

## *University Students' Ability in Evaluating Fake News on Social Media*

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**Paper Type:**  
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### Abstract

**Background of the study:** Social media has become a traffic information exchange for both true and false information. Therefore, social media users should not simply believe the information they received. This paper investigates the process of evaluating news on social media carried out by students in assessing the news they find on social media, and their ability to distinguish fact and false news.

**Purpose:** It is to find out more about the process of students evaluating news on social media by assessing the news they found on social media, and how can they know which is the factual news and which is the fake news and the difference between them.

**Method:** Qualitative research methods with a descriptive approach are used in this research. This research was conducted at Gadjah Mada University. The purposive sampling technique was chosen to be used in determining students.

**Findings:** Overall, participants were able to identify almost all news articles. Participants are able to identify almost all factual news articles correctly and most fake news articles correctly. Only a small portion of all news articles cannot be correctly identified by participants. Participants are better to identify factual news than fake news.

**Conclusion:** Although participants already have experienced finding fake news on social media and have self-taught knowledge about how to distinguish fake news from reliable news, there is no guarantee that they can tell the news article they got, fake or fact. The researcher wants to give advice to the academic library to provide training on the characteristics of reliable referral sources and to think critically in assessing information as part of student information literacy training.

**Keywords:** *Fake news, social media, evaluating, students.*

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## Introduction

Internet as a product of the development of information and communication technology has become a daily part of almost every individual. One of the benefits of the Internet is that we can obtain, create, and disseminate information easily and quickly. As a result, a lot of information is available, which can be used by anyone according to their information needs. With all this information, of course it cannot be taken for granted because the information may have been altered so that it contains incorrect information, which is commonly known as *fake news* or better known to the Indonesian people as hoaxes.

The most phenomenal event of spreading *fake news* was during the election of the President of the United States in 2016 (Richardson, 2017; Finneman, & Thomas; Guo & Vargo; Ross & Rivers, 2018) which caused the *fake news* instinct to become famous and much discussed by the public. Layman (Nelson & Taneja, 2018) to researcher. At that time, a lot of manipulated news circulated causing an information crisis. Facebook is accused of being a media that has an important role in spreading *fake news*.

In Indonesia itself, the public was shocked by the news of the arrest of a group called Saracen in 2017. Saracen is a group whose members consist of several people. Their job is to spread false *news* or *fake news* based on certain orders from various parties, with high pay. The media used to spread the *fake news* are *Facebook* and *Twitter* (Saraswati, 2017).

Furthermore, the spread of *fake news*, which was also on a large scale also occurred some time ago, namely in the middle of 2019. *Fake news* that was spread was related to demonstrations in Hong Kong. Since the action took place from July to September 2019, *YouTube* claims to have deleted more than 210 channels, while *Twitter* closed more than 200,000 accounts, and *Facebook* has disabled more than 1000 accounts (France-Presse, 2019).

Based on the three major events that occurred above, there is a similarity between the three, namely the media in spreading *fake news*. Social media is used as a tool to disseminate information that has been manipulated and polished in such a way that it looks like factual news by *fake news* spreaders. This is not without reason. Social media is easy to use, is inexpensive, and can connect many people at once so you don't have to wait a long time for a story to be read by many people.

The survey results from the Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) show that social media and the Internet are the most commonly used media in spreading *fake news*. As a result, social media has become a place of *fake news* exchange traffic, making it no longer safe for its users. The short time it takes to spread the news also makes it difficult for users to judge the credibility of the information they get on social media (Leeder, 2019).

According to research from Nelson & Taneja (2018), active *Internet* users with high usage intensity are more prone to being exposed to *fake news* than light users. This means that heavy *Internet* users are more at risk and more likely to be exposed to *fake news* so they need to be cautious and not easily believe what they find on the Internet.

Based on the results of a survey conducted by APJII in 2018, an overview of the penetration of Internet users by age was obtained (Figure 1.2). It can be seen that the highest Internet users by age are the 15-19 age group, followed by the 20-24 and 25-29 years age group (APJII, 2018). The age group 15-19 years and 20-24 years, including the youth age group, are the highest Internet users. Meanwhile, the lowest user group is at the age of 65 years and over. So it can be concluded that the highest Internet users in Indonesia are *digital natives*. *Digital natives* is a term used to classify generations who are familiar with digital technology (Zimmerman, 2012).

*Digital natives* are someone very familiar with digital technology, computer, and so on, because they have grown with them (Cambridge University Press, nd). So, the term *digital natives* refer to someone who is very familiar in using and using technology.

*Fake news* can be fatal if it is used as a weapon to manipulate people. Fake news and false statements can cause confusion, doubt, and dependence on inaccurate content (Khairunissa, 2020). Netizens must be more careful and more serious at evaluating news found on social media (Rapp &

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Salovich, 2018). A vigilant attitude at consuming information must be applied and be more active, not just accepting the news that is received.

To overcome this, Internet and social media users must know the right way to protect themselves to avoid *fake news*. In order for the public to have better and reliable information, awareness is needed in finding news sources (Spohr, 2017). The public must know and be able to distinguish which sources present reliable and accurate news. In addition, being more open to the information received and not only relying on one source must also be started. The public must be more vigilant and do not fully trust the news that is spread so that it can be protected from *fake news* and not easily provoked by existing issues.

Apart from that, there are many other things that can be done to protect yourself from *fake news*. Governments around the world are also acting and trying to protect the public from *fake news* (Funke-Flamini). There are various kinds of efforts that have been made / starting from laws and regulations, training in media literacy, fines, law enforcement, and so on.

In addition to the efforts of the government, international librarian organizations such as the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) and the American Library Association (ALA), researchers around the world, and community or volunteer organizations ( *volunteer organizations* ) are also involved in trying and thinking about the best way. Which is easy to understand and apply. The result is a variety of templates, models, and steps that can be used to identify *fake news*.

As mentioned above, media literacy can be the answer and mandatory skills that each individual must have in order to avoid *fake news*. However, it is not only media literacy that is a mandatory *skill* that must be possessed. Information literacy as the mother of all types of literacy and digital literacy is also an additional skill that each individual should have. Media and information literacy can be used to improve students' abilities and build their understanding and ability to assess the validity of information sources (Rayees, et.al., 2018). Literacy skills must be developed based on a focus on one media at a time and not for all media at once.

Characteristics of different media require competence and *skills* differently. Therefore, media literacy must be further developed in accordance with the development of technology and the media itself. Apart from media literacy, other additional skills are needed, namely digital literacy. Digital literacy includes not only the ability to search, browse and obtain information by utilizing technology, but also the ability to evaluate the information obtained.

In 2018, Siberkreasi conducted research in four major cities in Indonesia, namely Bandung, Denpasar, Pontianak and Surabaya with respondents aged 13-18 years (Haryanto, 2019). Based on the results of this study, it was found that the digital literacy index of adolescents in Indonesia is already good and is at level 3 (*advance*). The main source of literacy knowledge possessed by respondents is self-taught. Furthermore, family is the second source, while friends and school are the third or the last source of respondents' choice (Haryanto, 2019).

The dangers of misleading information and the phenomena that occur related to misuse of information have been described in the background. Information can be used as a weapon to influence readers. Governments around the world have made efforts to prevent people from being deceived by *fake news*. In addition, researchers, international library organizations, and communities or *volunteer organizations* around the world also produce literature and campaign on how to recognize *fake news*, how to deal with its effects, what are the impacts or consequences of *fake news* and find a solution done.

Although many things have been done, students get information about how to identify *fake news* based on self-teaching by searching on the Internet themselves and based on knowledge of their surrounding environment. Referring to the results of research conducted by Siberkreasi, it can be concluded that adolescents aged 13-18 years have good digital literacy knowledge so they are likely not to be easily exposed to *fake news* on social media. However, is this true if tested in different cities? What about teens over 18 years of age? The phenomenon that occurs makes researchers interested in finding out more about the process of evaluating news on social media by students in assessing the news

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they find on social media, and can they distinguish between fact and *fake news*.

Based on the formulation of the problem described above, the questions in this study can be identified as follows:

*RQ1: Are students able to rate the news they find on social media?*

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher conducted interviews with 16 participants who were students and asked them to evaluate examples of news articles that had been selected by the previous researcher. In this study, researchers chose to use the term *fake news* rather than a hoax. The reason is because the term *fake news* includes a broader meaning than the term hoax. In addition, the term fake news is most commonly used in international research.

## Literature Review

### A. Fake News

According to the Cambridge dictionary the meaning of *fake news* is *fake news* that looks like facts spread on the Internet or other media, usually made to influence political views or jokes. Meanwhile, Tandoc, Lim, & Ling (2018) said that if previous research had mentioned *fake news* as a term to describe news parodies, political satire, and news propaganda, now the term has expanded to become *fake news* circulating in social media. Then Bartlett (2017) defines *fake news* as a term that has the connotation of fake news - unimportant stories that are published, and fake news that looks like facts.

*Fake news* is not true "news" but an attempt to deceive by imitating traditional journalism. Fraud is carried out deliberately through sensational communication that appears credible but is designed to manipulate and not be declared wrong (Finneman & Thomas, 2018). *Fake news* that contains misinformation is very dangerous because it "has the potential to influence attitudes and behavior, making people think and act differently than if they were properly informed" (Southwell, Thorson, & Sheble, 2018 in Guo & Vargo, 2018).

Writer *fake news* or hoaxer spreading false information with elements of sensational and use mass communication to reach a large audience. Confidence in the news media lie comes from the ability to author false news to write news, which looks like containing facts and can be in the trust, as well as the lack of awareness in readers. Trust in *fake news* is obtained from the results of journalistic imitation (Finneman & Thomas, 2018).

Furthermore, Tandoc, Zim, and Ling in Finneman & Thomas (2018) found that fake news adjusts the look and feel of real news; from the website view; how articles are written; how the photos that are entered are related. In addition, they show that fake news hides under a layer of legitimacy because it takes some form of credibility by trying to appear like real news.

Based on the above statements, it can be concluded that *fake news* is not only in the form of fake news but contains false information. This information is not always made to mislead many parties, although many create and spread *fake news* in order to create confusion and misleading. This term refers to 3 forms of *fake news*. The first form is fake news, which contains untrue news, which is deliberately made to mislead and change the opinion of the reader. The second form is the term *fake news* which refers to parody or *satire*. The purpose of making this second form of *fake news* is as a form of sarcasm from a phenomenon that occurs. Usually *satire* is made to criticize a phenomenon. Then the third form of *fake news* is *misinformation*. The purpose of *misinformation* is fake news spread by readers who believe that the news is a fact. In other words, *misinformation* occurs when the news announcer does not realize that the news is not true and immediately spreads it without any desire to mislead others.

### B. Social Media as a Tool

Social media cannot be separated from social life because it facilitates interpersonal relationships (Ledbetter et.al., 2011). But with developments to meet the needs and ease of access for users, social media is no longer used only as a means to communicate with friends, family, and even strangers

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(Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Nowadays, social media can also be used to consume news. The development of social media is not without reason. The tendency of people, especially adolescents, who prefer reading news online rather than reading in print (Chan-Olmsted, S., Rim, H., & Zerba, A, 2013) are one of the factors.

However, a new problem emerged. Consumption of news on social media, whether intentionally or unintentionally, significantly increases every year. However, the growth of news on social media has also been accompanied by the spread of disinformation. (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018).

The concept of *fake news* is not new, but the technique is because by using the Internet and social media, spreading *fake news* is easy (Bartlett, 2017). It is not wrong if social media is called a means of spreading *fake news*. Social media is a source of *fake news* because this platform frees anyone to spread viral news to many people easily and at low cost (Klein & Wueller, 2017). Just by clicking on the *share* menu, the news will quickly spread.

This convenience can be done by anyone. Therefore, it is not surprising that social media is chosen as the medium for spreading *fake news*. Jun et al. (2017) say in a collective environment, such as social media, the statement is less inspected. This effect becomes stronger when more people spread the message before (Weidner, Beuk, & Bal, 2019).

Hunt, Gentzkow, and Yu (2018) says that *Facebook* is the social media play an important role in spreading false news in the year 2016 and the current US presidential election. In addition, there are a number of popular websites, printers, and radio broadcasters that present fake news as facts for profit or to spread followers of a certain ideology (Bartlett, 2017).

Due to the multitude of information options currently available, finding reliable information is a complex and challenging task for information consumers, but especially for young people because they may not have the necessary tools and abilities to evaluate information effectively, partly because of development and experience. Their lives are relatively limited compared to adults, even though they are more skilled at using technological devices (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008; Metzger, Flanagin, Markov, Grossman, & Bulger, 2015). Information on the internet cannot be trusted just like that, but ironically more and more people believe it (Kano, 2018).

It is clear that citizens are aware of - and have concerns about - misinformation and disinformation in news coverage, especially on social media, but it may not be clear what to do about it (IFLA, nd).

## Research Method

This research uses qualitative research methods with a descriptive approach. This method was chosen by researchers because they wanted to understand more clearly and systematically about the phenomenon being studied. This research was conducted at Gadjah Mada University. The *purposive sampling technique* was chosen to be used in determining the participants in this study. The criteria of the participants in this study were students who actively used social media with a usage time of more than 3 hours per day. In addition, participants are also included in the *digital native* group. In this study, researchers took data by conducting structured interviews in which participants were given six news articles to be assessed for their accuracy. The six articles are stored on a tablet. The tablet which already contains the six articles was lent by the researcher to make the assessment process easier. During the assessment process, the activities carried out by the participants were recorded using a *screen recorder* application.

### A. Selection of News Articles

News articles within the last 3 months were selected by the researchers to be assessed by the participants. Six selected news article consists of three news false or *fake news* and 3 news facts. This is done so that there is a balance between *fake news* and factual news. Researchers selected 3 *fake news* articles based on a list of news contained on national fact-finding websites, namely Stophoax.id and Turnbackhoax.id. Meanwhile, 3 factual news articles were selected based on sources from news portals which were not phenomenal and less well known to all Indonesians. News *published* on popular news

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portals such as Liputan 6, CNN, Detik, and Tempo was not chosen to reduce the possibility of being easily recognized and potentially biased towards these sources. The selected fact stories have an unusual and provocative title, with the aim that participants have the same effort to judge every news, both factual and *fake news*. To be more balanced, the topics of the news articles chosen are political and non-political. News headlines, news categories, and news labels can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. News Title, News Category, and News Label

News Title	News Category	News Label
Miracles really exist, fish, half body missing can live!	Fact	Fish
Observe, here are five stomach acid drugs ranitidine that cause cancer potential.	Fact	Ranitidine
Gosh, the citizens of DKI are still chasing carelessly.	Fact	DKI residents

Table 2. News Title, News Category, and News Label (Continued)

News Title	News Category	News Label
Sri Mulyani wanted Rp90 trillion for the haj pilgrimage to cover the BPJS deficit.	Fake	Sri Mulyani
In a viral broadcast, residents were asked to put salt water in front of the house to make it rain.	Fake	Salt water
Rejecting the position of minister, Sandiaga: it is better to be unemployed than to be under the regime.	Fake	Sandiaga Uno

## B. Participants

Participants in this research were students who were included in the *digital natives* category, and were actively studying at the undergraduate (S1) or undergraduate and postgraduate (S2) or postgraduate levels. This research was conducted at Gadjah Mada University. The total number of participants was 16 people. *Digital natives*, students who participated in this study were aged 19 to 29 years. Based on gender, 62.5 % female participants and 37.5 % male participants. Most participants are studying ladder St flat 2 (S2) with a percentage of 68.75 %, followed by 2 5 % of the students Strata 1 (S1) and 6.25 % students of Diploma 3 (D3). Meanwhile, in terms of the field of science, the participants were dominated by non- ecclesiastical sciences with a percentage of 56.25 % and from the exact sciences 43.75 %.

## Results and Discussion

The identification of each of the 6 news articles by 16 participants, totaling 96 news articles, both factual and *fake news*. The results show that, the number of articles that correctly answer 78 (81,2%) articles, the number of articles that are not answered correctly as many as 14 articles 14,6%), the number of articles selected participants to be missed as much as 4 article (4,2%).

Fact article "Miracles really exist, fish, half body missing can live!" is the article most frequently answered incorrectly with a total of 5 participants who answered incorrectly, 29.4%, 1 person (5.8%) doubted and 1 person (5.8%) chose not to answer. While one article with the title "Broadcast viral, residents are asked to place the brain in front of the house to send down the rain" into the article that most often answered correctly with a total of 14 participants (87,5 %) answered correctly, and 2 (11.8%) chose answer for neutral. Furthermore, the articles that were able to be answered correctly with a total error of 0% were articles with the title "Pay attention, here are five gastric acid drugs ranitidine that

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cause cancer potential" and "Gosh, DKI residents are still defecating in the open." The following is the total number of identifications that were correctly answered by participants in Table 2:

Table 3. Total Number of Correct Article Identification

News Label	News Category	Number Correct	% Right
Ranitidine	Fact	16	100%
DKI residents	Fact	16	100%
Salt water	Fake	14	87,5 %
Sri Mulyani	Fake	13	81,2 %
Sandiaga Uno	Fake	11	68,7 %
Fish	Fact	9	56,2 %

Based on the categories of news (facts or *fake*), articles of news that is able to be identified correctly by the participants is as much as 41 articles on news facts (85,4%), and 37 articles *fake news* (77,1%). The results show that it is easier for participants to identify factual news than *fake news*. The factual articles most correctly identified by the participants were "Watch out, here are five gastric acid drugs ranitidine that cause cancer potential" and "Gosh, DKI residents are still defecating in the open." Meanwhile, a factual news article that tricked some of the participants so that at least the answer was correct was "Miracles do exist, fish with half bodies missing can live!" Meanwhile articles *fake news* that can be identified correctly as a whole by the participants is "Broadcast viral, residents are asked to place the brain in front of the house to send down the rain" and articles *fake news* most outwit so only slightly participant that is able to answer correctly is "Rejecting the position of minister, Sandiaga: It is better to be unemployed than to be the underdog of the regime." The total number of news articles that have been correctly identified based on news categories can be seen in Table 3:

Table 4. Correct Identification by News Category

News Label	News Category	Number Correct	% Right
Ranitidine	Fact	16	100%
DKI residents	Fact	16	100%
Fish	Fact	9	56,2%
Salt water	Fake	14	87,5%
Sri Mulyani	Fake	12	75%
Sandiaga Uno	Fake	11	68,7%

The identification results of the total number of news, both fact and fake news that had been identified by 16 participants showed that as many as 7 participants (43,7%) we're able to identify all articles without any identification errors. Then, the lowest results that we're able to be answered correctly by participants were 3 articles successfully identified by 3 participants (17.6%). The following is the number of correct identifications of news articles by participants can be seen in Table 4:

Table 5. Number of Correct Identification by Participants

Number of news articles that are correctly identified	Number of Participants	% of Participants
6	7	43,7 %
5	3	18,7 %
4	3	18,7 %
3	3	18,7 %

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On the whole, participants were able to identify the 81,2% of the total number of articles with details of as many as 41 articles of news facts (85,4%) were identified true, and 37 articles *fake news* (77,1%) were identified with right. Then, almost 18.7 % of the total articles could not be identified correctly by the participants. Based on these results, participants were considered to be more able to identify factual news than *fake news*.

When asked to assess 6 news articles that have been provided by previous researchers, there are some participants who refuse to assess a number of articles on the total 6 article. As much 3 participant reject for man's use values, while the number of articles that are not in value is 4 articles. One participants are not men use values 2 of 6 articles while two participants each are not men use values 1 of 6 articles.

The reason of one of the participants chose not men use values provided the article is because they are not interested in the contents of the article mentioned. The reason can be seen from the following participant statements:

*"Because I'm not that interested, so I don't really care. But I looked for it on Google earlier, did I have news. But because it is because the news is like this, we don't continue to do so..."* (Bradley, FIB Faculty Masters student)

Based on the participant's statement, it was concluded that he thought that if the news article presented contained things or topics that he did not like, then he would not be interested in analyzing and even seeing further the contents of the article. This is also in accordance with the statements of several other participants. Almost part of the participants admitted to not always evaluate the news that in found in social media. The reason it is as a participant only be read and evaluate the news article if the topic of the news are interesting and in accordance with the interests of participants. This can be seen as from the following participant statements:

*"It depends on the news. News that is interesting or that I really want to know. That's what I just checked..."* (Ann, Graduate School Faculty student).

The large selection of news topics offered allows everyone to freely choose news topics according to their respective wishes, Trilling, & Schoenbach (2013). Therefore, the behavior of participants in choosing news topics according to their interests is influenced by the large variety of topics and news content offered by producers or news creators. Participants can choose which news topics they want to read freely. This is different from a few years ago when society in general still depended on television and printed newspapers and magazines as their main source of information. Therefore, participants can more freely choose which news topics they like and which they don't like.

In addition, other reasons participants refused to evaluate the news and answered whether the articles they read contained facts or *fake news*, which can be seen from the statements of the participants below:

*"I am not looking for it.. I don't know if this is a hoax or not, but what I believe is that its citizens are victims of hoaxes..."* (Henry, ISIPOL Faculty Master student)

The participant refuses to rate and answer the truth of the article he reads because he feels they cannot judge the news article that is given. However, participants commented that he is to believe that society, many are fooled by the news article. Participants did not say further the reasons why they did not want to rate the news article. When asked, the participants only repeated their statement firmly as above, namely the participants believed that the community was the victim of the related news article.

## Conclusion

The development of technology and information not only facilitates a lot of work, but also changes people's habits. If, several years ago people saw television or read newspapers, magazines and bulletins as a source of information, now the consumption of information sources on social media is commonly

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used by the younger generation. However, social media is not a safe medium for searching and finding information.

Over the past few years, social media has become a platform for the exchange of false information. Therefore, it is not uncommon for social media users to be deceived by the news they read on social media. The cause is a lack of alertness and critical thinking when consuming news on social media. The style of consuming news on social media can result in users paying less attention to credibility cues, as they rely on social media & aggregator advice (Pearson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2018). In addition, the absence of an editorial team of social media that guarantees the quality of journalism and the correctness of information (Park, 2019) so that the news on social media cannot be fully trusted.

In this study, all participants on average have had experiences related to *fake news*. Based on the overall results of the research data obtained, it was finally concluded that when participants read news articles on social media, not all of the articles were evaluated as a whole. The selection of articles to be evaluated depends on the interests of each participant. When participants find topics that they like, the truth of the contents of the article will be searched for further.

Based on the research that has been done, the researcher formulates several suggestions. First, practical advice. Although participants already have experience in finding *fake news* on social media and have self-taught knowledge of how to distinguish *fake news* from news that can be trusted, this is not a guarantee. Based on the data obtained from the study, the participants still made some mistakes when they identified several news articles. Therefore, researchers want to provide advice to academic libraries to provide training on the characteristics of reliable reference sources, and think critically in assessing information as part of student information literacy training. The critical ability to evaluate information can help avoid being deceived by fake news (Cooke, 2017). In universities, the most common thing for students to gain this ability is by providing training on information literacy in libraries (Leeder, 2019).

There is a positive relationship between information literacy skills and critical thinking skills with information evaluation (Metzger et al., 2015). That is, information literacy training and critical thinking skills have an impact on the ability to evaluate information. In addition, information literacy training also improves information seeking behavior for students who receive training on how to evaluate critically (Leeder & Shah).

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