

The Analysis of Misleading Information on Covid-19 Posted on Facebook

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Abstract

The elegance of technology has various impacts on the life cycle of today's society. From a positive point of view, every activity can be done via various existing media including new media. However, the use of modern technology without control will also cause problems in society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the spread of fake news has increased since day 1. To combat this negative and ill situation, the official page *Sebenarnya.my* has been created on Facebook to help society identify fake news. The page would repost all the fake news pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic, or anything related and identify the number of shares made by Facebook users on that fake news. Thus, this study was conducted to identify the number of shares by Facebook users as identified and posted on *Sebenarnya.my* Facebook page and to investigate the dominant themes of the fake news spread. Content analysis was conducted to answer the objectives of the study. A total of 50 fake news postings on March, April, and May 2020 on the *Sebenarnya.my* Facebook page were selected. The findings showed various amounts of fake news posting within three months. Similarly, the percentage data for sharing by Facebook users recorded different amounts. Finally, few themes were identified to be the most dominant ones of fake news related to the COVID-19 issue that were posted by netizens.

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1.0 Introduction

Nowadays, the advancement of information technology is the biggest factor that gives benefits to society, (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020). People rely on existing media such as the internet, social media, and television to get information quickly. Besides, the world of technology is advancing as well as the place of information that becomes unlimited. Internet users are free to share the message from any sources provided (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020). According to Apuke & Omar (2021), social media users are exposed to inaccurate information from irresponsible parties. They are free to share any information that interests them. This shows that many parties will get involved in spreading the information on the internet, whereas the news has not yet been identified as the truth. Fake news is a well-known issue especially via the most recent and up-to-date media technology such as Twitter and Facebook are very popular among users in seeking information (Gelfert, 2018). Indeed, fake news has upset a lot of people and led to a lot of confusion. The Covid-19 pandemic that has attacked the whole world is of no exception from fake news issue (Mason, 2018). With the advent of social media in the era of the new millennium, fake news can be spread tremendously and become a threat to national security. The thing becomes even worse if it involves medical or health news. Therefore, the Malaysian government has produced several public service announcements advising the public to refer to the official website such as *Sebenarnya.my* for any clarification on fake news spread on social media like Facebook.

Today, social media is among the first medium used to gain information during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, too many sources of information could lead to an unrestrained situation. As a result, people will start to get confused about the accuracy and authenticity of the news (Indiyati et. al, 2020). The official Facebook page *Sebenarnya.my* has been developed as a social media platform to combat fake news. This development is due to the fact that Facebook has become the central focus for Malaysians to get the latest information pertaining to Covid-19 in Malaysia. Unfortunately, this has opened an opportunity for some people to spread hoax news and finally has caused a lot of confusion among netizens. As reported, there were about 273 fake news cases in Malaysia were investigated by The Royal Malaysia Police and Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission related to COVID-19 cases (Berita Harian, 2020). According to Yang, Zhou, & Zafarani (2020), news that is accurate, true and transparent is essential. Since we are in the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public tends to get more interest in the news or information that comes from social media. In this situation, social media's role is essential in ensuring the right information is delivered to them. Therefore, the objectives of this research paper are to 1) analyse the frequency of fake news about Covid-19 posted on *Sebenarnya.my* on each selected month and 2) to identify the number of shares made by Facebook users on the fake news analysed for the first objective. Due to the limitation of the study, the researchers focused the analysis of fake news that has been confirmed and verified as fake news by authorities via *Sebenarnya.my*'s Facebook page.

2.0 Problem Statement

Lately, the issues of fake news are popular during the Covid-19 pandemic. Mass media has become the first-place medium for the public to gain information during the pandemic. But then, too many sources of information can lead to an unrestrained situation. As a result, people will start to get confused about the accuracy (Indiyati et al, 2020). The official page *Sebenarnya.my* on Facebook has become a medium for conveying information about the spread of fake news. During this pandemic, social media like Facebook become the focus of the community to get the latest information and issues. However, there are still those who are not aware of the existence of this page.

If people do not get the right guidance to seek information, they will be manipulated by spreading fake news out there. As we all know, this social media medium is wide. Various agendas can be done by any party who wants to take advantage of this pandemic. According to Yang, Zhou, & Zafarani (2020), the news's accuracy is essential. Since we are in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the public will get more interest in the news or information that comes from social media. In this situation, social media's role is essential in ensuring the right information be delivered to them.

Therefore, the main reason for this research paper is to analyze the frequency of misleading information on Covid-19 posted on Facebook and will focus on the total frequency of fake news posted by *Sebenarnya.my* and the number of shares from Facebook users due to the posting of fake news on *Sebenarnya.my page*. This is important to know how far this page is being active in delivering the information during the pandemic and how the public assumes it as an important issue.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Fake News

According to Moscadelli et al. (2020), he agrees that fake news is the most terrific poison and can damage real news integrity. Similarly, fake news plans to provoke confusion, misunderstanding, and controversy in specific communities or parties. Besides, it has become a 'toy material' for some media to raise their ratings. The term fake news means ambiguous and present from inaccurate facts (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2020), while Allcott & Gentzkow (2017) believed it as fake reading material. It is created to make people confused about the storyline. Furthermore, fake news can be categorized as information delivery to cause public controversy. It is seen as a carrier of cliché content, mere design (Gelfert, 2018). Day by day, fake news has affected people's lifestyles so much that the delivery of untrue information influences some. It has also affected the quality and naturality of news itself (Khan & Jain, 2020).

Duffy, Tandoc, & Ling (2020) argue that people are starting to focus on social media for information nowadays. However, social media is also exposing misleading information. In general, the person can identify news accuracy if they know the sources of information received. Also, all the contents and elements found in the reading material are critical to proving its authenticity. In the world of the internet in the media, fake news is a prevalent

issue. It has opened the eyes of researchers worldwide to identify the real story behind the creation of this phenomenon (Molina, et. al, 2019). Ribeiro & Ortellado (2018) agreed that fake news has no specific meaning. It is still a debate among researchers.

4.0 Methodology

A quantitative analysis is a method used to generate numerical data. Usually, this method works in the process of finding variables (Apuke, 2017). Thus, this study used a quantitative method for both objectives to content analyze the misleading information on Covid-19 posted on Facebook and shared by the netizens. Stemler (2000) stated that content analysis is a reusable method to summarize the content while coding systematically. It can be both quantitative and qualitative. Therefore, quantitative content analysis was conducted on the *Sebenarnya.my* page to reach the objectives of this paper in investigating the frequency of fake news postings and to study the total number of shares made by the Malaysian Facebook users regarding news related to Covid-19 cases to get the best result. The researchers have developed a set of coding sheets to run the coding process. The coding process was done by the researchers as the coders and data for both research objectives were recorded in Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. 50 fake news postings were collected using constructive week method. Various fake news issues but related to Covid-19 posted on Facebook and reposted by *Sebenarnya.my* page on every weekend from March until May 2020 were selected. The reason for selecting *Sebenarnya.my* Facebook page is due to this page has suddenly become very popular and has actively reposted all the fake news on Covid-19 as shared by Facebook users. While the months of March, April and May were selected because they are the beginning of 1st Movement Control Order implemented in Malaysia due to Covid-19 pandemic.

5.0 Result

5.1 Frequency of fake news.

The first objective, that is, the frequency of fake news was analyzed following the three selected months: March, April, and May. All the postings were recorded and examined based on the COVID-19 fake news issue. Table 1 shows that each month has different frequency of fake news posted. The month of April recorded the highest frequency among three months for 52 percent followed by March 44 percent, and May 4 percent. Therefore, the frequency of posting in May is the lowest of all.

Months	Frequency	%
March	22	44
April	26	52
May	2	4
Total	50	100

Table 1: Total frequency of fake news posting

This result shows that *Sebenarnya.my* page is very active in clarifying netizens on the fake news surrounding Covid-19 in the month of April as compared to March and May 2020, which proves that this page was extremely active in informing the public on fake news while the Covid-19 pandemic was on the spike. It is within the knowledge of every Malaysian citizen that the pandemic was crucial within these three months. Thus, a lot of hoax news appeared while the society was seeking for the right information. Should the statistics of the spread of fake news increased, it would have a detrimental effect on the country and people.

5.2 The Number of Shares from Facebook Users on Fake News Posted by *Sebenarnya.My* Page

The second objective of this research is to identify the number of shares from Facebook users on fake news posted by *Sebenarnya.my* page. In this study, every posting recorded a different number of shares from Facebook users.

Table 3 below shows the actual number of shares from March until May 2020. Based on the finding, the highest share goes to article no 45 with the headline “*Dokumen SOP Pergerakan Pelajar IPT Yang Tular Di Media Sosial Adalah Palsu*” posted on 25th April 2020 and the lowest share is the article no 2 and 3 with the headlines “*Dakwaan Pesakit COVID-19 Melarikan Diri Dari Hospital Lahad Datu Adalah Palsu*” and “*Lahad Datu Ditutup Kerana Wabak COVID-19 Adalah Palsu*” respectively with 0 share for both articles.

NO. OF ARTICLE	DATE	HEADLINE	NUMBER OF SHARES
1	15 March 2020	Infografik #MalaysiaLockDown Pada 16 Mac 2020 Adalah Palsu	6
2	15 March 2020	Dakwaan Pesakit COVID-19 Melarikan Diri Dari Hospital Lahad Datu Adalah Palsu	0
3	15 March 2020	Lahad Datu Ditutup Kerana Wabak COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	0
4	15 March 2020	Terdapat Mesyuarat Tergempar Bagi Isytihar Darurat Kerana COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	8
5	21 March 2020	Dakwaan Kementerian Pertahanan Akan Minta Bantuan Veteran Menguatkuasa PKP Adalah Palsu	3
6	21 March 2020	Nota Suara Yang Mendakwa Suara Anggota ATM Diberi Kuasa Pukul Orang Awam Adalah Palsu	20
7	21 March 2020	Hospital Sungai Buloh Minta Sumbangan Kelengkapan Pelindung Diri Bagi Merawat Pesakit COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	7
8	21 March 2020	Dakwaan Terdapat Kenyataan Media Mesyuarat Khas Menteri-Menteri	2

		Mengenai Pelaksanaan PKP Oleh MKN Adalah Palsu	
9	21 March 2020	KKM Mohon Sumbangan COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	17
10	21 March 2020	Tiada Doktor Pakar Di Sebuah Hospital Di Perak Meninggal Dunia Akibat Jangkitan COVID-19	22
11	21 March 2020	Dakwaan Dikenakan Saman Semasa Sekatan Jalan Raya Di Hadapan Balai Polis TTDI Menghala Ke Maybank Adalah Palsu	2
12	21 March 2020	Emel Pihak HKL Minta Bantuan Barang Dan Dana Adalah Palsu	7
13	22 March 2020	Dakwaan 6 Orang Penduduk Di Butterworth Sertai Ijtimak Tabligh Di Masjid Seri Petaling Adalah Palsu	3
14	28 March 2020	Sebaran Senarai Kawasan Di Seluruh Negara Yang Kononnya Dikategorikan Sebagai Zon Merah dan Kuning Adalah Palsu	73
15	28 March 2020	Dakwaan Hospital Tuanku Fauziah Menggunakan Termometer Ke Dalam Mulut Ketika Proses Saringan Adalah Palsu	48
16	28 March 2020	Dakwaan Perintah Berkurung Dikuatkuasakan Di Daerah Hilir Perak Adalah Palsu	105
17	28 March 2020	Bantuan B40 (Peka B40) Memberi Bantuan Sebanyak RM250 Sebulan Semasa COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	126
18	28 March 2020	Wad Hospital Segamat Digunakan Bagi Menempatkan Pesakit COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	74
19	28 March 2020	Dakwaan Sekumpulan Remaja Dipaksa Meniarap Di Bahu Jalan Kerana Ingkar PKP Adalah Palsu	123
20	28 March 2020	Nota Suara Datuk Dr Christopher Lee Adalah Palsu	93
21	28 March 2020	Dakwaan Mesej Daripada Pegawai IPD Serdang Negeri Selangor Dan KL 'Totally Lockdown' Adalah Palsu	72
22	29 March 2020	Pakaian Terpakai Dari Pesakit COVID-19 Yang Meninggal Dunia Dijual Murah Adalah Tidak Sahih	194
23	4 April 2020	Mesej Tular Yang Meminta Orang Ramai Yang Pernah Mengunjungi Mydin Jalan Baru Pada 31 Mac Perlu Jalani Ujian	116

		Saringan COVID-19 Ekoran Terdapat Kes COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	
24	4 April 2020	Dakwaan Kononnya Terdapat 30 Kes COVID-19 Di Durian Burung, Kuala Terengganu Adalah Palsu	99
25	4 April 2020	Dakwaan Tips Dan Langkah Pencegahan Jangkitan COVID-19 Melalui Pengambilan Makanan Beralkali, Minuman Hangat, Berjemur Dan Supplemen Vitamin Dari Pesakit Pulih COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	114
26	4 April 2020	Pihak JKKP Tidak Pernah Keluarkan Kenyataan Bahawa Pemeriksaan Ulangan Jentera Ditangguhkan Sehingga Tamat Tempoh PKP	52
27	4 April 2020	Dakwaan Penumpang Yang Diberikan Perlepasan Dari Tawau Ke Semenanjung Menggunakan 'Orang Dalam' Imigresen Dalam Tempoh PKP Adalah Tidak Benar	76
28	5 April 2020	Mesej Jadual Perancangan PKP Berkaitan COVID-19 Kononnya Dari MKN Adalah Palsu	154
29	5 April 2020	Dakwaan Kononnya Terdapat Kes Kematian Di Beaufort Kerana Jangkitan COVID-19 Adalah Tidak Benar	90
30	5 April 2020	Dakwaan Pusat Kuarantin Yang Disediakan Oleh Kerajaan Negeri Sabah Di Dalam Keadaan Daif Adalah Tidak Benar	107
31	5 April 2020	Dakwaan Mesej Kononnya Dari Seorang Doktor Di Putrajaya Bahawa HKL Memindahkan Semua Pesakit Bagi Menampung 750 Kes Positif COVID-19 Adalah Palsu	103
32	5 April 2020	Dakwaan Kononnya Individu Yang Dikuarantin Dibawa Ke Pusat Kuarantin Menggunakan Trak Penjara Adalah Palsu	106
33	11 April 2020	Dakwaan Kononnya Terdapat Pesakit COVID-19 Lari Dari HKL Adalah Palsu	129
34	11 April 2020	Dakwaan Terdapat Campur Tangan Politik Dalam Urusan Pengagihan Bakul Makanan Di Kawasan Parlimen Kulai Adalah Tidak Benar	94
35	11 April 2020	Dokumen CIDB Berkenaan SOP & Garis Panduan Bagi Kebenaran Beroperasi Untuk Projek Pembinaan Semasa PKP Dan Amalan Langkah Pencegahan COVID-19	109

		Industri Pembinaan Adalah Palsu	
36	11 April 2020	2 Nota Suara Mendakwa Bahawa Terdapat Individu Yang Disahkan Positif COVID-19 Telah Mengunjungi BSN Dan Dicari Oleh Pihak Hospital Beaufort	85
37	11 April 2020	Dakwaan Kononnya Bantuan Barangan Asas Di Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya Boleh Didapati Di PPj Adalah Palsu	75
38	12 April 2020	Hebahan Mesej Yang Mendakwa Kononnya PKD Hulu Langat Mohon Sumbangan Barangan Keperluan Adalah Palsu	93
39	12 April 2020	Dakwaan Klinik Kesihatan Bangi Tutup Sehingga 28 April 2020 Kerana Semua Staf Perlu Jalani Saringan Adalah Palsu	81
40	12 April 2020	Mesej Pesanan Larangan Pergi Ke Pasar Seksyen 6 Oleh Para Doktor HSA Adalah Palsu	83
41	12 April 2020	Seksyen 6, Shah Alam Akan Dikenakan Perintah Berkurung Adalah Tidak Benar	83
42	18 April 2020	Tiada Keistimewaan Untuk Pihak Tertentu Bagi Melakukan Sebarang Perjalanan Tidak Wajar Dalam Tempoh PKP	128
43	18 April 2020	Tiada Pesakit Positif COVID-19 Kunjungi CIMB Bukit Gambir	133
44	19 April 2020	Mesej Didakwa Dari OCS Balai Kepala Batas Mohon Sumbangan Makanan Untuk 'Frontliners PDRM' Adalah Tidak Benar	148
45	25 April 2020	Dokumen SOP Pergerakan Pelajar IPT Yang Tular Di Media Sosial Adalah Palsu	204
46	25 April 2020	Dakwaan Kononnya KPWKM Menyatakan Bantuan Bakul Makanan COVID-19 RM100 Cuma Bernilai RM35 Adalah Palsu	167
47	26 April 2020	Mesej Kononnya Dari KP Kesihatan Berkenaan Perkara Penting Pencegahan COVID-19 Kepada Rakyat Malaysia Adalah Palsu	193
48	26 April 2020	Rawatan Pesakit Kanser Ditangguhkan Kerana Faktor Lain Bukan Kerana Jangkitan COVID-19 Atau Hospital Tutup	186
49	3 May 2020	Dakwaan Video Yang Memaparkan Kesusakan Pelanggan Di Pasar Borong Batu Berendam, Melaka Pada 2 Mei 2020 Adalah Rakaman Semasa Peringkat Awal PKP	148

50	16 May 2020	Dakwaan Jalan Pasar Pudu Dikenakan PKPD Adalah Tidak Benar	158
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Table 3: Number of shares (Fake news)

6.0 Discussion

From the study, a total of 50 fake news posting issues were analyzed, and the final data shows that 52% of fake news was posted on *Sebenarnya.my* page was alone in April. It also recorded that 44% of the posting came from March and 4% from May. Therefore, the findings reveal that fake news frequency is relatively high in April during the COVID-19 pandemic. This proves that the issue of fake news arose during the pandemic and the *Sebenarnya.my* page was active in the posting. The data for the number of shares from Facebook users recorded different numbers for every posting. From the three categories, the findings show that the value of 0 to 100 collected the higher number of shares from Facebook users. The fake news posting on this page gained the highest shares that is more than 200 shares. Therefore, the community needs to be aware of this page's existence and always aware of the issues presented. Some researchers claim that COVID-19 was picked up and made false content at a disquieting rate since 2020. As everyone struggled with the never-ending, unfamiliar circumstances and uncertainties due to Control Movement Order, social media became their prime source of information. Therefore, the pandemic brought upon an onset of both real and fake information being shared and spread with netizens around the world in a matter of seconds. Thus, while fake news is not new, the speed and degree of its spread in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic reached a new level (Balakrishnan et. al, 2021).

This study proves content analysis as one of the methods that can be used to examine fake news content pertaining to COVID-19 in Malaysia. There are indeed various ways of conducting a study on fake news and the methodology selected is based on the objectives of the study. Numerous empirical studies on fake news were mostly examined based on content analysis of social media communications whilst others focused on linguistic features and writing style. There are also studies focusing on sharing the history of the identified fake news, investigation of root content and information in the form of comments and articles, among others. Other technological attempts to detect fake news include the use of fact-checking websites such as Snopes.com, PolitiFact.com, FactCheck.Org and *Sebenarnya.my* (Shin & Thorson, 2017).

7.0 Conclusion

Sebenarnya.my is one of the official Facebook pages under the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). The primary purpose of the page is to deliver the right information regarding fake news to society. With the advancement of technology now, various mediums have functioned to convey information to the community. With this *Sebenarnya.my* page, it can control the spread of fake news in Malaysia. Instead of the Facebook page, *Sebenarnya.my* has its official website where the community is always encouraged to browse this website to get the latest info. Besides, this website has taken the initiative by creating an official page on other social media platforms such as Facebook to

expand its legacy further. Thus, the researchers have taken this opportunity to analyze the misleading information on COVID-19 posted on this page. Since the increase in the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in Malaysia in March 2020, researchers estimated that the number of fake news issues that occurred was high in March, April, and May only. However, this issue of fake news never ends and is increasing day by day should the study be expanded. Therefore, the data of this research is limited compared to other research that might contain more extensive data.

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