

Regional Government PR Synergy in Countering Hoaxes and Enhancing Digital Literacy in Bengkulu: A Phenomenological Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: Desember 14, 2025
Revised: February 14, 2026
Accepted: April 22, 2026

Keywords

Digital literacy
Hoax mitigation
Government public relations
Stakeholder collaboration
Bengkulu province

 [10.12928/channel.v14i1.1871](https://doi.org/10.12928/channel.v14i1.1871)

ABSTRACT

The spread of hoaxes on digital platforms has become a significant challenge in Indonesia, particularly in Bengkulu Province. This study examines the role of local government public relations, media, and influencers in combating hoaxes and improving digital literacy among the public. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, this research explores the collaborative strategies and lived experiences of key stakeholders. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The findings highlight the importance of collaboration between the government, media, and influencers in creating effective digital literacy campaigns. The study reveals a critical communication gap, where government PR has not fully optimized the role of influencers as strategic "opinion leaders" to reach younger demographics. While influencers demonstrate high engagement, the absence of standardized ethical guidelines, like those of traditional journalism, poses challenges for information accuracy. Key Challenges identified include low levels of digital literacy, insufficient regulatory frameworks, and the uncontrolled influence of social media actors. The findings underscore that cross-sectoral collaboration is essential for effective digital literacy campaigns, leveraging the emotional proximity of local media and the broad reach of influencers among younger audiences. The study concludes that a robust regulatory framework for influencers, combined with structured and continuous digital literacy programs, is essential to strengthen public resilience against hoaxes. These findings contribute to the development of government PR strategies in navigating the post-truth era at a regional level.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology has significantly transformed the landscape of public communication in Indonesia. The speed at which information circulates through social media platforms and other digital channels has expanded public access to news, government policies, and institutional information (Sugiarto, 2024). However, these developments have also created serious challenges, particularly the increasing spread of hoaxes and misinformation that shape public perceptions and weaken trust in government institutions (Rahmadhany et al., 2021). Hoaxes are often deliberately disseminated to



mislead audiences, and their consequences can be especially harmful in the context of public policy, governance, and social stability (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). As a result, the growing prevalence of misinformation on digital platforms increasingly disrupts communication between the government and the public.

In Indonesia, the spread of hoaxes has become an urgent national concern. Reports from the Ministry of Communication and Information indicate that hundreds, if not thousands, of hoax stories circulate across various social media platforms every month (Kominfo, 2023). This phenomenon is also evident in Bengkulu Province, where misinformation frequently emerges around sensitive issues such as government policies, politics, health, and social problems (Alvitara & Putra, 2023). One factor that intensifies this issue is the relatively low level of digital literacy among the public, which limits people's ability to critically assess information and control the spread of false content (Nugroho, 2021; Sari et al., 2024).

The Public Relations (PR) department of the Bengkulu Provincial Government has utilized several digital platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp, to disseminate policy information, communicate with citizens, and respond to public concerns. These platforms have enabled the government to reach broader audiences across different demographic groups. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these communication efforts has been challenged by the rapid spread of hoaxes that often contradict or distort official messages. Public skepticism toward government communication has consequently increased, making it more difficult for PR institutions to maintain trust and promote accurate information. This condition places greater pressure on government PR to ensure that communication remains transparent, clear, and evidence-based.

Previous studies have emphasized that digital literacy is a key factor in reducing the spread of hoaxes and strengthening public resilience against misinformation. Nisa (2024) found that digital literacy helps social media users recognize and avoid false information and fosters more critical attitudes toward digital content. A similar finding was also reported by Putri (2024), who found that digital literacy serves as a primary defense against hoaxes and constitutes a shared social responsibility among all digital citizens. Furthermore, Bahri (2021) and Putra et al. (2024) demonstrated that digital literacy significantly influences how social media users respond to misinformation and strengthens their resilience against hoaxes. These findings indicate that strengthening public literacy is essential and that such efforts require collaboration among multiple stakeholders.

In this regard, collaboration among local governments, the media, and influencers offers strategic potential. Local media have emotional proximity to communities and are often perceived as more credible than national media, making them valuable partners in public education and hoax-prevention efforts (McQuail, 2010). At the same time, influencers play an increasingly important role in shaping public opinion through the trust and emotional connection they establish with followers. Their ability to broaden message reach and engage audiences makes them effective actors in campaigns promoting accurate information and responsible media consumption (Freberg et al., 2011).

Despite growing attention to digital literacy and misinformation, several research gaps remain. First, limited studies have examined the effectiveness of collaborative programs involving local governments, the media, and influencers, particularly in Bengkulu Province. Second, there remains a lack of quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the actual impact of digital literacy campaigns on cognitive change, behavioral outcomes, and the reduction of hoax dissemination. Indicators of public resilience against misinformation also remain underdeveloped and are rarely examined longitudinally. Third, although influencers are frequently mentioned in the literature, their roles remain insufficiently conceptualized, particularly with respect to message strategies, selection criteria, and locally effective engagement approaches.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine the collaboration model among the local government, the media, and influencers in Bengkulu Province by measuring the effectiveness of digital literacy campaigns in improving the community's ability to filter information and resist hoaxes. It also seeks to explore the role and communication strategies of influencers, map differences in campaign impact across demographic groups, and identify coordination mechanisms and implementation barriers that affect long-term sustainability. As key actors in public communication, government PR institutions hold a strategic role in combating hoaxes and improving digital literacy. PR is responsible for building constructive relationships between government and society through transparent, clear, and fact-based communication (Cutlip et al., 2013). However, in the digital era, this role cannot be performed unilaterally. Effective public communication increasingly depends on cross-sector collaboration.

This study is guided by the Two-Step Flow Theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), which explains that media messages often first influence opinion leaders before reaching the broader public. In this context, local media and influencers function as opinion leaders who help filter misinformation and shape public perceptions. The study also draws on Public Relations Management Theory, which emphasizes the importance of strategic, two-way communication between institutions and their publics (Cutlip et al., 2013). Together, these perspectives provide a relevant framework for understanding how collaboration among government PR, media, and influencers can foster a more informed and resilient society in confronting hoaxes.

In Bengkulu Province, synergy among the local government, the media, and influencers remains underdeveloped. Key challenges include the suboptimal use of digital media by public relations institutions, limited involvement of media organizations and influencers in digital literacy initiatives, and weak coordination in responding to the spread of hoax information (Kurnia, 2021). These conditions highlight the need for stronger governance of collaborative communication to address misinformation more effectively. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of collaboration among the local government, the media, and influencers in combating hoaxes and to identify strategies for building more transparent, credible, and trustworthy public communication.

The findings of this research are also expected to provide practical insights for strengthening public digital literacy, formulating evidence-based communication strategies, and improving the community's capacity to evaluate information in the digital era critically. Ultimately, through appropriate and coordinated strategies, the Bengkulu Provincial Government is expected to become more proactive in countering hoaxes and fostering constructive dialogue with the public.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders involved in combating hoaxes and promoting digital literacy in Bengkulu Province. Qualitative research was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to understand social meaning through naturalistic data and combines inductive and deductive analysis, participant perspectives, and researcher reflexivity (Creswell, 2014). Meanwhile, in phenomenology, reality is understood as an intersubjective world shaped through individual consciousness and everyday experiences (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020). Therefore, a phenomenological approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations regarding collaboration among government institutions, media organizations, and influencers in responding to misinformation.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to describe their experiences and perspectives in detail. Each interview lasted

approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement, expertise, and relevance to public communication and digital literacy initiatives. A total of seven participants representing key stakeholder groups were involved in this study.

Table 2. Participants Category

No	Category	Description
1	Provincial Government	Department of Communication and Information (Diskominfo)
2	Expert	Academics and PR Researchers
3	Police	Head of Public Relations Division, Bengkulu Police
4	Local Government	Head of National Unity and Politics Agency (Kesbangpol)
5	Influencer	Influencer from Bengkulu
6	Media	General Manager of <i>SKH Radar Utara</i>
7	Activist	Student Activist

Source: Researcher (2025)

As shown in Table 2, the seven participants of the FGDs represented key sectors within the local communication ecosystem. Government institutions, including Diskominfo and Kesbangpol, were included because of their roles in managing public communication, policy dissemination, and social coordination. The Bengkulu Police provided a law-enforcement perspective on misinformation control and preventive communication. Academics and PR researchers contributed theoretical and analytical insights related to media literacy and communication strategies. Participants from the media and influencer sectors were selected for their significant role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. Local media serve as credible sources close to the community, while influencers can engage audiences through digital platforms. In addition, a student activist was involved to represent civil society and youth perspectives as active consumers and disseminators of online information.

Furthermore, document analysis was conducted to complement findings from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). This method was used to provide additional contextual evidence and to strengthen understanding of how anti-hoax and digital literacy efforts were formally communicated to the public. The documents examined included government policy documents, official reports, campaign materials on digital literacy, media publications, and online communications produced by government institutions, media organizations, and influencers. Through these materials, the researcher identified communication strategies, campaign narratives, and the extent to which institutional objectives were reflected in public messaging practices. Document analysis also helped reveal how different stakeholders framed issues of misinformation and promoted public awareness through various communication channels.

Moreover, data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves systematically coding transcripts, identifying recurring patterns, and organizing them into overarching themes (Pradika et al., 2025). This analytical process enabled the researcher to systematically connect individual experiences to broader institutional practices through thematic patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo 12 was used to support coding and data organization, while ATLAS.ti assisted in data visualization and cross-theme mapping to improve analytical clarity. Furthermore, to ensure trustworthiness, this study employed triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was conducted by comparing findings across interviews, FGDs, and documents to strengthen data consistency. Member checking was conducted by asking participants to review summaries of the findings and

interpretations to ensure their views were accurately represented. These procedures were intended to enhance the credibility, dependability, and authenticity of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed that combating hoaxes and promoting digital literacy in Bengkulu Province are shaped by interconnected institutional, social, and technological factors rather than isolated issues. As illustrated in Figure 1, the main themes identified from interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis highlight the relationships between regulation, communication actors, public literacy, and collaborative governance. The findings show that the spread of hoaxes is driven not only by false content itself, but also by weak coordination, outdated regulations, limited public understanding, and uneven communication capacity. At the same time, the figure highlights strategic opportunities through stronger collaboration among government, media, influencers, law enforcement, experts, and civil society, as well as broader digital literacy initiatives. Thus, Figure 1 provides the analytical basis for discussing the key themes of this study.

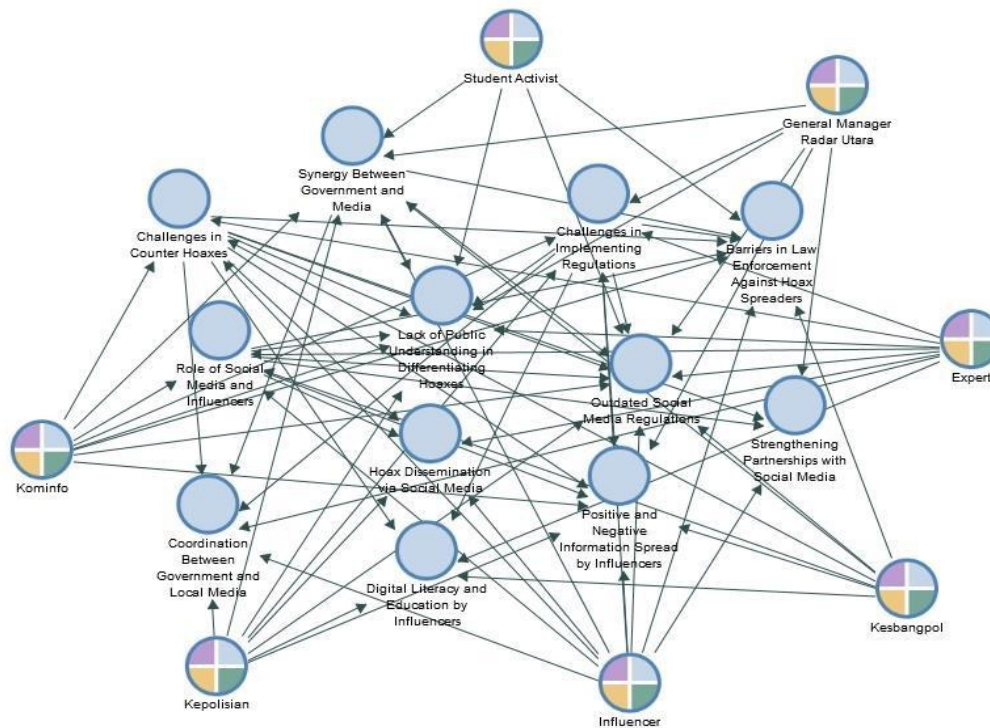


Figure 1. Main Theme of Research
Source: Primary Data Processing with ATLAS.ti (2025)

Figure 1 presents a thematic relationship map illustrating that interconnected institutional, social, and technological factors shape the challenge of combating hoaxes in Bengkulu Province. One of the most dominant patterns shown in the figure is the centrality of collaboration among stakeholders. Themes such as *Synergy Between Government and Media*, *Coordination Between Government and Local Media*, and *Strengthening Partnerships with Social Media* are strongly connected to multiple participants, indicating that anti-hoax efforts are widely understood as a shared responsibility rather than the task of a single institution. At the same time, the figure highlights persistent governance obstacles, including *Challenges in Implementing Regulations*, *Outdated Social Media Regulations*, and *Barriers in Law Enforcement Against Hoax Spreaders*. These findings

suggest that current regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms have not fully adapted to the speed and complexity of misinformation in digital spaces.

The figure also emphasizes the role of public capacity and communication actors in shaping the spread of misinformation. Themes such as *Lack of Public Understanding in Differentiating Hoaxes* and *Hoax Dissemination via Social Media* indicate that limited digital literacy remains a key factor increasing public vulnerability to misleading content. In addition, influencers appear in an ambivalent position across themes such as the *Role of Social Media and Influencers*, *Digital Literacy and Education by Influencers*, and *Positive and Negative Information Spread by Influencers*. This shows that influencers can serve as both strategic partners in disseminating credible information and potential amplifiers of misinformation when ethical standards are weak. Overall, Figure 1 demonstrates that addressing hoaxes in Bengkulu Province requires an integrated approach that combines stronger regulation, multi-stakeholder coordination, public digital literacy, and the strategic engagement of contemporary communication actors.

The Role of Media and Influencers in Combating Hoaxes

Handling hoaxes on social media is a complex communication challenge that involves multiple actors, including government institutions, media organizations, influencers, and the public. In the context of Bengkulu Province, the findings reveal a critical gap in how public relations (PR) institutions respond to misinformation. Although social media has been widely adopted as a channel for public interaction and information dissemination, government efforts to curb hoaxes remain limited in effectiveness. Unlike traditional media such as newspapers and television, which generally apply strict editorial procedures and verification standards, social media operates with minimal oversight, allowing false and misleading information to circulate rapidly. This creates significant pressure on government PR institutions to respond quickly while maintaining credibility.

One issue highlighted by the General Manager of *SKH Radar Utara* was the public's tendency to engage with clickbait headlines and emotionally charged content. This condition reflects the continuing lack of critical thinking skills and digital literacy among sections of the public, both of which are essential for distinguishing credible information from misleading narratives. In this context, hoaxes do not spread solely because of content producers; audiences often lack the capacity to critically evaluate messages before sharing them. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy becomes a central strategy in reducing public vulnerability to misinformation.

The findings also show that influencers occupy an increasingly important role within Bengkulu's communication environment. With their large audiences and high engagement levels, influencers have the capacity to either amplify hoaxes or help reduce their impact. Research by Susanti et al. (2023) demonstrates that influencers can play a significant role in disseminating accurate information and educating audiences about hoaxes, particularly among younger generations who are highly active on social media. In this sense, influencers can serve as an extension of PR efforts because they often bridge communication gaps that traditional media and formal government channels cannot fully address.

However, the study indicates that the Bengkulu government has not yet fully optimized the strategic potential of influencers. This reflects a gap in current communication strategies, where influencers are recognized as relevant actors but have not been systematically integrated into anti-hoax campaigns. Public relations institutions, therefore, need to build stronger partnerships with influencers and involve them in digital literacy initiatives, particularly campaigns that encourage audiences to verify information before sharing it. Such collaboration would make government communication more adaptive, relatable, and effective across digital platforms.

This argument is reinforced by Kaňková and Matthes (2026), who emphasize the importance of critical-thinking interventions in mitigating the negative effects of misleading information often spread by influencers. They explain that misleading communication, whether through misinformation or overgeneralized messaging, can weaken message credibility, trust in the source, and parasocial relationships between influencers and followers. Their study found that critical thinking interventions reduced negative influence in the short term, although the effects tended to weaken without sustained reinforcement. These findings are highly relevant to Bengkulu, suggesting that influencer-based campaigns should not only deliver messages but also consistently encourage reflective, critical consumption of information.

In addition, Shahbazi and Bunker (2024) argue that social media can serve as a major channel for addressing misinformation, particularly during crises, when supported by credible actors and verified information. Their research shows that public distrust of information shared on social media can intensify the spread of hoaxes. They therefore propose collaborative efforts among government, media, and the private sector to strengthen information integrity and public trust. This perspective is relevant to Bengkulu, where trust in digital communication remains a key issue. Stronger collaboration among the government, the media, and influencers, supported by clearer regulations and accountability mechanisms, is necessary to ensure that accurate information reaches the public while reducing reliance on unreliable sources.

Digital Literacy and Societal Challenges

The spread of hoaxes on social media poses a major societal challenge, particularly regarding digital literacy among younger generations who primarily consume information on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. As active digital users, young people are frequently exposed to fast-moving content, yet many still lack the skills to evaluate the information they encounter critically. As noted by an influencer from Bengkulu, many users are unable to properly sort or verify online information, resulting in the circulation of content that is not necessarily true. This indicates that misinformation spreads not only because of malicious content producers but also because audiences often share information without adequate verification.

With the rapid development of information technology, hoaxes have become easier to produce and disseminate. Putri et al. (2025) argue that addressing this issue requires teaching the public to use social media more wisely. In this context, digital literacy should not be understood merely as the technical ability to access or operate digital platforms, but also as the critical capacity to assess, compare, and verify information. Similarly, Afifah & Yanti (2022) emphasize that digital literacy includes evaluative skills that enable users to distinguish reliable information from misleading narratives. These competencies include checking the credibility of sources, recognizing signs of manipulative or false content, and verifying claims before redistributing them. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy among younger users is particularly important, as they are among the most active demographic groups in digital environments.

However, the findings indicate that digital literacy alone is insufficient to curb the spread of hoaxes, as structural issues related to platform governance and communication accountability remain significant. Participants emphasized that many influencers are not subject to the same ethical codes or verification standards as traditional media. Unlike journalists or mainstream media institutions, influencers often circulate content without editorial review, creating gaps in oversight and increasing the risk of inaccurate, sensational, or misleading information reaching highly engaged audiences. This concern aligns with Rianisa (2024), who highlights the need to regulate information dissemination in the post-truth era, where emotional and attention-grabbing narratives frequently outweigh

factual accuracy. Therefore, stronger supervision of influencers and social media communication is necessary to ensure information remains credible and accountable.

Another major challenge lies in the lack of clear, adaptive regulations governing digital platforms and influencers. Although countries, including Indonesia, have begun developing policies to monitor online content, implementation remains slow and often ineffective. Isnaini et al. (2025) show that despite the introduction of reporting systems on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, fake accounts and hoax content continue to evade detection. This demonstrates that technological moderation alone is not enough. Effective anti-hoax strategies require stronger collaboration among government institutions, digital platforms, media actors, and the public to establish responsive monitoring systems. In addition, clearer regulations are needed for influencers whose broad reach is not always matched by responsibility. Establishing ethical standards similar to those used in traditional media could be an important step toward ensuring that influential digital actors prioritize verification before disseminating information.

Collaboration Between Government Agencies and Media

The spread of hoaxes in the digital era is a multidimensional challenge that a single actor cannot address. Rapid information flows, the open nature of social media, and uneven levels of public digital literacy require coordinated responses involving government institutions, media organizations, digital platforms, and other stakeholders. In this context, collaboration between government agencies and the media becomes a fundamental element in building timely, credible, and effective responses to misinformation. The findings of this study indicate that anti-hoax efforts in Bengkulu Province depend not only on institutional authority but also on actors' ability to work collectively within an integrated communication system.

Local governments play a strategic role in preventing hoaxes because of their direct relationship with communities and their understanding of local social dynamics. Zulmawati (2025) explains that local governments have the authority to formulate policies and regulations that can reduce the spread of misinformation through mass media and digital platforms. This includes designing communication policies that encourage the dissemination of accurate information while limiting the misuse of social media as a channel for disinformation. Likewise, Bustami & Sazili (2025) emphasize that government involvement in regulating social media is increasingly important. Local governments, therefore, need to collaborate with digital platforms to identify harmful content, improve monitoring systems, and respond more quickly to misleading narratives. However, regulation alone is insufficient. Governments must also promote digital literacy so that citizens become more careful when receiving and sharing information.

The media also play a central role in verifying and disseminating credible information. Sartijo (2024) notes that media institutions have significant influence over public opinion and perceptions of social issues. Because of this role, cooperation between local governments and the media is essential to ensure that information reaching society is accurate and trustworthy. In practice, such cooperation should involve both conventional media, including newspapers, television, and radio, and digital media channels that reach wider, faster-moving audiences. Nisa (2024) further emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the government and the media to filter information circulating on social media, where hoaxes often spread rapidly. This collaboration may include journalist training, fact-checking partnerships, and the development of shared guidelines for information verification.

Beyond government and media relations, the findings also highlight the importance of involving influencers in broader communication strategies. The synergy among local governments, the media, and influencers can be leveraged to develop digital literacy programs that increase public awareness of hoaxes and disinformation. These initiatives

may take the form of seminars, workshops, online campaigns, or community outreach programs involving all three actors. Government institutions can function as facilitators and policy coordinators; media organizations can provide verified information and uphold professional standards; and influencers can deliver messages in more engaging formats to audiences that are often difficult to reach through formal channels. Such collaboration can reduce public dependence on unreliable sources and strengthen collective resilience against misinformation.

Several studies support the effectiveness of this collaborative model. Putra et al. (2024), for example, describe how cooperation among local governments, media, and influencers in a hoax literacy program successfully increased public awareness regarding misinformation and the importance of verification. Programs of this kind demonstrate that anti-hoax strategies are more effective when communication actors operate in coordination rather than separately. In the context of Bengkulu Province, these findings suggest that sustainable partnerships among government agencies, media institutions, and digital opinion leaders are necessary to build a stronger, more adaptive communication ecosystem.

Regulation and Law Enforcement in Tackling Hoaxes

The findings indicate that regulation and law enforcement remain central issues in efforts to combat hoaxes in the digital era. Participants emphasized that while traditional media generally operate under clear professional rules, editorial standards, and legal accountability mechanisms, social media actors, such as influencers, often operate with far fewer controls. This creates a significant gap in monitoring and responsibility, particularly when false or misleading information is disseminated to large audiences. Such conditions demonstrate that the current communication environment is unevenly regulated, allowing misinformation to circulate more freely through digital channels than through conventional media.

This concern is supported by Isnaini et al. (2025), who highlight the need for stricter oversight of influencers and social media platforms to ensure that information shared with the public can be held accountable. Traditional media institutions are generally subject to established regulations and verification procedures, whereas influencers often operate without equivalent standards. As a result, information distributed through personal digital accounts can easily deviate from factual accuracy, especially when content prioritizes engagement over credibility. In this context, regulation becomes essential not only to punish violations but also to create equal standards of responsibility across communication actors.

The challenge becomes more serious because social media enables information to spread virally within a very short time. News, rumors, or misleading narratives can reach thousands or even millions of users within hours. Denniss & Lindberg (2025) argue that the spread of hoaxes frequently occurs without adequate control because regulatory frameworks often fail to keep pace with rapid technological change. In addition, platform algorithms designed to maximize user attention tend to amplify sensational, emotional, or controversial content, regardless of its accuracy. This means that misinformation is not only a human communication problem, but also a structural issue shaped by digital platform design.

Participants also noted that influencers require particular regulatory attention because of their large audiences and persuasive power in shaping public opinion. Without clear rules governing transparency, verification, and accountability, influencers may unintentionally or deliberately spread false claims to highly engaged followers. This concern is especially relevant on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok, where influencers can reach millions of users quickly. Isnaini et al. (2025) further emphasize that digital literacy alone is insufficient if platform governance remains weak. While literacy programs are

important for helping audiences identify hoaxes, they cannot replace the role of regulation in limiting the circulation of misleading content.

The government, therefore, has a strategic responsibility to develop clearer and more adaptive policies. Participants acknowledged that local governments, including in Bengkulu Utara, have attempted to collaborate with print and online media to disseminate accurate information. However, weak supervision of social media remains a persistent issue, with many accounts spreading hoaxes without clear sanctions or consequences. According to Denniss & Lindberg (2025), although some countries have introduced stricter digital regulations, Indonesia's regulatory framework still lags behind the speed of technological development and social media expansion. This suggests the need for more responsive legal instruments that can adapt to changing communication environments.

Based on these findings, a more comprehensive regulatory framework is required—one that not only governs traditional media but also includes influencers, digital platforms, and other online content producers. Such regulations should promote equal standards of accountability through mechanisms such as content verification, disclosure of paid promotions, transparency in sponsored communication, and clearer sanctions for repeated misinformation. In Bengkulu Province, these efforts should be integrated with digital literacy programs and technological support systems, such as automated detection tools and information-monitoring platforms. As noted by Shaari et al. (2025), effective anti-hoax policies must combine regulation, education, and technology to reduce the impact of misinformation and foster a more critical and resilient society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that combating hoaxes and enhancing public literacy in Bengkulu Province cannot rely solely on government communication efforts. Effective anti-hoax strategies require synergy among regional government public relations (PR), media institutions, influencers, law enforcement, academics, and civil society. However, this collaboration has not been fully optimized, particularly in the integration of influencers as strategic intermediaries to reach younger online audiences. At the same time, local media remain important, credible sources that strengthen public trust and support fact-based communication. The study also identified three major barriers to anti-hoax efforts: low levels of digital literacy, limited coordination among stakeholders, and regulatory frameworks that have not kept pace with rapid digital developments. As a result, many members of the public remain vulnerable to emotionally driven and unverified content, while influencers with broad reach often operate without clear ethical standards or accountability mechanisms. These findings indicate that misinformation spreads not only because of false content itself, but also because of structural weaknesses in governance, communication systems, and public preparedness.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the relevance of Two-Step Flow Theory, which explains the strategic role of opinion leaders in shaping public understanding. In the contemporary digital context, influencers and local media function as modern opinion leaders who mediate information between institutions and society. The study also extends Public Relations Management Theory by demonstrating that effective government communication in the post-truth era requires collaborative, network-based, and multi-directional engagement rather than one-way message delivery. Public relations practice at the regional level must therefore adapt to more participatory and platform-driven communication environments.

In practice, this study suggests that regional governments should strengthen partnerships with local media and credible influencers to design structured digital literacy campaigns. These programs should focus on fact-checking habits, critical thinking, source verification, and responsible information sharing, especially among younger generations. In addition, clearer regulatory frameworks are needed to govern digital content creators,

including standards for transparency, accountability, and ethical communication. The use of monitoring technology and faster cross-agency coordination mechanisms is also necessary to improve responses to misinformation.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to examine the measurable impact of collaborative anti-hoax campaigns on changes in public attitudes and behavior using mixed-method or longitudinal approaches. Comparative studies across provinces or regions would also be valuable to identify different communication models and governance capacities. Further research may additionally explore audience perceptions of influencers involved in public communication campaigns and assess which types of digital actors are most effective in strengthening trust and public resilience against misinformation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their profound gratitude to the Directorate General of Research and Extension, Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia, for the financial support provided under 2025 Decree No. 0419/C3/DT.05.00/2025; Contract No. 119/C3/DT.05.00/PM/2025.

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