lower than group 1 at $p = .005$

If H₂ holds true, it should be less likely that respondents will react after reading negative feedback for the false news article than if they had read remarks endorsing the story. A cross tabulation was applied using a chi-square test. The results showed a significant difference ($p < .001$) between the predicted proportions of interviewed individuals.

The results of this study indicate that the comments and actions of other people on social media actually do influence users' responses to fake online news and their willingness to propagate it. People who were subjected to the critical responses of other users toward the false news took a dimmer view of the fake news than those users subjected to comments that supported the false news, so they were therefore less likely to share the fake news themselves. These findings demonstrate the role that everyday users can play in halting the spread of false news and other misinformation and minimizing its effects on society.

The study gave technically mixed results, however, specifically because H_{3b} was only partly supported. It was especially important to challenge the self-concept by showing how a person can be fooled by other online users spreading fake news. The respondents in this study were not affected when they saw other users denouncing the story as false. This might be because in previous studies, the value of preserving the self-concept in an online environment has been overestimated, although this appears unlikely given the large body of research suggesting its significance. The most likely case is that a clear argument denouncing a story is often viewed by users as an overt reprimand, and orthodoxy and the perceived challenges to the self-concept work in tandem to explain the discrepancies between the three trial groups. However, it could be claimed that the findings of the study were not responsible for either supporting or challenging the self-concept. Alternatively, some may claim that such response trends are merely due to the effect of "waking up." Studies have also shown that people spend relatively little time digesting online content (Bishop et al., 2017; Prochazka et al., 2018), meaning that they are not wasting large amounts of cognitive effort processing web content. Certain users, at least, may not believe that a fake news article is bogus, and this only changes when they see feedback from other users. This is analogous to the incongruous effect of advertising on certain marketing posts (Belanche et al., 2017). If so, certain triggers that point out to an individual that a news story is false may have a similar effect to the comments shown to groups two and three of this study. These could take the form of warnings from social media companies, indicating that users may have cause to be suspicious of the content.

Conclusion

This work is intended to add to the growing literature on debunking misinformation and fake news, as stated in the introduction. Past researchers have extensively explored how counterarguments can mitigate them is perceptions created by false news. Furthermore, this work takes a step back and refrains from investigating the misperceptions of people who are exposed to fake news. It instead explores the behavioral intentions of people to comment on and spread false news based on responses from other users about the misinformation. More specifically, this work explores the influence that it has on persons subjected to fake news that other users condemn and indicate as misinformation, such as through the comment feature. The results of this study show that other users' comments about fake news have a substantial influence over the attitudes of the subsequent readers of misinformation and their desire to comment on and share the fake news. The findings suggest that the behavior of online users may be more influential than disclaimers and other forms of warnings to combat fake news through social media companies.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study includes some shortcomings that should be addressed by other researchers. From the beginning, no distinction was drawn between frequent Facebook users and more casual Facebook users. For example, it is possible that frequent users may be more adapt at identifying fake news articles, so they may be less influenced by other users' comments than less-frequent users. Investigating how these two groups of Facebook users are influenced by other users' behavior when responding to false news is therefore a suggestion for future research.

Another limitation of this study concerns a person's exposure to the fake news used in the experiment and how personal factors may affect their responses was not taken into consideration. For instance, a bogus news item may seem more viable to a conservative than a liberal, or vice versa, and the responses of these two people may vary accordingly.

In addition, prospective scholars are urged to examine how mixed statements affect reactions to false news. A set of comments about fake news usually comprises a combination of supportive and critical feedback. This research did not take into account the consequences of such mixed opinions. Future research could examine how various proportions of positive and negative

remarks influence the reaction to these comments. In this way, we will all gain a better understanding of how people react to the fake news that is currently affecting society.

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