COVID-19 HOAX DISINFORMATION DURING THE PANDEMIC IN INDONESIA

Riesta Ayu Oktarina[1], Muhajir Sulthonul Aziz[2], Fathul Qorib[3]
STIKOSA-AWS Surabaya, Institut Agama Islam Darullughah Wadda'wah, Universitas Tribhuwana Tunggadewi
Email : riestaayu@stikosa-aws.ac.id[1], muhajirsa@iaidalwa.ac.id[2], fathul.indonesia@gmail.com[3]

Abstract

Hoaxes related to Covid-19 continue to increase on social media in Indonesia. As one of the largest internet users in Indonesia, hoax production is predicted to continue to occur. This research wants to map the hoax of Covid-19 news, especially related to vaccine news in Indonesia. Data was obtained from the hoax buster page of the Committee for Handling Covid-19 and Aptika Kominfo from January 18 to May 28, 2021, as many as 36 hoaxes. This research is important to be a guide to understanding hoaxes so that anti-hoax activists can formulate effective hoax prevention strategies. The results of this study found that most of the hoaxes were related to misleading information about the impact of vaccines, found as many as 12 news stories spread through social media on Facebook, more specifically spreading distrust of the government. Other hoax themes are partly targeting some individuals who deliberately use the name of a doctor to provide misleading information. The covid-19 hoax that spreads a lot has a pattern of attach, sort, straighten, resettle, break. That is, hoax makers make use of images or text from real events and then changed according to certain intentions and purposes.

Keywords : *Hoax, Disinformation, Covid-19*

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 still leaves painful experiences for countries in the world. According to WHO data, the death toll from this virus has reached 971,360 people (GoogleNews 2020), far outperforming the deaths of the SARS and MERS viruses (El Zowalaty and Järhult 2020; Peeri et al. 2020). Nevertheless, this virus not only injures and kills human physique, it also impairs mental health. The rapidly

evolving information makes our understanding of this virus decline. Valid news is mixed with misinformation that misleads our understanding.

This misinformation is commonly called a hoax. Hoax is a popular name that we use to refer to several terms such as: misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and post truth. The hoax in this study refers to the understanding conveyed by the High Level Expert Group, namely all forms of false, inaccurate, and misleading information, which is spread by certain people with the aim of benefiting or harming others (High Level Expert Group (HLEG) 2018). This understanding contains an important meaning in the purpose of spreading hoaxes, namely benefiting certain parties and harming others.

The emergence of the internet is accused of triggering the spread of hoaxes. Nowadays, if any information comes to the social media homepage that belongs to us, then we should suspect it. Is the news indeed sourced from a trusted informant, or is it just made by people who want to take unilateral advantage? Many recent studies have placed social media as a new world where human activities are located (Hall 2018; D. Zhang and Guo 2014). While it doesn't really show reality, but social media is widely used to predict what's really going on in the real world (Ahmad, Alvi, and Ittefaq 2019; Pulido et al. 2018).

Therefore, when hoaxes then spread on social media, people's lives in general must be disrupted. Indonesians who enjoy chatting in coffee shops will eventually bring information from social media to the real world. This is dangerous when people's understanding is filled with hoax news rather than valid news. Social media provides a virtual space to become a new human being. A person can arbitratorily create an account under a false name so as to spread information without consequence (Regards 2018).

Social media provides spaces for debate that will never end. Because in addition to the negative sides that are always explored, the emergence of social media can actually be used for the dissemination of useful information. Social media also brings social equality because anyone can comment anything there. But at the same time it is also dangerous because it can bring disintegration (Susanto 2019) and the spread of

negative ideas (B. Zhang 2015). Social media, like technology in general, always brings advantages and disadvantages depending on how government regulations limit negative messages, and user discretion.

In the case of Indonesia, social media cannot be separated from the needs of its people. Indonesia, which has one of the largest number of citizens in the world, is also the largest user of social media. As of January 2020, social media users in Indonesia have reached 160 million citizens representing 59% of the Indonesian population (Hootsuite 2020).

Furthermore, the low literacy rate of the Indonesian people is also one of the reasons why people easily believe in hoaxes (Majid 2019). Hoaxes attack people's fear of viruses and other fears so that they are finally interested and believe (Voichici 2018). A study of the hoax of the spread of Covid-19 in the younger generation shows that they still believe Covid-19 can die in the Indonesian climate, Covid-19 is a biological weapon, even they also believe that rinsing salt water can cure this virus (Nasir, Baequni, and Nurmansyah 2020).

Hoaxes in Indonesia appear in various events, both social, political, natural disasters, to Covid-19. The poor condition of the community because of this deadly virus has not stopped the steps of hoax producers. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia on May 7, 2020 released that there were 1,401 distributions of hoax issues about Covid-19 (Yusuf 2020). One month later, on June 15, 2020, the Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19 Handling formed by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, said that there was an increase in hoax news up to 137,829 cases (Rikin 2020). This condition indicates that Indonesia is in a state of emergency with correct information. At a time when people who are frightened by the Covid-19 virus need clarity of information, what they can get is hoax news.

The Indonesian government responded to this condition by collaborating with one of the civil society organizations (CSOs) to prevent hoaxes, the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (MAFINDO) to check facts related to Covid-19 on social media. The task force formed by the President of the Republic of Indonesia Joko Widodo then uploaded all the results of the Covid-19 hoax fact check on the covid19.go.id website.

MAFINDO in early 2020 has compiled several categories of hoaxes about Covid-19. The initial mapping is useful to be the preliminary data in this study. The data is then developed by researchers to find out the typology of hoaxes more broadly and specifically.

Literature Review

The study of hoaxes is nothing new in this world. Before the advent of the internet, hoaxes already existed and spread through talk from one person to another (Aldwairi and Alwahedi 2018). MacDougall has also conducted studies on hoaxes and traced *hoax* studies since the 17th century (Macdougall 1958). In contemporary times, hoax studies have been discussed again since Donald Trump was elected President of America (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017), followed by the word *post truth* becoming the most popular word by the Oxford Dictionary in 2016 (Wang 2016).

As in America, hoax studies in Indonesia have also begun to emerge in the political field. Even hoaxes with topics about politics ranked highest in Indonesia in 2017 – 2018 by 34% (Kusumarani and Zo 2018). Therefore, the study of hoaxes in the political field also ranks the most because of its great influence on various areas of people's lives (Nugraha 2019; Qorib 2020; Suharyanto 2019; Tahir, Kusmanto, and Amin 2020; Gruzd and Mai 2020). After political topics, other topics that occupy the top three are SARA (ethnic, religious, racial, and inter-group) and socio-cultural which are 17% each (Kusumarani and Zo 2018).

Hoaxes are indeed something scary. But today's media literacy makes hoaxes easier to understand, even easier to detect. (Afroz, Brennan, and Greenstadt 2012) for example uses linguistic features to detect message patterns on social media so that it can be known whether the message is a hoax or not. Some big data analytics can even detect internet robots (botnets) spreading propaganda on Twitter massively (Chu et al. 2010; Caldarelli et al. 2019).

In addition to using technology, identifying hoax distribution patterns is also important so that we are not easily deceived. The hoax typology that we are currently

discussing, also has many correlations with previous research. Some experts create hoax typologies based on special needs for the specific research site or issue they are surgical about, such as fabricated, propaganda, conspiracy theory, hoaxes, biased, rumors, clickbait, and satire (Zannettou et al. 2019). He specializes in the spread of political hoaxes on the internet.

LSE Media Policy also revealed that there are six typologies of political reporting in the United States that can be attributed to hoaxes; the use of foreign policy to create fake news, utilizing hoaxes for financial gain, parody and satire, bad journalism, the use of figures to reduce good news as fake news, using news that challenges popular opinion (Tambini 2017). To better understand the complete picture of hoaxes, we can study them in a hoax taxonomy compiled by Molina et al, namely; real news vs false news, polarized content, satire, misreporting, commentary, persuasive information, and citizen journalism (Molina et al. 2019).

A simpler typology of hoaxes is demonstrated by (Kumar and Shah 2018). He built the concept that an information is considered a hoax if it contains at least four things: misinformation, disinformation, opinion-based, fact-based. Misinformation and disinformation are classified as hoaxes that require the intention to create and spread them. Meanwhile, opinion-based and fact-based require knowledge to create and disseminate it.

Each researcher has a perspective in interpreting hoaxes and dividing them into several typologies. In this study, the typology of hoaxes to be examined must be easy to understand, simple, but can provide a big picture of how the pattern of hoax spread in Indonesia, especially hoaxes related to Covid-19, namely *shorten, straighten, resettle,* and *break*. These four typologies are inspired by the categorization related to rumors that circulated before the internet grew, namely leveling, assimilating, and sharpening (Allport, Gordon; Postman 1947).

Shorten means this hoax about Covid-19 which is considered trivial and there is a reduction in information that should be received by the public. *Straighten* means that there is a reinforcement and addition to the facts so that the information has become fake news. *Resettle* is the creation of a *hoax* that comes from a vacuum, aka not based

on facts. Finally, *break* means breaking the truth by changing the facts so that the information misses the mark. The goal is for people to slip like humans slip when the road is slippery.

Research Method

This research deliberately does not use quantitative data because it wants to identify every hoax information in detail. So that this research can reveal the purpose of making the hoax news. Primary data in the form of hoax information is obtained from the www.covid19.go.id/hoaxbuster website which is the official website of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia to educate the wider community. This website collaborates with the community organization MAFINDO (Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society), which is the largest fact-finding movement in Indonesia. As well as a collection of hoax issue reports from Aptika.kominfo.go.id.

The hoax information collected by the researchers from the website was 36 news from January 18 to May 28, 2021. The determination of the collection date is carried out in sequence to find out the Covid-19 hoax validly. This is done because the covid vaccination program is targeted to spread starting in early 2021. The data from these 36 news stories then the researchers tabulated according to the concepts that the researcher wanted to look for, namely shorten, straighten, resettle, and break. Researchers collect according to the pattern of making hoaxes so that there is a tendency towards making hoaxes in Indonesia.

The researcher then performs its main content analysis to group each disinformation into specific categories. Content coding and analysis is done by inputting all the data into excel. In particular, researchers employ qualitative interpretive content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013)

The hoax information collected by researchers from the website was 69 news from August 1, 2020 to September 15, 2020. The determination of the collection date is carried out randomly to find out the Covid-19 hoax validly. This date randomization is used to avoid special moments that *hoax* producers would normally focus on the theme. The data from these 69 news stories then the researchers tabulate according to

the concepts that the researcher wants to look for, namely shorten, straighten, resettle, and break. Researchers collect according to the pattern of making hoaxes so that there is a tendency towards making hoaxes in Indonesia.

Conducting qualitative mapping of the content of hoax news about Covid-19 has special difficulties, especially in the foresight of the researcher himself. Qualitative research believes that researchers are the main instruments capable of interpreting data so that it can be meaningful (Smith and Sparkes 2020). Quality control of this research is greatly influenced by the ability of researchers, experience in the field under study, the ability to process research data, to certainty in matching theoretical concepts with data are the main challenges (Bahrami et al. 2016).

Results of Discussion

The hoax about Covid-19 in Indonesia is already in a troubling stage. A lot of evidence shows that *hoaxes* can dull a person's consciousness to the point that he does not believe in health protocols. Even those who believe in Covid-19 as a conspiracy consider this virus to be a biological weapon (Nasir, Baequni, and Nurmansyah 2020) so they are reluctant to keep their distance, do not want to wash their hands, because they believe that this condition is just a mere hoax (Bierwiaczonek, Kunst, and Pich 2020).

All the unrest about hoaxes, conspiracies, misinformation, and disinformation, is reflected in the 36 data researchers have collected. Here is a simple mapping of the data:
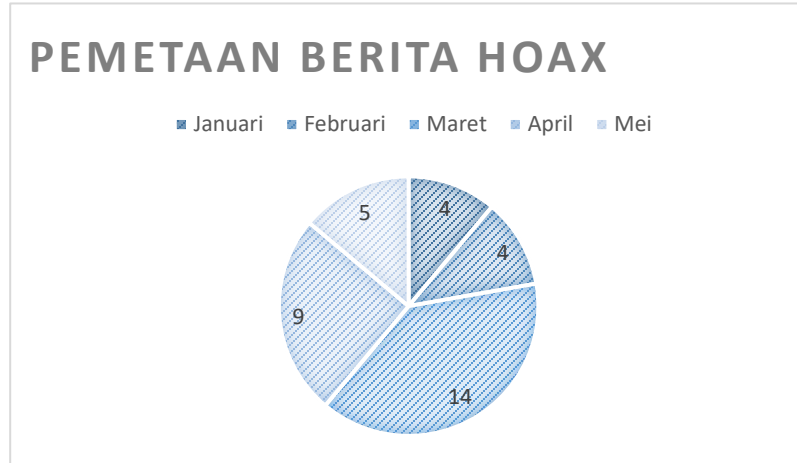

Figure 1 Mapping hoax news from January 18 – May 28, 2021
Source : Processed Researcher (2021)

Figure 1 shows the number of hoax reports in March 2021 as many as 14 news that contain hoaxes related to information and impacts – the impact of the COVID-19 vaccine. The emergence of this hox news is an implication of the vaccination program announced by President Jokowi. The Ministry of Health on December 14, 2020 has also issued a Regulation of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia Number 84 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Vaccination in the Context of Overcoming the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) Pandemic (Kompas, 2020).

Media Disinformation

In addition to mapping news, researchers also analyze platforms where the spread of disinformation is widely found. In general, researchers found the spread of hoax news on various social media such as *Facebook, Instragram, Twitter, Whatsapp, and Youtube.* Researchers found that social media as the most widely found dissemination medium is Facebook with 18 hoax news, the next order is *whatsapp* with the discovery of 9 hoax news.
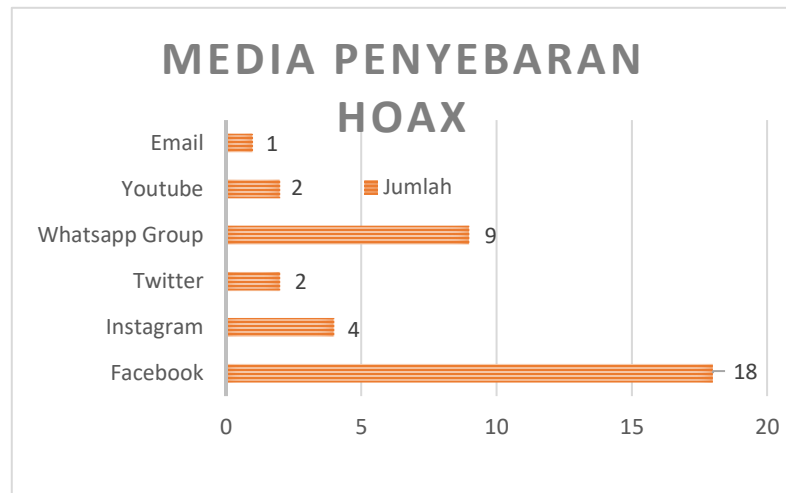
MEDIA PENYEBARAN HOAX

Media	Jumlah
Email	1
Youtube	2
Whatsapp Group	9
Twitter	2
Instagram	4
Facebook	18

Figure 2 Media Spreading hoax news Source : Processed Researcher (2021)

Facebook is still the main platform for disinformation dissemination activities. Several times Facebook has made various innovations to ease the circulation of the spread of hoax news (BBC, 2020) but it is still felt necessary to evaluate from media companies, because the undetected language is still an obstacle by Facebook's algorithm. In addition to the need to develop new algorithms, the public should also have started sorting out news by looking at quotes or the need to re-examine, so as to be more careful about hoax news.

Whatsapp group is also the second favorite spreading medium after Facebook, because of the need to have discussions in groups, causing a lot of hoax news spread through this medium for reasons of convenience.

Types of Disinformation News

Jenis-Jenis Hoax

Evidentiality

Data Pendukung
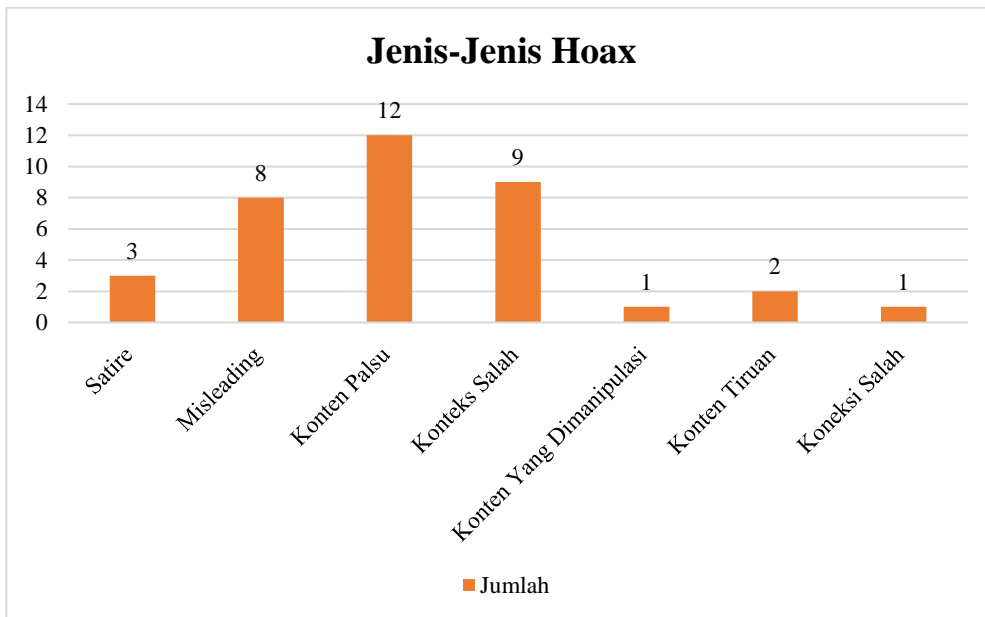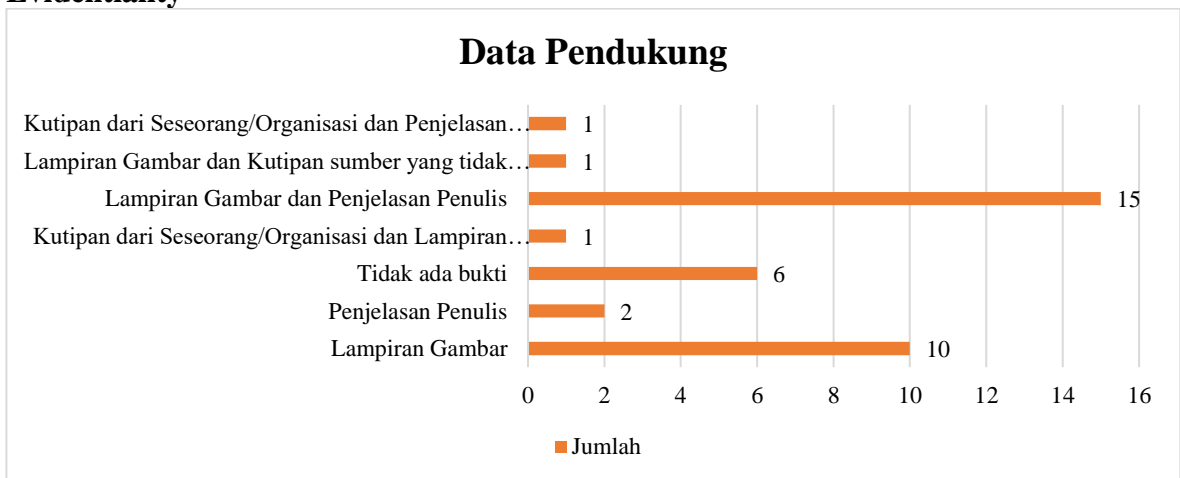
Conclusion

A new era of Information Warfare has arrived. Various actors, including state-sponsored ones, are weaponiz-ing information on Online Social Networks to run false-information campaigns with targeted manipulation of public opinion on specific topics. These false-information campaigns can have dire consequences to the public: mutating their opinions and actions, especially with respect to critical world events like major elections. (Zanettou, 2019).

Reference

Afroz, Sadia, Michael Brennan, and Rachel Greenstadt. 2012. "Detecting Hoaxes, Frauds, and Deception in Writing Style Online." *Proceedings - IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy*, 461–75. https://doi.org/10.1109/SP.2012.34.

Ahmad, Taufiq, Aima Alvi, and Muhammad Ittefaq. 2019. "The Use of Social Media on Political Participation Among University Students: An Analysis of Survey Results From Rural Pakistan." *SAGE Open* 9 (3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019864484.

Aldwairi, Monther, and Ali Alwahedi. 2018. "Detecting Fake News in Social Media Networks." *Procedia Computer Science* 141: 215–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2018.10.171.

Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. American Economic Association. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211.

Allport, Gordon; Postman, Leo. 1947. *The Psychology of Rumor*. New York`: Henry, Hold, Rinehart,& Winston.

Bahrami, Nasim, Mohammad Ali Soleimani, Ameneh Yaghoobzadeh, and Hadi Ranjbar. 2016. "Researcher As an Instrument in Qualitative Research: Challenges and Opportunities." *Advances in Nursing and Midwifery* 25 (90): 27–37. https://doi.org/10.22037/anm.v25i90.11584.

Bierwiaczonek, Kinga, Jonas R. Kunst, and Olivia Pich. 2020. "Belief in COVID-19 Conspiracy Theories Reduces Social Distancing over Time." *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12223.

Caldarelli, Guido, Rocco De Nicola, Fabio Del Vigna, Marinella Petrocchi, and Fabio Saracco. 2019. "The Role of Bot Squads in the Political Propaganda on Twitter." *Communications Physics* 3 (1): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1038/s42005-020-0340-4.

Chu, Zi, Steven Gianvecchio, Haining Wang, and Sushil Jajodia. 2010. "Who Is Tweeting on Twitter: Human, Bot, or Cyborg?" *Proceedings - Annual Computer Security Applications Conference, ACSAC*, 21–30. https://doi.org/10.1145/1920261.1920265.

GoogleNews. 2020. "Virus Corona (COVID-19) - Google Berita." News.Google.Com. 2020.

Gruzd, Anatoliy, and Philip Mai. 2020. "Going Viral: How a Single Tweet Spawned a COVID-19 Conspiracy Theory on Twitter." *Big Data and Society* 7 (2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720938405.

Hall, Jeffrey A. 2018. "When Is Social Media Use Social Interaction? Defining Mediated Social Interaction." *New Media and Society* 20 (1): 162–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816660782.

High Level Expert Group (HLEG). 2018. "A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation." *European Comission*. Vol. 2. https://doi.org/10.2759/0156.

Hootsuite. 2020. "Hootsuite (We Are Social): Indonesian Digital Report 2020 – Andi Dwi Riyanto, Dosen, Praktisi, Konsultan, Pembicara: E-Bisnis/Digital

Marketing/Promotion/Internet Marketing, SEO, Technopreneur, Fasilitator Google Gapura Digital Yogyakarta." Wearesocial.Com. 2020.

Kumar, Srijan, and Neil Shah. 2018. "False Information on Web and Social Media: A Survey" 1 (1).

Kusumarani, R, and H J Zo. 2018. "Exploring Digital Fake News Phenomenon in Indonesia." *Cpr South*.

Macdougall, Curtis. 1958. *Hoaxes*. New York: Dover Publications.

Majid, Abdul. 2019. "Fenomena Penyebaran Hoax Dan Literasi Bermedia...(Abdul Majid)." *Jurnal Komodifikasi* 8: 228–39.

Molina, Maria D., S. Shyam Sundar, Thai Le, and Dongwon Lee. 2019. "'Fake News' Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219878224.

Nasir, Narila Mutia, Baequni Baequni, and Mochamad Iqbal Nurmansyah. 2020. "Misinformation Related To Covid-19 in Indonesia." *Jurnal Administrasi Kesehatan Indonesia* 8 (2): 51. https://doi.org/10.20473/jaki.v8i2.2020.51-59.

Nugraha, Muhamad Tisna. 2019. "Hoax Di Media Sosial Facebook: Antara Edukasi Dan Propaganda Kepentingan." *JSW: Jurnal Sosiologi Walisongo* 3 (1): 97. https://doi.org/10.21580/jsw.2019.3.1.3359.

Peeri, Noah C, Nistha Shrestha, Siddikur Rahman, Zhengqi Tan, Saana Bibi, and Mahdi Baghbanzadeh. 2020. "The SARS, MERS and Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Epidemics, the Newest and Biggest Global Health Threats: What Lessons Have We Learned?" *International Journal Of Epidemiology*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyaa033.

Pulido, Cristina M., Gisela Redondo-Sama, Teresa Sordé-Martí, and Ramon Flecha. 2018. "Social Impact in Social Media: A New Method to Evaluate the Social Impact of Research." *PLoS ONE* 13 (8): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203117.

Qorib, Fathul. 2020. "Persepsi Hoax Politik Caleg Perempuan Pada Pemilihan Umum Legislatif 2019 Di Kota Malang." *WARTA Iski* 3 (01): 13–22.

Rikin, Ari Supriyanti. 2020. "137.829 Hoax Covid-19 Teridentifikasi Gugus Tugas." Beritasatu.Com. 2020.

Salam, Aprinus. 2018. "The Hoax Phenomenon in Indonesian Society: Observing Anti-Diversity Memes since 2014." *Jurnal Humaniora* 30 (3): 315. https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v30i3.38891.

Smith, Brett, and Andrew C Sparkes. 2020. "Qualitative Research." In *Handbook Od Sport Psychology*, edited by Gershon Tenenbaum and Robert C Eklund, 1001–19. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Suharyanto, Cosmas Eko. 2019. "Analisis Berita Hoaks Di Era Post-Truth: Sebuah Review." *Masyarakat Telematika Dan Informasi : Jurnal Penelitian Teknologi Informasi Dan Komunikasi* 10 (2): 37. https://doi.org/10.17933/mti.v10i2.150.

Susanto, Eko Harry. 2019. "Social Media, Hoax, and Threats against Diversity in Indonesia." *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 8 (12): 328–44.

Tahir, Rahman, Heri Kusmanto, and Muryanto Amin. 2020. "Propaganda Politik

Hoaks Dalam Pemilihan Presiden Tahun 2019." *Perspektif* 9 (2): 236–51. https://doi.org/10.31289/perspektif.v9i2.3458.

Tambini, Damian. 2017. "Fake News: Public Policy Responses." *LSE Media Policy Project*.

Voichici, Oana. 2018. "Internet Hoaxes: Chain Letters - How Dangerous Are They?" In *Explorations of Identity and Communication*, 219. Editura Universitaria.

Wang, Amy B. 2016. "'Post-Truth' Named 2016 Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries - The Washington Post." Washingtonpost.Com. 2016.

Yusuf. 2020. "Kominfo Temukan 1.401 Sebaran Isu Hoaks Terkait Covid-19 – Ditjen Aptika." Aptika.Kominfo.Go.Id. 2020.

Zannettou, Savvas, Michael Sirivianos, Jeremy Blackburn, and Nicolas Kourtellis. 2019. "The Web of False Information." *Journal of Data and Information Quality* 11 (3): 1–37. https://doi.org/10.1145/3309699.

Zhang, Boyang. 2015. "How and Why Some Issues Spread Fast in Social Media." *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies* 5 (1): 90–113.

Zhang, Dayong, and Guang Guo. 2014. "A Comparison of Online Social Networks and Real-Life Social Networks: A Study of Sina Microblogging." *Mathematical Problems in Engineering* 2014. https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/578713.

Zowalaty, Mohamed E. El, and Josef D. Järhult. 2020. "From SARS to COVID-19: A Previously Unknown SARS- Related Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) of Pandemic Potential Infecting Humans – Call for a One Health Approach." *One Health* 9: 100124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.onehlt.2020.100124.