

Creators of Controversy: Problematic Content and Digital Emotional Intelligence in Indonesia's 2024 Election

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ABSTRACT

Various parties can easily produce, distribute, and consume information in today's digital era. Information circulates quickly without a verification process for its truthfulness. Digital literacy is the keyword for building civilized communication. This study aims to analyse the circulation of hoaxes, fake news, and hate speech among supporters of presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 General Election in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach with critical discourse analysis (CDA) and virtual ethnography by analysing the text dimensions, social cognition, and social context of content on social media into an integrated analysis supported by big data analysis from various online media platforms. The study results illustrate a difference in the characteristics of hoaxes and hate speech in the 2024 general election and the 2019 election. The political polarization was not as sharp as in the previous elections. However, there were still many issues of hoaxes and hate speech circulated to discredit specific pairs of presidential and vice presidential candidates. The variety of media outlets that people can use to upload and spread content is increasing with the presence of new media such as TikTok. However, the enthusiasm and militancy to support one particular candidate pair tend to reduce the emotional intelligence of netizens in terms of empathy, self-management, and relationship management on social media.

Keywords: *Hoax, election, content, emotional intelligence, digital.*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of internet technology has transformed communication, offering both democratic opportunities and new risks. While digital platforms enable the expression of identity and political opinion, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation and hoaxes, especially during politically sensitive periods like elections. In Indonesia, hoaxes often intensify around general elections, with political content dominating the misinformation landscape (Lim, 2017). The Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (Mafindo) revealed that in 2018, 997 hoaxes spread, and almost half were political. Every five years in Indonesia, the general election period is a vulnerable moment for the spread of hoax content. Hoax content is used to polarize public opinion, which seeks information based on desired facts (Annas et al., 2019). Political affiliation in elections can be a source of dominance of hoaxes about political opponents. Factors such as age and differences in the number of followers are positively associated with sharing hoax sources (Grinberg et al., 2019).

2024 is an interesting political year where there are various changes from the previous two election periods, such as the number of presidential and vice presidential candidates, the campaign model of each candidate pair, coalition splits, and indications of fraud in the form

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E-ISSN: 2289-1528

<https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2026-4203-04>

Received: 27 December 2024 | Accepted: 12 November 2025 | Published: 30 September 2026

of internal government and presidential support for one of the candidate pairs. Hoaxes have the potential to spread more massively based on the potential diversity of issues that are used for political purposes. Hoaxes have even developed from before the campaign period to after the election. So, this study aims to analyse the characteristics and types of hoaxes during the 2024 elections, before and after the implementation of the 2024 elections. The analysis of the characteristics and types of hoaxes will also be associated with the issue of digital emotional intelligence as an important skill that digital citizens must possess (Park, 2019).

The uniqueness of researching digital emotional intelligence behind the problematic content of elections in Indonesia lies in the very diverse socio-political and cultural landscape. In contrast to many other countries, the character of a multicultural society in Indonesia, consisting of hundreds of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, heavily influences digital discourse (Shukri, 2023). This diversity creates fertile ground for emotional manipulation, where political actors can design messages that fit specific identities but have the potential to divide others. In addition, platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok, which have different penetration rates and usage patterns, influence Indonesia's digital ecosystem compared to users in other countries (Ma'ruf et al., 2024). The viral nature of the content on these networks, coupled with the low digital literacy of a large portion of the population, allows emotional rhetoric to spread rapidly, often without critical filtering.

This research aims to answer how problematic information are circulated in the 2024 presidential and vice presidential elections in Indonesia and the relationship with digital emotional intelligence of the uploaders of hoaxes and hate speeches. Previous studies have shown that the spread of hoaxes and hate speech during elections in Indonesia—particularly in 2019—posed a serious threat to the integrity of democracy. Various studies highlight how platforms such as WhatsApp were used to disseminate content laden with ethnic and religious sentiments, significantly affecting society, especially vulnerable groups like women (Wendratama et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Tukina and Sanjaya (2020) emphasized how hoaxes generated public anxiety, social division, and weakened trust in democracy. Although they proposed solutions such as maintaining personal integrity, ethical information sharing, and verification, their recommendations remain normative and somewhat utopian. Another study by Khalyubi and Perdana (2021) revealed that hoaxes were strategically used not only to discredit political opponents but also to undermine the legitimacy of electoral institutions, such as the General Elections Commission (KPU). Their findings introduced the concept of "electoral manipulation via information," highlighting how hoaxes target both candidates and organizers to disrupt democratic processes.

While the aforementioned studies focus on the dissemination of hoaxes, political actors, and their societal impacts, our research offers a more specific approach by exploring the relationship between digital emotional intelligence (DEI) and user behaviour—particularly among those who produce and spread hoaxes or hate speech. This study aims to introduce a digital psychological approach within the field of political disinformation, addressing neglected aspects such as empathy, emotional regulation, and social awareness in online interactions. The novelty of this research lies in its potential to serve as a foundation for interventions based on digital emotional literacy, expanding the discourse on critical digital citizenship by incorporating affective dimensions, not just cognitive ones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Van Dijk (2001), provides a powerful framework for understanding how language, power, and ideology are interwoven within

social discourse. Van Dijk's CDA framework is particularly valuable in uncovering the mechanisms by which problematic content—such as hoaxes, fake news, and hate speech—is designed to manipulate social cognition (Van Dijk, 2001). Discourse structures like sensational headlines, visual memes, and emotionally loaded language are crafted to evoke immediate emotional responses that bypass critical reasoning, thus making audiences more susceptible to misinformation. These strategies are frequently deployed in political hoaxes, where misinformation is not randomly generated but carefully constructed to damage political opponents, undermine public trust, or legitimize particular candidates (Duile & Tamma, 2021; Tapsell, 2021). In the case of Indonesia's 2024 election, hoax narratives about candidates' health, personal integrity, or political allegiances circulated widely, indicating the deliberate framing and embedding of such discourse within existing societal fears and biases. By applying CDA, researchers can systematically deconstruct how these discourses reinforce existing social divisions and sustain power relations within the digital political sphere.

Complementing the discourse analysis, Goleman's (1995) Emotional Intelligence Theory provides a psychological lens to understand why individuals create, disseminate, or fall victim to problematic content in digital environments. Goleman identifies five key components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, all of which are central to effective and ethical communication. In the context of digital political discourse, low emotional intelligence—particularly limited self-awareness and empathy—can lead to impulsive sharing of misinformation and participation in toxic online debates (Grieve & Woodfield, 2023). Netizens who lack self-regulation are more likely to react to provocative content without verifying its accuracy, thereby perpetuating the spread of hoaxes. Conversely, those with high emotional intelligence are generally more adept at navigating emotionally charged content and are better positioned to engage in respectful, fact-based political discussions. Goleman's framework is essential in explaining how individual emotional competencies—or the lack thereof—directly impact the quality of discourse in social media environments.

The Digital Intelligence Framework proposed by Park (2019) further refines Goleman's theory by contextualizing emotional intelligence within the digital sphere. Park's Digital Emotional Intelligence (DEI) framework expands Goleman's theory by focusing on emotional skills in online context, namely digital empathy, self-awareness, and relationship management. In emotionally charged political climates like Indonesia's, low DEI often results in aggressive behaviour and misinformation spread. Integrating this framework deepens understanding of how emotional competencies—or their absence—shape political discourse online and inform efforts to promote responsible digital citizenship.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs big data analysis to examine hoax dissemination during the 2024 Indonesian election across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, and YouTube. The focus is twofold: identifying key sources of hoaxes and hate speech (individuals or groups) and analysing dominant hoax topics across platforms. Data is sourced from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and NoLimit, a digital analytics provider. It is used to map hoax patterns, identify "Top Talkers" (influential accounts), and assess their impact on public opinion and candidate image.

To further examine how hoaxes are constructed, the content created or shared by these Top Talkers will be analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the

socio-cognitive approach developed by Van Dijk (Van Dijk, 2001). This method investigates how social-cognitive structures mediate between text and society, highlighting the interplay between discourse and social structures. Elements examined include the semantic macrostructure and schematic structure of the text (e.g., topics and propositions), local meaning (e.g., vocabulary choices and culturally conditioned arguments), the socio-cultural context, and the "event models" represented in the discourse.

Additionally, the study incorporates virtual ethnography as a complementary method. As suggested by Hine (2008), the combination of ethnographic observation and discourse analysis allows for a deeper understanding of online interaction. Ethnography, as a qualitative approach, enables researchers to explore the everyday practices and lived experiences of online users from their own perspective (Machin, 2002). In this study, selected social media content—including text, images, videos, and cited sources—will be examined through this lens to gain a richer, more contextualized understanding of digital behaviour and emotional communication strategies employed in the spread of hoaxes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mapping Hoax Issues

Reports on hoax issues during the 2024 election specifically collected from November 2023 to March 2024. The researchers analysed by dividing by category of the hoax period, spread into 3 periods, namely pre-election, which began on the first day of the campaign on November 28, 2023, to the last day on February 10, 2024. Then, during the election, from the quiet days starting on February 11, 2024, until election day on February 14, 2024. Moreover, the last is post-election, starting from the first day after the election on February 15, 2024, until one month after March 17, 2024. In this analysis, the researchers use hoax report data published by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia by analysing it into three discussions: the frequency of time, the type of hoax, and the platform or media used to spread hoaxes.

In the report published by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology through the official website, there are a total of 167 hoaxes from November 28, 2023 to March 17, 2024. There is an increase in the number of hoax reports closer to election day if categorization is made based on monthly frequency where February has the highest number with 57 hoax reports. As for the other month, namely November, there were 10 hoax reports, December 46 hoax reports, January 42 hoax reports and March 12 hoax reports. This can be seen in the following graph:

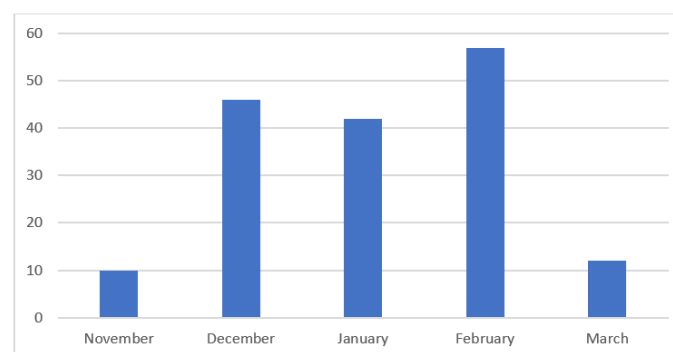


Figure 1: Monthly frequency of hoax issue reports (processed by researcher, 2024)

Figure 1 shows an increase in the number of elections in the month of the election. If grouped in the pre-, current and post-periods. The majority are found in the pre-election period, which is also longer. There were 116 hoax reports in the pre-election, 12 during quiet days and the implementation, and 39 in the post-election. The following graph illustrates the number of hoax reports before, during and after the 2024 election. The data confirms previous research that has been carried out in the 2019 election that in the run-up to the election days, the intensity of hoaxes will increase and must be watched out for (Khalyubi & Perdana, 2021; Tukina & Sanjaya, 2020; Utami, 2019).

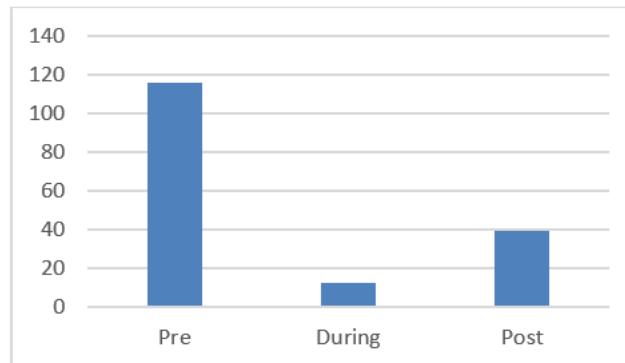


Figure 2: Frequency per hoax issue report period (processed by researcher, 2024)

Claire Wardle (2017) in the media literacy project classifies hoax news into 7 types, namely Satire or Parody, Misleading content, Imposter content, Fabricated content, False connection, False context, and Manipulated content. The researcher analysed the types of hoaxes contained in the 2024 election hoax issue report by dividing them into categorization of the 2024 election pre, during, and post-election analysis periods. The results show that there are three types of hoax content that are most dominant in the 2024 election, namely misleading content or misleading content as many as 50, manipulated content or manipulated content as many as 49, and false context or wrong context as many as 32. In detail on the following graph to see the number of types of hoaxes in each period:

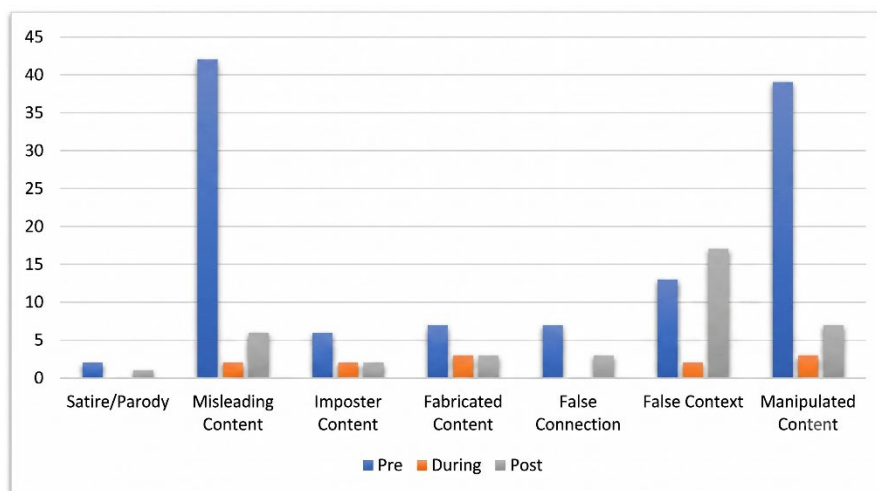


Figure 3: Types of hoaxes (processed by researcher, 2024)

Figure 3 shows the complexity of hoax issues that are not easy to identify, but have the potential to mislead voters (Utami, 2019). The large amount of deliberately manipulated content also shows the important role of campaigners on social media in driving public opinion as part of a campaign strategy (Tapsell, 2021) and the potential of such content in creating political polarization (Kubin & Von Sikorski, 2021).

Figure 4 shows that Facebook is the most used platform as many as 50, then TikTok as many as 40 and YouTube as many as 39. TikTok, which is a new platform, turned out to be a fairly massive platform to spread hoax information, even though it is still under Facebook. It also shows that information through visual social media platforms is still dominant compared to text only. The use of the Facebook platform, which is still dominant, shows that this platform is still strong as a political articulation medium as happened in the 2019 election (Sosiawan & Wibowo, 2020) and the presence of a new, more interactive platform such as TikTok is a new challenge also for efforts to reduce hoaxes during the election period. TikTok's algorithmic structure, which prioritizes showing users content similar to what they have previously interacted with, plays a major role in the swift circulation of misinformation. When users engage with deceptive or inaccurate videos, they are more likely to encounter similar misleading content, reinforcing an echo chamber where falsehoods thrive (Lan & Tung, 2024).

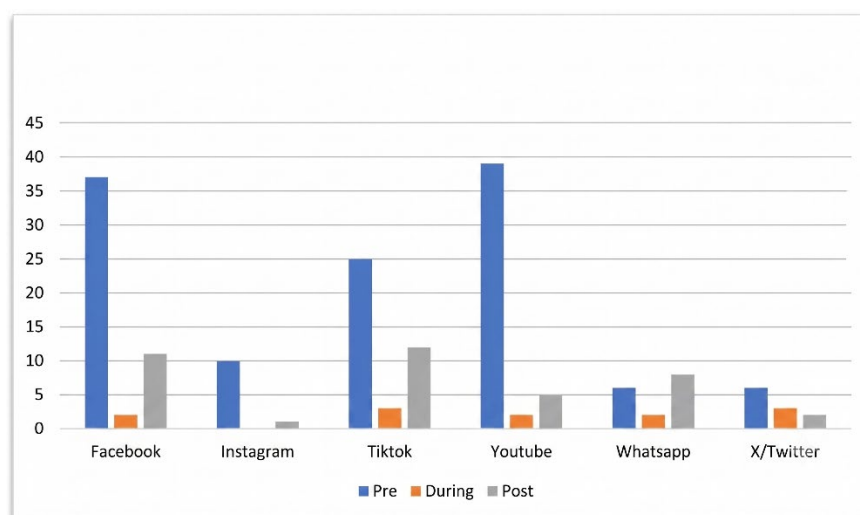


Figure 4: Social media platforms (processed by researcher, 2024)

Analysis of the content aspect shows that the hoax content that is spread is diverse. The hoax content during the campaign period is dominated by negative campaigns to discredit one of the candidate pairs so that they are not chosen. This content has the potential to reinforce political polarization among supporters of presidential and vice presidential candidates (Duile & Tamma, 2021). Hoax content during calm days and post-elections is dominated by suspicion of election organizers who are not neutral, which has the potential to reduce the credibility of election organizers (Asa Akhrani et al., 2020).

The results of the advanced analysis using No Limit big data analysis application describe phenomena related to the dominant hoax topics in online media, contributors to hoax issues, impacts and parties affected by hoaxes. These findings underscore how misinformation not only affects political perceptions but also undermines public trust in democratic institutions. Moreover, the networked nature of digital platforms allows hoaxes to circulate rapidly, creating a cycle where false information can influence both online discourse and offline political behaviour (Eismann, 2021; Tucker et al., 2018).

The Dominant Hoax Topic in Online Media

In talks related to the 2024 Presidential Election, hoaxes at most amounted to 31% related to speculation about if Prabowo died, Gibran would be the one to replace him. In addition, there are 27% related to the hoax of Prabowo not shaking hands with Anies in the 2024 presidential candidate debate and 7% of hoaxes about Prabowo spreading threats if he cancels his 2024 presidency (see Figure 5). Based on this data, it can be seen that the top three hoax news leads to presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto who ultimately won the presidential election contest and has now officially become the president of the Republic of Indonesia. This shows a positive signal that the quantity of hoaxes against one of the presidential and vice presidential candidate pairs are not significantly correlated with the results of the general election. In fact, the spread of such hoaxes might have even triggered a wave of sympathy or defensive support from loyal voters. The ability of Prabowo's campaign team to maintain narrative control and respond calmly to misinformation may have also strengthened public confidence. This demonstrates the increasingly strategic role of communication teams in shaping voter perceptions amidst digital noise.

Based on data that 31% of hoaxes related to the 2024 Presidential Election focus on speculation about the possibility of Gibran replacing Prabowo if he dies, 27% of hoaxes about Prabowo not shaking hands with Anies in the presidential candidate debate, and 7% of hoaxes about Prabowo spreading threats if he cancels his presidency, it can be concluded that the majority of hoax narratives tend to point to candidate Prabowo Subianto. However, the final results show that Prabowo still won the presidential election contest and has officially become the President of the Republic of Indonesia. This indicates that the high intensity of hoaxes aimed at a candidate does not have a direct and significant correlation with the election results.

This conclusion shows that the public's perception of candidates is more complex and is not solely influenced by the existence or spread of hoaxes. Other factors, such as campaign strategy, programmes, and public trust in candidate figures, are likely to be more dominant in influencing the election's outcome. Therefore, while hoaxes can influence public discourse in the short term, their impact on people's electoral decisions is limited compared to more substantial factors. These findings emphasize the importance of a deep understanding of political dynamics and voter psychology in modern democracies.

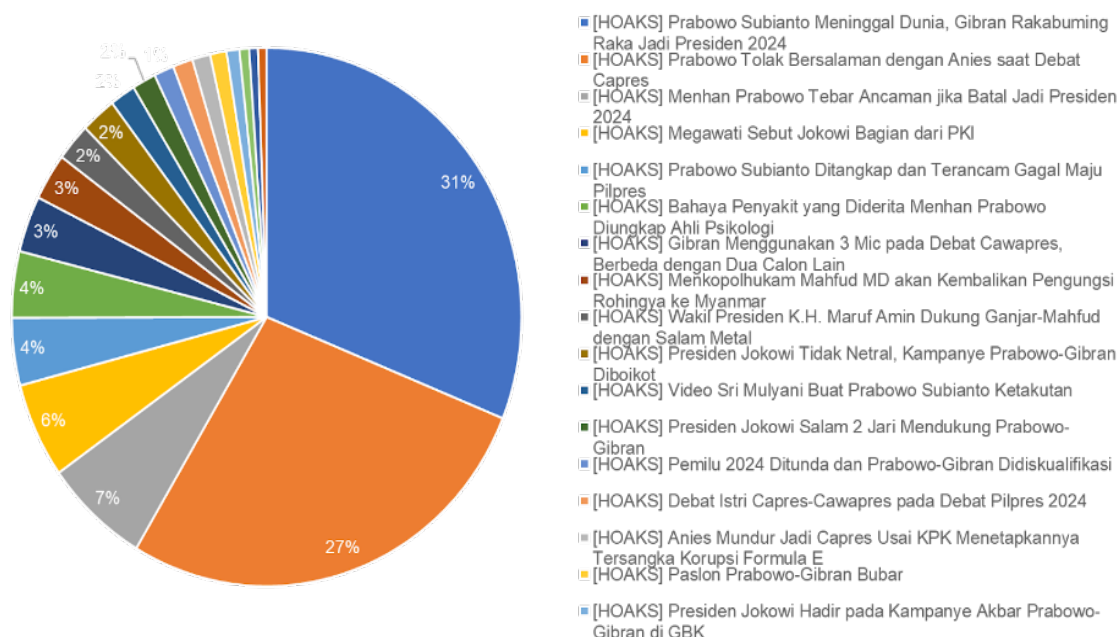


Figure 5: Dominant hoax topics on social media
 Source: No Limit Dashboard

Contributor to Hoax Issues

In social media conversations, the users who contributed the most to the spread of hoaxes were netizens at 55% and buzzers at 21% (Figure 6). This data shows that netizens who use real accounts remain the main contributors to the spread of hoax issues through their respective social media accounts. The involvement of netizens in disseminating hoaxes also shows indications that the spread of election-related hoaxes does not solely occur due to political engineering, but also because of the lack of ability to filter information from netizens so that they inadvertently participate in disseminating information that cannot be accounted for in the truth.

Data in Figure 6 shows that the majority of hoaxes in the digital space are not solely driven by organized actors such as buzzers, but by ordinary individual users. This phenomenon reflects the low digital literacy among the public, where many netizens do not have the critical ability to verify information before disseminating it. In contrast to buzzers that are strategically aimed and often coordinated to support or attack certain parties, the much larger contribution of netizens indicates that the spread of hoaxes is more organic and driven by emotions and spontaneous desire to share information.

In this context, the responsibility does not only lie with the content creator or buzzer, but also on the general public as consumers of information. Netizens' inability to distinguish between true and false information can exacerbate political polarization, increase social tensions, and undermine trust in the democratic process. Therefore, the strategy to eradicate hoaxes is not enough just to crack down on buzzers or political actors, but also requires massive education to the public about the importance of digital literacy, fact verification, and ethics in using social media. Thus, the root of this problem can be dealt with more comprehensively.

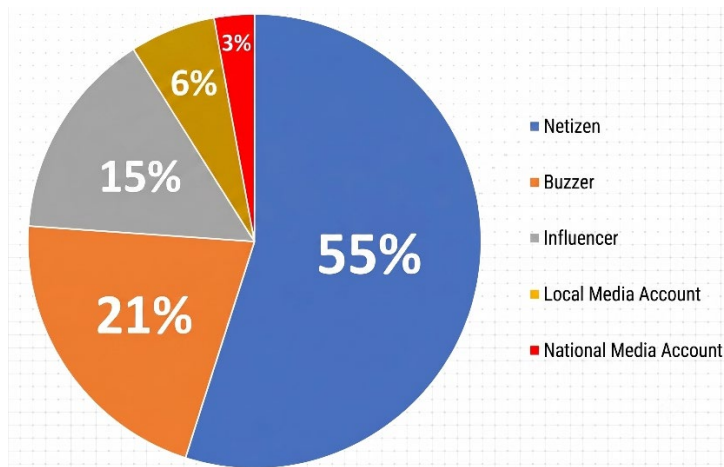


Figure 6: Contributor to hoax issues
 Source: No Limit Dashboard

Impact of Hoaxes

Hoaxes related to the 2024 presidential election have a significant impact on society. The most impact is related to the number of netizens who vote for golput (abstention). Of the hoaxes that have been circulating, the most significant impact is the number of netizens who decided to golput with 30% and 24% of conversations related to the number of netizens who are confused about the truth of information (Graph 6). The increase in the number of abstentions certainly reduces the quality of democracy.

Hoaxes related to the 2024 Presidential Election have proven to have a significant impact on society, especially in influencing their political decisions. Based on data, the biggest impact of this hoax is the increasing number of netizens who decide not to use their voting rights (golput), with 30% of conversations related to this issue. In addition, 24% of the conversations reflected netizens' confusion in distinguishing the truth of the information circulating. This condition has serious implications for the quality of democracy, because the increasing number of voters who are golput means a decrease in the active participation of the community in determining the direction of government.

This phenomenon reflects how hoaxes can create distrust in the political system and candidates fighting in election contests. The inability of society to verify correct information from the wrong exacerbates its impact, leading to widespread apathy and skepticism. In the long run, this impact can weaken the legitimacy of elections as an inclusive and representative democratic process. Therefore, these findings emphasize the importance of systematic efforts to improve people's digital literacy, tighten regulations on the dissemination of information on social media, and strengthen election transparency mechanisms to reduce the destructive impact of hoaxes on democracy.

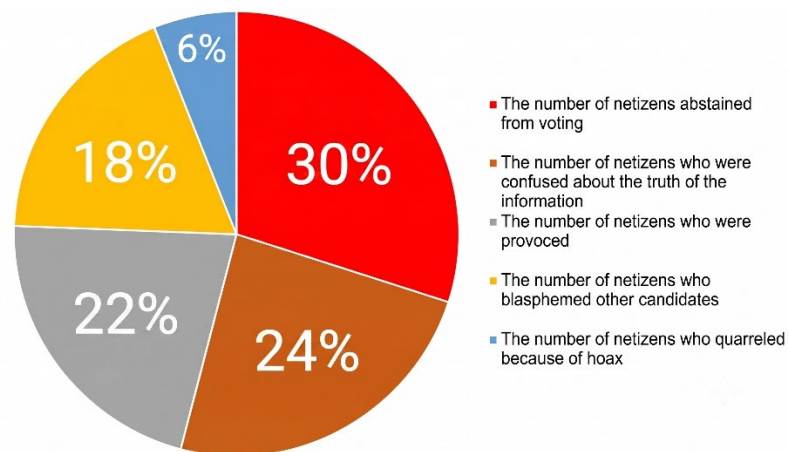


Figure 7: Impact of hoaxes
 Source: No Limit Dashboard

Parties Affected by Hoaxes

The party most affected by hoaxes is political candidate at 35% and then followed by political party at 25%. This data gives an idea that the hoax issue causes losses, especially to election contestants, namely candidate pairs and political party which supports the candidate pairs. Some hoaxes also directed to election organizers, especially the General Election Commission.

Data shows that the parties most affected by hoaxes related to the 2024 Presidential Election are candidate pairs, with an impact percentage of 35%. In addition, political parties as the supporters of candidate pairs also had a significant impact, with a percentage of 25%, due to netizen attacks triggered by hoax news on social media. These findings provide a clear picture that hoaxes not only attack individual candidates, but also institutions or groups that are part of the political process, including political parties and even election organizers such as the General Election Commission (KPU).

The losses caused by hoaxes against candidate pairs and political parties not only damage their image in the eyes of the public, but also have the potential to reduce the level of public trust in political institutions as a whole. In the long run, this impact can affect the stability of democracy, as the legitimacy of elections based on public trust is threatened. In addition, attacks on the KPU as an election organizer can weaken public perception of the integrity and credibility of the election process.

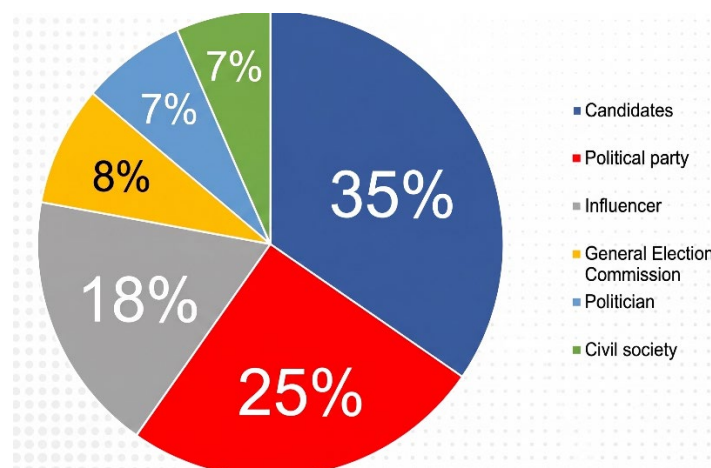


Figure 8: Parties affected by hoaxes
 Source: No Limit Dashboard

Hoaxes and Digital Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence developed when society began to feel that the focus on cognitive intelligence in industrialized societies had made humans lose emotional touch in their lives. Many intelligent people are ignorant and insensitive to the situation around them. When interactions between humans are now beginning to be mediated by information technology, emotional intelligence must also be present in the new interaction model.

The initiative to develop the concept of digital emotional intelligence is carried out by the DQ Institute, an international non-profit organization, engaged in digital community education. One important aspect of digital intelligence, which is still rarely elaborated in various digital literacy studies is digital emotional intelligence. According to Park (2019), three skills must be trained to cultivate digital emotional intelligence, namely digital empathy, self awareness and management, and the third is relationship management.

Digital empathy is related to sensitivity and supportive attitudes towards the feelings and needs of others in the digital world. Self-awareness and management are related to the ability to understand and align between the digital value system and competencies with the digital environment faced by each individual. Meanwhile, relationship management is related to the ability to manage relationships in the digital space through persuasion, cooperation and conflict management.

The analysis of voters' digital emotional intelligence in this study was carried out by observing several examples of hoax contents and uploads or statements on social media made by several netizens who became top talkers during the 2024 presidential election. The analysis is grouped into three sections related to aspects of digital emotional intelligence, namely militancy and empathy, self-expression and management and participation and relationship management.

a. Militancy and Empathy

The militancy of supporters of a candidate pair or political party can reduce empathy for others and the surrounding environment. For example, the issue of hoaxes related to the death of Prabowo Subianto which then opened up opportunities for Gibran to appear as President of the Republic of Indonesia (Figure 1). The spread of sad news without a credible source of information is undoubtedly detrimental to the party who is reported to have died and has the potential to mislead many related parties. The news said Prabowo died after being treated in a hospital due to a leaky kidney. The word 'Leaky Kidneys' is an unusual word to pin on the news of prominent figures like Prabowo (see figure 1). One of the characteristics of hoax news is the use of bombastic and sensational sentences. Sensational and bombastic language to grab the reader's attention and influence their emotions, as such language can create a sense of urgency or shock that makes people more likely to provide such information without verification (Grieve & Woodfield 2023).



Figure 1: Hoax Prabowo passed away

Another example is the hoax about the KPK forcibly picking up Anies Baswedan because of a corruption case (Figure 2). This hoax content still reproduces the term *Kadrún* and discredits Anies Baswedan as a presidential candidate. *Kadrún* is an abbreviation of the word Desert Lizard referring to a nickname aimed at people who are considered narrow-minded, especially those influenced by extremist and fundamentalist movements from the Middle East, to stigmatize those who are labelled as radicals (Sumartias et al. 2024). Several internet users uploaded this content through various digital platforms and shows the empathy problem of the uploaders of the content.



Figure 2: Hoaxes about Anies arrested by KPK

Apart from the spread of hoax content, there are clear indications of diminishing empathy due to militant support for one of the presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs. This is exemplified by an account with the initials @bd, one of the top talkers supporting the Prabowo-Gibran pair. In one of his posts, the @bd account mocked Anies Baswedan, implying that he had become the new “party officer” of PDIP, replacing Jokowi. In this context, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) is often perceived as the party that drives the aspirations and decisions of its cadres, including Indonesia’s 7th president, Joko Widodo (Jokowi). Over time, Jokowi’s relationship with the party soured, culminating in his departure and estrangement from its chairwoman, Megawati Soekarnoputri. This political development has fueled tensions and led to various hate speech and hoax narratives being directed at Anies Baswedan, who was considered the strongest rival to the Jokowi-aligned coalition in the 2024 presidential race. These narratives attempt to delegitimize Anies’ position by portraying him as a puppet or opportunist, thereby diminishing his credibility in the public eye. The images

discussed above illustrate the socio-cultural context of how visual and verbal texts reference previous political events (van Dijk 2011).

Figures 2 and 3 portray Joko Widodo and Anies Baswedan as fierce competitors in the race for Indonesia's leadership. While they are positioned equally in the frame, the choice of body gestures and verbal cues subtly reinforces Jokowi's superiority and Anies' inferiority. Jokowi is portrayed as a powerful figure capable of "controlling" Anies through state institutions like the KPK, elevating him to the status of a people's hero who acts decisively against corruption (as seen in figure 2). Meanwhile, figure 3 suggests that Anies has walked into a PDIP "trap" by accepting a symbolic role as a party officer—a role once attributed to Jokowi before he defected. Anies' portrayal as a "victim" of PDIP serves to frame him as politically naïve or complicit, weakening his stance in the electoral narrative. The macrostructural element of the verbal text "I want to be a party officer, sir" in Anies' speech bubble illustrates a tone of submission, while Jokowi's response "That's fine, go ahead" suggests condescension or even strategic entrapment. These speech bubbles do more than clarify the dialogue—they function as key narrative devices that guide audience interpretation and embed ideological messages. This demonstrates how political memes or visual content act as symbolic discourse tools, shaping perceptions and public understanding in ways that reflect the political and ideological interests of their creators (Budiman 2011).



Figure 3: Uploaded content from an account with the initial @bd

b. Self-Expression and Management

Account X with the initials @SM is the account that talks the most about the number one presidential candidate, Anies Baswedan. There is an interesting phenomenon on this account, namely he became a top talker because he reposted a lot of news about Anies Baswedan with captions that were not in line with the context, namely captions combined with trending words on the day he sent his tweets.



Figure 4: Uploaded Content from an account with the initial @SM

Account with the initial @SM shows a limited level of self-awareness in expressing opinions related to presidential candidate Anies Baswedan. This is reflected in his actions that often pin captions that are not relevant to the news uploaded. This trend suggests that account owners may not understand the emotional impact conveyed to their audience, especially in the context of the connection between their content and personal expression. Optimal self-awareness should encourage account owners to be more sensitive to the content conveyed, especially in complex political situations.

In addition, the lack of harmony between news content and trending captions shows the potential for inconsistency in awareness of public perception. The account owner doesn't seem to be fully aware of how this action can affect or confuse his audience. As a result, there is a potential for perception bias from the public, who may assume that the account owner is simply following the trend without considering the actual context. This unconsciousness can cause confusion among the audience, obscuring the intent of the message they want to convey. It is also possible that the content text is deliberately made to have inconsistency because it is intended to confuse the reader.

This account also shows limitations in terms of self-knowledge, especially related to understanding the motivation and impact of reposting news with irrelevant captions. Good self-knowledge should allow the account owner to consider the implications of each post and how the post reflects his or her personal identity or opinion in the eyes of the public. In these cases, the mismatch between news content and captions suggests that the account owner may lack an understanding of the best way to express his or her views authentically and responsibly.

By creating out-of-context captions, account owners seem to be focused more on top of trending words without considering their relevance to the political content being shared. This tendency reflects a lack of awareness of the best way to present oneself in the public domain, especially in a political context that often requires prudence and integrity in expressing opinions. Firm self-knowledge is needed to understand when and how to adjust communication to better align with the identity and intent.

Based on the concept of digital emotional intelligence (DEI), the actions taken by @SM account reflect some limitations in the main aspects of digital emotional intelligence, especially in the dimensions of self-awareness and emotional management. The discrepancy between news content and uploaded captions shows that account owners have a level of self-awareness that is not optimal in managing their digital communications. In DEI, self-

awareness includes a deep understanding of the emotional impact of digital actions on oneself and others. The inability to align content and captions can create confusion and damage the credibility of the account owner in the eyes of his or her audience.

In addition, these behaviours reflect weaknesses in digital empathy, namely the ability to understand and consider the audience's perspectives and emotional reactions. By pinning irrelevant captions, account owners risk creating a negative emotional response, including frustration or suspicion from the public, which can exacerbate polarization in political discussions. DEI emphasizes the importance of alignment between the message conveyed and the emotional context of the audience, especially in a sensitive political environment, where public trust and perception are particularly easily influenced.

Furthermore, limitations in self-management can be seen from the tendency to follow trends without considering the relevance or long-term impact on personal image. In DEI, self-management includes the ability to consciously control digital behavior to align with personal values and communication goals. When account owners focus more on trend popularity than message consistency, it shows a lack of strategic thinking in building an authentic and responsible digital presence.

In addition, the relationship management dimension in DEI is also not well implemented. When digital communication is not contextual or relevant, relationships with audiences become less effective, potentially even damaging the trust that has been built. In the context of politics, a healthy relationship with the audience requires honest, transparent, and integrity-based communication.

In conclusion, @SM account behaviour shows some shortcomings in applying DEI principles, particularly in terms of self-awareness, digital empathy, self-management, and relationship management. To increase the effectiveness of digital communication, account owners need to develop awareness of the emotional impact of their actions, align messages with context, and prioritize integrity in every post. In this way, digital political communication can be more constructive and reflect greater social responsibility.

Expressions of support for one of the candidate pairs by discrediting the other party is also an indication of a lack of self-management skills. For example, as done by one of the top talker accounts supporting Prabowo-Gibran with the initials @bd who reposted a satire to Ganjar Pranowo regarding the high poverty rate in Central Java during Ganjar's tenure as governor (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Repost upload from account with initial @bd

c. Participation and Relationship Management

The support shown by netizens on social media to one of the presidential and vice presidential candidate pairs often leads to poor relationship management with other different parties. Examples of content created by @SM accounts (see figure 4 above) also show poor relationship management, especially in the way they communicate with their audience. The account uploads a lot of content that is in line with captions and hashtags that are not relevant

to the uploaded photos. The selected caption does not show an effort to build clear and effective communication, especially since the content shared is political and requires a deeper understanding. In political communication, it is important for account owners to have skills in designing structured and relevant messages so that the public can better understand their intentions and views.

Another example can be seen from the content uploaded by the account with the initials @MI with the narration 'Let's go, who wants to JOIN...' in the image containing the words 'Don't choose Jokowi's son' (Figure 6). It can be seen that @MI contains negative comments that tend to incite the right to vote for each individual's presidential and vice presidential candidates.



Figure 6: Repost content in the account with initial @MI

Account with the initial @MI is one of the accounts that talks the most about the Ganjar-Mahfud candidate pair. The account contains content as a pro party to the Ganjar-Mahfud candidate pair, but in other content he corners the Prabowo-Gibran candidate pair as a form of defending the candidate he supports. One of the other top talker accounts supporting Ganjar-Mahfud with the initials @JC also uploaded content that tends to discredit Gibran after officially becoming vice president (Figure 7). This content shows the lack of relationship management carried out by supporters of the presidential and vice presidential candidate pairs who continue to discredit the opposite party after the contest ends. This behaviour reflects how political partisanship often overshadows the need for post-election reconciliation and healing. Instead of shifting toward unity, such communication patterns perpetuate hostility and divide.



Figure 7: Uploaded Content from account with the initial @JC

Based on the concept of Digital Emotional Intelligence (DEI), the behaviour of @MI accounts and other accounts such as @JC in uploading content that supports the Ganjar-Mahfud candidate pair as well as discrediting the Prabowo-Gibran candidate pair shows weaknesses in several main aspects of DEI, especially in relationship management, digital empathy, and self-management. In DEI, relationship management includes the ability to build and maintain positive relationships, both with those who agree and those who disagree. As the accounts continue to produce content that tends to discredit political opponents even after the contestation has ended, they show a lack of effort to improve the dynamics of relationships between supporters and create a more constructive digital atmosphere. This reinforces the echo chambers often found in digital spaces, where users are more focused on affirmation than dialogue. A more mature DEI approach would prioritize engaging with opposing views respectfully rather than attacking them.

In addition, the post that discredited other candidate pairs, such as Gibran after officially becoming vice president, reflected the weakness of digital empathy. Digital empathy requires individuals to understand the audience's perspectives and emotional reactions, including those with different views. Content that focuses on destructive criticism instead of substantive criticism has the potential to increase social polarization and worsen inter-group relations. In the post-election context, this action could prolong political tensions in the digital space, which should have begun to subside in favour of democratic consolidation. Empathetic communication plays a crucial role in bridging political divides, particularly in transitional periods. Without it, the risk of deepening ideological fragmentation grows, weakening trust in democratic processes.

Weaknesses in self-management can also be seen from the tendency of these accounts to prioritize loyalty to candidate pairs who are supported in an unconstructive way, such as attacking the opposing party. In DEI, self-management includes the ability to control actions and emotions, especially in stressful or competitive situations. Posts that constantly corner opponents without considering their emotional implications for the public show a lack of self-control in balancing expressions of support and social responsibility. Such behaviour signals impulsivity and a failure to regulate digital conduct in a way that supports civic harmony.

Furthermore, this behaviour also indicates a lack of social awareness, which in DEI refers to the ability to read social dynamics in the digital space and act adaptively according to the context. After the political contest, it is hoped that supporters of the candidate pairs can play a role in easing political tensions and creating a more inclusive narrative. However, posts like those made by @MI and @JC actually prolong the split, showing that they do not fully understand their role in creating a healthier digital ecosystem. This underscores the urgent need for digital literacy programs that incorporate emotional and relational dimensions. Only with comprehensive digital education users can be empowered to communicate more responsibly and ethically online.

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that hoax makers show varying emotional manipulation capabilities, both in the context of the content they produce and the impact on the audience. They use strategically designed narratives to exploit emotional responses such as fear, anger, or confusion. This strategy reflects that hoax makers understand the emotional dynamics of their audiences, even though their application of digital emotional intelligence (DEI) is more often directed towards destructive goals than constructive ones. For example, hoaxes about a presidential candidate's health condition or

personal attacks on political opponents are designed to influence public perception, create polarization, and direct certain narratives that benefit certain parties.

These findings contribute significantly to the development of science in the field of DEI, particularly in understanding how emotional manipulation in the digital space can impact people's collective behaviour. This study highlights the importance of researching the dimensions of digital empathy, emotion management, and social awareness in disseminating information, including in the context of hoaxes. The hoax creators indirectly describe how emotional intelligence can be used negatively to influence the perception and actions of others in the digital world. This analysis expands academic understanding of how emotions are processed and manipulated in an increasingly complex digital environment.

In addition, these findings offer insights to develop more effective strategies in fighting hoaxes by integrating the concept of DEI in digital literacy education. By understanding the emotional manipulation mechanisms used by hoax creators, digital literacy approaches can be more focused on strengthening individuals' ability to recognize and manage their emotional responses to manipulative content. The findings also encourage the development of technologies that can detect communication patterns that exploit emotions in a destructive way, so that they can be applied in the regulation of digital platforms to create healthier and more inclusive spaces.

Thus, research on the behaviour of hoax creators is not only relevant to understand the dynamics of digital politics, but also makes an important contribution to the development of DEI theory and applications in creating a more ethical and responsible digital ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The circulation of hoaxes and hate speech during the election period is one of the significant challenges to developing democracy in various countries, including Indonesia. The characteristics of hoaxes and hate speeches in the 2024 election in Indonesia are slightly different from the spread of hoaxes in the 2019 election. Political polarization is not too narrow on the two camps' front, but each group still portrays an opposite identity politics. The changes that have occurred are more in the increasing choice of media, including new platforms such as TikTok, especially among young people. From the aspect of digital emotional intelligence, the enthusiasm to support one of the specific candidate pairs tends to reduce the emotional intelligence of supporters of political contestants, which is shown by the results of the analysis of netizens' activities on social media from the aspects of empathy, self-management, and relationship management.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors thank the Directorate of Research, Technology, and Community Service, Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Republic of Indonesia for providing the grant to this research.

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