

ANATOMY OF A LIE: MAPPING THE STRUCTURE AND SPREAD OF HOAXES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

In the digital era, the spread of hoaxes or fake news has become an increasingly complex and worrying phenomenon. Hoaxes are not just misinformation, but have a systematic structure and pattern of dissemination, fuelled by political and economic gain, or simply provocation. Social media and digital platforms play a major role as catalysts for the spread of hoaxes due to their characteristics of wide reach, speed of dissemination, and low filtering of truthful information. Mechanisms such as echo chambers and digital platform algorithms amplify the effects of hoaxes, increasing the risk for individuals with low digital literacy. To counter the negative impact of hoaxes, strategic measures are needed such as improving digital literacy, strengthening education on information verification, and developing effective regulations in the digital world. Collaboration between the government, digital platforms and the public is essential to address the threat posed by hoaxes, as well as to shape a more critical and informed society.

Key Words: Anatomy of a Lie, Structure, Hoax Spread, Digital Age.

Introduction

The digital age has brought about major changes in the way people obtain and share information. The internet, social media and communication technologies have accelerated the spread of information around the world. As such, the spread of information, especially inaccurate information or hoaxes, can have serious impacts on individuals, groups and society at large. At the social level, the spread of hoaxes often triggers conflict, division and polarisation in society due to the emergence of various conflicting viewpoints (D. Silverman, 2015) . In addition, in the political realm, hoaxes can be used to manipulate public opinion, lead to certain perceptions, and even destabilise the country. In the economic sector, false information can reduce public trust in certain institutions or products, leading to potential financial losses. Not only that, the spread of false information also has a direct impact on people's psychology, by creating fear, panic, or even apathy in receiving news. All these impacts serve as a reminder of the importance of collective efforts to improve information and digital literacy (DiResta & et al., 2018) .

Hoaxes are false information or news that are spread with the aim of misleading or deceiving the public. This information is often disguised in such a way that it appears as if it is true or valid, even though it has no clear or valid basis in fact. Hoaxes can operate in many forms, including text, images, video or audio, and often capitalise on certain emotions or beliefs to attract attention and further dissemination. The impact of hoaxes can be devastating, both individually and collectively, as they can lead to misinformation, fear, and conflict in society (Vosoughi et al., 2020).

Hoaxes have become a global phenomenon that affects various aspects of life, from political to economic to social. Hoaxes, which are often designed to manipulate public opinion, utilise the complex anatomy of information dissemination in the digital age. This false information is usually spread through communication channels that are easily accessible to the public. With an organised structure and sophisticated dissemination techniques, hoaxes often appear convincing, making it difficult for recipients to distinguish between facts and lies (Lazer et al., 2021).

One of the key characteristics that makes hoaxes so effective is their ability to tap into users' emotions. Information that evokes feelings such as anger, fear or sympathy has a tendency to be more quickly adopted and passed on by individuals. In addition, social media algorithms that prioritise viral content further exacerbate the spread of hoaxes, as such information is often more engaging and thus receives greater attention than the actual facts (Bulovsky ., 2024)

In Indonesia, the impact of hoaxes is significant. Based on data from various surveys, Indonesians are vulnerable to fake news due to low levels of digital literacy. As a result, hoaxes can trigger disinformation, social divisions, security disturbances, and economic losses. The importance of understanding the structure and pattern of hoax distribution in the digital era is increasingly urgent to support mitigation efforts and good digital literacy education (Flynn et al., 2017).

Based on this background, studying "Anatomy of Lies: Mapping the Structure and Spread of Hoaxes in the Digital Age" is a relevant thing to do. This research is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the mechanism of hoax spread, including how hoaxes are designed, spread, and accepted by the public. By understanding the anatomy of lies, effective strategies can be formulated to counter the spread of hoaxes and improve people's digital literacy.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses the literature method. The literature research method is a research approach conducted by collecting, analysing, and critiquing various literature sources, such as books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and other documents relevant to the research topic. This method focuses on reviewing secondary data that is already available to understand concepts, theories, or findings related to the problem under study (Torraco, 2005) ; (Tranfield et al., 2003) . In its

application, researchers use techniques such as critical reading, noting important points, and systematically compiling a literature review to find research gaps or strengthen arguments in scientific studies. This method is essential to build the conceptual framework of the research, provide a theoretical basis, and support the interpretation of the results obtained (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Results and Discussion

Hoax Structure in the Digital Age

Hoaxes in the digital era have become an increasingly worrying phenomenon. With the development of information and communication technology, the spread of false information can happen faster and wider than ever before. Hoaxes can be spread through various digital platforms such as social media, websites, instant messaging applications and other forms of communication. Users who are not vigilant or inexperienced in filtering information are often targeted by hoaxes (Pennycook & Rand, 2020).

Hoaxes can come in many forms and formats, including text, images, video or even audio. Often, hoaxes are disguised as news or information that appears legitimate and credible. For example, a photo that has been given a misleading new context or a video that has been edited to manipulate the facts. These diverse formats allow hoaxes to attract attention and spread more easily among digital media users (Martens et al., 2020).

The motives for spreading hoaxes vary widely, from political, economic, to social interests. In the political sphere, hoaxes are often used to influence public opinion, lead perceptions of certain political figures or parties, and even create instability. In the economic sphere, hoaxes can be used to bring down a competitor's reputation or promote certain products unethically. Meanwhile, in the social context, hoaxes can play a role in reinforcing stereotypes, fuelling conflict, or simply for entertainment from irresponsible parties (Gravagne & Graves, 2021).

Hoaxes spread through a very effective mechanism in the digital age. Social media and instant messaging applications enable the rapid dissemination of information through share or forward features. Digital platform algorithms designed to increase user engagement also play a role in accelerating the spread of hoaxes. Information that evokes strong emotions, such as anger or fear, tends to be shared more, so hoaxes that target emotional aspects often receive more attention and go viral quickly (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The psychological and social impact of hoaxes is significant. At the individual level, they can cause fear, anxiety and confusion. When a person is exposed to unsettling false information, the resulting emotional response can affect mental health. At the social level, hoaxes can cause division, reduce trust between community

members, and lead to far-reaching conflicts. They also disrupt effective communication and lead to polarisation in society (Friggeri & et al., 2014) .

Resolving and controlling hoaxes requires a multi-level and collaborative approach. The government and digital platform providers need to coordinate to develop effective regulations and policies to tackle the spread of hoaxes. Educating the public on digital literacy and critical information filtering skills is also key. Technologies such as fake content detection algorithms and alert systems can help identify and limit the spread of hoaxes (Marwick & Lewis, 2017) .

Media and journalism have a strategic role in fighting hoaxes. Credible media must be committed to presenting news that is accurate, verified and free from bias. Journalists must perform a clarification function by checking facts before publishing news. In-depth investigations into the sources and origins of hoaxes are also part of journalism's responsibility. The use of reliable sources and transparency in the reporting process can help rebuild public trust in the media (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2020) .

Technology and algorithms play an important role in detecting and mitigating fake news. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems that can analyse patterns in content can be used to identify false information. Anti-hoax algorithms work by filtering content based on keywords, analysing writing styles, and comparing with existing factual data. These technologies can be integrated into digital platforms to alert users to potential hoaxes, helping to reduce the impact of false information (Brooke, 2015) .

Thus, overcoming hoaxes in the digital era requires continuous efforts and synergy from various parties. Awareness of digital literacy is the first step that can be taken by every individual. Collaboration between the government, platform providers, media, and society will create a safer and more reliable information ecosystem. Technology continues to evolve and can be a powerful tool to combat hoaxes, but awareness and shared responsibility remain the most important elements in solving this problem. A systematic, sustainable and comprehensive approach is needed to effectively control the spread of hoaxes.

Hoax Spreading Patterns

Hoaxes or fake news are one of the main threats in the rapidly growing digital era. With the ease of technology, information can now be easily disseminated by anyone without regional and time restrictions. This phenomenon is a serious problem because hoaxes can cause unrest in society, damage reputations, and lead to conflict. The pattern of spreading hoaxes is often not realised by most people, so it needs to be observed and understood so that it can be anticipated.

The spread of hoaxes is usually initiated by certain parties who have certain interests, such as politics, economics, or even just looking for sensation. The content is given a provocative narrative, accompanied by an interesting and surprising title. It is designed to arouse the reader's emotions, whether in the form of fear, anger, or

curiosity. In an emotionally affected state, a person is more likely to spread information without verifying the truth first (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2020) .

Social media platforms are the most commonly used means of spreading hoaxes. The ease of sharing information in the form of images, text, or videos allows hoaxes to spread quickly and massively. With features such as "share" or "forward," fake news can reach thousands to millions of people in just a short time. Social media algorithms that prioritise content with high engagement also accelerate the spread of hoaxes, especially if the content triggers the emotional response of many users (Brooke, 2015) .

Apart from social media, hoaxes can also be spread through chat groups such as WhatsApp or Telegram. These groups are often a more concentrated place for the spread of hoaxes as users tend to trust news that comes from their own social circles. In these groups, hoaxes are spread horizontally from one person to another, creating a network of spread that is difficult to control. Even if a hoax is officially debunked, misinformation is usually difficult to stop (Pennycook & Rand, 2020) .

The pattern of spreading hoaxes also involves cognitive biases of internet users. For example, confirmation bias is where individuals are more likely to believe news that matches their beliefs or views. When a person receives information that aligns with their opinion, they tend not to verify the source and immediately spread it to others. As a result, hoaxes are increasingly widespread due to the tendency to ignore facts that contradict what they believe (Tambini, 2017) .

Hoaxes often become more dangerous when they take advantage of certain moments or situations, such as natural disasters, pandemics, or hot political issues. Under these conditions, people usually have a higher level of anxiety, making it easier to believe information without checking first. This is utilised by hoax spreaders to magnify the emotional effect, allowing fake news to spread faster. This pattern is repeated so that hoaxes continue to be present in every crisis or major event (Bakir & McStay, 2018) .

The government and related agencies have tried to tackle the spread of hoaxes through various efforts, such as digital literacy education and strengthening the law for fake news spreaders. Many social media platforms have also started to implement verification systems for certain information. However, these efforts have not been fully effective because the pattern of spreading hoaxes continues to evolve along with technological innovation (Howard & Hussain, 2022) . Therefore, the public needs to proactively improve their ability to recognise and counteract hoaxes.

Understanding the pattern of hoaxes is very important so that people can be more vigilant and careful in consuming information. The habit of reading critically, checking sources of information, and not immediately believing news that looks "hot" must be formed early on. With awareness and collective action from the community, the chances of hoaxes spreading can be minimised. Through joint efforts, we can create

a healthier information environment that is free from the spread of fake news (Tandoc et al., 2020).

Factors Fuelling the Spread of Hoaxes

The spread of hoaxes has become an alarming phenomenon in today's digital era. One of the main factors driving its spread is the lack of digital literacy among the public. Many people are not able to distinguish valid information from misleading information. This ignorance often makes them easily influenced by news that looks attractive, even though the truth cannot be accounted for (McCord, 2023).

In addition, the highly accessible nature of information disseminated through social media is also a major cause of the rise of hoaxes. With just one click, a person can share information to thousands of other people. Ironically, many social media users do not verify the truth of the news before sharing it. This indirectly gives room for hoaxes to spread more widely and quickly (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

People's tendency to believe information according to their biases or beliefs also contributes to the spread of hoaxes. Information that aligns with a person's views, emotions or ideology is often taken for granted without any verification process. This confirmation bias reinforces acceptance of hoaxes and encourages people to spread them further, as they feel the information supports their point of view (C. Silverman, 2013).

Another factor lies in the economic motives of certain parties who deliberately create hoaxes. In many cases, irresponsible parties create hoaxes to gain financial benefits, for example through adverts, clicks or sales of certain products. This strategy utilises the hype generated by the hoax to attract people to visit certain sites, where they will generate profits for the hoax creator (DiResta & et al., 2018).

Political motives are also a significant driver behind the spread of hoaxes. Hoaxes are used as propaganda tools to attack political opponents, increase popularity or influence public opinion. Under these conditions, hoaxes are deliberately disseminated to create unrest among the public and change their perception of certain issues. This often happens ahead of elections or other important political moments (Vosoughi et al., 2020).

The ability of hoaxes to capitalise on human emotions is one of the reasons why false information spreads quickly. Hoaxes often present narratives that evoke fear, anger, or sadness so that people are moved to share the information. Emotions triggered by hoaxes often override a person's rational ability to evaluate the truth of the information (Lazer et al., 2021).

A lack of attention to the source of information also fuels the spread of hoaxes. Many people only read the headlines without finding out more about the origins of the news. This inattention makes it easier for fake news to be believed and accepted as fact, resulting in its widespread spread (Bulovsky ., 2024)

It is also important to look at the role of social media algorithms in encouraging the spread of hoaxes. These algorithms are designed to prioritise content that has a high interaction rate. As hoaxes often contain attention-grabbing sensational narratives, algorithms tend to prioritise such content in users' feeds, accelerating its spread (Flynn et al., 2017) .

Thus, the lack of law enforcement against the perpetrators of hoaxes is another factor that opens the opportunity for hoaxes to continue to grow. Although fake news laws exist in many countries, their implementation is often weak or ineffective. This makes perpetrators feel safe to continue producing and spreading false information without fear of legal consequences. This combination of factors demonstrates the importance of concerted efforts in raising awareness, digital literacy and monitoring to minimise hoaxes.

Conclusion

The digital age has accelerated the dissemination of information, but it has also led to the increasingly complex phenomenon of hoaxes or fake news. Hoaxes are not only a matter of misinformation, but also have a systematic structure and pattern of dissemination. Social media and digital platforms play a major role as catalysts for the spread of hoaxes due to their wide reach, rapid dissemination time, and low filtering of truthful information. In this context, understanding the anatomy of lies is important to evaluate how hoaxes are formed and spread.

The spread of hoaxes in the digital era is often related to certain motives, such as political, economic or even just provocation purposes. This allows certain actors to create manipulative narratives to influence public opinion. Mechanisms such as echo chambers or social media platform algorithms also amplify the spread of hoaxes, where individuals tend to be exposed to information that supports their prior beliefs. As a result, people who lack digital literacy or critical thinking are at risk of falling victim to these hoaxes.

In response to the spread of hoaxes, measures such as improving digital literacy, strengthening education on information verification, and developing fair regulations in the digital world are crucial. Collaboration between the government, digital platforms and society is key to countering the threat posed by hoaxes. By understanding the structure and pattern of the spread of falsehoods, the public can be wiser in receiving information and minimise the adverse impacts of this phenomenon.

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