

Radio Podcasts and Media Literacy in Combating Hoaxes: A Case Study of the Implementation of Media Social Responsibility

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of radio podcasts as a medium for media literacy in combating COVID-19-related hoaxes through the perspective of social responsibility theory of the media. This research adopts a practice-based qualitative approach using a case study method focusing on the production of media literacy podcasts involving a professional journalism organization and a local radio station. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations of the planning, production, and distribution processes of the podcast content. The data were analyzed thematically by linking empirical findings with the framework of social responsibility theory of the media. The findings indicate that podcasts function not merely as alternative channels for information distribution, but also as dialogic, reflective, and contextual spaces for public education. Through a personal and non-linear audio format, podcasts enhance media credibility, explain the complexity of health-related issues, and assist audiences in reinterpreting pandemic information circulating across multiple platforms. Podcasts also represent a form of media convergence that integrates journalistic values, communication ethics, and digital distribution strategies. From the audience perspective, the study reveals an increased level of critical awareness toward COVID-19 information, particularly in evaluating sources, credibility, and message context. Although the impact is gradual, these findings highlight the potential of podcasts as an instrument for implementing media social responsibility in maintaining the quality of the public sphere during an infodemic.

Keywords: radio podcast; media literacy; COVID-19 hoaxes; social responsibility of the media; case study

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic not only triggered a global health crisis but also a structural, multidimensional, and prolonged public communication crisis. Since the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, societies around the world—including Indonesia—have been confronted with a massive, rapid, and not always accurate flow of information (World Health Organization, 2020). This situation demonstrates that the pandemic is not merely a medical issue, but also a matter of communication, meaning-making, and media responsibility within the public sphere.

In the context of communication, the pandemic has clarified the problematic relationship between the media, knowledge authorities, and society. The media no longer function merely as channels for information distribution, but also as arenas of discursive contestation among science, political and economic interests, and personal beliefs. This excessive flow of information has given rise to the phenomenon of the infodemic, a condition in which the public is flooded with information—both accurate and inaccurate—making it difficult to distinguish facts, opinions, and disinformation (World Health Organization, 2020). The infodemic has exacerbated the crisis, as misleading information often spreads more rapidly than evidence-based scientific clarification.

In Indonesia, the first COVID-19 cases were announced on March 2, 2020. Since then, mass media, online media, and social media have been saturated with diverse narratives about the virus, its transmission, social restriction policies, vaccination, and various alternative claims lacking scientific evidence. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics indicate that thousands of COVID-19-related hoax contents circulated throughout 2020–2021, particularly via social media and instant messaging applications. This condition underscores that the problem of hoaxes is not merely an individual failure in receiving information, but a systemic issue within the public communication ecosystem.

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Rubin (2015) classifies fake news into three main categories: serious fabrication, large-scale hoaxes, and humorous fakes. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these three types of hoaxes emerged simultaneously and intertwined with one another. Hoaxes were not limited to false medical information, but also included the delegitimization of health workers, scientific institutions, and public policies. Their impact extended beyond misperception, directly influencing public health behavior, such as vaccine refusal, neglect of health protocols, and the use of scientifically unproven treatments (Turner-McGrievy, Kalyanaraman, & Campbell, 2013).

In communication studies, media literacy is understood as the ability of individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media messages critically (Potter, 2001; Baran & Davis, 2009). Media literacy becomes crucial in situations of information crisis because the public is required not only to understand message content, but also the context of production, political-economic interests, and the power relations surrounding the information. Thus, media literacy functions as a mechanism to protect the public from information manipulation and as a prerequisite for rational participation in a democratic public sphere.

However, low levels of public media literacy cannot be separated from the responsibility of the communication system as a whole. Therefore, the discourse on media literacy must be situated within the normative framework of the social responsibility of the press theory. This theory emerged as a critique of press liberalism, which emphasizes media freedom without social accountability. The Hutchins Commission (1947) asserted that freedom of the press is not an absolute right, but a social trust that must be exercised with moral responsibility to provide accurate, balanced, and relevant information for the public interest.

From the perspective of social responsibility theory, the media are understood as social institutions inseparable from the public interest. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) formulated five primary obligations of the media: to provide truthful and meaningful information, to serve as a forum for public exchange of ideas, to represent social groups fairly, to clarify social values and goals, and to be accountable for the social impact of the content they produce. Thus, the media are evaluated not only by their operational freedom, but also by their contribution to social welfare and the quality of public life.

In subsequent developments, McQuail (2010) emphasized that media social responsibility encompasses ethical, professional, and public accountability dimensions. The media are required to balance market interests, political pressures, and the informational needs of society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of this theory became increasingly evident, as media information not only shaped public opinion but also influenced individual decisions related to health and safety.

When the media fail to fulfill their social responsibility—for instance, by disseminating unverified or sensational information—the consequences may include mass panic, social polarization, and declining trust in public institutions.

Within the digital media ecosystem, the implementation of social responsibility theory faces new challenges. The production and distribution of information are no longer

monopolized by press institutions but are fragmented across social media and digital platforms. The boundaries between producers and consumers of information have become increasingly blurred, rendering media responsibility more complex. Nevertheless, professional media institutions and journalistic organizations continue to play a strategic role as guardians of ethical standards, credibility, and the quality of public discourse.

The Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI), as the oldest journalists' professional organization in Indonesia, holds a normative mandate to uphold journalistic standards and protect the public interest. However, the challenges of media literacy during the pandemic cannot be addressed solely through conventional news reporting. Patterns of media consumption—particularly among younger generations—have shifted significantly toward on-demand digital media that are more personal and flexible.

One medium that has experienced significant growth is the podcast. Podcasts are characterized as non-linear and personal, allowing audiences to access content repeatedly (Morris, 2008). From a communication perspective, podcasts facilitate more intimate parasocial interaction between speakers and listeners, thereby potentially fostering audience trust in sources and media institutions. Several studies indicate that podcasts are effective tools for information literacy and health communication due to their reflective, dialogical, and contextual nature (Roberts, 2007; Berk et al., 2007; Renisyifa, Sunarti, & Pebriyanti, 2022).

Within the framework of social responsibility theory, podcasts can be understood as a form of media institutional adaptation to the ethical demands of public communication in the digital era. Through podcasts, media organizations not only disseminate information but also provide context, clarification, and space for critical reflection. Thus, podcasts have the potential to serve as strategic instruments in combating hoaxes and enhancing media literacy amid an infodemic situation.

Nevertheless, empirical studies examining podcasts as a practical implementation of media social responsibility—particularly within the context of local media and professional journalistic organizations—remain relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on technical aspects, audience motivations, or the effectiveness of podcasts as alternative media, without explicitly linking them to the normative framework of media responsibility and media literacy in the context of communication crises.

Based on this gap, this study focuses on analyzing radio podcasts as a practical implementation of media social responsibility in fostering media literacy to combat COVID-19 hoaxes. Using a qualitative practice-based case study approach, this research aims to understand how journalistic values, media literacy principles, and media convergence are manifested in the production and distribution of podcast content, and how these practices contribute to enhancing the critical awareness of audiences in confronting the infodemic.

2. Literature Review

Recent studies on podcasts position this medium as strategically significant within the digital communication ecosystem—serving as a tool for information access, a means of literacy development, and even a therapeutic medium for health-related issues. Renisyifa, Sunarti, and Pebriyanti (2022) demonstrate that podcast credibility significantly contributes to fulfilling public information needs; such credibility is constructed through the selection of authoritative sources and transparent verification practices. These findings align with the analysis of Jones et

al. (2021), which emphasizes challenges in information retrieval on podcast platforms while also noting the long-term potential of podcasts in building trust relationships between presenters and listeners.

From the perspective of information literacy, Roberts (2007) and Berk et al. (2007) underline that podcasts are effective for learning purposes because their on-demand format allows listeners to replay and reflect upon content; this feature has been utilized in educational and information literacy contexts. Studies in the educational domain during the pandemic—such as Susilowati, Sutarna, and Faiziyah (2020)—report increased student engagement when materials are delivered through podcast platforms like Spotify. Meanwhile, Fitri and Edlina (2021) highlight institutional communication strategies by Indonesia's Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominformasi), which employed podcasts on YouTube to reach local audiences, emphasizing the importance of format and presentation in determining the effectiveness of public messages.

In health communication, empirical evidence indicates the psychosocial effects of delivering health messages through audio media. Turner-McGrievy, Kalyanaraman, and Campbell (2013) found that podcasts can positively influence audiences' psychosocial responses compared to traditional web formats, partly due to audio's capacity to foster emotional engagement. Dhiman (2023) argues that podcasts have revolutionized the way the public consumes news—offering depth, narrative, and context often absent in fast-paced news cycles—thus making them particularly relevant for health crisis communication. Tobin and Guadagno (2022) add a motivational dimension: listeners choose podcasts for information, entertainment, and social connection—motivations that can be mobilized for media literacy purposes if content is clearly designed.

Studies on local practices further reinforce the relevance of these global findings. Ismail (2022) describes the convergence of radio journalism into podcast formats (a case study of KBR Prime), highlighting the continuity of journalistic values within digital practices. Hidayat, Setiawan, and Mariati (2021) emphasize the visual promotion aspect of podcasts, noting that promotional design influences reach and content identity. Collectively, this body of evidence indicates that podcast effectiveness depends on three elements: source credibility, distribution design (convergence and promotion), and understanding listener motivations.

Normatively, these empirical findings can be interpreted through the lens of social responsibility theory of the press: the media must be not only free but also accountable—providing accurate, fair, and educational information. The Hutchins Commission (1947), along with Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), and later McQuail (2010), emphasized that media institutions bear moral and social obligations toward the public. Podcasts designed according to journalistic principles (verification, balance, context) and inclusive distribution strategies represent a concrete manifestation of such responsibility, particularly during an infodemic. Thus, the integrated practice package—credible content + reflective format + integrated distribution—emerges as a model worthy of examination at the local level for combating hoaxes and enhancing media literacy.

3. Method

This study employs a case study method with a descriptive qualitative approach. The case study method was chosen because it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth

understanding of the context, processes, and dynamics involved in implementing the community engagement program within a particular social setting. A case study is particularly relevant when the research focus is not on quantitatively measuring impact, but rather on interpreting processes, communication practices, and the interactions among actors involved in podcast-based media literacy initiatives.

The descriptive qualitative approach is used to systematically describe how the podcast is produced, how principles of media social responsibility are translated into content practices, and how audiences initially respond to the program. This approach aligns with the objectives of community engagement, which emphasize solving partners' problems and strengthening institutional capacity rather than generalizing findings.

The subjects of this case study consist of actors directly involved in the planning and production of the media literacy podcast, including administrators of the Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI), local radio broadcasters, and invited podcast speakers, namely journalists and healthcare professionals.

Data were collected through two primary techniques: in-depth interviews and observation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' understandings, perspectives, and experiences regarding COVID-19 hoaxes, the role of media in crisis situations, and the strategic reasons for selecting podcasts as a medium for media literacy. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to explore emerging issues during the course of the engagement process.

Observations were conducted directly and participatively during the planning, production, and publication stages of the podcast. The observations focused on interactions among PWI administrators, broadcasters, and speakers, as well as on how principles of accuracy, verification, and empathy were applied in communication practices. Field notes were used to document dynamics that did not always emerge during interviews, such as editorial decision-making processes and spontaneous responses during recording sessions.

Data obtained from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analytical stages included data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretation of findings. The main themes analyzed comprised media responsibility, media literacy, discursive intertextuality, and audience response. The analysis was conducted iteratively by linking empirical data with the theoretical framework of media social responsibility.

To ensure data validity, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing findings from interviews and observations. In addition, limited discussions were conducted with institutional partners to ensure that interpretations were consistent with the field context. This approach was intended to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research and community engagement outcomes.

4. Result and Discussion

This applied research resulted in the production of two anti-hoax COVID-19 media literacy podcast episodes, which were broadcast through local radio and digital platforms. Each episode addressed a different issue: media literacy and the role of journalists in combating hoaxes, and medical clarification regarding COVID-19 and vaccination. An interactive dialogue format was selected to create a communicative discussion atmosphere that would be accessible and easily understood by the audience. Observations indicate that the podcast production

process involved careful consideration of journalistic ethics, information accuracy, and social relevance. Administrators of the Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI) played an active role in selecting speakers and ensuring that the information delivered adhered to the principles of media social responsibility.

4.1. Podcast as an Implementation of Media Social Responsibility

The discussion of podcasts as an implementation of media social responsibility must be situated within both normative and empirical frameworks. A number of studies indicate that podcasts function not merely as alternative channels for information distribution, but also as instruments for building media credibility and fulfilling the public's right to quality information (Renisyifa, Sunarti, & Pebriyanti, 2022; Ismail, 2022). In the context of radio journalism, podcasts represent a form of media convergence that allows journalistic values to be sustained within a more flexible and participatory digital format (Ismail, 2022).

Within the theory of media social responsibility, the media are viewed as possessing not only the freedom to produce and disseminate information, but also the moral obligation to ensure that such information contributes to the public interest. The Hutchins Commission (1947) emphasized that press freedom entails accountability to society. Observations of the podcast production process indicate that the Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI) consciously positioned the podcast as an instrument of social responsibility rather than merely an alternative content product. This aligns with the findings of Fitri and Edlina (2021), which demonstrate that institutional podcast programs are designed to bridge public information needs with communication strategies adaptive to digital media environments.

As a product of media convergence, podcasts enable the integration of journalistic practices with the logic of digital platforms. Henry Jenkins (2006) describes media convergence as the intersection of various media forms within a participatory space where audiences are no longer passive. In the case of PWI's podcast practice, convergence is reflected in the combination of radio journalism values, digital distribution through YouTube, and cross-platform promotion via social media. This pattern strengthens the media's responsibility function because information does not remain confined to a single channel but is strategically expanded to reach broader audiences.

Furthermore, podcasts enable media institutions to perform their educational function contextually. Research by Susilowati, Utama, and Faiziyah (2020) demonstrates that podcasts were effective as learning media during the pandemic due to their flexible and repeatable nature. This finding is relevant to PWI's media literacy podcast, which was designed to help audiences gradually and reflectively understand complex issues, rather than through instant and fragmented information delivery.

From the perspective of media responsibility, this educational function is crucial, as the media are tasked not only with informing but also with empowering the public. Podcasts provide space for in-depth explanations, clarification of terms, and deconstruction of the logic behind hoaxes, which are often embedded within popular narratives. In this sense, podcasts function as an emancipatory medium that enhances audiences' media literacy capacities.

Beyond content, media responsibility is also reflected in podcast visual and promotional strategies. Hidayat, Setiawan, and Mariati (2021) emphasize that visual promotional design plays a significant role in attracting audiences and constructing media identity. In the case of

PWI's podcast, the use of visual promotion through social media supported efforts to expand the reach of media literacy messages without compromising informational substance.

Thus, podcasts as an implementation of media social responsibility function not merely as communication tools, but as integrated communication practices that combine journalistic credibility, media convergence, public education, and ethical distribution strategies. In crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this practice reaffirms the role of the media as a socially responsible institution committed to maintaining the quality of the public sphere and sustaining public trust.

4.2. Impact on Audience Media Literacy

The primary impact of this community engagement program is reflected in changes in how audiences interpret, assess, and respond to information related to COVID-19. Based on interviews and observations, the media literacy podcast did not instantly transform audience behavior; rather, it contributed to the development of critical awareness as a foundation for long-term media literacy. Audiences no longer positioned themselves as passive recipients of information, but as active subjects who interpret and evaluate media messages.

One indicator of improved media literacy was the emergence of healthy skepticism toward pandemic-related information. Audiences demonstrated a tendency not to immediately trust information circulating on social media, particularly chain messages and posts lacking clear sources. This attitude was reflected in statements indicating that they began comparing information from multiple sources before drawing conclusions. This finding aligns with the concept of media literacy, which emphasizes analytical and evaluative competencies in engaging with media messages (Potter, 2001).

The podcast also contributed to enhancing audience understanding of authority and source credibility. Through explanations provided by journalists and healthcare professionals, listeners gained insight into the distinctions among official sources, professional expertise, and personal opinion. This process helped audiences recognize that not all information carries equal epistemic weight. Consequently, media literacy was understood not merely as a technical skill of fact-checking, but as the capacity to assess legitimacy and the interests underlying information production.

From an intertextual perspective, the podcast's impact on audience media literacy cannot be separated from its relationship to other texts previously consumed by the audience. The podcast functioned as a reflective space that enabled listeners to reinterpret prior information, whether from online news outlets or social media. In many cases, audiences connected podcast content with their personal experiences during the pandemic, such as confusion over contradictory information or anxiety resulting from repeated exposure to negative news. The relationship between media texts and experiential texts strengthened the internalization of media literacy practices.

Furthermore, the podcast encouraged audiences to understand health information as dynamic and contextual. Explanations regarding policy changes, evolving scientific knowledge, and scientific uncertainty helped audiences accept that shifts in information do not necessarily indicate deception or manipulation. This understanding is crucial in mitigating excessive suspicion toward media institutions and healthcare authorities, which are often targets of hoaxes.

Nevertheless, the impact on audience media literacy also revealed certain limitations. Not all audience members possessed equal levels of digital literacy, meaning that the ability to access and utilize podcasts depended on factors such as age, education, and media consumption habits. Moreover, increased critical awareness did not always translate into consistent behavioral changes in information-sharing practices. Some audiences acknowledged a tendency to share information aligned with personal beliefs, even when the sources had not been verified.

Overall, the program's impact on audience media literacy can be understood as a gradual process oriented toward cultivating critical and reflective attitudes. Within the framework of media social responsibility theory, the enhancement of audience media literacy serves as an indicator that the media fulfill not only their informative function, but also their educational and emancipatory roles. The media literacy podcast thus operates as a form of public learning, assisting audiences in navigating the complexities of pandemic information in a more rational and responsible manner.

4.3. Critical Discussion: Intertextuality, Podcasts, and the Production of Public Meaning

The discussion of intertextuality is essential to understanding how this media literacy podcast operates not as a single, isolated text, but as a node within a broader network of COVID-19 discourse. In communication and media studies, intertextuality refers to the reciprocal relationship between one text and other existing texts, whether in the form of news reports, social media narratives, government policies, or the personal experiences of audiences.

Findings from observations and interviews indicate that the podcast content produced by the Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI) consciously constructed intertextual relationships with dominant discourses circulating in society. The podcast narratives did not stand alone; rather, they responded to, corrected, and negotiated meanings derived from other texts, such as online news, social media posts, WhatsApp chain messages, and official statements from government and health authorities. In this sense, the podcast functioned as a meta-text that enabled audiences to reread and reinterpret information they had previously encountered.

In the context of COVID-19 hoaxes, intertextuality became evident when podcast speakers implicitly or explicitly referred to popular claims circulating in society—for example, narratives about vaccine dangers, global conspiracies, or alternative treatments. These claims were not always mentioned in full detail but were presented as discourses already familiar to audiences. This strategy allowed the podcast to enter the audience's horizon of meaning without reproducing hoax texts in their entirety, thereby avoiding the risk of amplifying misinformation.

From the perspective of media social responsibility theory, this intertextual practice reflects the media's effort not merely to refute false information, but to explain the social and epistemological contexts behind the emergence of hoaxes. Media institutions do not simply declare information to be incorrect; they demonstrate why it emerged, how it spread, and what interests may underlie it. This approach aligns with the principles articulated by the Hutchins Commission (1947) and further elaborated by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), which emphasize that the media must clarify social values and purposes, rather than merely deliver fragmented facts.

Intertextuality was also evident in the relationship between the podcast and institutional discourse. The podcast actively linked speakers' explanations to references from scientific and

health authorities, such as the World Health Organization and Indonesia's Ministry of Health. These references functioned as authoritative intertexts that reinforced message legitimacy. However, such legitimacy was not presented dogmatically. Through its dialogic format, the podcast explained scientific processes, epistemic uncertainty, and evolving policy dynamics, inviting audiences to understand science as a process rather than as an absolute and static truth.

In this regard, the podcast served as a mediating space between often abstract scientific texts and the everyday experiences of audiences. Intertextuality enabled the translation of meaning from technical language into accessible discourse without losing substantive accuracy. This process is crucial in media literacy and health communication, as gaps in understanding frequently create opportunities for hoaxes to flourish.

Furthermore, intertextuality operated at the level of personal audience experience. Interview findings suggest that audiences interpreted podcast content by connecting it to their own pandemic experiences—such as illness, the loss of family members, or confusion caused by contradictory information. Thus, the podcast interacted not only with other media texts but also with what may be termed the “text of experience.” This relationship strengthened the reflective effect of the podcast and encouraged audiences to critically evaluate the information they consumed.

Critically considered, this intertextual practice demonstrates that media literacy cannot be reduced to the technical ability to fact-check. Rather, media literacy constitutes a hermeneutic process—the capacity to interpret, relate, and evaluate meaning within a complex network of texts. Through its dialogic format and contextual narratives, the podcast provides space for such interpretive engagement.

Nevertheless, the limitations of podcast intertextuality must also be acknowledged. Its relatively limited audience reach and dependence on digital literacy present significant challenges. Not all segments of society have equal access to or familiarity with podcast consumption, meaning that the intertextual network constructed remains partial. Therefore, integrating podcasts with other media—such as conventional radio, social media, and community forums—is essential to expanding the discursive network of media literacy.

Overall, this discussion of intertextuality affirms that the media literacy podcast produced by PWI performs not only informative functions, but also interpretive and reflective ones. Within the framework of media social responsibility theory, such functions represent an advanced form of media accountability in the era of the infodemic: assisting the public in navigating the complexity of meanings and discourses during times of crisis.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the production of radio-based podcast content can serve as a relevant and effective strategy for implementing media social responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a case study approach, this community engagement project affirms that podcasts function not merely as alternative channels for information distribution, but also as spaces for public education capable of bridging the complexity of health issues, misinformation, and media literacy in a dialogic and reflective format.

The findings indicate that the media literacy podcast produced in collaboration with the Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI) was able to fulfill the normative functions of the media:

providing credible information, explaining social and scientific contexts, and fostering public trust. Within the framework of media social responsibility theory, this practice illustrates how media institutions can adapt to the evolving digital communication landscape without abandoning ethical principles and public interest commitments. The podcast thus represents a concrete form of ethical media innovation, integrating journalistic values, media convergence, and an educational approach.

From the audience perspective, this research contributes to strengthening media literacy, particularly in encouraging critical and reflective attitudes toward pandemic-related information. Although the impact observed is gradual and context-dependent, the enhancement of critical awareness constitutes an essential foundation for fostering more responsible media behavior. This finding reinforces the understanding that media literacy cannot be achieved through short-term interventions, but rather through sustained and consistent public communication processes.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by the small number of podcast episodes produced and the relatively restricted audience reach. Future media literacy initiatives should therefore consider ensuring content sustainability, integrating cross-platform dissemination strategies, and expanding collaboration with community groups and educational institutions.

Overall, the podcast-based research model developed through this community engagement initiative holds potential for replication in addressing other public issues. Such an approach can contribute to strengthening the role of the media in safeguarding the quality of the public sphere and promoting a more resilient and democratic information environment.

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