Language policy in fake news handling within French and Indonesian digital media

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Abstract This research examines the language politics carried out in handling fake news discourse through French and Indonesian online media platforms. As the internet-based communication has grown significantly in number, variety, quality and speed, making it also ideal to the fake news spread, then it requires certain language policy strategies to mitigate their destructive effect. The data of this research uses archives of online media articles, and related government websites in recent years in both countries, to look for the most recent discussions which are related to the discourse of handling fake news. Government and media discourses related to this matter are also highlighted. All the data is classified and analysed using the conceptual framework of language politics from Robert L Cooper. Since the nature of the research delves with discourses, it will be crucial to consider the discourse analysis method that refers to the critical and post-structural paradigms. Consequently, interdiscursivity and intertextuality are used as the main tools in the methodology of data analysis. As the result of this study, it shows that solid and consistent legal instruments have positive implications for maintaining journalistic quality in fighting fake news. The fake news strategy is also found in the narratives made by the authorities, but the terminologies given are different from the lexical labels to the discourse of political opponents in the public sphere. France and Indonesia utilise distinct strategies in addressing online media fake news.

Keywords: digital media; fake news; language policy

INTRODUCTION

Among the 17 targets of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals: https://sdgs.un.org/goals (Accessed on August 18, 2023)) set by the United Nations (UN), the 16th indicators speaks of ensure access to information and protect this most basic right for all citizens of the world. This target certainly does not stand alone, as the 4th SDG points out equal access to education and literacy for all residents which therefore supports the 16th SDG. These two SDGs are key to sustainable development and development in this digital information age. Without adequate literacy (Niedringhaus, 2018), freedom of expression and access to information on the internet can actually become a boomerang with rampant misinformation or fake news proliferating. 'Fake news' is a term used to refer to an old phenomenon that has occurred since the ancient Roman period around 44 BC (Posetti & Matthews, 2018), when Marc Anthony met Cleopatra, then Octavian launched a negative campaign against Anthony, so that he could smoothly move his way to become the first Emperor of Rome by disseminating fake information. In general, according to UNESCO (Ireton & Posseti, 2019), fake news involves two aspects of information, such as 'misinformation' if false information is spread by people who believe it is true and 'disinformation' if untrue information is deliberately spread by people who know it for malicious purposes.

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These two aspects certainly create chaos considering the discourse practices in the information accessed have implications for social practices and social cognition in society (Andriani et al., 2022) Language policy in handling fake news is pivotal since it will affect the message delivered to the society. Public comprehension generates a social change in a larger scale and time frame. According to Cooper, language policy is involved in the growth of literacy and the advancement of education, as it is influencing the language used by others that leads to social change (Cooper, 1989). In order to operate this language planning, there are three stages of language policy strategies; status policy, corpus policy and diffusion policy (Spolsky, 2004). Within the context of fake news handling, the status policy can be identified at the phase of identification of misinformation or fake news. Next, the corpus policy should be used to manage the sentences and lexical terms to counter or declare the false of the fake news. And the last step is to diffuse largely through different channels suited to the targeted society.

France, as one of the most powerful countries in the world, with a literacy rate of 99.9% based on the UNDP's Human Development Report 2022/2023 (Human Development Index https://hdr.undp.org/content/human- development-report-2021-22 (Accessed on February 17, 2023). However, the country is not immune to the chaos caused by rumours and fake news. Fake news circulating in France is often related to immigrant issues, terrorism, government or party policies, racism and sentiment towards Islam (Francisco et al., n.d.). In order to address this, the French government has passed a law in 2018 that restricts the dissemination of rumours and fake news through social media and digital media platforms on the internet (Craufurd Smith, 2019). Nonetheless, there is still much fake news circulating in French society. During the pandemic in 2020-2022, a lot of fake news was found, especially related to the Covid-19 virus. The increase in the number of fake news circulating in the past three years has reached 900% according to statistic data from L'INSEE https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6475020 (Accessed on February 17, 2023), the French statistics bureau. The number of fake news is so confusing that 30% of its citizens do not believe in the existence of this virus. This has made it quite difficult for the French government to implement health protocols and was forced to deploy officers to control the mobility of citizens and implement a curfew in the early days of the pandemic in 2020.

The French government's strategy of strengthening media literacy (Alemanno, 2018) does not seem to have produced adequate results, given the facts on the ground. However, government claims that are often voiced through the politics of language within the media by selecting certain discourses in major media are often referred to as '*propagande*' (Rouiller, 2019). Meanwhile, narratives that (Monnier, 2018) contradict the government are labelled '*complot*' or 'conspiracy'. This strategy of language politics in labelling with the use of corpus strategy is needed to control discourse in accordance with the interests of the survival of the state. For example, during the pandemic, discourse battles in the form of '*propagande*' and '*complot*' related to the mandatory Covid-19 vaccine have created a dichotomy in French society (Monnier, 2020). Meanwhile, in the Indonesian context, the handling of fake news is more totally controlled by the government with certain restriction strategies in several social media applications or digital media on the internet in general. According to the Director General of Public Information and Communication, Ministry of Communication and Information, Dr. Usman Kansong at a joint research workshop related to the detection of fake news about Covid-19 in 2022, there are several sites, social media, digital media platforms and certain accounts that are restricted by the government to reduce the spread of fake news.

The development of digital journalism models along with the development of internet technology has created new patterns in the production and consumption of press media. The convenience of this media technology and its spreadability have made access to the production and dissemination of fake news more intensive in society. To deal with the spread of fake news, after 2016 in France a verification journalism model was developed, also known as fact-checking (L. Bigot, 2017; V. Bigot et al., 2020). According to Bigot, the principle of fact-checking journalism which is starting to be developed in America is not a new approach. It was first carried out in 1923 by Time Magazine. The first mission of journalists at that time was to verify names, dates, numbers and facts related to some news. While in Indonesia, fact-checking journalism has been widely recognised since 2018, with the launch of the cekfakta.com platform (Nurlatifah & Irwansyah, 2019). The growing digital media ecosystem in Indonesia is slowly replacing traditional media. Along with this, participatory citizen journalism has also developed to colour social interaction and life (Dame Laoera & Wibowo, 2023). This phenomenon certainly increases

the opportunity for the development of fake news in the community that consumes news made without following the rules of true journalism (Tukina et al., 2020).

Based on the fact and conceptual framework discussed previously it is important to search for the language policy used in both countries to handle the fake news. This perspective is a novel for the research in this domain in both countries. The exploration in this research will look at what kind of political language strategies are used by the French government. While looking at the Indonesian context to be able to consider the good practices that exist in these two countries, then formulate them in a study that can be used as a reference for decision-making or public policy related to this issue. Broadly speaking, this series of research on fake news is designed by taking three different perspectives, such as; (1) the perspective of fake news production, (2) the perspective of fake news consumption in society, and (3) the perspective of media and government as policy makers. This research will explore media archives and official French government documents related to handling fake news in digital or online media. This search will also be accompanied by an examination of the Indonesian context to get an overview of the handling of fake news in the online media of both countries. The cross-sectional research with the context of the two countries is expected to provide answers to the following research questions: (1) What are the political language strategies applied by the French and Indonesian governments in handling fake news in online media? (2) How do the media in general and online media in particular in France and Indonesia report the handling of fake news? And (3) how do the public or online readers respond to the news of handling fake news in both countries?

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed using Foucault's critical paradigm with the principles of the archaeology of knowledge he developed (Foucault, 1969, 1998). The research method with this perspective relies on qualitative strategies of interdiscursivity and intertextuality. This Foucauldian   strategy was later also developed by Fairclough in the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2009). The fundamental assumption in this approach is language and power (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). How language is used as an instrument of power and vice versa. In this way, the ideology of power can also be traced through the language used, which later developed in the language policy (Azmi et al., 2013). So, this research tries to collect data in the form of various texts related to handling fake news and connect various discourses from various subjects related to this issue.

Data collection will be done through a selection of digital media on the internet, by observing several major French and Indonesian online media and related government websites. The collected data will then be crossed with media archive data to analyse the strategy of instant texts published online, with news texts in printed format from the same media. Given that one of the characteristics of news through online platforms is rapid, it often needs to be accompanied by adherence to journalistic rules, for example related to news verification and fake news handling. A survey is also conducted with several respondents in France and French people at the French Embassy who often encounter fake news in French daily. As a comparison, respondents in Indonesia will be selected from among consumers of digital media, randomly selected from the discussion forum in the media. The collected data will then be classified and studied according to the critical sociolinguistic perspective. Then the selected data will be analysed by applying the techniques of interconnectivity, intertextuality and interdiscoursivity, of all discourse components in three levels; language practice, social practice and discourse practice (Fairclough, 2009; Foucault, 1969).

In detail, the steps to be taken in this research are as follows: (1) identification of online media in France and Indonesia; (2) collection of news related to the handling of fake news in both countries using keywords (i.e. fake news, mis-information, hoax, verification, turn-back hoax, fact-check, etc); (3) verification of collected data (using tools Atlas-i); (4) analysis of verified news data; (5) comparative test of news discourse using the intertextuality method; (6) interpretation of the results of media data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conceptual framework of language policy and discourse analysis in this study serve a crucial role to connect all the data and facts collected in these issues of fake news handling. It connects the linguistic practice through the corpus policy used in different media, the discourse practice

and the social practice among the different agents, Media, NGO, Government, and society as news consumers. Freedom of the press is an important barometer in measuring the level of political practice, economic and socio-cultural progress in various countries in the world. The measurement of the level of press freedom throughout the world was carried out by an NGO called Reporter Sans Frontieres (RSF Website https://rsf.org/fr/classement (Accessed on 17 September 2023)), an independent body trusted as a consultant by world institutions such as the UN, UNESCO, OIF and the Europe Council. The main goal of this non-profit and non-governmental institution is to ensure the continuity of freedom of information. In addition to daily press releases released in the main UN languages, every year RSF releases an annual report in the form of the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) with reference to survey data from the field connected to individual journalists in 180 countries in the world. RSF was first founded in the city of Montpellier, France in 1985, currently has its head office in Paris, and 13 branch offices spread across several countries.

The indicators measured by RSF in preparing the WPFI ranking are the political, economic, sociocultural context, legal implementation practices and security of a country. For 2023, the country in the top three rankings is Norway with an index of 95.2, then in second place is Ireland with a score of 89.9, and in third place is Denmark with a figure of 89.5, as seen in this figure 1.
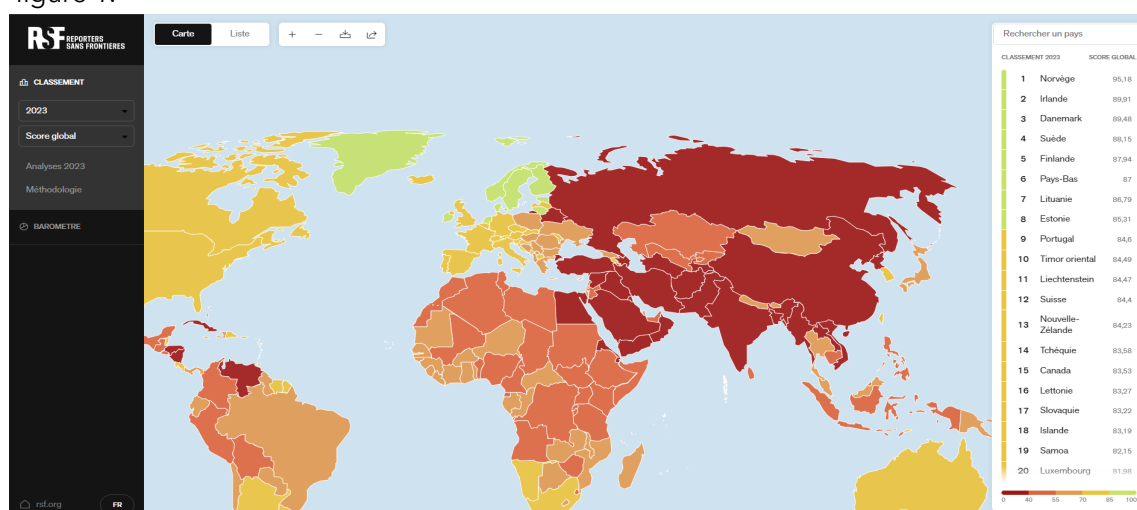
Figure 1. RSF Countries ranking 2023.
Source: https://rsf.org/fr/classement

Meanwhile, the lowest index is occupied by North Korea with a score of 21.7, then China with a score of 23.0 and Vietnam with a score of 24.6. These three countries are known to be authoritarian, and exercise power by involving repression and violence. The media in these three countries is fully controlled by the state, and there have been several reported cases of detention and murder of journalists. The statistical agency Statista summarises the RSF report for 2023 in the following image (Dark to light colours show a gradation of the press freedom situation. The darkest colours show the most worrying situation.)

The French country's WPFI index for 2023 was found to have risen two places compared to last year's index, specifically from 26th place to 24th this year (Figure 2). According to Le Monde's analysis, this increase did not occur because of improvements in press performance in France (Le Monde, 2023), but because of the decline in the global situation throughout the world after the Covid pandemic. Factors that influence the implementation of press freedom globally are propaganda practices in the country's political life, manipulation of economic performance, and the rise of fake content created using Artificial Intelligence (AI). In general, all of this can be categorised as fake news practices, and of course this seriously threatens the freedom and credibility of the press throughout the world. According to RSF, in 2023, it was found that the conditions of journalism practice in the field were very poor in seven out of 10 countries. And the main cause is the influence of fake news which often involves political actors and those in power. The graph of the French WPFI Index over the last 20 years can be seen in the following image (Figure 3).
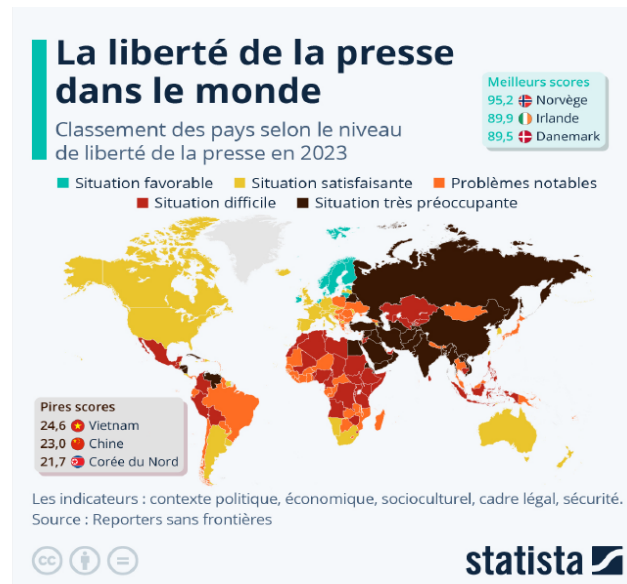
Figure 2. Freedom of Press in the world.
Source: https://fr.statista.com/infographie/17858/liberte-de-la-presse-dans-le-monde/

Figure 3. Indicator of Press freedom in France.
Source:https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/05/03/la-france-24e-au-classement-mondial-2023-de-la-liberte-de-la-presse_6171875_3210.html.

The decline in the press freedom index ranking in France over the past 20 years has been very significant, from 5th in the world in 2003 to 24th in 2023. This can be explained by the status of legislation related to the press which has also undergone many significant changes. The Law of 29 July 1881 concerning Freedom of the Press is the main legal reference that provides the definition of ' les libertés et responsabilités de la presse française', 'the freedom and responsibility' of the French press (Vie-Publique, 2022). Article 1 of the 1881 law also guarantees freedom to print and sell journalistic products. However, over time the 1881 law has undergone many changes to regulate matters that arise along with the dynamics of the State, such as the protection of minors, repression, defamation, protection of privacy rights, etc. The latest law in 2018 which regulates the prevention of the spread of fake news is available in two forms, namely organic law and basic law specifically related to elections. Organic Law no. 2018-1201 which was passed on December 22, 2018, to fight fake news generally states the following:

I. – A la fin de l'article 4 de la loi n° 62-1292 du 6 novembre 1962 précitée, la référence : « loi organique n° 2017-1338 du 15 septembre 2017 pour la confiance dans la vie politique » est remplacée par la référence : « loi organique n° 2018-1201 du 22 décembre 2018 relative à la lutte contre la manipulation de l'information ».
II.-Le II de l'article 1er de la loi organique n° 2017-1338 du 15 septembre 2017 pour la

> *confiance dans la vie politique est ainsi rédigé :*
> *« II.-Après le mot : " résultant ", la fin du deuxième alinéa du 2° du I de l'article 3 de la*
> *loi organique n° 2016-1047 du 1er août 2016 rénovant les modalités d'inscription sur*
> *les listes électorales des Français établis hors de France est ainsi rédigée : " de la loi n°*
> *2018-1202 du 22 décembre 2018 relative à la lutte contre la manipulation de*
> *l'information. " »*
> *La présente loi sera exécutée comme loi de l'Etat. (Vie-Publique, 2022)*

Translation as follows:

> I. – At the end of article 4 of the aforementioned law no. 62-1292 of November 6,
> 1962, the reference: "organic law no. 2017-1338 of September 15, 2017, for
> confidence in political life" is replaced by the reference: "organic law no. 2018-1201
> of December 22, 2018, relating to the fight against the manipulation of information".
> II.-II of article 1 of organic law no. 2017-1338 of September 15, 2017, for confidence
> in political life is worded as follows:
> "II.-After the word: "resulting", the end of the second paragraph of 2° of I of article 3
> of organic law no. 2016-1047 of August 1, 2016, renewing the terms of registration on
> the electoral lists of French people established outside France is worded as follows:
> "Law No. 2018-1202 of December 22, 2018, relating to the fight against the
> manipulation of information." »
> This Act shall be executed as the law of the State.

The enactment of this law makes the climate for handling fake news more structured, because according to state law, all acts that can be categorised as manipulation of information can be prosecuted. The Covid pandemic period since 2020 has become an arena for testing the 2018 law with the incessant circulation of fake news in society. Fake news does not only originate from social media, but there are also press media which also become agents for the spread of fake news (Le Parisien, 2022). One well-known case is the daily France-Soir which aggressively published fake news about misleading anti-vaccine Covid-19 opinions and conspiracy theories related to the pandemic. The work of the France-Soir media is quite disturbing for various parties and society in general. Until then in 2021 Google was forced to censor by removing this media from its search engine (Leloup, 2021).   However, France-Soir did not accept Google's censorship, then took the case to court, demanding counter-performance. France-Soir lost this case, because it was proven in court to be a producer of fake news and not to comply with the journalistic code of ethics (Coquaz & Andraca, 2022). The judicial case of the France-Soir media news agency in 2022 became the centre of attention of the French public, which then resulted in the closure of the media and the termination of its press broadcast rights as an online media in November 2022 (Les Echos, 2022). This media is also required to pay a fine of 70,000 euros to the court (Europe 1, 2022). This incident is an example of a case of handling fake news that involves legal and statutory instruments.

Meanwhile, if we take a closer look at the Indonesian context, press freedom is still a utopia that has not yet been fully realised. During the New Order, there were several bans on media that were in opposition to the government (Triwardani, 2010). Press history notes that not many cases of violence, media bans, and even cases of murder of journalists have been successfully resolved legally. As an example, the case of journalist Udin in Yogyakarta which is still unresolved. In fact, in some cases, the government's role is very dominant in controlling legal instruments and reporting of related cases in the media. The Indonesian press freedom index in the 2023 RSF survey is as follows at Figure 4. In the data at Figure 4, it can be seen that Indonesia ranked 108th out of 180 countries in the world with a score of 54.83 points, which is quite a significant increase when compared to the same WPFI report in 2022 which ranked 117th.
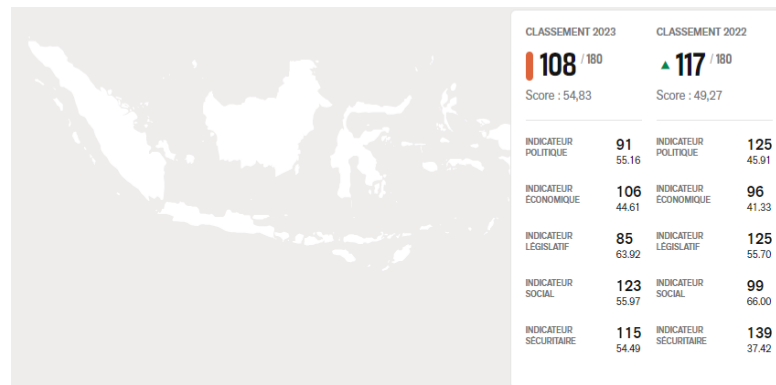
Figure 4. Index of Press Freedom in Indonesia 2023.
Source: https://rsf.org/fr/pays/indon%C3%A9sie

Likewise, in handling fake news in various media, both social media and press media, the government has a central and dominant role. The presidential staff office has a management system in handling fake news (Saidah & Rusfian, 2020). According to the Director General of Information and Public Communication, the government's Ministry of Communication and Information has three layers of strategy in handling fake news in Indonesia. The first strategy is called 'upstream', with a digital literacy program that seeks to educate the public so that they can spread valid and positive news. The second strategy is called 'midstream', namely action to remove news content or ban the media. To carry out this second strategy, the government is equipped with crawling machine (AIS) technology which is capable of detecting fake news, and special channels for reporting negative content. Then the third strategy is called downstream by using police equipment, forming a cybercrime unit for investigations and implementing criminal sanctions related to fake news.

The legal tools for handling fake news cases in Indonesia refer to Law no. 11 of 2008 regarding Electronic Information and Transactions (UU ITE), which delivered by the minister of communication and information as follows:

"Tindakan memproduksi maupun meneruskan hoaks adalah tindakan melanggar hukum. Itu berpotensi dikenakan pasal pidana yang bisa sampai lima hingga enam tahun penjara dan denda Rp1 miliar," ujar Menteri Komunikasi dan Informatika (Menkominfo) Johnny G Plate dalam keterangan resminya di Media Center Gugus Tugas Percepatan Penanganan COVID-19, Graha Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB) Jakarta, Sabtu (18/4). (KOMINFO, 2020)

Translation:

"The act of producing or continuing hoaxes is an unlawful act. This has the potential to be subject to a criminal offence which could be up to five to six years in prison and a fine of IDR 1 billion", according to the Minister of Communication and Information (Menkominfo) Johnny G Plate in his official statement at the Media Center of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19, Graha National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) Jakarta, Saturday (18/4). (KOMINFO, 2020.)

Several well-known cases of fake news that have attracted public attention in general are related to the Presidential election. One of them that reached trial was the Ratna Sarumpaet case (Medistiara, 2019), whose trial decision came out in 2019. The reported perpetrator, Ratna Sarumpaet, was sentenced to two years in prison. In general, trials in cases of fake news or hoaxes in Indonesia make the subject of the news a suspect. This research search has not found any online media in Indonesia that publishes fake news that has been prosecuted and punished. In Indonesia there are laws for this act of media (Jamaludin, 2022). In the critical perspective, this fact implies that justice has not yet been implemented consistently. And the corpus policy used to handle the spread of the fake news tends to focus only on the subject and neglects the media responsibility on the fake news publication.

Freedom to express opinions and express thoughts in the form of journalistic writing should be guaranteed legal protection and the legislative system. This is very much realised and practised in France, empirically it can be seen from the press freedom index rankings released

by RSF every year. This freedom is also seen as an opening to produce texts and opinions that are misleading or contain fake news. This pretext is then often used by media and journalists who do not comply with the journalistic code of ethics by applying verification and critical thinking to a report. French and Indonesian media have methods and approaches that look different, but the principles are the same.

CONCLUSION

The most basic difference of fake news handling in France and Indonesia based on the data presented in the discussion above is regarding the role of the government in controlling the media and news. The French government cannot ban a media that is in opposition and always criticises the government. Nevertheless, the court can decide on punishment for the media by revoking press permits or anyone proven to have created and spread fake news. However, in Indonesia, this has happened and has become a historical record of press freedom in Indonesia. Likewise with the practice of implementing the law. In many trials of fake news cases, the suspect is the main perpetrator in the fake news. Meanwhile, press media that spread fake news are not subject to any sanctions. This certainly does not deter media that do not adhere to the journalistic code of ethics, and instead becomes fertile ground for monetizing sensational fake news with click-bite strategies on online media. There is still room for further research regarding the fake news phenomenon, such as subject perspective, mitigating freedom of expression in different media that lead to different kinds of misinformation.

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