

Firehose of Falsehood Propaganda Model in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election

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Abstract. *The general election is a democratic means to gain power constitutionally. Several groups, however, use all the possible means to achieve that power. Firehose of falsehood is an example of political propaganda models that use every means to influence public opinion. This model of political propaganda finds its momentum through propaganda on social media. The purpose of this research is to understand the model of the firehose of falsehood on social media in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. This research method uses a discourse analysis approach to identify the phenomena and events regarding the use of political propaganda on social media. Meanwhile, data collection is carried out through Twitter social media documentation. The results of this analysis indicated that the Firehose of Falsehood propaganda model was used as a political propaganda in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. Social media, especially Twitter, became a means of propaganda to influence public opinion. The message delivery models were carried out through several methods. First, they were disseminated massively through various channels; second, they were carried out continuously and repeatedly; third, they were not following objective facts; and fourth, the media were lack of consistency.*

Keywords: *Political Propaganda; Firehose of Falsehood; Political Communication; Presidential Election; Social Media*

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INTRODUCTION

The firehose of falsehood propaganda influences the 2019 presidential election campaign in Indonesia. This propaganda model is used as a form of political communication in the campaign (Golose, 2019). This propaganda is also often referred to as Russian propaganda because this model was first used by Russia during the cold war against the United States (Paul & Matthews, 2017). This propaganda contains fake news, rumors, and hoaxes that are widely disseminated in the entire media, especially social media, to influence public opinion.

Propaganda is one of the political campaigns used in various countries

around the world. Presidential candidates have lots of means to gain public support, from utilizing well-known figures, holding music concerts, and using mass media advertisements, to using fake news and hoaxes to gain votes. Propaganda by spreading false information through various media is a new style of campaign that has emerged since the digital era. The development of communication technology makes it easier for people to access a lot of information anytime and anywhere.

Life digitization makes propaganda easier and cheaper, but also deadly because it uses manipulation and spreads restlessness in society. Of course, there are many benefits that humans gain. However,

on the other hand, the development of communication technology, such as social media, has caused some negative impacts. One of the negative effects of social media is that the social media is utilized as a means of propaganda to influence public opinion in general elections. Often these propaganda messages contain fake news or rumors that are not based on facts and keep the public away from true and accurate information. This misleading information can affect one's political beliefs in elections (Berinsky, 2017; DiFonzo, N. & Bordia, 2007).

Propaganda now is very complete (Umar, 2005). Social media is a medium on the internet that allows users to represent themselves to interact, cooperate, share, and communicate with other users (Fardiah et al., 2020). The use of social media as propaganda media in spreading false news is considered effective for several reasons. First, the cost of producing and marketing social media content is low and social media keeps users away from conflicting information or different facts. Second, social media is usually accessed via small smartphones, making it difficult for users to verify the correctness of information with facts. Third, social media is controlled by algorithms that unite people with the same ideology; thus alienating social media users from conflicting information or different facts (Bakshy et al., 2015; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

The facts mentioned above are the consequences that must be taken from technological advancement. People who do not keep up with technological developments are always considered poor and underdeveloped. As a developing country, Indonesia also wants to achieve progress through technological developments. Social media, which is an extension of the social interaction process, is also one of the benchmarks for the progress of society. Since the world today

is united by the internet, information is spread to influence daily life, of course, to be a better society.

Nowadays, social media has evolved and is used not only for long-distance social interactions. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, is the main tool for people to discuss politics and information dissemination (Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, 2013; Lilleker et al., 2016; Stier et al., 2018; Thorson & Wells, 2016; Vaccari, 2017). Social media also has the potential to set the media agenda (Chadwick, 2013; Neuman et al., 2014) so that the community agenda, which is usually determined by the mainstream media agenda, is now replaced by the social media agenda. This makes social media a rapid and massive means of propaganda.

The large use of social media in Indonesia is also one of the reasons why this media can be used as an effective propaganda tool. Because information as a whole is produced and disseminated via the internet, especially social media, people become dependent. The dependence of society on media cannot be separated from the leap in the development of digital technology, including computational technology, which becomes more sophisticated and personal because it is driven by the existence of technology in the network system, more popularly called the internet, which occurred during the period between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century (Quan-Haase, 2013).

Social media, thus, has finally become the only tool to disseminate messages quickly, massively, and without a time limit. The incapability of society to tell whether the information is "right" or "wrong" has become a problem in the 21st century. Information is indeed a very vital need, but only if the information is correct. What if wrong information is

shared? What if the misinformation is spread over a wide range, continuously, and over a long period? What exists is a mass lie that is finally believed to be the truth.

In 2018, in Indonesia, there were approximately 3,884 cases of hoaxes being investigated by the Indonesian Police (Polri). The number of cases has increased sharply from the number of cases in 2017 which reached 1,254 cases (Golose, 2019). Hoaxes spread massively because the public does not yet acquire media awareness to sort out various information from social media, so all information is taken for granted without verification.

The premise that can be put forward is that hoax messages spread through social media will stop if people have adequate literacy skills. The public will prevent it, then conduct independent clarification when finding hoax news. Unfortunately, the premise will encounter two different facts. First, Indonesian society has low literacy. Second, supposing a portion of society is literate, there are too many fake accounts, political buzzers, and robotic accounts that spread fake news faster and farther than human beings can.

The existence of these fake accounts is the firehose of falsehood's propaganda. Propaganda using fake accounts on social media has a high success rate and is difficult to detect. Rapidly, the issue in favor of one candidate spreads all over social media accounts, becomes a trending topic, and overwhelms political opponents. Candidates and political campaign service providers realize that information that is disseminated massively and from various sources can give an impression that the information can be trusted. Therefore, in the next few years, the firehose of falsehood propaganda will be used continuously and even more developed.

The firehose of falsehood

propaganda in the context of the presidential election is evil, even though the perpetrators are often undetectable. The complexity of using propaganda from year to year also requires research to be carried out on an ongoing basis. Previous studies have also been conducted on the firehose of the falsehood propaganda model and other models. Haqqi (2020) said that the two candidates carried out the propaganda. Even when the debate was open, both partners threw hate speech at each other instead of fighting visions and missions. Another study also stated that propaganda in the 2019 presidential election led to "chaos" causing public distrust of the KPU itself and could endanger the democracy in Indonesia (Asa et al., 2020; Sapitri & Nurafifah, 2020).

The reality of the existence of a propaganda war between the Jokowi and Prabowo camps shows that this problem persists. In every moment of the presidential election in Indonesia, propaganda is always played (Tahir et al., 2020). Therefore, this study wants to confirm previous research that propaganda carried out by political actors continues even though there is also a moral urge to end it. The focus of the research is to reveal the existence of a propaganda and show the mode of propaganda that occurred in the 2019 Presidential Election, not only through official and formal channels, such as mass media, but also through social media, which does not have an official channel for any information.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research type with a discourse analysis approach. This research is mainly concerned with patterns and human behavior (Kuncoro, 2022). The use of a discourse analysis approach aims to gain a deeper understanding of patterns, symbols, firehose and falsehood propaganda

languages and netizen interactions that disseminate propaganda content on social media (Creswell, 2009).

The source of the data in this study is a documentation originating from Twitter social media (2019), survey results from the Indonesian Telematics Society (Mastel, 2019), and online media (Merdeka.com, 2016; Katadata, 2016; Setkab.go.id, 2016). To support the documentation of data that has been determined, other secondary data is needed in the form of other texts. This other text is referred to as intertextuality, which is understanding a text using another text. Intertextuality is the presence of other elements in the form of a text outside the original text that will be given meaning. These other texts can be quotes, references, or bodies. This intertextuality shows how other voices contained in the text can be quoted, compared, and dialogued (Haryatmoko, 2019).

This study uses the analysis model of Critical Discourse Analysis by Teun van Dijk. He describes a discourse as having three dimensions: text, social cognition, and context. The dimension of the text studied is how the structure of the text and discourse strategies are used as affirmations in raising a particular theme. Then, the measurement of social

cognition, which is studied, is the production process of a text that involves individual social understanding. Also, the dimensions of the context studied are discourses developed in society about a problem/event that occurred. However, this study only focuses on the second and third levels of analysis because the first level of analysis, namely text, requires a good understanding of linguistics. Simultaneously, the study also focuses on the social conditions of the existing data. Thus, this research does not reduce the meaning and significance of the method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of various media with high volume

The use of firehose of falsehood propaganda includes text, video, audio, and images that are disseminated through a variety of media including the printed, electronic, and internet (Paul & Matthews, 2017). In a series of studies conducted by Harkins and Petty (1987), it was identified that the information obtained from various sources was more effective than the same information presented by one source. Information sources that are widely referenced by many people will be more convincing to the public regardless of the credibility of the source from which

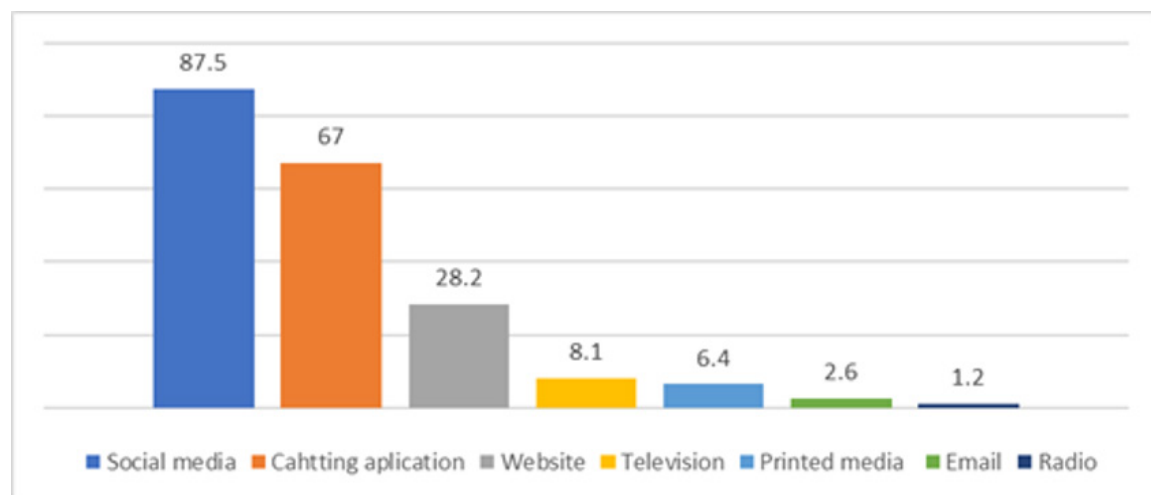


FIGURE 1. Hoax News Spread Channel
Source: Mastel (2019)

the information is obtained (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013).

The data presented in Figure 1 shows how hoax news spreads in the entire media, which covers social media, chat applications, websites, television, printed media, email, and radio. The data presented above concludes that no media is free from hoax news. Even though the level of media usage number is different, all media have their mass base. It seems that the people living in Indonesia today will never be free from the manipulation of information disseminated in political campaigns. The spread of hoax content shows that the public cannot be separated from hoaxes and will be affected by the emergence of these hoaxes, either directly or indirectly.

Seeing the distribution channels used in a political propaganda, the public must be aware of several channels, namely social media. Among these media, social media is the most widely disseminating hoax news with around 87.5 % (Mastel, 2019). Thus, social media users who do not understand this are at risk because they can be easily deceived by hoax spreaders. Social media is indeed one of the tools for spreading information massively. Social media users are mostly the millennial generation who are indifferent to practical politics. However, millennials tend to follow trends that are happening. If a political message is disguised by trends and popular culture, its spread will be massive.

The use of various channels to spread hoaxes is a hallmark of the firehose of false propaganda in accordance with its aim to reach all individuals and spread hoaxes massively. Various choices of tools for spreading political campaigns benefit presidential candidates in this era. This propaganda is more effective and efficient in reaching the widest possible audience because the message is conveyed not only to users of certain sources but also to

every individual who uses the media as a reference for information.

This way, the dissemination of hoaxes has two advantages. First, audiences who use a variety of media will easily believe the message because the hoax message is in the entire media they use. The public also cannot avoid it because all media will display the same message. Second, audiences who use one particular media will still know the hoax information regardless of whether they believe it or not (Paul & Matthews, 2017). Moreover, the hoaxes being distributed at the time will not only stop on the media, but they will also continue to the social life of the community. In principle, the wider the hoax is spread, the greater the likelihood that the audience will be exposed to the message.

This fact makes people's life no longer free. This society, which should have had room to live without knowing various types of propaganda, finally had to give up. Humans indeed need information even if it is about political agendas and busy presidential election campaigns. However, what the public needs is correct information, not propaganda that justifies any means necessary to gain political victory.

From the data above, it can also be identified that messages are not only delivered in one form. For example, television media uses audiovisual forms, printed and online media use visual forms of words, and social media uses multimedia. Forms of propaganda may have different effects on people's cognition. In a report by Mastel (2019), the dissemination of hoaxes uses seven forms as displayed in Figure 2.

Mastel's report also mentions that year by year, the form of hoaxes has evolved from the simplest forms to the more complicated ones. In 2017, when Mastel conducted a survey, hoaxes only developed through writing on fake

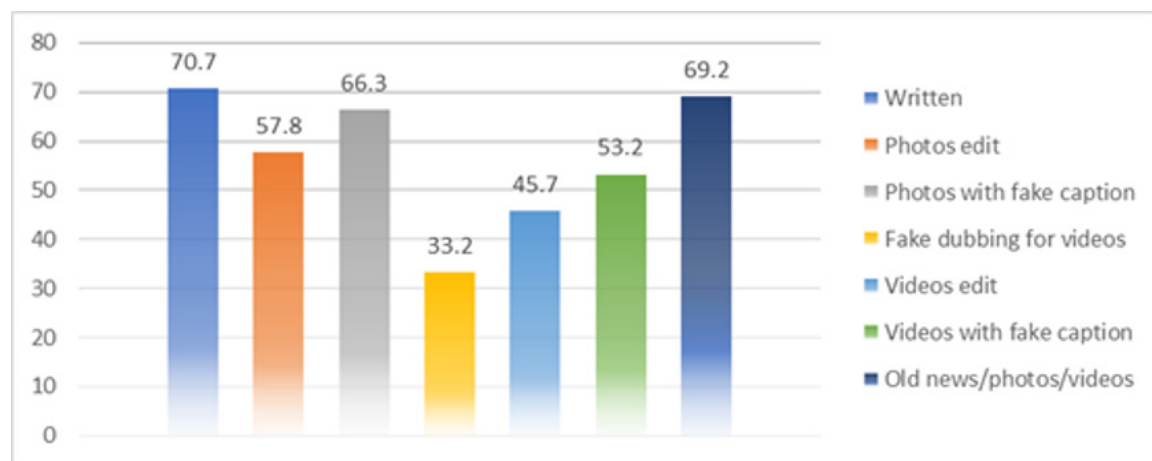


FIGURE 2. The forms of hoaxes spread through social media
Source: Mastel (2019)

online media by 57.90%, fake images by 37.50%, and the other 0.40% through video. Today, they are spread into seven types with videos that are cropped and then combined into one at the most complicated level. This shows that both the campaign team and the buzzers are getting serious about working on hoaxes supported by technology that is getting easier and cheaper.

Political advertising service agencies must follow the developing trend. They need to keep up with the latest technology and make the most of it, regardless of whether it is right or wrong. The capability of the winning election team to study the media and the form of messages that will reach readers is one thing to watch out for. Posting on internet blogs, editing photos on various social media with bombastic captions, and making new videos become serious efforts to gain people's votes and win elections.

Fast, Continuous, and Repeated Message Dissemination

Firehose of falsehood propaganda in spreading its message is carried out quickly, continuously, and repeatedly (Paul & Matthews, 2017). The objective is to obtain the first impression effect which can last a long time in one's memory. This

repeated delivery of information adopts the reasoning by Joseph Goebbels who mentioned that the truth is a lie delivered repeatedly. This phenomenon is applied in various forms of advertisement, promotion, and publication. The various mass media used to disseminate this information plays a significant role to ensure the message is disseminated not only massively, but also continuously and repeatedly.

From these characteristics, it can be understood that the Indonesian presidential election campaign in 2019 used methods designed to gain as much support as possible. The plan involves a team that understands the direction and development of the media, including the psychology of society. The campaign team must be responsive to any possible changes that occur so that the issues disseminated can be diverse and can be accepted by the public without suspicion. This form of responsiveness appears in various issues blown up to social media to get clicks from users. The campaign team must understand the political map and be aware of religious, cultural, and international issues, so that information appearing to the public can be biased. Hence, no one realizes that the information is a part of the propaganda.

Another assumption from firehose

of falsehood itself says that the second method disregards the facts due to the demand for quick information dissemination. If we understand more thoroughly, social media messages only contain something that we should not know. Knowing misinformation is a big loss for society. If the public understands this condition, there may be a wave of protests on social media and people stop using social media in droves. However, it will also be difficult to occur because social media is an irresistible development of communication technology.

Therefore, it is not surprising that people are bombarded with messages whose truth is unknown. This graph indicates that 14.7% of the public received hoax news more than once every day, another 34.6% claimed to receive hoax messages every day, 32.5% received hoax messages once a week, and only 18.2% of the public received hoax news once a month. The more channels are accessed by the public, the more likely people are exposed to hoax news. This data is in accordance with the findings of Golose (2019) regarding the 2019 general election which was contaminated by fake news and hoaxes.

This condition shows that hoaxes spread rapidly as the concept of the firehose of falsehood is fast, continuous, and repetitive. In this case, the public has no time to be critical because they are bombarded by hoax messages all the time. The spread of propaganda is indeed carried out quickly and continuously so that the public is unable to realize that what they receive from various media is a political message. Initially, people only consume mass media for various reasons, such as to spend free time, look for entertainment, or look for information. But in reality, the messages they consume contain political elements. Society in this condition is considered a product by the media industry and the media industry commercializes other industries, including political parties. The data shown in Figure 3 was taken by Mastel in 2019. Therefore, this data can be used to explain the firehose of falsehood propaganda in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election.

How can people distinguish between true information and hoaxes if dozens of hoaxes are disseminated in a day? According to Paul and Matthews (2019), the team in charge of propaganda with this method has the capability to repeat

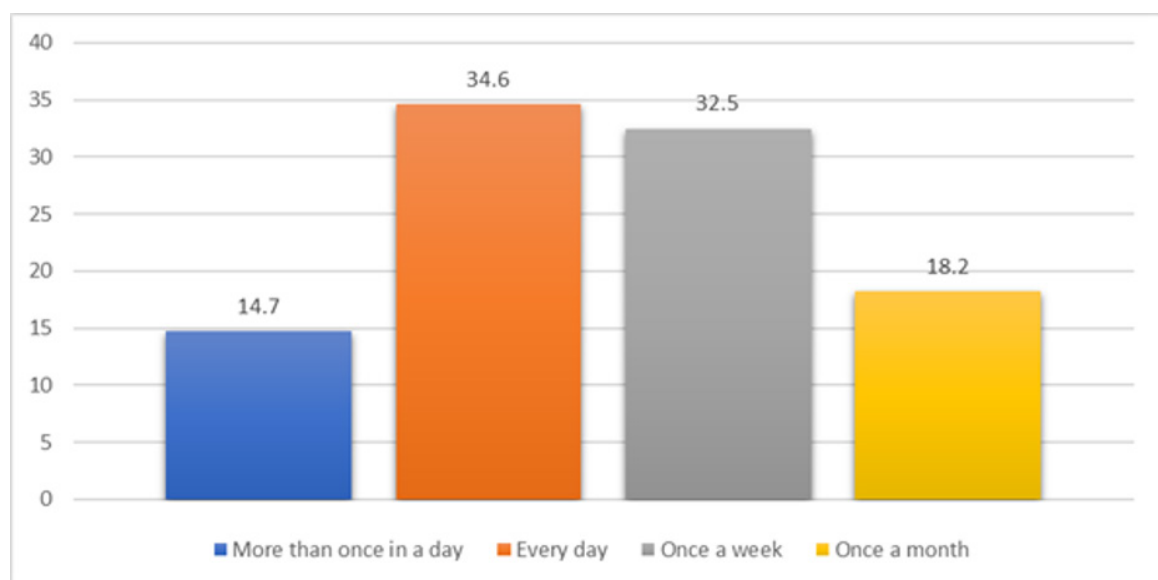


FIGURE 3. Hoax News Exposure Volume
Source: Mastel (2019)

information and recycle it even from things that have not happened. Moreover, political advertisements have also gotten more creative from year to year, thus the public is completely unaware that the content of the media contains campaigns. Various new media are used by candidates to market themselves, such as through music videos and social media.

The number of exposures to advertisements in the community has a profound effect on their cognition. The more often and the longer the advertisement is shown, it is hoped that more and more people will become familiar with the candidate, and from this introduction, it is hoped that the public will be able to understand his vision and mission and then vote for him during the general election. This kind of advertising context is often done for various commercial products to increase purchases. It turns out that this kind of advertising idea was used to advertise presidential candidates. Every four years, during the presidential election, they surely advertise continuously in various media to increase publication. It shows that constantly published advertisements can influence the public and help the candidates to win the election.

Non-Reality based Information

This propaganda has a low commitment to the occurring facts. In other words, the message conveyed in this propaganda contains little truth (Paul & Matthews, 2017). This fact shows that the presidential candidate and his entire successful team are indifferent toward society. Even the incumbent who was usually able to show his development history during his tenure did not have the power to spit out success. Propaganda published through social media is susceptible to containing hoaxes that preached more false information.

As Harold D. Lasswell (1927)

mentioned, propaganda is a well-planned communication process to influence public opinion by manipulating representations of reality. Notice that propaganda is not only about influencing public opinion, but also about manipulating reality. There are many ways to influence the public using existing facts. For example, by showing evidence of progress made by candidates, or by pointing out past mistakes based on facts or researches to corner political opponents. Unfortunately, Indonesia's presidential candidates prefer to display falsehoods, manipulate reality, and even spread lies to increase their popularity.

This is not surprising because the word propaganda itself harms the reader's mind. Continuing what Lasswell stated above, at a later stage, a propaganda is often associated with lies, reduction of truth (distortion), manipulation, mind control, psychological warfare, and brainwashing (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015). Consequently, the firehose of the falsehood propaganda model is not going to speak the truth any longer since the truth has been distorted for the sake of political interests. Figure 4 displays some hoaxes circulating before the 2019 Presidential Election.

Hoax as displayed in picture 4 showed the Indonesian government's plan to hire foreign workers from China. This news caused a variety of rejection and controversy in many online media, especially Twitter. The spread of this hoax news resulted in a decline in the credibility of the Jokowi government, especially ahead of his second candidacy as the President of the Republic of Indonesia.

The information above is suspected of a hoax because the truth was confirmed by many mainstream media. The true story was the government's plan to bring 10 million tourists instead of workers from China to Indonesia. This is in line with the indication by news from the



FIGURE 4. Hoax news of 10 million Chinese workers
Source: Merdeka.com (2016)



FIGURE 5. Clarification of 10 million Chinese workers hoax news
Source: Katadata (2016); Setkab.go.id (2016)

Data Word and the confirmation from the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia.

The clarification of hoax news was also accompanied by the data on foreign workers in Indonesia shown in Figure 5. These data provided comparisons of the number of foreign workers from different countries in Indonesia. The fact was that there were 21,271 foreign workers from China working in Indonesia.

The data in Figure 6 shows a propaganda model that emphasizes massification, continuity, rapidness, and then uses the fact-based information to

be distorted into a hoax. This condition not only afflicted Jokowi's side as the incumbent but also Prabowo Subianto's side, who had been a contender since the 2014 presidential election. Both candidates got hoaxes that attacked their credibility, psychology, and past which could reduce the level of electability of both candidates.

Inconsistent Information

The final feature of the firehose of falsehood propaganda is the low consistency of the disseminated information (Paul & Matthews, 2017).

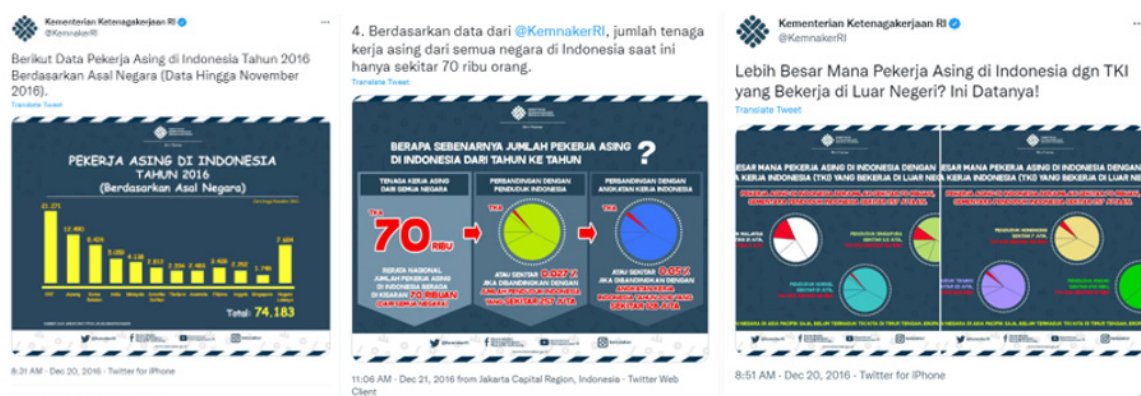


FIGURE 6. Data to deny hoax news
 Source: Twitter (2019).

An example is the delivery of news that varies between one media with another media about an event so that it gives a rise to a contradiction. If the sources are inconsistent, how can they be trusted? If they are not credible, how can they be influenced? Research shows that inconsistencies can damage effects on persuasion, for example, when recipients try to investigate inconsistent messages from the same source (Ziegler et al., 2004).

This inconsistency surely occurs because all disseminated information does not have a valid fact base or data. Therefore, the buzzer tasked with spreading false information within the frame of political propaganda does not have a definite formula. It is as if the team spreading fake news uses all means, all information, including sentences, pictures, and videos, as an ammunition to knock out their political opponents.

Controversial news due to inconsistency between one media and another encourages someone to look for further information related to the change in opinion. Therefore, even though news contains inconsistencies, contradictions make one tend to see the truth with stronger arguments (Rucker et al., 2008; Reich & Tormala, 2013). One of the goals of this firehose of falsehood propaganda is to spread information as widely as possible regardless of whether the information is

true or false. When information attacking political opponents is spread, this propaganda can be considered successful. Although this does not necessarily lead to the winning votes and the winning supported candidates.

In propaganda, the lack of source credibility due to the inconsistency of the message is balanced by the synergy characteristic of the success of other propaganda methods. An example is the dissemination of information by many sources or media will be more persuasive than the message delivered with a variety of arguments but with fewer media (Harkins & Petty, 1987). One of the goals of this firehose of falsehood propaganda is to spread information as widely as possible regardless of whether the information is true or false. When information attacking political opponents is spread, this propaganda can be considered successful. Although this does not necessarily lead to the winning votes and the winning supported candidates.

Propaganda made by the campaign team can take various forms. One of those is disseminating unclear information that has been revealed earlier to the public in the hope that it will be published by the mass media. It is a tactic used by candidates to ensure their names always appear in the media and receive the public's attention. In public relations, this is referred to as the press agency, which is

the creation of news and events that have news value to attract the attention of the mass media and receive public attention (Cutlip et al., 2006).

This is exactly what President candidate Prabowo Subianto did when announcing his victory three times with different votes. The announcement of the first win was 62% of the total votes, the second was 54.24%, and the last was submitted in the lawsuit to the Constitutional Court by 52% (Detikcom, 2019). Not only was Prabowo considered inconsistent in his actions, but Joko Widodo was also inconsistent with his decision to retain Airlangga Hartanto as the Minister of Industry even though he had been elected as the Chair of Golkar Party (CNNIndonesia, 2018).

Those inconsistencies can be a double-edged sword for candidates. Viewed from the context of the press agency, the candidates have taken surprising steps to attract the mass media to publish the incident. Publications from the media are valuable for candidates to recall the public's memory of the candidates. Inconsistency can also be detrimental to candidates because inconsistent statements leave a negative

image in the society. Of course, this attitude can be used by political opponents to bring down the candidate and undermine public support.

The inconsistencies above are not directly related to hoax information on social media. One thing to note, however, is that the inconsistent activities of political figures can lead to more dangerous hoaxes. Regarding the inconsistencies above, Twitter was already filled with hate speech and suspicion. Many were disappointed and ridiculed the inconsistent attitude of both figures. Under the characteristics of the firehose of the falsehood propaganda model, it can be observed that both candidates with all their activities perpetuated propaganda that was not in accordance with the truth

The inconsistencies shown by the two political figures in news reports in the mainstream media were not a hoax. That condition, however, became hoax material by political buzzers to carry out propaganda. How can inconsistency win support? Paul and Matthews (2017) explain how that process occurs well, i.e. because the audience who is already inclined to a certain candidate tends to ignore the contradictions in certain

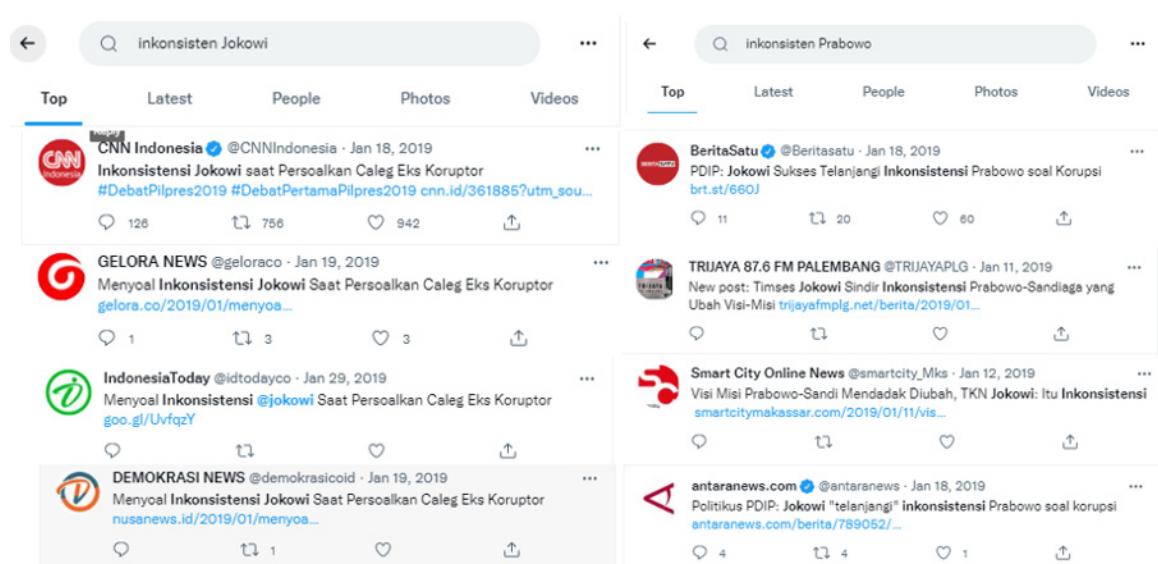


FIGURE 7. Inconsistency of news about Jokowi and Prabowo
Source: Twitter (2019)

circumstances and the losses caused by inconsistencies can be covered by the success of other propaganda models.

This phenomenon encourages candidates to be more careful in determining their political steps. The right decision can be falsely accepted by political opponents, especially if the decision was flawed from the start. Each candidate certainly has a past that can be used as an advantage but can also be a stumbling block. From the various analyses above, political candidates must have a special team tasked with spreading propaganda and dispelling propaganda created by opposing parties. In the future, this will be more challenging. The candidate who masters information technology will win the war on social media.

The firehose of falsehood propaganda is a form of political communication that justifies any means to win the contestation in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. This propaganda contains political messages that tend to contain fake news to build a discourse on social media. Discourses that are built from narratives of lies are misleading information to manipulate public opinion. Discourse on social media has become an arena for propaganda battles between Jokowi's camp and Prabowo's camp supported by the buzzers of the two presidential candidates.

The use of social media as a propaganda medium to manipulate the public is considered effective for several reasons. First, the cost of production and marketing of social media content is cheap. Second, social media is usually accessed via small smartphones, making it difficult for users to verify the correctness of information with facts. Third, social media as a network of friends is controlled by an algorithmic system that unites people with the same ideology, thus alienating its users from

contradictory information and different facts.

CONCLUSION

The firehose of falsehood propaganda model has been used as a political propaganda in the 2019 presidential election in Indonesia. Social media, especially Twitter, is a means of a propaganda to influence public opinion. The model of delivering messages of a political propaganda by the firehose of falsehood was: first, they were massive and disseminated using all channels; second, they were carried out continuously and repeatedly; third, they were not following objective facts; and fourth, they were lack of consistency.

This propaganda model shows success on Twitter because most of its users do not have good preferences regarding hoaxes. Even, users who are aware of the hoax spread via Twitter unable to verify the truth for several reasons, such as the absence of a verification method, laziness to find the correct information, and frequent doubt regarding whether the information is a hoax or fact.

The 2019 presidential election made the battle of discourse on social media a propaganda practice to influence public opinion. The narratives used in building a discourse on social media contain negative connotations and stigmas to degrade the credibility of presidential candidates, both Jokowi and Prabowo.

There are still few studies on the firehose of falsehood propaganda in Indonesia due to a lack of interest in the topic. However, the trend of research on the propaganda continues to be relevant over the years when it is related to the development of communication technology and this is increasingly being done so that it can become a mutually complementary research cluster. Future research should be able to record and describe propaganda on social media in

detail so that it can be categorized based on the latest concepts.

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