

Research Article

# Hoaxes and Headlines: Comparing News Framing and Political Narratives in Social Media

Fohan Muzakir\*, Rizkha Maulana, Linda Handayani, Yusri and Razami

Department of Communication Science, Muhammadiyah Mahakarya University, Aceh, Indonesia, 24252

\*Corresponding Author: [fohanm@gmail.com](mailto:fohanm@gmail.com) | Phone: +6285360055173

## ABSTRACT

The development of social media has accelerated the spread of hoax news, especially in the context of political narratives. The framing used in hoax news often differs from that used in mainstream journalism, creating polarization of public opinion. This study aims to examine the differences in framing between hoax news and news from mainstream media, and their impact on public political perceptions. By understanding these framing patterns, research can contribute to hoax mitigation strategies and improve media literacy. This study used qualitative methods with framing analysis and critical discourse analysis approaches. The results show contrasting framing differences: hoax news tends to use emotional, sensational, and manipulative framing, with provocative titles, hyperbolic language, and unclear sources to polarize audiences. In contrast, mainstream journalism uses informational and contextual framing, prioritizes facts, data, and credible sources, and strives to maintain the principle of balance. Furthermore, on social media, hoax framing spreads more quickly and widely due to algorithms that encourage engagement, creating echo chambers that strengthen beliefs and complicate factual correction.

**Keywords:** Hoax News; Mainstream Journalism; Framing; Social Media; Political Narrative

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary democratic landscape, mass media is no longer understood merely as a channel for conveying information, but rather as an active symbolic actor in the process of constructing social reality (Annisa, 2023). Hoaxes and disinformation have become major challenges in journalism and political communication, especially in the digital era. Research on the framing of hoax news in journalism shows a significant impact on public perception and political discourse. In Indonesia, hoaxes spread very easily and demonstrate how false information can function like memes that exploit pre-existing sentiments in society and threaten participatory democracy (Utami, 2019). Furthermore, framing and hoaxes play a significant role in shaping political narratives and public perceptions amidst Indonesia's social and political diversity. In the political context, social media has become a battleground for discourse, where narratives from mainstream journalism that adhere to ethics and verification must compete with hoax narratives that are often more sensational, fast-paced, and in line with certain prejudices.

Hoax news is defined as information deliberately fabricated to conceal truth and carried out for a specific purpose, whether political, economic, or social. Mainstream journalism, while imperfect and subject to bias, operates under a code of ethics that upholds the principles of accuracy, balance, and accountability. Framing, as a theory, is an appropriate tool for unraveling the differences in reality construction between these two entities. Framing is the process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of a reality to encourage specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and recommendations for action. This difference in framing then influences how the public perceives a political issue.

The spread of hoaxes through social media is a serious issue, containing misleading information, distorted context, and completely fabricated content (Irdartuti et al., 2024). The use of foreign languages, regional dialects, and non-standard abbreviations in hoax messages contributes to their spread on platforms like WhatsApp (Ni'mah et al., 2020). The Indonesian government has taken various steps to combat hoaxes and disinformation, recognizing the threat they pose to social stability (Safiranita et al., 2023). Political hoaxes often act like memes, modifying original content to better align with existing beliefs, making them an effective tool for political propaganda (Utami, 2019). This phenomenon is even more worrying in Indonesia's multicultural context, where historical tensions related to racial and religious issues can be further exacerbated by the spread of false information.

Hoaxes and disinformation pose a serious threat to democracy and public opinion, especially in the digital age. Social media allows fake news to spread at a rapid pace, often faster than factual information (Utami, 2019). In Indonesia, hoaxes have played a role in increasing political tensions by exploiting existing social trust and exacerbating societal polarization (Utami, 2019). Furthermore, political hoaxes can influence public opinion, necessitating strategies to improve media literacy to prevent the spread of hoaxes. Analysis of hoax messages on WhatsApp shows that these messages often use foreign languages, regional dialects, and lack journalistic elements, with imperative sentences encouraging recipients to spread them further (Ni'mah et al. 2020). These findings underscore the importance of media literacy and fact-checking in maintaining a healthy democratic discourse.

Digital literacy plays a crucial role in countering hoaxes and disinformation in the digital age. Studies show that the spread of hoaxes through digital platforms, particularly social media and messaging apps like WhatsApp, is a major concern in Indonesia (Safiranita et al., 2023). Furthermore, women, who dominate social media use in Indonesia, are more vulnerable to receiving and spreading hoaxes due to a lack of media literacy and a tendency to prioritize emotional aspects over rationality (Ilahi, 2018). To address this issue, experts recommend improving digital literacy through various strategies, including media-savvy approaches, digital empowerment movements, and online lecture models oriented toward strengthening critical understanding of information (Ilahi, 2018). Furthermore, youth organizations need intensive training and mentoring in digital content creation, financial literacy, and utilizing the digital-based creative economy so they can improve their digital literacy skills and contribute to community empowerment in the Society 5.0 era (Setiadi, 2023).

Meanwhile, the concept of alternative media challenges mainstream journalism by promoting social responsibility and challenging established reporting practices (Sen, 2017). Alternative media plays a crucial role in fostering critical perspectives and democratic values in journalism education (Sen, 2017). A study of Malaysian media during the 14th General Election revealed differences in the emphasis placed on issues by mainstream, alternative, and government media on platforms like Twitter (Sanawi, 2022). However, in the digital era, the boundaries between alternative and mainstream media have become increasingly blurred, leading many scholars to view them as a spectrum rather than a clear dichotomy (Rauch, 2016). Nevertheless, alternative media generally remain less influenced by commercial interests, more critical, and more oriented toward social change (Rauch, 2016). The concept of alternative media is highly context-dependent and involves multiple dimensions of contestation, necessitating an analysis that is not centered on Western perspectives and recognizes the dynamics of its evolving relationship with mainstream journalism (Waisbord, 2022).

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed qualitative methods with framing analysis and critical discourse analysis approaches. Data were collected through news monitoring on social media and mainstream news portals. In-depth interviews with social media users were also conducted to understand how they interpret hoax news and mainstream journalism. The data were analyzed by comparing narrative patterns, visuals, and news dissemination strategies across both media types.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Difference in Framing Between Hoax News and Mainstream Journalism News in Political Narratives on Social Media

The framing of hoax news and mainstream journalism has evolved rapidly in recent years. Political hoaxes often function as memes that reinforce existing beliefs in society, thus having a broad impact on political perceptions. Meanwhile, media framing of the Wamena riots, where mainstream media tended to present a uniform narrative, reduced the diversity of perspectives in reporting. Other events, such as the media framing of Anies Baswedan's alleged early campaign, can shape public opinion. In the context of the spread of hoaxes, there are elements within hoaxes that often contain misleading information and twisted context. Furthermore, the use of foreign languages, regional dialects, and non-standard abbreviations in hoax messages contributes to their spread on platforms like WhatsApp and other social media. The proliferation of hoax news necessitates a government response to address political hoaxes, recognizing the threat they pose to social stability.

Framing analysis using Robert Entman's model shows that the two media have different approaches in defining the problem, diagnosing the cause, making moral judgments, and providing treatment recommendations. From the impact of hoaxes and framing in journalism, there are several research gaps, namely: 1) Direct comparisons between the framing of hoax news and mainstream journalism in political narratives are still rare, 2) Factors that influence the spread of hoaxes, research that specifically compares the spread of hoax news with news from mainstream media is still limited. 3) The impact of hoax news framing on public political perceptions on social media has not been studied in depth with a comparative approach. This study attempts to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of the framing between hoax news and mainstream journalism in political narratives on social media. This approach will provide new insights

regarding the types of news that influence public opinion and the different characteristics of their framing.

**Table 1.** Framing Differences Between Hoax News and Mainstream Journalism News

Aspect	Hoax News	Mainstream Journalism
Objective	Opinion manipulation	Information and education
Language	Emotive, provocative	Neutral, factual
Source	Vague, unverified	Transparent, verified
Narrative Structure	Simplistic, sensational	Complex, balanced
Verification	No fact checking	Cross check and correct
Social Impact	Divide, polarize	Build healthy discussions

Thus, the difference in framing between hoaxes and mainstream journalism is fundamental: hoaxes use emotional framing to manipulate at the expense of accuracy, while mainstream journalism uses informational framing that focuses on truth and context. On social media, algorithms tend to amplify the spread of hoaxes because their content triggers high engagement. Media literacy is key to distinguishing between these two types of framing and mitigating the negative impact of hoaxes on democracy.

### 3.2 Factors Influencing the Spread of Hoax News Compared to News from Mainstream Media

People tend to accept, believe, and share information that aligns with their existing beliefs or prejudices, even if the information is false. Hoaxes are often deliberately designed to target specific group biases. They often exploit strong negative emotions such as anger, fear, or disgust. Content that triggers these emotions is more likely to be shared because it elicits a quick, intuitive response, without critical thought. Hoax narratives are typically simple, black-and-white, and provide easy explanations for complex issues. They are more "easily digestible" than mainstream news, which is often nuanced and rich in detail. Social media groups users based on algorithms, creating a space where they only see information that reinforces their views. Within this space, hoaxes spread unchecked. Hoaxes are often spread by family, friends, or trusted communities. People are more likely to trust information from sources they know personally than from media institutions. In a polarized society, hoaxes are used as a weapon to attack opponents and mobilize support. Group identity becomes more important than factual truth.

Platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok are designed to maximize user time on the platform. Their algorithms prioritize content that generates likes, shares, comments, and reactions, all of which are more easily achieved than sensational and emotional content like hoaxes. Social media allows information to spread to thousands of people instantly, far faster than the fact-checking process carried out by mainstream media or fact-checkers. Anyone can create and disseminate information without hindrance. There are no editors or gatekeeping processes to filter the veracity of information like in mainstream media. Many hoax creators profit from advertising. Sensational headlines drive traffic to their websites, which in turn generates advertising revenue. Hoaxes can be funded by political actors or special interest groups as part of a cheap and effective black campaign to influence public opinion. The lack of ability to evaluate the credibility of sources, verify information, and understand how social media algorithms work makes many people susceptible to hoaxes. In crisis situations (such as a pandemic or an election), people seek quick and definitive answers. Hoaxes often exploit this anxiety by offering simple, yet false, "answers."

### 3.3 Factors Influencing the Spread of Hoax News Compared to News from Mainstream Media

The framing of hoax news on social media goes beyond simply spreading misinformation; it actively shapes and distorts public political perceptions. Its impact is multidimensional and severely undermines the foundations of democracy. Hoaxes construct their own version of reality, often simplistic, dramatic, and aligned with specific prejudices. People who are continually exposed to them begin to accept these narratives as truth, ignoring the facts presented by mainstream media. For example, a narrative that elections were massively rigged without valid evidence can create the perception that election results are illegitimate, even though independent institutions have declared otherwise. The "us vs. them" framing of hoaxes divides society into hostile groups. Group identity becomes more important than factual truth.

People become unable to engage in dialogue with opposing parties because they perceive them as "enemies" or "fools" who have been deceived, thus hindering healthy democratic deliberation. Hoaxes are often deliberately designed to undermine public trust in key democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, election commissions, mainstream media, and the government. When trust in institutions collapses, people may refuse to recognize their authority, trigger violent protests, or refuse to comply with laws and regulations. Voters make decisions based on misinformation or manipulated information. This robs them of the right to make fact-based political choices. Hoaxes often mobilize primordial sentiments such as ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations to gain support, instead of debating at the policy and program

level. The flood of hoaxes and conflicting information can leave people exhausted, confused, and ultimately apathetic. People may develop the belief that "all politicians are equally corrupt" or "all news is a lie," which ultimately weakens political participation and facilitates the rise of authoritarianism.

Hoaxes that inflame situations and spread hatred can directly trigger social conflict and physical violence. For example, hoaxes about blasphemy or violence by a group can trigger riots. Hoaxes damage the fabric of society by instilling suspicion and fear between groups. When confronted with facts that contradict their beliefs formed by hoaxes, individuals experience psychological distress. Instead of correcting their beliefs, they often further reinforce their false beliefs (the backfire effect). Constantly being consumed by hateful and threatening narratives can increase levels of anxiety, stress, and anger in society.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Framing hoaxes, which are divisive and target certain groups, contributes significantly to increasing political polarization in society. Public discourse becomes fragmented based on trusted narratives, rather than on agreed-upon facts. Mainstream journalism, on the other hand, tends to use informational and contextual framing. News is framed using the 5Ws + 1H, citing credible sources (official sources, data, experts), and striving to maintain neutrality by presenting multiple sides of an issue. Hoax news spreads much faster than factual news. Social media algorithms that prioritize engagement (likes, shares, comments) inadvertently amplify the spread of sensational and emotional content, which are characteristic of hoaxes. Furthermore, the media needs to be more proactive in debunking (denying hoaxes), using formats that are easy to digest and share on social media (such as infographics or short videos), and be more transparent in demonstrating their journalistic work processes to rebuild trust.

#### REFERENCES

- Annisa, P. I. (2025). Analisis Framing Pemberitaan Afif Maulana di Instagram Narasinewsroom. *MUKASI: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* <https://journal.ypp3a.org/index.php/MUKASI>, 239-253. <https://doi.org/10.54259/mukasi.v4i2.4341>
- Utami P. (2018). Hoax in Modern Politics: The Meaning of Hoax in Indonesian Politics and Democracy. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, 85-97. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.34614>
- Indartuti E, Murti I, Kusnan. (2024). Analisis Penyebaran Hoaks COVID-19 di Indonesia. *Society*. 251-278. <https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v12i2.559>
- Nimah AS, Itaristanti, Mulyaningsih I. (2020). Analisis Analisis Penggunaan Diksi dan Pola Berita Hoaks Pada Whatsapp. *Jubindo Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*. 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.32938/jbi.v5i1.329>
- Safiranita T, Palito J, Raila TA, Permata RR. (2023). The Spread Of Hoax Through Digital Platforms In The Perspective Of Indonesian Cyberlaw. *International Journal of Public Law and Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijplap.2023.10053504>
- Ilahi H.N. (2018). Women and Hoax News Processing on Whatsapp. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik*. 98-211. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.31865>
- Setiadi, D., Nurhayati, S., Ansori, A., Zubaidi, M., & Amir, R. (2023). Youth's Digital Literacy in the Context of Community Empowerment in an Emerging Society 5.0. *Society*. 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v11i1.491>
- Sen A.F. (2017) *Alternative Journalism Education in Turkey: A Case Study of the 'From School to Newsroom' (Oho) Program*. Palgrave Communications. 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.15>
- Sanawi J.B, Mustaffa N, Sannusi S.N. (2022). Perbincangan Politik di Laman Twitter: Atribut Isu Politik dalam Ciapan Media di Malaysia Semasa Tempoh Pra dan Pasca Pilihan Raya Umum Ke 14. *Jurnal Komunikasi Malaysian Journal of Communication*. 231-249. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmjc-2022-3804-13>
- Rauch J. (2016). Are There Still Alternatives? Relationships Between Alternative Media and Mainstream Media in a Converged Environment. *Sociology Compass*. 56-67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12403>
- Waisbord S. (2022). Alternative Media/Journalism and the Communicative Politics of Contestation. *Digital Journalism*. 1431-1439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2130385>