

# Using Media Literacy to Prevent the Dangers of Hoaxes and Intolerance among the Students of Universitas Negeri Semarang

*by Cahyo Budi*

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# Using Media Literacy to Prevent the Dangers of Hoaxes and Intolerance among the Students of Universitas Negeri Semarang

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In terms of diversity, Indonesia is a nation state that prides itself on being an irony. It is said to be proud because of the large variety of differentiations, which are viewed as a wealth as well as portraits of Indonesian multiculturalism. On the other hand, this diversity has become a disaster for the Indonesian people. Sectarian conflicts between ethnic groups, religions, races, groups, and beliefs can hardly be denied. The high number of conflicts and intolerance shows that there is still a low awareness of multiculturalism in Indonesia, as in the world. Importantly, intolerant bursts and frictions are sometimes triggered by mass media coverage. Inevitably, the neutrality of the media's attitude from various social, political and economic interests is increasingly being disputed, especially in the era of digital media, where many news hoaxes seem to immediately become viral. Within this condition, media literacy principles are needed in order to support the media literacy movement. This study aims to determine the level of media literacy abilities among UNNES students, how to develop media literacy principles to prevent the dangers of hoaxes and intolerance among students, and how to implement these principles. Study results showed that 18% of UNNES students had excellent media literacy abilities, 57% had good abilities, and 22% had moderate abilities, with 3% having poor abilities. The principles in media literacy are arranged in a hierarchy that also reflects the level of student ability in media literacy. The strategies that can be applied in implementing the literacy principles include using comprehensive strategies, through a special curriculum, embedding these implicitly in lecture activities, choosing the right media for students, increasing journalistic production for students' consumption, and community-based media literacy.

**Key words:** *Information, media literacy, multiculturalism, tolerance, UNNES.*



## Introduction

Indonesia is the largest multicultural country in the world, consisting of 1,705 islands, more than 1,300 ethnicities and ethnic groups, 7 religions and one other faith, 2,500 kinds of languages, and various races and groups (BPS, 2010). The diversity in ethnicities, race, religions and ideologies can be tied harmoniously by the spirit of “Bhineka Tunggal Ika”. This spirit gives rise to a national pride, which is translated by the reality of diversity living naturally in harmony without hurting others. We, in fact, have a great provision of life in the diversity itself. It is an obligation for us to realise the reality of the multiculturalism of the Indonesian people by upholding the value of multiculturalism and valuing equality in diversity. The concept of multiculturalism cannot be equated with the concept of ethnic diversity or ethnic culture, which characterises plural societies, because multiculturalism is more than just “plural”, in that it emphasises cultural diversity in equality (Suparlan, 2002).

The phenomenon of intolerance, which has recently emerged as ripples in human relations in Indonesia, should be observed to have created an injury to diversity. In the framework of diversity, Indonesia is a nation state that prides itself on being an irony (Hendris and Ahmad, 2014). It is said to be proud because of the large variety of differentiations, which are a wealth as well as a portrait of Indonesian multiculturalism. But on the other hand, this diversity has become a disaster for the Indonesian people. Sectarian conflicts between ethnic groups, religions, races, groups, and beliefs can hardly be denied. At present, conflicts in the name of ethnicity, religion, race and class are increasingly intensive and even lead to violence. They have been blinded by the paradigm and truth claims of their respective groups and ignored the truths in other groups. They have been trapped in the collective doctrines of primordialism, ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and dogmatism, which have caused their mindsets and actions to also be anti-diversity.

During 2015, in every month there were at least 15 incidents of violations of freedom of belief and religion. The number of incidents that were reported was 190 incidents with 249 actions. Then in 2016, the number of cases of violations of belief and religious freedom increased to 204 violations with 315 actions (Ayudha, 2018). Based on data from the National Human Rights Commission, there were 74 cases of intolerance that occurred in 2014, 87 cases of intolerance in 2015, and this reached nearly 100 cases in 2016 (Putra, 2017). Throughout 2014, there were 1,404 cases of fights between groups of people in Indonesia, 1,128 times fighting cases between villagers or urban villages, 327 fights between students, and 70 times between ethnic groups (BPS, 2017).

The high number of intolerant activities and confrontations show that there is still a low awareness of multiculturalism in Indonesia, as seems to also be the case for the world more generally. In this respect intolerance is not only caused by internal friction among several



elements in this nation, but also as the reflecting part of global conditions in this modern era, that increasingly show the existence of a borderless world because of the ease of access to information through the advancement of technology. There is an ideological network which unifies countries around the world.

Of particular concern is that the explosions of intolerance are sometimes triggered by reporting in the mass media. Because of this, the neutrality of the media's attitude towards various social, political and economic interests is now increasingly being disputed. Especially in the era of digital media, many news hoaxes that certainly cannot be guaranteed to be true, nonetheless become viral (Juliswara, 2017). This condition triggers an increasing intolerance and friction in plural societies. Therefore, the role of the mass media becomes very important in informing all people about the values of truth, character, tolerance and values of multiculturalism, in order to minimise friction due to intolerance.

Media, which can be considered to be neutral, is ideally an opened space to accommodate public discussion. In this respect media can become a garden with various types of flowers that grow, live and bloom there. Journalistic characters should also accommodate diversity without looking at the partitions, and instead promote the same living space and channels of expression for everyone. This would provide a practical development of multicultural and even plural journalism as one way to establish powerful Indonesian characters. Building powerful Indonesian characters is an attempt to create "diversity characters" as a means for developing greater social tolerance.

With this condition, the development of media literacy principles is highly needed in supporting literacy actions for college students. Literacy action is a strategy of establishing a particular attitude, with media literacy principles and strategies representing an attempt to achieve the noble goals of this attitude. This literacy movement can be conducted in all educational levels from elementary to college level. The media literacy movement can be carried out in higher education because higher education students are the biggest media consumers, and thus have extensive interactions with cyberspace. In circumstances where intolerance frictions happen, the role of media literacy becomes vitally important as a counter strategy to this.

### **Experimental Details**

This research was conducted in Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), because UNNES students exhibit many multicultural features, with both students and lecturers coming from various homelands comprised of different ethnicities, races, traditions, languages and habits. The research method belongs to Research and Development while the research subject covered students and lecturers.



The focus of this research was to develop the principles of media literacy in order to prevent the damage caused by hoaxes and intolerance among students. The data sources used involved written sources such as books, scientific magazines, archives, personal files and official documents. Photos were also used which describe the depiction of campus activities and cultures and interaction between students, lecturers and other people. Some data was also sourced from online sources relating to the research objectives. In collecting data, the methods used were interview, questionnaire, documentation and observation. This data was analysed using quantitative analysis methods.

### **Results and Discussion**

Students are an important element of society which have wider access to information sources. The adage that students act as agents of change, iron stock, and social control gives rise to the assumption of the "maha" affix before students speak. Young people, especially students, are most productive in the use of social media sites because there is an opportunity for them to express themselves, socialise, find relationships, participate in society and increase their creativity, but in addition to this, students are also in transition from school age to adulthood, and are thus also in the process of seeking identity. This condition requires students to always be wise in media literacy, both in disseminating information and in addressing media content.

Based on the research carried out for this study, the data indicated that UNNES students have high media literacy skills. To measure the level of the literacy abilities of student media, several areas of media engagement were used to assess the level of student media literacy skills. These areas were applied to various activities carried out by students in media literacy and information gathering in the media, which included the ability to find information in the media, access information in the media, process information in the media, create information in the media, communicate information in the media, evaluate information in the media, and use media information.

The level of media literacy skills of UNNES students can be seen in the following table.



**Table 1:** Literacy Media Ability in UNNES

No.	Activities	Ability Percentage			
		Excellent	Good	Moderate	Poor
1.	Searching	16%	59%	23%	2%
2.	Finding	13%	49%	33%	5%
3.	Accessing	14%	53%	26%	7%
4.	Processing	21%	52%	24%	4%
5.	Creating	25%	52%	17%	6%
6.	Communicating	14%	61%	25%	1%
7.	Evaluating	23%	65%	12%	0%
8.	Using	21%	67%	12%	0%
Average		18%	57%	22%	3%

In relation to searching information in the media, 16% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 59% are good, 23% are moderate, and 2% are bad. Searching information in the media includes the ability to find information content in accordance with the ability to search for information content as needed, understand the information objectives, and identify any type of information where information can be found. In finding information in the media, 13% of UNNES students have very good abilities, 49% are good, 33% are moderate, and 5% are bad. Finding information in the media includes the ability to determine the location of relevant information sources and the ability to select and sort information from reliable and credible sources.

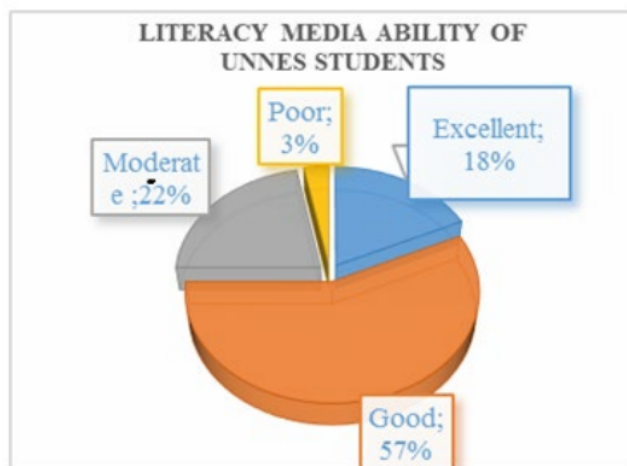
In accessing information in the media, 14% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 53% are good, 26% are moderate, and 7% are bad. Activities that become benchmarks in assessing the ability to access media information include the ability to choose information content as needed and cite information from relevant sources. In processing information in the media, 21% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 52% are good, 24% are moderate, and 4% are bad. The ability to process information includes the ability to filter and select all information that has been obtained, identify information content and categorise it (facts or opinions), and compare information from various sources of information with the existence of information bias among these different sources.

Then, in creating information in the media, 25% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 52% are good, 17% are moderate, and 6% are bad. Creating information relating to the ability to repack and correct information according to the target and include reference sources where information is obtained. In communicating information, 14% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 61% are good, 25% are moderate, and 1% are bad. This is related to the ability to provide information in accordance with the characteristics of the listener and the ability to use various information devices properly and wisely.

In evaluating information in the media, 23% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 65% are good, and 12% are moderate. This ability includes the ability to receive criticism, input, and advice from the listener's information and compare those responses with personal judgments and re-evaluate what has been obtained and delivered. Furthermore, regarding the ability to use information in the media, 21% of UNNES students have excellent abilities, 67% are good, and 12% are moderate. This is related to the ability to review every input, criticism, and suggestion given as an evaluation material and as material for further learning, and the ability to implement information obtained in life.

Based on these results, it was found that 18% of UNNES students had excellent media literacy skills, 57% had good abilities, and 22% had moderate abilities, and 3% had poor abilities. This percentage can be seen in the following diagram

**Figure 1.** Literacy Media Ability of UNNES Students



Also, in terms of media use, UNNES students had personal views on how to use the media wisely to build a good society. As many as 51% of UNNES students have the view that using the media wisely occurs by accessing information from sources that are clear, accurate, relevant, and credible, and avoiding hoax information. Furthermore, 17% of UNNES students said that using the media wisely is an active way to disseminate good and true information, be inspiring, and enlighten the public. The other 32% said that using the media wisely occurs by accessing information that is useful and in accordance with needs, being selective in choosing and filtering media content, and limiting the spread of hatred in the media.



### **Building Media Literacy Principles and Strategies to Prevent Damage from Hoaxes and Intolerance**

Media literacy needs to be broadly developed in various layers of society, one of them in college. Higher education is one of the institutions that carry out the mandate to answer the challenges of developing media literacy. This is an implication of the Tridharma of Higher Education which includes education, research, and community service. Higher education is a dynamic community of life. Its role fosters intellectual, emotional, and spiritual academics. Lecturers, students, and college staff struggle with the values of people's lives and pursue and disseminate knowledge as a service for the progress of society. Universities should not be like ivory towers or mere symbols of learning and awareness.

Students who are media literate are expected to become the superior "seeds" of society in terms of eradicating ignorance in the use of media. When the media has violated its role in building the nation, students can also become the front guard to correct it, calling on the media who have given up their responsibility to educate the nation, and vice versa, to immediately improve their journalistic products. Likewise, students as part of the community should not participate in the pollution of social media by sharing misinformation, igniting SARA issues, and promoting other counterproductive content.

Along with the development of an increasingly widespread digital world and the phenomenon of the flood of information in cyberspace that is intensifying, media literacy holds enormous urgency. To address a variety of deviant media problems, it is important to focus on the upstream media deviations that cause these problems, and not only limit and block them, but also seek to develop community literacy, especially student literacy in this manner. Students are expected to be wiser in using the media.

In media literacy, students must be able to filter media content. Students must choose positive content and avoid content that leads to discrimination in SARA or other content that is not in accordance with the noble values of national culture. In this case, students must be able to filter media content that suits their needs. Students must be able to determine the subject of information according to the topic of the problem needed. From the various information that has been collected and obtained, students must be able to choose the information that is most relevant to their needs. This strategy relates to how important it is that we are wise in media, so as not to waste time with valuable media content, or conversely, media that contains negative content that will adversely influence our opinions on things that are not good.

In exploring information in the media, students must be able to understand the information content provided by the media carefully. Students must understand that all information in the media has been constructed using a variety of specific languages, that people can have different





perspectives regarding the same media content, that each media source has its own point of view and values, and also keep in mind that media is created to seek profit and power. Therefore, the ability to understand media content carefully is needed. Do not let misinterpretation of media content lead to problems and conflicts. This step can be achieved by engaging in active discussion with others to gain a broader understanding of the relevant media content so that there are no misconceptions that lead to conflict.

Then, students must be able to identify the nature of media content, that is, which content includes facts, and which includes opinions. Students must be able to filter the credibility of accessed media content. In this respect it is important that students realise when they are plunged into a network of information dissemination that has been set by irresponsible individuals. This is in accordance with the media concept that media content has been constructed in such a way as to have a certain purpose for the benefit of certain parties.

This step can be achieved by checking the credibility of the media source. Students can carry out media truth tests by searching for primary, secondary or tertiary sources. Students can also test the credibility of media sources by not only searching for written information, but also consulting with other parties who have more capacity related to the topic of the media. In media literacy, students must be able to choose and sort the media in relation to literacy preferences and seek to avoid media that favours only a particular set of interests and is not independent. This is related to numerous media that is not neutral and is ridden by various interests. Because the media seeks to lead opinions, students must be truly selective in choosing the media sources they pay attention to.

Furthermore, students can also test credibility by cross-checking the same media content at different sources. Students can compare how the information presented by each media source is related to the existence of information bias regarding the content of the same topic. If irregularities in the information in the media are found, students can compare the available media information with various media sources that have been recommended and have been used as a preference by the public for media literacy.

To improve student media literacy, students cannot just access and use media information. Students should instead seek to understand the actual media content in depth by discussing it with their colleagues, both involving one scientific discipline or through multidisciplinary science. This can be done independently in small groups or structured to discuss issues in the media through regular discussion forums. This discussion forum can be a broader media of literacy for students to thoroughly explore various issues in the media. Discussion forums allow students to receive various views from other people who have capability in fields that are in line with these media issues.



In communicating media information, students must be able to repackage messages conveyed by the media to suit the target or the people who will be the recipients of media messages from them. Students must include various media sources which are used as a reference to further ensure the credibility of the information delivered. This is important because the reality that often occurs in the world of media is that information circulating from upstream sources often experiences synchronisation because of the misconceptions of the digital community who cannot understand the language used by the media. The digital community is less able to capture the messages conveyed by the media.

Then, to improve media literacy among students and society, and to create quality, credible, and useful media content, an active attitude is needed to produce media content themselves. The bureaucracy can produce its own media content for its students. This is a step for universities to facilitate their students in conducting media literacy so that they can fortify their students against irresponsible media. This can be done by public relations departments in universities or other fields.

Students must also be pro-active to produce journalistic products independently. This can be done through student activity units (UKM) at their respective universities or through other organisations, with red-scale organisations having a specific role in spreading positive media content. This step can also be done by students personally through social media platforms that are flourishing in the community, for example through Instagram, Twitter, blogs, websites, or YouTube. Media literacy is not only a matter of media consumption, but also how students can play an active role in creating a media product that enlightens and provides positive content for others. This can offer clear proof of the role of students, where they are able to provide their own journalistic products in order to become agents of positive media literacy. This will also increase student creativity and active roles as part of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education.

The highest form of media literacy ability is how students can implement the messages conveyed by the media in their daily lives. One of the outputs of media literacy is the increase in intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, or soft skills aspects of students, depending on what content they consume. With the existence of good and correct media literacy according to the principles and strategies above, this can be used to shape the character of tolerance and multiculturalism among students.

**Figure 2.** The Hierarchy of Media Literacy in UNNES

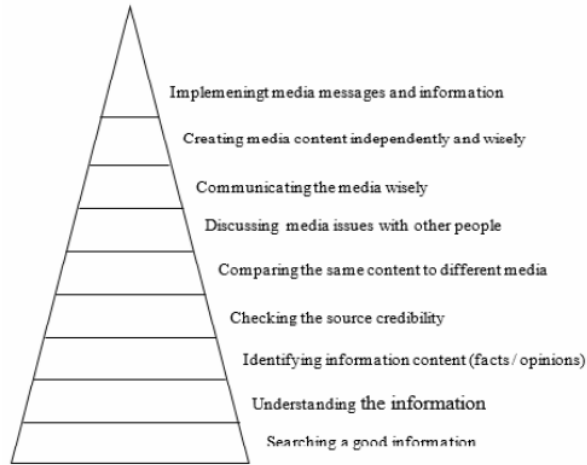


Figure 2 details how the principles in media literacy operate wisely. These principles are arranged in a hierarchy that reflects the level of one's ability in media literacy to become a media society that upholds tolerance and multicultural values. In this hierarchy, the guideline and level of a person in media beliteration begins with the ability to find good and useful information, comprehend information content comprehensively, identify media information to find out between facts and opinions, then check information credibility by cross checking media sources, compare the same media content between media sources to find out information bias, and discuss issues or media information with others. Furthermore, communicating media information properly and correctly, producing media content independently, and implementing media information in daily life. The implementation of all these principles will be effective in realising good media literacy to be able to instil a character of tolerance and multiculturalism amongst students. There are several strategies which can be applied in succeeding media literacy action for students, some of which are:

- a. It is conducted comprehensively by all elements  
Media literacy should be supported by all university elements; the bureaucratic, lecturers, students and other university elements. Media literacy is the responsibility of all university elements particularly for the bureaucracy to publish certain policies in the form of media literacy actions or programs for students. The bureaucracy plays an important role as the regulator and facilitator which can create a condition which can support media literacy on campus. Students are also supposed to be aware of the importance of media literacy, so they carry out actions towards their provisions.
- b. It is done using specific curriculum



This strategy can be conducted by the university bureaucracy by publishing a curriculum which facilitates the media literacy program. This can be implemented in the structural classroom lectures or other outdoor programs which support media literacy.

c. It is implicitly conducted in the lecturing activities

This strategy can be undertaken by all lecturers in the classroom. This should not be conducted with fore-determined implementation. Instead, it can be done by the lecturers autonomously. The lecturers can instill the principles of media literacy action in the daily lecturing either implicitly or explicitly. Hence, students will get accustomed to receiving media literacy unconsciously.

d. Selecting the exact media for students

The university bureaucracy can select the recommended media for students, so they easily do media literacy. This attempt is conducted to defend students from bias and SARA media. In fact, the bureaucracy cannot limit the use of media literacy for the students, but they can filter certain media to match students' literacy preference.

e. Improving journalistic production for students

The bureaucracy can also produce media content for the students. This is one of the steps taken by universities to facilitate media literacy among students, and to protect them from irresponsible media. This step is usually done by the public relations hub in the university or other parties.

f. Community-based media literacy

This strategy can be conducted by improving the roles of students' communities outside UKM (Students' Activity Unit) which refers to the official press institution so the students can actively give their contribution by providing media contents as literacy preference for other students. Through these communities, students can have discussion forums as additional literacy media for students.

## Conclusions

Areas of media literacy in this study led to various activities being carried out by students in media literacy and information gathering in the media. Based on the results of this research, the results showed that 18% of UNNES students had excellent media literacy skills, 57% had good abilities, and 22% had moderate abilities, with 3% having poor abilities. The principles in media literacy are arranged in a hierarchy that also reflects the level of one's ability in media literacy. In this hierarchy, guidelines and levels of a person in media literacy begin with the ability to find good and useful information, and then progress to understand information content, identify media information, check information credibility by cross-checking media sources, comparing the same media content between media sources to determine bias information, discuss issues or media information with other people, communicate media information properly and correctly, produce media content independently, and implement media information in daily life. These principles are expected to empower the



media literacy movement to create a millennial generation that is media literate and upholds tolerance and multicultural values. There are several strategies that can be applied in implementing these media literacy principles, including:

- (1) Comprehensively carrying out all elements,
- (2) Conducting media literacy through a special curriculum,
- (3) Embedding media literacy implicitly in lecture activities,
- (4) Choosing the right media for students,
- (5) Increasing student journalistic production for consumption by students, and
- (6) Conducting community-based media literacy.



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