Snapshot

Lessons Learned and Future Directives for Media Literacy and Fact-Checking Programs in Indonesia

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Media literacy and fact-checking programs represent two complementary interventions against misinformation and disinformation [5]. While fact-checking is a short-term, reactionary response, acting as the first line of defence, media literacy is a long-term effort that seeks to build the public's resilience against misinformation and disinformation over time. In Indonesia, these initiatives are undertaken through collaborations across various sectors, including the government, private sector, and civil society.

This research examines the current landscape of fact-checking and media literacy in Indonesia. Multi-stakeholder interviews and focused group discussions were conducted to distil the mapping of ongoing challenges and fragmentation of media literacy and fact-checking initiatives. This knowledge aims to provide informed policies and actions for the actors involved concerning future ideas for improving the already-existing initiatives on combating misinformation and disinformation.

Current Challenges of Media Literacy and Fact-Checking Programs in Indonesia Sustainability

Civil society organisations (CSOs) face specific challenges to ensure the sustainability of media literacy programs, such as funding dependency and restricted availability of internal resources. Additionally, digital platform's programmes on literacy projects with governments and CSO frequently shift focus to other programmes, which makes long-term planning challenging. Donors are also susceptible to the same shortsightedness. These challenges altogether threaten progress, as many CSO programmes face discontinuation stemming from diminishing support.

Media organisations and journalists, who are responsible for verifying facts, also experience similar challenges. For example, the issue of financial sustainability has plagued these organisations, limiting the amount of resources available, which in turn restricts their access to tools and technologies.

However, although project-based priorities cannot be avoided, embedding media literacy and fact-checking programs within other similar programmes remains viable. Diversifying sources of funding and assessing priorities are pragmatic solutions that may be adopted.

The Indonesian government could also support the establishment of CSOs endowment funds. Since 2021, many Indonesian CSOs have been involved in working groups that strive to accelerate the implementation of the endowment fund policy. Endowment funds would diversify funding resources, deriving from various donor agencies, private sector companies, as well as the government. Moreover, these funds would help to generate

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revenue from services to third parties, and enable public fundraising.[6]

One potential approach to implementing the policy could involve allocating the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara or APBN) to the endowment funds, with an independent Public Service Agency (Badan Layanan Umum or BLU) possibly acting as the fund management body.[7] In the long-run, financial sustainability would help CSOs strengthen their governance, encourage better partnership with the government, and ensure the continuity of their programmes.[8]

Additionally, the aforementioned challenges may be addressed through collaborations between CSOs which can allocate particular tasks, responsibilities, or personnel embedded to each CSO's programmes. Further research is required to determine the efficacy and susceptibility of the CSOs, as many remain prone to exploitation by specific parties, such as politically affiliated NGOs. It is possible to experiment with programmes (which may receive funding from donors) under "endowment" sponsorships for fact-checking and media literacy organisations.

Scale and Reach

Indonesia's population is spread across many islands and diverse. Hence, the scale and reach of media literacy and fact-checking initiatives could be limited and insufficient to cover all regions across Indonesia. Compared to urban areas, rural areas have less access and exposure to these initiatives due to limitations in internet infrastructures and services. These discrepancies have led to a digital divide in media literacy and fact-checking skills between people in rural and urban areas.

Media literacy and fact-checking initiatives also often have overlapping programmes that target the same segments of society and participants. At the same time, the implementation of fact-checking programmes may also vary considering differences in the definition of misinformation and disinformation and level of sensitivity across different regions in Indonesia. Disseminating the results of fact-checking assessments by CSOs to the public may also pose a challenge, particularly if there is a large volume of misleading or harmful content that is circulating.

Data from surveys such as the "National Digital Literacy Index" from Indonesia's Ministry of Communication & Informatics (MoCI), the "Inclusive Internet Index" from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), and the "Indonesian Internet Penetration Survey" from the Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII), among others, can inform broader outreach and improve program quality.

In addition, information from the field can be obtained from those who have received advanced training, such as Training of Trainers (ToT), who are located in their respective areas. ToT programmes are essential for a more effective dissemination of media literacy knowledge. Therefore, ToTs should be utilised to widen the scale and reach of media literacy and fact-checking programmes in Indonesia.

Scope and Content

According to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, there are four baseline pillars of media literacy: digital skills,

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[6] Darren Walker and Alexander Irwan. "Civil society endowment fund: A call for collaboration." The Jakarta Post. 23 July 2020. https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/07/23/civil-society-endowment-fund-a-call-for-collaboration.html

[7] Maulana. "Exchange of Aspirations: Governance of Endowment Funds of Civil Society Organizations" International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID). 27 June 2023. https://infid.org/en/tukar-aspirasi-tata-kelola-dana-abadi-organisasi-masyarakat-sipil/

[8] Arya Fernandes. "Demi demokrasi yang lebih baik, sudah waktunya pemerintah menggagas dana abadi untuk kelompok masyarakat sipil." International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID). 21 Maret 2024. https://infid.org/demi-demokrasi-yang-lebih-baik-sudah-waktunya-pemerintah-menggagas-dana-abadi-untuk-kelompok-masyarakat-sipil/

digital safety, digital culture, and digital ethics. Yet, media literacy programmes at the grassroots level have taken divergent forms. These forms include digital economy, digital parenting, the ability to use the internet, and fact-checking (prebunking and debunking misinformation and disinformation). The diverse characteristics of these programmes can lead to the elimination of most basic and pressing needs of media literacy, including critical thinking and a fundamental comprehension of digital rights.

To address the challenges of compartmentalisation, it is important to equip users with an "immunity" against misinformation and disinformation, such as through "prebunking."[9] Additionally, it is crucial to prioritise the delivery of media literacy initiatives that focus on pertinent content directly tied to specific issues at hand. For example, during an election year, it is important to focus on literacy material that helps individuals comprehend and prepare for the impending surge of information on social media, often referred to as "information tsunami". This type of media literacy project requires national leadership to effectively plan and anticipate its occurrence. Lastly, the presence of content resources for media literacy campaigns and fact-checking, such as repositories that can be accessed by informal fact-checkers and/or media literacy practitioners, is also key. However, the questions of "who will provide content resources", as well as "how and where the contents will be accessed", needs to be answered beforehand.

Evaluation and Effectiveness

Media literacy programmes at the grassroots level have been sporadic, with a lack of detailed guidelines for evaluation. Effectiveness is still measured based on the quantity of participants, rather than the quality of its impact. This issue has been part of a contentious discussion on the relative importance of quantity and quality

in media literacy and fact-checking programmes. The challenge is to seek an equilibrium where the program's quality can be attained, while simultaneously ensuring the accessibility of participants on a broad spectrum.

Moreover, assessing the effectiveness of media literacy and fact-checking initiatives should be verified through research and evaluation, identifying the gaps for improvements and the refinement of programmes in the long run. A more thorough evaluation might be achieved through the implementation of MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) in the programmes. The purpose is to re-evaluate the curricula, content, aim, and direction of Indonesia's media literacy movement and fact checking initiatives. MEL may be implemented by independent consultants or implementor NGOs.

Integration and Coordination

In Indonesia, media literacy initiatives are fragmented. Integrating media literacy into the national curriculum has not been entirely successful, followed by the government's absence of a cohesive media literacy strategy at the national level. The lack of strategy to encourage coordination and collaboration across different sectors creates a gap in coverage in several areas and overlapping initiatives in others. Therefore, the necessity of a standard media literacy curriculum or module tailored to the growing needs of the public cannot be overstated. This curriculum serves as a reference for all media literacy training initiatives, and is a key component in the fight against misinformation. While civil society can develop such a curriculum, government involvement - integrating the curriculum into school curricula or educational programmes - is crucial to its implementation. These efforts require collaboration and coordination amongst the various ministries, namely the Ministry of

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[9] Prebunking is aimed to help people identify and gain resilience against manipulative content in the information environment, as prevention action in which providing a layer of protection before individuals encounter malicious content.

Communication and Information, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Manpower.

Indonesia's rich and diverse cultural tapestry presents a formidable hurdle in establishing effective fact-checking programmes. The need to cater to different communities' nuances adds a layer of complexity to fact-checking initiatives. At a regional level, these initiatives have encountered obstacles stemming from varying levels of local capacity and the need for content adaptation. Unlike priorities such as infrastructure development or social welfare programmes, combating disinformation and misinformation often takes a back seat in the agenda of local governments. Consequently, there is a lack of urgency in addressing misinformation, leading to an inadequate allocation of resources for media literacy and fact-checking endeavours.

In combating hoaxes and disinformation, each fact-checking entity has employed different methodologies and approaches in their verification processes. These methodological differences have influenced the overall information ecosystem and user experience, and have led to inconsistencies in outcomes and concerns about accuracy. The various challenges in fact-checking highlight the need for a better management framework, one that employs standardised methodologies to ensure consistent, accurate, transparent, and reliable fact-checking outcomes. Without an improved fact-checking management framework, distinguishing between false and true information, facts, or content will remain daunting for the public.

These guidelines must be aligned with international human rights standards and should encompass various elements such as stages of activity, fact-checking methods, sources of information, and criteria for evaluating claims. Adopting standardised methods can uphold the quality of fact-checks, despite being conducted by different entities.

The following are the suggested components for fact-checking guidelines:

1. Ethical standards for reporting and content handling;
2. A standardised scoring system (i.e., True, False, Misleading, Inconclusive);
3. Transparency guidelines for fact-checking processes;
4. A user-friendly system for reporting inaccuracies in fact-check results;
5. A correction policy for platform managers based on community feedback;
6. An appeal mechanism, providing individuals and/or organisations with a transparent process to contest fact-checking decisions.

These guidelines could also include the fact-checker's key competencies, including research skills, critical thinking skills, fact-checking techniques, and proficiency in finding reliable sources of information. A consortium representing various fact-checking organisations should be developed to implement the guidelines. While the consortium model can take any form, it should be designed to ensure meaningful participation for all fact-checker organisations and aimed at mutual understanding and collaborative decision-making in specific misinformation and disinformation cases.

Public Engagement and Participation

Media literacy and fact-checking initiatives still lack public engagement and participation. Programmes often fail to consider the different needs, starting points, and accessibility points of participants. Thus, it is important for these initiatives to prioritise inclusivity, through providing beneficiaries in all phases, from the planning and implementation phase to project evaluation phase, to ensure that training remains impactful and enhances programme effectiveness.

Likewise, public participation in reporting disinformation is crucial, given the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, and the limited capacities of fact-checkers. CSOs must advocate for publicly reporting hoaxes and

encourage digital and media literacy in discerning misinformation. In fact-checking, public participation can be categorised into two main groups: CSOs who are engaged in fact-checking, and community groups who are exposed to disinformation and hoaxes. CSOs play a significant role in fact-checking, not only through donor-supported organisations, but also through grassroots initiatives. Notably, before the 2018 Regional Head Election and the 2019 Presidential Election, prominent media outlets and organisations collaborated to combat the spread of hoaxes, forming CekFakta.com in Jakarta. This collaboration involved 22 leading media outlets, including the Indonesian Cyber Society Association (AMSI) and the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (MAFINDO). Some of these organisations are also registered in the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), with the objective of countering the dissemination of false content through promoting accurate information.

Aside from those issues, CSOs encounter other challenges within their fact-checking efforts. One issue derives from the format of fact-checking results. Results are often presented through a report form, instead of a visually appealing format, such as videos and audio. The focus on substance and lack of attractiveness consequently fails to capture the attention of audiences. Another issue is the lack of transparency during the fact-checking process, which diminishes public trust and reduces interest in the fact-checking content. Lastly, the limited availability of fact-checking results debilitates the general public's and specific demographic targets' access to these contents.

To address these challenges, fact-checking organisations must enhance collaboration to improve the dissemination and accessibility of fact-checking results for the public. Moreover, fact-checkers should aim to find a balance between substance and appeal to capture a broader audience. It is also important for fact-checking organisations to increase transparency by clarifying the process of verification. Enhanced transparency will foster

trust and credibility for the fact-checking organisations within society.

One final aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is resource and management support. This support is essential to sustain fact-checking organisations, conduct mainstreaming verification efforts, strengthen pre-bunking activities, and investigate disinformation sources. The resources can be tapped from Foundation and International NGO grants working on global fact-checking initiatives or projects, as well as from government funding allocated for combating disinformation or digital literacy, and corporate sponsorships, which offers grants and resources for fact-checking partners to help combat misinformation on their platform.

Equally important is the enhancement of community participation in tackling disinformation and hoaxes. This involves a multifaceted approach that leverages education, technology, collaboration, and empowerment. In addition to conducting digital literacy programs, public awareness campaigns are crucial for raising awareness regarding the dangers of disinformation and hoaxes. Another option is to engage with local leaders and respected community figures to disseminate accurate information.

Improving individuals' capacity to verify the credibility of information sources is also vital to combat disinformation and hoaxes. This can be achieved by familiarising people with fact-checking tools and resources, alongside recommending browser extensions and apps that help to identify questionable content. Creating accessible online courses on fact-checking and media literacy is another viable strategy that allows individuals to learn at their own pace.

Adaptability to Changing Digital Landscape

The changing digital landscape, deriving from technology's rapid transformation, remains a persistent challenge in the implementation of

media literacy and fact-checking programmes. Digital threats, along with increasingly sophisticated tactics and methods for spreading misinformation and disinformation, will continue to escalate. Those who propagate hoaxes and disinformation have access to advanced tools, including sophisticated photo and video editing software. Access to AI algorithms also enables them to create convincing fake audios and video clips, with social media bots and automated accounts programmed to amplify false narratives. These challenges, as a consequence, underscore the need to adopt new strategies to counter emerging digital threats, thereby ensuring their initiatives remain relevant and effective for the public.

One effective strategy is to integrate hands-on training and experiential learning into media literacy initiatives. This would enable participants to engage directly with real-world examples of digital threats. By simulating scenarios via short videos, deep fake technology, and other emerging threats, for example, individuals may develop practical skills for identifying and mitigating digital risks in their daily lives.

Despite efforts to promote media literacy, disinformation and hoaxes persist. Fact-checking organisations need greater access to resources and technology to address new digital threats effectively. For example, advanced debunking technologies and capacity development programs are crucial. Without sufficient resources, organisations or community groups may struggle to counter the dangers of misinformation and disinformation, particularly in forms like short videos and AI-generated content. While automated fact-checking tools exist, they may struggle to keep pace with the evolving sophistication of hoax-creation techniques.

Even though some fact-checking organisations are maintaining their capacity and services in hoax prebunking and debunking—such as by specialising in deepfake dismantling—it can take only a few hours to create a deepfake video, while verifying its authenticity may take days or weeks. By the time the fact-checking process is concluded, false information may have already spread widely.

Mafindo, Liputan6, and Tempo have used a Chatbot to fight disinformation, which can only appropriately respond if the question is short. This issue is compounded by language and cultural barriers that hinder the dissemination of fact-checking findings, particularly among communities that primarily speak regional languages or dialects. Instead of solely relying on a chatbot, a basic understanding of AI technology - how it works, its capabilities, and its various applications in generating and spreading misinformation - will enable organisations to utilise their fact-checking database.

In light of these challenges, fact-checking organisations must invest in developing AI-powered tools capable of identifying subtle alterations in visual content. Media literacy content should also emphasise the importance of staying informed and adaptive, encouraging its participants to regularly update their knowledge and skills, whilst remaining vigilant against emerging threats. Collaboration between media literacy advocates, technology experts, and policymakers is imperative for developing comprehensive and adaptive strategies to tackle evolving digital threats. By sharing insights, resources, and best practices, stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of media literacy programmes, and ensure their resilience in the face of new challenges.

Access to Resources and Technology

With the emergence of the technology and information disorder, digital and media literacy actors face new limitations in addressing digital threats. For instance, the emergence of generated AI and short video content are difficult to debunk since it requires tremendous financial and human resources and sophisticated technology. First, as previously mentioned, the short-term or temporary nature of funding leads to financial sustainability issues

on CSO initiatives. Second, limited human resources also lead fact-checking groups to rely on volunteers who may lack the expertise, research skills, and critical thinking techniques to conduct fact-checking and digital and media literacy programmes. Consequently, the fact-checking process has become time-consuming and limited in scope, as not all misinformation or disinformation can be verified due to resource constraints.

The deprivation of advanced technology exacerbates these challenges. Limited funding has led to insufficient technological solutions, hindering organisations' ability to combat misinformation effectively. Moreover, the heavy reliance on donor funding or digital platforms raises concerns about dependency, cooptation, and credibility. Digital platforms, in particular, possess vast amounts of valuable data that could aid fact-checking efforts but might also influence the priorities and conclusions of fact-checkers. These platforms could steer fact-checkers toward downplaying particular misinformation or prioritising debunking content that reflects negatively on the platform.

To mitigate these risks, fact-checking organisations must retain full editorial control over their content, free from the interference of funders. This control should include the freedom to choose which claims to fact-check, how to conduct the fact-checking process, and how to present the results. Additionally, they should uphold their commitment to independence and impartiality, even when facing financial incentives or pressures.

To address these challenges, media literacy and fact-checking organisations should diversify their funding sources beyond donor assistance. Some fact-checking organisations have explored creative schemes to raise funding, including content creation and expertise services, aimed at business entities, academia, and media outlets. These schemes may help to open up collaborative efforts to maintain information integrity in social media and digital platforms. However, maintaining editorial independence and transparency is paramount in these endeavours.

Furthermore, collaboration among fact-checkers, media outlets, and academic institutions can enhance resource sharing, expertise exchange, and technology development. By establishing collaborative networks and platforms powered by AI technology, fact-checkers can effectively pool their efforts and respond to misinformation campaigns accordingly. Ultimately, prioritising transparency, editorial standards, and independence will enable fact-checking organisations to navigate the challenges of resource scarcity and technological limitations, whilst upholding their vital role in combating misinformation.

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