

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE SPREAD OF POLARIZATION AND PEACE
COUNTER-NARRATIVE EFFORTS IN INDONESIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the dual role of social media in driving social polarization and peaceful counter-narrative efforts in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach and literature study of secondary data, this research examines the mechanisms of social media as an accelerator of polarization and evaluates the effectiveness of counter-narrative strategies. The results indicate that polarization is accelerated by the spread of hoaxes, algorithmically reinforced echo chambers, and the exploitation of identity politics, all of which threaten national integration. On the other hand, social media also proves to be an effective tool for peaceful counter-narratives, as demonstrated by case studies of the Peace Ambassador Communities in East Kalimantan and West Java. The success of their strategies lies in contextualizing narratives of nationalism, religious moderation, and humanity. The study concludes that the effectiveness of counter-narratives is highly dependent on cross-sector collaboration and the improvement of standardized digital literacy to build societal digital resilience.

Keywords: Social media; polarization; peaceful counter-narratives; digital literacy; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Social media has rapidly expanded among Indonesian society. Its development has brought significant social changes since the 2000s until today (Nitami, 2023). Social media has succeeded in erasing the boundaries of space and time in social interaction, leading to a shift in social behavior patterns in terms of culture, ethics, and norms (Nitami, 2023; Cahyono, 2016). Indonesia, with its diversity of ethnicities, races, and religions, demonstrates that almost all groups and age ranges use social media as a means of accessing and disseminating information (Luthfiyah & Maknun, 2024; Cahyono, 2016). Social media offers positive impacts, such as expanding friendships, providing opportunities for self-expression, and accelerating the dissemination of information (Luthfiyah & Maknun, 2024).

On the other hand, social media also exerts significant negative impacts on Indonesian society. The growth of social media has contributed to cultural, ethical, and normative shifts (Cahyono, 2016). It has the potential to undermine national awareness and weaken national resilience through the dissemination of negative content (Prasetyo, 2024). Negative consequences include the emergence of social groups under the banner of religion or ethnicity that deviate from societal norms (Cahyono, 2016), as well as increasing antisocial behavior among youth who are overly attached to social media (Luthfiyah & Maknun, 2024). For children specifically, social media triggers various social problems such as cyberbullying, pornography, poor communication patterns, hate speech, and emotional development disorders (Cahyono, 2018). Addiction and dependency on social media among Indonesian children have become a concerning phenomenon (Cahyono, 2018).

Social media plays a significant role in polarization in Indonesia, particularly through the spread of hoaxes and misinformation across platforms such as Instagram and Twitter/X (Sitorus & Tanoyo, 2024). This is exacerbated by the low level of digital literacy among Indonesian users. Research indicates that Indonesia's national digital literacy index remains very low, especially in information processing, data literacy, and critical thinking skills (Amaly & Armiah, 2021). With around 175 million internet users representing 65.3 percent of the population, social media has been exploited to spread hoaxes, hate speech, and divisive content across groups (Yani, 2020). Facebook, for example, has become a hub for hoax dissemination and data theft, where users' heavy reliance on the platform and low verification awareness facilitate the spread of fake news and clickbait links (Vebryto & Irwansyah, 2020). In the context of social movements, networks on platform X demonstrate high modularity, where communities tend to interact within their own groups, reinforced by algorithms that prioritize ideological similarities (Insanukamil et al., 2025). Polarization is not limited to political issues but also appears in non-political discussions, such as films (Riski & Nitasari, 2022).

Political polarization in Indonesia refers to the division of society into groups with significantly different views, ideologies, or interests (Marlef et al., 2024). Polarization often emerges during political contests, extending from elite levels to grassroots constituents (Zulkarnain et al., 2023). In the digital era, polarization is further amplified through social media, where social movement networks display high modularity with communities interacting mainly within their own groups (Insanukamil et al., 2025). Social media algorithms that prioritize interactions based on ideological similarities also strengthen this polarization (Insanukamil et al., 2025). Nevertheless, polarization is considered an inseparable part of the democratization process, reflecting the heterogeneity of political choices in democratic consolidation (Zulkarnain et al., 2023).

Effective prevention requires comprehensive digital literacy education, early detection systems, and cross-sectoral collaborative efforts. Increasing digital literacy and implementing strict regulations are essential to minimize the negative impacts of polarization. Research highlights that improving digital literacy is crucial to mitigating the adverse effects of polarization and misinformation in Indonesia. However, studies also show that the concept of digital literacy and its measurement methods remain inconsistent across research, necessitating a more standardized approach (Limilia & Aristi, 2019).

In response to these challenges, various peace counter-narrative efforts have emerged from different societal actors, including civil society organizations, educational institutions, religious communities, and initiatives from social media platforms themselves. Peace counter-narratives are proactive strategies aimed at countering hate and polarized narratives by disseminating messages of tolerance, reconciliation, and verified facts. These initiatives aim to break the cycle of negative content dissemination, build digital resilience, and foster inclusive and healthy dialogue spaces.

This study examines various aspects of peace counter-narratives and dialogue initiatives in Indonesia. Abdullah & Alfatra (2019) analyzed how Duta Damai East Kalimantan implemented Islamic moderation principles to counter negative social media content through four strategies: aligning Pancasila with religious teachings, fact-checking hoaxes, promoting multicultural education, and actualizing contemporary concepts of jihad. Similarly, Rustandi & Muchtar (2020) explored counter-terrorism and anti-radicalism narratives on the Instagram account @dutadamaijabar, identifying three core frameworks: nationalism-oriented narratives, peace narratives based on religious moderation, and humanitarian narratives promoting tolerance, implemented through both online and offline approaches. Sihaloho (2023) examined the peace dialogue narratives between Papua and Jakarta within the framework of national resilience, finding that most dialogue initiatives remained rhetorical without clear implementation concepts. Conversely, Almujaeddi et al. (2023) investigated judicial perspectives on out-of-court peace efforts during legal processes, concluding that peace agreements made before court clerks cannot legally annul court decisions, which can only be overturned by judicial rulings.

Research on counter-narratives and polarization reduction in Indonesia reveals several key challenges and solutions. Identity politics during elections has fueled fragmentation and polarization, necessitating reconciliation efforts to prevent social division (Kiftiyah, 2019). Political campaigns face challenges such as polarized narratives, misinformation, hate speech, and the exploitation of identity politics, which are particularly reinforced through digital media and social platforms (Handoko et al., 2023). Political polarization poses a significant threat to national integration, with technology, culture, and social movements identified as its primary drivers, in line with Arnold Rose's theory (Nashrullah, 2023). Counter-narrative strategies have shown promising results in addressing these issues. For example, the Duta Damai community in East Kalimantan effectively applied Islamic moderation principles through four approaches: aligning Pancasila ideology with religious teachings, hoax fact-checking and education, multicultural education campaigns promoting respect for differences, and actualizing contemporary jihad concepts (Abdullah & Alfatra, 2019). Solutions emphasize strengthening public communication based on ethics and national values, enhancing digital literacy, promoting constructive dialogue, and ensuring active roles for government, society, and the media (Handoko et al., 2023; Nashrullah, 2023).

Based on this background, this article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of two critical aspects: first, the mechanisms and impacts of social media in accelerating polarization in Indonesia; and second, the effectiveness of various peace counter-narrative initiatives in countering polarization. By examining both aspects, this study seeks to contribute insights and strategic recommendations for stakeholders in designing more effective interventions to promote peace and social harmony in Indonesia's digital space.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to conduct an in-depth analysis of the influence of social media on polarization and the effectiveness of peace counter-narrative efforts in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture the complexity and nuances of social phenomena that cannot be measured quantitatively.

The data sources in this research are secondary data. Data were collected from various reports, documents, and relevant publications, including reports from government institutions such as the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo), civil society organizations such as the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (MAFINDO), as well as relevant news articles and scholarly journals.

The data analysis technique applied is content analysis, which is used to identify dominant patterns, themes, and narratives emerging from the data, both those that reinforce polarization and those that promote messages of peace.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the data analysis. The discussion is divided into two main sub-sections: the analysis of social media as an accelerator of polarization and the evaluation of peace counter-narrative efforts.

Social Media as an Accelerator of Polarization

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, have become primary channels for the dissemination of hoaxes and data theft (Yani, 2020). The low level of digital literacy among Indonesian users

particularly in information processing, data literacy, and critical thinking facilitates the rapid spread of fake news. Networks on platforms such as X (Twitter) display high modularity, where communities tend to interact primarily within their own groups, further reinforced by algorithms that prioritize ideological similarities (Insanukamil et al., 2025). This phenomenon has resulted in polarization not only in political issues but also in non-political discussions such as films (Riski & Nitasari, 2022).

The spread of negative content through social media has the potential to disrupt national identity awareness and weaken national resilience (Prasetyo, 2024). Political polarization poses a significant threat to national integration, with technology, culture, and social movements identified as its primary drivers (Nasrullah, 2023). Based on the conducted content analysis, social media has been shown to accelerate the process of polarization. There are three main mechanisms of polarization: (1) massive dissemination of misinformation, (2) the creation of echo chambers and filter bubbles by algorithms, and (3) the exploitation of identity politics.

Case studies of the 2019 and 2024 elections provide concrete examples. Handoko et al. (2023) revealed how political campaigns on social media were dominated by identity politics and highly polarized narratives, creating opposing “camps.” This was further exacerbated by low digital literacy. Amaly & Armiah (2021) emphasized that the public’s ability to process information and think critically remains very low, making them vulnerable to hoaxes and hate speech that deepen polarization gaps. Polarization is not limited to the political sphere. Riski & Nitasari (2022), in their case study, demonstrated how discussions about films on Twitter could also become sharply polarized, proving that algorithmic echo chambers have penetrated nearly all aspects of digital discourse.

The analysis of the mechanisms and impacts of social media on polarization is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Mechanisms and Impacts of Social Media on Polarization

Mechanism	Description	Case Study Examples and Impacts
Dissemination of Misinformation	The spread of hoaxes, fake news, and misleading content	Facebook has become a platform for data theft and the dissemination of hoaxes (Vebryto & Irwansyah, 2020). This influences public opinion and undermines trust.
Algorithmic Echo Chambers	Algorithms display content aligned with users’ ideologies	Social movement networks on Twitter (X) show high modularity, with groups interacting mainly within themselves (Sitorus & Tanoyo, 2024). This reinforces group beliefs and hinders inter-group dialogue.
Exploitation of Identity Politics	The use of ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup (SARA) issues to build support and attack opponents	The 2019 presidential election campaigns on social media were filled with divisive identity-based narratives (Handoko et al., 2023). This created social fragmentation along identity lines.

Evaluation of Peace Counter-Narrative Efforts

Peace counter-narrative initiatives involve multiple stakeholders, ranging from the government to civil society organizations. The *Duta Damai* community in East Kalimantan has successfully applied the principles of Islamic moderation to counter negative content. Their strategies include aligning Pancasila with religious teachings, fact-checking hoaxes, promoting multicultural education, and actualizing the concept of contemporary jihad (Abdullah & Alfatra, 2019).

Organizations such as *Duta Damai* utilize digital platforms, including Instagram, to disseminate peace narratives. For instance, they implement three core narrative frameworks: nationalism, religious moderation, and humanitarianism (Rustandi & Muchtar, 2020). Research has shown that improving digital literacy is crucial to minimizing the negative impacts of polarization and misinformation. Government programs such as *Indonesia Makin Cakap Digital* demonstrate tangible efforts to address these challenges (Diantini & Purwanti, 2025). However, methods of measuring digital literacy remain inconsistent, necessitating a more standardized approach (Limilia & Aristi, 2019).

Identity politics during elections has contributed to societal fragmentation and polarization, which in turn requires reconciliation efforts (Kiftiyah, 2019). Solutions to this issue emphasize strengthening public communication based on ethics, enhancing digital literacy, promoting constructive dialogue, and ensuring the active roles of government, society, and the media (Handoko

et al., 2023). In response, various peace counter-narrative initiatives have emerged. Case study analyses of *Duta Damai* communities provide valuable insights into effective strategies.

Case Study 1: Duta Damai West Java (@dutadamaijabar)

Rustandi and Muchtar (2020) conducted an in-depth analysis of how this Instagram account builds counter-narratives. Instead of merely debunking hoaxes, they reframed conversations through three narratives: nationalism, religious moderation, and humanitarianism. This approach proved highly effective because it was proactive and fostered an inclusive identity, rather than being merely reactive.

Case Study 2: Duta Damai East Kalimantan

Abdullah and Alfatra (2019) identified similar strategies, though with contextual adaptation. This community successfully aligned Pancasila values with Islamic teachings, conducted fact-checking, and actualized the concept of jihad in combating ignorance and hoaxes. The effectiveness of both case studies lies in their use of language and religious symbols familiar to their target audiences, making peace messages more easily accepted.

However, Sihaloho (2023) criticized that many dialogue initiatives, such as peace efforts in Papua, often remain rhetorical without clear implementation. This indicates that counter-narratives in the digital sphere must be supported by tangible offline actions to achieve genuine effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from secondary data, it can be concluded that social media plays a significant dual role in Indonesia's social landscape. On the one hand, digital platforms serve as a major accelerator in the spread of polarization, reinforced by algorithms, hoaxes, and disinformation. The impact of this polarization extends from political to non-political issues, threatening social resilience and national integration. On the other hand, social media also functions as an effective tool for building peace counter-narratives. Efforts carried out by the government, civil society organizations, and communities such as those initiated by *Duta Damai* demonstrate that narratives of tolerance, religious moderation, and fact-based information can be used to counter divisive content. The effectiveness of these efforts largely depends on cross-sector collaboration and the ability to reach a wide audience. The government and related institutions should continue and intensify digital literacy programs with more standardized methods, particularly for younger generations who are vulnerable to negative content. Furthermore, stronger collaboration is needed among the government, civil society, academia, and social media platforms to establish early detection and rapid response mechanisms against content with the potential to trigger conflict. Finally, counter-narratives should not only confront hate speech but also focus on building inclusive narratives and promoting constructive dialogue in the digital space.

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