CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The internet has now become a staple part of everyday life for a high number of Indonesians, particularly as a channel through which information is exchanged. The internet can be defined as a network of millions of computers worldwide connecting through agreed formats called Internet Protocols (IP) which allows users to transfer digital data from one computer to another (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). As a new media, the internet has the following characteristics (McQuail, 2010):

1) interactivity or high response by users towards the source

2) social presence or heightened sense of personal connection with others through the medium

3) media richness or increased traverse between frames of reference as well as cues which reduces uncertainty

4) autonomy or control over content by the user

5) playfulness or usage for amusement and recreation as opposed to being limited to effective instrumentality alone

6) privacy, particularly in terms of usage of the medium and the content in it

7) personalization or uniqueness of the content tailored to specific users.

Throughout the years, Indonesia has seen an increase in its number of internet users. According to Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (2017), the number of internet users in Indonesia have grown by 7.37% from the year 2016 to 2017 with the number of total Indonesian internet users in the latter year being 143.26 million out of the total Indonesian population of 262 million, putting the penetration rate at 54.68%. Further, internet users in Indonesia are not only large in number, but also typically spend more time consuming it compared to traditional forms of media such as television, radio, or print media. GlobalWebIndex (2017) has discovered that Indonesian internet users typically spend over 8 hours of their time consuming online media and only 5 hours consuming traditional media. This suggests that the users of the internet in the country are becoming increasingly reliant to the internet as the media through which they receive information from various sources, given the amount of time they spend on it.
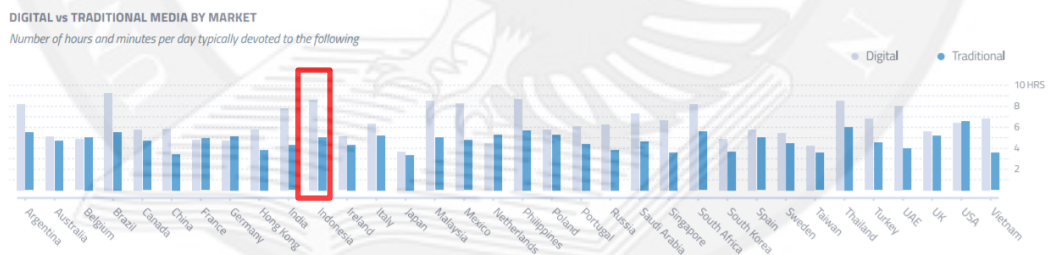

Figure 1.1 Chart of National Differences in Media Consumption. Data for Indonesia is highlighted in red. Taken from: GlobalWebIndex, 2017

The large amount of internet users in Indonesia is comprised of various age groups. Currently, users aged 20-35 make up 49.52% of Indonesia's internet user population, placing them as the dominant age group (APJII, 2017). This age group is more commonly referred to as the millennial generation or millennials (Nielsen,

2017). Millennials, particularly those in Indonesia have very specific characteristics which set them apart from other generations, which include constant craving of instantaneous outcomes in every aspect of life which makes them pursue speed over quality, dislike of learning something considered to be a waste of time, preference for options that the mass choose, imbalance between load of information received and the ability to judge them, and tendency to be multitasking savvies in using various technologies for their various purposes. (Sebastian, Amran, & Youthlab, 2016, pp. 18–30).

Apart from these characteristics, millennials also differ from the previous generation in terms of their media behavior. For one, they are the first generation which experiences growing up with high availability of information on any topic in various electronic media which leads them to rely on digital media, including social media such as mobile messaging applications as a channel through which they obtain information (Lloyd et al., 2013). According to Alvara Research Center (from Dewi, 2018), millennials in Indonesia also tend to easily share information with others through offline and online channels due to three philosophies they adopt in media usage:

1) "two faces of solidarity" – a belief that sharing of information about social justice issues online is enough of a contribution to the cause,

2) "sharing is better" – the feel-good factor of sharing knowledge and skills that leads millennials to share information online,

3) "followers is family" – a belief that millennials' social media followers are also their close friends and family.

As of 2017, millennial users are among the 89.35% of Indonesian internet users rank chatting with other people as the activity which they partake in the most online. (APJII, 2017)
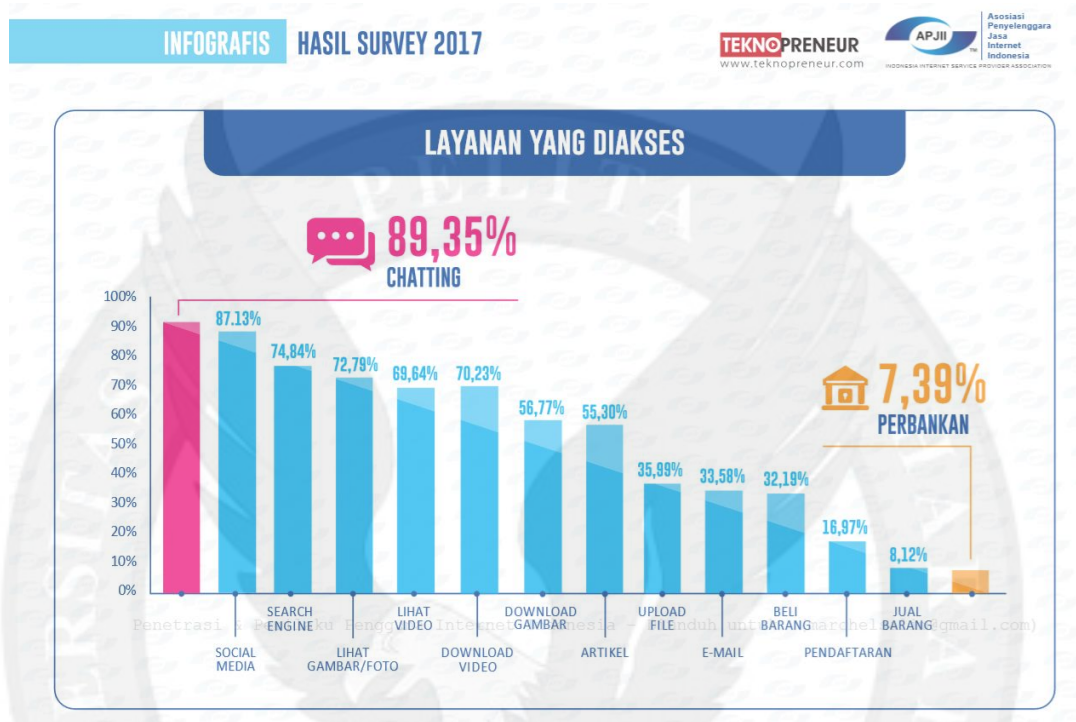

Figure 1.2 Chart of Services Accessed by Indonesia's Internet Users. Taken from APJII, 2017

Internet users, including millennials typically chat through social media, one of which are mobile messenger applications. Social media has been defined by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) as a type of internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 which allow creation and exchange of user generated content. Meanwhile, messenger applications are software programs based on mobile phones which allows its users to exchange information in the form of voice calls, video calls, text, files, images, audio, location data, and emojis through the internet (Wells & Borland, 2017). Wells and Borland (2017) also stated that users of messenger applications are not only able to exchange

4

information with another user, but also in small groups and through broadcast or bulk messaging to a huge number of people. In Indonesia, these applications have been seeing a rise in the number of local users over the years, with the tally of users in 2018 being forecasted to reach 81.7 million (eMarketer, 2016).

Mobile Phone Messaging App Users and Penetration in Indonesia, 2014-2019

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Mobile phone messaging app users (millions)	37.6	52.9	62.6	72.5	81.7	91.6
—% change	42.2%	40.7%	18.4%	15.8%	12.6%	12.1%
—% of mobile phone internet users	64.7%	74.0%	76.9%	80.1%	82.1%	84.4%
—% of mobile phone users	27.4%	35.4%	38.8%	41.8%	44.4%	47.3%
—% of population	14.8%	20.7%	24.2%	27.8%	31.1%	34.6%

Note: mobile phone users of any age who use an over-the-top (OTT) messaging app via mobile phone (browser or app) at least once per month
Source: eMarketer, Nov 2015

199635   www.eMarketer.com

Figure 1.3 Mobile Phone Messaging App Users and Penetration in Indonesia. Taken from eMarketer, 2016

Globally, there are various messenger applications which are available for usage. These applications include those with features that merely encompass the bare minimum of chat rooms and tools to make video or voice calls such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to applications which add features such as stickers, media sharing tools, and in-application games such as WeChat, Line, and KakaoTalk (IPG Media Lab, 2014). In Indonesia, users of messenger applications tend to be most active in WhatsApp (We Are Social, 2018). In WhatsApp, users can interact in individual chatrooms or in group chats which are especially popular in the country as 62% of WhatsApp users belong to more than one (Jakpat Mobile Survey, 2016). This activity is further evident in how an average user of WhatsApp has been found to send over 1.200 messages each month and receive over 2.200

messages in turn (Petronzio, 2014). Furthermore, WhatsApp is also the most actively used messenger application by millennial users in comparison to other applications available in Indonesia (Pratiwi, 2014)
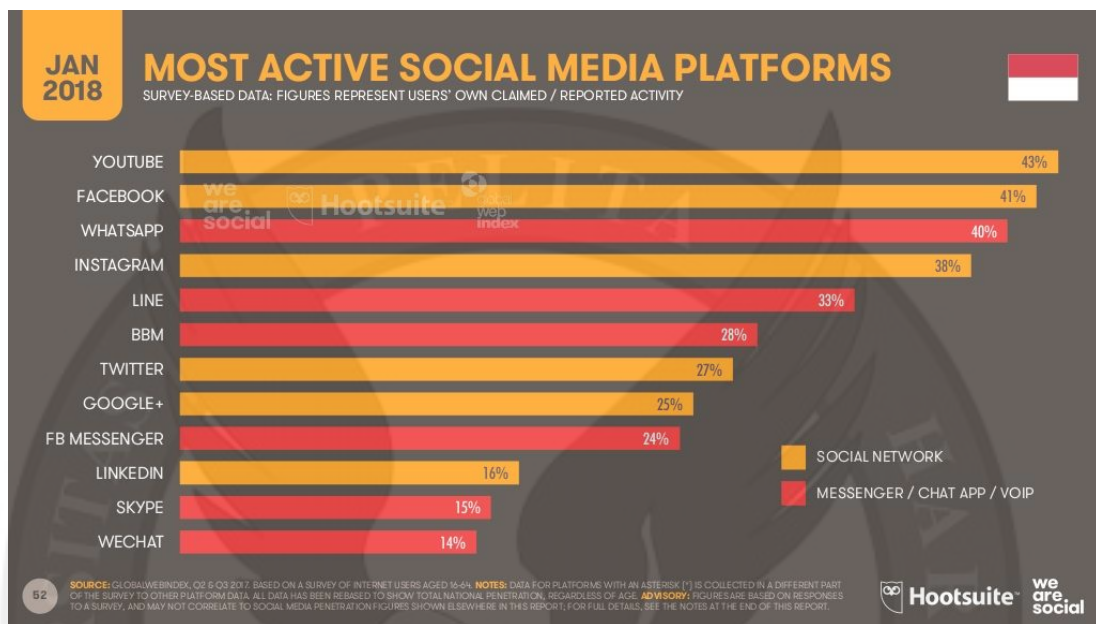

Figure 1.4 Most Active Social Media Platforms in Indonesia 2018. Taken from We Are Social, 2018

1.2. Problem Identification

The activity in communication generated by WhatsApp users coming from Indonesia carries with it several implications, one of which is the massive flow of information with various levels of credibility in every field. Credibility itself is defined by Hovland et al. (in Metzger & Flanagin, 2013) as the degree of belief which can be placed on a source, largely based on the information receiver's interpretation of source expertise and perception regarding level of information trustworthiness. Though traditionally, credibility is determined by evaluating the source of information, the message itself, or the merely the combination of both, the increase of information flow and access to it through online sources such as

6

messenger applications has made determining information credibility even more difficult due to several characteristics of online information, summarized as such (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013):

1) higher number of information sources available online,

2) lack of professional gatekeepers to filter information leading to a lack of accuracy in information,

3) possibility of source anonymity making it impossible for users to figure out the reputation of the information source,

4) lack of universal standards or government regulations towards online information,

5) convergence of channels made possible by technological developments resulting in more similarities between information with actual and dubious credibility,

6) lack of context to information due to the hyperlinked characteristic of online information,

7) complexity of the credibility judgment process itself in online situations due to the amount of credibility determination factors which need to be considered simultaneously.

Amid this increasing difficulty in determining the credibility of information online, there is actually an increase in trust which internet users have towards information they receive through messenger applications, particularly WhatsApp. Currently, there is a growth in the number of internet users who rely on WhatsApp, particularly private group chats in the messenger application as a source

of news and 15% of WhatsApp users even considering their chatting activities as a means of news collection (Levy, Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2017). This is mainly because users of the messenger application tend to view the presence of fake news in traditional mass media as a signal of unreliability of the conventional medium and are in need of an alternative medium through which they can share information with more comfort, privacy and assurance that they are communicating with people they know and will not misunderstand them (Waterson, 2018). Further, this increasing trust in information from WhatsApp may also be attributed to the tendency of interactions through computer-mediated communication, including through the messenger application, being hyperpersonal or more than intimate than face-to-face ones, partly due to the ability users have to selectively present themselves positively using the only message cues available on the application (E. Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015c).

As a result of these challenges in determining information credibility and the heightened trust towards messages on WhatsApp, false information is more prevalently exchanged through the application with increasing impacts in real life. There have been numerous cases worldwide of murders, political turmoil, and even disease outbreaks occurring as a result of massive trust in messages on WhatsApp which turned out to be false. In India, numerous people have been killed across the country after interacting with children due to a spread of false information regarding characteristics of kidnappers and organ traffickers which triggered an angry mob to react based on it with cases including a murder of a 55-year-old woman who gave candy to children and a lynching attack towards five men who appeared to be

8

talking to a six-year-old (Meixler, 2018). In Brazil, only 5.5 million of its 207.7 million population have received vaccination for yellow fever amid the disease's outbreak due to the massive spread of videos on WhatsApp claiming to have proof that yellow fever vaccine is actually a deadly way the government is controlling the population (Molteni, 2018). In Indonesia, though effects of misinformation spread on WhatsApp has not been as massive or fatal, it has had effects of fear-mongering among the population. A most recent example of this at the time of writing is the spread of messages on WhatsApp after the Lombok earthquakes in August 17, 2018 which claimed that a 7.0-magnitude will happen within 10 days based on scientific evidence (BeritaSatu, 2018).

This prevalence of false information on WhatsApp is further exacerbated by the messenger application's own features which makes transmitting false information such an effortless action. An example of this can be found in the case of WhatsApp groups spreading hate in Kenya ahead of its 2017 elections, in which features allowing anonymity of users made it more difficult for the government to the trace the original senders of hateful messages (Namlola, 2017). One of these features is the end-to-end encryption which protects the privacy of its users to the point that not even the company itself can read messages exchanged on the application or store records of them on their database (WhatsApp Inc., 2018e). This carries the implication that no entity whatsoever – including governments of the world – can get their hands on data of WhatsApp user activity or trace the first source or sender of a message shared on the messenger, which thus makes WhatsApp a haven to share false information in, as the sender can evade legal

9

repercussions of their actions (A. Griffin, 2016). Another feature on WhatsApp linked to ease in misinformation spread is the ability to forward messages from another chat to other individual and group chats (WhatsApp Inc., 2018b). This feature is one which is most commonly used in WhatsApp group interactions in Indonesia, with 57.29% of Indonesian WhatsApp users utilizing it to forward any message from office memos to news and information claimed to be dangerous (Jakpat Mobile Survey, 2016).
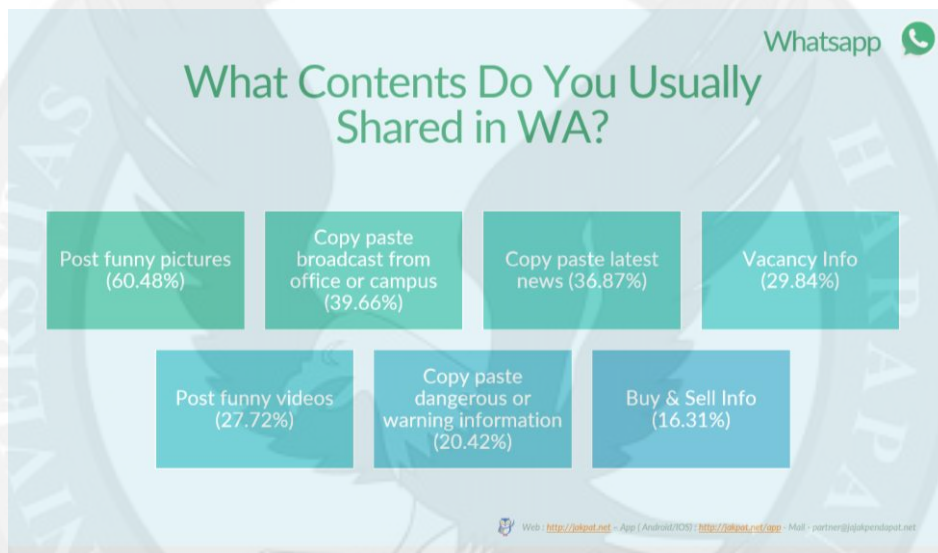

Figure 1.5 Contents Typically Shared on WhatsApp. Taken from Jakpat Mobile Survey, 2016

With the ease of false information spread on WhatsApp aggravated by the messenger application's features, WhatsApp users are thus, even more vulnerable to false information regarding various topics, particularly health. According to Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (2017), 51.06% of Indonesians use the internet to search for information regarding health – leading them to be more susceptible to false information on the matter. Users also tend to believe in false information about health most easily due to how matters related to health are

considered personal to users and the slow nature of scientific research to refute those false claims (Beck, 2017). The danger of misinformation regarding health is also due to how news which are seemingly scientific usually generate higher levels of interest if they are newer, regardless of content (Del Vicario et al., 2016). This susceptibility towards health misinformation is heightened by the condition of Indonesian WhatsApp users who are considered to be particularly vulnerable to it since the country is low in level of the skills to search for reliable content and create online content (Jurriens & Tapsell, 2017). For millennial users in the country, this vulnerability is further exacerbated by their tendency to share information to others as well as their lack of ability to judge and prioritize information. Hobbs, Broder, Pope, & Rowe (from Lloyd et al., 2013) has found that millennials tend to be more "cognitively vulnerable" and have less ability to be aware of persuasive strategies in communication, which includes persuasive messages in social media, including those about health.

Currently, there have been numerous researches done on credibility of messages, such as the credibility judgment process of university students (Rieh & Hilligoss, 2008a), the effects of social validation on online credibility judgment (Jessen & Jorgensen, 2012), the online information behavior of various age groups (Rieh, Kim, Yang, & St. Jean, 2012), the social and heuristic approaches to online credibility evaluation (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013), factors influencing credibility evaluation in social media (Li & Suh, 2015), and the credibility judgment process among laypeople in evaluating claims by online experts (Hendriks, Kienhues, & Bromme, 2015). Researches specifically on WhatsApp and the communication

phenomenon within the mobile messenger application have also been done, such as a comparison in texting habits in WhatsApp versus traditional text messages (Church & de Oliveira, 2013), an analysis on the usage of text messages exchanged through social media including WhatsApp for cyber-psychological attacks (Gupta & Nene, 2017), comparison of message credibility on WhatsApp versus Facebook (Simon, Goldberg, Leykin, Adini, & Sheba, 2016), and the usage and effects of WhatsApp usage in Africa (Pindayi, 2017). However, there has never been a research conducted specifically on the credibility of forwarded messages regarding health in WhatsApp groups as perceived by users, particularly those aged 20-35.

1.3.   Statement of the Problem

This research aims to answer the following question: how is credibility of forwarded messages regarding health issues in WhatsApp groups perceived by millennial users?

1.4.   Purpose of the Research

The research is conducted with the following objective: to investigate how credibility of forwarded messages regarding health issues in WhatsApp groups is perceived by millennial users.

1.5.   Significance of the Study

The research is intended to bring positive impacts in the following ways.

1) Academic Significance

a) To further understanding in the knowledge of Elaboration Likelihood Model and theories about credibility.

b) To provide knowledge regarding the perception of the credibility of forwarded messages received through messenger applications according to millennial users.

2) Practical Significance

a) To provide information for medical professionals and health information providers regarding the credibility judgment of millennial messenger application users towards forwarded messages regarding health.

b) To provide information for millennials on how they perceive credibility of forwarded health messages in WhatsApp groups.

c) To assist health care professionals, particularly doctors in optimizing the messages they send in interactions through WhatsApp with patients and members of the public who are millennials.

d) To provide knowledge for the general society, particularly millennials about how credibility of forwarded messages regarding health issues in WhatsApp groups is perceived by millennial users which in turn can assist them in deciding their behavior towards those messages.

1.6. Organization of the Study

The study is organized in systematic order as such:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter covers the background of the study, the identification of the problem, statement of the problem, the study's purpose, the significance of the research and the organization of the study.

Chapter II: Research Object and Subject

In this chapter, the research's object and subject will be discussed in detail.

Chapter III: Literature Review

This chapter consists of findings of previous researches related to the topic and the theory around which the research will be based which are used to construct the framework of the study

Chapter IV: Research Methodology

In this chapter, the design of the research is discussed in detail. This includes the approach used for the research, the method of variable operationalization, type of research, method of research which includes population and sampling, method of data collection, instrument testing, and method of data analysis.

Chapter V: Research Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings from the collected data are presented in the forms of tables and charts. These findings are then discussed to explain how and why they are the way they are, which will involve connecting them to data from the previous chapters.

Chapter VI: Conclusion and Suggestion

This chapter concludes the research by elaborating how it answers the research question and fulfills the purpose of the study. There are also suggestions

on how to improve the research should another study of similar topic be conducted

in the future.