

## *Digital Literacy In Detecting Hoaxes In Instagram Media (Analysis Study Of Communication Science Students, State Islamic University Of North Sumatra)*

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores the urgency of digital literacy in detecting hoaxes on social media, especially Instagram, among students of Communication Sciences of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU). This research identifies crucial problems in the spread of false information or hoaxes that have the potential to divide society and damage information integrity. This study uses a qualitative methodology, this research adopts an ethnographic approach and a constructive paradigm to gain a deep understanding of how students perceive and respond to the information they find on social media. The location of this study is Campus 4 Tuntungan UINSU, and the resource persons were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience and activeness in using Instagram as well as their involvement in digital literacy issues. Primary data sources are obtained from in-depth interviews and participatory observations, while secondary data sources include relevant document studies. The data analysis technique used is the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana analytical model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity test of the data was carried out through source triangulation. The results of the study show that even though students have access to digital literacy tools, there is still a tendency to trust and spread unverified content. The conclusion of the study emphasizes that digital literacy is not only important as a tool to verify information and avoid the spread of hoaxes, but also as a means to increase critical awareness of media content.*

**Keywords: Digital Literacy, Hoaxes, Instagram**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The dynamics of hoaxes in Indonesia are a problem that still exists today. In fact, research shows that there are around 800,000 hoax spreading sites in Indonesia [1]. Ironically, cumulatively there are around 60% of people who are exposed to hoax information while only 21-30% are able to identify hoax information.

Hoax information can divide society because it is misleading so it needs to be addressed [2]. Hoaxes in the new media era are accumulated by several individuals such as illegal media, fake accounts and anonymous sources. Generally, hoaxes are spread with the intention of polarization, violence, defamation and attracting negative emotions [3].

In today's era of disruption, it is quite difficult to identify messages without verifying their truthfulness. Many people use social media to spread fake news and bullying [4]. To facilitate the immediate impact of social media activism, some activists adopt deceptive strategies, altering the perception of ordinary people and manipulating their behavior despite ethical considerations [5].

At this level, several hoax issues are starting to run rampant in Indonesia. For example, the hoax phenomenon circulating on social media about Raffi Ahmad who is said to be distributing Rp30 million to help pay off debts is an illustrative example of the spread of false information that takes advantage of individual fame to deceive the public. In this case, the perpetrator used a fake Facebook account under the name @BossRaffi&Nagita, in contrast to the real account verified @RaffiAhmadLagi, to spread the narrative that Raffi Ahmad would provide financial assistance [6].

The narrative is intended to invite responses from the public in the hope of getting money, but actually aims to deceive victims by directing victims to certain WhatsApp links that have the potential to collect personal data or associate victims with illegal online loans.

According to Septiaji Eko Nugroho, Chairman of the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Community Community, the phenomenon of fake news or "hoaxes" that is not controlled can have a serious impact on the social integrity of the community. He understands "hoax" as information that is deliberately engineered to obscure the truth or as a form of distorting facts by using a narrative that seems convincing but does not have a strong basis for verification. Nugroho emphasized that the spread of fake news with the intention of provoking or slandering can trigger division and tension among members of society. This shows the importance of joint efforts to evaluate and supervise online media that produce this kind of content without credible sources, as a preventive measure to maintain information integrity and strengthen social coherence in society [7], [8], [9].

In an increasingly unlimited information age, social media such as Instagram has transformed into a massive information exchange center, allowing every user to become a source of information. However, this ease of access also includes the risk of spreading inaccurate information or hoaxes, which can affect public perception and trigger significant social consequences. Communication science students, as part of the generation of digital natives and aspiring media practitioners, are at the forefront of facing and tackling these challenges. Research that focuses on the digital literacy of communication science students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) in detecting hoaxes on Instagram is relevant and important.

The need for strong digital literacy among communication science students is aimed at equipping them with the necessary tools to sort and verify information before sharing it. This skill has become increasingly important amid the rampant spread of fake news or hoaxes on platforms like Instagram, which can quickly go viral and influence public opinion. By understanding how social media works and information verification techniques, students are expected to be wiser in using social media, both as consumers and content producers [10].

In addition, by highlighting the specific experiences of communication science students at UINSU, this study recognizes the diversity of educational contexts and the use of social media in Indonesia. This provides a rich local perspective, enriching the discussion of digital literacy which is often dominated by Western contexts. It emphasizes the importance of understanding local dynamics in formulating effective digital literacy strategies, ensuring that they are relevant and applicable in the student-specific context.

The urgency of this research is to overcome the challenges posed by the spread of hoaxes on social media, especially Instagram, which has become an inseparable part of daily life, especially for students of Communication Sciences of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU). As a digital native generation, students are in a key position to influence perceptions and behaviors in their social networks, making their skills in identifying false information crucial to minimize the spread of hoaxes. Furthermore, for communication science students who will have a career in the field of media and communication, honing their digital literacy skills to detect hoaxes not only forms the foundation of their professional ethics, but also prepares them as the front line in the fight against disinformation. Therefore, this research is very important to develop effective educational strategies in increasing digital literacy, as well as making a real contribution to collective efforts to confront and reduce the negative impact of hoaxes in the social and digital environment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This research sits at the level of hoax detection specifically in the context of Instagram media. As a new medium, Instagram has a significant impact on the way we interact and communicate with each other. One of the key aspects of Instagram is its ability to allow users to share photos and videos instantly with their followers [11]. This has created a strong visual culture where users can express themselves, share moments of daily life, and expand their communication reach through engaging images and videos.

In addition, Instagram has also become an important platform in promoting certain lifestyles, whether it is through influencers who share content around fashion, food, travel, or other topics [12]. These influencers have a great influence on their followers and are often a source of inspiration for many. They not only affect consumption trends, but they can also influence people's opinions and views on things.

First, Abdillah & Handoko Putro [13] in their research on "Digital Ethics in the Use of Social Media by Generation Z" used a survey approach to assess the level of ethical awareness of Generation Z in using social media. The study found that most respondents have an understanding of digital ethics but often fail to apply them in practice. This indicates the existence of a gap between ethical knowledge and actual behavior, highlighting the need for more effective and structured education in digital ethics to improve social integrity in the use of social media.

Afdal et al. [14] In the study "Trends in Hoax Behavior Among Indonesian Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic" adopted a mixed-method methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results of this study revealed that increased stress and isolation during the pandemic contributed to

the spread of unverified information. Students, while quite digitally literate, are often involved in the spread of false information due to the lack of self-verification, underscoring the need for more intensive and specialized media literacy programs.

Then, Asnaria et al [15] in their work "The Role of Digital Literacy in the Spread of Hoaxes on Instagram to Strengthen the Character of Unity" uses a qualitative approach to explore how digital literacy can reduce the spread of hoaxes. Research shows that with the increase in digital literacy, students can be more critical of the information they receive and share, which indirectly contributes to the formation of the character of national unity. These results support a deeper integration of the digital literacy curriculum in educational institutions as a means of character building and unity.

Furthermore, Fardiah et al. [16] examine "Digital Literacy Related to Hoaxes on Instagram" through content analysis and online surveys of students. Their findings show that while college students have access to digital literacy tools, there is still a tendency to trust and spread unverified content, especially those that fit their confirmation biases. This study emphasizes the importance of education that not only focuses on tools, but also on the critical application of digital literacy in daily life.

The last one, Fauziyah et al. [17] in the research "Digital Literacy in Dealing with Hoaxes as a Means of Unifying the Nation" applies a digital ethnographic approach to research how digital literacy can help in dealing with hoaxes. The results of the study show that a better understanding of digital literacy helps students in identifying hoaxes and preventing their spread, which in turn supports national harmony and unity. The study suggests a more coordinated national program to improve digital literacy, which can strengthen the foundations of social and political cohesion among the younger generation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative methodology with an ethnographic approach and a constructivist paradigm, which aims to deeply understand the experiences and perspectives of communication science students of the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) in detecting hoaxes on Instagram media [18], [19], [20]. The constructivist paradigm allows research to build an understanding of how students perceive and respond to the information they find on social media, which is considered subjective and diverse. The location of this research is at Campus 4 Tuntungan, which was chosen because of the concentration of communication science students and its relationship with the topic of digital literacy.

The selection of resource persons was carried out through purposive sampling, which allowed researchers to select students based on their experience and activeness in using Instagram as well as their involvement in digital literacy issues [21]. This criterion was chosen to ensure that the data obtained can reflect the various techniques and strategies used by students in detecting hoaxes. Selected speakers are expected to provide in-depth insights into the dynamics of Instagram usage and effective ways to identify misleading or incorrect information. The speakers are as follows:

Initial Name	Gender	Age
TO	F	22
AS	F	22
WILL	F	22
SR	M	21
IS	F	19
TIME	M	23
SR	F	20
RF	F	21
NSAM	M	19
MM	M	21

**Table 1.** Research Informant

In data collection, the techniques used include in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document studies. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore students' personal experiences in dealing with hoaxes on Instagram, while participatory observation helped researchers gain a contextual understanding of their interactions on social media. Relevant digital documents and archives are also reviewed to support theoretical and contextual understanding of digital literacy and hoaxes [22].

Data analysis was carried out by following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana analytical model, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Through data reduction, irrelevant information is filtered and the focus of analysis is clarified. Data presentation is carried out through matrices,

diagrams, and narratives to facilitate interpretation and drawing conclusions. Source verification and triangulation are used as a method of testing the validity of data, ensuring that the findings of the study are credible and trustworthy, by comparing information from different sources and methods [23].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Urgency of Digital Literacy in Detecting Hoaxes

In the context of today's information society, the ability to sort and verify information has become an indispensable skill. The development of information and communication technology has led to a drastic increase in the volume and speed of information circulating, which is not always balanced by an increase in the quality of such information. This causes the phenomenon of hoaxes to spread increasingly widely and quickly, especially through social media platforms such as Instagram. Digital literacy skills are important to enable users, especially students, to distinguish between credible and misleading information.

Research on digital literacy among communication science students reveals that even though they are exposed to different types of information, not all have adequate skills to validate the information. Awareness of the existence of hoaxes and their negative impacts does not automatically increase the ability to detect hoaxes. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to integrate a curriculum that strengthens digital literacy skills. The program should be designed to train students in the techniques of fact-checking and assessing diverse sources of information [24].

Advances in digital technology have also made it easier to spread false information, which is often designed to attract attention or influence public opinion. Therefore, understanding how information is presented, why certain content goes viral, and what impact such false information has on society is important. In the face of this, communication science students can take advantage of digital literacy education to develop a critical view of the content they consume and share [25].

Effective digital literacy education must include critical aspects of media, understanding of technology, and adequate interpersonal skills in the context of social media. Thus, students not only learn about tools and techniques in handling digital information, but also about ethics and responsibility in using such information. This training allows them to become responsible digital citizens, who not only consume information, but also contribute to the accurate and balanced dissemination of information [26].

Case studies on how students detect hoaxes on Instagram show variations in the approaches and techniques used. It confirms that there is no one universal method in digital literacy, but rather a spectrum of skills that must be developed continuously. From independent source verification to news content analysis, students must be equipped with a variety of tools to navigate the complex media landscape [27].

One of the challenges in digital literacy education is the constant change in technology and methods of disseminating information. The curriculum should be flexible and adaptive, with the ability to update educational materials on a regular basis to reflect changes in media technology. This includes an understanding of social media algorithms, which play a key role in the dissemination of content, as well as increasingly sophisticated digital manipulation techniques [28].

Along with the increasing need for digital literacy, there is also a need for initiatives to test the effectiveness of different teaching methods. Further research can identify which methods are the most effective in improving digital literacy skills, especially in the context of detecting and responding to hoaxes. This can include everything from digital simulations, practical workshops, to project-based learning activities [29].

Communication science students, with their access to media knowledge, can play an important role in combating hoaxes. They can be agents of

changes in their society, leading initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of information verification. Through campus projects or collaborations with social media platforms, they can help create a healthier and more transparent information environment.

When looking at the social impact of hoaxes, it is also important to consider how they affect specific individuals and groups. For example, hoaxes often target or exploit vulnerable groups, who may not have the resources or knowledge to verify the information they receive. Digital literacy education in universities must include components that address issues of social justice and digital inclusion [30].

The adoption of new technologies and social media by students brings the potential for the rapid dissemination of information, but also the risk of spreading hoaxes. Therefore, extracurricular activities such as digital literacy clubs or discussion groups can be an important platform for practicing digital literacy skills in real-time. This activity can also help build a supportive learning community, where students can share knowledge and strategies in detecting and handling hoaxes.

The urgency of digital literacy education is not only a matter of teaching the right techniques. It is also about cultivating a questioning and analytical attitude towards the information received. Cultivating a culture of healthy skepticism and intellectual curiosity can help students not only in academic settings but also in their daily lives as savvy consumers of information. Thus, digital literacy education becomes not only about tools and techniques, but also about developing the character and ethos needed for modern world navigation.

### Student Understanding of Digital Literacy

Understanding digital literacy has become an important element in the navigation of modern society which is increasingly integrated with digital technology. Students as part of the digitally active population, are faced with an infinite flow of information through various social media and internet platforms. Digital literacy is not only concerned with the ability to access and use information effectively, but it also involves critical skills in evaluating and producing information in an ethical and responsible manner. Thus, digital literacy forms a strong foundation for active participation in the digital society, where this ability is the key in distinguishing between correct information and misinformation or hoax news that is widely circulating.

Among students, digital literacy skills also determine how effectively they can use technology for academic and professional purposes. As the reliance on digital resources for research and learning increases, understanding and implementing digital literacy principles is essential. This includes the ability to identify credible sources, understand online privacy and security issues, and develop digital ethics in communicating and collaborating online. Therefore, research on the level of digital literacy understanding among college students has become particularly relevant to measure the extent to which they have been equipped with these skills and identify areas that still need to be strengthened.

Source of Trust	Hoax indicator	The Effectiveness of Digital Literacy Education
Official government website, trusted media	Sensationalism, grammatical errors	Helpful, but needs improvement and more activity
Fact-checking sites, national media	Suitability of title and content, photo/video editing	Effective, needs better implementation
Verified accounts, journalism	Unofficial accounts, information not supported	Varies; Some consider it less effective

**Table 1.** Student Understanding Related to Digital Literacy

In examining the understanding of digital literacy among UINSU communication science students, this study shows that students have acquired basic knowledge in identifying credible sources of information. Students consistently refer to official government websites and trusted media as the main source of information. This belief reflects a good understanding of the importance of validity and authority in information sources, which is a critical foundation of digital literacy.

In terms of hoax indicators, students showed the ability to recognize suspicious content characteristics, such as sensational titles and grammatical errors. This awareness is important in digital literacy, as often information designed to deceive or mislead tends to use tactics such as sensationalism to attract users' attention. The ability to critically analyze and evaluate content is key in combating the spread of false information.

Furthermore, the use of fact-checking sites and references from national media also shows that students have developed strategies for cross-verification of information. They recognize the importance of comparing information from multiple sources before concluding the truth. This signifies a level of maturity in digital literacy, where verification and diversity of sources are seen as essential components [31].

However, there are several challenges in the effectiveness of digital literacy education that are felt by students. Although many find it useful, some consider that the education received still needs greater improvement and activation. This shows that there is a gap between the curriculum presented and the practical needs of students in facing the real challenges of digital literacy.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of digital literacy education, which is considered "effective" by some students, shows that the program has provided them with enough tools to overcome the challenge of hoax information. However, the implementation of this education needs to be further improved to ensure that all students get maximum benefits and can apply this knowledge consistently [32].

Students who consider digital literacy education as varied or less effective highlight the need for a more inclusive and adaptive approach in educating digital literacy. This could include the integration of the latest technology, more interactive teaching methods, and more practicum activities that allow students to directly engage in media analysis.

Although there has been significant progress in the understanding of digital literacy among UINSU communication science students, there is still significant room for improvement. Effective and responsive digital literacy education is not only important for their academics, but it is also vital in preparing them for real-world challenges in the fast-paced and disinformation-rife information age.

**Against Hoaxes: How Students Handle Hoaxes on Instagram Media**

In today's digital era, social media platforms such as Instagram have become a widely used means for the dissemination of information, including news that is not always accurate or true. Ease of access to social media poses new challenges in the form of the spread of hoax information that can mislead the public and cause social panic. Therefore, it is important for social media users, especially students who are part of the academic community, to be able to identify and overcome hoax news. Communication science students, with access to knowledge of media and digital literacy, are at the forefront of combating this phenomenon.

In this context, the author will delve deeper into how students use their digital literacy knowledge and skills to detect and respond to misleading information. Through various proven methods, students not only actively seek the truth through various credible sources, but also actively contribute to educating their friends and social networks about the importance of verifying information before sharing it. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used and reflect the need for stronger digital literacy education in the academic environment.

Hoax Detection Methods	Source of Trust	Reaction When Detecting Hoaxes
Seeking confirmation from various reliable media sources	Official government website, official media, fact-checking website	Reporting to the platform, disseminating correct information, making clarifications
Check comments to see what other users are saying	Trusted media such as BBC, CNN, local media	Notifying friends or the public, commenting on the authenticity of the story
Analyze news content, look for grammatical errors or photos	Verified Instagram account, reputable news source	Ignoring the news, not disseminating the information
Assess whether the headline is clickbait	Other media platforms, youtubers, influencers	Create clarification posts if news has been shared a lot

**Table 2.** How Students Handle Hoaxes

In a study on digital literacy among communication science students, it was revealed that they applied a systematic method in detecting hoax information on Instagram. As OM explains, the main methods include verification through trusted news sources and analysis of user comments. "Some of the ways I do to determine whether the news is a hoax or not is by looking for other sources from other media to confirm whether the news is a hoax or not," said OM, showing concern for cross-verification as the main tool in detecting the authenticity of news.

Trust in valid and reputable sources of information is also an important pillar in the hoax detection strategy. The US, another respondent, emphasized the importance of referring to official websites and media that have high journalistic integrity. "When I doubt the origin of a news story on Instagram, I usually refer to reliable sources of information such as official news sites," said AS, who showed awareness of the importance of credible sources of information in this fast-paced information era.

The reaction to hoax detection not only includes verification, but also is active in combating the spread of false information. MAAL describes the active steps taken when discovering hoax news: "When I find a news story that I believe is a hoax on Instagram, I usually report it to Instagram as misinformation." This shows social responsibility in preventing the spread of misleading information [33].

Digital literacy education seems to play a crucial role in preparing students to face these challenges. NSAM, shared his experience in journalism class, "I determine whether a news is a hoax or not through fact-checking according to what I have gotten in journalism class." This experience proves that formal education related to media literacy greatly affects their ability in media analysis [34].

The effectiveness of digital literacy education often depends on how intensively the material is taught and applied in the university curriculum. According to MM, "I have never received any official lessons or training from the campus, only from seminars." This highlights that although some institutions have already started, there is still a lot of room for improvement in the delivery of more structured and in-depth digital literacy materials [35].

One of the detection methods used is to check comments on news posts. SR notes that he often looks at whether there are any suspicious uniformity in comments that indicate manipulation: "Usually it can be seen in the form of a photo or video, a caption as well, or sometimes a comment that is almost all similar."

IS brings a perspective on the importance of news content analysis more deeply: "by analyzing that content, by relating that content to the surrounding environment, whether the content or news makes sense if it happens." This approach combines contextual and analytical understanding, which is a hallmark of academic approaches in media literacy.

The need for more inclusive and continuously updated digital literacy education is an important highlight. As NSAM suggests, "there needs to be a more inclusive and hegemonic approach and training." It underscores that digital literacy education must continue to adapt to rapid changes in technology and social media to remain relevant and effective.

## DISCUSSION

In the context of detecting hoaxes on Instagram, UINSU communication science students showed how digital literacy is important in the new media era. New media, which is characterized by interactivity, digitization, and network connections, demands that users have skills that go beyond just content understanding. Students must be able to navigate through the structure and dynamics of platforms such as Instagram, which are not only a medium of information but also a space for social and cultural exchange.

The theory of media ecology, popularized by Marshall McLuhan, states that "media is an extension of man". In this context, Instagram is not only a communication tool but also shapes the way its users see the world. Digital literacy skills enable students to interpret and assess the authenticity and relevance of content in the broader media ecosystem, where each message can have a significant social impact [36].

An analysis of student behavior in identifying hoaxes on Instagram reveals a tendency to question the visual and contextual aspects of information. This corresponds to a critical aspect of media ecology theory, where a deep understanding of media and its impact helps individuals in identifying and processing information more effectively. In this case, UINSU communication science students are proven to utilize their analytical skills to differentiate between authentic and manipulative content [37].

The digital literacy education received by students does not only focus on theory but also on practical applications. This can be seen from class activities that often include real-life case analysis from Instagram, where students are asked to evaluate news sources and content. Through this approach, students are taught not only to passively consume content but to actively check and challenge the authenticity and integrity of the information they receive [38].

The application of new media theory in digital literacy also teaches students about the role of algorithms in presenting content on Instagram. Knowledge of how algorithms affect what users see in their feeds helps college students to better understand how hoaxes can be customized and targeted to reach specific audiences. This reinforces the importance of critical skills in the evaluation of sources and content, especially in a highly dynamic and personalized environment [39].

Furthermore, the interaction between students in class discussions and online forums shows the importance of collaboration and communication in developing digital literacy skills. They learn from each other, sharing insights and strategies in detecting hoaxes, which shows that digital literacy also develops through social interaction. This is in line with the principles of media ecology which emphasizes on the interaction between elements in communication systems.

The ability of students to adjust theoretical knowledge with real practice is an important indication of the effectiveness of digital literacy education. In preparing them for the post-university world, digital literacy education not only equips them with the skills to tackle hoaxes but also with a broader understanding of media dynamics in contemporary society. This allows them to become more active and conscious participants in the global media ecosystem.

This study introduces a unique approach by integrating new media theory and media ecology into the digital literacy analysis of communication science students, with a focus on detecting hoaxes on Instagram. This study reveals how students not only use technical skills in assessing the authenticity of content but also explore the social and cultural implications of digital interactions. Thus, this research opens up new insights into how social media plays a role as an ecological environment that influences and is influenced by its users, providing a new perspective on the interaction between technology, information, and users in the digital era. This encourages a more holistic and contextual understanding of digital literacy which has often been seen only from a functional point of view.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above presentation, it comprehensively explores the important impact of digital literacy in identifying and handling hoaxes on social media, especially Instagram, among UINSU communication science students. The results of the study show that digital literacy is not only important as a tool to verify information and avoid the spread of hoaxes, but also as a means to increase critical awareness of media content. Through the use of the new media theory framework and media ecology, this study describes how interactions in social media shape users' perceptions and reactions to the information they consume. Students, equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills, can take an active role in the fight against hoaxes, not only as consumers of information but also as responsible creators and disseminators of content.

Furthermore, this study reveals that, although educational institutions have begun to implement curricula that support digital literacy, there is still a significant need to strengthen and expand this education to respond to the changing dynamics of technology and media. Effective digital literacy education should be adaptive and inclusive, enriching students with the ability to not only challenge dubious content but also to understand and analyze the social consequences of digital interactions. Thus, students can be more effective as agents of change in a digital society, promoting informative and responsible dialogue in a public space that is increasingly dominated by social media.

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