

Indonesia's public vulnerability to ethnic and religious information

Nikolaus Ageng Prathama¹, Lenny Setyowati Bernadeta², Gita Juniarti³,
Yowan Tamu⁴, Retno Dwi Irianto⁵

^{1,5}Vocational School, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

²Law and Communication Faculty, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Indonesia

^{3,4}Social Science Faculty, Gorontalo State University, Indonesia

Corresponding author, ✉ nikolausagengp@lecturer.undip.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to describe the interpretation of religious and ethnic information by Millennials and Gen Z individuals in determining whether information is factual or false. This study is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach, collecting experiential data and testing individual judgments through an experimental phase from a sample of 30 non-expert Millennials and Gen Z in Semarang, Indonesia. The findings of this study reveal several attitudes formed by participants. First, participants believe that fake news still exists and is widely disseminated. Second, participants believe that they will not be trapped by fake news and that the news has credibility. Third, respondents discuss suspicious information with reference groups. Fourth, dissonance remains prominent in assessing the status of information (fake or fact), and cultural factors may be related to issues of information processing with ethnic and religious content.

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Introduction

Various types of hoaxes and fake news are still a global problem and have spread to a number of countries, such as US (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), Italy (Papapicco et al., 2022), Spain (León et al., 2022), Russia (Erokhina, 2022), Ukraine (Bösch & Divon, 2024), Pakistan (Kishwar & Zafar, 2023), and Indonesia (Prathama et al., 2022) recently. Several terminologies have been introduced by scholars to describe this information problem, such as hoaxes (Abdullah et al., 2024; Cordana et al., 2025), false information or fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Xu et al., 2022), disinformation, and misinformation (Fallis, 2015). Hoax spread faster than accurate information online (Salovich, Kirsch, et al., 2022). Medium such as WhatsApp (Moreno-Castro et al., 2021), Youtube (Calvo et al., 2022), Facebook and X (Sánchez Del Vas & Tuñón Navarro, 2024), Instagram (Fadhilah et al., 2021), Blog (van Eck & Feindt, 2022), and TikTok (Bösch & Divon, 2024), are the distribution media.

Recent findings suggest that people's decisions is negatively influenced by information they already know is inaccurate (Fazio et al., 2019; Rapp, 2016; Salovich et al., 2021; Salovich, Imundo, et al., 2022). This situation of uncertainty is what increases the risk of spreading hoaxes (Arin et al., 2023). Therefore, this phenomenon has led to increasing global public

scepticism in assessing the quality of factual information. There is, even, perception that others are more susceptible to being misguided by information than they are (Altay & Acerbi, 2024). The most prominent challenges is that most of the Z generation (Amrullah et al., 2019; Mansur et al., 2021), millennial generation (Afdal et al., 2023), and non-experts can't make the right decisions regarding hoaxes (Baram-Tsabari & Schejter, 2019).

This study focuses on Millennials and Gen Z individuals' interpretation of religious and ethnic information in determining whether it is factual or fake. These two generations are interesting research subjects because they struggle to recall previously received hoax information. Furthermore, both groups also struggle to process information related to hoaxes. Research by (Papapicco et al., 2022) highlights the challenges these two generations face regarding hoaxes.

Several studies have analyzed hoaxes containing religious and ethnicity or race elements, which could trigger mass hatred based on stereotypes and prejudices in real life. Religion hoaxes were chosen because the findings showed that religious hoaxes occupied the second highest position out of 997 hoaxes circulating in Indonesia in 2018 (Safitri et al., 2022). In addition, another study found that 95.5% of millennial respondents had seen, read, and heard religious hoax news sourced from social media (Munabiah Lestari & Saidah, 2023). These findings prove that fake news containing religious information is widely consumed by Generation Z and millennials through social media.

Research (Al-Zaman & Alimi, 2021) notes that prejudice in Indonesia and Bangladesh is shaped by the rapid flow of information in digital public spaces. These public spaces facilitate the spread of religious teachings (dakwah) with good intentions. However, findings indicate that these public spaces become platforms for the spread of hoaxes, post-truth, and Islamism. Subjectively interpreted religious information is then mixed with political information, resulting in information not being interpreted objectively but rather based on the beliefs and interests of particular religious groups (Asadi, 2021).

Intentional disinformation can trigger negative emotions such as fear, panic, and distrust in readers. The goal is to manipulate public opinion against certain religions, one of which is the Russian Orthodox Church, during a health crisis (Erokhina, 2022). Social media can also be a platform for spreading hate propaganda and speech crimes. Social media account holders even spread information that encourages audiences to persecute others based on religion (Kiper, 2023).

Hateful content and hoaxes that fuel prejudice and hatred are not limited to religious hoaxes. racial hoaxes can also discredit other ethnic groups (Bosco et al., 2023). Racial prejudice has existed for years, dating back to 1935. In that year, a New York journalist's report on an Ethiopian girl fueled racial prejudice and raised concerns about the formation of racial roles due to the journalist's subjective assessment of the Ethiopian girl (Carroll, 2022).

Hoaxes and subjective reporting can also create prejudice, suspicion, and hatred against certain racial minorities (Long, 2020). The prejudice and hatred fueled by racial hoaxes can oppress Black, even within the justice system. Black voices are not heard in courtrooms because of hoaxes containing anti-Black hatred (Russell-Brown, 2020). This phenomenon shows that stereotypes and prejudices can be formed through social interactions, particularly public discourse—both written and spoken—in mainstream media, as well as interpersonal communication influenced by such public discourse (Bonvillain, 2016; Maryani et al., 2019; Olmos-Alcaraz, 2023), as it happens on social media.

Racism is a pandemic. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter phenomenon shows a manifestation of racism (Horowitz, 2021). American Psychological Association (APA)

President described the current racist situation as acute (Pierson et al., 2022) and racial hoaxes are a depiction of cynical and fearful expressions on race, violence, and victimization. Very little academic attention has been paid to racial hoaxes, although racial hoaxes are currently very rare, but still harm and incite others (Russell-Brown, 2021).

Hoax or fake news don't just impact specific religious and ethnic groups. A similar trend is also observed among immigrant workers in Europe. For example, fake news successfully exploits negative stereotypes, contributing to the spread of prejudice and discrimination against immigrant groups in Italy (D'Errico et al., 2022). Other findings also indicate that fake news is more effective than real news in influencing public views of immigrants, thus contributing to the formation of negative prejudices and fueling hostility (Wright et al., 2021).

Research on prejudices formed from hoaxes and hate speech is crucial, as hoaxes are not simply jokes but deliberate attempts to disrupt the harmony and stability of a country, including Indonesia. Furthermore, with technological advances, hoaxes are becoming more sophisticated, complex, and increasingly difficult to counter (Safitri et al., 2022). Furthermore, the advent of artificial intelligence makes it increasingly difficult for individuals consuming information about a particular religion, race, or occupational group to determine the veracity of that information (Hausken, 2024).

This research is a development of previous research (Prathama et al., 2022), but with different methods and locations. To answer these challenge, we tested the validity of the Elaboration Likelihood Model in an experimental study on the formation of individual attitudes when exposed to information containing Religion and Ethnicity that is suspected of being a hoax and has not been factually verified.

In addition, Indonesia also has track record of ethnic and religious conflicts (Wirawan, 2010), so that the formation of individual attitudes (tolerance or intolerance) in dealing with the spread of digital hoaxes can be directed at compiling a social vulnerability index (religion and ethnicity).

Elaboration Likelihood Model

Richard Petty and John Cacioppo developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to examine the formation of individual attitude change through the central or peripheral route, which is related to the duration or brevity of the attitude change. There are two basic factors in the ELM: motivation and the ability to process persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Scholars have typically placed the Elaboration Likelihood Model within the Objective Territory (Griffin et al., 2019), which predominantly involves quantitative research. In this study, however, we attempt to connect the ELM theoretical framework with Cybernetics of Knowing, which is tolerant of non-objective territory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008) as a basis for thinking, thus opening up opportunities for qualitative (interpretive) research.

Research Objective: To explain how millennial and Gen Z individuals process ethnic and religious information and construct a categorical framework for the status of the information obtained.

Method

Based on recent research, the purpose of our study is to find out how individuals assess information as a fake (hoax) or factual, because some information has not been factually verified. We, therefore, use a qualitative type and select a purposive sample

consisting of the millennial generation (Kemp et al., 2024) represented by ages 29-41 years and generation Z (Siani et al., 2024) represented by ages 18-28 years. We deliberately avoided selecting old adult samples, because the results of the study (Swire et al., 2017) showed that there were “weaknesses” in old adult samples in processing information and maintaining beliefs. Specifically, in the selection process we asked the initial question “Do You Pay Attention to the Religious and Ethnic Information Obtained?”, because this type of information is often avoided to be discussed with strangers or dissimilar others.

The sample is quite diverse, covering religion and ethnic identity as well as occupation (students, private sector employee, government, and entrepreneurs), because according to our observations, occupation has not been studied much in the psychology literature which has so far focused more on age factors, school students, or adults, especially when considering the elements of religion and ethnicity in fake news.

This research was conducted in five stages, which were guided by the basic ideas of the *Interpretive Paradigm* (Prathama et al., 2022), and were intended to differentiate individual understanding from previous scientific explanations. First, we collected a number of studies related to religion and ethnic hoaxes in the last five years. Second, we have observed a number of pieces of information about religion and ethnicity that have emerged in recent years and have not been factually verified by public institutions.

Third, focus group discussions were conducted to enrich the types of ethnic and religious information each individual encountered. Fourth, qualitative steps were carried out using a phenomenological approach (Prathama et al., 2022; Tatang et al., 2022) in interviews in August 2022 until March 2023 (first period) and December 2023 until September 2024 (second period). Interviews were conducted individually to collect data on individual behavior in using media and consuming daily information. Then, the experimental stage was conducted to collect data on individual assessments of information status (fact or false) in groups (6 persons) accompanied by the research team.

There were 30 individuals with Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, Batak, and Chinese as their ethnicity identity (BPS, 2000) and Islam, Hindu, Catholic/Christian, and Buddha/Confucianism as their religion identity (BPS, 2022). Using NVivo, we first conducted emergent and open interpretative coding of the transcripts. Fifth, all collected data is presented in the form of specific theme categories and interpreted by the research team in a panel discussion. The names of informants have been disguised for public convenience and replaced with respondent labels.

Results and Discussion

Results

Media Selection and Consumption

According the results of interviews with all qualitative respondents, it can be seen that Instagram and WhatsApp are the most dominant information and communication channels used by Muslims, Christians/Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. For 30 respondents, Twitter (X), Facebook, TikTok, Youtube, Line, Google, and news portals (Kompas.com, detik.com) are the other references.

The duration of accessing Instagram and WhatsApp by respondents ranges from 5-6 hours each day, which is done while carrying out main activities (studying, working, business). WhatsApp is the most frequently used (primary) communication media with other people, while Instagram, X, Facebook, and Line are the secondary communication

media used next. Instagram, X, Facebook, TikTok, Youtube, Google, and news portals (Kompas.com, Detik.com) are media for searching information.

Several samples (11 persons) of qualitative informants, however, admitted that their smartphones and tablets were always connected to the internet all day long. They admitted to accessing information and communication for more than 5 hours each day. In these samples, it appears that the main activity of more than 1 is a driving factor such as working while studying and working in government while doing business.

Another media that respondents also access is television. The average duration of accessing information from television is under 2 hours each day. Television is one type of traditional media that is still used in certain situations with quite frequent frequency.

Example 1: *There is a television at home, so we still watch television programs quite often, such as talk shows or public (issues) discussions.*

Information Seeking Behavior

The results of in-depth interviews show that in the Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, Batak, and Chinese ethnic samples, individuals have various main activities (college, work, and business). Various information such as information related to main activities such as gender cases, politics, culture, currency exchange rates, government regulations, property business, furniture, fish, plants, fashion trends, and food are the most widely consumed information.

Example 2: *Cases related to gender equality are information needed to complete college assignments.*

Example 3: *In export activities, we need information related to changes in government regulations, political situations, and exchange rates of other countries' currencies.*

In addition, most of the samples (especially those who have worked and run businesses) also seek information about health such as types of healthy food and exercise. Information consumed secondarily includes crime news, social developments, and entertainment (games, infotainment, and talk shows).

Religion and Ethnic Vulnerability

This section presents some religious and ethnic information that is still found by all respondents in recent years. These informations causes dissonance between individuals, because they have not been factually verified, resulting in different assessments in qualitative samples. Most of the samples admitted not to share information, but admitted to receiving it from others (Family and School Friends Group). Twenty-three persons, even, discussed religious and ethnic information with reference groups from different religions and ethnicities openly.

Most of the samples stated that they could tell whether the information was fake or fact. They took several steps, including reading or listening to it repeatedly carefully, comparing it with similar news from various sources, paying attention to the credibility of the news source (from official or unofficial news portals), and collecting information released by the government. While several samples simply considered certain information uninteresting, so they did not follow up on it.

The information includes (2018-2021) the massacre of Thai Muslims, the Ahok's blasphemy, Muslim terrorists, the Meiliana case, and President Jokowi is Chinese. Meanwhile, in (2022-2024) a number of news items were found, namely the sentiment of the indigenous Papuan people towards immigrants, the Ahok's blasphemy, the massacre

of Thai Muslims, the FPI attacking pro-government activists, Habib Bahar bin Smith's lecture, President Jokowi is Chinese, President Jokowi will eliminate Islam, and Ustadz Khalifah Sinaga's lecture. In particular, the case related to Ahok received mixed responses.

The information formats obtained are text, images and text, and video and text. The media for disseminating these informations include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, Youtube, and WhatsApp. Regarding the Ahok case, however, several millennial samples said that television was also involved.

At this stage, we asked qualitative samples to sort information into fake and fact categories based on time period, along with the reasons for their assessment. This is the stage of presenting a structural description that is unique to phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1. Assessment of Information Emerging in the 2018-2021 Period

Information (Case)	Sample	Information Assessment	
		Fake (Unclear Information)	Fact (Clear Information)
Ahok's blasphemy	6 respondents	-	Example: <i>This is a clear case of blasphemy, as I witnessed him chanting scriptures in non-religious activities and political situations.</i>
Muslim Terrorists	5 respondents	-	Example: <i>All of the terrorists arrested claimed to be Muslims or identified themselves as Muslims</i>
Jokowi is Chinese	1 respondent	-	Example: <i>Physically, Mr. Jokowi's narrow eyes are like those of Chinese.</i>
the Thai Muslim massacre	All respondents	Example: <i>These two news items were only published once and are not ongoing. Unclear.</i>	-

Information (Case)	Sample	Information Assessment	
		Fake (Unclear Information)	Fact (Clear Information)
Ahok's blasphemy	19 respondents	Example: <i>The packaging of this case is fake. This is a political phenomenon that has turned into a problem of religious blasphemy. It is not the complete video that is distributed, but only a part. Number of netizens said that Moslem in the Seribu Islands were being despised by Ahok, but in fact, they do not feel treated like that. A television, even, broadcast hoax about the destruction of city grass and parks by Muslim demonstration</i>	-
Muslim terrorists	25 respondents	Example: <i>On a global scale, not all terrorists are Muslim. In India, some are Hindu, in New Zealand, there is a Christian. If all Muslim become terrorists, then all Non-Muslim will become victims. The news, therefore, is a false, because it contains wrong sentences.</i>	-
Jokowi is Chinese	29 respondents	Example: <i>Mr. Jokowi is a Javanese who comes from Karanganyar Solo, Central Java. Judging from his family name, the name of his hometown, and some of our friends are also neighbors with Mr. Jokowi's family</i>	-

Table 2. Assessment of Information Emerging in the 2022-2024 Period

Information (Case)	Sample	Information Assessment	
		Fake (Unclear Information)	Fact (Clear Information)
The sentiment of indigenous Papuans towards immigrants	5 respondents	-	Example: <i>During the Manokwari riots and the student riots in East Java, there was indeed anti-immigrant sentiment from the indigenous Papuan</i>

Information (Case)	Sample	Information Assessment	
		Fake (Unclear Information)	Fact (Clear Information)
Ahok's blasphemy	11 respondents	-	Example: <i>The religious (blasphemy) incident is a reality, but it has given rise to a lot of fake news (hoaxes) related to ethnic (Chinese) and religious (Christian) sentiments</i>
The Thai Muslim massacre	30 respondents	-	Example: <i>It turns out that the incident occurred in 2004 which was called the "Tak Bai Massacre"</i>
Habib Bahar Bin Smith's lecture on Habib Rizieq Shihab	3 respondents	-	Example: <i>A video is circulating of Habib Bahar Smith's statement giving a warning to a number of people who betrayed Habib Rizieq</i>
The sentiments of Papuan indigenous people towards immigrants	25 respondents	Example: <i>That is not true, because currently a number of our brothers and sisters in Papua are also being treated well by the native</i>	-
Ahok's blasphemy	19 respondents	Example: <i>The media should have broadcast the video of the speech (Ahok) in its entirety, not just bits and pieces. In addition, there are a number of hoaxes that have emerged as a result of this case, such as the narrative that Muslims who vote for Ahok because he is Christian will go to hell, which is also a companion hoax. Then, the narrative that voting for Ahok because of his ethnicity is Chinese means supporting the colonization of the natives. In fact, the colonizers in Indonesia were not from China, but Europe.</i>	-
FPI attacks pro-government activists	All respondents	Example: <i>The perpetrators did not show their identity clearly. Anonymous. This information, therefore, is unclear</i>	-

Information (Case)	Sample	Information Assessment	
		Fake (Unclear Information)	Fact (Clear Information)
Habib Bahar Bin Smith's lecture on Habib Rizieq Shihab	27 respondents	Example: <i>There has never been any act of violence committed by Habib Bahar Smith against anyone who is considered to have betrayed Habib Rizieq</i>	-
Jokowi is Chinese	All respondents	Example: <i>Mr. Jokowi was born in Karanganyar, Central Java, as a Javanese. I have an uncle who comes from the same village as Mr. Jokowi, Gondangrejo. Physically, my uncle's eyes are also slanted like Mr. Jokowi, but he is Javanese</i>	-
Jokowi will eliminate Islam	All respondents	Example: <i>This is fake news and slander, because it is impossible for Mr. Jokowi to discriminate against Muslims. Jokowi's extended family are Muslims</i>	-
Ustad Khalifah Sinaga's lecture on the differences between Christianity and Islam based on facial shape	All respondents	Example: <i>His statement isn't relevant to convey to the public, because it isn't the result of logical scientific research</i>	-

Discussion

In this study, there are three thematic areas namely media selection and consumption, information seeking, and religious and ethnic vulnerability (fact and fake), with two sessions. The first session was a group discussion (Volk et al., 2025) and the second session was an individual interview. In this session, each individual was asked to read at least 3 times each news item they received to test accuracy and memory.

In the first thematic area, namely media selection and consumption, it was revealed that all samples chose WhatsApp and Instagram as their preferred information and communication media. This result is in accordance with the results of research in Spain (Ceballos-del-Cid et al., 2025) which showed that WhatsApp and Instagram were experiencing increasing popularity. Meanwhile, X, Facebook, TikTok, Youtube, Line, Google, and online news portals (Kompas.com and Detik.com) are the next references. Besides that, the sample has a categorization in media selection, namely primary communication media (related to daily needs), secondary (related to friendship or just light communication), and media for seeking information.

This reality shows that social media dominates the sample's association with the media. The results show almost the same results as the survey in October 2024 which stated that the popularity of global social media increased by 63.8% (Das, 2025). Digital Era has triggered changes in people's information consumption patterns on mainstream media, since, even the covid19 pandemic (Widarini et al., 2021).

In this study, Gen Z dominates the use of social media as the preferred medium for seeking information, which is verified through previous literature on youth (Notley et al., 2023). Meanwhile, official web-based news portals (Kompas.com and Detik.com) are accessed directly by millennials without going through their social media accounts first. This phenomenon is possible because millennials are more interested in blogs than social media in general (Zvereva & Chvorova, 2020), so that they have a habit of accessing media types that have almost the same visual characteristics without affiliation of personal accounts. These results indicate that there is trust in news sourced from official websites such as previous literature (Newman et al., 2024).

The duration of most samples in accessing information ranges from 5-6 hours each day. The informants actively sought and accessed daily information based on their individual references. Only a few samples accessed information for more than five hours each day. Their phones and tablets were always connected to the internet. The presence of at least two primary activities was a prominent factor in the communication behavior of these samples.

Television is also still one of the types of mass media used by Indonesian to get daily information, because Indonesian still have their devices at home. However, the duration of television use is only limited to about 2 hours each day. In recent years, the internet and television are still the dominant media used by Indonesian (Ahdiat, 2022).

The thematic field of information search presents the types of information consumed by millennials and gen z, which consists of primary and secondary information. Primary information includes gender, politics, culture, foreign exchange rates, government regulations, property business, furniture, fish, plants, fashion trends, healthy food, and sports. While secondary information includes crime news, social developments, and entertainment (infotainment, games, and talk shows/podcasts). Gen Z accesses more entertainment news than millennials, such as research (Papapicco et al., 2022) about teenagers. The series of participant behaviors towards consuming information from certain media is part of selective exposure, which has a number of phases in interacting with information (Volk et al., 2025).

Related to the main theme that is the focus of the research, namely in the thematic field of religious and ethnic information, the sample revealed a number of pieces of information they remembered and paid attention to during focus group discussions (FGDs). Subsequently, in individual interviews, each participant was asked to read or access the information they had obtained and consider it individually three times.

Each piece of religious and ethnic information observed and accessed by the informant was processed within the individual's cognitive system. This activity is called information processing (Mowen & Minor, 2002), and is always related to the physiological properties of the brain—the right and left hemispheres—in processing the type and characteristics of messages (Engel et al., 1995). Subsequently, some of the processed information is evaluated and interpreted to shape the individual's experience. In this phase, Elaboration Likelihood Model was used to examine individual empirical data, which yielded individual assessments and attitudes toward religious and ethnic information—facts and fake—accessed by all individuals.

In an experiment conducted by Richard Petty, John Cacioppo, and Rachel Goldman to test the validity of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), three aspects of information processing by individuals using either the central or peripheral pathway were found: source credibility, motivation, and likeability (Littlejohn et al., 2017). In this study, however, we saw that the aspects of attention and memory accuracy were factors that emerged from this study.

Interesting facts emerged about the differences in assessment (fact and fake) of information. The existence of several pieces of information that still appear in different time periods (2018-2021) and (2022-2024) such as the massacre of Thai Muslims, the Ahok's blasphemy, and President Jokowi is Chinese shows that digital consumers are still actively following this information intentionally or unintentionally. This phenomenon indicates that the sample has sufficient memory to remember some information that is suspected to be inaccurate.

In research on fake news conducted by Gordon Pennycook dan David G. Rand, it was stated that memory is an important aspect in detecting the presence of fake news (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). However, in the initial phase of interacting with religious and ethnic information, all informants admitted that they experienced a situation of dissonance. This dissonance occurs due to limited verification from official institutions or agencies that are trusted by the public to provide clarification on the status of information that is a hot issue in the public domain.

However, all respondents assured us that they had never been trapped in the indiscriminate spread of false information. They have sufficient knowledge credibility related to a number of suspicious information by comparing information from other sources, discussing with close people (reference groups) who are believed to have the ability to determine the accuracy of information, and other specific behaviors.

On the other hand, several respondents received fake news from close people via WhatsApp (Family and School Friends Group). Previous literatures also confirms the results of this study (Chadwick et al., 2024; Moreno-Castro et al., 2021), inaccurate information found through WhatsApp groups was spread by people who knew the participants personally. While other media were used by people who did not know the participants personally or the intensity of communication between the two was not too high. Participants were aware of the impact of spreading negative or inaccurate news on interpersonal relation, which can lead to interpersonal conflict (Duffy et al., 2019; Prathama et al., 2022). On the other hand, our findings contrast with research conducted by (Vissenberg & d'Haenens, 2020) in Belgium, which found that youth strongly believed they would be protected from fake news scams and that they would spread fake news.

Related to dissonance in the process of assessing information status, research conducted by (Kemp et al., 2024) shows the role of individual memory in correcting information. In this section, we find vulnerabilities in the information assessment process of participants. Several participants tend to provide assessments using the Peripheral Route—which is related to the affective side and empirical experience—rather than the Central Route, when providing false and factual assessments. For example, such as the participants' responses to information on the Thai Muslim Massacre, Ahok's Blasphemy, Muslim Terrorists, President Jokowi is Chinese, and Jokowi will eliminate Islam. Intuition is a dominant factor in this regard. Schwarz and Jalbert also revealed that news consumers who are emotionally stimulated by certain framing tend to rely more on intuition and heuristics (Grefenider et al., 2020). This phenomenon suggests that the Peripherals tend to be used more frequently to assess the status of information.

The existence of similar identities (ethnicity and religion) of participants is also another factor in making arguments on the Peripheral. In a historical context, ethnicity and religion have become political commodities that are deliberately transmitted to become public discourse, thus becoming barriers between groups in social interaction (Missier, 2025; Widyawati, 2014). Therefore, ethnic and religious similarities tend to encourage Indonesians to think less critically. On the other hand, scientifically and accurately testing a person's ethnicity remains a challenge in the research world (Schmutter, 2025). The participants' assessments, therefore, are based solely on the limited perceptions of the senses.

The Peripheral Route phenomenon shows that information about religion and ethnicity is still information that is vulnerable to being spread without being accompanied by accurate facts, especially in communities that still maintain group identities (based on ethnicity and religion)—because it is related to emotional vulnerability and self-esteem in social interactions (Prathama, 2017), so that it can trigger conflict with other people who are different. These results also have similarities with previous literature which states that culture influences people's behavior towards fake news (Pothitou et al., 2025).

In general, there are three attitudes formed in the phenomenon of hoaxes or fake news, namely the belief that hoaxes or fake news still exist and are spread predominantly in cyberspace, participants are not easily trapped and have credibility, and discuss suspicious information with reference groups. However, on the other hand, beliefs about the status of information (fact or fake) still have dissonance.

Conclusion

There are three themes in this research, media selection and consumption, information seeking, and religion and ethnic vulnerability. Indonesians' vulnerability to religious and ethnic information remains evident in their daily media consumption. The results of this study theoretically propose an expansion of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which is currently based on elements of source credibility, motivation, and likeability. We identify the roles of attention and memory, which can be used to develop the ELM conceptually. Furthermore, from an Indonesian sample, we found the role of intuition in peripheral processing, which is related to shared religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Practically and socially, this research has implications for individuals' experiences when interacting with inaccurate information. When they find information containing ethnic and religious content, they tend to feel confused about how to discern the facts, even though they claim to have credibility and will not be trapped by fake news. This reality demonstrates that information related to the fundamental identity of Indonesian individuals (religious and ethnic) has an impact on the individual's affective or emotional level. Dissonance remains a fundamental problem. Furthermore, cultural factors, namely the behavior of maintaining group identity, can be associated with problems processing information containing ethnicity and religion.

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