

Social Media as a Gateway to Information: Digital Literacy on Current Issues in Social Media

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Abstract

The digital age has changed humans in accessing information from offline media to online media. The presence of digital media, such as smartphone help people get current issues quickly without limits of time and place. With advances in information technology, internet users not only can receive information but also send information in the form of comments and share information. The current internet media that has become a gateway for information is social media. This paper aims to discuss information dissemination on current issues in social media. The data sources for this paper were social media texts and online questionnaire results. The research question in this paper is what current issues are communicated in social media and how is the cyber communities' digital literacy on current issues in social media. The research findings show that 90.03% of people access information through social media, the frequency of time spent with social media to access information is 81%, and the type of social media used to access information is Facebook (38.4%), WhatsApp (20.2%), YouTube (18.4%), Twitter (8.3%) and Tiktok (6.1%). Furthermore, the current issues that can be accessed by media users are covid-19 vaccination and intolerance. The major problem with social media as a gateway to information is the digital literacy of the cyber communities on the spread of fake news related to the Covid-19 vaccination and intolerance.

Keywords

Social Media, Information Gateway, Current Issues, Semiotics.

Introduction

The appearance of the internet in the 1960s marked early technological development. Internet technology has enabled people to communicate between individuals, groups and societies. According to Heywood (1996), the technology began when the U.S. Department of defence launched Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET). Its purpose was to link computers over networks in necessary areas. This program was built for military purposes that can observe problems, monitor nuclear attacks or control different types of information. From the ARPANET program, the concept of the internet was invented and has evolved until today.

With the rapid development of information technology, the internet has become the most important medium of communication in human life in the world. With a wide and fast network coverage in various areas (remote areas), people (internet users) can easily access information in cyberspace. The number of internet users in the world continues to grow engender the emergence of cyber society, a society that knows no time boundaries and place (areas) and can interact with people from different countries. The internet has become a gateway to information and communication between netizens (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). This reality shows that the number of internet users continues to grow. The number of Indonesian internet users as netizens has reached more than 50% of the total population of Indonesia. In 2020, the number of Indonesian netizens reached 196.7 million¹ out of the total population of Indonesia of 272.1 million. The number of internet users increased by 8.9% (23.5 million) compared to 2018². Of the total internet users in Indonesia, the highest number of users are on social media, amounting to 160 million³. The most popular social media used reaches 88%, WhatsApp, 84%, 82%, and Instagram, 79%. The data shows that the average number of hours spent by Indonesians to access social media is 3.26 hours and 99% of internet users used their phones to surf in social media (Jayani, 2020).

The easiness of Indonesians uses the internet, especially social media to interact and communicate with others has led to various issues. Social media issues are diverse and may have an impact on dimensions of social life. The findings of the research conducted by Ayun (2015), indicates that there has been a change of habit (behaviour) of Facebook users who freely upload their activities for friends or groups. Uploading all their activities is a way of self-actualization on social media. Friends or group members know indeed all personal activities of the social media users. Social media causes behavioural addiction

¹Source: Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII), 9 November 2020), <https://apjii.or.id/>

²Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), <https://www.bps.go.id/pressrelease/2021/01/21/1854/hasil-sensus-penduduk-2020.html>

³Data on Social Media Trends in 2020 in the World based on Hootsuite: <https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-indonesian-digital-report-2020/>

and hurts the users, for example, Facebook may cause a decrease in sleep quality (Wolniczak et al., 2013); social media has detrimental effects on our health and can create depression and anxiety (Pantic et al., 2012). The negative effects of the use of social media are experienced by women. Studies show that women are more active than men in using social media and women's lives (lifestyle) are more influenced by social media (Duggan and Brenner, 2013).

The negative effects also affect the young generation. They grow up in digital culture with more aloof behaviour and are busy interacting and communicate in social media (Ibrahim, 2011). The issues that still happening and increasing today are the dissemination of hoaxes, cyber hate crime and cyber-bullying, especially those experienced by girls (William and Pearson, 2016). Social media addiction is identified by the emergence of problems in adolescents: the increased symptoms of depression, bullying, cyberbullying, self-esteem, salivary measures of stress (Shafi et al., 2021).

The positive and negative impacts of the use of internet media (social media) are highly dependent on digital literacy by internet users. Digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information from a variety of digital sources. Digital literacy includes the ability to read and understand signs (verbal and nonverbal language) through the thinking processes and interpret to understand and evaluate information found in digital media. According to Gilster (1997), there are four aspects of digital literacy that a person can do, namely; internet searching, hypertextual navigation, content evaluation and knowledge assembly. These four aspects determine the change of habits in internet users. Digital literacy is related to knowledge and skills to use information and communication technology to find, evaluate, use, create information, and utilize it to foster communication and interaction in everyday life. (Nasrullah et al., 2017).

The challenges of understanding information messages in digital media at present are interesting to discuss. This paper will discuss digital literacy on Current Issues in Social Media by internet users. The research question is how internet users represent digital literacy on the current issues in Indonesia. This study used media semiotics to answer the problem formulation.

Digital Literacy

Since prehistory, literacy is a part of human life. In its time, literacy skills were reading the nature signs to hunt and defend themselves as well as creating artifacts on cave walls as a form of expression to achieve something, for example, hunting.

The development of literacy is marked by the human ability to perceive writing leading to the emergence of thoughts through language or code. With both spoken and written, the literacy process transpires and evolves by interacting and communicating with others by using simple technology as a medium, such as a pigeon post to information technology (printing machines, cameras, paper, telegram, telephones). Along with the development of information technology with the appearance of the internet, digital literacy is also born as a medium for interaction and communication between individuals, groups, and societies (Bawden, 2008).

Digital literacy was established from the history of computer and information literacy (Yustika & Iswati, 2020). Computer literacy evolved in 1980 when computer technology was increasingly used in the business environment and society. Information technology evolved in the 1990s along with the development of information technology that is easily accessible for people, and disseminate various information.

The birth of internet-based digital technology devices, such as notebooks, tablets and smartphones makes digital literacy increasingly important and top priority that internet users must have in reading, understanding and evaluating various information received and shared with internet users. Digital literacy is necessary to be able to participate in the global world. Digital literacy is as important as reading, writing, arithmetic, and other disciplines (Hargittai, 2005). The generation that grows up with unlimited access to digital technology has a different mindset from the previous generation. Everyone can be responsible for using technology to interact with society and the environment. Digital technology allows people to interact and communicate with family and friends in everyday life.

However, today's internet world is full of hoax (fake) information, hate speech, radicalism and criminal acts. The existence of hoaxes can damage the current digital ecosystem which can only be prevented by building awareness of each individual. Digital literacy is the ability to process various information, understand messages and communicate effectively with others in various forms. In this case, the form in question includes creating, collaborating, communicating, and working according to ethical rules, and understanding when and how technology should be used to achieve a goal. Awareness and critical thinking of various positive and negative impacts on various information that can occur due to the use of internet media in everyday life. The young generation as internet users who do not know to use digital media hurts being excluded from competition for jobs, democratic participation, and social interaction. The participation of the young generation in digital literacy can create a society with a critical and creative mindset and

view in responding to various information (Hasjim et al., 2020). Digital literacy for young people makes them uninfluenced by controversial issues, victims of hoax information, or victims of fraud in cyberspace. Building digital literacy is necessary for society, it is a step of achievement in the field of education and culture.

Research Method

The method used was a descriptive-analytical beginning with an outline of the thoughts and issues to be studied, without using a basic assumption or proposition (Hasyim et al., 2021). The data collection technique used was the survey and tracking data in social media (Bungin, 2008). Another source of data was obtained through the results of online questionnaires distributed to social media users (WA, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook). The literature used in this study was taken from the latest issues on the internet (news media) and on social media. The characteristics of social media are that everyone can be a newsmaker, share with others, can be a critic by commenting on the news or information obtained (Georgetown University, 2010). The data obtained on social media is related to the characteristics of social media.

The number of respondents obtained from the online questionnaire was 505 people with a percentage of 66% males and 33.4% females. The percentage of the age of respondents as social media users was 68.2% aged 20 to 60, 31.2% aged 11-19, and as much as 0.6% aged over 60. Based on the level of education of the respondents obtained data is as follows, 58.2% of SHS students, 18.65% of Bachelor's degree, 15.6% of Master's degree, 5.7% of Doctoral degree. Furthermore, based on their employment status including 69.8% students, 10.9% civil servants, 6.5% employees, respectively 3.5% of entrepreneurs and lecturers, and 5.8% others.

Findings and Discussion

Social Media as a Gateway to Information

Internet is information technology that has a significant role in social change and it is a new media that continues to grow and have a big impact up to this date (Karman, 2014). The world's most widely used application is social networking (social media) which enables people to interact and communicate with others without time and place limits. Social media as a social networking application has caused social changes in society. Social media is not merely simple to access information but also used as a medium for individuals, businesses and political interests (Hasyim et al., 2019). Social media as a social network has designed a new pattern of interaction and communication, namely

allocation, conversation, consultation and registration (Mc Quail, 2010). Allocation is a pattern of disseminating information from a centre to several points that are simultaneously distributed, for example, information distributed in social media groups. The conversation is a pattern of communication and interaction between individuals and groups that can take place simultaneously. This pattern shows that the parties involved are equal. For example Facebook, a person makes friends with other people who work as artists, athletes and government officials. Consultation is a communication pattern that functions as a source of information and a medium for gaining the required information. For example, WhatsApp is used as a medium for health consultations. And the registration pattern is a communication pattern where internet users (social media) are used as a source of information by other users (institutions, organizations, etc.) for certain purposes. For example, the government wants to obtain information related to the level of Covid-19 vaccination services conducted by health workers to the public by distributing questionnaires on social media.

Based on the report of We Are Social and Hootsuite (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-indonesia>), more than fifty per cent of Indonesia's population actively uses social media in 2020. This report indicates that out of the 274.9 million population in Indonesia, 170 million uses social media. Thus, the penetration rate is around 61.8 per cent. The number of active social media users in Indonesia grew by 10 million (6.3 per cent). Internet users in Indonesia grew from 27 million (15.5 per cent) to 202.6 million.

Based on the results of this study, of the 500 respondents who gave answers, the most widely used social media application in Indonesia to obtain information is Instagram, 38.4%, WhatsApp, 20.2%, YouTube, 18.4%, Twitter, 8, 3%, TikTok, 6.1%, and Facebook, 2.2%.

The highest percentage of internet users is on social media. It means that social media has become a gateway to information for the Indonesian Cyber community. Based on respondents' answers, 100 per cent of information was obtained through internet media and the most widely used media to access information was social media, as much as 62% and online news media at 32.9%. Social media users are the most active netizens in accessing information with a percentage of 90.3%. This is in line with the average time spent in accessing information through social media which is three hours, fourteen minutes per day.

Social media as a gateway to information does not only function to access information but also functions to create information, provide comments on the received information, forward information and make criticism. Media users can act as publishers to disseminate information, as journalists to make news, resource persons to provide comments and criticism on trending issues (Jenkins, 2006). From the negative aspect, social media users can have a role in committing criminal acts, making threats (cyberbullying and bullying, and fraudulent actions and spreading hoax information.

Digital Literacy on Current Issues in Indonesia

Today's Internet media has shifted the way humans communicate with others. Internet technology accelerates and compresses the two-way communication model into the digital world. The movement of information dissemination and exchange is getting faster thanks to the presence of technology. The internet enables people to access the latest information to meet and support various human activities without time and space limits. Social media as an internet-based digital information media is an information and communication network that has replicated human social activities (Pratika et al., 2018).

Social media as a gateway to information can help us to get the latest issues distributing by social media users. Various information on events that just happened can be accessed in real-time on social media and at the same time spread to social media applications. Dissemination of information as a current issue widely is an initiative by social media users. Social media users have a role as journalists in disseminating trending information at that moment.

The results of this study showed that the most current issues obtained on social media are information related to the Covid-19 vaccines, with a total of 306 respondents or 60.6%, COVID-19 victims with a total of 217 respondents (43%), religious intelligence, 203 respondents (40.2 %) and rapid test (Swab), with a total of 127 respondents (25.1%).

Social media users who get the latest information can also share or forward the information to other people or groups on social media. The results showed that the percentage of media users' tendency to read the whole news (information) before the information was disseminated amounted to 77%. Even though media users have the freedom to forward information, the data shows that the frequency of sharing information was 32.7% (rare), 26.1% (average), 20.2% (rarely), 17.4% (often) and 3.5% (very often).

Digital literacy of social media users showed that they can understand the context of the information received and have an awareness of whether or not the information is

important to spread to other social media users. The results of this study indicated that social media users, with a percentage of 88.3 per cent, listen and understand well the information received before it is shared with others.

Apakah anda menyimak dan memahami dengan baik informasi yang anda terima sebelum dibagikan ke orang lain?
505 responses

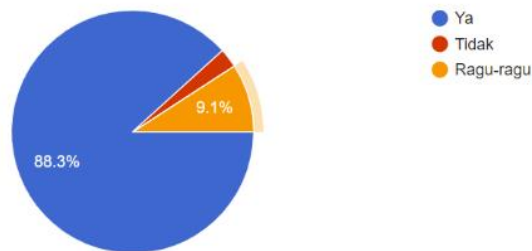


Figure 1 Percentage of media users' attitudes on the information received

Do you read and understand well the information you receive before you share it with others?

Yes, Non, Average

The role of digital literacy shows that social media users have positive strategies in evaluating various information received on social media. It means the information received needs to have listened to and understood properly and have an awareness of the nature of the dissemination of information to others.

Digital Literacy on Hoax Information

The spread of hoax information (fake news) in Indonesia is increasingly widespread. Information that leads to hoaxes raises doubts and confuses the public. The increase of hoax news makes it difficult to differentiate the real one and hoax information. The results of a survey conducted by Mastel (2019) showed that cyber society received hoax news every day and it was more than one. The most widely used media in spreading hoaxes is social media.

The results of this study are related to the interaction of hoax communication on social media involving 505 respondents showing the attitudes and views of social media users on hoax information. Based on the results of data analysis, the frequency of receiving hoax news on social media was 44% (often), 22.2% very often, 22% (average), 10% (rare), and 1.6% (rarely).

Menurut Anda, seberapa sering anda menerima berita Hoax di media sosial?
505 responses

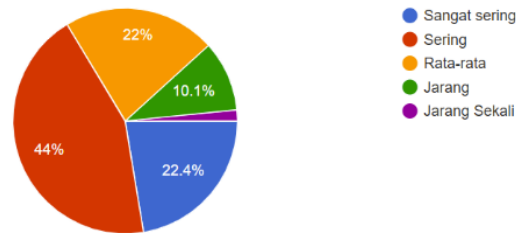


Figure 2 Percentage of receiving hoax news on social media

In your opinion, do you often receive hoax news on social media? Very often, often, on average, not often, very not often

This data shows that people always receive hoax information on social media. The topics of hoax news that they receive most are the Covid-19 vaccines, COVID-19 victims, religious intelligence, and rapid tests (Swabs). Digital literacy on hoax news shows that 75% of respondents can differentiate hoax news or not and 79% of respondents confirm the truth of the information. Respondents who confirm the truth of the information was 98.4%, confirm it because they perceive hoax news. The majority of respondents have a critical attitude and can identify hoax news, with the following characteristics: starting with suggestive and exciting words, often using the names of famous figures or institutions, sounding irrational, and often accompanied by false research evidence, and does not appear in the official online media.

1. [HOAKS] Pembatalan Ibadah Haji Tahun 2021 karena Alasan Keuangan



Figure 3 Example of hoax news. Source: kominfo.com

Hoax: cancellation of the pilgrimage in 2021 due to financial reasons

Explanation/Clarification

Information was distributed through a news article which stated that the cancellation of the 2021 Hajj pilgrimage was due to financial reasons and the Hajj funds were used to finance infrastructure projects. The Hajj Financial Management Agency (BPKH) denied

the information. BPKH emphasized that the cancellation of the pilgrimage in 2021 was not because of financial reasons, but because of the health, safety, and security of the pilgrims. It is according to the decision of the Minister of Religion on KMA No. 660 of 2021. In the Financial Statements (LK) of BPKH until LK 2020 there is also no record of debt in BPKH's obligations to Saudi Arabian pilgrimage service providers. BPKH also denied the information that the hajj funds were allocated for infrastructure financing. He emphasized that the investment allocation was aimed at investments with a low-moderate risk profile. 90 per cent of the investments made by BPKH are in the form of state sharia securities and corporate tribes. Quoted from the BPKH @bPKH Instagram page, the balance of hajj funds are managed by BPKH in a sharia, trustworthy and accountable manner. From the existing data, in 2019 there was an increase of 11% from 2018 reached IDR 124.32 trillion. In 2020 there was a greater increase to 16% and reached IDR 144.78 trillion. In 2021 in March there was an increase of 3% to 149.15 trillion (Source: Kominfo).

1. [HOAKS] Akun Facebook Mengatasnamakan Wakil Gubernur NTB



Figure 4 Example of hoax news. Source: kominfo.com

Hoax: Facebook account in the name of the deputy governor of NTB (East Nusa Tenggara)

Explanation/Clarification

A Facebook account appeared with the name of the Deputy Governor of NTB (West Nusa Tenggara), Sitti Rohmi Djalilah. The account using Sitti as a profile photo, as well as a photo of Sitti with the Governor of NTB, Zulkieflimansyah, as a cover photo. Reporting from the official website of the Office of Communication, Informatics and Statistics of the Province of NTB, Head of the NTB Province of Communication and Information Technology, Najamuddin Amy stated that the Facebook account was fake and did not belong to Sitti. His party informed the public that the Deputy Governor of NTB has never had a social media account (Source: Kominfo).

Conclusion

Social media as a social network, interaction and communication has become a gateway to information. It means that all information from various events that occur in the world can be accessed on social media. Although social media is not online news media, social media users can use it as an information network that is connected to all social media users in the world. Because social media is a gateway to information, even personal matters can become public news.

Social media is an information gateway as shown by survey results as much as 64% of information is obtained through social media and the majority of internet users search information through internet media. As a gateway to information, social media also enable to spread of hoax information distributed by individuals or groups with specific interests (such as politics). Dissemination of hoax information on social media can happen easily and quickly because every individual as an internet user has the potential to create hoax news and spread it.

Digital literacy by the cyber community is very important and urgent in understanding and responding to the latest issues that are spreading on social media. Knowledge of digital literacy by internet users as cyber communities ranging from elementary school education to higher education can read, understand, evaluate and be critical of various information, especially those that lead to hoaxes. Knowledge to be able to perceive hoax news and not be part of digital literacy activities that need to be improved and encouraged in the community so that there are no victims of hoax information.

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