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## Social Media And Hoax In Political Communication (The Perspective of the Quran and Muslim Students in Makassar)

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### Abstract

Since the United States of America presidential election in 2016, the spread and use of hoax on social media, in addition to hate speech, in modern politics to seek public support proven to be far more critical than the spread of real news in media. What needs to consider is social unrest between Muslim and civil society that may occur because of the range of hoax. Social media that should be a means to increase *ukhuwah* becomes a means to destroy the pluralistic social relations of a nation. Political communication, especially in Indonesia ahead of the presidential election in 2019, cannot be separated from the rampant of hoax reports from both sides of the presidential election candidates. This research is a qualitative descriptive study that aims to understand the perspective of the Quran and university students on the use of hoax on social media for political purposes.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Hoax, Politic, Communication.*

### Introduction

The presence of the Internet shows a significant development in the dynamics of political communication. This can be seen in the development of political communication activities in the General Election campaign on social media. The use of the Internet, with various applications and features provided, is significant and substantial in General Election, Regional Head Elections (Pilkada), and Presidential Elections (Pilpres) campaign activities through the social network. Although mainstream media like traditional and conventional media such as TV, radio and print media are still used, campaign done through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and so on seems more attractive, and even dominant.

Social media, as one of the human needs in this millennium, is the development of communication media through the Internet. The Internet itself stands for the interconnected network, which has a big influence on communication technology. The Internet is a tool for delivering messages quickly, and one of the communications done through the Internet is through social media (Anastasia & Emertus, 2014).

By looking at its advantages, social media is an Internet-based online media that gives users freedom and flexibility to join a broad social interaction network, participate,

share and create information, which allows indirect exchange or interaction between the users. This is because the Internet is easy to access individually or together in a group or mass.

Nowadays, human life cannot be separated from the need for the Internet and online communication. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Internet has developed, in terms of the number of host computers (main computers) and in terms of Internet users, is increasingly needed by people as a means of socialization that is very effective and reliable. This trend is seen by the number of Internet users in a country or even worldwide.

According to the result of the research released by Internet World Stats (Budiyo, 2015), Internet users in the United States was around 900 million from the total population of 1.5 billion people. This shows that new media users in America were 70% of the total population. As expected, this phenomenon has a great influence on the social condition in the United States and in the world.

In Indonesia, according to the survey carried out by MarkPlus, as quoted by Indiwan Seto, the Internet users in the country has reached 55 million people from the total 240 million of the population, it is estimated that 23% of them lived in big cities and only 4.1% were in rural areas (Indiwan Seto and Wahyu Wibowo, 2014).

The growing popularity of the use of Internet networks among the wider community that is rapid and unlimited today has contributed to the changing landscape of the world of political communication through social networks. Political communicators are eager to use social media as a medium for a political campaign to attract a more optimal mass of supporters and win the political contestation by earning the most votes in General Elections or Presidential Elections. For this reason, the problem that arises is the use of hoax to achieve political goals through social media.

This pragmatic-political goal drives people to think without presumption and speak in an inconsiderate manner, regardless of the impact on other people's feelings and comfort. However, social media is the potential to be used as a means of political communication. On the other hand, social media has a function as a means of communication and socialization with the freedom of expression for its users. Still, then it also can logically be used as a tool or means to spearhead a black campaign by spreading hoax news. To discredit political opponents or raise their image in public, spreading hoax news is a strategy that considered to be very effective and massive.

The freedom of using social media, as a result of technological advance and global communication, is often used to spread slander, both toward an individual or group interests. This is certainly very concerning. There are a number of hoax news that are used to shape public opinion that leads to panic, suspicion, information uncertainty, distrust and fear. The hoax news then spread through newspapers, radio, television and the Internet. The spread of hoax news is sometimes all right when it is used for certain reasons, such as humor, marketing, entertainment, activity info, education and so on.

The spread of hoax news cannot be separated from the *support* of mass media, both printed and electronic. According to a survey done in February 2017, hoax news has spread through Internet sites as much as 34.9%, television 8.7%, print media 5%, email 3.1% and

radio 1.2% (Librayanti, 2017). This shows that Indonesia is classified as one of the countries experiencing serious problems in the spread of hoaxes (Firmansyah, 2017).

Hoax news spread easily, especially in communities where the literacy rate is still very low. Usually, they easily receive information without clarifying and checking it first from trusted sources. They even spread it without considering the level of accuracy of the information they received. The community eventually falls into media confusion, provocation and mutual suspicion.

As religious people, especially Muslims, we should make the scriptures (God's revelation and the teachings of the prophet PBUH) as the main standard in assessing every personal and social behavior. The study of the Quran's perspective on the behavior of the spread of hoax is important that it is believed to be a way of life for Muslims. The Quran records the existence of hoaxes that have occurred and generally teaches the prohibition of saying lies and spreading *namimah* (provocation) which aims to destroy the peace of the people.

The spread of hoax as a social phenomenon in modern society is also a problem in the social world of the younger generation, especially for college students. Social media, with its various applications, for students, has become an important needs and lifestyle in social interaction. However, it cannot be denied that students, in this case the students of private Islamic colleges in Makassar, become the objects and at the same time the subjects of the spread of hoax. The political escalation in the recent presidential election and the attitude of their political choices to certain candidates become the main motive for students to explore political information on online social media. Hence, it is very possible that the students are easily exposed to hoax news and spread it to their fellow social networks.

Therefore, the researcher considered understanding the perspective of Quran and Muslim students in Makassar on hoax news and its spread on social media is important for they have a tendency to be influenced by manipulation of public opinion of political elites who have interest and to know the extent of their understanding about the Quran's view of the dangers of hoax.

## Research Method

The search and description of verses relating to the spread of hoax news in the Quran are important so that the messages and moral values can be taken in dealing with the phenomenon of the spread of hoax today. For this purpose, the method used by the researcher was interpretation. (Anton Bekker & Ahmad Charis Zubair, 1990). This method was aimed to explore the message of the Quran in revealing verses related to false news.

The survey done to obtain the data of students' perception was carried out through descriptive method with random informants selected based on the data source clusters. The data obtained from closed interview instrument was analyzed by using qualitative approach. This method was intended to obtain a picture of the data about the attitude and perception of students of Perguruan Tinggi Islam Swasta (PTAIS) in Makassar about the phenomenon and behavior of the spread of hoax news for political purposes. The researcher selected 30 informants randomly, namely students of Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI),

Universitas Islam Makassar (UIM) and Universitas Muhammadiyah (Unismuh) Makassar, from various faculties as the data sources.

The reason of choosing students of PTAIS as informants was because there is usually 'spread of ideology' or, at least, there is a construction of religious understanding that characterizes the attitudes and political inclinations of the academic community at private institutions. It is hoped that the perspective of Muslim students in Makassar in applying Islamic moral values especially in using social media as a means of political communication and social interaction can be known.

## Discussion

### 1. Hoax on Social Media

Some researches on the spread of hoax news as a social phenomenon and the religious views on it were carried out by studying them through approaches. In this study, the researcher specifically used a thematic approach by discussing verses of the Quran according to the theme under studied. Thematic approach was used to get the understanding of the verses of the Quran that are related to hoax and how to react to them.

Etymologically, hoaxis interpreted as "deceiving somebody with a hoax" (University, 2011). Hoax is also understood as "to deceive someone by making them believe something which has been maliciously or mischievously fabricated". As a noun, hoax is defined as "trick played on somebody for a joke" or "anything deliberately intended to deceive or trick" (Hoax, 2017). According to its practical use in Indonesian society, hoax is an absorption word that is understood as false news.

The trend of globalization has created its own atmosphere and character for human social life throughout the world. The emergence of hoax cannot be separated from the development of media technology that has transformed communication tools to be faster, easier to use and reach without limits, forming a form of life management that is often called as the global village (Jay W Jensen Rivers & Theodore Peterson, 2008). The speed of communication tools influences the growth of social media. Substantially, information media technology has changed the way of communication among people.

Communication and information can be spread quickly, unlimited, so that all people are free to express their opinions. All people are easier to receive, share and comment on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and so on. Information then overlaps, implosive, and explosive, because it is reproduced through the *share* and *copy* options in social media (Ratnalstrijani&Nur Huda Widianana, 2016).

For the purpose of shaping public opinion, freedom to issue news indirectly is a major factor in the rise of hoax news (Holmes, 2012) For the sake of certain interests, including practical political interests, hoax news is often used – or seen as important – to attack, accuse, commit stereotypes, even to claim that a particular group or religion is superior or more worthy and respectable than the others.

It is recognized that the media is present to convey information that is inseparable from various social and political interests. In the end, media becomes a place of bias for the interests of various parties (Haryanto, 2015). However, media has become a commodity of

information to meet the needs and curiosity of society. But on the contrary, media also tends to be used in the interest of discrediting one party for certain benefits. Moral values are set aside and consideration of reason is ignored for political victory. This is all done without regard to the social impacts that might occur.

The spread of hoax news on social media is assumed to be related to several things. First, interesting news articles go viral on social media so that they can attract advertisements and news providers to earn revenue through their home sites. This factor is seen as the main motive for most hoax news producers to seek profits from the news that was made intentionally. Second, some hoax news producers are trying to support the ideology they carry out by attacking opposition groups that are their rivals. For example, the right-hand news producer characterizes itself as the left side, then embarrasses people on the right by spreading hoax (Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow, 2017).

In addition, the emergence of social media providers, such as Facebook and Twitter, is also a means for public to receive and disseminate news and information, in the form of images or videos. In a very short time, hoax news had spread across all levels of society, even throughout the world. The ease in the process of distributing news is the main and most effective supporting factor for the spread of hoax news, especially through social media and that is unlimited and need no identity, so that everyone can freely express their thoughts and desires.

This is what would happen when there are issues that are not necessarily true, someone then just spreads it. Moreover, the condition of social culture of Indonesian people today that like to share information through social media such as Whatsapp, Blackberry Messenger, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on without trying to crosscheck (*tabayyun*) the truth of the information (Tasandra, 2017).

The behavior of spreading hoax news on social media has a very significant negative impact, including:

- a. Harming the community to get the right information, with hoax news that contains lies and slander.
- b. Creating social unrest and splitting the public on behalf of political interests or certain religious organizations.
- c. Influencing public opinion. Hoax news generally aims to provoke people, creates hatred and directs them to action in the interests of hoax makers.
- d. Hoax is a very effective means of creating conflict (*namimah*) and business between fellow believers and nations.
- e. Creating fears and excitement in ordinary people who have the potential to create social unrest.

## 2. The Quran's Perspective on Hoax

The term hoax in the Quran can be found from the understanding of the word *al-ifk* (الإفك) which means inverse (like an earthquake that reverses the country). The connection is that what is meant in this study is a big lie, because lies are basically means twisting facts. While the emergence of hoax is caused by dissident people. The Quran mentions the perpetrators or makers of the spread of hoax with the term 'usbah (عصبة). The word usbah is taken from the word 'asaba (عصب) which means to tie it hard. It is

from the origin word of muta'assib (متعصب) which means fanatic. This is understood in the sense of groups that are strongly intertwined by one idea, in this case spreading negative issues, to defame (Shihab, 2002).

The phenomenon of the spread of hoaxes has been coined and explained in the Quran, which is precisely Q.S. An-Nur: 11. In one narration, the revelation of the verse concerning the accusation of vile (adultery or infidelity) which was addressed to the wife of the Prophet, namely Aisyah, when she was going home to Medina with the Muslim forces. The phenomenon is identical to what is happening now, where there are parties who deliberately distort the facts and disseminate fake news with the aim of discrediting the victim or the target party.

On the way home from the battle of the Bani Mushtaliq, Aisyah was normally transported on a camel ride with a lid (*hawdaj*). When she stopped in one place, Aisyah got off from her camel because she felt her bracelet breaking and fell, so she looked for it. Her companion thought she was still on a camel or *hawdaj* stretcher. The delegation of the Prophet left for Medina and Aisha was left behind. She was confused and finally fell asleep there due to fatigue.

Then came from behind one of the companions of the Prophet, Shafwan bin Mu'aththal Al-Sulami, who was assigned to walk behind the troops to collect items left behind. He found and recognized that the woman who was left behind from the group was Aisha. Then he ordered Aisyah to go up to her camel and lead her to Medina. But after the incident, several Muslims in Madinah were busy defaming and spreading false news about Ayesha. She was suspected of having committed an affair with Shafwan bin bin Mu'aththal. The Prophet almost believed it and planned to divorce her (Kathir, 1994).

Aisha also complained about the problem and complained to God about what happened, until the verse Q.S. came down. An-Nur (24): 11 answered the hoax accusation. Allah says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ ۚ لَا تَحْسَبُوهُ شَرًّا لَّكُم ۚ بَلْ هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۚ لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ  
مَا اكْتَسَبَ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ ۚ وَالَّذِي تَوَلَّى كِبْرَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ - 24:11

Which means: "Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you. Do not think it bad for you; rather it is good for you. For every person among them is what [punishment] he has earned from the sin, and he who took upon himself the greater portion thereof - for him is a great punishment."

This verse is critized and refuted the people who defamed the wife of the Prophet. Ayesha, without any valid evidence. Allah mentioned that the people who intentionally created and disseminated that false news concerning the honor of the Prophet's family were from the Muslim community itself that existed Medina at that time. It can be understood from the verse that in fact the hoaxes that occurred and struck the people of Indonesia today is not the first case in the history of Muslims. Long before, even in the time of the Prophet Muhammad there were already bad people who spread fake news and issues that damaged the peace of society. The hoax even happened to the Prophet's own family.

Responding to this phenomenon, Allah SWT provides guidance to Muslims not to do anything harmful, participate in disseminating hoax news. In the next verse, the Quran

tells how Muslims should behave towards hoax news that is spread. Allah says in Q.S. An-Nur (24): 12:

لَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ ظَنَّ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بِأَنفُسِهِمْ خَيْرًا وَقَالُوا هَذَا إِفْكٌ مُّبِينٌ -  
24:12

Which means: "Why, when you heard it, did not the believing men and believing women think good of one another and say, "This is an obvious falsehood?"

This verse explains that when hoax news spread, there are Muslims who are silent, do not justify and do not argue. Some talk about it while asking questions and some do not believe it and express their beliefs about Aisyah's chastity. Therefore, Allah revealed this verse to warn people of silence as if they are justifying the news, especially those who talked while wondering whether the news was viral (Shihab, 2002).

Furthermore, the Quran also criticizes Muslims who are involved or play a role in spreading hoax news, even though they have not confirmed the truth of the news. In Q.S. An-Nur (24): 11 Allah Almighty says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ ۚ لَا تَحْسَبُوهُ شَرًّا لَّكُم ۚ بَلْ هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۚ لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ  
مَا اكْتَسَبَ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ ۚ وَالَّذِي تَوَلَّى كِبْرَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ - 24:11

Which means: "Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you. Do not think it bad for you; rather it is good for you. For every person among them is what [punishment] he has earned from the sin, and he who took upon himself the greater portion thereof - for him is a great punishment."

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِي مَا أَفَضْتُمْ فِيهِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ -  
24:14

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَتَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ مَا لَيْسَ لَكُم بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَتَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّنًا وَهُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ  
- 24:15

Which mean: "And if it had not been for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy in this world and the Hereafter, you would have been touched for that [lie] in which you were involved by a great punishment. When you received it with your tongues and said with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge and thought it was insignificant while it was, in the sight of Allah, tremendous."

From these verses, it is very clear that God threatens people involved in delivering hoaxes, both those who know that the news is not true and those who do not know. If it is associated with political phenomena in Indonesia today, which use social media for the purpose of distributing hoax news, it means that people who share the news that is not yet clear, especially the ones about lies, then they are certainly threatened to get the punishment of Allah. The hoax news is somehow trivial, but in fact it is very dangerous for the people's relationship and threatens the peace of the people.

The Quran guides Muslims to always clarify when receiving or finding news. This is what is meant by the command to *tabayyun*, as mentioned in Q.S. Al-Hujurat (49): 6:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَيَّ  
مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ - 49:6

“Oyou who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.”

This verse is an order to Muslims to be careful in receiving news that comes from *fasik* people (al-Qarni, 2008). Muslims are required to always be careful, both in delivering news and in carrying out daily activities. The Quran asserts that Muslims should confirm and be careful of the coming of news from *fasik* people who intend to mislead the *Ummah*, especially in political contestations that have the potential to social unrest. The verse above emphasizes that faith and piety are implemented in an attitude of thoroughness and caution in receiving or spreading the news before the truth is deemed clear. In political communication, we should avoid deliberation to uncover hoax news for the purpose of winning. If we are not careful and reckless in responding to hoax news, people will experience prolonged destruction and regret.

### 3. Hoax in Political Communication and the Perception of Muslim Students in Makassar

It has been previously explained that the Internet, cyberspace and social media today cannot be separated from the lives of the younger generation, or commonly called as the millennial generation. Almost all of their activities come into contact or need the Internet and social media facilities. This makes the scope of the communication and associations are not only based on friendships, but it extends to a form of global association that is not limited by social and geographical boundaries. Therefore, all forms of information, whether in the form of knowledge, advertisements, opinions, news and debates, even hoax news, are certainly consumed by millennial.

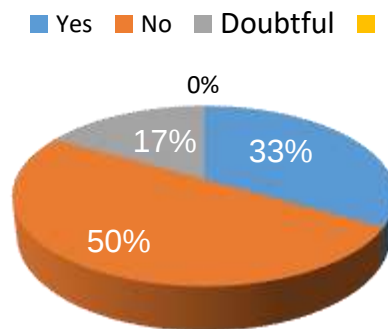
According to the investigation done by the researcher, the informants from the millennial generation of Muslim students in Makassar, it was found that the college students were all active users of social media through the Internet network. They understand the meaning and function of social media, while being aware of hoax news that are milling about without strict restrictions from the government. However, it turned out that all of the informants have more than one social media application that they actively used. They are not satisfied to have only one social media platform, such as Facebook or Instagram. Therefore, it can be said that millennial students are very vulnerable to negative influence of hoax news.

They acknowledged that social media, with the variety of applications provided, is like a knife; one side is useful, yet it also can be harmful. Social media can function to improve and create benefits, but it also has the potential to cause damage. However, when asked about the urgency of the Internet, it turned out that not all informants agreed on this matter.

Ihwal and Nurfaidah Umar, students (UIM), for example, argued that the Internet is not their important needs that they cannot avoid their necessity for social media. The Internet and social media are facilities that humans do not really need. People in ancient times carried out activities without the Internet and social media. According to these two students, social media is actually a destructive virus in social life.

Students' perceptions of the importance of the Internet and social media can be seen in the following diagram:

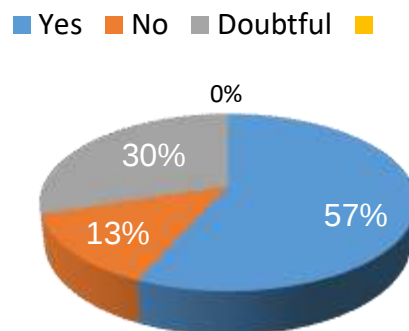
Is the Internet and social media important for life?



The majority of students admit that social media is actually not a very urgent matter in social interaction. Precisely, with the presence of social media, communication within the family, between parents and children, is increasingly rare. The feeling of being offended, 'bully', and hate speech are easy to occur. Instead of strengthening social relations, it creates social estrangement when used as a political means (black campaign).

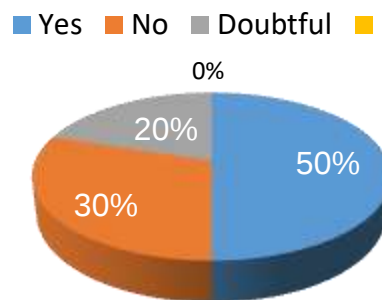
Unfortunately, not all elements of society, including students, are able to distinguish news from facts and false news that are disseminated or posted on social media. The researcher found out that some informants could not decide and doubt on how to distinguish whether a news is true or hoax. Of the 30 student informants, there were 4 students (13%) who admitted they did not know how to differentiate it, and 9 students (30%) were doubted their ability to distinguish between fact and hoax. The following diagram below:

Are you able to distinguish fact and hoax?



In addition, the understanding of the functionalization of social media has not been fully socialized among students and millennials. They acknowledged that they are only users of social media without understanding whether or not there are norms that limit the use of social media, so that they are not used to spread negative things and disturb the peace of society. Evidently, half of the number of informants said that social media must not be limited by religious, ethical and moral norms. Social media is the expression of freedom of communication and socialization.

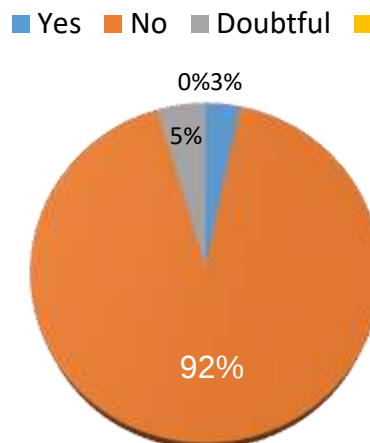
**Does social media need to be limited to ethical norms and moral values?**



However, the informants who expressed their refusal to spread hoax are sure about their choice. They disagree if politicians and political actors produce and cover hoax news to win political contestation. Notably, the one related to the phenomenon of identity politics to achieve political power, where religion and the issue of *jihad* are often politicized as a means of influencing public opinion. The majority of informants opposed the attitude or behavior of using and spreading hoaxes under the pretext of *jihad* and defending religion, even though the fact was for electoral political power. The following diagram illustrates their firm attitude:

Is it permissible to use and spread hoaxes under the pretext of *jihad* and defending religion in political contestation?

**Can someone use and spread hoax for the sake of *jihad* in political contestation?**



Whatever the reason, according to the informants, producing and spreading hoaxes, slander, hate speech, agitation and provocation is unlawful and expressed in the Quran as hypocritical acts and threatened by punishment from Allah. The attitude that must be put forward as a true Muslim, don't spread unclear news from unaccountable source to others, clarify the truth of the news (*tabayyun*) and if it turns out to be a hoax, then he is obliged to delete the news from his social media.

All in all, in political communication, elites and supporters of certain political interests, including sectarian political ideology, must prioritize moral values and ethical norms as well as the general benefit of the nation to not use hoax, hate speeches and provocation based on prejudice and hostility. Students, according to M. Alif Febriansyah (UMI) and Abd. Malik (Unismuh), must be smarter in receiving information scattered on social media that is not able to be fully controlled by any institution.

## Conclusion

Social media is an Internet-based online media that gives its users the freedom and flexibility to join a very broad social interaction network, to participate, share and create informative content, which allows indirect exchange or interaction between the users. This is because the Internet is easy to access for communication, not only individually but also by group and mass.

However, the function of communication and socialization media which is loaded with freedom of expression for its users, social media can logically also be a tool or means of a black campaign to spread hoax news. To discredit political opponents or raise their image in public, spreading hoax is a strategy that is considered to be very effective and massive.

The phenomenon of the spread of hoax news has been recorded and explained in the Quran in Q.S. An-Nur: 11-15. The phenomenon is identical to what is happening now, where there are parties who deliberately distort the facts and disseminate untrue news with the aim of discrediting the victim or the target party. From these verses it is very clear that God threatens people involved in delivering hoax news, both those who know that the news is untrue and those who do not.

Muslim students in Makassar recognized that social media, with the variety of applications provided, is like a knife that can be useful, yet also harmful. Social media can function to improve and create benefits, but it also has the potential to cause damage. Therefore, they expressed resistance to the behavior of spreading the hoax.

Regarding political communication, they disagree if politicians and political actors produce and spread hoax to win political contestations. Notably, the one related to the phenomenon of identity politics to achieve political power, where religion and the issue of *jihad* often politicized as a means of influencing public opinion.

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