

From persuasion to panic: algorithmic affordances and the affective turn of electoral disinformation on social media in Indonesia

Da persuasão ao pânico: affordances algorítmicas e a virada afetiva da desinformação eleitoral nas redes sociais na Indonésia

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ABSTRACT: Electoral disinformation in Indonesia has often been understood as persuasive communication aimed at shaping political beliefs. This article shows that the 2024 election cycle marks a shift toward panic-oriented disinformation that frames politics as an unfolding crisis rather than an object of deliberation. Using a comparative qualitative analysis of debunked election-related disinformation from the 2019 and 2024 elections, the study examines changes in platforms, content formats, and circulation patterns. The findings show that while disinformation in 2019 relied on explicit claims and ideological messaging, disinformation in 2024 predominantly circulates as video-based content optimized for algorithmic visibility on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, functioning as atmospheric communication that shapes collective moods and perceptions of instability.

Keywords: *affective communication; algorithmic affordances; electoral disinformation; indonesia; social media platforms.*

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RESUMO: A desinformação eleitoral na Indonésia tem sido frequentemente compreendida como comunicação persuasiva voltada à formação de crenças políticas. Este artigo mostra que o ciclo eleitoral de 2024 marca uma mudança em direção a uma desinformação orientada pelo pânico, que enquadra a política como crise em curso, e não como objeto de deliberação. Com base em uma análise qualitativa comparativa de conteúdos de desinformação eleitoral desmentidos nos pleitos de 2019 e 2024, o estudo examina mudanças nas plataformas, nos formatos de conteúdo e nos padrões de circulação. Os resultados demonstram que, em 2024, a desinformação circula predominantemente como conteúdo em vídeo otimizado para visibilidade algorítmica, funcionando como comunicação atmosférica que molda humores coletivos e percepções de instabilidade.

Palavras-chave: *comunicação afetiva; afordâncias algorítmicas; desinformação eleitoral; indonésia; plataformas de mídia social.*

Introduction

Electoral disinformation is often understood as a problem of persuasion. False or misleading messages are assumed to shape beliefs, influence attitudes, and redirect political preferences, a framing that has dominated scholarship on misinformation, particularly in polarized electoral contexts (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017; BENNETT; LIVINGSTON, 2018). This understanding, however, leaves open the question of what happens when disinformation no longer seeks to convince, but instead overwhelms. In Indonesia's 2019 election, disinformation largely circulated as message-based content embedded in partisan narratives, religious symbolism, and identity politics, aiming to align audiences with or against specific political actors (FOSSATI, 2019; ONG; TAPSELL, 2022).

The 2024 electoral cycle, however, reveals a markedly different communicative environment. A significant portion of election-related disinformation circulating on Indonesian social media does not primarily attempt to persuade audiences through explicit claims. Instead, much of this content foregrounds situations, such as protests, clashes, alleged deaths, or institutional threats, that do not invite interpretation so much as immediate emotional recognition. Rather than inviting deliberation, such content frames politics as an unfolding crisis, producing urgency, instability, and a sense of loss of control.

This shift coincides with broader transformations in social media architecture. Whereas earlier platforms such as Facebook and Twitter relied heavily on social graphs and share-based visibility, contemporary platforms like TikTok and YouTube are organized around algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritize engagement metrics such as watch time and affective response (CINELLI *et al.*, 2020; GAO; LIU; GAO, 2023). Research on short-form video environments shows that these systems encourage immersive, low-friction consumption patterns that limit opportunities for reflection and verification (SONG *et al.*, 2021). As a result, political content is increasingly encountered incidentally rather than sought out, altering the conditions under which meaning and credibility are formed.

While these dynamics do not determine how audiences interpret political content, they shape the conditions under which certain forms of communication become more visible and affectively resonant than others. Platform affordances, relational properties between technological features and user practices, privilege content that is visually legible, emotionally charged, and quickly graspable (HUTCHBY, 2003; EVANS *et al.*, 2017). Visual and audiovisual materials are particularly powerful in this context, as audiences tend to perceive images and videos as more realistic and credible than text, even when they are misleading or taken out of context (HAMELEERS *et al.*, 2020; WEIKMANN; LECHELER, 2023). When circulated through algorithmic feeds, such visuals often function as situational cues rather than evidence, contributing to shared affective intensities or what Papacharissi (2015) describes as affective publics.

Indonesia provides an instructive case for examining this transformation. Fact-checking organizations document a sharp rise in election-related disinformation leading up to the 2024 electoral period, alongside increased circulation of video-based, platform-native content (HASANI *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, studies of political disinformation in Southeast Asia highlight how low-cost, opportunistic practices, rather than sophisticated technological manipulation, dominate misinformation ecosystems (ONG; TAPSELL, 2022). These dynamics suggest that contemporary disinformation operates less through sustained persuasion and more through the exploitation of platform affordances that reward immediacy, affect, and visibility.

Despite extensive research on persuasion, polarization, and belief formation, far less attention has been paid to how disinformation operates as an affective and experiential mode of communication within algorithmic media environments. Focusing on the Indonesian case, this article traces how shifts in platform affordances and algorithmic visibility reconfigure electoral disinformation, moving it away from persuasion-oriented messaging toward forms of panic-oriented, situational signaling that shape how political reality is felt rather than argued.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a comparative longitudinal qualitative design to examine how the communicative function of electoral disinformation in Indonesia shifted between the 2019 and 2024 election cycles. Rather than treating disinformation as a fixed or homogeneous category, the analysis traces how its form, modality, and circulation patterns evolved across changing platform environments over time. The qualitative orientation of this study allows close attention to shift in communicative function and modality rather than statistical generalization.

A longitudinal comparison is particularly suited to identifying structural transformations in mediated communication practices without presuming linear causality or direct behavioral effects (NEUMAN, 2014; KRIPPENDORFF, 2019). In line with affordance-oriented approaches in media and communication research, disinformation is approached here as a mediated practice shaped by platform architectures, content formats, and circulation logics (HUTCHBY, 2003; EVANS *et al.*, 2017; VAN DIJCK; POELL; DE WAAL, 2018).

Corpus construction and data sources

The dataset is derived from archival records of routine electoral disinformation mapping conducted by the Research and Development (Litbang) Committee of Mafindo, an International Fact-Checking Network — IFCN-signatory organization. Mafindo maintains a systematically archived and publicly accessible repository of debunked content (turnbackhoax.id), ensuring traceability and institutional accountability (GRAVES, 2016).

The corpus comprises two electoral periods. The first covers the 2019 election cycle from August 2018 to August 2019, and includes 128 election-related disinformation items. The second covers the 2024 election cycle from June 2022 to October 2024, and consists of 1,484 election-related items. The 2024 period begins in mid-2022 to capture early electoral discourse and pre-campaign mobilization in digital environments.

Only items explicitly categorized by Mafindo as election-related disinformation were included in the analysis. Entries unrelated to electoral governance, duplicate records, satirical content, or cases with incomplete documentation were excluded to ensure analytical consistency across periods.

The marked difference in dataset size reflects the consolidation of Indonesia's fact-checking ecosystem over time rather than a direct indicator of disinformation growth. While monitoring capacity in 2019 was still developing, the 2024 period benefited from coordinated national efforts such as the CekFakta coalition. To avoid misleading volume-based comparisons, the analysis emphasizes proportional distributions and compositional shifts rather than absolute frequencies (RITCHIE; LEWIS, 2014).

Coding procedure and reliability

For the 2019 dataset ($n = 128$), all items were coded directly by the authors to establish baseline consistency in variable construction and category definitions. For the larger 2024 dataset ($n = 1,484$), coding was conducted by a trained team within Mafindo's Research and Development Committee using a standardized coding instrument. The instrument underwent internal validation prior to implementation.

Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha across key analytical dimensions ($\alpha = 0.958\text{--}1.000$), indicating very high internal consistency among three coders. Reliability testing involved three coders and covered dimensions related to actor classification, content scope, electoral cycle, target entities, dissemination channels, tools used, narrative type, and disinformation modality.

The authors supervised the 2024 coding process to ensure alignment with the 2019 framework and maintain longitudinal comparability. Each item was assigned a dominant category within each analytical dimension. Comparative analysis was conducted by examining proportional distributions across variables and identifying cross-period shifts in dominant modality, platform use, and communicative orientation.

Analytical dimensions

Each disinformation item was coded across four primary structural variables designed to capture shifts in modality and platform logic. The first variable, tools, refers to the modal combinations used in constructing the disinformation, such as text combined with photographs or text combined with video. The second variable, media usage, identifies the dominant content format, distinguishing between text-only, static visual, and dynamic audiovisual materials. The third variable, channel, records the platform through which the disinformation was disseminated, including Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. Finally, evidentiality captures the form of “evidence” invoked to legitimize the false claim, such as visual footage, URL citation, or testimonial framing.

Together, these variables enable systematic comparison of how electoral disinformation is constructed, formatted, and circulated across different platform environments, in line with scholarship emphasizing the multimodal and visual dynamics of contemporary disinformation (HAMELEERS *et al.*, 2020; WEIKMANN; LECHER, 2023).

Interpretive layer: persuasion and panic-oriented communication

The distinction between persuasion-oriented and panic-oriented disinformation was not part of the primary coding instrument. Instead, it constitutes a second-order interpretive layer applied after structural coding.

Persuasion-oriented items were identified as those presenting explicit propositional claims, evaluative language, or ideological alignment cues inviting belief or rejection.

Panic-oriented items were identified as those foregrounding situational urgency, institutional breakdown, unrest, or perceived crisis, often relying on audiovisual immediacy rather than structured argumentation.

This functional distinction draws on scholarship on affective publics and atmospheric communication (PAPACHARISSI, 2015; PETERS, 2015; WAHL-JORGENSEN, 2019). Each item was assigned a dominant communicative orientation during comparative analysis. This

categorization was applied after structural coding to avoid circular classification and ensure analytical separation between format and communicative orientation.

Algorithmic interpretation

This study does not directly measure engagement metrics or proprietary algorithmic reach. Instead, interpretations regarding algorithmic visibility are theoretically informed by platform affordance theory and observed shifts in dominant dissemination channels from social-network platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to recommendation-driven video platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) (CINELLI *et al.*, 2020; SONG *et al.*, 2021; GAO; LIU; GAO, 2023).

Accordingly, claims about algorithmic alignment are conceptual rather than based on platform analytics data.

Ethical considerations and limitations

The study relies exclusively on publicly archived materials and does not involve interaction with human subjects. Visual materials are not reproduced in full to minimize potential harm. As a content-based analysis, the study does not assess audience reception or psychological impact. References to panic and affect therefore describe communicative orientation rather than verified emotional response (HUMPRECHT; ESSER; VAN AELST, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

From persuasive claims to situational signals

While the 2019 dataset predominantly reflects text-based and static formats typical of social-network platforms, the 2024 corpus is structurally characterized by dynamic audiovisual formats and recommendation-driven channels. This shift in dominant modality and platform ecology

reconfigures the communicative logic of electoral disinformation. It corresponds to a broader transformation in how disinformation addresses its audience and organizes political meaning.

When comparing the 2019 and 2024 datasets, a noticeable difference emerges in how disinformation positions its audience as media users. In the 2019 election cycle, disinformation largely appeared as claim-based messages. These items typically articulated explicit propositions, such as allegations of electoral fraud or normative religious injunctions, that invited audiences to evaluate, accept, or reject them. Even when misleading, such content remained communicatively legible as arguments. Users were positioned as political subjects expected to form opinions, take sides, and, at least implicitly, translate belief into electoral choice.

Examples from the 2019 dataset illustrate this logic clearly. Headlines such as “*Ditemukan Jutaan Surat Suara Tercoblos di Gudang*” (“Millions of pre-marked ballots discovered in a warehouse”) constructed disinformation as an evidentiary claim about procedural manipulation. Similarly, messages like “*Ulama Menyerukan Umat Islam Tidak Memilih Pemimpin Sekuler*” (“Religious leaders urge Muslims not to vote for secular leaders”) operated through ideological alignment, explicitly linking religious identity to voting behavior. These items relied on persuasion-oriented cues: declarative language, evaluative framing, and appeals to moral or political judgment. In communication terms, they functioned within a message-centered paradigm, where disinformation competes with other messages in the arena of belief and opinion formation.

This contrast becomes easier to see when examples from both periods are considered side by side, particularly in terms of format, platform, and communicative function.

As illustrated in Chart 1, disinformation in 2019 relies on propositional claims that invite belief or rejection, whereas 2024 items operate through situational cues that construct a sense of immediacy and instability.

By contrast, the 2024 dataset is dominated by what can be described as situational disinformation, although persuasion-oriented elements have not disappeared entirely. Instead of advancing claims that can be debated

Chart 1 – Representative Disinformation Examples and Communicative Function (2019 vs. 2024).

Election Cycle	Hoax Headline / Claim (Translated)	Platform	Format	Dominant Function
2019	“Ditemukan Jutaan Surat Suara Tercoblos di Gudang” (Millions of Ballots Already Marked for Candidate X Discovered in Warehouse)	Facebook	Text + Image	Persuasion (electoral fraud claim)
2019	“Ulama Menyerukan Umat Islam Tidak Memilih Pemimpin Sekuler” (Religious Leaders Call on Voters to Reject Secular Candidates)	Twitter	Text	Persuasion (ideological alignment)
2024	“Mahasiswa Unibba Tewas Dalam Aksi Demo Tolak RUU Pilkada” (Students Killed During Protest Against Election Law)	TikTok	Short Video	Panic (situational crisis)
2024	“Truk Militer Masuk ke Jakarta untuk Amankan KPU” (Military Trucks Enter Jakarta to Secure the Election Commission)	YouTube	Video	Panic (institutional threat)
2024	“Mahasiswa Berhasil Masuk ke Dalam Gedung DPR RI” (Protesters Break into Parliament Building)	Facebook / TikTok	Video + Caption	Panic (loss of control)

Source: Mafindo electoral disinformation archive (turnbackhoax.id).

or disproven, these items present fragments of allegedly unfolding reality: protests escalating, deaths occurring, security forces mobilizing, or institutional boundaries being breached. Headlines such as “*Mahasiswa Unibba Tewas Dalam Aksi Demo Tolak RUU Pilkada*” (“Unibba student reportedly killed during protest against the Regional Election Bill”) or “*Truk Militer Masuk ke Jakarta untuk Amankan KPU*” (“Military trucks enter Jakarta to secure the Election Commission”) do not primarily ask audiences to agree with a political position. They ask audiences to register a situation.

This distinction is not merely thematic but communicative. In the 2024 examples, the audience is not positioned as a deliberative subject weighing competing claims, but as a witness to crisis. The communicative force of these items lies in their capacity to signal urgency, instability, and loss of control. Rather than offering a falsifiable proposition, such as “this candidate cheated”, situational disinformation works through what could be called indexical cues, signs that point to the immediacy of an event (“this is happening now”). As a result, the dominant question often shifts from “Is this true?” to a more immediate “What is going on here?”

This transformation is especially visible in the formats and platforms through which 2024 disinformation circulates. Short videos on TikTok or longer clips on YouTube often present visual scenes, crowds, police lines, smoke, sirens, with minimal explanatory text. Captions frequently lack contextual detail, temporal markers, or explicit political interpretation. Yet this absence of explanation does not weaken their communicative impact. On the contrary, it allows viewers to fill in meaning affectively, guided by visual intensity rather than narrative coherence. In this sense, situational disinformation can be understood as a form of experiential media, inviting users to feel the political moment rather than reason about it.

From the perspective of media and communication theory, this pattern aligns with scholarship on affective communication, where media content mobilizes emotions as a mode of public connection (PAPACHARISSI, 2015). Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) similarly argues that contemporary political communication increasingly operates through affective registers, fear, anger, anxiety, rather than through rational persuasion alone. The 2024 disinformation items exemplify this shift: their power lies not in ideological clarity, but in their capacity to produce shared emotional intensity around perceived crisis.

This shift does not imply the disappearance of persuasion, but rather a reordering of communicative priorities within contemporary disinformation practices. While persuasion-oriented disinformation in 2019 operated through sustained ideological narratives, situational disinformation in 2024 prioritizes immediacy and disruption, often priming audiences to experience politics as unstable and unpredictable.

Algorithmic affordances and the acceleration of urgency

The prevalence of panic-oriented disinformation in the 2024 dataset is closely tied to the platform affordances that shape visibility and attention on contemporary social media. Unlike Facebook and Twitter in 2019, where content circulation largely depended on social sharing within follower networks, platforms such as TikTok and YouTube rely on algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritize engagement metrics, including watch time, completion rates, and emotional resonance (CINELLI *et al.*, 2020; GAO; LIU; GAO, 2023). In these environments, political content is not primarily surfaced because it is endorsed by trusted contacts, but because it performs well within the platform's attention economy.

Situational disinformation aligns particularly well with these affordances. Short video clips depicting unrest, confrontation, or institutional tension are immediately legible without requiring contextual explanation. Viewers do not need prior knowledge, ideological commitment, or even explicit interest in politics to grasp their significance. A crowd running, police in formation, or military vehicles on urban streets already communicates urgency at a visceral level. This immediacy lowers the threshold for engagement and makes such content especially compatible with rapid, algorithmically driven consumption.

At the same time, these videos are emotionally arousing, often eliciting fear, anxiety, or alarm rather than reflective judgment. Research on short-form video platforms shows that immersive features, autoplay, full-screen display, and infinite scrolling encourage prolonged engagement while discouraging pauses for verification or contextualization (SONG *et al.*, 2021). Park and Jung (2024) similarly argue that algorithmic short-video environments intensify affective processing by privileging speed and continuity over interpretive depth. Under these conditions, panic-oriented disinformation gains algorithmic advantage less because it is persuasive or ideologically compelling, and more because it sustains attention.

Crucially, the effectiveness of panic-oriented disinformation does not depend on platform-native political identities. Unlike persuasion-oriented hoaxes that rely on ideological alignment or group identification,

situational disinformation often circulates without explicit partisan cues. In the 2024 dataset, many items make no reference to candidates, parties, or ideological positions. Instead, they frame politics as a shared condition of instability, allowing content to travel across heterogeneous audiences. This pattern suggests that panic operates as a transversal communicative mode, one that cuts across political divides rather than reinforcing them.

From an affordance perspective, this transversal quality matters because it aligns closely with how algorithmic systems are designed to distribute attention. Algorithmic systems are designed to maximize engagement across diverse user segments, not to sustain ideological coherence. Content that provokes strong but broadly relatable emotions, fear, shock, concern, fits this logic more effectively than content that requires ideological interpretation. As a result, panic-oriented disinformation becomes highly scalable, even in the absence of coordinated networks or explicit political messaging.

This dynamic also helps explain why much of the 2024 disinformation relies on cheapfakes, miscontextualized or selectively edited footage, rather than technically sophisticated manipulation. The algorithmic advantage lies not in deception at the level of fabrication, but in alignment with platform rhythms. Videos that compress political meaning into moments of perceived emergency are well suited to feeds that reward immediacy, repetition, and affective intensity.

These dynamics reshape the communicative incentives of political falsehoods. In algorithmic, video-first environments, disinformation no longer needs to persuade in order to spread. It only needs to *feel urgent*. Panic, in this sense, is not merely an emotional outcome, but emerges as a platform-compatible mode of political communication.

Visuals as atmospheric cues rather than evidence

A further empirical pattern emerging from the 2024 dataset concerns the communicative role of visuals. In many cases, videos do not function as evidence that substantiates a specific political claim. Instead, they operate as atmospheric cues, sensory signals that frame how a political

situation is experienced. Clips showing crowds running, smoke rising, sirens sounding, or uniformed personnel standing in formation are often accompanied by minimal captions such as “This is happening now” or “Jakarta today.” These captions provide little contextual information, yet they are sufficient to anchor the visuals to a perceived moment of crisis.

This communicative mode contrasts with persuasion-oriented disinformation, where visuals are typically mobilized to support an argument or substantiate an allegation. In the 2024 cases, the visual itself carries the communicative weight. The absence of detailed explanation does not weaken the message; rather, it enhances the viewer’s sense of immediacy. Politics is not presented as a matter to be interpreted or evaluated, but as a situation to be witnessed. In this sense, the audience is positioned less as a rational evaluator of information and more as a spectator of unfolding events.

This pattern resonates with what scholars describe as the realism heuristic, whereby audiences tend to treat audiovisual materials as direct traces of reality rather than as mediated representations (HAMELEERS *et al.*, 2020; WEIKMANN; LECHER, 2023). When a video depicts recognisable symbols of disorder, crowds, smoke, police lines, it activates a common-sense assumption that “something real must be happening.” This assumption holds even when temporal or spatial context is missing, or when the footage has been miscaptioned or repurposed from unrelated events. In algorithmic feeds, where content is encountered rapidly and often without surrounding context, the realism heuristic becomes especially powerful.

Crucially, the effectiveness of these visuals does not depend on technological sophistication. Most of the disinformation items in the 2024 dataset rely on cheapfakes: recontextualized footage, selective cropping, or misleading captions attached to otherwise ordinary videos. There is little evidence of widespread use of synthetic or AI-generated media. As Hameleers (2024) argues, cheapfakes can be highly effective precisely because they exploit existing perceptual shortcuts and platform dynamics, rather than attempting to deceive through technical realism alone. Their power lies in context collapse, not fabrication.

In media and communication terms, these visuals contribute to what can be described as atmospheric communication. Rather than transmitting discrete pieces of information, they shape the *mood* in which political events are perceived. Repeated exposure to similar visual cues across platforms, crowds, clashes, institutional symbols under pressure produces an ambient sense of crisis, even if individual items are quickly debunked. The political effect, therefore, is cumulative rather than propositional.

This atmospheric quality is amplified by platform affordances. Algorithmic feeds privilege repetition and continuity, meaning that users may encounter multiple visually similar clips in quick succession. Each clip reinforces the sense that unrest is widespread and ongoing, regardless of the factual status of any single video. In this way, visuals function less as isolated messages and more as building blocks of a mediated environment in which politics is experienced as unstable and threatening.

Visual disinformation does not primarily operate by convincing viewers of specific claims. Instead, its communicative effect lies in shaping a background condition of anxiety in which political order appears fragile and unpredictable. In algorithmic, video-first environments, visuals function less as evidence meant to persuade than as atmospheric cues that modulate affect and structure how political reality is experienced. This helps explain why corrections or fact-checks, while effective at addressing individual falsehoods, often fail to counter the broader sense of crisis produced through sustained visual exposure, pointing to the need for analytical approaches that move beyond truth and falsity toward the interplay of media forms, platform affordances, and affective processing in shaping collective perceptions of political stability.

Temporal concentration and interruptive circulation

Another salient pattern in the 2024 dataset is the temporal concentration of panic-oriented disinformation around high-stakes political moments, particularly the pre-inauguration phase. Rather than circulating evenly across the electoral cycle, disinformation spikes during periods marked by heightened uncertainty and public anticipation. These moments,

when institutional transitions are imminent, but outcomes are not yet stabilized, provide fertile ground for situational narratives that frame politics as fragile and volatile.

This temporal clustering matters because it shows that disinformation operates not only through content and format, but also through timing. Panic-oriented disinformation does not seek long-term ideological influence; it capitalizes on windows of uncertainty, inserting itself into moments when audiences are already attuned to risk and disruption. In this sense, disinformation functions opportunistically, amplifying existing anxieties rather than constructing new ones from scratch.

Within algorithmic social media environments, this timing intersects with a form of interruptive circulation. Panic-oriented disinformation appears in users' feeds unexpectedly, interrupting routine scrolling with signals of crisis, crowds clashing, institutions under threat, violence allegedly unfolding. These interruptions are not neutral. They momentarily reframe the user's media environment, transforming an otherwise mundane feed into a space of perceived emergency. Unlike scheduled news consumption, algorithmic feeds collapse boundaries between entertainment, personal content, and political crisis, intensifying the affective impact of interruption.

Importantly, this interruptive quality does not rely on sustained exposure to a single narrative. Instead, panic-oriented disinformation operates through repeated short bursts. Each item may be fleeting, but their cumulative effect is significant. Encountering multiple fragments of unrest across a short period produces a sense that crisis is ongoing and unresolved, even when individual claims are quickly debunked. This helps explain why the political impact of disinformation often outlasts the lifespan of any single hoax, even when individual claims are quickly corrected.

From this perspective, panic-oriented disinformation operates less by convincing audiences of specific falsehoods than by modulating temporal experience. Political time becomes compressed and urgent, undermining pauses necessary for verification and reflection. When politics is encountered as a series of interruptions, trust in institutions erodes gradually through sustained exposure to uncertainty rather than ideological conversion.

Seen across the two election cycles, the comparison between the 2019 and 2024 datasets demonstrates a fundamental shift in the communicative logic of electoral disinformation in Indonesia. While earlier disinformation primarily operated through persuasion-oriented messaging embedded in ideological and identity-based narratives, recent disinformation increasingly functions as panic-oriented, situational signaling. This transformation reflects broader changes in social media environments, where algorithmic visibility and video-first affordances privilege affective immediacy, interruption, and experiential intensity over argumentative coherence.

Conceptually, these findings challenge message-centered models of disinformation that focus on belief formation and attitudinal change. Instead, they point to the need to analyze disinformation as part of a platformized affective environment in which political communication operates by shaping atmospheres, moods, and temporal experience. In such environments, the political significance of disinformation lies less in convincing citizens of specific false claims than in destabilizing shared perceptions of reality and normalizing uncertainty as a condition of political life.

Conclusion

This article examined how electoral disinformation in Indonesia has transformed across two election cycles, shifting from persuasion-oriented messaging in 2019 to panic-oriented, situational communication in 2024. Rather than treating disinformation as a stable category of false content, the analysis approached it as a platform-mediated communicative practice shaped by changes in social media architectures, affordances, and temporal dynamics. The findings show that contemporary electoral disinformation increasingly operates by modulating affect and temporal experience, rather than by competing for belief or ideological alignment.

The comparison between the two datasets reveals a clear reconfiguration of communicative function. In 2019, disinformation largely relied on propositional claims embedded in ideological or identity-based narratives, positioning audiences as deliberative subjects invited to accept or

reject political arguments. By contrast, the 2024 dataset is dominated by situational content that foregrounds unrest, institutional instability, and perceived crisis. These items do not primarily seek to persuade audiences of a particular viewpoint; instead, they position users as witnesses to unfolding emergencies. This shift is evident not only in topic and format, but also in how audiences are addressed, from political subjects engaged in debate to spectators of instability.

This transformation is closely tied to the rise of algorithmic, video-first platforms. Recommendation-driven feeds privilege immediacy, emotional intensity, and continuity of engagement, creating conditions in which panic-oriented content gains visibility regardless of its factual accuracy or partisan clarity. In such environments, disinformation does not need to persuade in order to spread; it only needs to feel urgent. Panic thus emerges not merely as an emotional outcome, but as a platform-compatible mode of political communication.

The analysis of visual materials further underscores this point. In many 2024 cases, visuals function less as evidence supporting claims and more as atmospheric cues that shape how political reality is experienced. Cheapfakes, miscontextualized or selectively edited footage, prove effective not because of technical sophistication, but because they exploit perceptual shortcuts and context collapse within algorithmic feeds. Repeated exposure to similar visual cues produces an ambient sense of crisis that often persists even when individual items are debunked, helping to explain why corrective interventions struggle to counter the broader affective impact of disinformation.

Temporal dynamics play a crucial role in this process. Panic-oriented disinformation clusters around high-stakes political moments, particularly the pre-inauguration phase, when uncertainty is already elevated. Circulating as interruptive media within algorithmic feeds, such content inserts signals of crisis into everyday scrolling practices. Its political impact accumulates through repetition and timing rather than narrative endurance, compressing political time and limiting opportunities for verification and reflection.

Taken together, the findings challenge message-centered models of disinformation that focus primarily on belief formation and attitudinal change. Instead, they point to the need for a media and communication perspective that treats disinformation as part of a platformized affective environment, where political significance lies less in convincing citizens of false claims than in shaping collective moods, normalizing uncertainty, and destabilizing shared perceptions of reality.

This study contributes to disinformation research by proposing a functional distinction between persuasion-oriented and panic-oriented disinformation, foregrounding the role of platform affordances and temporal dynamics, and situating Indonesia as a critical Global South case within global platform politics. While the analysis relies on curated fact-checking datasets and does not address audience reception directly, future research could combine content analysis with audience studies or platform ethnography to examine how panic-oriented disinformation is interpreted and negotiated in everyday media use.

Ultimately, understanding contemporary electoral disinformation requires moving beyond questions of truth and falsity toward an examination of how political reality is mediated, felt, and temporally organized on algorithmic platforms. As these environments continue to shape political experience, disinformation research must attend not only to what people believe, but to how politics comes to feel unstable, urgent, and perpetually unfinished.

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