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How Adolescents Understand and Practice Anti-Disinformation in Responding to Hoaxes on Social Media within Karang Taruna Communities in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze adolescents' understanding of disinformation on social media and to examine the effectiveness of community-based anti-disinformation education in enhancing digital literacy and information resilience among youth. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in adolescents' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward misinformation. The findings indicate that adolescents generally possess limited digital literacy, particularly in verifying information sources and distinguishing factual content from opinion; however, community-based educational programs were found to be effective in fostering critical awareness, evaluative skills, and active engagement in combating disinformation. These results emphasize the importance of strengthening sustainable digital literacy strategies through collaboration between educational institutions, local communities, and families to build a responsible and resilient information ecosystem in the digital era.

Keywords: Anti-disinformation education, Digital literacy, Youth, Hoaxes, Community, Social media.

INTRODUCTION

General education, as one of the fundamental pillars of the national education system, plays a crucial role in developing critical thinking abilities, conceptual understanding, social skills, and moral values required to respond to rapid global changes. Sahlberg (2018) emphasizes that modern general education should not



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merely focus on knowledge-based learning, but also foster creativity, adaptability, and the courage to think critically in addressing contemporary challenges.

Within the framework of national education policy, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2020) introduced the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) program, which promotes a flexible and learner-centered educational transformation aimed at developing students' holistic potential. This approach aligns with the perspective of the World Economic Forum (2016), which highlights 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration as essential competencies. Furthermore, the OECD (2019) underscores the importance of integrating social-emotional skills with academic knowledge to prepare learners for navigating the complexities of modern, interconnected societies.

In contrast to the ideals of education that emphasize critical awareness, the proliferation of disinformation poses a serious threat to public understanding. Disinformation can mislead the public, generate panic, manipulate political opinions, and erode trust in governmental institutions. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), disinformation is part of a broader phenomenon known as *information disorder*, which consists of misinformation (false information shared without intent to deceive), disinformation (false information deliberately created to cause harm), and malinformation (accurate information used maliciously).

Mihailidis and Viotty (2017) argue that anti-disinformation education must encompass critical thinking skills, digital awareness, and an understanding of the complex information ecosystem. O'Connor and Weatherall (2019), in their discussion of the *misinformation age*, explain that disinformation is often intentionally produced to fabricate public opinion, polarize communities, and provoke social unrest. Among young people, exposure to disinformation can lead to impulsive behavior, social conflict, and the formation of irrational beliefs. Therefore, adequate knowledge of how to identify and assess disinformation is essential to equip adolescents with a sound basis for informed and responsible decision-making. Bergstrom and West (2020) further emphasize that effective information processing depends heavily on critical thinking abilities and individuals' awareness of their own cognitive biases, which can influence how information is evaluated.



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In Indonesia, the spread of hoaxes has increased significantly alongside the rapid growth of social media usage. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, for instance, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) identified thousands of hoax contents related to vaccination circulating widely on social media platforms. False claims such as vaccines containing tracking microchips or causing sudden death triggered fear and vaccine resistance in several regions. This situation hindered government efforts to control the pandemic and exacerbated public health risks. A similar phenomenon occurred in 2023, when rumors about child abductions spread through Facebook and WhatsApp. Many posts contained irrelevant photos or videos intended to incite public fear. The Indonesian National Police reported that most of this information was unverifiable, yet it had already caused public anxiety and incidents of vigilantism.

During the 2024 General Election, political disinformation became increasingly organized. A report by MAFINDO (2024) revealed the use of anonymous accounts, bots, and micro-targeting techniques to disseminate manipulative content targeting specific political candidates. Such practices threaten the quality of democracy and weaken public trust in political institutions. These cases demonstrate that disinformation is not a trivial issue, but a tangible threat to social stability, public health, and democratic processes.

Adolescents constitute one of the most vulnerable groups to disinformation exposure due to their high intensity of social media usage. Various surveys indicate that Indonesian adolescents spend approximately 4–8 hours per day on social media, making them one of the largest populations exposed to digital information. Their responses to information are also strongly influenced by psychological factors such as emotions—anger, fear, and sadness—since emotionally charged content is more likely to be shared on social media regardless of its accuracy (Vosoughi et al., 2018). A study by Fauzi and Marhamah (2021) involving students of SMAN 7 Lhokseumawe examined the influence of digital literacy on the tendency to spread hoaxes and found that digital literacy significantly reduces hoax-sharing behavior. In particular, information verification skills were identified as the most decisive factor in adolescents' ability to reject false information.

However, high exposure to digital content is not accompanied by adequate levels of digital literacy. A study conducted by Comenius University revealed that 41% of adolescents experienced difficulty distinguishing factual news from hoaxes in health-related topics, and 11% perceived accurate news as less trustworthy



than false information (Vidi, 2022). The development of the *Youth Social Media Literacy Inventory* by Drake et al. (2023) further indicates that new literacy competencies, especially digital verification skills are significantly associated with adolescents' ability to evaluate claims circulating on social media. These findings confirm that social media literacy is a multidimensional construct encompassing technical, cognitive, and affective components. Moreover, educational interventions in media literacy have been shown to significantly improve the detection of false information and reduce the intention to share unverified content (Dianah, 2024).

The urgency of this study arises from the lack of specific data regarding the level of anti-disinformation knowledge among adolescents in the *Karang Taruna* community of Gunung Sahari Utara Subdistrict. This research aims to identify adolescents' understanding of anti-disinformation practices in responding to hoaxes circulating on social media, as well as their levels of trust in online content. By addressing this gap, the study is expected to contribute to the development of community-based educational strategies to strengthen adolescents' resilience against disinformation in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODS

The sampling for this study was conducted within a *Karang Taruna* community at the sub-district level. The criteria for the research sample in this case study were as follows:

- a) Adolescents aged between 13–18 years, who may be exposed to hoaxes and disinformation due to their active use of social media.
- b) Members involved in the *Karang Taruna* community, totaling 110 individuals.
- c) Residing within one sub-district.

The data collection technique used in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in the form of a series of written questions or statements that respondents were required to answer according to their actual conditions and genuine perspectives.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 1. Instrument Blueprint for Adolescents' Attitudes in Responding to Hoaxes

Dimension	Indicator	Statement Description	Item Number
Cognitive (Information assessment and evaluation)	Ability to recognize and hoax characteristics	Identifying signs of invalid or suspicious information	1, 2, 3
		Checking source clarity, evidence, Ability to assess source and media reputation before credibility	4, 5, 6
		believing the information	
	Awareness	of Understanding that false information 7, 8, 9 misinformation risks can have negative impacts	
Affective (Emotional responses to information)	Caution in accepting toward unverified information	Feeling the need to be cautious 10, 11, information 12, 13	
		Experiencing suspicion or discomfort when encountering questionable content	14, 15, 16, 17
		unclear information	
	Sensitivity to potential manipulation	Being alert to provocative or emotionally charged content 18, 19, 20, 21	
Dimension	Indicator	Statement Description	Item Number



Psychomotor (Actions in responding to information)	Habit of verifying information	Conducting fact-checking before 22, 23, sharing content 24, 25
	Refusal to hoaxes	spread Avoiding the sharing of doubtful or provocative information 26, 27, 28
	Responsible behavior	media Reporting false content, providing education, or reminding peers 29, 30

Discussion

The discussion of the research findings aims to interpret the empirical results obtained from the data analysis, particularly with regard to the influence of adolescents' knowledge of antidisinformation on their attitudes toward responding to hoaxes on social media. This discussion is conducted by relating the research findings to the theoretical framework, previous research findings, and the social context of the *Karang Taruna* community in Indonesia.

1. Adolescents' Level of Knowledge about Anti-Disinformation

The research findings indicate that, in general, adolescents' level of knowledge about antidisinformation falls within the moderate to good category. This is reflected in respondents' answers, which demonstrate an understanding of the concept of hoaxes, the characteristics of false information, and the importance of verifying information before trusting or sharing it on social media. These findings

These findings indicate that the majority of adolescents already possess an initial awareness of the dangers of disinformation in the digital space. This knowledge is acquired through various



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sources, such as personal experiences in using social media, exposure to information from schools, mass media, as well as discussions within community environments and peer groups. This condition aligns with the perspective of digital literacy, which emphasizes that individuals' media knowledge is shaped not only by formal education but also by social interactions and everyday media experiences (Hobbs, 2024).

Nevertheless, the research results also reveal that some adolescents have not yet fully understood systematic fact-checking strategies, such as verifying information sources, comparing news from multiple media outlets, or utilizing fact-checking platforms. This finding suggests that adolescents' anti-disinformation knowledge still needs to be continuously enhanced through more structured and contextual educational programs.

2. Adolescents' Attitudes in Responding to Hoaxes on Social Media

Based on the results of the data analysis, adolescents' attitudes in responding to hoaxes on social media demonstrate a relatively positive tendency. In general, adolescents report being cautious when encountering information that is provocative, sensational, or lacks clear sources. This attitude is reflected across cognitive, affective, and conative aspects.

From the cognitive perspective, adolescents tend to conduct an initial assessment of information credibility, although this is not yet fully supported by in-depth verification skills. From the affective perspective, adolescents exhibit emotional responses such as suspicion and vigilance toward information that has the potential to be misleading. Meanwhile, from the conative perspective, most adolescents indicate that they do not immediately share information whose accuracy is questionable.

These findings support the tripartite theory of attitudes, which posits that individual attitudes are formed through a combination of knowledge, emotions, and behavioral tendencies. In the context



of social media, more critical attitudes reflect an increasing awareness among adolescents of the social and ethical risks associated with the dissemination of hoaxes (Livingstone & Helsper, 2019).

3. The Influence of Anti-Disinformation Knowledge on Adolescents' Attitudes

The results of hypothesis testing indicate a significant influence of adolescents' knowledge of antidisinformation on their attitudes in responding to hoaxes on social media. This positive relationship suggests that the higher the level of adolescents' knowledge regarding antidisinformation, the more positive their attitudes are in dealing with hoaxes.

These findings reinforce the theoretical assumption that knowledge is a crucial factor in the formation of attitudes. Adolescents who understand the mechanisms of hoax dissemination and its impacts on social life tend to exhibit more selective, critical, and responsible attitudes in their use of social media. This result is consistent with previous studies by Friggeri et al. (2014) and Martel et al. (2020), which demonstrate that information literacy plays a significant role in reducing individuals' tendencies to believe and spread false information.

Within the context of the *Karang Taruna* community, anti-disinformation knowledge functions as a form of social capital that strengthens information resilience at the community level. Adolescents with higher levels of knowledge can act as digital literacy agents for their peers and surrounding environments.

4. Implications of Research Findings in the Context of Community Education

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of anti-disinformation education programs at the community level. The finding that knowledge has a significant influence on attitudes indicates that education-based interventions have considerable potential in shaping healthy media behavior among adolescents.



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Digital literacy programs designed for the *Karang Taruna* community need to emphasize practical aspects, such as fact-checking training, simulations for analyzing hoax-related news, and group discussions on the social impacts of hoaxes. Participatory and experience-based approaches are considered more effective in enhancing adolescents' understanding and critical attitudes compared to lecture-based approaches alone.

In addition, collaboration among sub-district governments, schools, and youth organizations is a crucial strategy for creating a healthy information ecosystem. In this way, anti-disinformation education becomes not only an individual responsibility but also part of a collective effort to build social resilience against hoaxes.

The results of this study also carry several important implications, both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, this research strengthens the body of literature on digital literacy and social communication, which emphasizes that knowledge is a fundamental factor in shaping individuals' attitudes toward information. The findings support media literacy theory and the tripartite attitude structure, which positions the cognitive aspect as the foundation for the development of affective attitudes and media-related behaviors.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for the development of community-based anti-disinformation education programs. The *Karang Taruna* youth community can serve as a strategic space for implementing participatory and sustainable digital literacy education. Educational programs that emphasize critical thinking skills, fact-checking practices, and ethical social media use have strong potential to enhance adolescents' resilience against hoaxes.

Furthermore, this study offers policy implications for sub-district governments and relevant stakeholders to integrate digital literacy education into youth development activities. With



institutional support, disinformation prevention efforts can be implemented more systematically and sustainably at the local level.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
14 - 16 years	7	7,4%
17 - 20 years	31	33,0%
20 -25 years	56	59,6%
	94	Total

Table 3. Educational Background of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
SD	3	3,2%
SMA/SMK	89	94,7%
Junior High School	2	2,1%
Total	94	

Table 4. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	13	13,8%
Famale	81	86,2%
Total	94	

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that adolescents within the Karang Taruna community possess a moderate level of anti-disinformation knowledge, which significantly influences their attitudes in responding to hoaxes on social media. Higher levels of digital literacy are associated with more critical, cautious, and responsible behavior in evaluating and sharing information. Although basic



awareness of hoax characteristics is evident, systematic fact-checking skills still require further development. Therefore, sustainable and community-based digital literacy programs are essential to strengthen adolescents' resilience against disinformation and to build a more responsible and informed digital society.

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Vol. 2 No. 1 January 2026

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