

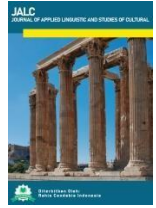


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LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN THE DISSEMINATION OF HOAXES ON TIKTOK: THE ROLE OF HASHTAGS IN SHAPING PUBLIC MISCONCEPTIONS

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A B S T R A C T

This study explores how hoaxes spread on TikTok by focusing on the use of language and hashtags as tools to influence public perception. Through the analysis of viral videos from 2025, the research uncovers how strategies like impersonating authority, emotional appeals, and simplified narratives are used to make false information feel convincing. Hashtags such as #fyp, #beritahoax, #deepfake, and #indonesiagelap play an important role in increasing visibility and shaping the tone of the content. These hoaxes often appear relatable, urgent, or credible—even when they are misleading. The findings show that TikTok's algorithm, combined with the strategic use of language, makes it easy for misinformation to spread and influence how people perceive certain issues. The study highlights how easily misinformation can circulate in emotionally driven digital spaces and why digital literacy is essential to help users recognize and respond to manipulative content.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, TikTok has transformed into one of the most widely used and influential social media platforms, especially among young people. With its short-form videos, personalized content recommendations, and creative tools, TikTok allows users to reach massive audiences in a matter of minutes. While this creates space for creativity and entertainment, it also opens the door for misinformation to spread quickly and quietly. Content that is emotional, dramatic, or controversial tends to perform better on the platform is not necessarily because it is accurate, but because it captures attention and drives engagement.

Unlike platforms that rely mostly on written text, TikTok presents information in a more immersive way by combining visuals, audio, on-screen text, and filters. This

multimodal format can be powerful, but it also makes it harder for users to distinguish between what's real and what's not. Hameleers and colleagues (2020) explain that visual misinformation often appears more trustworthy than text alone, especially when it's edited or framed in a convincing way. In TikTok's fast-paced environment, people may not take the time to verify what they're watching, which makes it easier for false narratives to be accepted and shared.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping how content is received. The way words are used, whether to evoke emotion, simplify complex issues, or mimic an authoritative voice can strongly influence how viewers interpret what they see. When paired with TikTok's algorithm, which tends to reward content that gets high engagement, these linguistic strategies become even more impactful. As Zappavigna (2011) notes, language in online spaces is more than just communication—it's a way of signaling meaning, emotion, and social alignment.

Previous research has further emphasized the impact of TikTok's design on misinformation dynamics. Zeng, Abidin, and Kaye (2021) found that TikTok intensifies echo chambers by continuously feeding users ideologically similar content, which limits critical exposure to diverse viewpoints. Bösch and Divon (2024) illustrated how features like deepfake voiceovers and sensational editing styles were used to spread geopolitical disinformation in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. In Indonesia, Alizen et al. (2024) observed that during Indonesia's 2024 general elections, TikTok played a crucial role in shaping public opinion through emotionally engaging content. They noted that the platform's algorithm often favored non-official, emotionally manipulative videos over verified information, which led to the rapid spread of political misinformation among youth audiences. These findings underscore the need for localized investigation into how TikTok's algorithm and linguistic design impact public understanding of truth.

This study focuses on how language contributes to the spread of hoaxes on TikTok, particularly through rhetorical and emotional strategies. By analyzing viral hoax videos from 2025, the research aims to uncover how misinformation is constructed, why it spreads so effectively, and how it shapes public perception. Drawing on multimodal discourse analysis and insights into algorithmic behavior, the study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how language, technology, and digital culture interact in today's information landscape. Most importantly, it highlights the need for greater media awareness and critical thinking—especially among users who engage with social media on a daily basis.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method, where the fundamental goal is to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social issues or phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Creswell further explains that qualitative research involves crucial steps such as data collection and analysis. Qualitative research focuses on understanding non-numerical phenomena. For instance, when examining why people behave in certain ways or why they hold particular beliefs, the study often delves into motivational research, a key aspect of qualitative

investigation. Qualitative research is especially significant in the behavioral sciences, as it helps uncover the motivations behind human behavior.

This study analyzed TikTok videos uploaded between January-April 2025. Videos were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria such as: (1) being flagged or fact-checked by official Indonesian fact-checking platforms (Kominfo, MAFINDO, TurnBackHoax, etc.); (2) achieving high user engagement (at least 5,000 likes and views); and (3) involving relevant socio-political or health-related issues. The researcher manually searched TikTok using trending hashtags such as #beritahoax, #deepfake, #mlm, and #tolakruutni. Each video was downloaded, then metadata such as upload date, caption, number of likes, comments, and hashtags were recorded for further analysis.

To analyze the content, each video was transcribed using an online transcription platform, allowing the researcher to convert spoken dialogue into written text for closer examination. The transcripts were then manually coded based on recurring patterns. The researcher applied multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to examine the interaction between textual elements (captions, hashtags, comments), audio elements (voiceover, music, tone), and visual cues (filters, effects, layout). Special attention was given to how language and visual presentation worked together to mislead audiences. Emotional appeal, impersonation, and sensationalism were common tactics identified in the data.

The collected data were then analyzed using multimodal discourse analysis techniques supported by theoretical frameworks. This study draws upon several theoretical frameworks: (1) Multimodal Discourse Analysis by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), which focuses on how meaning is constructed across different modes; (2) the theory of Computational Propaganda by Woolley & Howard (2018), which explains how digital algorithms and automation tools are exploited to manipulate public perception; and (3) the Information Disorder framework by Wardle & Derakhshan (2017), which categorizes misleading content into disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation. These frameworks helped contextualize the patterns found in TikTok hoaxes.

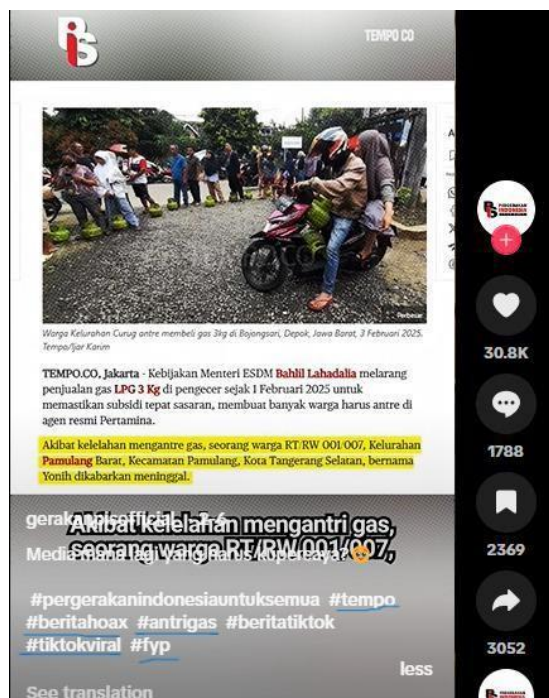
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the effort to investigate the linguistic strategies that contribute to the spread of hoaxes on social media, this research focuses on the TikTok platform, where hashtags serve as powerful tools to manipulate public perception. TikTok, as a video-based social media, allows information to spread rapidly, especially when combined with catchy or emotional hashtags that influence how users perceive and interact with content. This section explores how language and hashtags are used to construct and amplify misleading narratives. Rather than merely reporting facts, TikTok users often reframe events using persuasive language, emotional expressions, and popular hashtags to attract attention and provoke reactions. These practices enable hoaxes to circulate widely, often blurring the line between truth and fiction, and shaping how the public understands certain issues.

The research analyzes real-life Indonesian examples of viral hoaxes on TikTok, examining how specific linguistic strategies and hashtag combinations were used. The findings reveal patterns such as the use of institutional hashtags to simulate credibility, emotionally charged words to create urgency or outrage, and hashtag clustering to increase content

visibility on the platform. These strategies often lead to the rapid spread of misinformation and the formation of misconceptions among viewers. More explanation can be seen below.

1. Elderly Woman Dies After Queuing for 3 Kg LPG Gas (#tempo, #beritahoax, #antrigas, #tiktokviral, #fyp)



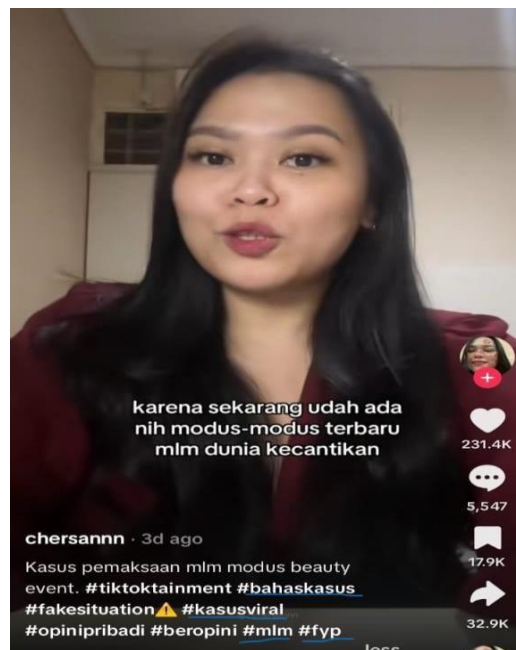
A 62-year-old woman named Yonih passed away after queuing for 3 kg LPG gas in Pamulang, South Tangerang. According to her family, she had a history of high blood pressure and was likely exhausted from her daily activities, including running a small food stall. Some social media posts claimed that she died solely because of the long gas queue, ignoring her preexisting health conditions. Hashtags like #beritahoax, #tempo, and #antrigas were used to spread the story quickly, even though the information wasn't verified. These hashtags can make content go viral but may also spread misinformation.

2. Fake Video of President Prabowo Offering Aid via WhatsApp (#liputan6, #newsstv, #fyp, #prabowo, #deepfake, #penipuan)



A manipulated video showed President Prabowo Subianto offering financial aid through a WhatsApp number. The original footage was from an event where he responded to a resignation, but it was altered using AI to add a fake voice and contact information. Hashtags like #newsstv, #prabowosubianto, and #deepfake were used to make the video seem credible and spread it widely. However, these hashtags were part of the deception. People who believed the video could suffer financial losses and contribute to damaging the reputation of President Prabowo Subianto.

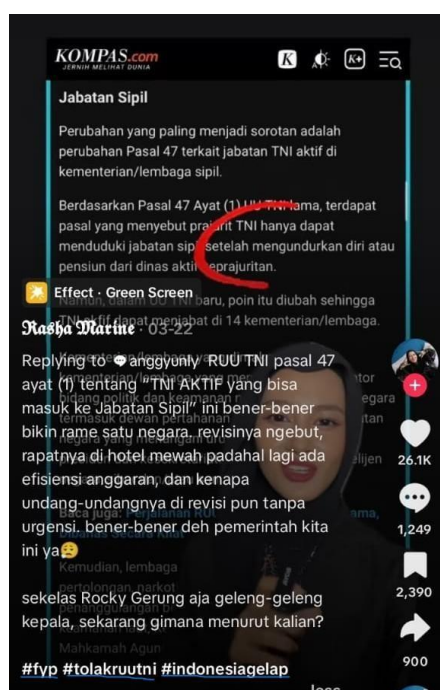
3. Woman Shares Experience About Alleged Scam Disguised as Beauty Class (#bahaskasus, #kasusviral, #mlm, #fyp)



A woman shared her concerns after reading and seeing testimonies from others about a beauty class event that was allegedly a front for a

multilevel marketing (MLM) scam and online loan fraud. Although she wasn't a direct victim, she wanted to warn others. The scammers used attractive offers like "business opportunities without capital" to lure victims, then pressured them into buying expensive products or taking out online loans. Hashtags like #mlm and #kasusviral helped spread awareness and reach more people about the potential scam, even though the woman wasn't directly involved. The video increased public awareness about scams disguised as training or seminars and highlighted the importance of verifying such events before participating. While no legal action was taken immediately, the viral video strengthened financial literacy movements and awareness of fraudulent schemes.

4. Revisions to the TNI Law and Misleading Information Spread (#fyp, #tolakruutni, #indonesiagelap)



In March 2025, the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) passed revisions to the TNI Law, specifically modifying Articles 7, 47, and 53. These changes sparked public debate and a wave of misinformation, especially on social media. Some content falsely claimed that the revisions would allow active TNI soldiers to immediately take up civilian jobs, suggesting a return to the military's "dual function" in government. However, this interpretation is incorrect and not supported by the revised legal text.

The revision to Article 7 added two new non-combat (OMSP) duties for the military, increasing the total to 16. The new roles include supporting cybersecurity efforts and protecting Indonesian citizens and national interests abroad. These additions aim to modernize the military's functions in response to today's digital and global challenges. In Article 47, the number of civilian institutions where active TNI personnel can be assigned increased from 10 to 14. New additions include the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), National

Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), the Attorney General's Office, and the Supreme Court. These assignments are limited to strategic and security-related institutions, not general public offices and TNI personnel must still follow internal regulations before taking these positions.

Meanwhile, Article 53 was revised to adjust retirement age based on military rank. Non-commissioned officers and enlisted soldiers now retire at 55. Officers up to colonel retire at 58; one-star generals at 60; two-star generals at 61; and three-star generals at 62. Four-star generals retire at 63, with a possible two-year extension if needed by the organization. These changes are meant to align the retirement age with the level of responsibility held at each rank. Despite these clarifications, misleading narratives about the revisions quickly spread on TikTok and other platforms. Hashtags like #tolakruutni and #indonesiagelap were used to suggest that democracy in Indonesia was under threat, even though the legal revisions do not allow unchecked military involvement in civilian governance.

In response, government officials, legal experts, and members of the DPR issued clarifications via social media, news outlets, and press briefings to explain the actual contents and intentions behind the revised law. This case highlights how partial information and emotive hashtags can distort legal facts and stir unnecessary public fear. It underscores the importance of consulting official sources and verifying information, especially when it concerns laws related to national security.

Based on the findings of this research, the spread of hoaxes on TikTok is strongly supported by a combination of linguistic strategies, visual presentation, and algorithmic tools like hashtags. A hoax, in this context, refers to content that contains false, manipulated, or misleading information—often presented in a way that appears believable or emotionally compelling. These hoaxes are not random; they are deliberately framed using persuasive language and multimedia elements to shape how people perceive certain issues or events. One of the most common hashtags found in hoax content is #fyp, short for "For You Page." Although this tag may seem harmless, it plays a significant role in helping videos reach a broader audience. It is often used alongside emotionally charged or controversial topics to boost visibility through TikTok's recommendation algorithm. While #fyp does not directly indicate that a video contains false information, it is frequently used as a tool to amplify the reach of hoaxes by increasing their chances of being seen and believed.

Each case analyzed in this study demonstrates how linguistic strategies are used to construct and deliver hoaxes. In all four cases, hashtags particularly #fyp are shown to function not just as technical tools for organizing content, but also as persuasive instruments to shape opinions and accelerate content spread. When hoaxes are paired with emotional language, trending hashtags, and dramatic storytelling, the result is content that feels more authentic and convincing, even when the information is false.

Hashtags help content reach more users through TikTok's

algorithm, regardless of the content's accuracy. They act as a catalyst, pushing videos onto users' screens and making stories appear more popular and trustworthy. This highlights how hashtags serve not only to categorize content but also to influence public opinion and emotional responses. When false information is packaged with emotional appeals and viral hashtags, it can significantly alter public perceptions, even of complex legal or political issues that require careful consideration. In this way, hashtags are not just technical tags, they are also powerful rhetorical tools that both reflect and reinforce public biases and fears.

These findings support earlier research by Miltsov (2022), who demonstrated that emotionally charged and visually persuasive content tends to outperform factual content in terms of user engagement on TikTok. Likewise, Laucuka (2018) emphasized that hashtags act not only as organizational tools but as rhetorical devices that trigger emotional and ideological alignment. In the Indonesian context, Dewani et al. (2024) found that TikTok serves as a space where digital language use reflects user identity and community trust, especially among youth. This helps explain why emotionally framed hoaxes using hashtags such as #tolakruutni and #beritahoax can rapidly gain traction and shape public narratives—even when the information lacks factual accuracy. Thus, this study reinforces the view that linguistic strategies and platform features must be analyzed together to fully understand how misinformation spreads and influences public perception in Indonesia's digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that the spread of hoaxes on TikTok is the result of deliberate linguistic strategies combined with the platform's algorithmic features. Users craft emotionally driven narratives using persuasive language, impersonation of authority, and simplified messages that feel urgent and relatable. Hashtags like #fyp, #beritahoax, and #deepfake are not just categorization tools, but part of a broader strategy to frame content, enhance credibility, and boost visibility. By using these tags, creators increase the chances of their content appearing on users' For You Page, making false information easier to find, watch, and believe. The use of emotionally loaded and politically suggestive hashtags, such as #indonesiagelap, also adds intensity to the message, prompting audiences to engage quickly and emotionally—often without verifying the facts.

From the four cases analyzed, it becomes evident that hoaxes on TikTok are not spread by accident, but through carefully crafted communication tailored to the platform's style and audience. The combination of short video formats, trending hashtags, and dramatic storytelling makes misinformation feel both familiar and convincing. This highlights the importance of digital awareness, especially for younger users who are often the main consumers of such content. Understanding how language and hashtags work to shape meaning and trigger emotional responses can help users pause, reflect, and question what they see—before sharing it with others. In a space where popularity can overshadow truth, this kind of awareness

becomes a powerful tool against the everyday influence of hoaxes.

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