

The Threat of Forming a Post-Truth Scenario Through Political Propaganda by Social Media Users in the 2024 General Election

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Abstract

At the beginning of 2023, We Are Social recorded that internet users in Indonesia reached 212.9 million people, or the equivalent of 77 percent of the total population. This figure has more than doubled compared to the initial year that regulations on the use of social media as a means of campaigning were implemented, namely in 2014, which was 88.1 million people. Currently active social media users in Indonesia have reached 167 million users. The more social media users there are in Indonesia, the faster the potential for information dissemination, including the spread of hoaxes and content with hate speech nuances, which is also increasingly widespread. This condition has triggered an increase in the concentration of post-truth in Indonesia ahead of the 2024 General Election. This research will identify patterns of post-truth formation in Indonesia, as well as analyze the threat of the existence of post-truth in the midst of holding the General Election. This qualitative research will use netnographic methods by focusing on Hoax content and nuances of Hate Speech on Social Media, especially Twitter. Apart from that, interviews will also be conducted with experts, academics, and practitioners.

1. Introduction

In the history of elections in Indonesia, since the 2014 election, the KPU RI has prepared regulations regarding the use of social media in campaigns. At that time, the use of social media as a campaign medium was still at a normative level, so there were not many issues related to hoaxes (false news) or hate speech. In the 2019 election, there was a significant increase in the use of social media as a campaign tool; however, its implementation was not aimed at improving the quality of political education. Instead, social media became a platform for spreading political content in the form of hoaxes and hate speech, with the aim of undermining the electability of certain candidates. From a campaign perspective, hoaxes and hate speech are categorized as black campaigns and negative campaigns, which are prohibited during the election campaign period of 2019. The discovery of hoaxes in several social media posts indicates that the 2019 election took place in the post-truth era.

From August 2018 to September 30, 2019, 3,356 hoaxes were recorded (Kominfo, 2019). Based on this data, the occurrence of hoax content increased significantly from January to April 2019, coinciding with election day on April 17, 2019. Kominfo recorded at least 800,000 accounts contributing to the spread of hoaxes during this period (Latief, 2019). However, even after the election and until September 2019, the number of hoax content findings remained high.

The presence of hoaxes and hate speech during the 2019 Election triggered the development of the post-truth era, where widespread falsehoods occurred not due to the public's lack of access to information but as a result of low regulation of information debitage (information overload) that is openly accessible to the public (Latief, 2019). The organization of the 2019 Election in the post-truth era diminished the essence of the democratic celebration, as the dominance of presidential election issues overshadowed those of the legislative election. This condition demonstrated the absence of correlation or continuity between the contestation of Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates and the Legislative candidates at the National, Provincial, and District/City levels.

In Indonesia, the post-truth phenomenon is often associated with the use of SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup) issues and identity politics, particularly sentiments related to ethnicity and religion. The use of SARA issues and identity politics can disrupt national stability, as they easily influence public emotional responses, making people vulnerable to incitement and provocation. A survey (Ramadhan & Santosa, 2023) revealed that 49 percent of respondents were worried, and 7 percent were very worried about the recurrence of divisions during the 2024 Election. The same survey also highlighted respondents' concerns about the use of divisive campaign strategies by 2024 Election candidates, with 49.3 percent expressing worry and 18.8 percent expressing great concern. These findings indicate that the 2019 Election left a significant mark, as it was characterized by fierce rivalry among presidential candidate supporters.

At the beginning of 2023, We Are Social reported that the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 212.9 million people, equivalent to 77 percent of the total population (Clinten, 2023). This figure is double the number recorded in 2014, the year when regulations on the use of social media as a campaign tool were first introduced, which stood at 88.1 million users. Meanwhile, active social media users in Indonesia in 2023 reached 167 million (Widi, 2023). The increasing number of social media users in Indonesia has accelerated the dissemination of information, including the widespread circulation of hoaxes. From January to October 2023, Kominfo recorded 2,736 instances of hoax content, while Turn Back Hoax identified 2,947 instances of hoax content related to the 2024 Election.

In facing the 2024 Presidential Election, the post-truth phenomenon manifests through the spread of hoaxes and provocative content containing hate speech. With the increasing number of social media users, the potential for the post-truth phenomenon to occur also rises significantly. This condition represents a negative use of cyberspace, as it poses a detrimental impact on national integration. The presence of political post-truth undermines political education in Indonesia. Moreover, the effects of this phenomenon are not limited to the period leading up to or during the 2024 General Election but also extend negatively into the tenure of the elected president. The post-truth phenomenon creates a deep societal polarization, marginalizing certain segments of the population. Its impact will also persist beyond the inauguration of the elected president, potentially leading to the exploitation of policies implemented by the administration. Continuously, the post-truth phenomenon will hinder foreign investment in Indonesia, as investors may feel insecure about investing in a country with highly volatile political stability. Additionally, the post-truth phenomenon can result in negative media coverage by international outlets, damaging Indonesia's reputation on the global stage. This situation will also have adverse effects on Indonesia's diplomatic relations, further exacerbating the nation's challenges in navigating international politics and cooperation.

The circulation of hoaxes and hate speech has become increasingly massive as internet technology becomes more accessible and available at one's fingertips. Human lifestyles have evolved alongside the development of internet technology, leading to the emergence of cyberspace. Digital cyberspace demands attention due to the proliferation of new media platforms. These platforms often disseminate hoaxes, fake news, and hate speech, which can easily influence public opinion in the public sphere and significantly contribute to the rise of the post-truth phenomenon. In the post-truth era, democracy is under threat as repeated falsehoods condition society to prefer alternative facts—facts that align with what they want to hear. This cultural shift has also given rise to what is known as participatory culture, where individuals are not merely social media users but also active producers of media content, including hoaxes. As a result, people tend to trust hoaxes more readily than facts. The existence of post-truth poses serious threats to the conduct of elections and the governance of the state.

2. Literature Review

Harold D. Lasswell, as cited by Andi et al. (2016), explained that propaganda is the engineering of social symbols to manage or control public opinion, disregarding physical proximity. The manipulation of social symbols serves as a stimulus to elicit reactions from the general audience. Similarly, Lasdilas Farago, in *Spymaster* (Sukarno, 2011), stated that propaganda is a primary instrument in political warfare. Propaganda (Saronto, 2018) is a planned activity through actions, verbal statements, or a combination of both, with the intention of changing the attitudes and behaviors of the target according to the will of the propaganda agent. The success of propaganda is measured by how well the agent can exploit the psychological weaknesses of the target. The planning in propaganda will influence the impact on the target, either with the aim of uniting (cohesive) or dividing behavior (divisive). Hans Prunckun (2010) explains that a threat is a determination to harm or create a sense of insecurity for individuals, groups, or countries, resulting in physical or emotional damage. A threat does not occur by itself but happens due to an intermediary, namely the threat agent or actor. The existence of a threat actor is influenced by two main components: threat intent (intention) and threat capability (ability).

Post-truth (Ashari, 2021) refers to an era where lies are disguised as truths through the manipulation of the emotions and feelings of netizens. The Oxford Dictionary also declared Post-Truth as the Word of the Year in 2016, defining it as a social condition where emotions and personal beliefs have more influence in shaping public opinion than facts (Amilin, 2019). Lee McIntyre, in the book *Media Kebenaran dan Post Truth* (2022), reveals that the term *truthiness* (truthiness) was coined by Stephen Colbert in 2005 to describe the belief in truth without supporting facts. Ralph Keyes, as cited in Budi Gunawan (2021), explains that the presence of the post-truth era has blurred the boundaries between truth and falsehood, resulting in a coexistence between the two. Post-truth is also described as an era where alternative facts are more meaningful and trusted than absolute facts. The existence of post-truth is closely linked to hoaxes, fake news, and hate speech. These three components have an emotional impact on society in the digital world.

3. Methods

This study will use the Netnography research method, which is a qualitative study of political interactions in Cyber Society, particularly on the Twitter platform, using the keywords "Election Fraud and Presidential Election" and "Bawaslu Supervision," with posts dated from November 14, 2023, the date of the presidential candidate pair announcement, to December 31, 2023. Furthermore, interviews will be conducted with several practitioners and professionals to understand the scenario of post-truth formation and the level of its threat. The raw data will then be processed using content analysis, which will later result in a judgment. On the other hand, the results of the threat analysis by Prunckun will also form a similar judgment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Crawling Data Result

Based on screening social media posts using a social media monitoring tool with the keywords "Pilpres 2024," "Pemilu 2024," and "Bawaslu," 1,882,037 posts were obtained from various social media platforms. Specifically, the posts were sourced from the following platforms: 1,280,141 posts from Twitter/X, 202,913 posts from online media platforms, 151,591 posts from Instagram, 86,795 posts from YouTube, 86,795 posts from Facebook, and 12,257 posts from TikTok.

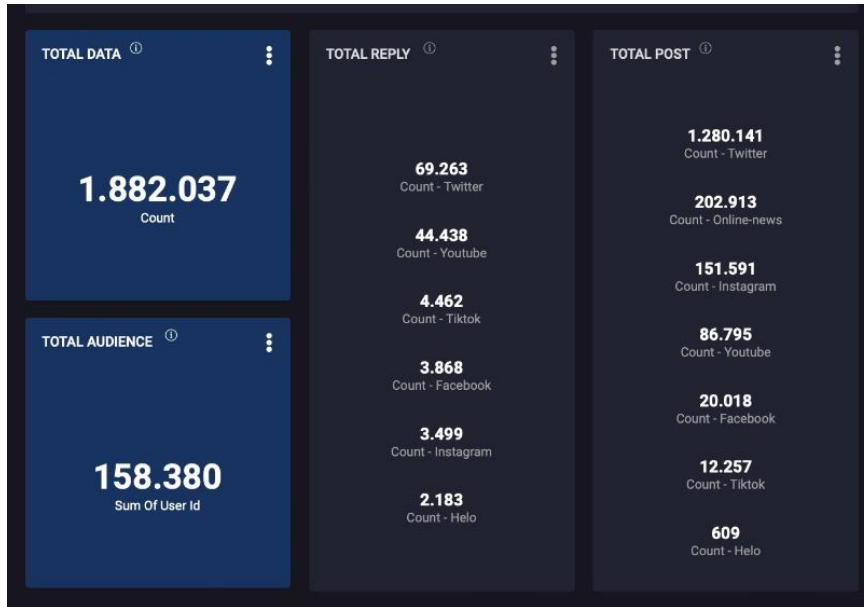


Figure 1. The Result of Social Media Monitoring Crawling

Let's look at the monthly search trends. As shown in the Audience Trend chart, the three keywords have significantly increased since the registration and announcement of the presidential candidates and continued throughout the campaign period.

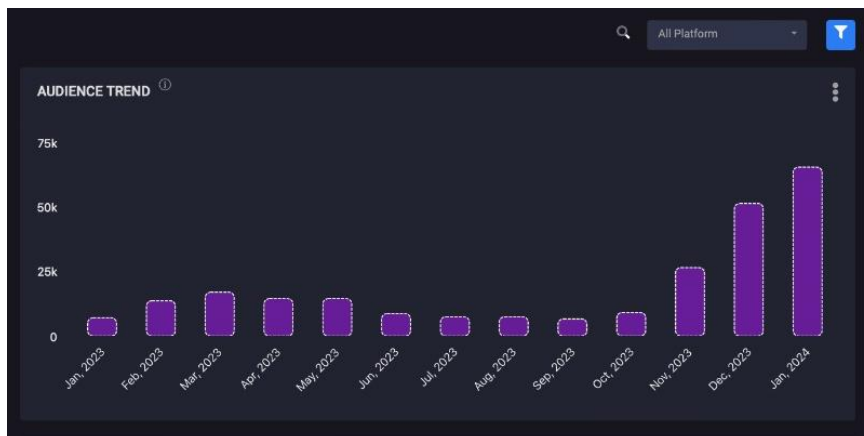


Figure 2. Audience Trend Chart

Meanwhile, based on the user action trends for the three keywords, the actions of netizens have been dominated by the massive spread of posts. However, based on the graph, posts from each content have not yet received overall attention from netizens, indicating that the interaction remains one-sided. Since the beginning of the year until the registration of the presidential candidates, the action trend has fluctuated and tended to decline. However, from the registration stage until the campaign period, the trends for retweets and comments have increased. This situation shows that social media users are becoming interconnected, forming interactions. Based on the screening results, a more specific data crawling was conducted using the keywords “fraud” and “supervision” on the Twitter/X platform within the timeframe of November 14 to December 31, 2023. This resulted in 5,459 posts from 2,988 Twitter/X user accounts. Subsequently, the data was filtered by eliminating content without engagement value, leaving 302 posts from 161 Twitter/X user accounts with measurable engagement.

Table 1. Crawling Result Tweets

	Raw Data		Engagement Filter Results	
	Post	User	Post	User
“Bawaslu”	3682	2030	259	132
“Kecurangan Pemilu”	1469	701	40	56
“Kecurangan Pilpres”	308	257	3	31
Total	5459	2988	302	161

Based on the netnography results, Using the three keywords, the 302 posts were made by 161 accounts, categorized as buzzer accounts, authentic accounts, and editorial accounts. Editorial accounts refer to news accounts such as Kompas, Viva, and Liputan6. Authentic accounts, in their posts, still display aspects of their personal lives, which distinguishes them from buzzer accounts. Buzzer accounts are identified as solely posting politically oriented content. Throughout 2023, Kominfo identified 1,618 hoax contents, with 386 of them categorized under politics. Meanwhile, after the announcement of the presidential candidates on November 14 until December 31, 2023, 82 hoax contents were found in the political category, accounting for 21 percent of the total political hoax findings for the year.

Turn Back Hoax identified 645 hoax contents related to politics throughout 2023. During the research timeframe, 156 hoax contents were found. According to Turn Back Hoax, the distribution of hoax content across platforms is as follows: 56 content YouTube, 41 content Facebook, 28 content TikTok, 20 content Twitter, 6 content WhatsApp, 4 content Instagram, and 1 content Online Portals. This highlights the platforms most frequently used for spreading political hoaxes, with YouTube being the most dominant.

4.2. The Formation of Post-Truth through Political Propaganda on Social Media

The research conducted netnography on data crawled from tweets on Twitter/X using the three keywords “Kecurangan Pilpres 2024” (2024 Presidential Election Fraud), “Kecurangan Pemilu 2024” (2024 Election Fraud), and “Pengawasan Bawaslu” (Bawaslu Supervision). The observations revealed that social media users' posts and political narratives employed propaganda techniques to influence or steer public opinion. The Name Calling propaganda technique was notably used by attaching labels to one of the candidates, such as “Blimbing Wuluh”, “Asam Sulfat”, and “Gemoy”. In addition, the Card Stacking propaganda technique was also employed by repeatedly raising similar issues, such as the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the change in the minimum age requirement for presidential or vice-presidential candidates. This technique was further utilized by continuously associating certain state institutions or election organizers with a bias toward specific candidates. The association of bias also demonstrated the use of the Bandwagon technique, which was leveraged to attract support through claims of influencer endorsements for particular candidates. These propaganda strategies highlight efforts to shape public perception and garner political advantage.

The Glittering Generalities technique was also frequently used, primarily to highlight the negative traits of prominent candidates. Examples include allegations of human rights violations, suspicions of illegal campaign funding, and disparaging certain candidates regarding their debate performance. On the other hand, there remain instances of political propaganda by social media users that have not been clearly identified as employing specific propaganda techniques. These instances provide netizens with the opportunity to personally analyze opinion-based facts, allowing them to form their interpretations. The Card Stacking technique is considered the propaganda method most closely aligned with the formation of post-truth, as repetitive propaganda emphasizing only one side of an issue can compel society to accept and believe the message. This selective presentation of facts reinforces biased narratives, shaping public perception and diminishing the importance of objective truth. Card Stacking is highly effective in elections because it is built upon the basic beliefs and perceptions of ordinary people.

Buzzers are generally categorized as propaganda actors. Their goal is to influence others' ESTOM (attitude, emotions, thoughts, and actions) according to their will. Their techniques vary, with some using name-calling, others applying the bandwagon technique, and many employing other tactics. Essentially, buzzers aim to make their beliefs or desires the beliefs or desires of the larger public. Whether they are

partisan or anarchistic actors, their target remains the same: to influence as many people as possible. On the other hand, almost all of the sources who use Twitter/X experience doubt when they encounter posts that contradict what they believe or know. In some cases, this doubt almost causes them to alter their reasoning and logic. This illustrates how conflicting information, especially when presented persuasively or repetitively, can cause cognitive dissonance, prompting individuals to reconsider their beliefs or adjust their thinking to reconcile the new information.

Based on the results of the netnographic observation, it can be concluded that political propaganda content does not immediately create post-truth. There is a process and stages involved in destabilizing the target's opinion. According to the Audience Trends graph, the content was massively spread at the beginning of the year, but only received responses when the candidate registration phase began. This situation further supports the idea that repetitive propaganda can influence the target's thinking and logic, gradually shaping their perceptions and beliefs over time. Political propaganda does not emerge spontaneously; instead, some intellectual actors play a significant role in creating opportunities for political propaganda to take place, thereby forming the scenario of post-truth. These actors strategically craft narratives, manipulate emotions, and exploit psychological weaknesses to shape public perception, blurring the lines between truth and falsehood. Through this process, they create a fertile ground for the spread of post-truth, where emotions and personal beliefs outweigh objective facts in influencing public opinion.

In Indonesia's democratic system, there are groups known as the Political Superstructure and the Political Infrastructure. Ideally, the political infrastructure group should offer criticism of the political superstructure to ensure the health of democracy in a country. However, in Indonesia, the situation is different. The political superstructure utilizes the political infrastructure to attack political opponents within the political superstructure itself. This condition may appear as a form of criticism, but the criticism is often tendentious rather than constructive. In fact, many of these criticisms lack a solid foundation and are based on hoaxes. The post-truth phenomenon begins with the existence of internal conflict within the political superstructure. In this context, components of the political superstructure seek assistance and collaborate with the political infrastructure to win the next general election contest. This assistance can take a positive form, such as enhancing electability, or a negative one, where strategies may involve spreading misleading or false narratives to discredit opponents and manipulate public opinion. Such dynamics contribute to the formation of post-truth, where emotional appeals and personal beliefs overshadow objective facts in shaping the political landscape.

Next, the narrative and content of the propaganda are constructed to achieve the intended goal. If the content or narrative contains propaganda, it has the potential to include elements of hoaxes, hate speech, or fake news. However, if it does not, it will merely become part of the social media algorithms. If propaganda that contains hoaxes, hate speech, or fake news receives a positive emotional response from the public, the post-truth phenomenon will intensify. If it does not receive such a response, it will simply remain within the realm of social media algorithms. As content with alternative facts continues to receive positive emotional reactions, the space for post-truth will expand within the social media algorithmic environment, thereby increasing the intensity of post-truth itself. This creates a feedback loop where misinformation and emotionally charged narratives become more entrenched, further shaping public opinion in a distorted manner.

4.3. Forms and Levels of Threat Posed by Post-Truth in the 2024 Election

Based on Hank Prunckun's concept of threats, where the threat agent arises due to intent and capability, the level of threat posed by the existence of Post-Truth in the 2024 election can be described in the following table.

Table 2. Prunckun Threat Variable

Threat Intent	Desire	-	Partisan Group
		-	Anarchist Group
	Expectation	-	Winning a particular candidate pair.
		-	Thwarting the Election.
Threat Capability	Knowledge	-	Have the ability to be carried out in a structured, systematic and massive manner.

Resource	- Can understand Social Media algorithms.
	- Have relations with foreign parties.
	- Have qualified technology.

The buzzers consist of two groups: partisan and anarchist groups. The anarchist group has higher militancy than the partisan group because the goal of the partisan group is only to win a specific presidential candidate, which means it is for personal interests. Meanwhile, the anarchist group has higher militancy because they aim to disrupt the conduct of the election, particularly the presidential election. They also can spread hoaxes and hate speech without being detected by the system. This means that they not only learn how to create anonymous accounts but also study social media algorithms so that their content can become trending among audiences. On the other hand, it is also believed that they have sufficiently advanced technology, at least technology that helps them read social media algorithms.

The political infrastructure group consists of intellectuals because they are able to build certain narratives. They are not only strong in terms of funding but also receive support from abroad. It can be concluded that the threat capability of buzzers is not limited to just using social media but also includes special skills such as the ability to read and change the target's ESTOM (Emotional, Social, and Thought Management), the ability to build propaganda narratives that the target can accept, the ability to avoid legal traps under the ITE Law, the ability to study social media algorithms, as well as having advanced technological tools and foreign support.

Meanwhile, regarding the level of threat, practitioners and experts agree that the existence of the post-truth era poses a significant threat. This means that the impact of post-truth can lead to problems at a national level, even with the potential to undermine sovereignty and national unity. Almost all the variables that shape post-truth are threats. We are witnessing a battle of narratives and political disinformation on the stage of the 2024 presidential election. On another front, there is also a narrative that human rights violations are just a political issue. All these narratives weaken the essence of human rights violations as crimes, creating a new perception among the public that human rights violations are merely political language, not legal crimes. A deviation from moral standards in interpreting an event is one of the characteristics of the post-truth era. Political branding has succeeded in obscuring the meaning of crime and virtue. People's preferences in choosing eventually become super-subjective, allowing bad people to win in elections.

The existence of post-truth in Indonesia can manifest as hybrid warfare, which is a combination of conventional warfare, asymmetric warfare, and cyber warfare. Currently, cyber warfare is associated with a war of narratives, where ideas are pitted against each other without considering facts but rather based on feelings and emotions. Based on Robert Ring's scale, the post-truth phenomenon in Indonesia is currently at a significant threat level but has not yet reached a critical stage. While it appears to disrupt national political stability primarily, there are no clear indications that it is leading to actions that could endanger the nation's sovereignty and unity.

According to experts and practitioners, the presence of post-truth in the midst of the 2024 presidential election poses a serious threat at a significant level, as it can lead to a shift in logical thinking and disrupt national political stability. Meanwhile, the threat of post-truth represents a form of hybrid warfare dominated by a war of narratives and logic.

5. Conclusion

The presence of post-truth through political propaganda on social media is inevitable due to technological advancements. Post-truth in Indonesia was formed even before the General Elections Commission (KPU) began the stages of the 2024 election. As time goes by, the intensity of post-truth has been increasing because many people believe the lies that are continuously repeated. In propaganda techniques, this method is similar to the use of the card stacking technique. The goal of this technique is to change the public's ESTOM (Emotional, Social, and Thought Management). On the other hand, the emergence of post-truth cannot be separated from the collaboration between the political superstructure and political infrastructure. This cooperation arises due to efforts to win the political contest. Post-truth also poses a serious threat because its impact can disrupt national political stability, although it is still far from threatening the sovereignty and unity of the nation. Moreover, the actors behind the creation

of the post-truth scenario also involve foreign support, which further increases the potential threat posed by this phenomenon.

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