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The Discourse Dimensions of Hoax News in Online Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explain how hoax news was constructed and disseminated during the COVID-19 pandemic by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to three dimensions: (1) textual, (2) discourse practice, and (3) sociocultural practice within online media. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with data sourced from hoax news labeled “Hoax” by Kominfo that had not been deleted. The data were analyzed using Norman Fairclough’s (1989) three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. The results show that: (1) The textual dimension of hoax news during the pandemic is constructed through cohesion and coherence, grammar, and diction. (2) The discourse practice dimension includes the processes of text production, dissemination, and consumption in online media. (3) The sociocultural practice dimension operates at three levels: situational, institutional, and social. At the social level, many netizens expressed disappointment with the government, which was perceived as slow to respond to the COVID-19 threat, while others appreciated the policies implemented and even offered prayers for their success. This study concludes that linguistic features, production contexts, and the broader social dynamics of online communities influence the construction and spread of hoax news.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, the global community faced an unprecedented crisis following the outbreak of COVID-19, a disease caused by the coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China. The rapid spread of the virus across countries transformed what initially appeared to be a localized health issue into a global pandemic. Beyond its devastating impact on public health systems, economies, and social life, the pandemic also gave rise to a parallel crisis widely referred to as an “infodemic.” This infodemic is characterized by the massive

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circulation of misinformation and hoaxes, particularly through online media, which has significantly influenced how people perceive and respond to the pandemic situation [1].

In Indonesia, the spread of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic became a serious concern. The increasing penetration of internet access and the widespread use of social media platforms have accelerated the dissemination of information, both accurate and misleading. As a result, false information can reach a large audience quickly. According to data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, at least 1,485 COVID-19-related hoaxes were identified circulating online media between January 2020 and March 2021 [2]. This figure demonstrates that the issue is not simply about the presence of misinformation, but also about its scale, speed, and persuasive nature. Hoaxes are often constructed to appear credible, making it difficult for the public to distinguish between factual and false information.

The persistence of hoaxes poses serious challenges for society. Misinformation can influence public attitudes and behaviors, particularly regarding health protocols. For example, exposure to false claims about the effectiveness of certain treatments or the dangers of vaccines may lead individuals to ignore official health recommendations. This, in turn, can hinder efforts to control the virus's spread and even increase the risk of infection. As noted by Sathish et al. [3], false information represents a significant threat in digital communication environments, especially during times of crisis. In addition, the media's role as a primary source of information further complicates the situation. Media platforms, including social media, websites, and messaging applications, are not entirely neutral, as they may be influenced by certain interests or agendas [4]. Consequently, the public is exposed to a mixture of reliable information and misleading content, which can create confusion and panic.

This condition highlights the urgent need for stronger media literacy and more effective analytical approaches to understanding hoax news. Media literacy enables individuals to critically evaluate information, identify unreliable sources, and make informed decisions. However, improving media literacy alone is not sufficient without a deeper understanding of how hoaxes are constructed and communicated. In other words, it is necessary to examine not only the content of hoaxes but also the underlying structures, strategies, and contexts that shape them. This is where discourse analysis becomes particularly relevant. Recent studies have shown that media literacy plays a significant role in helping individuals identify misinformation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, although its effectiveness depends on users' critical understanding of digital content and information ecosystems [5]. Furthermore, misinformation spreads rapidly in digital environments due to the interplay of social, emotional, and technological factors, underscoring the need for deeper analytical frameworks, such as discourse analysis, to understand how such content is constructed and disseminated [6].

To address this problem, this study proposes using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically the model developed by Norman Fairclough, as an analytical framework. CDA is a method that examines the relationship between language, power, and society, emphasizing how discourse both reflects and shapes social realities. Fairclough's model consists of three interconnected dimensions: the textual dimension, which focuses

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on linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure; the discourse practice dimension, which examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed; and the sociocultural practice dimension, which considers the broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts in which discourse occurs Fairclough, 1989 [7]. By applying this framework, researchers can uncover the hidden meanings, assumptions, and power relations embedded in media texts, including hoax news.

Previous studies have examined hoaxes from various perspectives, underscoring the complexity of the phenomenon. For instance, Sutisna [8] emphasized the importance of enhancing digital literacy as a preventive measure against the spread of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study highlights the role of education and awareness in equipping individuals with the skills needed to assess information critically. Meanwhile, Raisma et al. [9] focused on the linguistic characteristics of hoax news. Their findings indicate that hoaxes often employ exaggerated expressions, persuasive language, and ambiguous or unverifiable sources to attract attention and influence readers. These linguistic strategies are deliberately used to create a sense of urgency or credibility, even when the information is false.

In addition, several studies have applied Critical Discourse Analysis to examine media texts, including hoaxes. Samsuri et al. [10] analyzed the use of COVID-19-related terms in online news and found that discourse reflects certain ideological positions and social relations, particularly between the government and the public. Similarly, Sukma [11] demonstrated that CDA can be used as a tool within media literacy to identify potentially misleading texts by analyzing their formal and intertextual features. Zulfadhli et al. [12] also conducted a CDA-based analysis of hoax news on social media, revealing inconsistencies in content structure, lack of coherence, and the use of non-standard language. These studies collectively suggest that hoaxes are not random occurrences but are systematically constructed through specific discursive strategies.

However, despite these valuable contributions, a notable gap remains in the existing literature. Most previous studies tend to focus on specific aspects of hoaxes, such as linguistic features, media literacy, or social impact, without integrating these perspectives into a comprehensive analytical framework. In particular, few studies have systematically examined how hoax news is constructed across all three dimensions of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis textual, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice within the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia [13]. This limitation is also reflected in studies of digital communication, which highlight how information flows and public engagement in online environments are often shaped by affective and technological factors rather than comprehensive discourse analysis [14]. As a result, there is still limited understanding of how these dimensions interact to shape the construction and dissemination of hoax news in digital media environments. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing a holistic analysis of hoax news using Fairclough's CDA framework. By examining the textual features of hoax news, this study aims to identify the linguistic strategies used to construct misleading narratives. Through the analysis of discourse practices, it seeks to understand how hoax news is produced, distributed, and consumed in online media. Furthermore, by exploring the sociocultural context, this study

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aims to reveal the broader social and ideological factors that influence the emergence and spread of hoaxes during the pandemic. In doing so, this research not only contributes to the academic understanding of hoax discourse but also provides practical insights for addressing misinformation.

Based on this background, the research question is formulated as follows: How is hoax news constructed in online media during the COVID-19 pandemic when analyzed through the textual, discourse practice, and sociocultural dimensions of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis? This question is designed to guide the study in systematically and comprehensively examining the phenomenon of hoaxes.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze and explain the construction of hoax news in online media by examining three main aspects: (1) the textual dimension, which focuses on language use and linguistic features; (2) the discourse practice dimension, which explores the processes of production and consumption of hoax news; and (3) the sociocultural practice dimension, which investigates the broader social and ideological context surrounding the dissemination of hoaxes. These objectives are aligned with the research question and reflect the comprehensive nature of the analysis.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis by applying it to the study of digital misinformation, particularly in the Indonesian context during a global crisis. It also enriches the existing literature on hoaxes by integrating multiple analytical dimensions into a single framework. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study can support efforts to improve media literacy by providing insights into how hoax news is constructed and how it can be identified. This is particularly important for helping the public become more critical consumers of information in the digital age.

Furthermore, this study is expected to serve as a reference for future research on misinformation, digital communication, and discourse analysis. It may also provide policymakers, educators, and media practitioners with valuable input for developing strategies to combat the spread of hoaxes. Ultimately, by enhancing understanding of the mechanisms underlying hoax news, this research aims to contribute to the creation of a more informed and resilient society, capable of navigating the challenges of the modern information landscape.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the construction of COVID-19-related hoax news in online media. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring meaning, interpretation, and discursive patterns embedded in texts, particularly when the objective is to understand how language constructs social reality [15].

The study is positioned as document-based research, as it relies on textual data rather than human participants. This approach is consistent with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which focuses on discourse as a social practice [16]. Therefore,

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interviews or audience reception data were not included, since the research emphasizes the structure, production, and sociocultural context of hoax texts rather than their reception.

Data Source and Sampling

The data were collected from the official website of the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo), specifically from the “Hoax Issue” database. This source was selected because it provides verified hoax content, ensuring the credibility and validity of the dataset. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select relevant data. The dataset consists of:

- 1) 30 hoax news texts
- 2) Published between March 2020 and December 2021, representing the peak period of COVID-19 information dissemination
- 3) Selected based on the following criteria:
 - a. The text is officially labeled as a hoax by Kominfo
 - b. The content is directly related to COVID-19
 - c. The text is available in complete and analyzable form
 - d. The text contains sufficient linguistic and narrative elements for discourse analysis

The selected data include:

- a. Reposted online news articles
- b. Social media content (e.g., WhatsApp messages, Facebook posts, Twitter content)
- c. Screenshots documented and contextualized by Kominfo

This sampling strategy ensures that the dataset captures diverse forms of hoax discourse circulating in digital environments.

Analytical Framework

This study applies Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, which conceptualizes discourse as a three-dimensional construct:

- a. textual analysis,
- b. discourse practice, and
- c. sociocultural practice [16].

Textual Dimension

The textual analysis focuses on micro-level linguistic features, including:

- a. Vocabulary (e.g., emotionally loaded words such as “deadly,” “dangerous”)
- b. Grammar and clause structure (e.g., causal claims without evidence)
- c. Pronoun usage (e.g., “they” vs. “we” framing)
- d. Rhetorical strategies (e.g., repetition, exaggeration)

For example, a hoax text stating “*After vaccination, many people suddenly died*” constructs a causal relationship without empirical evidence, thereby influencing readers’ perception.

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Discourse Practice

This dimension examines how hoax texts are produced, distributed, and consumed within media systems. The analysis considers:

- a. The origin of texts (e.g., anonymous social media posts)
- b. Modes of circulation (e.g., reposting across platforms, viral sharing)
- c. Intertextuality (e.g., imitation of news formats or institutional language)

For instance, expressions such as “*Share this message before it is deleted*” function as discursive strategies to accelerate dissemination and create urgency.

Sociocultural Practice

At the macro level, the analysis explores the relationship between hoax discourse and broader social contexts, including:

- a. Public distrust of government policies
- b. Social anxiety during the pandemic
- c. Cultural and ideological narratives

For example, claims such as “*The vaccine is a tool for population control*” reflect underlying skepticism toward authority and institutional power.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted systematically through the following steps:

1. Data Collection

Hoax texts were retrieved from the Kominfo “Hoax Issue” database.

2. Data Selection

Texts were filtered based on predefined inclusion criteria.

3. Data Organization

The selected texts were categorized into thematic groups, such as:

- a. Vaccine-related hoaxes
- b. Government policy hoaxes
- c. Health misinformation

4. Textual Analysis

Linguistic features were identified and coded, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical patterns.

5. Discourse Practice Analysis

The production and dissemination processes of hoax texts were examined, including their patterns of digital circulation.

6. Sociocultural Interpretation

The texts were analyzed in relation to broader social, political, and cultural contexts.

7. Synthesis of Findings

The results from all three dimensions were integrated to explain how hoax news is constructed and disseminated.

Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the study, several strategies were employed:

- 1) **Data Credibility:** The use of Kominfo's verified hoax database ensures that all analyzed texts are officially classified as misinformation.
- 2) **Theoretical Validity:** The analysis is grounded in an established CDA framework (Fairclough, 1989), which has been widely applied in discourse studies.
- 3) **Analytical Transparency:** The step-by-step procedure and explicit analytical categories enhance the study's reproducibility.
- 4) **Data Triangulation:** The dataset includes multiple media types (news articles, social media posts, screenshots), enabling cross-contextual analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study uses publicly available data from an official government source. No personal or sensitive data were collected, and all materials analyzed are publicly accessible. Therefore, no ethical risk is associated with human subjects. Research using publicly available data is generally considered to pose minimal ethical risk, particularly when it does not involve identifiable personal information or direct interaction with participants, as outlined in established research ethics [17].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Textual Dimension of Hoax News in Online Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic Based on Critical Discourse Analysis

The findings of this study reveal that the textual dimension of hoax news in online media during the COVID-19 pandemic is constructed through three main aspects: cohesion and coherence, grammar, and diction. These aspects not only function as linguistic structures but also play a crucial role in shaping the persuasive power of hoax discourse. In terms of cohesion and coherence, the analysis identifies the use of repetition, pronouns, substitution, articles, and conjunctions. While these elements are generally used to ensure textual unity, this study finds that they also serve ideological and persuasive functions. For instance, the use of pronouns such as "they" and "we" constructs a dichotomy between groups, often positioning authorities as untrustworthy and the public as victims. This aligns with Fairclough's perspective, which argues that language reflects and constructs social relations and power dynamics.

Repetition is another significant feature found in the data. Statements such as "do not trust hospitals, do not trust doctors" are repeated to reinforce particular messages and create a sense of urgency and certainty. This technique strengthens the perceived credibility of the message, even in the absence of factual evidence. Although Natasya and Saksono [18] identified these elements as markers of discourse cohesion, this study demonstrates that they also function as tools of persuasion.

From a grammatical perspective, the findings indicate the use of both active and passive verbal clauses, including transitive, semi-transitive, and intransitive forms. As noted by Asraka [19], these clause types can be identified through specific morphological

1 markers. However, this study goes beyond structural identification by examining their functional role in discourse construction.

Active clauses are often used to assign agency and responsibility, as in statements that suggest deliberate actions by certain actors. For example, sentences such as “*they created the virus*” explicitly assign blame, thereby strengthening the narrative of conspiracy. In contrast, passive clauses obscure agency while maintaining suspicion, as seen in statements such as “*the virus was engineered.*” This dual use of grammatical structures allows hoax texts to remain persuasive while avoiding direct accountability. Moreover, the use of causal clause structures can create misleading logical relationships. For instance, statements such as “*after vaccination, many people died*” imply causality without providing evidence. This creates an illusion of logical reasoning, making the information appear credible and convincing.

The construction of sentences using clear and straightforward patterns, such as S-P, S-P-O, and S-P-O-ADV, further enhances readability and comprehension. As stated by Payuyasa [20], effective discourse should provide clarity to avoid ambiguity. However, in the context of hoax news, clarity does not necessarily indicate truth. Instead, it may function as a strategy to disguise false information as factual.

3 Diction also plays a central role in shaping the meaning and impact of hoax texts. The findings show that hoax news frequently uses emotionally charged words such as “*dangerous,*” “*deadly,*” “*conspiracy,*” and “*engineering.*” These lexical choices evoke fear, anxiety, and suspicion, which can influence readers’ emotions and reduce their critical thinking. This is supported by Lado [21], who emphasized that language is used strategically in discourse to achieve specific purposes, including the exercise of power. In addition, the study finds that hoax texts often mention credible institutions or authoritative entities to enhance their legitimacy. This strategy creates an impression of reliability, even when the information is false. By associating the message with trusted sources, hoax texts can manipulate readers’ perceptions and increase their persuasive power.

Overall, the textual dimension demonstrates that hoax news is constructed through deliberate linguistic strategies that aim to influence readers’ perceptions and emotions. These findings support the view of critical discourse analysis that language is not neutral but is actively used to construct social reality.

17 Discourse Practice of Hoax News Texts in Online Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

17 The research findings indicate that discourse practice in hoax news texts in online media during the COVID-19 pandemic encompasses three key aspects: production, distribution, and consumption.

36 The purpose of the production process of hoax news is to divide, prioritize personal interests, deceive, divert issues, and others. The distribution of hoax news is characterized by its very rapid, easy spread, a distinctive feature of online media. Based on the research findings, it is evident that COVID-19-related hoax news in Indonesia primarily circulated on digital platforms, with 359 hoax issues reported: 303 on Twitter, 3 on Instagram, and 53

on Facebook. Kominfo took firm steps to curb its spread by reporting it to digital platforms and the police.

Text is a part of a word or a collection of sentences that describes the object being reported and has interrelationships between the described objects [15]. Discourse practice determines how a text is created, while sociocultural practice refers to the context not directly related to the media text, but rather to situational conditions outside the media that can influence the news appearing in that media, whether in mass media or on websites. When observed, hoax content providers often exhibit a close relationship with linguistics and grammar. The close link is evident in the choice of vocabulary, semantics, and sentence structure that require review, including sentence coherence and cohesion.

Many health-related coronavirus hoaxes are very dangerous. They can pose a greater threat to lives than other types of hoaxes. Some health hoaxes make people unwilling to seek hospital treatment, causing them to try unproven herbal medicines instead [22]. The spread of hoaxes and disinformation has several causes. One is public ignorance about which information is probably a hoax.

This is relevant to research by Juditha [23] titled "Public Behavior Regarding the Spread of Covid-19 Hoaxes." Juditha [23] found that the public generally cannot distinguish between information about COVID-19 that is indicated as a hoax and that which is not. This is a result of the large volume of information received and public panic about the COVID-19 outbreak. Information labeled as a hoax still spreads because its spreaders are unsure whether it is false and believe it may be useful for prevention or treatment [23].

Another goal of spreading hoaxes is for groups with specific interests to disseminate misinformation to achieve their objectives [24]. Hoaxes also serve interests driven by economic, ideological, or political motives, as well as entertainment [25].

The Construction of Sociocultural Practice in Hoax News Texts in Online Media During the Covid-19 Pandemic Based on Critical Discourse Analysis

The findings indicate that the construction of sociocultural practice in hoax news texts operates at three levels: situational, institutional, and societal. These levels provide a broader context for understanding how hoax news emerges and gains influence. At the situational level, the COVID-19 pandemic created a context of uncertainty, fear, and urgency. In such conditions, people tend to seek information that can provide explanations or solutions. Hoax texts often exploit this situation by offering simple and emotionally appealing narratives, even if they are not accurate. Terms such as "conspiracy" and "engineering" are frequently used to provide alternative explanations that resonate with public anxiety. This phenomenon is consistent with research showing that misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic is often driven by emotional responses and uncertainty, which make individuals more susceptible to simplified and misleading narratives [26].

At the institutional level, the findings show that hoax news often reflects public distrust toward authorities, including the government and healthcare institutions. Some hoax narratives suggest that official information is unreliable or manipulated. This

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indicates that hoax discourse is closely related to issues of power and ideology, as emphasized in critical discourse analysis.

At the societal level, the findings reveal diverse public responses to hoax news. While some individuals express skepticism, others accept and spread the information. This variation is influenced by factors such as media literacy, access to information, and social conditions.

The study also finds that hoax news both reflects and reinforces social anxiety. As noted by Rodríguez [27], misinformation spreads rapidly during crises. However, this study shows that the influence of hoax news is not only due to its speed of dissemination but also its ability to connect with existing social concerns.

Furthermore, the findings are supported by Juditha [23], who stated that public panic contributes to the spread of hoax news. However, this study extends this argument by showing that panic is not only a cause but also a result of the dissemination of hoaxes. Hoax texts amplify fear and uncertainty, which in turn encourages further spread.

In conclusion, the sociocultural dimension demonstrates that hoax news is deeply embedded in the broader social context. It is shaped by situational conditions, institutional dynamics, and societal responses, all of which contribute to its construction and influence.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined how hoax news in online media during the COVID-19 pandemic is constructed by applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: textual dimension, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. In line with the research problem and gap identified in the introduction, particularly the limited integration of these three dimensions in previous studies, this research's findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of hoax discourse in the Indonesian pandemic context.

The results demonstrate that hoax news is not simply characterized by misleading content but is systematically constructed through the interaction of linguistic strategies, media practices, and sociocultural conditions. At the textual level, the use of cohesive devices, grammatical structures, and diction contributes to the formation of messages that appear clear, logical, and credible, even when they are not factually accurate. These linguistic features play a crucial role in shaping readers' perceptions by creating emotional engagement, simplifying complex issues, and constructing implicit relationships such as causality and authority.

At the level of discourse practice, the study reveals that the persuasive power of hoax news is reinforced through its production, rapid digital distribution, and active public consumption. Hoax texts are not only designed to convey information but also to encourage circulation, often aligning with the characteristics of digital media environments where speed, repetition, and user participation determine visibility. This confirms that hoax dissemination is not accidental but follows specific patterns that maximize reach and influence.

Furthermore, at the sociocultural level, the findings indicate that hoax news is deeply embedded in broader social conditions, particularly public anxiety, uncertainty, and

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distrust toward institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hoax narratives often resonate with these conditions, making them more easily accepted and shared. Thus, hoax discourse both reflects and reinforces existing social tensions, highlighting the close relationship between language, power, and ideology as emphasized in **Critical Discourse Analysis**.

The main contribution of this study is to demonstrate that hoax news during the COVID-19 pandemic is constructed not only through linguistic features but also through the interaction of institutional distrust, digital circulation patterns, and sociocultural dynamics. By integrating the three dimensions of Fairclough's model, this research extends previous studies that tended to focus on isolated aspects, such as linguistic characteristics or media literacy, without providing a holistic analysis.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis by applying it to the study of digital misinformation in a crisis context, particularly in Indonesia. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening media literacy, not only by focusing on identifying false information but also by understanding how such information is constructed and disseminated. This insight is particularly relevant for educators, policymakers, and the general public in addressing the challenges of misinformation in digital media.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the dataset is limited to 30 hoax news texts sourced from the Kominfo database, which may not fully represent the diversity of hoax discourse across different digital platforms. Second, the study focuses on textual and discursive analysis without incorporating audience-based data, such as interviews or surveys, which could provide deeper insights into how the public interprets and responds to hoax news. Therefore, the findings are primarily limited to the construction of discourse rather than its reception.

Given these limitations, future research is recommended to expand the scope and depth of the analysis. Further studies could conduct comparative analyses across different digital platforms, such as social media and online news portals, to identify variations in hoax discourse. In addition, cross-period studies could be undertaken to examine how hoax narratives evolve over time, particularly before, during, and after crises. Future research may also incorporate audience reception approaches to better understand how individuals interpret, negotiate, and respond to hoax news across different social contexts.

In conclusion, this study confirms that hoax news is a complex discourse phenomenon shaped by the interaction of language, media systems, and social conditions. Understanding this complexity is essential not only for academic purposes but also for developing more effective strategies to combat misinformation. For the general public, this research emphasizes the importance of critical awareness in consuming digital information, encouraging individuals to question not only the truth of information but also how it is constructed and circulated.

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