

Combating Infodemic Covid-19: Government Response Against Fake News on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The global commitment to fighting the pandemic is not only about medical and epidemiological work, but also about how information about the disease is disseminated. The threat of the Covid-19 infodemic is no less dangerous than the pandemic itself. The phenomenon of infodemic has distorted the work of science and reduced public trust in state authorities. This research has identified, mapped, and analyzed official government responses to fake news attacks on social media. This study uses an interpretive-phenomenological approach, related to the spread and belief of fake news about Covid-19 in Indonesia. Data analysis uses the Nvivo-12 Pro application, as an artificial intelligence tool to support data exploration from various sources. The results show that the quality of media literacy, public communication performance, and the effectiveness of government regulations have become part of the challenges in mitigating infodemic. The level of public trust in information from social media contributes to the decline in trust in fake news about Covid-19. Stimulation from the social media news that does not control the belief in myths and false information about Covid-19. Content creators who have produced, posted, and shared on social media channels that are less critical, have an impact on the infodemic situation. The solution is to increase media literacy education and the effectiveness of law enforcement in mitigating the infodemic in Indonesia.



INTRODUCTION

Social media has made easy access to news and information in the form of text, audio, and audiovisual very easy. The downside is that this convenience also supports the spread of fake news. In general, term of fake news has been referred to as fraud, manipulation, fabrication, satirical, and parody (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016; Marchi, 2012; Tandoc et al., 2018). In particular, fake news can be said to be completely good or contain intentional misleading elements in its content or context (Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020; Sushmita & Rahmanto, 2021). Such fake information and news is normally circulated online and has the specific purpose of stimulating emotions and generating more attention. The goal will be to reproduce news as well as messages over populations; stain the image; intimidating the press, closing and silencing dissent (Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020).

Misinformation and disinformation related COVID-19 have been spreading relentlessly in the media (Mian & Khan, 2020), despite efforts by social media companies to stem the transmission of fake news (Allcott et al., 2019). World agencies under the United Nations have also warned of the massive spread of false, inaccurate, and misleading COVID-19 content (Melki et al., 2021), which is WHO calls an infodemic (WHO, 2020). The news has become a "global epidemic" by spreading myths and distrust in methods of preventing and curing epidemics that are claimed to endanger human life, along with global mitigation efforts (Mian & Khan, 2020; Pulido et al., 2020).

Every communication strategy needs to realize the importance of building a sustainable information supply chain for improving organizational performance (Sriyakul, Jernsittiparsert, et al., 2019; Sriyakul, Prianto, et al., 2019; Sutduean et al., 2019). Effective communication is very important to reduce public distrust (Faisah & Prianto, 2015; Prianto, 2014; Prianto & Amalia, 2019; Reynolds & Quinn Crouse, 2008). Precise and continuous media coverage that increased public awareness and understanding of the pandemic (Davidson & Wallack, 2004; Pratt et al., 2002). In a media ecosystem characterized by information overload, social media plays an equal role than conventional media (Nurmandi, Achmad; Purnomo, Eko Priyo; Prianto, Andi Luhur; Solahudin; Jaenuri, 2015). Social media can also be an important channel to revealing the public about viruses, medical diagnoses, prevention methods, and symptoms (Liu & Kim, 2011; Smith, 2009).

Lack of quality control mechanisms in traditional gatekeepers, makes social media face a choice. Scholars use it to successfully propagate scientific findings and guidelines (Bardus et al., 2020; Vicario et al., 2016), while millions of others peddle false information in the same place (Evanega et al., 2020; Lazer et al., 2018), which distorts science by underestimating disease, increasing public skepticism of the government. This includes preventive policy actions and selected mitigation planning and promoting harmful methods and practices (Ricard & Medeiros, 2020; Vigdor, 2020), mainly in societies with low levels of



media literacy (Jhummon-Mahadnac et al., 2012; Ratzan et al., 2020).

The purpose of this article is to explore the spread of Covid-19 information through social media in identifying, mapping, and analyzing the government's response to countering fake news channels and content in public communications in Indonesia. Referring to the analysis model by Sommarive et al., (2018, pp. 246–255), this study aims to (1) identify news that is widely

circulated in 2020-2021, (2) chart the spread of verified rumors and news, and (3) analyze the headline qualitatively to determine its potential popularity. The results of the study provide insight into strategies for mitigating information and at the same time maximizing social media sites as communication platforms to convey accurate messages and fight the spread of fake news related to the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

Picture 1. Research Frame Work



Source: *Processed with Nvivo 12 Pro, 2021*

This study explores the role of media and public trust, especially on mainstream online media sites and official government websites, as well as social media which is facing the paroxysm of widespread fake news (Liu & Kim, 2011, pp. 233–244). We expect that trust and exposure to social media news about COVID-19 will have an impact on (a) positive attitudes with acceptance

and credence in myths and disinformation about COVID-19 and (b) negative attitudes with critical practices for posting and share in social media. We also postulate that good media literacy and reliance on information from (a) health experts and (b) government authorities will support negative attitudes with distrust of COVID-19 myths. The widely accepted spread of



disinformation is related to the practice of being precarious of social media sharing, while the opposite would apply to trust in the information (c) religious figures. Religion, religious figures and religious institutions have an unquestionable influence on political and social issues (Luhur Prianto et al., 2021) - including in healthcare. Thus, we include the variable role of clergy as the main root of information, through with government authorities and health experts.

This article explores ~~exploring~~ the role of mainstream online and social media as providers of information in reducing the infodemic. This study uses theoretical analysis in reviewing policy communication models, information dissemination patterns, trust, and media literacy. The focus is the Covid-19 myth of fake news spreading on social media. Critical verification practice is very important, before posting and sharing on social media.

METHODOLOGY

This study intends to review the response of government institutions to the attacks of fake news on social media in Indonesia. The methodological steps are to identify, mapping out and analyze the

responses by the government. The study uses qualitative and quantitative data to build the analysis. Data collection through exploration of news content and news sources on social media, as well as official government policies. This study was carried out with an interpretive-phenomenological approach, related to the dissemination and trust of fake news about Covid-19 that occurred in Indonesia. The spread of fake news on social media in 2020-2021 and the official response through the ministry of communication and information. Data analysis in this study uses the Nvivo-12 Pro tool, to help identify, map, and analyze research data in more depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fake news content and dissemination of myth and distrust in social media

The following describes the fake news, data traced from various sources. Reports and official identification from the Directorate of Informatics Application Control, Directorate General of Telematics Applications, Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia (2021) that occurred in Indonesia. As shown in table 1:

Table 1. Fake News about the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia



No	Content of Fake News	Counter Link	Description
1.	Electronic Letter on behalf of the Section of Information, Publication, and Dissemination (IPD), Health Research & Development Agency, regarding the provision of Covid-19 vaccines.	https://twitter.com/litbangkemenkes/status/1366981169506516993	<p>An electronic letter (e-mail) has circulated on behalf of the Section of Information, Publication, and Dissemination (IPD), the Research and Development Agency, Ministry of Health, containing information related to the administration of the Covid-19 vaccine for all Indonesian citizens and foreigners who are long-term living in Indonesia.</p> <p>In fact, the official Twitter account @litbangkemenkes clarified that the Litbangkes Agency does not carry out a vaccine program and has never sent a message via email to ipd-balitbangkes@litbang.kemenkes.go.id. The email is not an official email from the Research and Development Agency that is used for external relations.</p> <p>The Research and Development Agency also explained that in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia No. 64 of 2015, Section of Information, Publication, and Dissemination (IPD) is no longer a structure in the Secretariat of the Research and Development Agency. For this reason, the public is asked to ignore messages or other things on behalf of the Research and Development Agency, the Ministry of Health through the email account.</p>
2.	The hot steam from the stew of guava leaves can treat Covid-19	https://www.facebook.com/groups/fafhh/permalink/1430913870574477/ https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/myth-busters/web-mythbusters/mb-sun-	<p>A post on Facebook shared that said that hot water steam from the stew of guava leaves, ginger, garlic, lemon, onion, and vinegar can smooth the respiratory tract and clean the lungs. The narrative closes with the expression against Covid-19 as if this method is effective in treating Covid-19.</p> <p>It has been reported by the FAFHH fact-finding team (Anti-Slander,</p>



		<p>exposure.tmb-1920v.png?</p> <p>https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7361064/fbclid=IwAR3YF3Uhx2T70Z3BwaN8r_PbcKE2wt7uY7W9J1WQ56N98B4ldyOefc_zjPU</p> <p>https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/03/08/125700665/-klarifikasi-hirup-uap-panas-rebusan-daun-jambu-biji-untuk-covid-19</p>	<p>Incitement, and Hoax Forum), no research results that prove that hot steam can treat Covid-19, mainly hot steam from guava leaf stew. Furthermore, an explanation from the who.int website, that exposure to sunlight or hot temperatures above 25 degrees Celsius, cannot prevent or treat Covid-19.</p> <p>The Covid-19 Task Force at Sebelas Maret University Hospital, Surakarta, dr. Tonang Dwi Aryanto stated that the information conveyed was incorrect. He said that steam therapy does have something to do with the respiratory tract, such as in asthma patients, but it is not specifically against Covid-19.</p>
3.	An Argentine woman has convulsions after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine	<p>https://factcheck.afp.com/video-shows-patient-having-seizure-hospital-argentina-not-covid-19-vaccine-recipient</p> <p>https://factual.afp.com/la-mujer-que-convulsiona-en-un-hospital-argentino-no-fue-vacunada-contr-el-covid-19</p>	<p>There has been a video circulating on the YouTube channel showing a woman lying on the floor and having a seizure. The video caption states that the woman experienced convulsions after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine in Argentina.</p> <p>As reported from Factcheck.afp.com, AFP Argentina confirmed the video was taken in the territory of Argentina. However, the claim that the woman in the video is convulsing from the Covid-19 vaccine is false. Gladys Amantia, as Medical Director of Larcade Hospital Argentina, explains that the woman in the video is a patient at Larcade Hospital, who has a history of seizures and delayed maturity and behavior disorders. Furthermore, Sebastián Motrel, a surgeon at Larcade Hospital, added that the woman's seizures were not related to the Covid-19 vaccine.</p>
4.	Eating cassava tapai can eliminate the function of the Covid-19 vaccine	<p>https://voi.id/berita/40836/hoaks-makan-i-tape-i-bisa-hilangkan-fungsi-vaksinasi-covid-19</p>	<p>A chain message circulated to the WhatsApp group with information stating that eating cassava tapai and consuming alcohol after being injected with a vaccine will eliminate the</p>



		https://cekfakta.tempo.co/fakta/1305/keliru-5-bulan-usai-vaksinasi-covid-19-dilarang-konsumsi-alkohol-dan-tape	body's immunity or the function of the Covid-19 vaccine. Reported from voi.id, the Spokesperson for COVID-19 Vaccination from the Ministry of Health, dr. Siti Nadia Tarmizi, said that the information was not true. She emphasized that until now there were no related clinical trials and the public was asked not to spread similar messages to other parties.
5.	Video proof of the lies of the Covid-19 vaccination by the Jews	https://cekfakta.tempo.co/fakta/1303/sesat-klaim-video-ini-bukti-kebohongan-vaksinasi-covid-19-oleh-yahudi https://www.medcom.id/telusur/cek-fakta/8N0jPxdk-cek-fakta-video-bukti-yahudi-bohongi-dunia-seolah-olah-divaksin-ini-faktanya	A video has outspread on Twitter which is claimed to be proof of the prevarication of the Covid-19 vaccination by Jews. The video shows an officer not injecting the vaccine into the vaccine recipient's arm, but into the vaccine recipient's shirt. In fact, the claim that the video is evidence of a Jewish Covid-19 vaccination lie is false. However, the video does not show the actual vaccination process. The simulation was carried out with an empty syringe.

Source: Processed from the Directorate General of Informatics Applications, Ministry of Communication & Information of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021.

One of the fake news on the hoax issue reported by the Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia (2021) is that the use of masks and lockdowns did not reduce the number of Covid-19. The explanation is that a politician from the United States through his Twitter account said that the use of masks and the lockdown policy did not slow the spread of Covid-19. He also considered two things to be part of a conspiracy theory. In fact, claims that the use of masks and the

lockdown policy have not slowed the spread of Covid-19 are not true. A number of studies on the use of masks and lockdown policies are known to be able to reduce or reduce the spread of Covid-19. The United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) conducted an experiment in January 2021 on the use of medical masks covered with cloth masks. The results of the study stated that the use of masks can reduce exposure to aerosols that have the potential to transmit the Coronavirus by more



than 90 percent. Meanwhile, two experts from Johns Hopkins University in the United States, Elizabeth Stuart and Stuart Ray, emphasized that the lockdown policy greatly reduced the transmission of Covid-19 with a proportional approach. So that the results of the identification of the Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia, categorize them as fake news.

Media literacy Education as an effort to mitigate the infodemic against fake news in Indonesia

Digital literacy is the skill of using digital media in finding, assessing, using, and creating information, and using it appropriately. This ability is needed to ward off and anticipate negative information, such as false information related to the Covid-19 pandemic on social media. Digital literacy education has two big challenges, namely the rapid flow of information and negative content (Bahri, 2021).

At this point, digital literacy plays a role in selecting information that matches reality with hoax information or fake news. The critical ability of individuals in utilizing digital media also depends on their cognitive abilities. Someone with low cognitive understanding is considered less responsive in checking the truth of the message, compared to those who have high cognitive. This means

that the lower a person's cognitive ability, the less critical they tend to be in dealing with hoaxes and fake news.

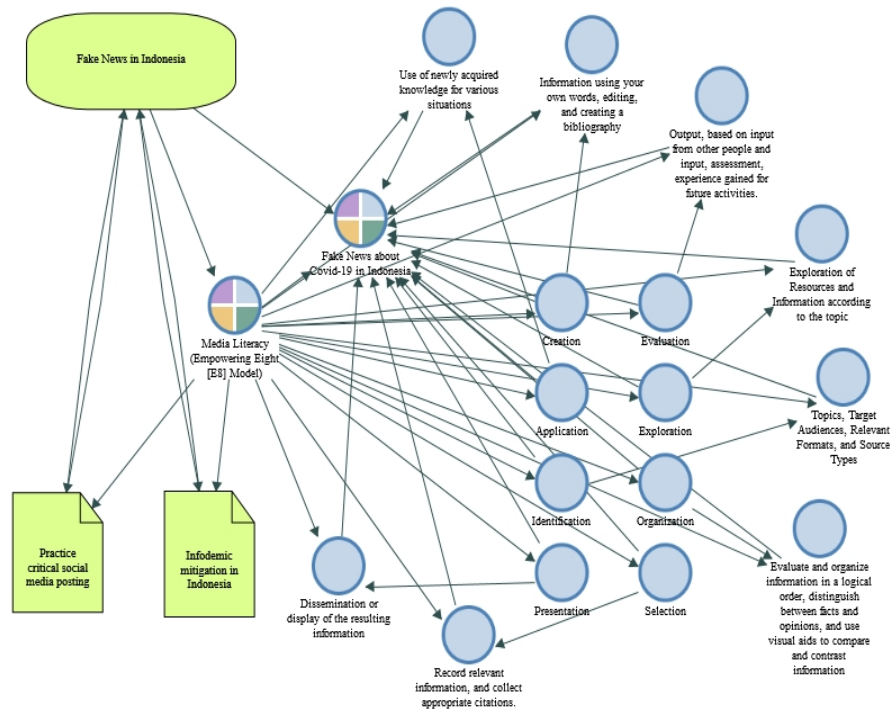
According to Wijetunge & Alahakoon (2009), empowering eight (E8) models can fight the spread of fake news. Through the ability to carry out information literacy and search for information sources for hoax news. Empowerment model, 8 stages of practice to perform the following steps.

Firstly 1) Identify the topic or subject, audience, relevant formats, and source variations. 2) Exploration of resource and information that are relevant to the topic. 3) Select and record critical information, and collect appropriate quotations of information. 4) Organizing, evaluating, and compiling information according to a logical arrangement, distinguishing between facts and opinions, 5) Information using own words, editing, and making a bibliography. 6) The presentation, dissemination, or display of the resulting information. 7) Output appraisal, based on input from Output appraisal, based on input from others. And the last 8) Application of input, assessment, experience and the use of newly acquired knowledge.

The following presented in the tables is an example of developing a media literacy model based on the stages in the Empowering Eight (E8) model of the Covid-19 news polemic that is developing in Indonesia.



Figure.2. Steps of Empowering Eight (8)



Source: Processed with Nvivo-12 Pro, 2021

Table 2. Media literacy model based on Empowering Eight (E8)

Steps	Explanation
(1) Identification and (2) Exploration	Topic/subject, target audience, relevant formats, types of resources. Exploration of resources and information according to the topic
(3) Selection	Record relevant information and collect appropriate quotations
(4) Organization	Evaluate and organize information logically, distinguish between facts and opinions
(5) Creation	Information with self-words, editing, and creating a bibliography
(6) Presentation	Dissemination or announcement of the resulting information display



(7) Assessment and (8) Implementation	Output, based on input from other people and input, assessment, experience and the use of newly acquired knowledge for various situations.
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Source: Processed from various sources, 2021

The spread of fake news is increasing in number of online media channels. In a pluralistic society, the spread of hoaxes related to Covid-19 brings concern, tension, and anxiety to the people of Indonesia. Mainly because it is difficult to distinguish the true news from all existing reports. By using the Empowering 8 (E8) model of media literacy as an effort to analyze, identify, select and evaluate the existing infodemic news. This step is one of the infodemic mitigation efforts from the government and the community. The spread of fake news should be a valuable lesson and opportunity in improving the quality of media literacy in Indonesia. One important effort that can be made by the government is through a structural-systemic approach, namely through regulations and policies such as the Law on Information and Electronic Transactions.

The pattern of hoax attacks created is very diverse. In an effort to fight back, the government and the public must have built protocols to counteract the negative content. The goal is that citizens are more critical in filtering any information they receive, especially on social media.

To grow digital literacy activities, various efforts need to be made. Such as growth, awareness of information by selecting the right sources, increasing understanding of various treasures so that the foundation of knowledge is stronger (Bafadhhal & Santoso, 2020). In addition, continuous education is needed as well as efforts to check similar news to other media to get information from various points of view. The last is to develop a culture of correcting fake news circulating in the community.

The circulation of the fake news that is not handled seriously will lead to public distrust of government authorities and scientific rationalities. Another consequence that has emerged is the denial and apathy towards the virus that has endangered the wider community. Thus, it is very important to encourage a strong government presence in providing information and clarifying disinformation that appears on various social media platforms.

One alternative that can be done is the construction of a single narrative in Covid-19 information. The Ministry of communication and information as well as networks. The regional communication and



information office provides press releases for websites, picture content or infographics for social media. The strategy for disseminating information related the content of this single narrative will be disseminated to the public affairs unit within the Covid-19 Task Force. It is then posted on mainstream and alternative channels at the same time using a bookmark or hashtag as a search keyword.

The government as a valid information source authority needs to use the aircraft carrier system for the information dissemination process as well as public preferences. The absence of the government makes people tend to choose unverified social media platforms, which is the cause of the infodemic. Therefore, as an effort to respond in disseminating information from the government, one solution that is worth trying is to adopt a single narrative system, from the central leadership level to the local level. As we know that a single narrative is a key message on issues of common concern in a concise and clear manner. This single narrative is contained in Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2015 concerning the Management of Public Information, which is one of the points of the Presidential Instruction, which is to disseminate public with a single narrative and other supporting data compiled by the Ministry of Communication and Information

related to government policies and programs (Rahmatullah, 2021).

The existence of a single narrative for the sender or recipient of hoax messages is an attempt to place the government as a strong authority. The recipient of the message denied the hoax as support for government authorities. Hoaxes that are widely spread over and over through social media can form public opinion that the news is true. At least an effort to anticipate the spread of hoaxes in the community is through institutional, technological and literacy approaches (Juditha, 2018).

Formal rules & law enforcement to countering fake news in Indonesia

The spread of the infodemic on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic is increasingly unstoppable. This massive distribution is often believed to be the truth, so it is considered far more dangerous than the transmission of the Covid-19 outbreak itself. The infodemic has the potential to threaten the safety, generate hatred for the authorities. This situation makes the task of social media users even more difficult in checking facts and straightening out any rumors circulating in the community.

Some brief descriptions of the articles in the Law that regulate fake news, hoaxes, or disinformation. There is a clause that regulates the government's efforts to control fake



news in Indonesia law. The spread of fake news related to Covid-19 has a negative impact on society, such as by giving birth to worry, panic, and distrust of scientific information about Covid-19 and its prevention efforts. These regulations are expected to regulate, combat and control these fake news channels, as

well as provides a criminal sanction mechanism for the creators. Not only for the creators, the parties who participated in sharing/transmitting (share/forwarding) the fake news. At the same time as an effort to mitigate the Covid-19 infodemic by the Indonesian government (Hasibuan, 2021).

Table 3. Regulation against fake news in Indonesia

No.	Legal Basis	Description
1.	Law on Criminal Code	Article 311 of the Criminal Code: "if the person who commits the crime of defamation or a written statement is allowed to prove his innocence, not prove it, and make accusations with what is known, then he is threatened with slander with a maximum imprisonment of four years" Article 378 of the Criminal Code: "Whoever with the intention of unlawfully benefiting himself or another person, by using a false name or false dignity, by deceit, or a series of lies, moves another person to hand over something to him, or to give a debt or write off receivables are threatened with fraud with a maximum imprisonment of four years"
2.	Law No.1 of 1946 on Criminal Law Regulations	Article 14 paragraphs (1) and (2): Paragraph 1: "Whoever, by broadcasting false news or notification, intentionally causes trouble among the people, shall be punished with a maximum imprisonment of ten years." Paragraph 2: "Whoever broadcasts a news or issues a notification that can cause trouble among the people, while he should be able to think that the news or notification is a lie, is sentenced to a maximum imprisonment of three years." Article 15: "Whoever spreads the news that is uncertain or news that is excessive or incomplete, while he understands, at least, should be able to suspect that such news will or has been able to cause trouble among the people, is punished with a maximum imprisonment of two years "
3.	Law No.19 of 2016 on Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE).	Article 27 paragraph (3): "everyone intentionally, and without rights distributes and/or transmits and/or makes accessible Electronic Information and/or Electronic Documents that contain insults and/or defamation contents." Article 28 paragraphs (1) and (2): Paragraph 1 "everyone who intentionally and without rights spreads false and misleading news that results in consumer losses in electronic transactions." Paragraph 2 "everyone intentionally and without rights disseminates information aimed at causing feelings of hatred or hostility towards certain individuals and/or community groups based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group.

Source: Processed from diverse sources, 2021



The Ministry of Communication & Information of the Republic of Indonesia (2021) has found 554 hoax issues spread across 1,209 digital platforms, be it on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or YouTube. Hoaxes are more widely spread on Facebook, reaching 861 cases, followed by Twitter with 204 cases, four on Instagram, and four cases on YouTube.

From the law enforcement perspective, it is not easy. Research results from Davina et.al (2021) showed that fake news regarding Covid-19 through social media Facebook is, in practice, regulated in Article 28 paragraph (2), Article 14, and Article 15 of Law Number 1 of

1946 concerning Criminal Regulations.

However, regarding the application of the articles in Law Number 1 of 1946 concerning Criminal Regulations, the majority by law enforcers are forced, because the elements in the article are no longer adequate when applied to cyber media. Then, Facebook as the organizer of the electronic system cannot be held legally responsible for the mistakes of its users.

The following is a simple visualization of infodemic mitigation efforts in Indonesia, which builds the relationship between the quality of media literacy using the E8 model and the accuracy of government policies:

Figure 3. The scenario of infodemic mitigation in Indonesia



Source: Processed with Nvivo-12 Pro, 2021

Based on the results of the mapping analysis in Figure 3, it can be seen that the construction of the Government of Indonesia's commitment to mitigating the Infodemic can be seen. As is the policy of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in voicing the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration in dealing with the infodemic. The attention of the Indonesian government focuses on the prevalence of disinformation and misinformation in handling Covid-19 from a medical perspective (Plate, 2020). Furthermore, according to Plate (2020) the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic is not just a medical problem. The biggest problem lies in the problem of public perception and trust in information. There is information about obesity or too much information circulating and not a little of the information is misleading. That's why an infodemic can be more dangerous than a pandemic itself. In the end, only increasing media literacy and adoption of digital technology are strategic steps in the effort to eradicate the infodemic (Sushmita & Rahmanto, 2021). This effort is an integrated part of handling the Covid-19 pandemic. The initiative must be carried out through a cross-stakeholder or multi-stakeholder approach.

CONCLUSION

The rise of fake news on social media related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia has had a negative impact on public awareness. One of the efforts to restore public confidence in science and health authorities is to increase media literacy. The media literacy model offered is the Empowering 8 (E8) model proposed by Wijetunge and Alahakoon (2009). This model works by investigating fake news through 8 practical stages: (1) identification; (2) exploration; (3) selection; (4) organizational evaluation; (5) creation; (6) presentation; (7) assessment; and (8) implementation. Other efforts besides improving the quality of Indonesian public media literacy, the handling of fake news is also controlled through Law No. 19 of 2016 on Amendments to Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions.

This study shows that the quality of media literacy education and the effectiveness of law enforcement in Indonesia are efforts to mitigate the infodemic. The synergy of forces on the community side and on the stateside will help deal with the Covid-19 pandemic based on science and policy. An evidence-based policy approach is only possible with the support of the right information. The level of public trust in information from online media and social media, which are valid and trusted news sources, will have an impact on decreasing public trust in fake news related to Covid-19. Government and society cooperation



which plays an important role in mitigating the infodemic in Indonesia.

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