

## “I Don’t Know If It Is Fake or Real News” How Little Indonesian University Students Understand Social Media Literacy

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### ABSTRACT

Concerns over fake news have been raised in Indonesia since there has been a significant increase in the spreading of fake news via social media. University students, as the most active social media users, are susceptible to consume and distribute fake news. This study is motivated by the assumption that media literacy interventions help users resist fake news. However, limited studies have specifically addressed their level of media literacy in identifying fake news. Using the new media literacy framework, this study analysed the level of media literacy to process fake news on social media among university students in Aceh. A total of 500 undergraduate students from Syiah Kuala University and Ar-Raniry State Islamic University participated in the survey. Following the survey, 28 students were selected to take part in four focus group discussions. The findings showed that students' degree of media literacy concerning fake news is relatively low. Although almost all students demonstrated a good skill in using multiple social media platforms and understanding information they received, they were not confident in their abilities to distinguish between fake and real news. Surprisingly, some students deliberately share controversial posts on social media for no reason or to please themselves. The study suggests that program of media literacy should emphasise the identification of fake news and the consequences of its distribution.

**Keywords:** *Media literacy, social media, fake news, university students, Aceh.*

### INTRODUCTION

Internet penetration is growing rapidly across the world and Indonesia is no exception, with one of the fastest growth rates in the world. Based on a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII), the number of Internet users in Indonesia in 2015 was 110.2 million users and reached approximately 143.26 million users or 54.68 per cent of the total population in December 2017 (APJII, 2017). Indonesia became the fourth largest of the world’s Internet users as of June 2019, with 171.26 million internet users (Statista, 2020a).

Social media are the most frequently visited sites on the Internet. Statista (2020d) highlights that YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia. In particular, Indonesia is positioned as the third largest of Facebook users in the world with 130 million active accounts (Statista, 2020b) and fourth largest of Instagram users with 63 million active accounts as of January 2020 (Statista, 2020c).

However, the high enthusiasm for using social media is challenged by the spread of fake news on social media. Lazer et al. (2018, p. 1094) explained that fake news consists of “... fabricated information that mimics news media content informs but not in organizational process or intent”. While Lazer et al. (2018) focused on the process and intent in defining fake news. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) defined fake news based on facticity and intention to deceive. Furthermore, Molina, Sundar, Le, and Lee (2019) argued that the term fake news

does not simply refer to false news since it has been used as a political weapon by politicians to label any claims against them.

Based on research conducted by the Indonesian Telematics Society (Mastel), social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Path are the most widely used channel in spreading fake news (Mastel, 2017). The distribution of fake news on social media in Indonesia is at a critical stage (Media Indonesia, 2017). Its increasing spread puts Indonesia at serious risk because it can cause unrest, spread hatred, threaten the unity of the nation and threat national stability. These risks have prompted the government to form the National Cyber Agency and to cooperate with the Indonesian Press Council and Facebook in addition to blocking sites to fight against fake news (Siswoko, 2017).

The increasing amount of fake news distributed in social media is supported by the characteristics of social media itself, namely user-generated content (Nasrullah, 2015). Social media users play a chief role not only as of the consumers of social media content but also the producers and the distributors of content. The share feature on social media platforms enables users to distribute content (Nasrullah, 2015), including fake news.

Furthermore, Sukmayadi (2019) contends that Indonesian internet users are lack of media literacy can cause them to be very prone to fake news. Additionally, Jones-Jang, Mortensen, and Liu (2019) found that "information literacy significantly increases the likelihood of identifying fake news stories". Hence, Juditha (2018) asserts that media literacy is one of the important approaches to combat the spread of fake news on social media.

Media literacy is defined as abilities to access, understand, and critically evaluate media content and create messages in various forms (Livingstone, 2004). Such a definition refers to a general definition of media literacy and does not specifically address the definition of new media literacy. Meanwhile, media literacy in the context of social media is well described as "the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognise and use that power, to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively and to easily adapt them to new form" (New Media Consortium, 2005, p. 2). Ling, Ali, and Mustaffa (2019) highlight the concept of critical thinking in the definition of media literacy. Hence, it is a necessary skill to combat the negative effects of social media, especially the distribution of fake news. Obtaining an adequate level of social media literacy, users would have more critical attitudes towards content and not easily fall for the content they receive.

There have been considerable previous studies on new media literacy in Indonesia. However, little attention has been paid to the topic of social media literacy, let alone social media literacy to combat fake news among university students in Indonesia. Most recent and pertinent studies have focused on social media literacy among high school students (Atmi, Satibi, & Cahyani, 2018; Hariyanto, 2017). University students are a significant subset of social media consumers. APJII (2017) revealed that 49.52% of Internet users in Indonesia are young adults (aged 19-34) and university students are included in the category. A similar finding is also evident in previous studies. Gangadharbatla, Bright, and Logan (2014) found that university students depend on social media for information and news. Their dependency and heavy usage on social media make them prone to be consumers and distributors of fake news on social media. Moreover, the study by Aminah and Sari (2019) further showed that fake news on Facebook during the 2019 election spread hatred and changed voting decisions among early voters in Aceh Jaya District.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap as it investigates the level of social media literacy among university students in Aceh. The findings of the study are intended to develop a program for social media literacy to combat fake news among university students in the context of Indonesia.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Past research on fake news has shown that a lack of thinking can result in susceptibility to fake news instead of partisanship (Pennycook & Rand, 2018, 2019). The ability to discern between fake and real news is associated with analytical thinking (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). These studies indicated the importance of media literacy in combating the spread of fake news on social media platforms. In addition, Jones-Jang et al. (2019) conducted an online survey on 1,2999 American citizens and found that those who have abilities to find and verify information online (information literacy) are more likely to identify fake news. Another study of Jang and Kim (2018) found that fake news has third-person effects, thus individuals believed that fake news would more likely to influence others than themselves. They further highlighted, "partisan identity, the social undesirability of content, and external political efficacy were positive predictors of the third-person perception" (Jang & Kim, 2018).

Furthermore, the current studies on media literacy, in general, can be categorized according to the use of the theoretical framework to measure the concept of media literacy, i.e. no specific framework (Adiarsi, Stellarosa, & Silaban, 2015; Fitriyarini, 2016), individual competence framework (Kurniawati & Baroroh, 2016; Muttaqin, 2016; Purba, 2013), and new media literacy framework (Atmi et al., 2018; Chen, Li, Lin, Lee, & Ye, 2014; Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Hariyanto, 2017).

##### *Current Studies on Media Literacy*

Adiarsi et al. (2015) found that active Internet users were those who accessed the Internet more than five hours per day and they mostly used it for social media and instant messaging. Their critical attitudes towards media content depending on the informant's interest. This study emphasises on the comparison between the duration of Internet usage and the use of the Internet among university students.

Another study conducted by Fitriyarini (2016) on nine students in the Study Program of Communication Sciences, University Mulawarman, found that the ninth informant has limited literacy skills as they have a fairly good ability in accessing mass media and new media, but did not possess a critical analysis towards the content. Fitriyarini (2016) only defined and measured the level of media literacy based on the definition of media literacy by Livingstone (2004) as the ability to access, understand and critically evaluate media content and create messages in various forms. Like Adiarsi et al. (2015), she employed a qualitative research method.

Both studies are lacking theoretical frameworks since they do not deploy any specific framework on media literacy. These studies refer to the definition of media literacy that does not exclusively address the new media or the Internet but all types of mass media.

##### *Individual Competence Framework*

Research conducted by Muttaqin (2016) on adolescents in Lamongan, Kurniawati and Baroroh (2016) on students of the University of Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, and Purba (2013) on university students of North Sumatera, employed the Individual Competence Framework

(EAVI, 2009) with quantitative research methods to measure media literacy. This framework consists of two individual competences: personal competence, that is the ability to use media (uses/technical skills) and analyse media content (critical understanding) and social competencies including the ability to communicate and produce the media content (communicative abilities) (EAVI, 2009). It further suggests distinguishing individuals based on their competencies of media literacy into three categories (EAVI, 2009):

1. Basic refers to the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and reduce media content is very limited.
2. Medium refers to the ability to access the media is quite high, the ability to analyse and evaluate media content is good, as well as active in creating content and participating in the social context.
3. Advanced refers to the ability to use media is very high, able to analyse and evaluate content in-depth, and actively communicate.

However, this framework not only measures internet media literacy but media literacy in general. Therefore, different from the studies of Muttaqin (2016) and Purba (2013), Kurniawati and Baroroh (2016) modified the Individual Competence Framework to measure digital media literacy. They found that the ability of digital media literacy among the university students was at the basic level, since they had a relatively good ability to access digital media, but lacked abilities to analyse, evaluate, and produce media content (Kurniawati & Baroroh, 2016). These studies use a definition and media literacy framework based on EAVI (2009) that is not exclusively for the Internet, but all types of mass media.

#### *New Media Literacy Framework*

A new media literacy framework proposed by Chen et al. (2011) and later developed by Chen et al. (2014) consists of a two-way continuum, Critical-Functional and Consuming-Prosuming that form four new media literacy quadrants, namely Functional Consuming, Critical Consuming, Functional Prosuming, and Critical Prosuming. Chen et al. (2014) propose four quadrants including nine indicators as follows:

1. Functional Consuming is defined as the ability to access media content (consuming skills) and understand the textual meanings of such content (understanding)
2. Critical Consuming is defined as the ability to interpret media content in a particular social, political, economic and cultural context. Critical consuming includes three indicators, i.e. analysis (performing a textual analysis of the media content), synthesis (comparing and combining information from multiple sources), and evaluation (criticizing media content).
3. Functional Prosuming is defined as the ability to operate software to produce, disseminate, and duplicate media content.
4. Critical Prosuming is defined as the ability that requires a contextual interpretation of media content. It is measured by the ability to actively and critically participate (participation).

This framework was also employed to measure media literacy for high school students in Surabaya (Hariyanto, 2017) and Sidoarjo (Atmi et al., 2018). However, the current studies using the framework of new media literacy have focused predominantly on youth under 18.

Of all the previous research highlighted above, none have focused on the new media literacy concerning fake news on social media. Therefore, this study deploys the new media literacy framework to investigate the critical ability of university students to process fake news on social media.

#### METHODOLOGY

This study employed mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative methods. By using this method, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of social media literacy among young adults. For a quantitative method, it conducted a face-to-face survey with 500 undergraduate students. The sample size is sufficient as Krejcie and Morgan (1970) states that the required "sample size remains relatively constant at slightly more than 380 cases" for population size more than 40,000. The respondents were 250 students of Syiah Kuala University and 250 students of Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. Both universities are the most reputable in Aceh, the westernmost province in Indonesia. Also, previous studies indicate that students in Banda Aceh are active social media users (Hidayah & Nurrahmi, 2019; Nurrahmi, 2018). The sample was selected using the convenience sampling technique. The participation was voluntary. Only the students who were active students at Syiah Kuala University and Ar-Raniry State Islamic University and have active social media accounts were preferred.

The survey utilized a questionnaire assessing the respondents' demographics and the level of social media literacy. The questionnaire was administered in Indonesian to ensure complete comprehension. Respondents were asked to complete questionnaires by themselves (self-administered survey) with consent. For demographic questions, the respondents were asked to identify their gender and age and this personal information as confidential. Moreover, the items to measure the level of media literacy was developed and modified from the framework proposed by Chen et al. (2014), consisting of four dimensions: Functional Consuming (nine items), Critical Consuming (11 items), Functional Prosuming (nine items), and Critical Prosuming (nine items). Hence, the modification of the 38-item social media literacy scale was intended to specifically address the phenomenon of fake news on social media to appropriate the purpose of the study. Items were measured with a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). The 4-point scale was selected to remove the respondents' tendency to choose the middle options (neutral answer). The higher the score, the higher the level of social media literacy possessed by respondents. Reliability test results from the 38 items show that six items of Functional Consuming, nine items of Critical Consuming, nine items of Functional Prosuming, and only one item of Critical Prosuming had at least 0.7 for Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Hair, 2010) and thus they were considered statically reliable for the measurement. The remaining 23 items were examined for their validity using Product Moment Pearson Correlation. The validity test showed that 25 items had p-values less than 0.05, indicating that the 25 items were valid.

The statistical analyses in this study were conducted using the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) software version 22. The statistical test was a descriptive test based on the mean score for each dimension of social media literacy. The respondents who had the mean score of less than three were classified as having low social media literacy levels, while those having the mean score of more than three were categorised into the high level of social media literacy.

In addition to a quantitative method, this study also deployed a qualitative method. This research arranged a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). FGD was intended to explore more detailed aspects of social media literacy that emerged in the findings of the quantitative research. FGD was organized four times involving two groups of seven male students and two groups of seven female students. The segregation between gender groups was aimed to minimise the possibility of psychological pressure caused by gender differences. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the criteria that they were active students at both universities and active social media users.

The FGDs were conducted, recorded, and transcribed in Indonesian. Data were analysed qualitatively and coded based on indicators of Functional Consuming, Critical Consuming, Functional Prosuming, and Critical Prosuming. To avoid a potential bias introduced from the FGD, this study employed triangulation techniques (Moleong, 2007). In this study, the triangulation technique is carried out by finding the most common answer from 28 participants of four FGDS. Only data confirmed by most participants were included in the analysis. The findings that emerged from the FGD were also crosschecked with the results from the quantitative study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of that 500 questionnaires returned, seven questionnaires contained missing data. Hence, only 493 questionnaires were included in the analysis. The majority of the respondents were women, at 54%, while men stood at 46%. In addition, the respondents' age was ranged from 17 to 24 years old. Most of the respondents were 21 years old with 24.1%, followed by 20 years old (20.3%), 22 years old (19.5%), 19 years old (19.3%), 18 years old (8.9%), 23 years old (6.5%), 24 years old (1.2%), and 17 years old (0.2%). The details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	229	46%
	Female	264	54%
Age	17 years old	1	0.2%
	18 years old	44	8.9%
	19 years old	95	19.3%
	20 years old	100	20.3%
	21 years old	119	24.1%
	22 years old	96	19.5%
	23 years old	32	6.5%
	24 years old	6	1.2%

### *Functional Consuming*

This section describes the findings related to the respondents' ability to consume media and comprehend meaning from the content. As detailed in Table 2, it is evident that the university students in Aceh possessed a good ability to access and comprehend social media content.

Table 2: Functional consuming

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I access more than 2 social media platforms a day	3.18	0.728
I can find the information I need on social media	3.36	0.611
I can use Facebook features	2.47	0.792
I can use Instagram features	3.12	0.685
I easily understand posts on social media	3.06	0.592
I understand the meaning of emoticons	3.03	0.634

Most of the respondents were confident in their abilities to find the information they needed on social media. They believed that social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram could provide them with the information they are looking for. Also, they accessed more than two social media platforms daily. Findings also indicated that the majority of respondents were able to utilise the features of Instagram instead of Facebook. The mean score of the item “I can use Facebook features” fell into the low level. Finally, most respondents could understand posts on social media and the meaning of emoticons.

Qualitative findings also confirmed that most informants had and actively used more than two social networking sites. The most visited social media platforms were Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. With respect to news, some informants expressed that Instagram was appropriate for the promotion channel and self-presentation, but not for seeking information and news. Several informants admitted that they rarely used Facebook as the platform was often associated with something tacky and cheesy. This qualitative finding explains the low mean score in the item on Facebook features. Informants felt that Facebook was out of date because they accessed it while they were high school students. They viewed Facebook as the den of fake and negative news, they thus preferred seeking information from Twitter. Most informants said that they only knew the meaning of the most frequently used emoticons including laugh, cry, smile, and sad. However, they acknowledged that they sometimes were unsure of the emoticon’s meanings, such as high five.

### *Critical Consuming*

This section describes the findings associated with the students’ abilities to interpret the textual meaning of social media content, to synthesise information from various media outlets, and to evaluate the media content. Analyses on the mean score from each item indicated that most respondents were able to interpret social media content, seek information from various media platforms, and critically evaluate the information they obtained from social media. The details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Critical consuming

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Every get information on social media, I cross check it to verify the information	3.20	0.606
I look for information from various sources	3.23	0.545
I don't easily trust information circulating on social media	3.15	0.615
I often suspect that information I received on social media is fake news	3.08	0.572
I define information as fake news after reading from various sources	3.24	0.572
I look for information from various sources	3.32	0.592
I like to further analyse information I receive from social media	3.11	0.645

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Everyone can have different interpretation towards a single similar piece of information	3.40	0.553
There are political interest and agendas behind the message disseminated by the media	3.26	0.553

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According to Table 3, most respondents agreed that a single piece of information may result in multiple interpretations as suggested by the highest mean score of the 8<sup>th</sup> item. The students did not trust the information they received from social media as they suspected it as fake news. They were also keen to look for information from various media outlets to confirm the credibility of the information.

On the other hand, the results from focus group interviews show slightly dissimilar results. Regarding the level of understanding of posts on social media, most informants said that they needed time to assess the credibility of information on social media. Some of them might check information from one social media platform against other media outlets or social media platforms. Others would check information found in social media by going directly to the mass media sources such as newspapers and television.

Surprisingly, most informants expressed difficulty in distinguishing between fake and real news on social media, especially Facebook. They were somewhat confused to assess fake news, in particular, political information, for instance during the last presidential election. Most informants believed that many students easily fell for fake news on social media. First, it mostly happens when information suits their own's interests and beliefs. Several informants specifically mentioned the 2019 presidential election as an example where a lot of people had a tendency to believe information that discredited another presidential candidate, although it could be fake news. They said that those who were fanatics of a certain candidate would retain their beliefs, even though such beliefs were based on falsehood. Second, personal admiration is also a contributing factor in consuming and sharing fake news. Most informants argued that if someone admired someone else, then he/she would trust whatever information received from him/her.

All informants agreed that their motivation to verify information depended on the relevance degree. Most informants would give their best effort to check the credibility of information for information relevant to them such as job vacancy or scholarship. Meanwhile, they would ignore irrelevant information.

### *Functional Prosuming*

This section describes the findings about the abilities to operate software to create, distribute, and duplicate media content. In general, based on the mean scores of all items for Functional Prosuming, it can be concluded that the respondents' skills for this category are considered low. The details are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Functional prosuming

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Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I can create social media account	3.33	0.611
I can edit photos or pictures	3.22	0.644
I can edit videos	2.84	0.782
I can make memes	2.42	0.822
I can make video	2.90	0.739

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I like posting photos to my social media	2.87	0.778
I like posting how I feel to social media	2.15	0.809
I like posting my activities to social media	2.50	0.764
I like posting my ideas to social media	2.87	0.736

Table 4 illustrates that according to the mean score, nearly all informants knew how to create social media accounts and edit pictures or photos. It can be understood through the abundance of user-friendly software to edit pictures. However, other items show the mean scores of less than three, meaning that they are regarded as low. A number of respondents disclosed that they are inclined to have skill deficits in making videos and memes. Concerning post behaviours, generally, respondents showed that they disliked posting anything to social media. Nevertheless, the standard deviation scores for these four items are high. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference among respondents about the four items about posting behaviours category on social media. There were also a few of those who admitted that they like to post their pictures, emotions, activities, and ideas to social media.

Focus group interviews provided more elaborative results. Most informants said that they knew someone else using a fake social media account. Those accounts were intended to spread fake news. However, some informants acknowledged that they sometimes edited photos to give an impression as if he/she were elsewhere and uploaded them on social media.

In contrast to the survey findings on posting behaviours, some informants said they liked uploading certain photos depending on the occasion. For new or rare occasions, most informants agreed they would take photos and upload to their social media. Results of focus group discussions also indicate that there is a gender difference in posting behaviours, although all male and female informants admitted that they loved posting something on social media. The female informants expressed they were inclined to share their emotions on social media. On the other hand, male informants confessed they were rarely to do so because they would get insulted if they did it. In addition, the majority of informants contended that social media were channels to self-branding.

### *Critical Prosuming*

This section describes the findings on the respondents' abilities to interpret media content in context while actively and critically participating in social media discourse. In general, based on the mean score of a single item, it can be concluded that the respondents' do not have ample skills in critical prosuming. The details are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Critical prosuming

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I'm not sure if I share fake or real news	2.58	0.837

A tendency to share fake news is also prevalent in the qualitative findings. Some informants acknowledged that they sometimes intentionally shared information that was considered fake news on social media. Meanwhile, other informants admitted that their friends often distributed fake news. In the beginning, they did it for fun. However, when the information they shared attracted wider audiences, it would encourage them and more people to repeat such behaviours. Nearly all informants said that most social media users

were less critical towards the information they obtained from social media as they found it difficult to distinguish between fake or real news on social media.

Furthermore, most informants would provide critical comments on posts that were considered fake news only if the information suited their interests. Several informants mentioned a free airplane ticket as an example. In that case, they would check the information in various media outlets or go directly to primary sources such as airport crews. However, they would ignore and refused to check irrelevant information.

Based on four dimensions of new media literacy, major quantitative and qualitative findings are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Major findings of the survey and focus group discussion

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Quantitative Results</b>	<b>Qualitative Results</b>
Functional Consuming	High	Able to use social media, seek information on social media, understand the content
Critical Consuming	High	Eager to verify information, but depend on interests, partisanship, or fans
Functional Prosuming	Low	Confused between fake and real news Lack ability to create content Post edited photos
Critical Prosuming	Low	Tend to share (fake) news for no reason or having fun Provide critical comment on attractive content

The use of mixed methods in this study not only provides a general description of the university students' media literacy degree but also explores the aspects of their media literacy skills in more detail. As detailed in Table 6, the results of quantitative research show that the students have a high level of media literacy in the elements of functional consuming and critical consuming, yet lack in the elements of functional prosuming and critical prosuming. However, the results are relatively problematic when they are compared to the results from the focus group discussion, further illustrating some opposite results.

First, both quantitative and qualitative findings have confirmed that students have high skills in functional consuming. They can use social media, together with all their features, to obtain the information they need and distribute content.

Second, while quantitative and qualitative results show high critical consuming, further analysis of qualitative finds revealed that the participants admitted that they found it difficult to identify fake news. They also showed limited critical response towards the information they receive on social media. They would only verify and evaluate information that they were interested in or associated with. Those who were fanatics tended to consider information according to political choices. Moreover, they were more likely to trust information that was in favour of their political beliefs or people they admired/preferred, even though the information was fake news. These qualitative findings ultimately indicate that their critical consuming that is high according to quantitative results does not apply in all circumstances.

Third, this research also finds some contradictive results from both methods, albeit the fact that both methods document a lack of abilities in the dimensions of functional prosuming. While quantitative results document low preferences in posting to social media, focus group interviews reveal the reversed results. Participants were keen to post anything on their social media, especially photos. Some of them acknowledged that they posted edited photos to give a better impression. The difference in response to the questions about posting behaviours on social media might be explained by the possibility that the students answered in a way reflecting researchers' interests or fulfilling the normative expectancy. In addition, there is also a possibility that they did not understand the items of the question because a survey method does not provide any interaction between a researcher and the respondents. However, the drawback can be covered by the utilisation of focus group discussion, verifying and elaborating all aspects of media literacy.

Fourth, the qualitative results extend the quantitative results in the aspect of critical prosuming. While quantitative findings show a low level of critical prosuming as students were not sure whether they have shared fake news, qualitative results found that some students played with fake news and shared fake news on purpose. Data from qualitative research further found that they were satisfied when they saw that others got affected by the fake news they shared.

In general, a closer examination of both quantitative and qualitative results shows that the degree of media literacy on university students in Aceh is low. These findings showed similar agreement with the findings of Purba (2013) and Kurniawati and Baroroh (2016) describing that the media literacy skills of university students are limited in the abilities to use social media. However, the findings of this study extend the previous work by revealing the social media literacy skills concerning fake news.

The tendency of the students to perform critical analysis and further investigation on information they were interested in is consistent with the findings of Adiarsi et al. (2015) who investigated the media literacy of university students in private universities in Jakarta. This can be explained by a lack of reasoning as proposed by Pennycook and Rand (2019). When students found the information in accordance with their interests, they would be motivated to verify the information by checking it against various sources. However, they would perform a lack of thinking for irrelevant information and hence they would easily fall for fake news. However, this study also reveals a lack of reasoning for information related to their political beliefs and personal admiration. This result is in contrast with the findings of Pennycook and Rand (2019) that acceptance or rejection of fake news is not driven by political beliefs.

Furthermore, this study found a third-party effect as found in the study of Jang and Kim (2018). Some of the students said that they believed that others fell for fake news and distributed it. In fact, a closer examination of focus group interviews showed that they were not confident in their abilities to identify fake news. Therefore, it is possible that they fell for fake news and shared it on their social media.

## CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that university students in Aceh lack media literacy skills to process fake news. They have a relatively good ability in the aspect of functional and critical consuming. They demonstrate the capability of using some social media platforms. Their social media usage is followed by relatively critical attitudes towards the content by not immediately trusting information on social media. However, they find it somewhat difficult

to discern between fake and real news. On the other hand, the students show a lack of ability in the aspects of functional and critical prosuming. They do not have adequate skills to produce new content such as memes and videos. They also tend to share unverified information for no reason or having fun.

Therefore, the findings suggest a new model of media literacy introducing the way to identify fake news and explore the consequences of fake news behaviour among university students in Aceh. Also, it recommends social media literacy to be a compulsory subject taught at the university. Currently, media literacy is only introduced in the communication and information-based departments. Besides, the findings also highlight the urgency to campaign social media literacy in various platforms such as public service advertisements. The campaign needs to reach as many people as possible in urban and rural areas.

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