
AI-DRIVEN POLITICAL DISINFORMATION AND PUBLIC TRUST OF INDONESIAN SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

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Abstract

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has transformed the landscape of political campaigns on social media through the massive production of disinformation, which is manipulative, and difficult to detect, such as deepfakes and automated text-based narratives. In Indonesia, this phenomenon poses a serious threat to democratic stability and digital polarization. This study aims to explore in depth how Indonesian social media users interpret, respond to, and experience the impact of exposure to AI-based political disinformation on their trust in the political system. This study aims to conceptually and critically analyze the mechanisms by which AI-based political disinformation degrades public trust in Indonesian social media users and to map existing regulatory gaps. This study employ, desk research or known as secondary research Secondary research is a method of gathering information and insights from various scientific literature, including reputable journal articles, digital research institute reports, and relevant policy documents in Indonesia. The study's findings indicate that AI-based political disinformation disables secondary cognitive verification systems through motivated reasoning mechanisms, which are then structurally amplified by filter bubble and echo chamber algorithms. This phenomenon gives rise to "epistemic cynicism," where the public not only rejects hoaxes but also begins to doubt all objective truth, including journalistic products and official government data. The impact is a vertical erosion of social trust in democratic institutions and a horizontal polarization (digital tribalism). This crisis is exacerbated by a legal vacuum (*rechtsvacuum*), where the reactive-punitive downstream ITE Law and the PDP Law have not been able to address the automation of AI production upstream.

Keywords: *Political Disinformation, Artificial Intelligence, Public Trust, Epistemic Cynicism, AI Governance.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary political landscape in Indonesia has shifted radically to the digital space, with social media becoming a primary arena for political contestation and public opinion formation. However, this digital transformation is accompanied by the evolution of new threats in the form of the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology into information production (Giyandri & Sinaga, 2024). While political disinformation was previously produced manually and simply, the advent of Generative AI now enables the massive, rapid, and low-cost fabrication of manipulative content. This phenomenon has sparked new concerns because AI-based content possesses unprecedented levels of persuasiveness and visual sophistication (Dehnert & Mongeau, 2022).

To understand this phenomenon in depth, the analysis must be framed within the Post-Truth Theory framework popularized by Lee McIntyre (2018). In the post-truth era, objective facts are no longer the primary variable in shaping public opinion, replaced by emotional sentiments and personal beliefs. AI-based political disinformation exploits this era's characteristics by producing content specifically designed to appeal to audiences' deepest emotions. As a result, the line between factual truth and fabricated lies has become extremely blurred, creating a digital environment vulnerable to ideological manipulation (Sarjito, 2024).

The vulnerability of social media users in Indonesia to AI-driven disinformation can be explained through Motivated Reasoning Theory. This theory states that individuals tend to process information in a way that supports their pre-existing political beliefs or identities (Kunda, 1990). When confronted with AI-driven disinformation attacking political opponents, users readily accept it as truth without verifying it. This biased cognitive process is exacerbated by AI technology's ability to personalize hoax content to suit the psychological preferences of specific target groups (Kertysova, 2018).

This psychological impact is structurally reinforced by the architecture of social media itself, as explained in Eli Pariser's Echo Chamber Theory and Filter Bubble Concept (2011). Social media algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement by consistently presenting content aligned with their interests. When AI-based political disinformation enters this loop, the algorithm amplifies it into a homogenous echo chamber. As a result, users are isolated from alternative views and continually exposed to distorted political narratives, ultimately widening the polarization gap in Indonesia (Rodillo, 2024).

The accumulation of exposure to AI hoaxes and this information isolation directly threatens the foundations of public trust, which can be analyzed using Social Trust Theory (Robbins, 2016). Public trust is the primary social capital that binds society to democratic institutions (Suharko, 2005). When the digital space is flooded with deepfake videos or fake audio recordings discrediting political actors and institutions, the foundations of this trust begin to crack. The public not only loses trust in specific political figures but also experiences a widespread degradation of trust in the democratic system itself (Sudirman, 2012).

Furthermore, the flood of AI disinformation has given rise to a condition known as "Epistemic Cynicism." At this stage, the damage caused by AI is no longer simply leading people to believe misinformation (Levy, 2005). The more damaging impact is when people begin to doubt all available information, including valid information issued by official authorities or professional journalism. When everything can be falsified by AI, nothing can be trusted, creating an apathetic society that loses its grip on objective reality (Saltman, 2022).

In Indonesia, this challenge is significantly more complex because the public's digital literacy and artificial intelligence (AI) literacy levels remain low to moderate. The communal nature of Indonesian society has led to the exponential spread of false information on platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and X, driven by group solidarity (Setyawan, 2020). Furthermore, existing legal instruments, such as the ITE Law and the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Law, are deemed insufficiently adaptive and comprehensive in regulating the misuse of Generative AI technology for politically offensive purposes (Fikri & Amelia, 2024).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze how AI-based political disinformation undermines public trust in social media users in Indonesia through the lens of integrated socio-digital theories. The novelty of this research lies in its focus, which goes beyond viewing AI as a tool for spreading hoaxes, but rather as an agent of change in the epistemic structure of society in the local Indonesian context. The results of this literature study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to political communication science as well as practical recommendations for the formulation of urgent AI governance regulations to maintain the integrity of Indonesia's digital democracy.

B. METHOD

This study employ desk research (secondary research) with involves the use of existing sources of information to investigate the mechanisms of AI-based political disinformation in influencing public trust in Indonesia (Somantri, 2005). The research data is entirely secondary data collected from various reputable scientific sources, such as indexed national and international journal articles (Scopus and Sinta), political communication textbooks, reports from trusted digital research institutions, and policy regulatory documents (such as the ITE

Law and the PDP Law). The researcher organizes the collected secondary data, performs data reduction based on topic relevance, and synthesizes it into theoretical clusters covering user psychological mechanisms (motivated reasoning), the impact of algorithm architecture (filter bubbles), and the erosion of social trust (epistemic cynicism). Data validity and conceptual validity are guaranteed through literature data source triangulation techniques, where findings from one study are verified and confirmed with theories and research results from other literature. The results of this critical synthesis are then drawn into conclusions to formulate a new theoretical model and recommendations for adaptive AI governance policies for Indonesia.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Cognitive Mechanisms and Algorithmic Structure in the Formation of Epistemic Cynicism

The political disinformation landscape in Indonesia has undergone a drastic paradigm shift with the widespread adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. While in conventional political contests, hoaxes were produced through manual text manipulation or simple image editing, the era of artificial intelligence has introduced far more sophisticated fabrication techniques (Łabuz & Nehring, 2024). The advent of Generative AI has enabled the creation of artificial political content that is not only massive in quantity but also highly persuasive and precise in quality. The key characteristic of this AI-based disinformation lies in its ability to replicate reality audio-visually with near-perfect accuracy, surpassing the limits of traditional digital manipulation (Shoaib et al., 2023).

Technically, the effectiveness of AI disinformation is supported by technologies such as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), which produce deepfake video and audio. Through these algorithms, the system can learn the facial characteristics, facial expressions, and voice intonation of a political figure to then generate a new narrative that is completely false but appears highly authentic. This phenomenon creates what's known as digital hyperreality, a state in which artificial products appear more realistic than reality itself. As a result, lay audiences lose the basic sensory ability to distinguish between authentic political document footage and machine-generated content (Hariyanto et al., 2024).

The fundamental vulnerability of Indonesian social media users in the face of this onslaught of hyper-realistic content can be comprehensively analyzed using Motivated Reasoning Theory. This cognitive psychology theory states that humans fundamentally do not process political information neutrally or objectively. Instead, individuals have a strong tendency to direct their mental processes to reach conclusions that support their pre-existing beliefs, ideologies, or group identities (Sinha, 2020). In this context, information is no longer judged based on its factual validity, but rather on its emotional utility in validating personal biases.

When a social media user is exposed to AI-driven disinformation that attacks or discredits a political rival, this motivated reasoning mechanism automatically kicks in. The visual sophistication of deepfake content acts as a stimulant that disables the human secondary cognitive verification system. Because the content presents what users "want" to see and hear, their brains instantly lower their standards of skepticism and skip the critical evaluation stage. The false information is immediately integrated into their belief systems because it satisfies the emotional need to champion their group's narrative.

Furthermore, AI not only falsifies content but also automates the process of message personalization on a macro scale (micro-targeting). Leveraging big data analytics, AI algorithms can individually map the psychographic preferences (Molnár, 2026), fears, and political leanings of millions of social media users in Indonesia. Based on these profiles, AI systems can produce thousands of variations of disinformation narratives tailored specifically to trigger specific emotional responses in each user cluster. This exponential level of

personalization makes disinformation messages far more deadly because they directly target the deepest psychological vulnerabilities of each target audience.

The impact of individual cognitive biases and AI-driven message personalization is not isolated but structurally amplified by the architecture of social media platforms. Modern platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X operate on an attention economy business model. In this model, the most valuable commodity is the duration and level of user engagement. To keep users engaged within the app, the system architecture is designed to consistently deliver content that triggers the strongest emotional reactions (Rachmad, 2024), whether it's anger, fear, or group euphoria.

This is where Eli Pariser's concept of the filter bubble finds its full relevance. Social media algorithms constantly track every user's digital footprint—from viewing time, likes, comments, to search history—to build a completely personalized curation of information (Koç, 2023). When a user begins to interact with AI-driven political disinformation content, the algorithm reads that interaction as a key indicator of interest. Consequently, the system automatically isolates that user into a homogenous information bubble, where alternative views, countervailing facts, and official clarifications are deliberately filtered out of their timelines.

This massive digital isolation, in turn, transforms individual filter bubbles into a collective echo chamber. Within these echo chambers, millions of users with similar political biases gather, replicating and confirming the AI-driven disinformation they receive. False narratives produced by artificial intelligence are continually echoed and reflected over and over again without ever being interrupted by objective facts. This process of social amplification creates the illusion of consensus, where users perceive their distorted group opinion as representing the absolute truth shared by all.

The integration of echo chambers and AI-generated disinformation creates a highly destructive circular effect on the public information ecosystem. AI-generated political content, specifically designed to trigger emotional bias through hyper-realistic visualizations, has a much higher level of virulence than factual news, which tends to be rigid and neutral. Literature studies have shown that AI-powered hoaxes spread many times faster, deeper, and more widely on social media networks (Kertysova, 2018). This is because users within echo chambers voluntarily act as amplifiers out of group solidarity and the drive to maintain political identity.

The accumulation of massive exposure to AI disinformation, manipulative personalized messaging, and structural isolation within these echo chambers has ultimately given rise to a new cognitive crisis in Indonesia: "Epistemic Cynicism." This concept refers to a social-psychological condition in which society loses fundamental confidence that objective truth exists and is accessible (Rose, 2022). The damage to the digital ecosystem caused by the flood of artificial content has led individuals to develop a defense mechanism in the form of destructive, radical skepticism toward all forms of information circulating in cyberspace.

Through the lens of epistemic cynicism, it can be understood that the greatest damage of AI technology in the political sphere is not its ability to make people believe a specific lie. The far more dangerous and long-term impact is when AI technology successfully distrusts any information, including information that is completely valid and fact-based. When the public realizes that videos, audio recordings, photos, and official documents can be easily falsified by artificial intelligence, they begin to adopt the assumption that "everything on the internet is fabricated.

This state of epistemic cynicism has fatal consequences for professional journalism institutions and mainstream media in Indonesia. Amidst the AI disinformation storm, journalism products produced through rigorous investigative processes, multi-layered verification, and broadcasting codes of ethics are often equated by the public with propaganda or other forms of digital fabrication. When conventional mass media publishes evidence of

political violations or factual data that is unpleasant for certain groups, cynical people will easily dismiss it with the narrative that the evidence is a product of deepfake or AI manipulation designed by political opponents.

This phenomenon has triggered what digital political communication studies call The Liar's Dividend. The epistemic cynicism caused by AI actually provides a safe space for dishonest political actors to escape public accountability. When a political actor is caught on camera or audio recording committing an act of corruption or a clear ethical violation, they can now very easily deny it by claiming the authentic evidence is an "AI-engineered hoax." The already damaged public's mass skepticism makes such denials sound plausible, thus obscuring political accountability (Schiff et al., 2022).

Furthermore, epistemic cynicism undermines the effectiveness of conventional mitigation mechanisms such as fact-checking (debunking). In Indonesia, independent institutions and media outlets dedicated to verifying AI-generated hoaxes often fall victim to this mass distrust. The public, trapped in echo chambers and cognitive biases, views fact-checking institutions not as neutral arbiters of information, but as part of a partisan political conspiracy. Scientific clarifications issued to address AI disinformation have instead been accused of covering up the truth, further deepening polarization.

The ultimate psychological impact of this vicious cycle of epistemic cynicism is the rise of political apathy and information fatigue among social media users in Indonesia. Constantly bombarded by confusing, contradictory, and AI-fabricated political content, people experience mental fatigue in processing information. Instead of seeking the truth, many users choose to withdraw entirely from public discourse and adopt a disregard for the democratic process. This loss of grip on objective reality makes society highly vulnerable to manipulation by authoritarian populist narratives (Giraud, & Poole, 2021).

On the other hand, for those groups that remain active in the digital space, the loss of objective standards of truth due to AI is replaced by the strengthening of group sentiment (digital tribalism). When rational facts are no longer credible due to AI bias and epistemic cynicism, the only informational anchor left for individuals is blind loyalty to their group, idol figure, or political party. Truth is no longer determined by empirical data, but by "who" is delivering it. If the information comes from the mouth of the group's leader, it is considered true, no matter how much evidence there is that the content was produced by artificial intelligence.

2. The Erosion of Social Trust and the Limitations of AI Governance Regulation in Indonesia

The structural consequences of the widespread phenomenon of epistemic cynicism in the digital space no longer stop at the individual psychological level, but have mutated into a real threat to the macro-stability of Indonesian democracy. This condition can be analyzed in depth through Social Trust Theory. Social trust, both horizontal (between citizens) and vertical (between citizens and state institutions), constitutes the most crucial social capital that binds the foundations of a democratic system (Rothstein, & Stolle, 2008). When the digital public space is flooded with manipulative AI-based political disinformation, the foundations of this social capital experience massive and profound cracks.

Vertically, exposure to smear campaigns and artificial AI-based narratives systematically erodes the legitimacy of key democratic institutions in Indonesia. State institutions such as the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), political parties, and even the judiciary have become easy targets for deepfake content fabrication. For example, the spread of fake audio recordings cloned from the voices of public officials or artificial videos fabricating election fraud has created a collective perception that Indonesia's political system is completely corrupt and untrustworthy. This

vertical erosion of trust has caused public decisions and the outcomes of political contests to lose their moral authority in the eyes of the public.

Horizontally, AI-based political disinformation is destroying social cohesion by widening the polarization gap between societal groups (Baecker et al., (2023). AI algorithms that exploit emotional biases deliberately produce narratives that incite conflicting sentiments of identity, ethnicity, religion, and intergroup relations (SARA). When interpersonal trust collapses, cyberspace no longer functions as a forum for healthy digital deliberation but instead becomes a cyber-warfare battlefield rife with hatred and suspicion. Society loses the ability to engage in rational dialogue as each group views the other as an existential threat guided by false information.

Amidst this breakdown in social trust, Indonesian state institutions face a major institutional dilemma. Government efforts to restore law and order are often overlooked by a public already infected with radical skepticism. Every clarification or official data release issued by government cyber authorities to refute AI hoaxes is suspected of being a form of counter-propaganda or a new style of political manipulation (Kertysova, 2018). This failure of public communication demonstrates that the institutional damage caused by AI disinformation cannot be remedied solely with conventional public relations approaches but requires a more radical demonstration of accountability.

This crisis of social trust and digital instability is exacerbated by the fact that Indonesia's current legal instruments are not ready to deal with the penetration of Generative AI technology (Armiwulan, et al., 2024). The primary regulation relied upon, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), suffers from fundamental conceptual limitations. The ITE Law was designed in an era where disinformation was manually produced by clearly identifiable human actors. When manipulative content is produced autonomously by artificial intelligence systems, proving intent (*mens rea*) and tracing the intellectual actors behind the algorithms becomes extremely difficult within conventional legal frameworks.

Furthermore, law enforcement under the ITE Law in Indonesia tends to be post-event (punitive and reactive). This legal approach focuses on removing content (takedown) after the disinformation has gone viral and damaged public opinion, or on criminalizing the individual social media users who spread it. This downstream strategy has proven ineffective and inefficient in combating AI-based disinformation, which spreads exponentially. Punishing the final spreaders (downstream) without addressing the technology infrastructure providers and algorithm creators (upstream) is like treating the symptoms of a disease without eliminating the underlying virus.

In addition to the ITE Law, the Personal Data Protection Law (PDP Law) has also failed to optimally mitigate the exploitation of AI in the political sphere. Generative AI requires a large data supply derived from citizens' digital activities to personalize disinformation (micro-targeting). Although the PDP Law regulates consent for data use, in practice, oversight of the use of public data for training cyber political algorithm models remains very weak. This regulatory loophole is exploited by digital political consultants to map the psychological vulnerabilities of Indonesian voters without strict legal sanctions (Afisa et al., 2024).

The most crucial weakness in Indonesia's legal system is the absence of a law-level regulation specifically addressing the ethics, obligations, and accountability of artificial intelligence technology (AI Act). Indonesia currently only has a soft law instrument in the form of Circular Letter of the Minister of Communication and Information Technology Number 9 of 2023 concerning the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. As soft law, this circular has no legal force whatsoever, contains no criminal sanctions or administrative fines, and serves only as a moral appeal to technology developers. This absence of binding hard law creates a dangerous legal vacuum amidst the rapid pace of cyber innovation.

As a result of this hard law vacuum, there is no legal obligation for global and local AI platform providers operating in Indonesia to implement internal cybersecurity systems. Ideal regulations should require every Generative AI platform to embed an irremovable digital watermark and automatic labeling of all machine-synthesized audio, video, or text content. Without regulatory enforcement from the state, technology corporations tend to ignore these security features in pursuit of commercial gain, leaving Indonesia's digital space free to be exploited by offensive political actors (Firza et al., 2023)

This regulatory impotence is exacerbated by the technological asymmetry between Indonesian law enforcement and perpetrators of political cybercrime. The deepfake detection methods employed by national security authorities often lag several steps behind the sophistication of AI hoax-generating algorithms, which continue to evolve daily. Without an artificial intelligence-based early warning system, the legal process of scientific evidence will take a very long time, thus losing momentum in safeguarding the integrity of the public sphere during a political crisis.

This literature study also found that the previously glorified non-legal mitigation model, namely conventional digital literacy programs, has reached a saturation point in the face of AI disinformation. Digital literacy curricula in Indonesia generally only teach people how to check news links or verify official media. These competencies become obsolete when faced with deepfake videos that can directly manipulate human visual perception. Without advancements in artificial intelligence literacy (AI literacy), which teaches the workings of algorithms and the logic of digital synthesis, the public will remain resigned victims of digital manipulation (Armiwulan, et al., 2024).

Therefore, a radical and comprehensive reconstruction of public policy in Indonesia is necessary. Governance of AI-based political disinformation can no longer be left to free market technology mechanisms or repressive law enforcement after the event. The Indonesian government must immediately initiate the formation of comprehensive regulations that regulate multi-layered accountability: starting from the ethical responsibilities of AI developers, the obligation to filter content by social media platforms as gatekeepers, to the protection of citizens' epistemic rights to obtain information that is clean from cyber manipulation.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on a critical analysis and in-depth synthesis of various scientific literature, policy documents, and evolving socio-digital dynamics, this study draws several key conclusions regarding the impact of AI-driven political disinformation in Indonesia. First, artificial intelligence technology has triggered a new epistemic crisis that surpasses the destructive power of conventional hoaxes. Through hyper-realistic characteristics such as deepfakes and fabricated content that targets users' cognitive biases (motivated reasoning), this technology has successfully paralyzed society's mental verification system. The most destructive impact of this phenomenon is the emergence of epistemic cynicism, a condition in which Indonesian social media users not only reject false information but also begin to doubt all objective truth, including the products of professional journalism and official data from state institutions.

Second, the flood of AI-driven disinformation, structurally amplified by filter bubble and echo chamber algorithms, has been proven to have massively degraded social trust in Indonesia. Vertically, the legitimacy of democratic institutions and election organizers has been eroded by smear campaigns that are very difficult for the general public to visually detect. Horizontally, polarization at the grassroots level is intensifying as society becomes trapped in digital tribalism that prioritizes group loyalty over rational facts, thus undermining the social cohesion that is the primary foundation of democracy.

Third, this crisis of trust is further exacerbated by the inability of positive legal instruments in Indonesia to stem the rapid penetration of new technologies. Current regulations,

such as the ITE Law and the PDP Law, remain reactive and punitive downstream and are not designed to address the autonomous automation of content production by AI machines. The absence of hard law-level regulations governing AI governance at the upstream level creates a legal vacuum freely exploited by offensive political actors without any technological responsibility from developers or social media platforms as digital infrastructure providers.

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