

ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARD HOAXES

Dadang Herli Saputra

University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Serang, Banten

herlid64@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study investigated the university students' attitudes toward hoaxes along with the potential determinants affecting their attitudes, sources the students usually access, and the impact of hoaxes toward the students' life.

The design of the study was a mixed method in which both written questionnaire and semi-structured interview were administered to the participants. The participants recruited are Law students departments who are currently studying in one of the state universities located in Serang Banten.

Unlike the previous study, the finding indicates that the action of spreading or sharing hoaxes is not always negative. In fact, it can be used as a means for preventative measures. In case of the absence of the news from the mainstream media, the news from the alternative media constitutes inseparable information which makes them more alert toward any harmful occurrence. Some suggestions regarding this matter are offered

Keywords: *Attitudes, university students, toward, hoaxes*

I INTRODUCTION

Hoax is naturally untrue or false information. The causes of the emergence of hoax are numerous, such as malicious intention, covering the truth, or even a mere fun. Nugroho (as citing other scholars such as Lion Gu, Kropotov & Yarochkin) defines hoax as the promotion and dissemination of news through social media which is designed as well as possible so that it looks real (2018, p. 3). Further, he confirms that hoax is usually designed to influence or to manipulate the opinions of social media users on specific topics for specific purposes (Nugroho, 2018, p. 3).

The need to analyse hoax among young generation is imperative given the ubiquity of hoaxes has resulted in social unrest as well as legal implications (see e.g., Rosyadi, 2018 August 06). The present study seeks to elicit the students' attitudes so that it can possibly improve the education stakeholders' awareness on the phenomena of hoaxes among young generation. So far, the study of hoaxes is limited to the description of the students' attitudes or perceptions toward hoaxes without ever delving further into the reasons behind the bearers' attitudes (see e.g., Suyanto, Zen, Prasetyo, Isbandono, Gamaputra, Purba, 2018).

The present study sticks on the concept of attitudes which is viewed as a behavioural tendency (see e.g., Alamsyah, 2018) in order to allow the other relevant researchers or the higher education stakeholders to anticipate the potential recurrence of the hoaxes among young generation. Given the concept of attitudes which covers multiple components (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioural), the present study allows us to analyse not only the students' opinions or perceptions (i.e. cognitive component), but also what they feel about the hoax (i.e. affective component).

Further, the study is expected to enable us to highlight the students' behavioural component in relation to hoax news (see the concepts of multiple components of attitudes voiced by Ajzen, 2005). Besides, with the more holistic concept of attitudes, the present study could elicit more elaborate data on hoaxes and the potential re-emergence among young generation. The present study focuses on the students' attitudes toward hoaxes, the factors (determinants) affecting the students' behaviours toward hoaxes, the sources of media that the students usually access, and the students' perceptions toward the impacts of hoaxes.

II MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 ATTITUDE

Attitude is considered as a behavioural tendency which indicates someone's evaluation toward an attitude object (Alamsyah, 2018). Therefore, someone who has bad attitudes toward certain culture, for instance, will usually avoid any contact or try to prevent possible interaction with those belong to this group (Ajzen, 2005). Baker (1992) postulates that the umbrella term of attitudes, which is sometimes interchangeably termed as language attitudes or attitudes may cover lots of issues and belong to sociolinguistics study.

Although the concept of attitudes is commonly related to language just as other linguistic concept refers to, in some occasions however, language attitudes can possibly analyse more varied issues. Attitude or sometimes termed as attitudes indicating plural entities are commonly viewed as behavioural tendencies which lead someone (i.e. the bearer) to do something based on his/her evaluation toward the attitude object (an object to which the attitude refers to) (see e.g., Baker, 1992; Bouzidi, 1989; Ajzen, 2005; Alamsyah, 2018).

Thus, if someone has negative attitudes toward smoking, for instance, one will probably avoid smoking, avoid the smokers, avoid meeting those involved in tobacco production, etc. Although some scholars (Matsuda, 2000; Almahmoud, 2012) consider that the significant influence of attitudinal components toward behaviour may vary due to possible inconsistent relationship among the three attitudinal components (Baker, 1992; Stangor, Jhangiani, & Tarry, 2014), scholars generally believe that attitude is naturally potent to drive someone's behaviour (Fazio, 1986; Bouzidi, 1989; Habyarimana, 2015). Pedagogically, for instance, scholars believe that that certain attitude(s) can function as a catalyst which activates the students' behavioural component to act in certain intensity and direction (Fazio, 1986; Bouzidi, 1989; Johnson, 2008).

2.2 HOAXES IN MEDIA

There are several factors which can possibly become the triggers of hoaxes or false news. Meinarni and Iswara (2018, p. 184) elaborate as the followings:

2.2.1 IDEOLOGY

Ideology is considered as the main factor producing hoaxes. In this case, hoaxes or false news can be used as one of the means for propagating the proponents' ideology.

2.2.2 POLITICAL AFFILIATION

Political interest is also considered as one of the promising "commodities" for the hoax proponents. Through hoax, biased or misleading information (e.g., political propaganda) can be done efficiently, effectively and massively.

2.2.3 ECONOMY FACTORS

In this information era, mass media tend to depend solely on the concept of profit and loss just like other industry or business venture. Therefore, they emphasize their operation on business or economy aspects. The operational cost, which is extremely high (e.g., the cost of media technology, the salary of the workers), has forced media to resort to any means to survive, including in the ways to deliver the content of the news to its readers.

2.2.4 POPULARITY

Popularity is one of the motives of hoax used by people. For instance, celebrities often use hoaxes or false news to improve their existence in the entertainment world. How to get attention in this way is well-known in Indonesian language as *Pencitraan* (image making).

2.3 LAW GOVERNING HOAXES

Prior to the enactment of the information and telecommunication or ITE act, the government or other law apparatus has already set up some rules which regulates the spread of the news using defamation, libel, and so forth. For instance, there are five acts, including hoaxes, which are categorized as hateful expressions and are regulated in Indonesian criminal law (KUHP) ranging from slander, insults, to filing a false written or oral report to authorities that could harm the reputation of others. The above violation can possibly carry a maximum prison term of four years.

2.3.1 HOAXES BASED ON ITE LAW

The newly enacted ITE law (See e.g., JDIH BPK RI, 2017) clearly prohibits the acts of spreading false news which may result in personal or public damage. Specifically, the article 28 section 1 UU No. 11 2008 stipulates that anyone who intentionally benefits himself or herself causing to rise or to drop of the prices of merchandise, funds or securities by disseminating false news shall be punished up to two years and eight months.

2.3.2 HOAXES BASED ON INDONESIAN CRIMINAL LAW (KUHP)

In addition, the action of spreading hoax or false news is also found in the criminal law or penal code or commonly termed as KUHP (See e.g., Moeljanto, 2005). Article 390 of penal code, for instance, governs such acts with relatively different perspective. Specifically, the article uses the term “spread false news” instead of hoaxes.

2.4 RESEARCH METHOD

In order to elicit more elaborate data from the participants, mixed method was used. Creswell, (2008, p. 552) coined mixed method as a procedure for collecting, analysing, and ‘mixing’ both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study in order to understand a research problem (Creswell & Clark as cited in Creswell, 2008, p. 552). The present study was started with the use of written questionnaires in order to allow the researcher to get preliminary data on the students’ attitudes regarding hoaxes. Further, semi-structured interview was employed in order to get more elaborate data.

The recruitment of the participants was based on convenience sampling (Frankel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 99). There were 80 students of Law departments who were recruited conveniently. The participants recruited are the students who are currently studying in Law departments. The population of participants consisted of mixed backgrounds with the average age of twenty years old, excluding a few students who had a job. The participants were briefed in the same day before participating in the research project. The briefing aimed to provide the participants with necessary information regarding the commencement of the research as well as their rights to remain confidential. In the first phase, the participants were requested to fill in the written questionnaires pertaining to their attitudes toward hoaxes. In the second phase, the participants were requested to have a separate interview session so that the information elicited from the questionnaire could be verified and elaborated. The number of the students interviewed was specifically chosen based on the relevant findings, thus not all students were interviewed. The period from the questionnaire filling and the interview was only about two or three hours. Relatively similar time/concurrent period aimed to allow the participants to answer the responses given in their questionnaires more consistently (Yu, 2010).

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 ATTITUDES OF THE PARTICIPANTS TOWARD HOAXES AND UNTRUE NEWS

Based on the written questionnaires and the participants’ verbal responses, it could be found that basically most participants indicated negative attitudes toward hoaxes. There were 74 participants who stated that ‘they disliked hoaxes’. Further, most of the participants (70 students) also confirmed that hoaxes were untrue and harmful for them. Despite their negative attitudes, whatsoever, most participants were found to be unable to identify the criteria of correct or false news. In fact, there were only 32 students (40 % of the total participants) who claimed to be able to differentiate between false news and truthful news.

3.2 DETERMINANTS AFFECTING THE PARTICIPANTS’ BEHAVIOUR TOWARD HOAXES AND UNTRUE NEWS

Based on further analysis, it could be found that the main reasons for spreading false or untruthful news was for preventative measure as indicated in both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The finding indicated that the students took different news in order to cross-check the validity of the news. Most of the participants verbalized that certain information they needed was not available in the mainstream/common sources, thus finding other news were perceived necessary. In sum, there were 65 participants (approximately 81.25 % of the total respondents) who claimed that their attempt to spread hoax was necessary so that they could prevent any harmful occurrence earlier. The second reason for spreading or sharing hoaxes among the participants was their interest in reading sensational news. More specifically, there were only 10 participants (approximately 12.5 % of the whole respondents) spreading or sharing hoaxes for the sake of a mere fun.

3.3 SOURCES THAT THE PARTICIPANTS REGULARLY ACCESS

Based on the finding above, it could be also found that the students accessed less informal media (e.g., Facebook, Tweeter, etc.) more frequently compared with formal media. Further verbal responses during the interview indicated that they preferred less formal media since the less formal media could

provide more interactive discussion toward the news. In sum, there were 48 participants (approximately 60 % of the total respondents) who claimed that they accessed social media more than other formal media such as TV, Radio, and newspaper.

3.4 PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD THE IMPACTS OF HOAXES

The impact of hoaxes was also considered light and less serious as indicated by 67 participants (87.5 % respondents). Further, research data elicited from the participants also supported the above finding. Specifically, there were 76 participants (approximately 95 %) who were found to perceive that all news was not free from possible inaccurate or untruthful contents. The less severe impact of hoaxes and possible flawed found in any media voiced by the participants were also relevant with the last data of the present study indicating the participants' objection in solving the hoax cases in the courts (76 participants said 'no' toward legal action taken by the government).

3.5 THE AVID YET GULLIBLE READERS

Based on the findings, it can be interpreted that the participants who comprise of young university students do not always know the truth of the news. This finding slightly disconfirms the study conducted by Chandra, Surjandy, and Ernawaty (2017) in terms of the ability to identify hoaxes or fake news. Further study needs to be done whether identifying the sources or the speakers is sufficient to determine the validity of the news (Chandra, Surjandy, & Ernawaty, 2017).

3.6 THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

It can also be interpreted that the participants' ambivalent attitudes are primarily caused by a mere preventative measure. The present study also disconfirms other studies (See e.g., Chandra, Surjandy, & Ernawaty, 2017) in terms of negative side of accessing hoaxes. In some cases, it is necessary to balance the information for the sake of improving the validity of the information obtained by the readers. The case of alleged organ trafficking which occurs in Indonesia, as voiced by the participants, has been investigated by one of the well-known TV channels (see e.g., Kompas, 2017 March 19, or Witjaksono, 2019, January 15). Unfortunately, despite the increasing public concern, the authorities remain tight-lipped about this matter. In fact, the news on kidnapping, which is considered as hoaxes by the authorities, has also resulted in several incrimination cases (Astuti, 2018, November 02).

3.7 THE CONSISTENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEWS

The finding indicates that 'basically the participants who are the predominantly young students do not always believe that the news of the government is always truthful'. Based on both written questionnaire data and their verbal responses, it could be interpreted that not all of the government's information is true or accurate. It is certainly urgent to conduct further study whether the conflicting information released to public or the alleged use of buzzers for certain political advantages (see e.g., Cahyono, Putri, & Faizah, 2019) may have lowered the public trust on the mainstream media at the present time.

IV CONCLUSION

The participants' ignorance toward hoaxes or fake news indicates that the students are not fully aware of the significant impact and legal consequence that can incriminate them. It also indicates that the students' motive to spread or share hoaxes is not always negative. In fact, sharing other news from different media is necessary due to the absence of certain news in the mainstream media.

In other words, finding or depending on the other sources of information/media can also be an indicator that formally registered news channels do not always satisfy the people's right to know about things which are deemed important for them.

Out of court/trial is also necessary to be taken into account since most of the young perpetrators do not have malicious agenda. In fact, they merely do it for fun or for preventative measures.

Media, which are found to have spread hoaxes, should also be given strict sanction in order to create fair trial since the possible hoaxes or untrue news can also occur in any media as verbalized by the participants. This is certain unfair to punish the ones who spread the news among their immediate colleagues while being lenient to the media or institutions which may have triggered such news.

REFERENCES

- Alamsyah, A. (2018). *Local language, bahasa Indonesia, or foreign language?* In Totok W. A., Nyong E. T.I.S., Mochammad T. M., Fika M. (Eds.). ICIGR 2017 International Conference on Global Intellectual Responsibility. (pp. 61-66). Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo. <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/icigr-17/25890838>
- Astuti, N.A.R. (2018 November 02). *Polisi tangkap empat penyebar hoax pelaku penculikan anak*. DETIKNEWS. Retrieved March 10 2018 from: <https://www.google.com/search?q=polisi+menangkap+penyebarnya+hoax+penculikan+anak+di+ta+ngerang&oq=po&aqs=chrome.2.69i60j69i57j69i59j69i60i2j69i59.3267j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>
- Ajzen, I. (2005). *Attitudes, personality and behavior*. (2nd Ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Almahmoud, M. A. (2012). *Saudi university students' attitudes towards the use of Arabic and English: Implications for language planning*. (Doctoral Thesis). Macquarie University. Retrieved June 12 2016 from: http://www.researchonline.mq.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/mq:33484;jsessionid=16FADA1FE278ADF1B95DDE7BFB9D8006?f0=sm_subject%3A%22Arabic+language+--+Standarization%22
- Baker, C. (1992). *Attitudes and language*. Clevedon: Multilingual matters.
- Bouzidi, H. (1989). *Language attitudes and their implications for education: Morocco as a case study*. (PhD thesis). Retrieved June 20 2016 from: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5371>
- Cahyono, F., Putri, K., & Faizah, H. N. (2019). *Indonesian Case of Political Identity, Post Truth, and Computational Propaganda*. *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies*, 1(2), 49-57. Retrieved February 20 2020 from: <https://doi.org/10.34199/ijracs.2019.10.01>
- Chandra, Y. U., Surjandy., & Ernawaty. (2017). *Higher Education Student Behaviours in Spreading Fake News on Social Media: A Case of LINE Group*. *International Conference on Information Management and Technology (ICIM Tech) Proceeding*. Retrieved March 20 2020 from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322879882>
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. New Jersey: Pearson.
- Fazio, R.H. (1986). *How do attitudes guide behaviour?* In R. M. H. Sorrentino & E. Tory (Eds.). *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundations of Social Behaviour* (pp. 204-243). New York: Guilford Press.
- Frankel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H.H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. (8th Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Habyarimana, H. (2015). *Investigation of attitudes and classroom practices of educators and learners in relation to English as the medium of instruction at four primary schools in Rwanda*. (Doctoral dissertation). Faculty of Humanities, School of Education. University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Retrieved on April 10 2016 from: <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/18233/Hilaire%20PhD%20Thesis%20full%20text.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>
- JDIH BPK RI. (2017). Data Base Peraturan. Undang-undang (UU) Nomor 11 Tahun 2008 Tentang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik. Retrieved June 24 2020 from: <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/37589>
- Johnson, K. (2008). *Introduction to foreign language learning and teaching*. (2nd Ed.) Harlow: Pearson.
- Kompas. (2017 March 19). *Waspada penculikan anak*. Retrieved March 20 2019 from: <https://www.kompas.tv/article/630/waspada-penculikan-anak>
- Matsuda, A. (2000). *Japanese attitude toward English: A case study of high school students*. (Doctoral dissertation). Purdue University, Indiana. Retrieved June 10 2017 from: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/dissertations/AAI3018243/>
- Meinarni, N. P. S., & Iswara, I. B. A. I. (2018). *Hoax and its mechanism in Indonesia*. *International Conference of Science Communication Research (ICCSR)* Retrieved January 20 2019 from: <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/iccsr-18/25904597>
- Moeljatno (2005). *Kitab Undang-undang Hukum Pidana (KUHP)* Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- Nugroho, A. (2018). *The analysis of hoax spread in social media*. *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science*, 23(6), 50-60. Retrieved on January 20 2019 from: <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2023%20Issue6/Version-6/G2306065063.pdf>

- Rosyadi, M.I. (2018 August 06). *Sudah ada UU ITE kenapa masih ada hoax?* DETIKNET. Retrieved on January 04 2019 from: <https://inet.detik.com/cyberlife/d-4152354/sudah-ada-uu-ite-kenapa-masih-ada-hoax>
- Stangor, C., Jhangiani, R., & Tarry, H. (2011). *Principles of social psychology*. International edition. E-book version. Retrieved May 10 2018 from: <http://solr.bccampus.ca:8001/bcc/items/66c0cf64-c485-442c-8183-de75151f13f5/1/>
- Suyanto, T., Zen, IM., Prasetyo, Isbandono, P., Gamaputra, G., Purba, IP (2018). *The study perception of social sciences and law faculty students for hoax in social media*. Physical Conference Series. IOP Science. Retrieved March 02 2020 from: <https://iopscience.iop.org/journal/1742-6596>
- Witjaksono, A. (2019 January 15). *Anak hilang organ lenyap*. KOMPAS. Retrieved March 23 2019 from: <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2019/01/15/05391221/aiman-anak-hilang-dan-organ-lenyap>
- Yu, Y. (2010). *Attitudes of learners toward English: A case of Chinese college students*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Graduate School of Education. The Ohio State University. Retrieved March 12 2019 from: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=osu1283303545&disposition=inline

