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ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ADDRESSING HOAX INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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students' awareness of accurate and trustworthy information.

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Abstract

In the digital era, social media has become the main platform for information dissemination among students and society. However, easy access to information has also increased the spread of hoaxes, which can cause misunderstandings and reduce public trust. This study aims to analyze students' perceptions of the role of public relations in handling hoax information on social media. The research used a quantitative method with a descriptive approach through online questionnaires distributed to students of the Office Administration Education Study Program at Makassar State University. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages. The results showed that most students had positive perceptions of the role of public relations. Around 55%–65% of respondents agreed and 27%–40% strongly agreed regarding the role of public relations in improving digital information literacy, providing clarification, responding to hoaxes, utilizing social media, and monitoring and preventing hoaxes. Therefore, public relations is considered to play an important role in building

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has resulted in a significant transformation in the dissemination of information in society, particularly among students. Social media has become a primary means of obtaining a variety of information because it can be accessed quickly without the constraints of space and time. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are frequently used by students for academic activities and daily interactions (Sari & Nugroho, 2023). According to Databoks (2024), social media is the most widely accessed source of information for the younger generation to obtain the latest news.

However, this ease of access to information has also resulted in the increased spread of hoaxes on social media (Arifin & Fuad, 2022). Unverified information can spread quickly and be perceived as truth. This situation has the potential to cause misunderstandings, undermine public trust, and influence people's perspectives on an issue (Sarjito, 2023). The ongoing spread of hoaxes can also create a digital environment filled with misleading information (Juwita et al., 2024).

Students who actively use social media are highly likely to receive a variety of information daily. However, not all students have sufficient digital literacy skills to verify information before sharing it (UNESCO, 2023). Poor critical thinking and information evaluation skills can increase the risk of spreading hoaxes (Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

Furthermore, social media algorithms that display content based on user preferences accelerate the spread of information that is not necessarily valid, as users tend to accept repeated information without comparing it with more credible sources (OECD, 2024).

In these conditions, public relations plays a crucial role in managing public communications and conveying accurate information to the public. Public relations serves as a liaison between organizations and the public by delivering clear, reliable, and accountable information (Cutlip & Center, 2022). In the digital era, public relations is also required to be able to utilize social media effectively to counter hoaxes and improve the public's digital literacy (OECD, 2024; Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

The role of public relations is not only as a conveyor of information, but also as an educator, raising public awareness about the importance of verifying information before disseminating it (UNESCO, 2023). Public relations is expected to reduce the spread of hoaxes and strengthen public trust in information circulating on social media (Cutlip & Center, 2022). Therefore, the existence of public relations is crucial in creating effective, transparent, and trustworthy communication in the digital age (OECD, 2024).

Research on disinformation and social media has been extensive, but studies focusing on student

perceptions of the role of public relations in addressing hoaxes are still limited, particularly in higher education settings (OECD, 2024). Most previous research has focused on digital literacy or the spread of hoaxes in general, while studies on the role of public relations are rarely discussed (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). Therefore, this study is important to understand student perceptions of the contribution of public relations in addressing hoaxes on social media.

Conceptually, this research is grounded in digital literacy and public relations communication theory. Digital literacy is an individual's ability to access, understand, evaluate, and use information effectively in the digital environment (UNESCO, 2023). This ability is crucial for students to discern accurate information and avoid the spread of misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

2. Literature Review

This study also uses the concept of public relations as a means of managing public communications. According to Cutlip and Center (2022), public relations plays a role in building harmonious relationships between organizations and the public by conveying accurate and reliable information. In the digital era, public relations also plays a role in clarifying misinformation and

maintaining an organization's reputation on social media (OECD, 2024).

Another theory used is digital communication theory, which explains that social media is a channel for rapid and widespread information dissemination (OECD, 2024). Information, including hoaxes, can spread quickly and reach a large audience. This situation requires strong digital literacy skills so users can distinguish between true and false information.

3. Methodology

The widespread spread of hoaxes on social media demands in-depth scientific study, particularly regarding how students view the role of public relations in managing and responding to such information.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' perceptions of the role of public relations in handling hoaxes on social media, encompassing several aspects: digital information literacy, awareness of the role of public relations, public relations responsiveness, social media utilization, and hoax monitoring and prevention (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

Table 1. Questionnaire Instruments

No	Indicator	Question	Answer
1.	Digital Information Literacy	I am able to identify potentially hoax information on social media.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
		I am used to comparing information from various sources to ensure its accuracy.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
2.	Awareness of the Role of Public Relations	I know that public relations has a role in handling hoax information on social media.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
3.	Public Relations Responsibility	I realize the importance of the role of public relations in providing information clarification to the public.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
		Public Relations responded quickly to hoax information circulating on social media.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
		Public Relations immediately provides clarification when incorrect information appears.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree Strongly Disagree
4.	Utilization of Social Media	Public relations uses social media effectively to convey clarification of hoaxes.	a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Disagree d. Strongly Disagree
5.	Monitoring and Prevention	Public Relations monitors issues that have the potential to become hoaxes on social media.	d. Strongly Agree e. Agree f. Disagree g. Strongly Disagree

4. Results and Discussion

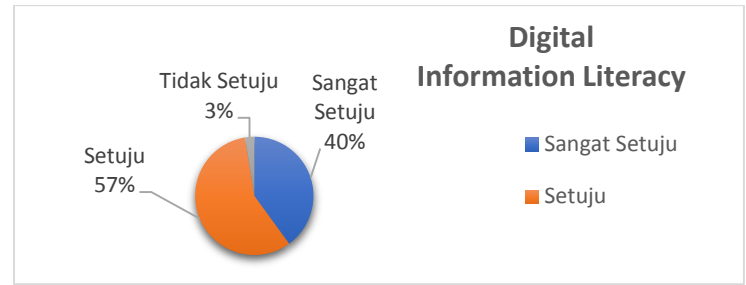


Figure 1. I am able to identify potentially hoax information on social media.

In Figure 1, 40% of respondents strongly agreed, 57% agreed, and 3% disagreed that they were able to identify potentially hoax information on social media. These results indicate that most students possess basic skills in recognizing misinformation, such as distinguishing between provocative headlines, unclear sources, and unsupported content. This ability is an important part of digital literacy, particularly in critically evaluating information. Students who possess this ability tend to be more cautious in receiving and sharing information on social media. According to David Pennycook and David Rand (2022), critical thinking skills play a significant role in reducing the spread of hoaxes. Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2023), digital literacy encompasses the ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate information appropriately. However, the presence of respondents who disagreed indicates that not all students possess the same abilities, necessitating improvements through digital literacy education and training.

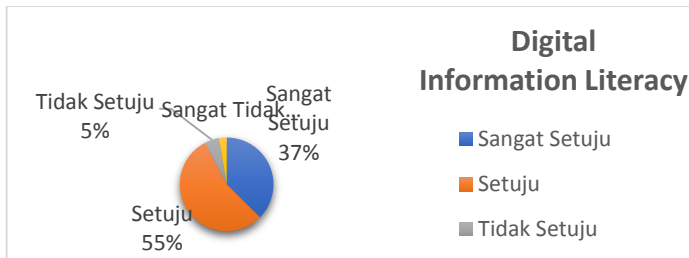


Figure 2. I am used to comparing information from various sources to ensure its accuracy.

In Figure 2, 37% of respondents strongly agreed and 55% agreed, while 5% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed that they habitually compare information from various sources. This indicates that the majority of students have developed the habit of verifying information before believing it, such as seeking out other sources, reading news from different media outlets, and ensuring the authenticity of information. This habit is crucial in preventing the spread of hoaxes, as information obtained from a single source may not be accurate. According to David Pennycook and David Rand (2022), comparing information from various sources can help individuals distinguish between valid and invalid information. Furthermore, according to the OECD (2024), the ability to evaluate information is a key skill in digital literacy. However, a small percentage of students still do not consistently practice this habit, necessitating increased awareness of the importance of information verification.

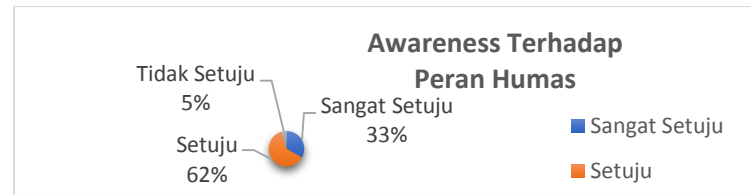


Figure 3. I am used to comparing information from various sources to ensure its accuracy.

In Figure 3, 33% of respondents strongly agreed, 62% agreed, and 5% disagreed that they were aware of the role of public relations in addressing hoaxes on social media. These results indicate that students' awareness of the role of public relations is quite high. Students understand that public relations serves as a liaison between organizations and the public and is responsible for conveying accurate, clear, and reliable information. This awareness is important because it can increase trust in the information conveyed by institutions. According to Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center (2022), public relations plays a role in building good relationships with the public through effective communication. Furthermore, according to the OECD (2024), good public communication is essential in facing the challenges of digital information. However, the continued presence of respondents who disagree indicates that understanding of the role of public relations needs to be further improved.

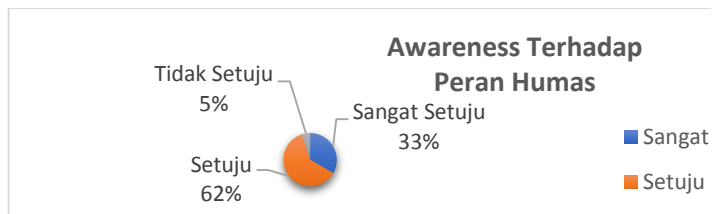


Figure 4. I realize the importance of the role of public relations in providing information clarification to the public.

In Figure 4, 33% strongly agreed, 62% agreed, and 5% disagreed that public relations plays an important role in providing information clarification. This indicates that students not only understand the role of public relations but also understand the importance of the clarification function in correcting misinformation. Prompt and accurate clarification can prevent misunderstandings and reduce the negative impact of the spread of hoaxes. According to Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center (2022), public relations has a responsibility to convey accurate information to the public. Furthermore, according to the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information (2024), information clarification is a crucial step in addressing hoaxes on social media. However, increased consistency in implementing this role is still needed.

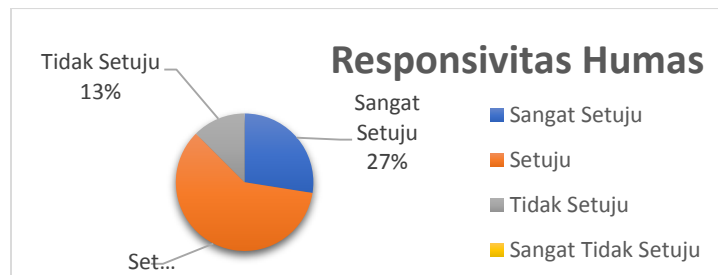


Figure 5. Public relations responds quickly to hoax information circulating on social media.

In Figure 5, 27% of respondents strongly agreed, 60% agreed, and 13% disagreed that public relations responded quickly to hoaxes. This indicates that most students considered public relations to be quite responsive, but not yet fully optimal. A quick response is crucial to prevent the wider spread of hoaxes. If the response is delayed, the misinformation can become widely believed by the public. According to the OECD (2024), speed in responding to information is a crucial factor in maintaining public trust. Furthermore, according to Juwita et al. (2024), delays in responding to information can magnify the impact of hoaxes. Therefore, public relations needs to improve the speed and accuracy in handling information.

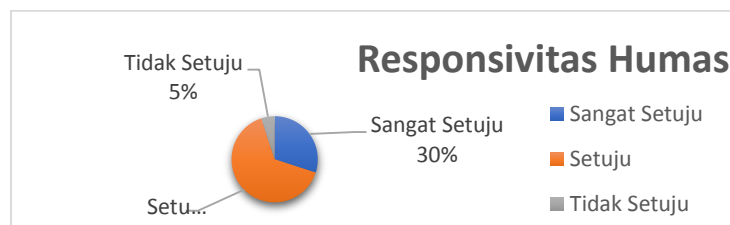


Figure 6. Public relations immediately provides clarification when incorrect information appears.

In Figure 6, 30% of respondents strongly agreed, 65% agreed, and 5% disagreed that public relations promptly provides clarification when inaccurate information emerges. This indicates that public relations is considered quite responsive in providing clarification to the public. Prompt and clear clarification can help the public understand the truth and reduce misunderstandings. Furthermore, this action also plays a role in maintaining the credibility of the institution. According to Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center (2022), public relations has a responsibility to convey accurate information. Furthermore, according to the OECD (2024), information transparency is crucial in digital communication. However, consistency in providing clarification still needs to be improved.

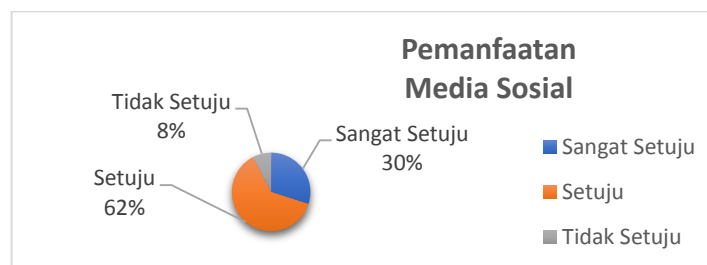


Figure 7. Public relations uses social media effectively to convey hoax clarification.

In Figure 7, 30% of respondents strongly agreed, 62% agreed, and 8% disagreed that public relations uses social media effectively. This indicates that social media has been utilized quite well as a means of public communication. Social media allows for the rapid, widespread, and efficient dissemination

of information. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information (2024), social media is an effective tool for conveying information to the public. Furthermore, according to the OECD (2024), the use of digital media can increase the effectiveness of public communication. However, innovation is still needed to optimize and attract the use of social media.

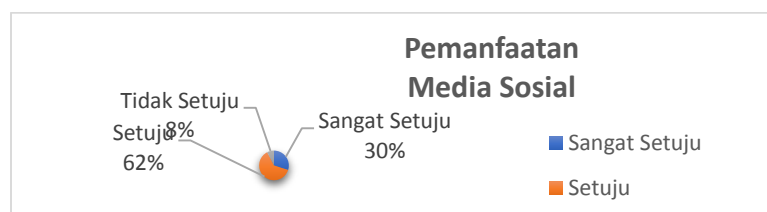


Figure 8. Public relations monitors issues that have the potential to become hoaxes on social media.

In Figure 8, 30% of respondents strongly agreed, 62% agreed, and 8% disagreed that public relations monitors issues that have the potential to become hoaxes. This indicates that public relations is considered quite active in monitoring information. Monitoring is crucial as a first step in preventing the spread of hoaxes before they become widespread. With effective monitoring, public relations can immediately take action, such as providing clarification or educating the public. According to the OECD (2024), information monitoring is a crucial part of a digital communication strategy. Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2023), hoax prevention can be achieved through increased digital literacy and continuous

information monitoring. However, monitoring efforts still need to be improved to be more effective.

Therefore, strengthening communication strategies, increasing responsiveness, and ongoing education are needed to optimize the role of public relations in the digital era.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the majority of students have a positive perception of the role of public relations in handling hoax information on social media. This is indicated by the high percentage of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed with all research indicators. Students have mastered basic digital literacy skills, such as identifying potentially hoax information and comparing information from various sources. Furthermore, students also demonstrated a good awareness of the role of public relations in providing clarification, responding to hoaxes, and maintaining the accuracy of information circulating on social media. The role of public relations is considered quite effective in utilizing social media to convey information and clarify hoaxes, with respondents agreeing in the range of 55%–65% and 27%–40% strongly agreeing. In terms of monitoring and prevention, public relations is also perceived to have fulfilled its role, although there is still room for improvement. Overall, public relations plays a crucial role in increasing digital literacy, preventing the spread of hoaxes, and building public trust in circulating information.

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