

The Transformation of Crisis Communication in Indonesian Mass Media during the Post-Truth Era

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze how Indonesian mass media adapt to the communication crisis triggered by the post-truth era. Through a comprehensive literature review, it was found that both conventional and digital mass media in Indonesia are increasingly influenced by the dominance of opinion and emotion, which often replace factual information in the delivery of news. The post-truth era encourages media outlets to tailor their content to audience preferences, focusing more on sensational or emotionally charged news that aligns with personal beliefs, rather than presenting objective and verified information. A significant consequence of this shift is the widespread dissemination of hoaxes and misinformation, which are frequently published without adequate verification processes. Despite efforts by media outlets to adopt technological solutions and collaborate with fact-checking organizations, the spread of misinformation remains challenging to control. This study also highlights the ongoing shift in media communication strategies, which, although boosting audience engagement, increases the risk of sensationalism and the distribution of inaccurate information. Public trust in Indonesian mass media remains low, particularly among younger audiences who are heavily exposed to information through social media, which further exacerbates the communication crisis. The study concludes that the post-truth phenomenon contributes to growing social polarization, requiring a more holistic approach to address these issues. Collaboration between media organizations, the government, and society at large is essential to improving digital literacy and effectively combating the spread of misinformation.

Keywords: post-truth, crisis communication, misinformation, mass media, digital literacy

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has significantly changed the landscape of mass media, including in Indonesia. Initially, mass media was the main channel for conveying information to the public. According to data from the Press Council as of January 2024, there were 1,811 verified media companies, with digital media dominating 1,502 companies. A survey by the Katadata Insight Center (KIC) together with the Ministry of Communication and Information showed that in 2024, 73% of Indonesians accessed information through social media, while television was accessed by 27% of respondents (Prasty, 2011). This data shows a shift in public preference from conventional media to digital media in consuming information.

Along with the rapid development of digital platforms and the internet, mass media are now faced with new challenges in maintaining the credibility and objectivity of the information they convey. One of the biggest challenges that has emerged in recent years is the post-truth phenomenon. The post-truth phenomenon refers to a condition where objectivity and verifiable facts become less important than emotional influences or personal views in forming public opinion (Purba & Sitorus, 2023). The term post-truth comes from the combination of the words post meaning after and truth meaning truth, describing an era where truth is no longer the main standard in public discussion. The term post-truth began to be popular in the early 21st century, especially in politics and the media. Oxford Dictionaries even named post-truth as the Word of the Year in 2016, following phenomena such as the Brexit referendum in the UK and the US presidential election. The concept of post-truth reflects a paradigm shift where emotions, narratives, and information manipulation are often more dominant than facts in influencing people's decisions and views (Salma, 2017).

In the post-truth era, arguments based on facts often lose out to narratives that emphasize emotions, beliefs, or individual personal identities. This phenomenon is further exacerbated by advances in technology, especially social media, which allows information to spread at high speed and without adequate control. In cyberspace, algorithms tend to prioritize provocative or emotional content because this type of content gets more interaction such as likes, shares, or comments compared to fact-based or more nuanced information. This creates an echo chamber, where individuals are only exposed to information that supports their views, while other perspectives are ignored or even dismissed.

The theory of post-truth as developed by various scholars, focuses on how emotions, personal beliefs, and identity often outweigh objective facts in shaping people's understanding and decisions, particularly in the context of politics and media. A key figure in understanding post-truth is Ralph Keyes who first explored the concept in his book *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*. Keyes argues that we live in a society where truth is often subjective, and people increasingly prioritize their emotions and beliefs over factual accuracy (Moravčíková, 2020). In a more recent context, Lewandowsky et al., (2017) in his book *Post-Truth* further elaborates on the phenomenon by linking it to the rise of misinformation and the erosion of trust in institutions. McIntyre suggests that the post-truth era is characterized by a growing skepticism toward traditional sources of authority, such as the media and scientific experts. In this environment, people are more likely to accept information that aligns with their personal beliefs, even if it contradicts established facts.

Framework of critical media literacy emphasize the importance of understanding how media content is shaped and how digital platforms contribute to the spread of misinformation. Hobbs argues that in the post-truth era, media literacy education is essential for helping individuals critically assess information and recognize bias or manipulation in the information they consume. The post-truth theory suggests a shift from an objective, fact-based approach to truth to one where personal belief, emotion, and identity are often seen as more important than factual evidence in shaping perceptions and decisions. This phenomenon is amplified by digital platforms, where algorithms tend to prioritize emotionally charged or sensational content over balanced, fact-based reporting.

The post-truth phenomenon has also encouraged many media outlets to pursue sensationalism and clickbait as a way to increase readership or viewership in order to gain ratings and revenue. Although the information presented is often not entirely accurate or verified, the media continues this practice because of its effectiveness in attracting attention. In fact, in some cases, mainstream media are involved in the spread of unverified information, either because of a desire to follow trends or because of a lack of strict verification processes (Manaransyah, 2022). This has resulted in declining public trust in the media as a reliable source of information, worsening the ongoing communication crisis.

This communication crisis is increasingly evident in Indonesia, especially with the increasing consumption of information through social media and digital platforms. Based on data from We Are Social and DataReportal reports in early 2024, Indonesia was recorded as having 185.3 million internet users, with a penetration rate of 66.5 percent. In addition, around 139 million people in Indonesia actively use social media, covering almost 50 percent of the total population. In fact, the number of active mobile phone connections has reached 353.3 million, more than the total population, with a penetration rate of 126.8 percent (Purba & Sitorus, 2023). These figures reflect a very high level of connectivity, which of course has a major impact on how information is consumed and disseminated, accelerating the spread of hoaxes and unverified information, and worsening the increasingly widespread communication crisis.

High consumption of information through digital platforms creates challenges in terms of the credibility and accuracy of the information circulating. The post-truth phenomenon is increasingly becoming a deep issue. The post-truth phenomenon affects the Indonesian mass media which must adapt to conditions where many readers or viewers prefer information that is in accordance with their views, even though the information is not necessarily accurate. In many cases, emotional or controversial information spreads faster than information based on valid facts. This poses the risk of worsening the quality of information received by the public and creating distrust of the media.

One real example of this communication crisis is the rampant spread of hoaxes or fake news circulating in the community. Based on the TurnBackHoax Indonesia report, in 2023 there were more than 4,000 identified cases of hoaxes related to political, health, and social issues in Indonesia. These hoaxes are often spread through social media, but also often get attention in mainstream mass media which sometimes cannot verify their truth properly. The Indonesian mass media as the main source of information often has to face challenges in responding to the communication crisis caused by this misinformation (Harahap et al., 2024). This is further exacerbated by the difficulty in distinguishing between authentic facts and narratives constructed for specific purposes such as identity politics or economic interests.

The literature review shows that the communication crisis experienced by the Indonesian mass media is not something new. Since the reform era, the media in Indonesia has experienced many major changes, starting from the increase in the number of mass media, both print and electronic, to the presence of social media that allows anyone to become a disseminator of information. However, in the post-truth era, the challenges faced by the mass media are increasingly complex. Research by Wahyono et al., (2020) shows that in the post-truth era, the mass media often have to deal with increasing public distrust of the information they convey. In Indonesia, this is increasingly felt with the strengthening political polarization in recent years, especially ahead of general elections and other social issues. On the one hand, the mass media are required to maintain their objectivity and credibility, but on the other hand, they also have to deal with pressure from political and economic interests that can influence the content of the news.

A study by Nguyen (2020) shows that post-truth is also related to changes in communication patterns in society. In the digital era, information tends to be consumed

selectively according to individual preferences, which ultimately creates an echo chamber where individuals are only exposed to information that strengthens their views. This makes the process of verifying facts increasingly difficult because many people prioritize narratives that fit their beliefs rather than accountable truths. Indonesian mass media, which must struggle to remain relevant amidst these changes, must find new ways to overcome the communication crisis caused by post-truth.

This study aims to analyze how Indonesian mass media adapt to the communication crisis triggered by the post-truth era. This study will explore the strategies implemented by the mass media in facing the challenges of the post-truth era. The research question that will be answered in this study is: How do Indonesian mass media manage the communication crisis that arises due to the post-truth era? By answering this question, this study is expected to provide a clearer picture of the impact of post-truth on mass media in Indonesia and the media's contribution to dealing with the communication crisis that occurs.

RESEARCH METDHOD

This study uses a literature study design in which an in-depth analysis is conducted on various literature relevant to the post-truth phenomenon, communication crisis, and mass media. Literature study is the process of searching, collecting, and analyzing relevant literature to explore the topic or phenomenon being studied. The main purpose of the literature study is to understand previous research, theoretical concepts, and existing findings in the field related to the research topic (Sugiyono, 2018). Through literature study, researchers can identify gaps or deficiencies in the existing literature, as well as strengthen the theoretical basis used in the research.

Literature study also serves to provide a strong foundation for writing research, help formulate research problems, and determine the right methodology. Literature study allows researchers to explore information from various sources such as books, journal articles, research reports, and other relevant documents without involving direct primary data collection from the field. The focus of this study is on the study of existing documents which are the main basis for understanding how the post-truth phenomenon affects the dynamics of mass media in Indonesia. So that the main data sources for this study include various literature that discuss important themes such as post-truth, communication crisis, and the challenges of mass media in the digital era.

The data sources used in this study can be categorized into three main types. The first is books and scientific articles that provide an in-depth theoretical basis related to the post-truth phenomenon, communication crisis, and communication challenges in the digital era. This literature acts as an academic foothold in understanding how the post-truth phenomenon develops and influences the mass media ecosystem. Second, relevant reports and case studies from research institutions, non-governmental organizations, and media reports that review the communication crisis in Indonesia. These documents provide practical insights related to mass media strategies in dealing with the challenges of disinformation and hoaxes. Third, journals and media publications that review current issues about post-truth, hoaxes, and disinformation in Indonesia. These articles help explain the dynamics of communication in Indonesia and how the mass media navigates the complex flow of information.

The data collection technique in this study was carried out through a literature review with a series of systematic steps. The first step is to search for literature sources using various academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest. After the literature sources are collected, the next step is literature selection. The researcher selected the most relevant and quality literature to be analyzed, ensuring that the literature provides in-depth information on managing communication in the mass media in the face of the post-truth era. The final step is the content analysis of the literature, where the researcher explores the main

themes related to the communication crisis in the mass media, the communication strategies implemented, and the impact of post-truth on the quality of information delivered.

Data analysis was carried out using a descriptive-analytical approach, including three main stages. First, theme coding, where the researcher identifies the main themes that emerge from the literature reviewed such as the concept of post-truth, communication strategies, and the impact of post-truth on the credibility of the mass media. Second, literature synthesis aims to summarize and integrate various findings from the existing literature. This synthesis helps provide a comprehensive picture of how the post-truth phenomenon affects the Indonesian mass media and the strategies used to manage the communication crisis. Third, data interpretation, where the researcher draws conclusions from the literature synthesis and provides an in-depth understanding of the adaptation of the Indonesian mass media to the challenges of communication in the post-truth era.

RESULT

This study reveals how the post-truth phenomenon affects the communication crisis in the Indonesian mass media. Based on the literature review conducted, it was found that the post-truth phenomenon has affected the Indonesian mass media, both conventional and digital. Research by Barrera et al., 2020 shows that in the post-truth era, information conveyed by the mass media is often more dominated by opinion and emotion than objective facts. The results of the study Prastyo (2011) revealed that this change occurred along with the increasing role of social media, which allows audiences to more easily access information that is by their personal views, which are often unverified.

The main finding found by Aditia (2021) is that the mass media is increasingly adjusting its content to audience preferences, tending to prefer sensational or emotional news, which can arouse the audience's feelings, compared to news based on verified and objective facts. The media, both conventional such as television and newspapers, and digital such as online news sites and social media, are now more focused on things that can attract the attention of the audience, often ignoring the truth or accuracy of the information. This exacerbates the phenomenon of the spread of hoaxes and disinformation, where unverified information can quickly spread and be believed by the audience, especially because it is more evocative to their feelings.

The results of the study Rianto (2019) also revealed that audiences, who are increasingly polarized by their political and social views, tend to believe information that confirms their beliefs, rather than that which contradicts their views. This post-truth era encourages the media to adjust their content to the preferences of the audience, who are more interested in news that is evocative or that confirms their personal views, rather than objective and verified information. As stated by Alamsyah et al., (2024) this era reflects a transition from objectivity to subjectivity in the delivery of information. The same thing was emphasized by Lewandowsky et al. (2017), who explained that the post-truth phenomenon is driven by the increasing influence of audience cognitive bias on information consumption.

One of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon is the spread of hoaxes and disinformation that is often received and published by the mass media without going through an adequate verification process. Restianty (2018) stated that the viral nature of information on social media accelerates the spread of hoaxes, which are then adopted by the mass media in pursuit of sensation. Based on research results in several political or social cases, the mass media often focus more on sensational and controversial stories that can attract the attention of the audience, even though the information provided is not entirely true. In 2019, for example, several major Indonesian media outlets were involved in spreading unverified news during the election, which was later proven to be a hoax. This led to widespread distrust

among the public towards the media concerned, as reflected in the Edelman Trust Barometer report, which showed a sharp decline in public trust in the mass media.

Disinformation spread through social media platforms also exacerbates the communication crisis. Simarmata (2014) revealed that social media platforms are often used to spread digital propaganda that exacerbates the political situation. With easy access to information through available platforms, many fake news stories spread quickly and are believed by the public, often without a clear verification process. This study found that although many media outlets have tried to adapt by using technology to combat hoaxes, such as collaborating with fact-checking institutions and using digital monitoring systems, the spread of disinformation remains difficult to control. Aditia (2021b) showed that fake news has a greater chance of being spread than news that has been verified as true.

The findings of this study also show that there has been a change in the communication strategy of the mass media to adapt to market and audience demands. Many media outlets are starting to rely on data and analytics to understand their audience's preferences, and then present content tailored to what the audience wants. As explained by Diniyanto & Sutrisno (2022), data analysis allows the media to map audience behavior in more detail but also increases the risk of sensationalism. While this helps increase engagement and revenue, it also increases the risk of the media getting caught up in spreading inaccurate information, as criticized by Faturahmi (2020).

Several major Indonesian media outlets, such as Kompas and Detik, have begun to make stricter fact-checking efforts and collaborate with independent institutions such as Mafindo (Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia) to combat the spread of hoaxes. According to the Fact-Checking in Asia report in 2022, these initiatives have shown an increase in media credibility, although implementation challenges remain. However, despite efforts to improve media credibility, data shows that public trust in Indonesian mass media remains low, especially among the younger generation who are more exposed to information through social media, as found in a Pew Research Center study (2021).

The post-truth phenomenon reveals an imbalance between information providers and increasingly polarized audiences. According to Wuryanta (2018), this polarization is driven by social media algorithms that create echo chambers, where audiences are only exposed to information they agree with. This study shows that audiences are more likely to believe information that is in line with their personal views, making it increasingly difficult for people to accept information that differs from their beliefs. This leads to the strengthening of echo chambers, as described by Cosentino (2020), which exacerbates the communication crisis and deepens social polarization.

While there have been some attempts by the Indonesian mass media to address the challenges posed by the post-truth phenomenon, the findings of this study reveal that the communication crisis faced by Indonesian mass media is far more complex than initially perceived. The sheer scale and rapid spread of misinformation, combined with the deepening divisions in public opinion driven by emotional and identity-based narratives, have made the task of restoring trust in traditional media increasingly difficult. The issues at hand are multifaceted, encompassing not just the accuracy and reliability of information but also the broader societal impacts, including the erosion of public trust in institutions and the manipulation of public discourse.

One of the key challenges identified is the overwhelming dominance of social media platforms, which, despite efforts to regulate, remain major channels for information dissemination. The algorithms that prioritize sensationalist, emotionally charged, or polarizing content continue to thrive, further contributing to the spread of misinformation. Moreover, the traditional media landscape in Indonesia has also struggled to keep pace with the changing dynamics of digital communication. Many outlets, faced with intense

competition for audience attention, have resorted to clickbait and sensationalism to maintain relevance. Unfortunately, these practices have often compromised journalistic integrity and further fueled the communication crisis.

To effectively address these challenges, this study argues that a more holistic approach is needed—one that goes beyond the media industry alone and involves active collaboration between various stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society, and the media itself. A central component of this approach is the need for a comprehensive strategy to improve digital literacy among the public. Lacković (2020) proposed within the framework of critical media literacy, enhancing digital literacy involves not only equipping individuals with the tools to critically evaluate information but also fostering an understanding of how media content is produced, consumed, and interpreted in the digital age. This includes an awareness of how algorithms shape the information we encounter and how to recognize bias, manipulation, and disinformation.

DISCUSSION

The rapidly growing post-truth phenomenon in Indonesia has changed the way mass media convey information and interact with audiences. Post-truth, which refers to a condition in which emotions and personal beliefs influence public opinion more than objective facts, is the biggest challenge in the world of modern journalism, especially in Indonesia, which is facing an increasingly worsening communication crisis. In this study, it was found that most Indonesian mass media, both conventional and digital, are caught in a dilemma between meeting audience demands for sensational and interesting information, and maintaining the quality and credibility of the news presented. Some media ultimately choose to adapt to what the audience wants, such as providing content that is controversial or more emotional, which although it can increase the number of readers, can also damage public trust in the media.

Mass media in Indonesia is facing a major shift in the communication paradigm. On the one hand, they must face the audience's desire to get information that is by their beliefs—a phenomenon known as confirmation bias. Research shows that audiences who are exposed to information that is by their personal views will tend to believe the information more, even if the information contains elements that are not true. In some cases, this forces media that strive to be objective to compete with media that prioritize sensationalism, which often results in unverified information.

To address these challenges, several media outlets in Indonesia have begun to adopt more adaptive communication strategies that are based on fact-checking. For example, they work with independent organizations to verify news and provide tools for audiences to access more transparent information. Some examples of best practices include collaboration between media and digital platforms to create a more credible media ecosystem. However, despite these efforts, the biggest challenge faced by the mass media is how to maintain a balance between providing reliable information and remaining interesting to audiences, without falling into the trap of sensationalism.

The increasing prevalence of disinformation and hoaxes on social media has exacerbated the situation. These platforms often excel at spreading attention-grabbing information, regardless of the truth or validity of the information. With greater speed and reach, social media has become a primary channel for unverified information to spread. This adds to the burden on the mass media as they try to restore public trust in them. The main weakness found in this study is that although the mass media has made efforts to adapt to the post-truth phenomenon, the deeper problem of media literacy and public education on the importance of fact verification is still very limited.

Importance of media literacy is a major issue in dealing with the post-truth phenomenon. Many Indonesians do not fully understand the importance of distinguishing

between accurate and unverified information. Media efforts to increase audience engagement by providing more verified information can be a long-term solution, but the public also needs to be given further education on how to identify valid and invalid news. Therefore, in addition to the media trying to improve themselves, there needs to be greater collaboration between educational institutions, the government, and the media to improve the understanding of digital literacy in Indonesia, so that the public can be wiser in consuming information.

Post-truth phenomenon that is growing rapidly in Indonesia has a significant impact on the communication crisis in the mass media. As found in the results of this study, many Indonesian mass media are now facing a major dilemma between maintaining the integrity and objectivity of the information conveyed with the demand to attract the attention of the audience with more sensational and emotional content. In this discussion, the author will use various communication theories and concepts, including mass communication theory, agenda-setting theory, and truth theory to dig deeper into the implications of the post-truth phenomenon in the world of Indonesian journalism.

Based on the perspective of mass communication theory, the role of mass media as the guardian of objective information and the main source of public knowledge is increasingly threatened. According to McQuail (2010), mass media has the function of providing accurate information, educating the public, and becoming a channel of social control. However, in the post-truth era, Indonesian mass media faces major challenges in carrying out these functions. Media that tend to prioritize opinions and emotions, and provide space for the dissemination of unverified information, sacrifice basic journalistic values, such as objectivity and accuracy.

The spread of hoaxes identified in the results of this study makes it increasingly difficult for the public to distinguish between true and false information. This is to the theory of confirmation bias introduced by Tavris and Aronson), which states that individuals tend to seek and believe information that is by their views and beliefs, even though the information is invalid (Cosentino, 2020). In this context, the public is more easily influenced by news that confirms their views, and the mass media is also trapped in this pattern by presenting sensational content and containing elements of provocation to attract readers, even at the risk of damaging its credibility.

Agenda setting theory that developed by McCombs and Shaw is relevant to understanding how the media influences public opinion by determining which issues are important to discuss. In the post-truth era, the media not only sets the agenda through issue selection but also through the way information is presented, which often prioritizes emotion and sensationalism. For example, media that prefer to cover conflicts or controversies that occur in politics, without paying attention to the accuracy of the facts contained, risk obscuring their role in providing objective information and educating the public.

This post-truth phenomenon also exacerbates the increasingly sharp problem of social polarization. Based on the results of this study, there is a strong tendency among audiences to believe information that is by their personal views, which causes echo chambers—a situation where the audience is only exposed to information that supports their beliefs and closes themselves off from conflicting information. The echo chamber theory explains that this condition creates a limited space where only certain voices are heard, while different voices are sidelined. In the context of post-truth, this causes a deeper communication crisis, where the public is increasingly divided and cannot agree on the same truth because they are only exposed to information that is by their views.

This post-truth phenomenon also affects the role of the media in educating the public. As found in this study, despite efforts by the media to adapt by verifying facts through collaboration with institutions such as Mafindo, the results are still limited in stemming the flow of misinformation. This shows that although the mass media is trying to restore public

trust through verification measures, a more fundamental change in the public mindset regarding the importance of fact verification and media literacy is needed. For this reason, in the author's view, greater collaboration is needed between the media, educational institutions, the government, and the public itself to create a healthier communication ecosystem and support a culture of information based on truth.

This study also shows how the media tries to adapt to the demands of audiences who prefer more interesting and emotional content. This approach is based on the perspective of media economics, which is increasingly dependent on the number of clicks and readers to ensure the continuity of their business. However, although this is financially beneficial, it can ultimately damage the long-term relationship between the media and the audience. Media that prioritize sensationalism will lose credibility and audience trust, which will lead to a decrease in the quality of information spread in the community.

CONSLUSION

The post-truth phenomenon has created a complex communication crisis in Indonesian mass media, where the dominance of opinion and emotion replaces objective facts in conveying information, exacerbating the challenges faced by conventional and digital media. Although efforts to verify facts and collaborate with independent institutions such as Mafindo have been carried out by several major media outlets, the crisis of public trust in Indonesian mass media remains high, especially among the younger generation who are more exposed to information through social media. The rapid spread of hoaxes and disinformation on social media platforms has further exacerbated this situation, causing audiences to be more likely to believe information that is in line with their personal views, strengthening social polarization and creating echo chambers. Although technology and analytics have helped the media adapt to audience preferences, this has also increased the risk of being trapped in sensationalism and unverified information. Therefore, this communication crisis requires a more holistic approach, including improving digital literacy, collaboration between the media, government, and society, and more effective efforts to combat disinformation and improve media credibility amidst the increasingly dominant post-truth era.

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