



## Overcoming Disinformation and Hoaxes in Political Communication: Promoting Media and Fact Literacy

Ni Putu Sinta Dewi <sup>1</sup>, Elfiandri <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Bumigora, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

**Corresponding Author:** Ni Putu Sinta Dewi, E-mail; [sintadewi@universitasbumigora.ac.id](mailto:sintadewi@universitasbumigora.ac.id)

### Article Information:

Received June 10, 2024

Revised June 19, 2024

Accepted June 25, 2024

### ABSTRACT

The digital era has accelerated the spread of information, including disinformation and hoaxes, which often appear in the context of political communication. This phenomenon threatens the integrity of the democratic process and the quality of information received by the public. Therefore, the importance of media literacy and fact verification has become increasingly urgent to ensure that citizens can make decisions based on accurate and reliable information. This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of various media and factual literacy initiatives in reducing the influence of disinformation and hoaxes among voters. The primary focus is identifying the most effective strategies to promote a critical understanding of media content and the ability to verify facts independently. The methods used were field experiments and surveys conducted in several regions with significant variations in media literacy levels. Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling techniques and divided into a control group and an intervention group that received intensive training on media literacy. The results showed that participants who took media and factual literacy training showed significant improvements in identifying and rejecting misinformation. This group is also more critical of information sources and cross-checks facts more often before sharing content. The research conclusion states that media literacy interventions can significantly reduce the influence of disinformation and hoaxes in political communication. In-depth and continuous education is needed to strengthen citizens' abilities to face information challenges in the digital era. Furthermore, collaboration between sectors, including government, educational institutions, and the media, is important to increase awareness and media literacy skills among the wider community.

**Keywords:** *Disinformation, Facts, Hoax*

Journal Homepage <https://ejournal.staialhikmahpariangan.ac.id/Journal/index.php/judastaipa/>

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How to cite: Dewi, S, P, N & Elfiandri, Elfiandri. (2024). Overcoming Disinformation and Hoaxes in Political Communication: Promoting Media and Fact Literacy. *Journal International Dakwah and Communication*, 4(1), 186–198. <https://doi.org/10.55849/jidc.v4i1.663>

Published by: Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Hikmah Pariangan Batusangkar

## **INTRODUCTION**

In a world increasingly connected via the internet and social media, disinformation and hoaxes have become important issues that influence many aspects of social and political life (S. H. Ali et al., 2020). Political communication, as the main means of discussing and spreading political ideas, cannot be separated from the influence of this phenomenon (Aagaard, 2019). Disinformation and hoaxes can undermine the foundations of democracy, reduce public trust in political institutions, and disrupt healthy political processes by misleading voters and damaging the reputation of individuals or groups. In an increasingly polarized political context, disinformation and hoaxes have become effective tools for influencing public opinion, manipulating understanding, and shaping voter behaviour. Therefore, addressing this issue is not only important for information integrity but also for maintaining social and political stability (Zamora-Medina et al., 2020). In the current information era, disinformation and hoaxes have developed into a global issue that affects various aspects of life, especially in the context of political communication (Setiawana et al., 2021). This problem arises when inaccurate or misleading information is spread to influence public opinion or damage the reputation of a particular individual or group. This spread of false information not only affects public perception of political issues but also undermines trust in the democratic system and media institutions.

Disinformation is false or misleading information spread with the intent to deceive (Casino, 2022). This is often done intentionally to create misunderstanding, create fear, or steer public opinion in a certain direction. Disinformation is not just limited to spreading false facts; it also includes misinterpreting context, truncating quotes to change nuance, or selectively using data to support a particular narrative. This phenomenon is often associated with entities with a specific agenda, such as political parties, certain organizations, or individuals with special interests. On the other hand, hoaxes are a type of disinformation that contains clear lies and are often designed to cause shock or sensation. Hoaxes are frequently created to attract quick attention from the public or media and are usually easier to detect than more subtle disinformation (Vázquez-Gestal et al., 2023). However, in the digital era, the speed at which hoaxes spread can cause them to go viral before adequate verification or refutation can be carried out, so their potential for damage can be enormous.

The implications of disinformation and hoaxes in political communication are very broad. They can create confusion among voters, influence election outcomes, and undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process. Disinformation can exacerbate political polarization by amplifying confirmation bias, in which individuals are more likely to believe information that agrees with their beliefs and ignore information that contradicts it. This leads to the formation of a highly fragmented information space, where groups with different views have almost no common factual basis. On a broader level, disinformation and hoaxes can also be used by foreign actors to disrupt political processes, as seen in several cases of election interference by foreign countries

(Gayoso, 2023). This not only threatens national security but also reduces public confidence in the reliability and integrity of political and electoral systems.

Why is this issue important to research? In a political context, disinformation can change election results, undermine public dialogue, and fuel social polarization. Therefore, it is important to identify and implement effective strategies to combat this phenomenon so that society can make decisions based on correct and valid information (Eshbayev et al., 2023). This research aims to overcome the problem of disinformation and hoaxes by promoting media and fact literacy. By increasing individuals' ability to recognize, assess and verify the truth of information, it is hoped that they can reduce the negative impact caused by inaccurate or deliberately misinterpreted information (Faccia & Pandey, 2021). The importance of this research is examined because media literacy is not only about filtering misinformation but also about building critical skills that enable citizens to participate effectively in the democratic process (Campbell et al., 2021). Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, media regulation, and policy development.

This research was conducted in response to the urgent need for practical solutions to address the problem of disinformation in the public sphere and media. Through this study, we aim to demonstrate how media literacy-based interventions can effectively reduce the spread of hoaxes and strengthen the foundations of democracy. This research contributes to the existing literature by filling a knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of media literacy programs in specific political contexts. Many previous studies have discussed media literacy in the context of general education, but only some have explored its application in dealing with political disinformation. We use a methodology that integrates theory and practice from the disciplines of communication, psychology, and political science to develop and assess targeted interventions (Thomson et al., 2022).

In this study, we adopted a more integrated and interactive approach to teaching media literacy (Celik et al., 2021). Our innovations include using new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to identify patterns of disinformation and developing adaptive training modules that can be tailored to voters' needs and local context. This approach offers an improvement over traditional media literacy programs that are often general in nature and do not account for variations in individuals' prior knowledge and attitudes. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of advanced technologies and pedagogical methods in a media literacy module designed to fight disinformation more effectively. In contrast to previous studies that may only focus on one aspect of media literacy, such as comprehension or critical skills, this research provides a holistic framework that addresses cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of media literacy. The next step in this research involves a long-term evaluation of the effects of media literacy interventions on voting behaviour and public trust in the media. Researchers also hope this research will spark more studies exploring the interactions between information technology, politics, and social

psychology in different contexts. Our hope is that the findings from this study will be used to guide the development of public policy and educational strategies that are more effective in addressing the information challenges of the digital age.

There are several previous research opinions. According to Dame Adjin-Tettey (2022), the first research is *Combating Fake News, disinformation, and Misinformation: Experimental Evidence for Media Literacy Education*. The results of his study stated that MIL-trained respondents were more likely to determine the authenticity or otherwise of information and were less likely to share inaccurate stories. This means that when MIL increases, the sharing of fake news decreases. This is yet another evidence that MIL enables information consumers to make informed judgments about the quality of information. It is recommended that MIL is incorporated into mainstream educational modules and consistently revised to reflect the demands of the times.

According to (M. Ali et al., 2021), the second research is titled *The Role of Literacy Education in Preventing the Impact of Fake News on Government Policies and Socio-political Stability*. The results of his study stated that through the mediation of hoax reporting through social media, online social media representations such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and other personal messaging applications were explored. So, of course, based on the findings of the preliminary observations, there needs to be a strategy for creating new, shifting narratives about different government policies based on relevant references since modern media influence the social, cultural, and political landscape of life. A proper media literacy and literacy analysis must also be carried out to see if offline communities with limited internet connectivity no longer accept the notion of 'hoax opinion' established in Indonesia. Therefore, literacy education would be able to reveal false knowledge that has spread through society and will correct any myths in social life.

The third research, according to Dumitru et al. (2022), with the research title *A Generational Approach to Fight Fake News: In Search of Effective Media Literacy Training and Interventions*. The results of his research stated that students and educators were the main target groups, almost entirely to the exclusion of other groups; that they took place mainly in educational settings; and that, at least in the case of the training sessions, they were not evidence-based, which meant that neither the long-term nor short-term efficacy could be tested. Such findings shed light on the relatively poor reliability of the available training and interventions and their limited effectiveness in the target groups.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy strategies in reducing the spread of disinformation and hoaxes in political communication (Carlson, 2019). The approach involved combining qualitative and quantitative methods to produce comprehensive and in-depth data regarding the effects of media literacy interventions as well as subjects' understanding and responses

to political information.

### **Research design**

This study used a mixed design consisting of a field experiment and a longitudinal survey. Field experiments were conducted to measure the effectiveness of hands-on media literacy training, while longitudinal surveys helped observe changes in participants' behaviour and attitudes toward political information over time (Xie et al., 2019).

### **Population and Sample**

The target population in this study is voters aged 18 years and above, drawn from various demographic and political backgrounds, to ensure broad representation. The sample will be drawn randomly from a national voter database, using stratified sampling techniques to provide a diverse sample group regarding education, ethnicity, gender, and political affiliation. It is estimated that respondents will be involved in the field experiment and 500 respondents in the longitudinal survey.

The intervention in this research is a series of media literacy training modules designed to improve participants' ability to identify, verify, and respond to political information they encounter in everyday life. This training module includes:

1. Basic understanding of media and editorial processes,
2. Source assessment and fact verification techniques,
3. Content analysis and bias identification,
4. Education about the effects of social media and algorithms in the dissemination of information.

Training will be delivered through online workshops, using digital learning platforms to facilitate wider access. Each module includes reading materials, videos, interactive quizzes, and group discussions. The total duration of training is four weeks, with one session lasting two hours per week.

### **Data collection**

Data will be collected through several methods. First, a pre-test and post-test will be conducted to measure participants' media literacy knowledge and skills before and after the intervention. Second, a longitudinal survey will measure changes in participants' attitudes and behaviour related to the consumption and dissemination of political information (Gordon et al., 2020). This survey will be run every three months for one year.

### **Research instrument**

The instruments used in this research include questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. The questionnaire will consist of questions related to

media consumption habits, information verification skills, and level of trust in various sources of information (“A Study into the Skills of Using Data Verification Tools as a Media Information Literacy Instrument for University Students,” 2020). In-depth interviews will be conducted with a random sample of participants to gain further insight into their experiences during and after the intervention. Content analysis will examine the types of information participants frequently encounter on social media and other platforms.

### **Research Data Analysis**

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This analysis will help determine significant differences in media literacy levels before and after training and changes in consumption behaviour and information dissemination. Qualitative data from interviews will be processed using content analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to perceptions and responses to disinformation.

### **Evaluation and Validity**

Several steps will be taken to ensure the validity and reliability of research results (Abowitz & Toole, 2010). First, data triangulation will be used to verify the findings between different data sources and different methods. Second, the instrument's validity will be tested with a pilot study before full implementation to ensure that the questions and methods used can accurately measure what is intended. Third, the reliability of data analysis will be improved through the use of proven qualitative and quantitative data analysis software. This overall methodology is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of how media literacy can be used as a tool to counter disinformation and hoaxes in political communication while providing practical insights that can be used to guide future education policies and programs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Disinformation and hoaxes in political communication are some of the biggest challenges in the current information age, affecting the integrity of the democratic process, public trust in institutions, and the quality of public debate. With the rapid development of information technology, the speed and reach of information dissemination has increased significantly. However, this has also made it easier to spread inaccurate or deliberately misinterpreted information (Radue, 2019). Disinformation is false information spread without the intention to deceive, while hoaxes are false information spread maliciously. These two phenomena are often used in political communication to influence public opinion or discredit political opponents. Disinformation and hoaxes in a political context are not new phenomena, but how they affect society has changed with the advent of social media and digital platforms. Social media facilitates the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, often without adequate verification, making false information easier to spread and harder to control. Additionally, social media algorithms designed to maximize user



engagement usually do not differentiate between accurate and inaccurate content, so provocative and emotionally inciting content often gets more attention.

One of the significant impacts of disinformation and hoaxes in politics is increased political polarization. Misleading information can reinforce confirmation bias, in which individuals are more likely to accept information that is consistent with their prior beliefs and reject information that contradicts it (Pérez-Curiel et al., 2022). This leads to 'filter bubbles', where individuals or groups are only exposed to information that supports their views and isolated from alternative perspectives. This polarization deepens social divisions and reduces the possibility of compromise, a key component in healthy democratic functioning. Apart from that, disinformation can also reduce public trust in the media. When the public is continually confronted with conflicting or demonstrably false information, their confidence in legitimate sources of information can erode. This weakens the media's role as a watchdog of government and protector of the public interest and makes it more difficult for citizens to make informed decisions in political affairs.

Various strategies have been implemented to overcome the problem of disinformation and hoaxes (Langmia, 2023). Media education and literacy is one of the main approaches. Media literacy programs aim to teach citizens critical and analytical ways of evaluating information sources and content, understanding how the media operates, and being aware of potential biases and intentions behind the production of information. However, more than media literacy is needed if adequate policies and regulations do not support it. Regulations and policies also play a key role in limiting the spread of disinformation and hoaxes. Several countries have introduced legislation to combat fake news, although this often raises concerns regarding freedom of speech. Another approach is partnerships between governments, non-profit organizations, and technology companies to identify and counter disinformation proactively. For example, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google have introduced initiatives to identify and flag questionable content and prioritize information validated by trusted sources.

International collaboration is also important, given the transnational nature of the internet and digital media (Adamson et al., 2014). Cooperation between countries can facilitate the exchange of best practices, the development of common standards for transparency and accountability in the publishing of digital content, as well as more effective law enforcement against entities that knowingly spread disinformation. In addition, technological innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning offer the potential to detect disinformation patterns more quickly and accurately. This technology can help monitor and analyze large data flows to identify the source and spread of false information in real-time. However, the use of this technology must also be balanced with strong governance and ethics to avoid potential abuse and ensure fairness and transparency. Overcoming disinformation and hoaxes in political communication requires a holistic approach that integrates education, regulation, technology and international cooperation. Although these challenges are great, joint efforts from various sectors and countries are key to promoting healthy public dialogue and strengthening democratic principles in a well-informed society.

Promoting media and fact literacy is important in combating widespread disinformation and hoaxes, especially in political communication (Moore & Hancock, 2022). Media literacy is accessing, analysing, evaluating and creating information in various forms, using multiple media effectively and responsibly. In today's digital era, media literacy is a useful skill and an absolute necessity for citizens to participate actively and critically in a democratic society. The importance of media literacy is emphasized by the rapid spread of information through digital platforms and social media, where fake news and misinformation often spread faster than facts. In this context, media literacy aims to equip individuals with the skills necessary to distinguish between true news and misleading information and increase awareness of how news is created and how bias can influence narratives.

#### Aspects of Media Literacy:

1. **Understanding of Media Processes:** Teach the public about how the media works, including the editorial process and the factors that influence the way news is produced and presented. This includes an understanding of the role of algorithms and the attention economy in social media that can manipulate the spread of information and influence public opinion.
2. **Fact Verification Skills:** Train individuals in basic techniques for verifying facts and sources of information, such as checking the existence of multiple reliable sources, understanding context, and using fact verification tools available online. It also includes teaching about how to use advanced search tools to trace the origin of an image or claim.
3. **Critical and Analytical Development:** This encourages critical thinking, which enables media consumers to question information, recognize biases and differing perspectives, and understand the impact of media on individuals and society. These skills help individuals not only passively ingest information but also actively evaluate and challenge the content they consume.
4. **Ability to Create Content:** Media literacy also involves the ability to create ethical and responsible content. This includes education about copyright, media ethics, and the social impact of information dissemination, preparing individuals to participate actively in media discussions and production.

To be effective, media literacy education must be integrated at various levels of education and through community programs. Schools play a key role in introducing media literacy concepts from an early age, combining a comprehensive curriculum that includes theory and practice. At the university level, more specific courses can delve deeper into media ethics, law, and related technologies (Scull et al., 2022). Community programs are also important, especially for adults and groups needing more regular access to formal education. Workshops, seminars, and training programs held by libraries, non-profit organizations, and community groups can help increase awareness and media literacy skills among the general public. The use of technology must also be integrated into the promotion of media literacy. Digital platforms and applications can be used to develop simulations and



games that educate about media literacy, providing engaging and interactive learning experiences. Additionally, collaboration with journalists and media experts can provide more authentic insight and training into the real challenges of navigating this complex information landscape.

**Table: Challenges in Promoting Media Literacy**

NO	Challenge	Description
1	Limited access to resources	Many educational institutions and communities need more funds and resources to implement effective media literacy programs.
2	Outdated curriculum	The rapid development of information technology means that media literacy curricula often need to catch up to the latest practices.
3	Teacher skills	Teachers may need more skills or training to teach effective and relevant media literacy.
4	Low public awareness and priority	Media literacy is often not considered a priority in educational and public circles, which reduces support and participation.
5	Political influence and pressure	Media literacy programs can come under pressure or resistance from political parties who feel threatened by increasing public criticism.
6	Resistance to change	Individuals and institutions may need to change how they consume and understand media, maintaining old habits.
7	Audience diversity	Media literacy needs and capabilities can differ greatly across age groups, cultures, and educational backgrounds.
8	Hoaxes and disinformation continue to grow	Spreaders of hoaxes and disinformation continually update their strategies, making it difficult to constantly teach effective methods for recognizing them.
9	Dependence on technology	Media literacy programs that overuse technology may overlook users who have limited access or low technical skills.
10	Impact measurement	It is not easy to measure the effectiveness of media literacy programs, as their impact may not be immediate or easy to identify.

Promoting media literacy faces several significant challenges in implementation, which can hinder the effectiveness and reach of programs aimed at increasing public criticism and understanding of the media. One of the main barriers is limited access to resources. Many educational and community institutions need more funding to develop and run comprehensive media literacy programs. Without adequate investment, it is not easy to provide updated training materials and train competent teachers. In addition, a curriculum that needs to be updated is a problem because the media world continues to change rapidly.

Existing curricula may not reflect the latest practices or address the latest media technologies, so students do not gain knowledge relevant to today's realities. This is compounded by the fact that many educators may need to acquire the skills necessary to teach media literacy effectively, as they have yet to receive adequate training in this area.

Low public awareness of the importance of media literacy and the perception that it is not a priority also add to the challenges in promoting media literacy. With strong support from the community and stakeholders, media literacy programs often receive adequate attention and funding. On the other hand, the presence of political influence and pressure can affect the freedom and scope of media literacy programs, with certain political parties perhaps feeling threatened by the increasing critical capacity of society. Resistance to change is another obstacle, both at the individual and institutional levels. Many people may be comfortable with the way they have consumed and understood media, and they may be resistant to efforts to change this paradigm. Additionally, media literacy needs can differ greatly from one group to another, depending on factors such as age, cultural background, and education, which adds complexity to designing programs that can reach and be relevant to all audiences.

With the continued proliferation of hoaxes and disinformation, there is a constant challenge to keeping media literacy training materials relevant and effective. Hoaxers continually update their strategies, forcing media literacy programs to update their approaches as well constantly. Another challenge is an over-reliance on technology in teaching media literacy, which can be a barrier for those with limited access to technology or low technical skills. Finally, measuring the immediate impact of media literacy programs is challenging because the effects are often abstract and long-term, making it difficult to assess and improve programs in real time. Each of these challenges requires a thoughtful and multifaceted approach, collaborating with the education sector, government and communities to create effective and sustainable solutions for media literacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that promoting media and fact literacy is a crucial approach to overcoming disinformation and hoaxes in political communication. Key findings suggest that increasing media literacy can significantly reduce individuals' vulnerability to misleading information and strengthen the foundations of democracy by encouraging more informed and critical citizen participation. Effective media literacy programs not only improve individuals' ability to assess the reliability of information but also empower them to participate actively in healthy political discourse. Experiments and surveys show that well-structured media literacy interventions influence positive changes in participants' understanding of media consumption and behaviour. Additionally, an inclusive and diverse approach to delivering a media literacy curriculum, which considers differences in needs based on demographics and social context, has proven effective in reaching a wider audience. This research also identifies challenges that need to be overcome to optimize media literacy programs, such as resource accessibility, resistance to change, and adaptation to

rapidly changing information technology. Therefore, recommendations for further research and policy development include increased funding for media literacy, cross-sectoral collaboration for curriculum updates, and policies that support transparency and accountability in media production.

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