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## Dissecting Hoaxes as an Important Strategy in Maintaining Information Literacy

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### Abstract

The modern mass population is affected by the hoax phenomenon in the information age, which has a negative impact on productivity, information integration, and social stability. This paper aims to contribute to the public's understanding and response to hoaxes, with a focus on literary and digital literary criticism. In this case, a careful and structured qualitative descriptive is used to identify a hoax phenomenon. This approach comes from two different perspectives. While literature analysis addresses the characteristics and nature of the information in question, other approaches involve empirical methods to examine the impact of language use on readers' perceptions and responses to hoaxes. One more example is the use of an online form that requires the use of a questionnaire that is unique to each individual. The results of the survey, which had 108 responses, showed that media literacy, intensive education, and mass media consumption were all important factors in achieving this goal. The results of this research show that there are various types of fabrication that are commonly found in the computerized period, and each has its own characteristics. One research focus is on political tricks, which are often used to influence public opinion or damage the reputation of political opponents through the spread of false claims about policies or statements taken out of context. The findings of the survey indicate that the mass media's literacy rate has increased as a result of the verification of information and analysis.

**Keywords:** Information Literacy; Hoaxes; Critical Thinking



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## 1. Introduction

In the age of information that can be easily obtained and disseminated, modern society faces increasingly complex challenges related to the hoax phenomenon. Hoaxes are currently a hot topic of conversation in mass media and social media because they have disturbed the public with information whose truth cannot be ascertained (Sosiawan & Wibowo, 2020). Hoax conveys misguided news or information that is deliberately disguised to make it look true, while hoax news is a publication that looks like it is factual, but turns out to contain summaries, slander, and has no identifiable pattern. This poses a serious threat to the trust and integrity of information (Rasywir & Purwarianti, 2015).

In an increasingly complex digital information era, the role of linguistics becomes very important in identifying and understanding the language used in spreading hoaxes. Linguistic analysis can help reveal language patterns, rhetoric and manipulative strategies used in constructing hoax narratives. Thus, linguistics can provide deep insight into how language is used to manipulate public opinion and spread misinformation (Kohn, 2015). Through a careful linguistic approach, it will help to detail the linguistic elements involved in the construction of hoaxes, thereby enriching our understanding of linguistic dynamics in the context of the information in question.

History records many influential hoaxes, including the Piltdown hoax that fooled the scientific community for decades, and false claims about the moon landing that called into question accepted historical truths. In academia, hoaxes have been used to expose weaknesses in peer review processes and scientific integrity, as the Sokal case shows. Hoaxes are also considered a form of social criticism that exposes flaws in our social beliefs and practices. Literacy interactions in Indonesia show the need for serious action. The massive spread of fake news and people being lulled by hate speech has increasingly confirmed the lack of understanding of literacy in Indonesia (Karimi-Dehkordi, 2023)

Furthermore, the influence of hoaxes goes beyond the intellectual sphere and can change public opinion, change collective perceptions, and even trigger panic or discrimination. For example, disinformation surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine has become a serious obstacle to public health efforts to control the pandemic. This shows that hoaxes are not only a matter of correct information, but also a matter of public health and security. In overcoming this challenge, researchers and experts from various fields have explored ways to detect, handle

and prevent the spread of hoaxes. New technologies and detection methods have been developed to identify and counter hoaxes, while media education and information literacy have become increasingly important to equip the public with the ability to differentiate between fact and fiction.

Initiatives such as those developed by Popat et al. (2016) and Kumar et al. (2016) have made advances in hoax detection techniques, while insights from Hynes et al. (2012) and Rea (Chey, 2017) explore the social and methodological impact of hoaxes. This effort is very important to ensure the public can differentiate between credible and non-credible information, and to support an open information environment. Given the complexity and negative impact of hoaxes, it is very important for all levels of society, including academics, educators, and policy makers, to understand the dynamics behind the spread of hoaxes and to develop effective strategies in dealing with them and the role of literacy as a basis for critical analysis.

Hoaxes, as social and communication phenomena, play diverse and often paradoxical roles in literacy contexts. Christopher G. Rea (2019) suggests that hoaxes can be considered as a theoretical paradigm that challenges categories such as creativity and value, as well as the method itself, suggesting that hoaxes can serve as a tool for critical thinking and analysis. Hynes et al. (2012) add that hoaxes can draw our attention to the rules and norms of social scientific practice, thereby confirming our commitment to them, highlighting the role of hoaxes in questioning and reinforcing social and academic structures (Hynes-Berry & Berry, 2014). In a political context, Pratiwi Utami identified that hoaxes can create a culture based on shared beliefs among communities and have the potential to become a means of political partisanship, showing how hoaxes can influence and manipulate public opinion (P. Utami, 2019). However, Lynne H. Jennrich (1979) criticized that while literature on hoaxes can stimulate academic inquiry, its application in practical education is still limited, indicating a gap between theory and practice in media literacy (Fanni et al., 2005). In subsequent research, it was said (Amalia & Suhandano, 2023) that the use of 'wrong expressions', and the most frequently used misleading items were 'exaggerated expressions' and 'false expressions', which showed the same amount in all advertisements.

Tsaniyah and Juliana emphasized that massive development of digital literacy skills can be a bulwark against hoaxes, highlighting the importance of digital literacy education in modern society (Tsaniyah & Juliana, 2019). Research by Putri et al. (2020) supports this, showing that a culture of literacy through articles and YouTube makes it easier for people to identify hoax news, confirming the role of media literacy in fighting disinformation (Putri, 2020). Sellnow et al. reveal that an effective response to a hoax involves attacking the source, reinterpreting the hoax maker's claims, and recognizing the value of what is threatened (Sellnow et al., 2012), while (Fleeson et al., 2017)(2010) describe the hoax maker as a reader

and highly skilled manipulators of text genres, demonstrating that expertise in text literacy is important for creating and detecting hoaxes.

Leone suggest that the results of research on hoaxes can improve media literacy to confront disinformation and help develop automated hoax detection systems in the future, emphasizing the importance of research in informing literacy practices (Leone, 2022). Kumar et al. (2016) found that although most hoaxes on Wikipedia were detected quickly and had little impact, some hoaxes persisted for a long time and were widely cited, highlighting the challenges in detecting and addressing more sophisticated hoaxes (Kumar et al., 2016). Overall, literacy—especially information and media literacy—is needed to identify and counter hoaxes. Jones-Jang et al. found that information literacy significantly increased the likelihood of identifying fake news stories, underscoring the importance of critical literacy in a society that is increasingly connected and vulnerable to disinformation (Jones-Jang et al., 2021).

The role of critical literacy as a basis for understanding information in society is very important. Based on a series of research, involving aspects of social construction and political dimensions. Critical information literacy enables in-depth analysis of the social formation and political dimensions of the library and information sector, giving students the ability to think critically about the production and use of information. This emphasizes the significance of understanding the context behind the information received, as emphasized by Eamon C. Tewell in his research (Tewell, 2018).

Furthermore, the role of critical information literacy is manifested in understanding and changing the world, providing a deeper understanding of the origins, structure and function of their world. Research conducted by I. Beilin and A. Leonard highlights literacy as an empowerment tool that allows individuals to feel they have the capability to change the world around them (Beilin, 2013). In cultural, ideological and sociolinguistic contexts, critical literacy helps librarians understand the cultural and social background of information. Mary A. Wickline emphasizes the importance of critical literacy in exploring the cultural, ideological, and sociolinguistic contexts in which research literature is created and consumed (Wickline, 2017). Using a qualitative approach with content analysis, the results showed that the types of reading comprehension questions could foster the student's critical thinking regarding acquiring learning objectives in the English curriculum

The need to involve diverse social and cultural perspectives is also reflected through critical literacy, encouraging people to evaluate information from various points of view. D. Neuman and colleagues in 2019 showed that critical literacy helps achieve intelligent and insightful judgments about the value of information from various social and cultural backgrounds (Neuman et al., 2019). In the context of social change and gender roles, critical information literacy utilizes critical approaches in education and primary source analysis to

impact social change and address gender roles in communication, as explained in Julie M. Porterfield's research (Porterfield, 2018).

Ultimately, critical literacy aims to teach students to understand and manage the relationship between language and power. The focus on aspects of dominance, access, diversity and design was expressed by H. Janks (Janks, 2000). It can be concluded that critical literacy plays a major role in empowering individuals to not only understand information superficially, but also to criticize and evaluate that information in a broader context. This ability has become an essential skill in today's information age, where the ability to filter and critically assess information is very important.

Critical literacy has a role in fighting hoaxes. The ability to critically process information, understand context, and critically evaluate content is key in dealing with fake news and misleading information. Digital literacy, as part of critical literacy, has become very important in the current digital era. Critical literacy education, in both formal and informal contexts, is essential to equip individuals with the skills necessary to navigate a complex and often misleading information landscape.

Critical literacy in recognizing and opposing fake news is revealed by the results of various studies. Susi Fitriani highlighted the contribution of libraries and literacy awareness movements in combating the spread of hoaxes, with an emphasis on effective strategies (Fitri & Fitriana, 2020). The importance of developing digital literacy skills as a form of defense against hoaxes was emphasized by Gema Irhamdhika (Irhamdhika, 2022), who showed that increasing digital literacy can strengthen critical skills in identifying fake news in the midst of an era of disruption.

Naimatus Tsaniyah and Kannisa Ayu Juliana (Tsaniyah & Juliana, 2019) emphasized the urgency of developing comprehensive digital literacy skills to ward off hoaxes. Digital literacy not only facilitates understanding of context, but also supports in-depth critique of content. Fitriani Rika Asnaria and her colleagues added a dimension of united character, where digital literacy helps students search for valid information and reduces the spread of hoaxes (Asnaria et al., 2022). Furthermore, research by P. H. Wijayati and team shows that there is a moderate correlation between digital media literacy and perceptions of hoaxes, confirming the significance of this relationship (Wijayati et al., 2021). Critical literacy does not only involve processing information, but also involves understanding language and power, as highlighted by Janks (Janks, 2000). A mature understanding of language and power supports the ability to identify hoaxes, confirming that critical literacy education and its orientation are interdependent.

Thus, it is important for us to understand that hoaxes can have a wide impact, from influencing cultural debate (Wardani & Sabardila, 2020) and public debate to undermining scientific integrity in the world of education. Critical and reflective responses to hoaxes are

the key to ensuring the truth of information and maintaining public trust. Therefore, in dealing with news, independent of the source, we need to engage in a careful attitude of vigilance and prudence to maintain the integrity of information and build a society based on truth. The research results show that there are various types of general fabrication found in the computerized era, and each has its own characteristics. One focus of his research is on political tricks, which are often used to influence public opinion or damage the reputation of political opponents through the spread of false claims about policies or statements taken out of context. Survey findings among women and men aged 20 to 40 out of 108 respondents show that mass media literacy levels have increased thanks to information verification and analysis.

## **2. Method**

**Method** In this research, a careful and structured qualitative descriptive approach was used to explore the hoax phenomenon. This approach consists of two main stages. First, literature analysis is the basis for understanding the characteristics and impacts contained in false information. By exploring related literature, this research seeks to understand the context and characteristics generally associated with the spread of hoaxes. Second, a field approach was carried out through an online survey using a questionnaire consisting of ten questions. Respondents were asked to assess their understanding of factual news, practices for verifying the authenticity of news, and their habits in sharing information on social media.

The data used in this research comes from two main sources. First, a case study of the spread of hoaxes was taken as a concrete illustration to complement the findings of the literature analysis. This case study provides a real picture of the impact and role of hoaxes in certain situations. Second, several articles on theories, methodologies, and instruments that can be adapted to assess public opinions and perceptions regarding critical literacy public opinions and perceptions regarding critical literacy (Barbosa et al., 2022; Gultom et al., 2022; I Komang Budiarta, 2022; Moustaghfir & Brigui, 2023) and distributing questionnaires via goggle form to 108 respondents. This process aims to describe the extent to which the public understands and is able to assess the validity of the information they receive.

## **3. Findings and Discussion**

Research identifies several commonly encountered types of hoaxes, each with different characteristics. One type of hoax that often occurs is political hoax. Fake news in a political context is often used to influence public opinion or discredit political opponents. False claims about policies, statements quoted out of context, or fabricated scandals are some common forms of political hoaxes. Health hoaxes are a type of hoax that can be dangerous. False information about health, such as fake medicines, conspiracy theories about vaccines, or

unproven treatment methods, can influence an individual's health decisions with serious consequences.

Apart from that, financial hoaxes are also a serious threat. Finance-related fake news, such as investment scams, get-rich-quick schemes, or false information about economic conditions, aims to trick individuals into investing money or providing personal financial information. Science hoaxes involve false or misleading information about scientific topics, such as claims about climate change, astronomical discoveries, or scientific research. The goal is often to challenge or reject established scientific evidence. Furthermore, what is no less interesting is that social and cultural hoaxes include fake news related to social or cultural issues, such as rumors about celebrities, historical conspiracy theories, or claims about cultural events. This hoax is often used to create a sensation or spread certain views.

False information about technology, such as fake computer virus warnings, software-related scams, or claims about technology products, falls into the category of technology hoaxes. These hoaxes can trick users into downloading malware or giving access to personal data. In addition, disaster and emergency hoaxes include fake news about natural disasters or emergencies, such as earthquakes, floods, or disease outbreaks. Hoaxes of this kind often spread quickly on social media during emergency situations, causing panic or confusion. In dealing with the threat of hoaxes, it is important to always verify the information received, especially if it comes from unknown or untrusted sources. Using critical literacy skills and seeking credible sources of information is key to avoiding the spread of hoaxes and maintaining the integrity of information.

This research not only identified various types of hoaxes that are commonly encountered, but also conducted a survey to measure the level of critical literacy of the public in facing the challenge of false information. Findings from an online survey involving 101 respondents showed that the majority of respondents had a good understanding of factual news, with 62% feeling they understood. However, media literacy related to verifying information sources is still low; only 47% always carry out verification. As many as 52% of respondents were confident in distinguishing hoax news from real news, indicating a sufficient level of media literacy to recognize fake news. Despite this, only 38% often analyze the news they read, and 68% respond to news based on the authenticity of the information.

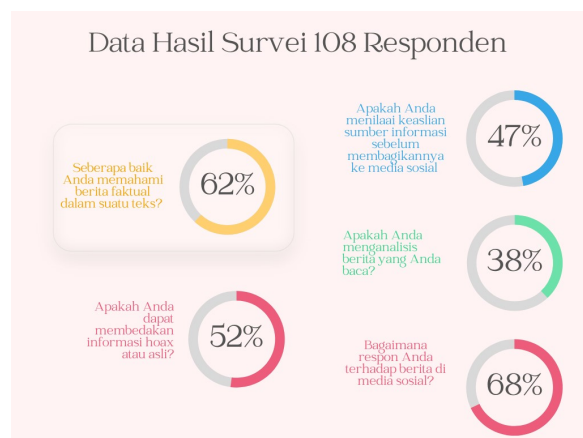


Figure 1. Results of Online Survey on Community Critical Literacy Levels

Analysis of the survey data highlights several pressing challenges that need to be addressed. First, regarding information verification, the fact that only 47% of respondents consistently verify the authenticity of information indicates an urgent need to increase awareness and information verification skills among social media users. This is something that needs to be addressed, and an intensive education campaign introduced to improve verification practices. Second, related to news analysis skills, the finding that only 38% of respondents actively analyze news shows low media literacy. The solution is the need for a more active approach in increasing people's ability to analyze and understand the context of information. It is necessary to be able to detect hoaxes on social media as research has been carried out by researchers (Dewi, 2022; Ismayanti & Setiawan, 2021; Jamaludin & Setiawan, 2022; Januantoro & Romadhan, 2019; Mundhir & Djurban, 2021; P. D. Utami & Sari, 2018).

Third, in terms of detecting hoaxes, although most respondents feel they can detect hoaxes, almost half of them may not be confident in their abilities. The solution is to provide additional education on how to detect and avoid the spread of hoaxes, with a focus on developing the necessary critical skills. Such as counseling on information literacy carried out by various units in Indonesia, especially in Jakarta, as the capital of the country which is required to have a modern society. Fourth, related to responses to news, with 68% of respondents responding to the news they saw, this shows that news has a big impact on people's attitudes and behavior. In this regard, it is important to seek solutions that combine media literacy with policies or practices that encourage critical responses to information, and reduce the risk of the spread of fake news.

Overall, these findings are something that needs to be done immediately. Responding to these challenges requires cross-sector efforts, involving governments, educational institutions and social media platforms. Comprehensive solutions, such as ongoing education campaigns, establishing media literacy policies, and developing easily accessible information verification tools, must be the focus to ensure society can understand and respond critically

to information in this digital era. As a pressing example, let us consider the following case that has attracted media attention recently, where the information disseminated has caused confusion and concern among the public.

This shows how important media literacy is in the current information era, where the following hoax news is a prominent case. Analysis of hoax images in the context of cases is becoming increasingly relevant, because the images included in fake news can play a key role in influencing public perception. Therefore, efforts to understand and critically analyze the images included in the news are an essential step to responding to the challenge of disinformation and ensuring that society can differentiate between facts and hoaxes. Like one example in image 1 below.



Figure 2. News Spread in Society

The 1 minute 28 second video was uploaded by @535simberz via his TikTok account. The broadcast explained that the government had carried out outreach to people with mental disorders so they could exercise their right to vote. The narrative circulating that the 2024 KPU is registering people as crazy is only for the sake of content, comparing it with the selection of social assistance recipients which only prioritizes the relatives of the party making the decision. This content leads to the opinion that stakeholders will claim that crazy people are entered into the voter list in general elections just to get assistance, but when the assistance comes out it is given to the relatives of these stakeholders.

This sentence resulted in a long assumption of comments on other social media owners and was shared on social media other than TikTok. This creates a wild ball from social media users who are easily influenced by hoax news that is not necessarily true. On the social media Facebook, this was related to the 2018 news with the narrative "Crazy People Follow The Blessings" in picture 3 below.



Figure 3. Television Show Promo

This fake news or hoax appears and is spread for various reasons. For political purposes for 2024, this hoax is used to influence public opinion or election results by spreading false information or damaging the reputation of political competitors. This can include smear campaigns, political propaganda, and attempts to manipulate voters. In the sensationalism and financial gain of social media and fake news sites can make money by getting clicks and ad views. Some people create fake news with financial motives, without regard for truth or detrimental consequences (Bara et al., 2019).

Controversial or shocking fake news often gets more attention on social media. People who create chaos or gain attention may be deliberately spreading hoaxes (Mahpudin, 2019). People or groups who have a particular political or ideological agenda may use fake news to promote or defend their views, regardless of the truth of the facts. In situations where political polarization is high, some individuals or groups may accept or spread fake news even if they know it is false, to strengthen their identity within their group or political party.

Fake news is a serious problem because it can undermine democracy, create uncertainty and influence significant decisions in society. Therefore, it is very important to be smart and critical when consuming information or promoting better media literacy and being responsible in various information in the digital era. One way that users can do is media literacy education, verify information, be critical, use fact-checkers, don't get caught in filter bubbles, report fake news, and be ethical in various information.

In the news above, the author finds out the truth of the information according to fact checking. Tempo verification found that the video used in the upload on TikTok was the same as the CNN TV news published on their site on Tuesday, March 19 2023. However, the news was not related to election data collection. The news shows the socialization of voting procedures in the 2019 Election among groups of people with mental disabilities or people with mental disorders (ODGJ) at an Islamic boarding school, in Ngawi Regency, East Java. Socialization is carried out by volunteers. People with mental disabilities or ODGJ are

not crazy people. The two terms are quite different. According to experts, there is no medically insane status for patients and it cannot be compared to the condition of ODGJ patients.

It should be noted that in the world of medicine, there is no medically insane status for patients and it cannot be compared to the condition of ODGJ patients. The two terms are quite different. People with mental disabilities or People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ) are not crazy people. The two terms are quite different. Meanwhile, ODGJ's right to vote is enshrined in the 1945 Constitution which guarantees everyone's right to recognition, guarantees, protection and fair legal certainty as well as equal treatment before the law. Apart from that, Article 43 of Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights (UU HAM) regulates the rights of citizens to participate in government. Previously, in the 2019 Election, the Constitutional Court (MK) emphasized that as long as mental or memory disorders are not permanent, ODGJ remains can exercise their right to vote. Meanwhile, when ODGJ is in moderate or severe condition, their obligation to use their voting rights will disappear.

So it can be concluded that the news and narrative are misleading. The TikTok post stating that the KPU is registering crazy people as voters for the 2024 presidential election is a hoax. The video used is an old news broadcast from the 2019 Election. As for the actual facts, the KPU never listed crazy people as electioneers, but ODGJ. There is a clear difference between crazy people and ODGJ.



*Figure 4.* Declaring the News to be a Hoax/Fake

Thus, after going through a verification process and in-depth analysis of the circulating content, we reach the irrefutable conclusion that the narrative by @535simberz via his TikTok account has no foundation of truth and must therefore be categorized as a hoax. This conclusion not only emphasizes the importance of caution and media literacy in consuming information in the digital era, but also reminds us all of the collective responsibility of academics to combat the spread of fake news that can damage the integrity of democratic processes, such as elections, which we cherish and take place. in 2024. The form of activity that linguistic practitioners can carry out is in the form of training both theoretically and

practically related to the concept of Indonesian digital literacy and the good use of social media and the internet that does not violate the law (Taryadi & Yuniarto, 2022).

The impact of this research on Applied Linguistics is of importance that cannot be ignored. First, the discovery that the narrative is a hoax provides deep insight into the way language is used to manipulate information and undermine the truth. Within this framework, this research contributes to the development of linguistic analysis methods that are more sophisticated and responsive to linguistic signs of hoaxes. These implications pave the way for the development of automated analysis software that can more efficiently identify potential hoaxes. Second, the findings highlight the importance of media literacy and caution in consuming digital information. Thus, Applied Linguistics can play a role in designing media literacy programs that focus on understanding language and manipulative strategies that may be involved in the spread of hoaxes. This can increase society's resilience to information fraud and accelerate efforts to create a more informed society.

Not only that, this research provides a basis for further research in identifying patterns and trends in the spread of hoaxes, which can be implemented in early warning systems or mitigation strategies to reduce their impact. Thus, Applied Linguistics can play a key role in formulating policies and strategies to counter the spread of disinformation in society. By emphasizing the responsibility of academics in dealing with the spread of fake news, this research also highlights the importance of advocacy and education regarding information ethics at the academic level. With a deeper understanding of the ethical implications of the results of this research, academics in Applied Linguistics can play an active role in increasing awareness and forming a critical attitude towards the information they convey to the public. As a result, this research forms a solid foundation for the role of Applied Linguistics in advancing the integrity and truth of information amidst the challenges of the digital era.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Conclusion this research shows that there are various types of hoaxes that are commonly encountered in the digital era, and each has its own characteristics. One research focus is on political hoaxes, which are often used to influence public opinion or damage the reputation of political opponents through the spread of false claims about policies or statements taken out of context. The survey findings show that people's critical literacy needs to be improved, especially in terms of information verification and news analysis. Even though most respondents felt they could distinguish hoax news, analysis and information verification skills were still a major weakness. Therefore, efforts to improve media literacy, intensive education, and empower people to become smarter consumers of information are very urgent. Thus, this research encourages the need to increase society's critical literacy in facing the challenges of false information, and emphasizes the urgency of developing comprehensive and collaborative solutions to overcome this phenomenon in the digital era.

Although this study makes an important contribution to the understanding and treatment of hoaxes in the context of information literacy, several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, linguistic analysis may have limitations in addressing the cultural or political context underlying the spread of hoaxes. This study may not always be able to touch on contextual aspects that support a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Second, focusing on linguistic elements can ignore non-linguistic factors that contribute to the success of hoaxes, such as psychological, social or technological aspects. Third, this study may have been limited in the data and examples available at the time of the study, and with the rapid evolution of the way digital information is disseminated, the findings of this study may have limited relevance in this particular time period. Fourth, linguistic interpretation is often subjective, and analysis may vary depending on the researcher's point of view. Finally, efforts to understand and detail hoax strategies may be limited by limited access to data that may be protected or difficult to access. By understanding these limitations, further research can be directed to overcome these shortcomings and deepen our understanding of the complexity of hoaxes in linguistic contexts.

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