

Fighting the Disinfodemic: Fact- Checking Management of Hoax Covid-19 in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 September 2021
Revised 20 May 2022, 30
September, 10 October 2022
Accepted 12 October 2022
Available online 20
November 2022

Keywords:

Disinfodemic
Fact Checking
Management
Hoax

To cite this article with APA Style:

Hidayat, D., Rohendi, A.,
Hanafy, D., Christin, M.,
Nur'aeni. (2022). Fighting
the Disinfodemic: Fact-
Checking Management of
Hoax Covid-19 in
Indonesia. Profetik: Jurnal
Komunikasi, 272- 286.

ABSTRACT

Indonesia was currently fighting disinfodemic COVID-19. During this situation, several hoaxes related to COVID-19 were circulating. Of course, the hoax news makes people even more worried and afraid. One way to prove the facts in that news is through a fact-checking system. This system is intended to check facts and verify information so that the truth can be identified. Fact-checking needs to be known by the public to suppress the spread of hoax news, especially related to the circulation of COVID-19 in Indonesia. Based on this phenomenon, the purpose of this study is to determine the informants' experience related to the fact-checking process. The study informant referred to Mafindo, an internationally licensed fact-checking agency. To answer the objective of the research, the researcher used an ethnographic study of public relations with a qualitative approach. The ethnographic study of public relations focuses on examining communication activity planning using analysis units of Insight, Strategic Program, Program Implementation, Action, and Reputation or the IPPAR Model. The results of this study indicate that the Mafindo fact checker interprets the fact-checking for COVID-19 news as important, to reduce public concerns. The lack of reference sources to be used as data and evidence of hoax news becomes a challenge when doing fact-checking. The fact-checking phases include data collection, sorting, analyzing, and checking the results before publishing them to the public.



The discussion is an effort to maintain the credibility of the results, image, and reputation of the fact-checker institution.

INTRODUCTION

The ease of access to information is needed for people. This situation is also influenced by technological advances. The advances in the field of communication technology mean that people no longer find it difficult to find information. However, the problem is how people can figure out that the news or the circulating information is following the facts or on the contrary, lies or hoaxes. News is general information or reports which aim to inform present events. News is conveyed by journalists through the mass media (Amalia, Suprapti & Mardikantoro, 2016). According to Charnley, the news is a fact or opinion which is important and interesting to be known by the public (Rofiqi, 2017). News becomes the main source of information for people. However, news must be following the facts, and the value of information should not be exaggerated and reduced.

With the advancement of technology, the sources of information are shifting. People usually get information from media such as newspapers and television, but currently, access to information is done through online media. This phenomenon is evidence of the success of technology in utilizing the internet network as a medium of information. Online media that is more accessible, faster, and only utilizes the internet network makes people comfortable and relies on online media to find information. In its history, the media has undergone 3 periods of change, firstly print media, and secondly electronic media, and currently people are enjoying the era of digital media or internet technology-based media. This precisely occurs in the third

generation (Alifia, 2022) and (Hidayat et al., 2022).

The internet influenced changes in all fields, including the field of online journalism. Many newspaper companies around the world have changed their publication system from printing such as newspapers to online newspaper media. Massive changes to the publishing system have also occurred in Indonesia. It was recorded that in the 1990s for the first time several online media had started to appear, such as *Bisnis Indonesia Online*, *Waspada Online*, and *Kompas Online*. (Margianto & Saefullah, 2012). The advantage of changing printing media to online media is that the news can be published faster to the public without having to wait for the printing process such as newspapers. At least until 2012, online mass media according to Yanuar Nugroho's findings in Indonesia had reached 66 sites (Arifin, 2012). Judging from the many news sources in the online media, of course, people have many choices to get information or news according to their choosing.

The development of information sources with online media is in line with the increasing number of internet users in Indonesia. Based on the survey results from the *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jaringan Internet Indonesia (APJII)*, internet users have increased significantly, reaching 143 million users or 54% of the total population in 2017 (Fitrah, Wahyuni & Putra, 2019). The high number of internet users is a strong reason for the media industry to change to the online publishing system. Not only the public can access the information conventionally, but it can also be accessed online. This is in line with the media convergence theory which explains the system of combining conventional media with online media. Media convergence is a



strategy for combining internet-based technologies which cause changes in the handling, provision, distribution, and processing of all forms of information (Trinoviana, 2017).

The presence of online media is of course supported by online journalistic activities. This phenomenon has changed the order of journalism in terms of its practitioners. Online journalism allows everyone to become a journalist. This concept is called citizen journalism/citizen journalism. Anyone can now write and disseminate information through the internet and cyberspace in many forms, such as social media, blogs, and so on. However, citizen journalism has its challenges related to responsibility, accuracy, and adherence to the journalistic code of ethics. For example, a blogger because basically, bloggers can see an article and information on their blog. A blogger who is an ordinary citizen does not feel compelled to comply with various journalistic rules, and journalistic and reporting ethics codes; they also do not have standard writing procedures and can degrade written information. This can trigger fake news (Alifia, 2022).

Online media helps people easier and quicker to get the latest news. People can easily access information through their smartphones. Social media has two roles, as content producers and at the same time as users (Astuti, 2019). However, on the other hand, there are negative things behind the advantages of social media if it is used inappropriately and misused. One of them is to provide opportunities for fake news to occur. Indonesia is one of the countries that does not escape fake news or the spread of fake news or what is called a hoax. The Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) noted that from 2008 to the end of 2016 there were at least 800,000 hoax news spreading sites (Satyawati, Utari & Hastjarjo, 2019).

This incident began to disturb the public in Indonesia because many people felt wronged. Hoax is defined as information or news that contains things that are uncertain or which are not facts (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020). Bramy Biantoro stated that there are four dangers arising from hoax news, namely hoaxes wasting time and money, hoaxes as a diversionary issue, hoaxes as a means of public fraud, and hoaxes as a trigger for public panic (Ahyad, 2017). The Mastel survey in 2017 revealed that of 1,146 respondents, 44.3% received hoax news every day and 17.2% received more than once a day. The frequent consumption of hoax news can certainly make many people confused and misinterpret the truth that has happened (Juditha, 2018).

Until early 2020, hoax news was still circulating on social media in Indonesia. Even hoax news also occurred during the Coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19. This pandemic has caused many casualties. Data until April 16, 2020, for Indonesia showed that patients with confirmed positive COVID-19 status totaled 5,316 positive cases, 446 people were declared cured and 469 people died (Hidayah, 2020). To break the spread of COVID-19, the Indonesian government has implemented various policies, such as Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar or PSBB (Hidayat & Noeraida, 2020).

The government has also followed the recommendations of the World Health Organization to implement social distancing (Pratama & Hidayat, 2020). During a situation where the government and society are trying to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, it turns out that there are people who are trying to make the situation worse by spreading hoax news about COVID-19. Of course, this worsens the situation of society in Indonesia. There was excessive panic as a result of spreading fake news.



From all the information and news that has been spread, the public should be careful in responding to COVID-19 information or news. Minimally, people make cross-checks from other sources regarding the same information. Meanwhile, the act of checking data or proving or testing the truth of facts scientifically is called fact-checking. This is done for news items that are deemed to be indicative of misinformation and disinformation. Fact-checking is a check that is carried out on a statement or information that has been declared or published to the wider community to prove its validity (Peregrina, 2019).

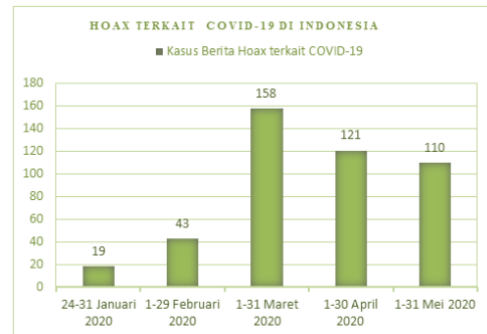
This fact-checking activity is often carried out by online media companies in Indonesia to test or prove the validity of the news in the country. People who carry out fact-checking activities themselves are called fact-checkers. In Indonesia, five online media have passed the certification test belonging to The International Fact-checking Network or IFCN. Among them was Tirto.ID, followed by Liputan6.com, Kompas.com, Tempo. co and finally Mafindo (turnbackhoax. id) (Peregrina, 2019).

Mafindo is the only institution in Indonesia that has passed the test from the international fact-checking network IFCN. Mafindo is also listed as the only organization outside the press issuing company that has obtained a certificate. This is proof that Mafindo has the same goals as other press media which are serious about fighting hoax information. Historically, Mafindo was formed from several representatives from several members of civil society who had and felt concerns about hoaxes.

Currently, Mafindo is also handling reports that indicate misinformation and disinformation related to COVID-19. Data obtained by the research from one of the fact-checking teams, at least from January 24 to

May 31, 2020, Mafindo has identified and claimed 451 hoax news related to COVID-19 on their website, turnbackhoax. id.

Figure 1. Hoax COVID-19 News Data January-May 2020 Period



Source: Masyarakat Indonesia Anti Hoax (MAFINDO), 2020

From the data on hoax news examined by Mafindo, it can be known that there are still many people who spread hoax news related to COVID-19. Therefore, learning how to fact-checking is certainly very important, considering the benefits for the community so that they can avoid hoaxes that spread on the media, especially social media. However, there is no significant standardization related to fact-checking. This makes fact checkers still draw conclusions based on subjective personal decisions (Lim, 2018). The results of Lim's research conducted in the United States did not rule out the possibility that this would also occur in Indonesia.

Hoax will have negative impacts, such as creating divisions, disputes, and others. In addition, hoax news related to the COVID-19 virus has made the public become uneasy and confused over the news circulating in society. Therefore, based on the importance of fact-checking based on the point of view of the fact checkers, the research is interested in taking the focus of the research related to the experiences in running the fact-checking process towards news. The mentioned fact checker is Mafindo, an internationally certified fact-checking institution. The object

of the research is hoax news related to COVID-19 in Indonesia. This research is intended to explain data findings related to the fact-checking process, including Mafindo's experience in fact-checking COVID-19 news. Challenges experienced by fact-checking include preparation of data collection, sorting data based on news themes and content, analyzing news, and checking the final results to maintain the credibility of the results and the image of the fact-checker institution.

These various aspects will be summarized according to the experience of the fact-checkers which will be described in the form of research articles. Hopefully, the results of this research can help the government in reducing the spread of hoax news. The existence of public knowledge about how to identify hoax news during the COVID-19 pandemic is also expected to reduce worry among people so that their immune system remains stable. In addition, people become aware of hoax news so it will be easy to avoid false information.

METHODOLOGY

The research on the fact-checking process for hoax news related to COVID-19 in Indonesia uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm. Qualitative research is research that involves a researcher directly in a research problem (Yayu et al., 2019). To answer the focus of the research related to Mafindo's fact-checker experience in the process of fact-checking, the researcher uses public relations ethnographic studies. This study aims to analyze the units in the plan processing of communication activities (Hidayat et al., 2018). The unit refers to fact-checking processes including preparation of data collection, sorting data based on themes and contents of COVID-19 hoax news, analyzing news, and checking the results.

The ethnographic component of public relations ethnography consists of the Insight-Program Strategic-Program Implementation-Action and Reputation (IPPAR) Model (Hidayat, Kuswano & Zubair, 2017). This concept is per the public relations management function that Cutlip described (Ardianto, 2013) that public relations activities always begin with planning, strategy, implementation, and evaluation. The communication program strategy as well as the ethnographic study component of public relations ethnography also refers to Dell Hymes' communication ethnographic data analysis unit. The mentioned components are the SPEAKING term, which means Situations, Participants, Ends, Act sequences, Keys, Instrumentals, Norms, and Genres. (in Ray & Biswas, 2011).

Public relations ethnography as a study requires aspects that are not only to understand communication behavior, but also the behavior which intends to build or maintain good relations. Therefore, every communication activity must be well structured. Ethnography of public relations helps communication activities by referring to the stages of planning a communication program starting from a situation analysis of communication events. This stage is intended to determine the background of the program including the setting of time, place, and parties involved in the activity plan. The existence of a situation analysis will help public relations in formulating its program goals and objectives.



Table 1. IPPAR Model: Elements of Public Relations
 Ethnography Analysis

IPPAR	Definition	Explanation
I- Insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Situation analysis, data collection related to cultural activities. Time and place of activity, goals and objectives of the activity. The parties involved in communication activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Situation analysis is concerned with the initial preparation of each communication activity. The fact-checking planning activity which involved Mafindo as a fact checker. Conducted at the Mafindo office. The purpose of fact-checking is to convey the truth about hoax news.
P - Program Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regarding the type of activity, theme, message which want to be conveyed. Refers to the form of the message related to the word used, how it is used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of activities covering the types of fact-checking activities, the theme of hoax news activities, messages in the form of COVID-19 information. Form of verbal messages which conveyed through the mass media.
P- Program Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refers to a strategy of action; the tone, manner and spirit in which a message is conveyed. Refers to the type of delivery form; the strategy of communication and media used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mafindo's actions as a fact-checking agency in packaging message contents. For example, message with pleasure, seriousness, brief, and so on. Or it can be shown with gestures. Mafindo's methods of conveying messages, for example in the form of written, oral, and using mass media or other media.
A- Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auditing public perception Assessment, public response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public assessment of Mafindo's communication activities related to COVID-19 hoax news fact-checking. Public support for Mafindo's fact-checking activities.
R - Reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public trust and support related to a set of images about cultural relations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mafindo's credibility is built because of the public's trust in the results of the fact-checking work, thus establishing a pattern of cultural relations.

Source: (Hidayat et al., 2018) dan (Ray & Biswas, 2011)

Ethnographers in public relations ethnographic studies must be able to answer the research questions about the variety of communication events in each communication activity, events that can describe the act of communication following the components of the ethnographic study of public relations. The consistency between the findings and the component of the study is expected to describe communication activities and public relations activities to identify and build relationships between individuals in community groups based on beliefs in cultural values or cultural relations.

IPPAR as a public relations ethnographic analysis unit aims to describe and interpret the underlying aspects of communication that are influenced by culture, communication, and language activities. It is hoped that the explanation of the communication acts from the IPPAR findings can answer the objective of the research. IPPAR is only a method for exploring and obtaining data including a tool for analyzing all aspects of communication acts. By having a tool to obtain data while ethnographers are in the

field, it is hoped that it can help them to answer the objective of the research.

Ethnography of public relations is the same as the ethnography of communication, that is, apart from being a method, it can also be used as a theoretical approach. Public relations ethnography and communication ethnography provide a theoretical description of action and communication strategies such as the language used, the way of speaking or narrative such as tone and style, and the media used when speaking. These studies are principally the stage of situation analysis which aims to determine goals and objectives. It determines the platform program in which there is a messaging platform or main message to be achieved. It establishes a strategic program, namely designing a communication strategy and program action. It determines the output or impact on the final result that can be felt by the public so that it can build an image and reputation to gain public trust and support (Hidayat & Hafiar, 2019).

This is following the activities of the fact checker during fact-checking the news in which they always create a program planning. Mafindo as a factor checker as well as a research informant conducted a fact check in several stages. Hence, the researcher used public relations ethnography as a method in analyzing the various stages of each fact-checking unit.

To answer the objective of the research, the researcher used primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from the interviews with Mafindo fact-checkers. Interviewees are selected based on their position and experience during their time as fact-checkers at Mafindo. The informants consisted of Muhammad Khairil Haesy (Senior Fact checker), Bentang Febrylian (Fact checker), and Adi Syafitrah (Fact checker). Meanwhile, secondary data was taken from the official Mafindo website



(turnbackhoax.id) and some documentation from the people of Mafindo.

The data collection method is using interviews in an online system. This method is used because the location of the informant is in the city of Bandung, a city that is still affected by Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB). The results of the data interview will be processed through data analysis methods including reduction, display, and data conclusion. During the data reduction phase, the researchers made transcripts from the results of interviews with sources related to Mafindo's fact-checker experience in the process of conducting fact-checking related to COVID-19.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The news coverage in various mass media became a major point when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Indonesia. Various mass media collide with each other with headlines to get the attention of the public and government. Unexpectedly, it has had a significant impact on society after the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic news. This situation occurs following the instability of information management in society following an individual who misuses the news with hoaxes or fake news. This phenomenon creates fear, stress, and anxiety experienced by society. The anxiety is added to the presence of bad memories about the COVID-19 virus which is obtained from various media information. In the psychiatric discipline, stress is known as a psychosomatic term.

In a pandemic situation like today, the need for information speeds up very quickly. Almost all people monitor the development of COVID-19 information from various sources including social media. However, the existence of people who spread fake news certainly triggered concerns about the

credibility of the received information. Even during the pandemic in Indonesia, hoax news has occurred at several points. The city that is most exposed to hoax news is Jakarta. This is following the situation in Jakarta, which has the highest number of cases compared to other regions or cities.

Table 2. Cities Where Hoax News Occurred

Kota	Jumlah	Persentase (%)
Bali	1	2,00
Bau - bau	1	2,00
Cimahi	1	2,00
Cipali	1	2,00
DKI Jakarta	32	64,00
Halmahera	1	2,00
Jember	1	2,00
Makassar	1	2,00
Mataram Lombok	1	4,00
Mojokerto	1	2,00
Muntok Bangka	1	2,00
Tangerang	2	4,00
Singkawang	1	2,00
Soe -NTT	1	2,00
Solo	1	2,00
Surabaya	2	4,00
Yogyakarta	2	4,00
JUMLAH	50	100

Source: (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020)

Hoax is increasingly difficult to contain even though until 2016 the government blocked 700 thousand of sites, but every day hoax news continues to appear. In January 2017, eleven sites containing negative content were blocked by the government, but the blocking case did not go to court (Adityawarman, 2019). Several cases in Indonesia related to hoax news have claimed victims, one of which is hoax news about child kidnapping that has spread on several social media. The prevalence of hoax news encourages fact checkers to carry out independent fact checks. They do their best to carry out the mandate related to independence or to be impartial when carrying out fact-checks related to COVID-19 news.

The spreading of hoax information to the masses has become one of the triggers for public concerns in Indonesia. The quantity of news in a short period continuously increases excessive worry in society. Therefore, filtering and high awareness in all aspects of society are needed in seeking and receiving COVID-19 news information. Public concern is needed to form a healthy and intelligent society in



receiving and consuming information from various mass media. The types of mass media are divided into two categories, namely printed mass media and electronic media. Both have the same goal, namely to provide information to the public. There are differences in each media characteristic. For example, printing media has the form of newspapers and magazines, while electronic media has the form of radio, television, films, and online media (internet). This is what makes mass media diverse with various distinctive characteristics. Mass media at present time is needed by society, especially those with higher economies because they can have many choices in accessing mass media.

Mafindo is one of the non-governmental media and one of the 5 organizations that have been tested due to its diligence in checking the information value of news with international legality recognition. Mafindo is not a part of corporate media, so Mafindo is committed to working independently. Mafindo has a vision of eradicating hoax reporting with the tagline "Turn back hoax". The presence of Mafindo provides hope to society to get information according to their needs.

The narrative is embedded in facts that are considered important and highlighted in the news. Because it could be a narrative that emphasizes certain things mentioned in the content, even though the content is not misinformation, disinformation, or mal-information content. For example, mention of race, gender, or nationality status of a person who is a victim or suspect in certain cases. The mention or prominence of the narrative is something that cannot be separated from the background of the content creator. Therefore, it is important to carry out a narrative examination in a report so that the public can distinguish between those are facts and which are not (Ireton & Posetti, 2018)

For Mafindo fact checkers, the spread of hoax news is currently out of control. Based on the findings and experiences of Mafindo's fact checkers, there is so much hoax news. This situation was also encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. According to the informants, the reporting of hoaxes in Indonesia is currently in a very worrying capacity so it is already unsettling and affects the mental mind of the society. This also underlies Mafindo as a fact-checking agency to work independently in uncovering hoax news facts. "We are called to help the government break the chain of people who spread hoax news." In line with the following informant's confession, "Indonesia is currently being assisted by hoax news disorder, this is a form of crime that is a common enemy (for us)."

The informants' admission also reinforces the experience of Mafindo's basic principles in establishing a hoax news fact-checking agency. This experience can also be categorized as their motives in carrying out their duties or jobs as fact-checkers.

The public generally understands misinformation as hoaxes and fake news. This term originally developed along with the ongoing election in the United States in 2016. Fake news is a form of false information that aims to influence society (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2018). In addition, Wardle and Derakhshan also think that the concept of fake news is more emotional and aims to discredit journalists' work.

This is the reason why the two of them introduced the development of the fake news concept into the concepts of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). With hoax and fake news, fact-



checking efforts are required, likewise with the COVID-19 hoax news. Admittedly, fact-checking is very important because it can help reduce public unrest. Like an interview quote from an informant when a question was asked about meeting the information needs for clarifying hoaxes related to COVID-19 to the public.

“Very important. Because hoaxes about Covid-19 can sometimes distort people's understanding of the outbreak. The community became frightened and this epidemic ultimately targeted not only the body but also the mental.” (Muhammad Khairil Haesy, Senior Fact checker Mafindo).

Hoax is also related to disinformation. For example, by spreading the issue of grief or death which actually is not due to exposure or related to COVID-19, but has already stated that the victim died because of exposure to COVID-19. This situation has occurred several times during the pandemic in Indonesia. This situation is as described by informant Muhammad Khairil Haesy, Senior Fact checker Mafindo.

"During COVID-19 there was confusing news, for example regarding the cause of death, after being reported due to being exposed to the corona, was not, now this is also part of a form of fake news."

Meanwhile, disinformation about COVID-19 is when you know the value of the information is incorrect or valid, but deliberately some people spread it through a non-media portal. This phenomenon is also found during pandemics. Likewise mal-information, namely actions by individuals who deliberately misuse correct information to be framed as fake news by them.

The spread of fake news about COVID-19 is more prevalent on social media. Previous research findings stated that during the pandemic there were around 50 hoax news

stories (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020). Most of the 50 hoaxes about COVID-19 occurred on March 24, 2020. This situation was right at the beginning when Indonesia was exposed to COVID-19 after previously on March 16, President Jokowi announced the first victim of COVID-19 that occurred in Depok. Of course, the community deeply regrets the hoax news in the community who are anxious and panicked due to COVID-19. This action adds to the panic and even turns into a feeling of excessive fear. Therefore, the government through the Ministry of Communication and Information is working quickly to investigate and stop cases of hoax news amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high spread of hoax news on social media is caused by the opportunities that the media provides for each individual to produce and convey information without a filter process (Watie, 2016). Social media is relatively faster in the process of delivering information than other media. For example, Instagram media, which has a unique form of instant message, means that messages can be conveyed very quickly to the public (Ulfa & Fatchiya, 2017).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, various hoax information was also carried out through social media such as Instagram and WhatsApp. This action is considered to have violated the freedom of speech (Floridi, 2010). Therefore, the ethics of using the internet is very necessary for a person who obeys the law. To break the hoax news chain related to COVID-19, encouraged Mafindo as an independent fact checker to do everything in its power to combat the spread of hoax news. "Our commitment as a fact-checking agency, strives to combat hoax news, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic." (Bentang Febrylian, Fact checker).

The informant's admission is in line with the narrative of other informants, "the



calling from the heart to uphold correct information and not mislead the public." (Adi Syafitrah, Fact checker). The statement from the informant can be categorized as a motive and the experience of being a fact checker. Another experience shared by informants during fact-checking was the lack of reference sources to serve as data and evidence for hoax news. "The challenge when doing fact-checking is the lack of sources, making it difficult to compare facts." (Bentang Febrylian, Fact checker). The existence of these challenges has encouraged Mafindo to work more optimally to maintain the credibility of the institution.

"The problem is usually when analyzing the data, right.... not all things we find on Google like that e ... like I said, sometimes we get an issue, we search for it on Google, it turns out that there is no such media that reported it, as for we search on social media, we only find e ... postings that are still confusing and distorted, we also asked for help to our journalist friends, for example, or Mafindo volunteers in their areas who are also confused, so the challenges usually are mostly in the form of fact-checking, like that. To the difficulty when analyzing the data or finding the facts." (Muhammad Khairil Haesy, Senior Fact checker Mafindo).

In the end, the focus group discussion (FGD) was carried out by the fact checker in producing the results of the filtering through stages that had been carried out according to Mafindo standards. The FGD process is carried out by the fact checker through social media group communication. FGD aims to summarize every perception regarding the results of fact-checking. In the next phase, when the facts are found, the results of the examination will be published on the official Mafindo website, namely

"turnbackhoax. id". The results of the examination were also conveyed through various media including Mafindo's social media accounts.

The contents of the message conveyed are related to rebuttals that can dispute hoax reports that have been circulating. However, in its working spirit, Mafindo still upholds the value of being independent so that the message conveyed is neutral and can be justified. Independence is the most important thing and must be prioritized when carrying out fact-checking. As acknowledged by the fact-checkers as well as the informants of this research.

"We work independently, not taking sides. When we get hoaxes, we look for the facts on credible media channels, especially those who have joined the Press Council. When there was none, then we looked for other sources to clarify from trusted sources, for example verified social media accounts or sites that included the author's name, editorial composition, to the address of correspondence. After that, reporting into the telegram group by submitting the fact-check article. Then, we publish it on Mafindo's media channels." (Bentang Febrylian, Fact checker).

The fact-checking activity does intersect with verification activities, but in practice, it cannot be categorized as verification. Verification is the process of checking the truth that is carried out before the information is spread or disseminated to the public. Usually, the parties involved are those who hold early information or those who act as eyewitnesses. The result is the determination of whether the information is published or not to the public at large (Ireton & Posetti in Peregrina, 2019). Meanwhile, fact-checking is conducted after the information is published.



In general, the practice of fact-checking runs on three phases, mainly to determine whether the information is worthy of checking or not, then proceed with checking the evidence supporting the information, and is closed by stating the truth of the information. (Ireton & Posetti in Peregrina, 2019). The following is an image display to facilitate the discussion of research on the stages of PR ethnographic research by adapting the ethnographic analysis unit of PR, namely the IPPAR Model which includes Insight, Strategic Program, Program Implementation, Action, and Reputation.

Figure 2. The IPPAR Model: The phases of the fact-checking process for the COVID-19 Hoax news



Source : Research findings and theoretical elaboration (Hidayat et al., 2018).

In the first phase, fact-checking determines whether or not a statement is appropriate. The examination is done by separating several statements found in the news that has been published. At this phase, the fact checker analyzes the situation by collecting data from various sources. The purpose of this situation analysis is to find the individual or group involved in hoax reporting and the goals and objectives of spreading hoax news about COVID-19 in Indonesia. The situation analysis carried out by Mafindo as a fact-checking agency is under the Insight phase as one of the analysis units of the ethnographic PR study.

The element of analysis is intended to collect data as a phase in designing background activities (Hidayat et al., 2018).

The second phase carried out by fact checkers is looking for supporting evidence related to the topic or problem raised in a statement (Kruger, 2017 in Peregrina, 2019). In the context of this study, looking for evidence related to the COVID-19 hoax news. This second process is determined from several factors including “proximity” which is related to the proximity of the resource person to an issue. “Expertise” or how strong is the level of mastery of material or expertise from the source regarding the hoax news issue of COVID-19? Another aspect is related to “rigour” or related to how data that supports evidence of facts on the issue of COVID-19 hoax news is collected. “Transparency” is related to openness to the evidence that the sources have. “Reliability” is related to the resource track record, and “conflict of interest”, aims to ensure that the source has no particular interest in the issue of the COVID-19 hoax news which is being raised.

The evidence-seeking phase carried out by Mafindo's fact checker is the stage of determining the platform program. The phases contained in the PR ethnographic study analysis unit are the strategy program. The elements of analysis that intend to formulate an action strategy which include the theme of fact-checking activities, types of activities, and key messages as the outcome of fact-checking activities. The strategic program also aims to ensure how to present fact-checking results. Submission of results can be done through external and internal media of Mafindo.

The final phase of the fact checker is to present the final result which is usually done by setting the truth scale of a



statement or information. In particular, because this research is focused on “debunking” activities, digital data checking is carried out by involving the data verification process. The stages of determining the scale of truth are done by submitting the results of the examination to the public. Submission of results is carried out by making statements regarding hoax news findings through various mass media and digital media. This is a part of the fact-checkers communication strategy in disseminating fact-checking results.

The phase where the examiners present their findings is carried out using the program implementation stage of the ethnographic analysis unit of PR. The phase emphasizes the process of implementation and control so that a response from the community is expected. Assessment from society is very necessary as a measure of the success of fact-checking. In addition, the assessment also represents public trust and support. The support from the public is of course highly expected as a manifestation of Mafindo's image and reputation as a fact-checking agency.

The series of fact-checkers carrying out fact-checks regarding Covid-19 coverage aims to reduce public anxiety regarding the news about COVID-19 that is happening in Indonesia. Moreover, with a pandemic condition, people will be more easily affected by hoax news. According to a psychological view, someone is more likely to believe in hoaxes if the information matches their opinion or attitude (Gandhi, 2018). For example, each individual will be more easily influenced by hoax news from COVID-19 when previously they have received a variety of information related to the same news. Naturally positive feelings will arise in a person if his opinion or belief is affirmed so that he tends not to care about the truth of

the information he receives. They even easily receive and spread the information back. This can be exacerbated if the hoax spreader has insufficient knowledge of using the internet to find deeper information or just to double-check the truth of the facts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research on the fact-checking process of hoax news related to COVID-19 in Indonesia, the research can conclude several points including, Mafindo fact-checkers interpret the fact-checking COVID-19 news as an important measure to reduce public concern. They consider Indonesia is currently in an unsafe condition for hoax news. Even many individuals deliberately took advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic situation by producing and spreading hoax news related to COVID-19. Informants admitted that this situation was a driving factor for Mafindo as an independent agency to eradicate hoax news during the pandemic.

The results of the research can also be concluded that the lack of reference sources to serve as data and evidence of hoax news becomes a challenge when doing fact-checking. However, these challenges can be overcome by utilizing primary and secondary sources, such as conducting interviews with related parties.

The fact-checking phases include the preparation of data collection, sorting data based on the theme and content of the news, analyzing the data, and checking the final results as an effort to maintain the credibility of the results and the image of the fact-checker institution. The data collection phase was carried out through a situation analysis by looking for comparisons of news from different sources. The existence of various sources



will help fact-checkers in identifying each statement related to the COVID-19 hoax news delivered on various social media.

The second phase is looking for supporting evidence by optimizing various sources that are considered competent. The final phase is to convey the results of fact-checking to the public through various media. It is hoped that the results of this fact-checking will help straighten out the information received by the public. In addition, it also provides knowledge and awareness to the public to be more vigilant in receiving information, especially regarding COVID-19 news. The results of this research are also indirectly expected to reduce the anxiety of the public following the COVID-19 pandemic which still has not ended in Indonesia.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organizations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to thank The Mafindo fact Checkers for research and Maylanny Christin (Telkom University) which has provided financial support for this research as well as to informants from Mafindo Fact checkers. Many thanks are also addressed to the reviewers and editor of the profetik jurnal komunikasi.

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