

PANDEMIC **X INFO**DEMIC

HOW STATES SHAPED NARRATIVES DURING COVID-19

Country Reports on

INDONESIA

BURMA/MYANMAR

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

THE PHILIPPINES

Thematic Reports on

Migrants and COVID-19 Disinformation

SINGAPORE

THAILAND



Country Report on
INDONESIA

Copyright © 2021 Innovation for Change-East Asia. All rights reserved.

No part of this report in printed or electronic form may be reproduced, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without written permission of Innovation for Change-East Asia.

Copyright belongs to Innovation for Change-East Asia unless otherwise stated.

Civil society organizations and educational institutions may use this report without requesting permission on the strict condition that such use is not for commercial purposes.

When using or quoting this report, every reasonable attempt must be made to identify owners of the copyright.

INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO COVID-19 DISINFORMATION: SOME LESSONS LEARNED

by **Gilang Desti Parahita¹** and **Zainuddin Muda Z. Monggilo²**

Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada³

1. Gilang Desti Parahita is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. She has published scholarly articles in various journals and books on the topics of digital journalism, communication and minority groups, and communication for sustainable development. Her works are accessible on <https://acadstaff.ugm.ac.id/gilangparahita>. She can be reached through gilang_parahita@ugm.ac.id.

2. Zainuddin Muda Z. Monggilo is a lecturer at the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. His research interests include journalism, digital literacy and digital communication. His academic works can be found on <https://acadstaff.ugm.ac.id/zainuddinmuda>. Further contact via zainuddinmuda19@ugm.ac.id.

3. Acknowledgment: Our highest appreciation to Faza Yudiansyah, Anna Nurjanah, and Annisa Nurul Hanifah (the alumni of graduate and undergraduate program of Communication Science at Universitas Gadjah Mada) for their rigorous help in desk study.

INTRODUCTION

Since COVID-19 entered Indonesia in early March 2020 until early September 2021, COVID-related disinformation has continued to spread in the community. Its continuing spread affects the weakening efforts in handling COVID-19 and its impacts (Monggilo 2020a; 2020b). Disinformation, or simply called hoax, is false information that is intentionally used to mislead, deceive, or worse, become a propaganda tool of the authorities. The element of intent distinguishes disinformation from misinformation, which is also false information but is carried out without the purpose of deceiving (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the abundance of COVID-related information, including disinformation, was referred to as an infodemic which was defined as too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak according to the World Health Organization (WHO). A number of studies have mapped the disinfodemic circulating in Indonesian society through various digital platforms. Data compiled by the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemenkominfo) until 31 August 2021 found 1,879 hoaxes related to COVID-19 (Kemenkominfo 2021a) and 307 hoaxes about the COVID-19 vaccine (Kemenkominfo 2021b). There are various issues circulating, including various herbal mixes that are claimed to be able to cure COVID-19, the dilemma of using cloth and medical masks, doubts over the halal level and effectiveness of vaccines, as well as political, economic and ethnic, religious, racial and intergroup conspiracies (SARA). Other data from the Indonesian Anti-Slander Society (MAFINDO) from January to June 2021 reveals that the most widespread disinformation related to the COVID-19 vaccine occurred in January (CNN Indonesia 2021). This is because that period saw the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine in Indonesia, and the polarization of the community regarding it was getting stronger. Hoaxes were mostly related to the Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI). Those disinformation were manifested as in the seven typologies of information interference put forward by the First Draft News (an organization that empowers society with the knowledge, understanding, and tools needed to outsmart false and misleading information) (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018).

Many civil society organizations since early 2020 have been trying to fight the disinfodemic. However, the government still plays the most crucial role because from the beginning the government has held the command stick in mitigation, including the management of public communications during the COVID-19 crisis (Monggilo 2020a, 2020b). In Press Release Number 153/HM/KOMINFO/04/2021, Minister of Communication and Information (Menkominfo) Johnny G. Plate said the government has implemented three approaches to dealing with COVID-19 disinformation, namely digital literacy education, government collaboration with the community and mass media for clarification, and information dissemination and legal action (Kemenkominfo 2021c). Hence, how has the Indonesian government handled COVID-19 disinformation?

GOVERNMENT'S PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: MESSSED UP AND EXCLUSIVE SINCE THE BEGINNING

Government intervention against COVID-19 disinformation is dominated by curative approaches such as imposing sanctions for suspected hoax spreaders, taking down hoax content on social media, making clarifications on the Covid19.go.id page and the official website of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (https://www.kominfo.go.id/content/all/laporan_isu_hoaks). Meanwhile, the digital literacy education approach, the COVID-19 anti-hoax campaign, and collaboration with the media tend to be late/less than optimal. Moreover, the ranks of government public figures often make contradictory statements and confuse the public (Monggilo 2020a).

In the early phase of the crisis, the mitigation of COVID-19 pandemic was distraught by the public statements of government officials that sounded like a joke, or unscientific, denying the existence of COVID-19, and speaking not on their capacities. According to the Institute for Research, Education, Economic and Social Information (LP3ES), from 1 January to 5 April 2020 alone, there have been 37 blunders in government statements related to COVID-19 (Farisa 2020). Unscientific statement was even made by the former Minister of Health Terawan who said that praying can avoid COVID-19 entering Indonesia, eating healthy food can prevent COVID-19, denying research from Harvard University (Nurita 2020; Annisa 2020). People were also confused about the policy on *mudik* (the annual mass exodus ahead of Eid al-Fitr) in May 2020 (Monggilo 2020a; Rizal 2020). Even up to now, the government is still considered not transparent and accurate especially regarding the data on the numbers of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) laboratory examinations' results at the city/district and provincial levels (Mashabi 2021).

Messy public statements of some public figures turned out to continue until 2021. Some were slip of the tongue, for example, the use of the term "Indonesian Military Emergency," which refers to the involvement of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri) in handling COVID-19 by the inappropriate minister, namely the Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture (Menko PMK) Muhadjir Effendy (Aji 2021). Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment (Menko Marves) Luhut Binsar Panjaitan had said that the Delta variant of the corona virus in Indonesia was under control and then he revised it (Aditya 2021). The slip of the tongue made the information confusing, thus adding to the challenges for press personnel who carried out coverage in situations of large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) in the early period of the crisis (Parahita 2020). The spokesperson was specifically appointed to convey a variety of information on the COVID-19 pandemic, which seems useless. In fact, the formation of a spokesperson for the handling of COVID-19 is a doorway to convey a variety of information to the public (Sukoyo 2020). Those confusing statements since the early phase of pandemic COVID-19 might be related to the policy of the governments to save the Indonesian economy by belittling COVID-19 (Apriliyanti, Utomo, and Purwanto 2021; Sani 2020).

Efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia have been claimed by the Indonesian government since January 2020 through early detection, human surveillance, environmental surveillance, inspection of transportation equipment, and inspection of incoming goods.

These agendas are also followed by a number of advanced policies at the central and regional levels that focus on limiting community activities at various levels (Sukmana, Aminuddin, and Apriyanto 2021). However, legally, the government has just formed the COVID-19 Handling Acceleration Task Force (COVID-19 Task Force) in Presidential Decree No. 7 of 2020 as of 13 March 2020—even though the first COVID-19 case in Indonesia was recorded on 2 March 2020 (Monggilo 2020a).

The position of authoritative institutions in accelerating the handling of COVID-19 in Indonesia is divided into directing and implementing. The steering committee consists of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance. Meanwhile, the implementers include the COVID-19 & National Economic Task Force, the Ministry of Communication and Information, the Ministry of Transportation, and the National Agency for Disaster Management. At the national level, a spokesperson is appointed for press conferences that are covered by both mainstream and online media (Noor, Ayuningtyas, and Prihatiningsih 2020). In the early days after the official announcement of the COVID-19 emergency in Indonesia, the central government's efforts to respond to mis/disinformation about COVID-19 were through online sharing sessions. One of them was delivered by the Head of Sub-Directorate for ICT Capacity Empowerment of Kemenkominfo Aris Kurniawan on 25 April 2020 (Rizkinaswara 2020).

Likewise in the national context, the COVID-19 Task Force was also formed at the provincial and district levels aligned with the national policies. However, this autonomy is in fact considered to be able to cause other polemics. One of them was communication between institutions that do not work well and are hampered by the bureaucracy during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sukmana, Aminuddin, and Apriyanto 2021) and even before the COVID-19 pandemic (Parahita 2017). There is an urgent need to look into government policy on and implementation of COVID-related communications at the local, regional, and national levels. The Regulation of Minister of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia No. 6/2020 concerning Guidelines in Facing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) towards adopting new habits in the form of protocols for organizing the communication and informatics ecosystem, for example, has just been founded. The regulation is more about health protocols on press and media practices as well as the management of the PeduliLindungi (pedulilindungi.id) which is an application developed to assist relevant government agencies in tracing the spreading of COVID-19.

Comprehensive policies related to the management of government communications during the COVID-19 pandemic are urgently needed, both in general management and to prevent disinformation and strengthen inclusion in COVID-19 crisis communications. A study from the Network of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (*Jaringan Organisasi Penyandang Disabilitas*) from 10 to 24 April 2020 found that only 60.55 percent of people with disabilities received sufficient information about COVID-19 and its prevention protocols. Only about 30 percent understand and adhere to prevention protocols, and the remaining 11.6 percent have comorbidities that result in susceptibility to contracting COVID-19 (Iswinarno and Tanjung 2021).

Crisis communication of COVID-19 tended to exclude people with disability in the beginning though it is now improving. WHO has issued a recommended action guide that can be implemented by local authorities entitled, "Disability Considerations during the COVID-19

Outbreak” on 26 March 2020 to create a more inclusive approach in accelerating COVID-19 handling for disability communities (WHO 2020). This guide recommends providing communication facilities starting from providing sign language facilities, formatting public materials that can be read by persons with intellectual disabilities and cognitive impairments, as well as collaborating with disability organizations to disseminate related information. Neglecting people with disabilities in COVID-19 crisis communication will prevent them from obtaining accurate information on COVID-19.

In Indonesia, the Covid.go.id website has uploaded several documents related to persons with disabilities, namely the "Disability Inclusive Response" (19 April 2020), "Protection of Women with Disabilities from COVID-19" (19 April 2020), "Protocols for the Protection of Children with Disabilities in the COVID-19 Pandemic Situation" (1 June 2020). Apart from that, Covid.go.id, "Guidelines for Health Protection and Psychosocial Support for Persons with Disabilities in connection with the COVID-19 Outbreak” from the Ministry of Social Affairs (Kemensos) can be accessed openly while simultaneously containing communication needs for people with disabilities in the pandemic era (Kemensos 2020). Although the government had included a sign language interpreter in the COVID-19 daily data press conference which was broadcast regularly on television at 9:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, and 3:30 p.m. WIB (GMT+7), the provision of sign language interpretation services ended along with the government’s decision to put an end to the daily broadcasts. This is the case in general with the digitization of COVID-19 information which is not yet fully accessible to persons with disabilities (Suhardi 2021).

SO-CALLED ONE PORTAL SITE TO COUNTER COVID-19 DISINFORMATION

The Indonesian government has developed a website operating as a central source of information about COVID-19 at the national level which also functions to tackle



Figure 1. Hoax Buster Menu on the Covid19.go.id Homepage

Source: covid19.go.id (2021)

disinformation. The COVID-19 Task Force website, with the address covid19.go.id, is a one-stop information portal dedicated by the government to manage information related to COVID-19 (figure 1). There is a Hoax Buster menu, which specifically archives a number of disinformation denied by the government. The rebuttal of each content is presented descriptively and is supported by screenshot evidence of information that has gone viral in the community (Monggilo 2020a). In that menu, the public can submit complaints regarding confusing information through a chatbot connected to the MAFINDO WhatsApp account. In addition, the main site for handling COVID-19 also refers to other sites to check the veracity of information, namely to the governmental sites <https://komin.f0/inihoaks>, <https://trustpositif.kominfo.go.id/> and <https://s.id/infovaksin> as well as civil society organizations' websites <https://turnbackhoax.id> and <https://cekfakta.com>. The government has various communication channels currently but measures in communicating COVID-19 crisis seem to have been taken later than civil society organizations' initiatives. While the so-called information portal by the government was published on 18 March 2020, [Kawalcovid19.id](https://kawalcovid19.id) has been even published earlier on 1 March 2020 (Monggilo 2020a).

Local initiatives in developing websites to inform COVID-19 mushrooms in later months though the functions are limited. There are around eighty websites for handling COVID-19 information at the city/district level (covid19.go.id, 2020). In 2020, as many as sixteen of eighty city/district websites used the address [COVID-19.\(region\).go.id](https://covid19.(region).go.id) as the web address for COVID-19 information (Gultom et al. 2020). However, if you look further at the "City/District Website List" menu, some cities/districts were listed twice, so the actual number listed is only seventy-one city/district. The domains of these sites vary, starting with the use of the words "against corona," "corona," "COVID-19," or "corona alert" then followed by the name of each region. Only a few local government websites offer the service to identify, flag, or refute disinformation as conducted by the national COVID-19 Task Force's website (table 1). Where the service is available, the content proves to be limited as information mostly covers national cases already reported as refuted on both the COVID-19 Task Force and MAFINDO websites (turnbackhoax.id). In fact, there may be disinformation in the local context which is not always covered, and this of course can contribute to worsening the crisis situation in different regions.

Hoax reporting services regarding the corona virus have been carried out by a number of communication and information offices at the regional level (Nugraha 2020). Information regarding hoaxes and disinformation is carried out in real-time. However, several other regional governments are still slow in submitting updates on COVID-19 related hoax or disinformation. For this reason, the role of the central government in encouraging local governments to provide hoax reporting services is very necessary. The handling of hoaxes and disinformation related to COVID-19 can be decentralized and comprehensively anticipated this way.

Management and services that still rely on the central government are considered to cause the slow handling of hoaxes and disinformation in the regions. Moreover, the type of disinformation circulating in each region is not necessarily the same. In fact, understanding information related to COVID-19 will be better if it was adapted to local culture and mindful of their respective regional languages (Maryani, Hariyanti, and Lotulung 2020).

Number	Provinces/ Districts/Cities	URLs	Menu		
			Call Center	Local News	Hoax Clarification
01	East Java Province	https://infocovid19.jatimprov.go.id/	V	V	V
02	West Java Province	https://pikobar.jabbarprov.go.id/	V	X	X
03	Central Java Province	https://corona.jatengprov.go.id/	V	V	X
04	Special Region of Yogyakarta	https://corona.jogjaprov.go.id/	V	V	V
05	Special Capital Region of Jakarta	https://corona.jakarta.go.id/id	V	V	X
06	Surabaya City	http://lawancovid-19.surabaya.go.id/	V	V	X
07	Bekasi District	https://corona.bekasikota.go.id/	V	V	X
08	Medan City	https://covid19.pemkomedan.go.id/	V	V	V
09	Kotawaringin Barat District	https://covid19.kotawaringinbaratkab.go.id/	V	X	X
10	Kotawaringin Timur District	https://siaga.kotimkab.go.id/	V	X	X
11	Mataram City	https://corona.mataramkota.go.id	V	V	X
12	Sumbawa District	http://covid19.sumbawakab.go.id/	V	V	X
13	Pohuwato District	https://covid-19.pohuwatokab.go.id	X	X	X
14	Makassar City	https://infocorona.makassar.go.id/	V	X	X
15	Sinjai District	https://covid19.sinjaikab.go.id/	V	V	X

Table 1. Content of the COVID-19 Handling Site at the City/District Level (Accessed August 28, 2021)

INCONSISTENCY OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AFFECTS PUBLIC TRUST

The blurring of government information/clarification boundaries with disinformation also contributes to the inconsistency of government messages as reflected in a number of policies at the national level. This was reflected, for example, when the government issued the Regulation of the Minister of Transportation Number 18 of 2020, which regulates transportation control during the COVID-19 pandemic, which actually contradicts the Regulation of the Minister of Health Number 9 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) (Hakim 2020). In the Minister of Transportation Regulation, ride hailing service is allowed to transport passengers according to health protocols. Meanwhile, in the Regulation of the Minister of Health regarding PSBB, ride hailing service is absolutely not allowed to carry passengers. Another example of inconsistency involved the case of the entry of thirty-four foreign workers (TKA) from China when the Level 4 Community Activity Restrictions (PPKM) was still in place (Safitri 2021). This kind of inconsistency can of course be used by irresponsible elements to produce disinformation, which further slows down the pace of handling COVID-19 in Indonesia.

In addition, government inconsistencies also impact public trust. This was made evident from a national survey of 1,200 respondents regarding the performance of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) in June 2021. Survey results show that the majority of respondents were still satisfied, but this reflects a drop in ratings to 59.6 percent (Detik.com 2021). Compared to the time before COVID-19 pandemic, the result actually decreased from the satisfaction rate in November 2019 with 65.1 percent (Adyatama 2020). The government should take this as a strong warning and an indicator to immediately fix the mechanisms for enforcing, monitoring, and evaluating its policies.

DISPARITY OF GOVERNMENTS' SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS TO PROVIDE COVID-19 INFORMATION AND CLARIFY COVID-19 DISINFORMATION

COVID-19 communication of the Indonesian government also applies a social media approach. The covid19.go.id site contains social media links on its page that lead directly to the government's official social media accounts. Interestingly, the three social media platforms listed do not refer to the same managers/owning institutions. If you click on the Facebook and Twitter icons, website visitors will be directed to the National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB) of Indonesia social media account. Meanwhile, if you click on the Instagram icon, visitors will be directed to the @lawancovid19_id profile. Social media @lawancovid19_id itself is the official social media of the Committee for the Handling of COVID-19 and the National Economic Recovery. Even it has accounts on seven different social media platforms that are actively uploading informative and educational content about COVID-19 (Lawancovid19 2021).

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has used various hashtags to complement the information disseminated through its social media accounts. The use of the hashtag *#BersatuLawanCOVID19* (unite against COVID-19) can be seen in the captions of several social media uploads of @lawancovid19_id, @bnpb_indonesia, and several ministries (figure 2). This hashtag is also used by Kemenkominfo on the main page of its official website, kominfo.go.id. Through this hashtag, Kemenkominfo



Figure 2. Official Social Media Accounts of the COVID-19 Handling Committee and National Economic Recovery

Source: Instagram/@lawancovid19_id

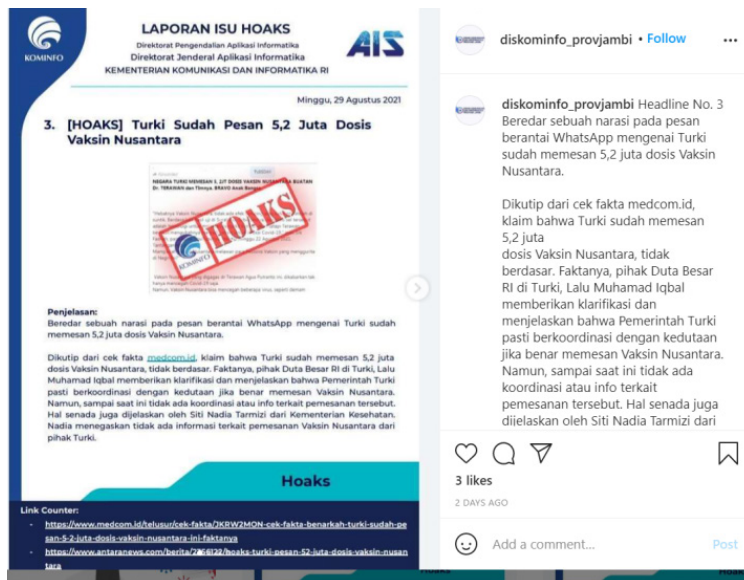


Figure 3. The use of the #StopHoaks by the Regional Diskominfo Instagram Account

Source: Instagram @diskominfo_provjab (2021)

created a special menu containing articles and clarification of false information about COVID-19 that have spread within the community.

Though various social media platforms have also been used by the government to help dispel hoaxes, the use of hashtag is inconsistent and

limited. The Instagram account @lawancovid_id regularly uploads clarifications of hoaxes circulating in the community. The hashtag #stophoaks was also used in early March 2021 in an upload that campaigned for anti-hoax, as well as encouraging the public to verify information on the <http://s.id/infovaksin> website (figure 3). However, the hashtag is not used routinely in other posts about hoaxes. In addition, there is also the hashtag #stophoakscovid19 (stop hoax COVID-19), which is used by government agencies in uploading content related to the COVID-19 hoax. Nevertheless, this hashtag is not used massively.

BELATED DIGITAL LITERACY

The Indonesian government's efforts to anticipate the spread of hoaxes related to COVID-19 through educational campaigns have been seen in the Education menu on the official website of the COVID-19 Task Force (Monggilo 2020a). The Indonesian government through the covid19.go.id page published the first informative article on 17 March 2020. However, the material that was uploaded for the first time was not actually material compiled by the COVID-19 Task Force or the Indonesian government, but rather an edict made by the Muhammadiyah (figure 4). Muhammadiyah itself is the largest Islamic organization in



Figure 4. The official website of the Indonesian government regarding COVID-19, which displays a message from the Muhammadiyah Central Executive.

Source: covid19.go.id (2021)

Indonesia with more than a hundred years of experience in Islamic teachings and movements. The announcement contains an appeal from the Muhammadiyah Central Executive regarding tips and policies taken to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, educational materials compiled by the COVID-19 Task Force were only published later on 27 March 2020, with the title “Guidelines for Health Workers.” The upload of content from Muhammadiyah on the government’s national website for COVID-19 shows the Indonesian government’s unpreparedness to respond to the pandemic in terms of digital literacy education. When this article was written, the Education page on the government website contained information about COVID-19, including information on vaccinations, self-isolation, and government policies related to handling COVID-19. As of July 2021, the number of COVID-19 digital literacy materials published on the educational menu of the covid19.go.id website has exceeded eight hundred educational materials and one thousand information articles for the benefit of the general public.

In addition, the main problem that needs to be emphasized is the poor rate of digital literacy in Indonesia. Based on research presented by Kemenkominfo and Katadata Insight Center (2020), Indonesia’s digital literacy status remains weak to this day. Strong commitment from the government is needed to improve this (Wendratama, Kurnia, and Monggilo 2021). However, in fact, digital literacy programs have only recently become massively echoed by the government after being innovated independently by grassroots communities, which were then covered widely by national media (Parahita, Nugroho, and Adnjani 2020) through a national program namely national digital literacy movements (*Gerakan Nasional Literasi Digital* as well as *Indonesia Makin Cakap Digital*) starting in 2021 (Agustini 2021; Rizkinaswara 2021).



COLLABORATING WITH THE PRESS TO CHANGE PUBLIC BEHAVIOR

While collaboration with civil society organizations through digital literacy campaign has just started in 2021, collaboration with the press communities has been undergoing since 2020. Although government websites and social media are managed specifically to provide reliable COVID-19 information, Indonesians more often obtain COVID-19-related information from other sources such as conventional and online media (Suherlina 2020; Pramiyanti et al. 2020). BNPB’s collaboration with journalists to report information related to COVID-19 and the handling of disinformation is actually the right step. BNPB, for example, carried out mentoring activities for journalists to educate the public about COVID-19 news in October 2020 (Jati 2020). BNPB has a dedicated WhatsApp group with journalists the

Figure 5. BNPB WhatsApp Group with Media

Source: Personal communication with a journalist (2021)

government can rely on for conveying the latest and official information, including various news related to COVID-19 (figure 5).

The Indonesian government does not seem to hesitate to take a measure that rarely happens before the pandemic with the journalists' community. The government's collaboration with members of the press to respond to other mis/disinformation about COVID-19 includes the Behavior Change Journalism Fellowship (FJPP) program. FJPP is a collaboration between the Press Council and the COVID-19 Task Force for journalists throughout Indonesia. The main activity involves journalists carrying out public education functions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is also a win-win solution for some journalists who want to avoid losing income (Parahita 2021). The FJPP is a continuing program that has actually opened registration for the second wave in May 2021 (Rakyat Merdeka 2021), but the effectiveness of the program remains unknown.

The national initiative of government-funded journalism to alter public behavior in the pandemic, however, is similar to a program at the regional level. The Regional Government through the Kapuas District Communication and Information Office provides incentives as a form of appreciation for press personnel who report on COVID-19 (Mahfuz 2020). Incentives are given so that journalists are more motivated to present valid information about COVID-19 and the public can be educated. The provision of incentives was first introduced in April 2020, long before the COVID-19 Task Force and the Press Council launched the FJPP program.

APPLICATION OF LEGAL SANCTIONS (CRIMINALIZATION) AGAINST PERPETRATORS OF SPREADING MIS/DISINFORMATION

One other government policy to suppress the spread of COVID-19 mis/disinformation is to impose legal sanctions. The sanctions rely on the Article 45A of Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law). The article states that anyone who intentionally spreads false and misleading news that results in consumer losses in electronic transactions may be subject to a maximum imprisonment of six years and/or a maximum fine of IDR1 billion. This statement was conveyed by the Minister of Communication and Information (Menkominfo) Johnny G. Plate in his official statement at the Media Center of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19, 18 April 2020 (Wibowo 2020). The Ministry of Communication and Informatics recorded 767 cases of mis/disinformation that were legally prosecuted until the end of July 2021 (Kemenkominfo 2021d). At the same time, 113 suspects of spreading mis/disinformation of COVID-19 were policed and are undergoing legal proceedings (Hafiez 2021).

However, public officials' statements on the legal measures are sometimes contradictory to each other. While the Minister of Communication and Informatics Johnny G. Plate summoned the legal sanctions, the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Mahfud MD has a different view. At the 31 July 2021 virtual gathering of the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs with Alim Ulama, Islamic Boarding School Carers, Leaders of Interfaith Community Organizations, and the Communication Forum for Central Java Regional Leaders, Mahfud emphasized that the government will not take legal

steps by using the ITE Law against perpetrators of spreading COVID-19 hoaxes. According to him, this is against the spirit of democracy. Instead, Mahfud invited the entire community, especially religious leaders, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 mis/disinformation (Basyari 2021).

Mahfud MD's statement was delivered shortly after the criminalization of ulama figures for the spread of COVID-19 misinformation. K.H. Muhammad Najih Maimoen (Gus Najih) was policed by the Nusantara Knights Agency (BKN) (Republika.co.id 2021). The man, who is known to be a *kyai* (religious leader), was reported for spreading disinformation stating that the vaccination program was a massacre. However, the case did not really prosper because the reporting party only wanted to ask for clarification through the police, instead of ensnaring Gus Najih with the ITE Law. Other perpetrators of misinformation/disinformation who have received the spotlight involve the determination of Lois Owien's status as a suspect in the spread of COVID-19 mis/disinformation.

Based on the articles published by Tirto.id, Lois was charged with a number of articles, including Article 28 paragraph (2) in conjunction with Article 45A paragraph (2) of Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to Law Number 11 of 2008 on ITE. Lois was charged with these articles for making quite controversial statements through her personal Twitter account @LsOwien (Briantika 2021). In her upload, she denied the existence of the coronavirus, said that the deaths of COVID-19 patients were drug-related, and did not trust the PCR test kits and antigen swabs for virus detection devices. Despite being a suspect and with the legal process continuing, Lois was not arrested because according to the police she admitted she was wrong and promised not to repeat the mistake or run away (Maharani 2021).

POTENTIALLY ARBITRARY DISINFORMATION LABELING FOR ANY DISSENTING OPINION

The Indonesian government's abuse of power towards labeling contradictory opinions or information that is not aligned with its standpoint as disinformation shows the government's inability to distinguish between hoax and non-hoax information. This was reflected in the statement by the Minister of Communication and Informatics Johnny G. Plate in the Mata Najwa talk show program that aired on Trans 7 on 14 October 2020. At that time, the issue discussed was related to mis/disinformation which was the reason for the rejection of the Job Creation Act (Damanik 2020).

In the talk, the head of Indonesian Association of University Student Unions/*Badan Executive Mahasiswa Seluruh Indonesia* (BEM SI), Remy Hastian, argued that the government or the state is the party that creates hoaxes and disinformation. He also said that the rejection of the Job Creation Law (*RUU Cipta Kerja*) was caused by the government's inability to convey clear and accountable information. Responding to these accusations, Johnny G. Plate actually showed an anti-criticism attitude by saying that the government must, with high accountability, convey which information is hoax and which is not. He also added a statement that "*Because it's a hoax. If the government has said it is a hoax, yes, it is a hoax. Why do you argue again?*"

Although Plate made this statement in the context of mis/disinformation related to the Job Creation Law (*UU Cipta Kerja*), the momentum for the rejection of the Job Creation Act itself occurred in October 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. This means it is not impossible that this statement also applies to the labeling of mis/disinformation about COVID-19. The statement suggests that any information can be arbitrarily labeled as a hoax without in-depth verification in accordance with standard methodologies and ethics. This has the potential to threaten the freedom of the press and opinion. Moreover, this arbitrariness also seems to have an impact on the level of public trust in the government. Public distrust of Jokowi's ability to handle COVID-19 as of February 2021 had fallen to 15.2 percent even though in June 2021 it increased to 22.6 percent (Jayani 2021).

TOWARD BETTER GOVERNANCE IN HANDLING COVID-19 AND DISINFORMATION

Indonesia has been facing the COVID-19 pandemic for more than a year. However, problems related to public communication, government policies, and disinformation continue to occur. The government does not seem to reflect on its previous weaknesses and has not improved its handling of the pandemic and the spread of disinformation around it. Government actions that are not fully oriented to the aspects of common safety, policy making that is not mature and tend to be reactive, public communication that is not yet systematic and reliable, literacy education that tends to be late, and law enforcement that is not strong enough are factors that are considered needing urgent and serious improvement. The main goal remains to create better communication and information governance in times of crisis.

References

- Adytama, E. 2020. "Survei Populi: Kepuasan terhadap kinerja Jokowi menurun karena pandemi." *Tempo.co*, November 9, 2020. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1403718/survei-populi-kepuasan-terhadap-kinerja-jokowi-menurun-karena-pandemi>.
- Agustini, P. 2021. "Peluncuran literasi digital, Indonesia makin cakap digital." <https://aptika.kominfo.go.id/2021/05/peluncuran-literasi-digital-indonesia-makin-cakap-digital/>.
- Aji, M. R. 2021. "Muhadjir sebut Indonesia darurat militer, PPP: Mungkin hanya slip of tongue." *Tempo.co*, July 17, 2021. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1484264/muhadjir-sebut-indonesia-darurat-militer-ppp-mungkin-hanya-slip-of-tongue>.
- Aditya, N. R. 2021. "Kritisi statement 'covid-19 terkendali', pimpinan MPR minta pemerintah perbaiki gaya komunikasi publik." *Kompas.com*, July 17, 2021. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/07/17/14111511/kritisi-statement-covid-19-terkendali-pimpinan-mpr-minta-pemerintah-perbaiki?page=all>.
- Akbar, N. A. 2021. "Formappi: DPR politisasi vaksin nusantara." *Republika.co.id*, April 15, 2021. <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qrl9f409/formappi-dpr-politisasi-vaksin-nusantara>.
- Annisa. 2020. "Ini daftar puluhan pernyataan blunder pemerintah soal corona." *www.law-justice.co*, April 7, 2020. <https://www.law-justice.co/artikel/84342/lp3es-ini-daftar-puluhan-pernyataan-blunder-pemerintah-soal-corona/>.
- Apriliyanti, I.D., W.P. Utomo, and E.A. Purwanto. 2021. "Examining the policy narratives and the role of the media in policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis in Indonesia". *Journal of Public Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2021.1954770>.
- Basyari, I. 2021. "Pemerintah tak gunakan UU ITE untuk melawan penyebar hoaks Covid-19." *Kompas.id*, July 31, 2021. <https://www.kompas.id/baca/polhuk/2021/07/31/pemerintah-tak-gunakan-uu-ite-untuk-melawan-penyebar-hoaks-covid-19/>.
- Briantika, A. 2021. "Lois Owien memang tak ditahan, tapi kasus hoaks Covid tetap lanjut?" *Tirto.id*, July 14, 2021. <https://tirto.id/lois-owien-memang-tak-ditahan-tapi-kasus-hoaks-covid-tetap-lanjut-ghHr>.
- Covid19.go.id. 2020. "Daftar Website Kabupaten/Kota." April 2, 2020. <https://covid19.go.id/p/konten/daftar-website-kabupaten-kota>.
- CNN Indonesia. 2021. "Pakar sebut hoaks Covid-19 tertinggi pada Januari 2021." *CNN Indonesia*, August 16, 2021. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/teknologi/20210816010214-192-680705/pakar-sebut-hoaks-covid-19-tertinggi-pada-januari-2021>.
- Damanik, M. J. 2020. "Menkominfo: Kalau pemerintah bilang hoaks, ya hoaks, kenapa membantah?" *IDNTimes.com*, October 15, 2020. <https://www.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/margith-juita-damanik/menkominfo-kalau-pemerintah-bilang-hoaks-ya-hoaks-kenapa-membantah/1>.

- Detik.com. 2021. "Survei LSI: Kepuasan atas kinerja Jokowi tangani corona turun, kini 59%." *Detik.com*, July 18, 2021. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5647909/survei-lsi-kepuasan-atas-kinerja-jokowi-tangani-corona-turun-kini-59>.
- Farisa, F.C. 2020. "LP3ES catat ada 37 pernyataan blunder pemerintah soal Covid-19." *Kompas.com*, April 06, 2020. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/04/06/17522121/lp3es-catat-ada-37-pernyataan-blunder-pemerintah-soal-covid-19?page=all>.
- Goeritman, H. I. N. 2021. "Komunikasi Krisis Pemerintah Indonesia di Masa Pandemi Covid-19 melalui Media Sosial (Crisis Communication of Indonesia Government During Pandemic Covid-19 using Social Media). *JURNAL IPTEKKOM (Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan and Teknologi Informasi)* 23, no. 1: 1-19.
- Gultom, R. et al. 2020. "Developing the government Covid-19 website: Lessons learned from Jakarta." *IEEE*. 978-1-6654-0422-8.
- Hakim, R.N. 2020. "Polemik permenhub 18, dinilai bertentangan dengan permenkes hingga menyesatkan." *Kompas.com*, March 14, 2020. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/04/14/09502941/polemik-permenhub-18-dinilai-bertentangan-dengan-permenkes-hingga?page=all>.
- Iswinarno, C. and E. Tanjung. 2020. "Selama masa pandemi, kehidupan penyandang difabel paling rentan terdampak." *Suara.com*, June 9, 2020. <https://www.suara.com/news/2020/06/09/140737/selama-masa-pandemi-kehidupan-penyandang-difabel-paling-rentan-terdampak?page=all>.
- Jati, R. 2020. "Perkuat Edukasi Pemberitaan Covid-19, BNPB Gelar Pendampingan Wartawan." www.bnpb.go.id, October 7, 2020. <https://bnpb.go.id/berita/perkuat-edukasi-pemberitaan-covid19-bnpb-gelar-pendampingan-wartawan>.
- Jayani, D. H. 2021. "LSI: Kepercayaan publik terhadap Jokowi dalam tangani Covid-19 menurun." *Katadata.co.id*, July 19, 2021. <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2021/07/19/lsi-kepercayaan-publik-terhadap-jokowi-dalam-tangani-covid-19-menurun>.
- Katadata Insight Center and Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika. 2020. "Status literasi digital Indonesia 2020: Hasil survei di 34 provinsi." Jakarta: Katadata Insight Center and Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika.
- Kemenkominfo. 2021a. "Isu hoaks covid-19 rilis 31 Agustus 2021 pkl 06.00 WIB." <https://trustpositif.kominfo.go.id/pdfhoaks/Covid>.
- Kemenkominfo. 2021b. "Hoaks vaksin covid-19 rilis 31 Agustus 2021 pkl. 06.00 WIB." <https://trustpositif.kominfo.go.id/pdfhoaks/VaksinCovid>.
- Kemenkominfo. 2021c. "Siaran Pers No. 153/HM/KOMINFO/04/2021 Jumat, 29 April 2021 Tentang Percepat Penanganan Pandemi, Menkominfo Ajak Bersama Lawan Hoaks Covid-19." https://www.kominfo.go.id/content/detail/34229/siaran-pers-no-153hmkominfo042021-tentang-percepat-penanganan-pandemi-menkominfo-ajak-bersama-lawan-hoaks-covid-19/siaran_pers.

- Kemenkominfo. 2021d. "Penanganan sebaran konten hoaks Covid-19 Selasa 27 Juli 2021." <https://www.kominfo.go.id/content/detail/35997/penanganan-sebaran-konten-hoaks-covid-19-selasa-27072021/0/infografis>.
- Kemensos. 2020. "Pedoman Perlindungan Kesehatan dan Dukungan Psikososial terhadap Penyandang Disabilitas Sehubungan dengan Terjadinya Wabah Covid-19 di Lingkungan Balai Besar /Balai/ Loka Disabilitas Lembaga Kesejahteraan Sosial (LKS) Disabilitas, dan Lembaga Lainnya." <https://kemensos.go.id/pedoman-cegah-covid-19-untuk-disabilitas>.
- Kompas.com. 2021. "23 berita hoax seputar Covid-19 dan penjelasan pakar pulmonologi UGM." *Kompas.com*, March 25, 2021. <https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2021/03/25/080000171/23-berita-hoax-seputar-covid-19-dan-penjelasan-pakar-pulmonologi-ugm?page=all>.
- LawanCovid19. 2020. "Akun Media Sosial Resmi Covid 19." Instagram update, May 17, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CO9bpfAh-Up/>.
- Mahfuz, G. 2020. "Bupati Kapuas beri insentif kepada jurnalis yang meliput Covid-19." <https://mmc.kalteng.go.id/berita/read/11053/bupati-kapuas-beri-insentif-kepada-jurnalis-yang-meliput-covid-19>.
- Maharani, T. 2021. "Dokter Lois tidak ditahan, Polri: Dia akui kesalahan dan janji tidak akan mengulangi." *Kompas.com*, March 25, 2021. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/07/13/12035551/dokter-lois-tidak-ditahan-polri-dia-akui-kesalahan-dan-janji-tidak-akan>.
- Maryani, E., N. Hariyanti, and L. J.H. Lotulung. 2020. "Bahasa lokal dalam kampanye Covid-19 jaga diri jaga keluarga." In *Kolaborasi Lawan (Hoaks) COVID-19: Kampanye, Riset dan Pengalaman Japelidi di Tengah Pandemi*, edited by N. Kurnia, L. Nurhajati, and S.I. Astuti, 93-111. Yogyakarta: Program Studi Magister Ilmu Komunikasi UGM.
- Mashabi, S. 2021. "Transparansi data penanganan Covid-19 di Indonesia masih jadi persoalan." *Kompas.com*, April 08, 2021. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/04/08/14562041/transparansi-data-penanganan-covid-19-di-indonesia-masih-jadi-persoalan?page=all>.
- Monggilo, Z. M. Z. 2020a. "Komunikasi Publik Pemerintah Masa Covid-19: Telaah Kritis Sistem Informasi Publik." In *Tata kelola penanganan covid-19 di Indonesia*, edited by W. Mas'udi and P. Winanti, 274-299. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Monggilo, Z. M. Z. 2020b. "Sistem informasi publik Covid-19: Telaah konten chatbot dalam melawan gangguan informasi masa pandemi." In *Kolaborasi Lawan (Hoaks) COVID-19: Kampanye, Riset dan Pengalaman Japelidi di Tengah Pandemi*, edited by N. Kurnia, L. Nurhajati, and S.I. Astuti, 331-352. Yogyakarta: Program Studi Magister Ilmu Komunikasi UGM.
- Noor, F., F. Ayuningtyas, and W. Prihatiningsih. 2020. "Disaster communications for handling coronavirus disease 2019." *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 27, 4: 25-35.

- Nugraha, A. 2020. "Menangkal pusaran hoaks dan disinformasi saat pandemi Covid-19." www.ombudsman.go.id. <https://ombudsman.go.id/artikel/r/artikel--menangkal-pusaran-hoaks-dan-disinformasi-saat-pandemi-covid-19>.
- Parahita, G.D. 2017. "Shifts and challenges of communication for sustainable development in Indonesia." In *Communication, Culture, Ecology* Vol 6, edited by K. Prasad. Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Parahita, G.D. 2020. "Lima dimensi jurnalisme krisis Covid-19." In *Tata Kelola Penanganan COVID-19 di Indonesia: Kajian Awal*, edited by W. Mas'udi and P.S. Winanti. Yogyakarta: UGM Press.
- Parahita, G.D., D.P. Nugroho, and M.D Adnjani. 2020. "Membandingkan framing dalam rilis dan berita: Studi kasus rilis pers "Japelidi Lawan Hoaks COVID-19" oleh Japelidi." In *Kolaborasi Lawan (Hoaks) COVID-19: Kampanye, Riset dan Pengalaman Japelidi di Tengah Pandemi*, edited by N. Kurnia, L. Nurhajati, and S.I. Astuti. Yogyakarta: Program Studi Magister Ilmu Komunikasi UGM.
- Parahita, G.D. 2021. "The COVID-19 pandemic: the resilience of Indonesian journalists." *Pacific Journalism Review* 27, no. 1/2: 65-84.
- Pramiyanti, A. et al. 2020. "Public perception on transparency and trust in government information released during the Covid-19 pandemic." *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research* 8, no. 3: 351-376.
- Rakyat Merdeka. 2021. "Pesan ketua Dewan Pers untuk jurnalis FJPP: Jangan hanya beri info, sadarkan masyarakat dengan pengetahuan." *Rakyat Merdeka*, May 10, 2021. <https://rm.id/baca-berita/nasional/75465/pesan-ketua-dewan-pers-untuk-jurnalis-fjpp-jangan-hanya-beri-info-sadarkan-masyarakat-dengan-pengetahuan>.
- Rizal, J. G. 2020. "Beda pengertian tentang mudik dari Menhub Budi Karya dan Presiden Jokowi." *Kompas.com*, May 9, 2020. <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2020/05/09/073200465/beda-pengertian-tentang-mudik-dari-menhub-budi-karya-dan-presiden-jokowi?page=all>.
- Rizkinaswara, L. 2020. "Tujuh upaya atasi hoaks saat pandemi COVID-19." <https://aptika.kominfo.go.id/2020/04/tujuh-upaya-atasi-hoaks-saat-pandemi-covid-19/>.
- Safitri, E. 2021. "34 TKA China masuk RI saat PPKM, PD: Inkonsistensi pemerintah meresahkan." *Detik.com*, August 9, 2021. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5675460/34-tka-china-masuk-ri-saat-ppkm-pd-inkonsistensi-pemerintah-meresahkan>.
- Sani, A.F.I. 2020. "Genjot pariwisata pemerintah anggarkan Rp 72 M untuk influencer." *www.bisnis.tempo.co*, February 25, 2020. <https://bisnis.tempo.co/read/1312156/genjot-pariwisata-pemerintah-anggarkan-rp-72-m-untuk-influencer>.
- Suherlina, R. 2020. "Bagaimana opini publik terhadap Covid-19 di Indonesia? Ini risetnya." <https://www.fixindonesia.com/bagaimana-opini-publik-terhadapcovid-19-di-indonesia-ini-risetnya/>.

- Suhardi, G. 2021. "Menyelamatkan kaum difabel." *Media Indonesia*, August 5, 2021. https://mediaindonesia.com/podiums/detail_podiums/2218-menyelamatkan-kaum-difabel.
- Sukmana, M., M. Aminuddin, and D. Nopriyanto. 2020. "Indonesian government response in Covid-19 disaster prevention." *East African Scholars Journal of Medical Sciences* 3, no. 3: 81-86.
- Sukoyo, Y. 2020. "Komunikasi bencana Covid-19 harus dilakukan satu pintu." *Berita Satu*, April 6, 2020. <https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/617387/komunikasi-bencana-covid19-harus-dilakukan-satu-pintu>.
- Wardle, C. and H. Derakhshan. 2018. "Module 2: Thinking about 'Information Disorder': Formats of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information." In *Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation*, edited by C. Ireton and J. Posetti, 44-56. Paris: UNESCO.
- Wendratama, E., N. Kurnia, and Z. M. Z. Monggilo. 2021. "Hari literasi 2021: Pemerintah dan masyarakat perlu kembangkan terus pendekatan yang beragam." *The Conversation*, September 7, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/hari-literasi-2021-pemerintah-dan-masyarakat-perlu-kembangkan-terus-pendekatan-yang-beragam-167345>.
- Wicaksono, P. E. 2021. "4.226 hoaks seputar Covid-19 tersebar di medsos, simak rinciannya." *Liputan6.com*, August 3, 2020. <https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/4623216/4226-hoaks-seputar-covid-19-tersebar-di-medsos-simak-rinciannya>.
- World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. "Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak." World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Disability-2020-1g>.
- Wibowo, A. 2020. "Kominfo: Penyebar hoaks COVID-19 diancam sanksi kurungan dan denda 1 miliar." *Kominfo.go.id*. https://kominfo.go.id/content/detail/25923/kominfo-penyebar-hoaks-covid-19-diancam-sanksi-kurungan-dan-denda-1-miliar/0/virus_corona.

PANDEMIC **X INFO**DEMIC

HOW STATES SHAPED NARRATIVES DURING COVID-19



INNOVATION
FOR CHANGE

WHERE PEOPLE CONNECT TO CREATE TOMORROW
