Hoax and Election: The Role of Social Media and Challenges for Indonesian Government Policy

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Abstract

The existence of a free media is an indicator of the quality of a country's democracy. The latest media, especially social media, is both an advantage and a challenge in the country's democratic process. Social media has become an alternative channel for politicians to build dialogue with their constituents. Therefore, social media has become an effective tool for political campaigning. Unfortunately, in the absence of control over the information being disseminated, social media has become a platform for the spread of hoax information. The research question is, did social media play a role in the spread of hoaxes during the general election, and what is the government's policy towards it? This research uses a qualitative method with data collection through literature studies and interviews with bureaucrats from government agencies, political elites, experts, and internet activists. The study found that instead of being a tool for political education, social media became a tool for spreading hoax information during the general election. The spread of hoax information that influences voter preferences or leads public opinion is caused by the absence of regulations governing social media. In addition, there is also a lack of digital literacy culture in Indonesia. The Electronic Information and Transaction Law, the Election Law and other derivative regulations are not sufficient to regulate the use of social media, especially in relation to elections. Political education is also still limited to educated people, so a broader political education is needed for the community to counteract hoax information during general elections.

Keywords: democracy, digital literacy, election, hoax, social media

1. Introduction

Media is one of the pillars of democracy whose role and function is considered important in the development of a country's democracy. There are two views on the important role of the media for democracy. First, the media can provide information for voters both in terms of political selection and political accountability issues. In this context, the media is expected to provide information to the public so that the public can make the right political decisions. Second, the media becomes a tool of propaganda and manipulation. In this case, politicians can use the media as a tool to influence the political decision-making process in various ways (Strömberg, 2015). It is undeniable that the internet and the presence of new media (online media and social media) have an important role in the political sphere in Indonesia, especially in relation to campaign activities. Information technology that is developing and effectively used for political campaigns includes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube, and chatting media such as WhatsApp. This is because social media information networks can connect with a wide circle of family and friends.

In the discourse of democracy, the media is one of the important actors in the democratic process in a country. The existence of a free media (press freedom) is one of the indicators of the quality of a country's democracy. The dynamics of democracy and the media were described by Thomas Jefferson and James Medison as 'no free press, no free country, no democracy' (Exoo, 2010). Thus, the press, mass media, and democracy are mutually supportive. The media is considered a means to provide information and public participation. The media is also an agent of socialisation for society, which can influence people's views and perspectives on society, the state and democracy (Ramadlan & Afala, 2022).

The link between democracy and the media is that democracy can work if there are two key elements: choice and information. In terms of options, democracy provides a range of alternatives for the public to agree upon, including the choice of candidates in elections. In the liberal tradition, the existence of options is the essence of democracy, namely the availability of a 'marketplace of ideas' where competition between different alternative ideas and beliefs can compete with each other in

public discourse. The existence of freedom of expression is considered essential to protect individual rights from political tyranny. Meanwhile, information is another key element that is important for the public in making choices. As the basis of democracy, the public must be well-informed to make good decisions and act appropriately. Likewise, the media can be a means for politicians to know the conditions that occur in society so that they can respond to public problems appropriately.

Social media plays an important role in elections, however, if social media is not managed wisely, it can cause problems in elections such as the spread of hoaxes, hate speech and polarization of society. This condition has occurred in the 2014 and 2019 elections in Indonesia. This article answers the question of how the role of social media in political life in Indonesia, especially during the general election?

Several cases demonstrate that digital media in Indonesia is often used not only as a campaign tool for disseminating information but also as a medium for bias, hoaxes, and political propaganda that are difficult to verify. For instance, during the 2019 Election, the rampant spread of fake news related to presidential candidates and the use of social media bots to amplify certain narratives highlight the serious challenges faced by Indonesia's political information ecosystem (Sosiawan&Wibowo, 2020). Additionally, existing regulations remain ineffective in controlling the spread of misinformation, a problem further exacerbated by low digital literacy among the public.

A study from the article *Hoax News Contestation of the 2019 Presidential Election in Online Media and Social Media*reveals that election-related hoaxes were not merely spontaneous distortions of information but rather part of a systematic political strategy. Fake news was deliberately used to discredit political opponents, strengthen support for particular candidates, and shape public opinion through framing and information manipulation. Social media algorithms further intensified the issue by reinforcing polarization and disseminating content that favored specific groups. This underscores the primary challenge of digital democracy in Indonesia—how to balance freedom of expression while mitigating the spread of disinformation.

The rapid advancement of sophisticated and modern communication technology has enabled online media to reach a wider audience without being constrained by time and space. The phenomenon of democracy in digital platforms, particularly social media, often emerges in Indonesia due to the lack of professional journalistic skills and understanding of journalistic principles and ethics among content creators. The journalistic language used tends to be informal and lacks depth. Additionally, driven by commercial interests, many online media outlets, even those affiliated with mainstream media, intentionally provoke readers through clickbait tactics, spreading sensationalized news that has the potential to incite conflict and hostility in society (Bahruddin, 2019).

Social media is defined as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on ideology and technology and enable the creation and exchange of User Generated Content' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One of the characteristics of social media is that it tends to be free and easily accessible to various social classes (Joseph, 2012). This is different from mainstream media which does have limitations, namely the control of media producers or editors regarding the content and distribution of information. The widespread use of social media in Indonesian society is not only related to economic activities, but also political activities, including in the electoral process. Social media has become an alternative channel for politicians to build dialogue with their constituents. Social media has become a powerful tool for political campaigns, allowing politicians to reach the public quickly and widely while shaping and influencing public opinion. Social media is influencing political campaigns (Smith, 2011). In Indonesia, where internet and social media penetration is high, platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp have significantly impacted electoral dynamics. However, unlike in established democracies, where social media largely functions as an extension of political discourse, in Indonesia, it has also facilitated the rapid spread of hoaxes, hate speech, and identity politics, exacerbating societal divisions. This phenomenon is particularly concerning given Indonesia's diverse and multiethnic society, where misinformation and political polarization can threaten democratic stability. Despite the increasing role of social media in Indonesian elections, there is a lack of research on how these platforms uniquely shape political engagement, influence voter behaviour, and contribute to political tensions in Indonesia. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the specific ways in which social media affects electoral processes in Indonesia, highlighting its implications for democracy and political communication in the country. The phenomenon of fake news is a threat to the democratic process (Baraza, 2021).

Social media can shape public opinion due to a lack of literacy skills. Based on the measurement results in 2022, Indonesia's Digital Literacy Index was 3.54 with an index range of 0-5 (Ministry of Communication and Information, 2023). Of the four components of the digital literacy index, namely digital skills, digital ethics, digital culture and digital safety, the lowest score is on digital safety.
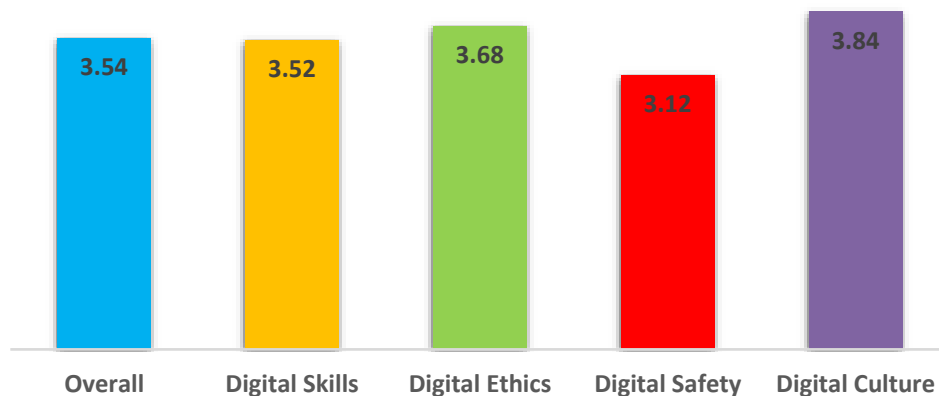
Graph 1. Indonesia's Digital Literacy Index in 2022

Source: data.komdigi.go.id, 2022

Although Indonesia's digital capability score is relatively high compared to other indicators, this does not necessarily translate into a well-informed electorate, particularly during elections. Social media communities become highly active not only in promoting candidates but also in attacking opponents, often through misinformation and manipulation. A significant concern is the proliferation of political hoaxes—false or misleading information deliberately created and disseminated to shape public opinion and influence voter preferences. Drawing on the agenda-setting theory and the concept of information disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), this study examines how political hoaxes spread on social media during Indonesia's general elections and their impact on voter perceptions. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following question: How do political hoaxes on social media influence voter behaviour in Indonesia's elections? By addressing this issue, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between digital media, misinformation, and electoral democracy in Indonesia.

Literature Review

There are many studies on the role of social media in elections. It has become common to attack political opponents by spreading hoax information through social media. This is the case in Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya, America, Turkey (Akser, 2018; Baraza, 2021; DİLEKLİ et al., 2021; Erbschloe, 2017; Jimada, 2023; Tarai, 2018, 2023). Ong stated that social media was instrumental in Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr.'s success in the Philippine elections (Ong, 2022). Bongbong Marcos' victory as president was a result of the use of hoax information and social media. He said that the Philippines is experiencing an information crisis where political and economic elites are the main architects of hoax information who conduct, design, and profit from campaigns.

Countries around the world are making serious policies to protect democracy. In 2018, Canada passed the Election Modernisation Act. Provisions in the Act stipulate that certain social networks must create and maintain lists of partisan advertising messages and election advertising messages posted on their respective platforms, and also that the Canadian government provide funding to organisations that run digital literacy programs.   In the face of threats to democracy in 2019, Denmark amended its law on foreign influence on domestic public opinion to include social media (Levush et al., 2019). Hofveberg explained that media literacy is also an effort to improve people's media literacy and public training—for media and public opinion shapers—in the European Union. Sweden has also been working to improve the misinformation literacy of its citizens. Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB) is specifically tasked with raising Swedish society's awareness of the threats associated with misinformation campaigns. An effort made by the MSB was to produce a publication in 2018 entitled Countering the Influence of Information. The publication contains information on how to recognise fake news and misinformation campaigns.

In France, in 2018, President Emmanuel Macron signed a new law prohibiting the spread of false information. In addition, online platforms must provide an annual statement to the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (CSA), the main regulatory body for radio and television broadcasting in France, indicating what measures they are taking to combat fake news. The CSA must then publish periodic reports on the anti-fake news measures taken by online platforms and their effectiveness. In addition, the government is adding media literacy to the school curriculum.

Another study revealed that countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, the European Union,

France, Germany, India, Mexico, Russia, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom have different ways of tackling hoax information (Levush et al., 2019; Roudik et al., 2019). Of the fifteen (15) countries, two (2) countries, namely Russia and Arabia, have established laws. Other government actions include launching platforms to broadcast 'factual' news sourced from state-owned media, local newspapers, and various government agencies; creating citizen reporting mechanisms by providing contact numbers for the Election Commission Service Centre; providing police hotline numbers; funding projects to monitor risks and map violations of media pluralism in various countries; and funding cross-border investigative journalism.

Social media has a significant role in shaping public opinion (Kline et al., 2022). The use of social media has grown rapidly with the emergence of new platforms and changes in user behaviour in modern life. In fact, the level of use is growing not only for social interaction and promotion (Gilkerson, 2017), but also as a means of spreading hoax information, especially in the political context. Because it has no control, social media can be an easy place for hoax makers and spreaders (Jimada, 2023). It is not uncommon for parties who use social media as a tool to spread hoax information to create tension in society, advance political agendas, or delegitimize political opponents, which has been used by foreign and domestic actors (Levush et al., 2019). On the other hand, social media also plays a key role in political campaigns (Jensen & Schwartz, 2022), demonstrating the complexity of its role and impact in contemporary political dynamics. Content sharing is a common activity on social media. Since sharing on social media is as easy as clicking a button, false stories and rumours can spread quickly (Burns, 2017). As such, social media has great potential to influence the behaviour, opinions and attitudes of the public at large in various aspects of life.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the role of social media in spreading hoax information during Indonesia's general elections and the challenges for government policy. A qualitative approach is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by analyzing perspectives from various stakeholders and contextual factors affecting digital political communication. Data for this study is obtained through two primary methods:

1. Literature Review:
   This includes an extensive analysis of relevant documents, academic papers, government reports, legal frameworks, and media articles that discuss social media, hoax dissemination, election integrity, and regulatory measures in Indonesia and other democracies. The literature review helps identify existing gaps in policy and governance.

2. Interviews:
   Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to gather primary insights. The selection of interviewees follows a purposive sampling technique to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives. The participants include:

   a. Bureaucrats from government agencies in the fields of communication and informatics, education, the election supervisory body, and the broadcasting commission.

   b. Political elites, including campaign strategists and political party representatives, to understand their views on social media regulation.

   c. Experts in digital communication, law, and political science who provide academic and legal perspectives on misinformation regulation.

   d. Internet activists and fact-checking organizations working on countering hoaxes and promoting digital literacy.

Interviews were conducted both face-to-face (offline) and virtually (online) to facilitate broader participation. In addition to collecting and confirming data and information, interviews also served to coordinate between parties and synchronize development programs or activities carried out by ministries, agencies, and local governments that support digital literacy training programs. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis. The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis, where key themes are identified based on recurring patterns in the responses and literature. The analysis follows these steps. To ensure validity and reliability, findings from different sources (literature and interviews) are cross-verified through triangulation. This approach strengthens the credibility of the study by comparing multiple viewpoints and sources. By structuring the methodology with clear research techniques, data selection criteria, and analytical methods, this study ensures transparency and replicability, addressing the concerns raised in the review.

3. Results

This study identifies various challenges in regulating and managing information on social media, particularly concerning

the spread of hoaxes and government policies in Indonesia. Using Thematic Analysis (TA), data collected from interviews, social media analysis, and policy studies are categorized into five key themes that illustrate how social media facilitates the dissemination of hoaxes and the challenges the government faces in addressing this issue.

First, Social Media and the Inevitability of Hoaxes, which highlights how the nature of social media enables the rapid and widespread circulation of unverified information. Second, Social Media is a Platform for Spreading Hoax Information, which examines how social media algorithms often amplify the spread of hoaxes by prioritizing sensational content. Third, Lack of Media Regulation in Indonesia's Digital Platforms, which underscores the weak regulatory framework in monitoring hoax dissemination and how government efforts remain reactive. Fourth, The Number of Anonymous Accounts on Digital Platforms, which discusses how anonymous accounts serve as key disseminators of hoaxes and the challenges in digital identity regulation. Finally, Problematic Digital Literacy Programme, which critiques the effectiveness of government-run digital literacy programs in raising public awareness of credible information sources. By categorizing the research findings based on these key themes, this study provides a systematic understanding of how social media contributes to policy challenges in Indonesia while offering recommendations for strengthening regulations and enhancing digital literacy programs.

3.1 Social Media and the Inevitability of Hoaxes

Everyday, people very easily access and consume various kinds of information with social media. Many people do not realise that social media is a place for one-to-many message exchanges (from one person to many people) and even many-to-many (from many people to many people), this is not realised by users (Heryanto, 2019; Munzir, 2019).   This has an impact on the ease with which people can access hoax information.

In 2022, 437,741 negative contents were taken down by the Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia (Kominfo). The two types of negative content that appeared the most were separatism and radicalism. In addition to negative content, Kominfo's data published in January 2023 showed that 153 hoax contents were successfully taken down by Kominfo. Political issues occupy the highest position in the number of hoax information in Indonesia. This is certainly a challenge for democracy. In Indonesia, hoax information is deliberately spread by politicians, political parties and buzzers. The messages spread contain three things: pro-party propaganda, attacking the opposition, and encouraging divisions in society (Kompas, 2020).

Global Disinformation Order: The 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation report (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019) notes that out of a total of 70 countries studied, 52 countries actively use cyber power to create hoax content and manipulate public opinion. Social media can be the biggest source of hoax information because of the easy access to information that is not limited by time and place. In addition, there is a communication network between users who do not know each other in the real world, but interact with each other in cyberspace. With easy access to information, in fact, the threat of hoaxes or false information still cannot be overcome.

3.2 Social Media is A Platform for Spreading Hoax Information

If we look deeper into the role of mass media in countering potential divisions on social media today, then we find the fact that there is a shift in the flow of information from mainstream media, which is often also called traditional media (TV, Radio, Newspapers) to new media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, Whatsapp, Youtube). The existence of social media is influenced by the breadth of public access and an effective means of influencing public opinion. The potential of social media is like a double-edged knife, negative because it has the potential to spread false information (hoax) and positive because it is a means of political education and increasing democratic participation. Indonesian people's media literacy can be said to be minimal because they cannot distinguish the class of information.

Social media is an unstoppable phenomenon given the rapid development of science and technology. What can be done is how to respond to it so that it can be useful. This is also because journalism has changed. The majority of online media journalists in Indonesia use social media as a news source, with 9 out of 10 respondents (92.2%) using social media as a news source (Rosemarwati & Lindawati, 2019). In relation to general elections in Indonesia, the phenomenon of political division occurred in the 2014 and 2019 elections. The latter election showed a sharp increase in polarisation in society, which was influenced by the high spread of hoax information (Ramadhan, 2023).

The change or evolution in communication and information technology also creates evolution in the world of politics (Andriadi, 2017), especially in the practice of democracy which also changes along with changes in communication and information technology innovation. The internet overcomes the weakness of technology in the previous era, which was only one-way and then turned into two-way (interactive). With digital technology, the internet makes the communication process interactive, where people can talk as if they were face-to-face regardless of location and time. Therefore, this interactivity makes the internet very compatible with the meaning of democracy.

However, like two sides of a coin, the interactivity that occurs on social media creates its own problems for democracy.

Social media is a medium on the internet that allows users to represent themselves while communicating and sharing information with other users, and forming virtual social ties (Nasrullah, 2015). The existence of social media with the virtual social ties formed strengthens the bond or sense of unity of the users with the opinions that are channelled and conveyed. This can be seen from the polarisation formed on platform Twitter/X during the campaign or political season, where social media users are easily divided and swayed by the news that spreads.

Hoax information on election issues increased throughout 2023. Leading up to the February 2024 polls, there were a total of 203 election hoax issues with 2,882 contents spread across various digital platforms (Ministry of Communication and Information, 2024). The findings increased significantly compared to the findings in 2022, which only totalled 10 election-related hoax issues. The distribution of hoax information was found on various social media, with the most distribution through Facebook with 1,325 contents and Twitter/X with 947 contents. Election hoax issues were also widely circulated on Tiktok, Youtube, Snack Video, and Instagram platforms. These findings confirm that social media has become a channel that hoax makers continue to target as information technology penetration becomes more massive and users become more widespread. In particular, young people as first-time voters and active users of social media are expected to gain votes in general elections. However, as a result, the integrity of elections may be diminished and public distrust of the electoral process increased. In addition, hoax information about elections on Indonesian digital platforms can not only reduce the quality of democracy, but also potentially divide the nation.
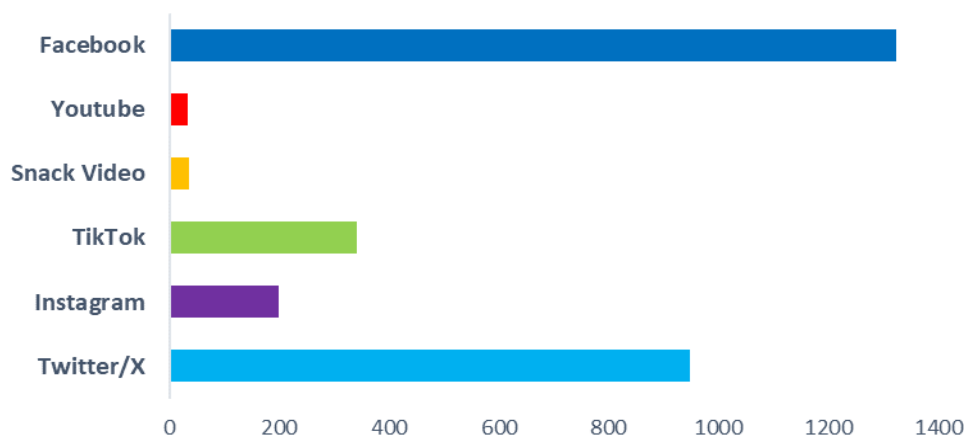
Graph 2. Distribution of Election Hoax Information on Social Media During 2023

Source: Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, 2024

3.3 Lack of Media Regulation in Indonesia's Digital Platforms

Irresponsible use of social media is the result of a regulatory vacuum (Baraza, 2021). Countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, the European Union, France, Germany, India, Mexico, Russia, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom have implemented several measures to tackle disinformation in their countries (Levush et al., 2019). This shows that these countries believe that social media can be a threat. What about in Indonesia?

Digital platforms have become a means for people to exercise democracy by expressing opinions, campaigning, and persuading others (Barisione et al., 2019; Barisione & Ceron, 2017). Aside from producing positive content, it also produces negative content such as hoax news, propaganda, separatism and radicalism that affect political stability and national resilience. Broadcasting regulation in Indonesia is regulated through Law Number 32 Year 2002. However, this law is considered less relevant to technological disruption and the rapid development of digitalisation because it only regulates television, radio, and conventional mass media. This limitation causes no legal certainty for the public in new media-based broadcasting activities in the digital platforms. In fact, social media users in Indonesia's digital platforms have grown rapidly and the phenomenon of citizen journalism has increased significantly. The absence of regulations governing digital broadcasting is also coupled with problems enforcing Law No. 19/2016 on Electronic Information and Transactions. This regulation, which aims to regulate various aspects of electronic data distribution, is still debated in the community due to inconsistencies in the enforcement of the substance of its articles. Therefore, these two legal products have not been able to positively become a legal tool that regulates all community activities in the digital platforms.

However, in the policy of organising general elections, there are regulations that aim to counteract the politicisation of Ethnicity, Religion, Race and Intergroup (SARA) through Article 280 Paragraph (1) Letter c, Law Number 7/2017 on General Elections. The article reads 'implementers, participants, and campaign teams are prohibited from insulting a

person, religion, ethnicity, race, group, candidate, and/or other election participants'. Letter d also states that implementers, participants, and campaign teams are prohibited from inciting and pitting individuals or communities against each other. Supervision of campaigns on social media has also been regulated in the General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) Regulation Number 28 of 2018 concerning Supervision of General Election Campaigns. This regulation regulates the supervision of social media accounts registered with the General Election Commission (KPU) and the supervision of social media accounts other than those registered with the KPU. In Article 36 of the regulation, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) or the Press Council can impose sanctions in accordance with the laws and regulations on broadcasting or the press if there is evidence that print mass media, electronic mass media, online media, and broadcasting institutions commit violations of reporting, broadcasting, and campaign advertising.

Regulations regarding the provisions of the general election campaign are also regulated through KPU Regulation Number 23 of 2018 concerning General Election Campaigns. In this regulation, the campaign policy on social media is only limited to regulating the registration of accounts belonging to general election participants. KPU limits each general election participant to a maximum of 10 social media accounts for the campaign. However, the KPU does not regulate the technical distribution of campaign content carried out by other parties outside the main team of general election participants, such as political buzzers. The dissemination of content from unauthorised parties has resulted in the polarisation of society in the digital platforms during the election campaign phase (Marozzo & Bessi, 2017). The Ministry of Communication and Information as the regulator can actually sanction violations committed by social media platforms in terms of reporting and broadcasting that are not in accordance with regulations. This is done by taking down social media content or websites that spread hoax information.

Unfortunately, the existence of some of these regulations has not fully encouraged public awareness of wise democracy in the digital platforms. This is partly due to the absence of regulations on online media operating in Indonesia's digital platforms. The lack of regulation makes KPI, which is tasked with overseeing broadcast content, unable to take action against negative content activities on digital platforms. To overcome this obstacle, KPI performs preemptive and preventive functions related to public content activities on social media. Preemptive function is done by building awareness and influencing people's way of thinking to sort out which content is hoax and which is not. KPI's preventive function is done by reminding broadcasters (television and radio) not to just take social media content as news material.

In early 2024, the Government issued a new regulation in the form of Presidential Regulation Number 32 of 2024 on the Responsibility of Digital Platform Companies to Support Quality Journalism. Through this regulation, the Indonesian government wants to regulate the ecosystem of digital companies to be responsible for the dissemination of information on digital platforms. The main objective is to regulate the responsibilities of digital platform companies to support quality journalism so that news that is journalistic work can be respected and valued for its ownership in a fair and transparent manner.

Indonesia is currently drafting a regulation that will update the Broadcasting Law. The update is expected to be a solution to the need for regulations that accommodate the rapid development of new media and public activities on digital platforms. However, this needs to be done appropriately and carefully, as the addition of new regulations governing digital platforms has the potential to add complexity to policies and regulations that lack coherence and consistency (Codagnone & Weigl, 2023). Reflecting on the experience of other countries, such as Denmark, digital platforms do need to be contained by regulations and multi-stakeholder commitments to maintain and strengthen democratic values (Danish Government, 2021; Fejerskov et al., 2023). Although improving people's digital literacy is still a challenge for Indonesia today, the issue of digital platform regulation also affects the quality of democracy and election integrity.

3.4 The Number of Anonymous Accounts on Digital Platforms

The existence of anonymous accounts on digital platforms has been in the spotlight of many parties including platform providers. As part of internet freedom, this condition is inevitable. A survey conducted by Kaspersky (a cybersecurity company) in the "Digital Reputation" study in 2020 found that 3 out of 10 internet users in Asia Pacific have anonymous social media accounts. This means that social media users do not use their real names, photos or other personal identities. About 70 percent of anonymous accounts are found on Facebook, 37 percent on Youtube, 33 percent on Instagram, and Twitter/X is about 25 percent (Kaspersky, 2020).

The use of anonymous profiles in the Kaspersky review has two perceptions. First, it relates to the user's desire to utilize freedom of speech on social media. Second, the use of anonymous accounts is perceived to prevent internet users from dangerous and harmful activities. Nearly half (49 percent) of the 1,240 respondents said they use anonymous accounts to express their opinions without fear of their reputation falling. About 34 percent of users use anonymous accounts to oppose the opinions of others. The potential for counterproductive conditions for democracy on digital platforms is also a challenge for Indonesia. The emergence of anonymous social media accounts in Indonesia, especially those that later became public information dissemination accounts, has been able to influence the public to make it the main information reference (Kurnia, 2017). However, verification of the information provided by anonymous accounts is still needed to

ensure the truth of the information. The National Police Criminal Investigation Agency found that the number of anonymous accounts on social media correlates with the increase in hate speech on digital platforms (Kurniawan, 2018). Anonymous social media accounts have become illicit users that challenge democracy and hinder the legal process.

3.5 Problematic Digital Literacy Programme

Social media is a media that is in great demand by the wider community. Based on the results of a survey conducted by We Are Social Indonesia, out of 212.9 million internet users, there are at least 167 million active social media users (We Are Social Indonesia, 2023). There are five social media platforms that are most actively used, including YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X. Social media, which was originally created as a place to stay in touch and to update status (information/news) by its users, has in fact turned into a means used by certain parties to convey political opinions that are provocative and cause uproar in the community. For some Indonesians who still lack a culture of literacy, the news circulating is taken for granted without checking the truth. In fact, some news circulating on social media is taken for granted and considered the truth.   Then the news that has not been tested for validity is spread to the circle of friends. The phenomenon of sharing news between friends both on social media (Facebook and Twitter/X) and chatting media (WhatsApp) makes the spread of hoax information and buzzer news more widespread.

In the 2019 general election, hoax information spread through social media has caused people to be swayed in the flow of election information. For example, in the use of WhatsApp, many new groups were formed deliberately to become a campaign medium for election participants. Often the dissemination of information in these informal groups becomes a medium for spreading hoax information and black campaigns. This aims to divide groups of people in determining their political preferences. Even family members or colleagues in WhatsApp groups have come into conflict due to differences in political views, which were actually caused by the disinformation they received. This has led people lost in making their political choices in the general election.

Therefore, what needs to be understood at this time is how to foster political awareness for ordinary people, how people have an understanding and knowledge of the actual political conditions that occur and develop, so that the interests and opinions of each individual in society can be utilised. Then, how to instill the values of literacy in democracy for the entire community in order to achieve common welfare for various groups. This is still a major problem because the substance and implementation of political education is still limited, and has not holistically reached all levels of society.

4. Discussion

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that social media plays a significant role in the spread of hoaxes in Indonesia, especially in the political context. The main factors that worsen this condition are the existence of anonymous accounts, the lack of digital media regulation, and low digital literacy in society. The government needs to strengthen regulations on digital platforms to be more responsible in handling the spread of hoaxes. Steps that can be taken include:

1. Strict Regulations to Combat Hoaxes

The government needs to strengthen regulations on digital platforms to be more responsible in handling the spread of hoaxes. One step that can be taken is to require digital platforms to implement an identity verification system for accounts that spread political news or information, so that it can reduce the misuse of anonymous accounts in spreading disinformation. In addition, cooperation with digital platform providers must be improved to accelerate the detection and removal of hoax content before it spreads widely in the community. To provide a deterrent effect, the government also needs to apply strict sanctions to parties proven to spread disinformation, including politicians, political parties, and buzzers who use social media as a tool for negative propaganda. With stricter regulations, it is hoped that the spread of hoaxes can be controlled and the digital space will become safer and more trustworthy.

2. Improving Digital literacy

One of the main challenges in tackling hoaxes is the low level of digital literacy. Therefore, the government and civil society organizations can take several measures to address this issue. Integrating digital literacy education into school and university curricula will help younger generations develop critical thinking skills in filtering information. Additionally, launching massive public awareness campaigns through social media, television, and local communities can increase public awareness of the dangers of hoaxes. Engaging local communities in the "Anti-Hoax Society" program can also create a social movement that actively verifies information before spreading it. By implementing these strategies, society can become more resilient against misinformation and contribute to a more informed digital environment.

3. Managing Anonymous Accounts on Social Media

The presence of anonymous accounts, which are often a source of hoax dissemination, requires better regulation. To address this issue, social media platforms should be encouraged to improve account transparency by implementing stricter "Verified User" features. Additionally, anonymous accounts should be restricted from spreading political or sensitive

information through the use of more advanced algorithms to detect high-risk content. Digital platform providers must also establish a more responsive complaint center to handle reports of anonymous accounts spreading hoaxes. By implementing these measures, the risks associated with anonymous accounts can be minimized, creating a safer and more reliable digital space.

   4. Strengthening Collaboration Between Government, Private Sector, and Society

Addressing hoax dissemination requires cross-sector collaboration between the government, technology companies, academics, and civil society. The government should work closely with social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter/X to enhance the accuracy of hoax detection. Research institutions and academics can contribute by developing AI-based hoax detection technology, improving the efficiency of identifying misinformation. Additionally, civil society and independent media can play a supervisory role by verifying and clarifying circulating information. By implementing these collaborative efforts, the spread of hoaxes in Indonesia can be minimized, protecting the public from the harmful effects of disinformation that could threaten social stability and democracy.

5. Conclusion

Social media has a significant role in shaping public opinion and determining voter preferences in Indonesian elections. However, social media also has problems in terms of the spread of hoax information, hate speech, and black campaigns in general elections. The rise of hoaxes in Indonesia is due to the low level of political education, digital literacy and also the lack of strict regulations in preventing the spread of hoaxes, especially on social media. This is because social media has double values, namely positive and negative. The positive side is a means of political education and increasing democratic participation. But, on the negative side, social media has the potential to spread false information (hoax). Although there have been several regulations governing the use of digital platforms, these regulations have not been effective enough in overcoming the massive spread of hoaxes, including during the general election period. The existence of some of these regulations has not fully encouraged public awareness of wise democracy in the digital platforms.

Various efforts need to be made by the Indonesian government to prevent the spread of hoax information during elections. The government needs to give strict sanctions to politicians, political parties, and buzzers who use social media as a tool for negative propaganda and spread hoaxes or black campaigns. Improving digital literacy by integrating digital literacy education into school and university curricula will help younger generations develop critical thinking skills in filtering information from media. The regulation that the government also needs to do is to require that each social media account must have a clear identity, not anonymous. Besides conducting digital literacy training for the public, the government can also tackle hoax information by improving digital security through specialised institutions or multi-stakeholder collaboration, regulating permissions and continuous monitoring, enforcing transparency of political advertisements, blocking or removing negative content, imposing criminal sanctions for hoax information disseminators, coordinating and cooperating with digital platform companies. In the future, more comprehensive government policies are needed to overcome the problem of hoaxes in Indonesia. This agenda needs to be organised through comprehensive policies and regulations, which serve as a reference for the public and digital platform companies in realising positive social media usage and collaboration between government, private sector, and society to overcome the spreading of hoaxes.

Authors contributions

All authors contributed equally to the study design and data analysis, providing valuable insights and expertise at every stage of the project. They engaged in extensive discussions to refine the research methodology and ensure the accuracy of the results. In addition, the team collaboratively reviewed and refined the manuscript, ensuring clarity, coherence, and adherence to the highest academic standards. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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