

Early detection model to prevent the damaging impact of political buzzer attacks on social media

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Abstract

Using buzzers in product marketing is common and part of a marketing communication strategy. However, the use of buzzers has shifted to the political realm, causing negative impacts such as manipulating public opinion by spreading false information and propaganda. A number of countries have utilized buzzers for propaganda and public opinion manipulation purposes, such as Russia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. This study aims to formulate an early detection model to prevent the damaging impacts of using political buzzers attacks on social media by referring to the AISAS (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share) model. This study uses a qualitative approach with data characteristics in the form of words, images, or sentences and includes many quotes and examples. The study results show that political buzzers on social media can be controlled strategically. The core of this strategy is to disrupt the buzzers' work process and strengthen the community's digital literacy because the digital literacy program that has been conducted has proven to be ineffective. Through the early detection model in this study, this can be done by disrupting the work process of buzzers and strengthening digital society through digital literacy by referring to the AISAS model. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen regulations by tightening account registration rules and clarifying law enforcement for the use of buzzers attacks.

Keywords: political buzzer, aisas model, social media, public opinion

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Introduction

A study conducted by researchers from Oxford University, Samantha Bradshaw and Philip Howard, published in a document entitled "The Global Disinformation Order, 2019 Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation", shows that the government and political parties in Indonesia pay cyber troops or buzzers to manipulate public opinion (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Research with the same theme was conducted by Idrianti and her team, they studied the use of buzzers during the Joko Widodo administration, the results were that the political messages conveyed were negative and political and had effects that could damage Indonesian democracy because buzzers always 'attacked' social media users who were against the government (Firdausi, 2021). Political buzzing refers to a form of engagement in societies where political mobilization is discouraged, and instead, mass media provides theatrical performances. Political buzzers view their work as not just a job but strategic like playing chess. They see their role as part of the spectacle in Indonesian political life (Rasidi, 2019).

In line with previous research, research conducted by Miqdad explains how buzzers work by using positive and negative narratives to create massive interactions (Miqdad, 2024). In addition, other research shows that buzzers also work by doing things that are contrary to communication ethics, such as carrying out propaganda, bullying, or slander with harsh, provocative, or incorrect language so that if allowed to continue, it can potentially cause conflict in society (Faulina, 2022). Buzzers use social media to spread negative propaganda and manipulate public opinion, often without precise regulation (Fatih, 2024). The narrative built by this political buzzer can create knowledge and can also have a political influence on people who are also in cyberspace. The knowledge created by political buzzers is certainly not objective because it depends on the interests of the party that employs it (Wijaya et al., 2019). In addition to propaganda, buzzers also spread hoax (Iskandar, 2024). The main purpose of buzzers is not only to change public opinion but also to distort facts. These hoaxes spread by buzzers often become the primary topic in mass media, fueling debates among those who support or oppose the arguments put forth. Unfortunately, these disputes sometimes escalate into hate speech, leading to divisions within society (Budiana, 2024).

The results of the Systematic Literature Review show that the number of studies on buzzers fluctuated and began to increase from 2022 to 2024. In 2021, there was only one study, and in 2024, there were four studies with the highest number (see figure 1). This is because 2024 is a political year with regional head elections, presidential elections, and legislative elections. Furthermore, the research cases include the use of buzzers by 2024 presidential candidates and the policy regarding the age limit for presidential and vice presidential candidates in 2024 (Rizkyah, 2025).

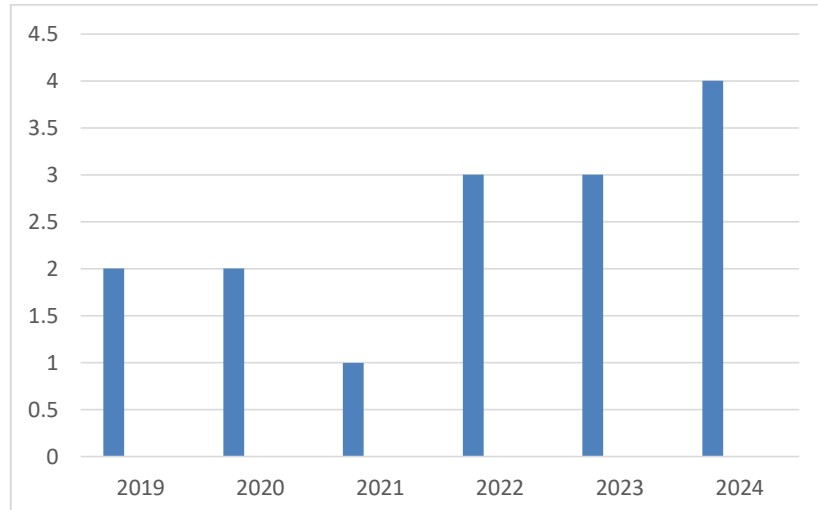


Figure 1. The amount of research on buzzers
Source: processed data from Rizkyah (2025)

Based on the literature review, the existence of buzzers or similar occurs in several countries, for example, the Philippines, where influence operations are carried out by groups called "troll armies" or "click armies," organized mainly by advertising and PR agencies. These groups spread disinformation to the Filipino public by using fake accounts on Facebook and Twitter as an extension of advertising and PR practices. In its working process, the group has a hierarchy, starting from the client's wishes being conveyed to the advertising boss, then the boss strategizes based on the client's wishes. The influence operation strategy involves anonymous influencers and Key

Opinion Leaders (KOLs). It is assisted by fake account operators on social media then grassroots volunteers and eventually the client's message reaches the public (Ong & Cabañes, 2018),

Unlike the Philippines, influence operations in Brazil and Colombia are organized by covert companies using click farm platforms (Grohmann et al., 2022) and in Malaysia are organized by political coalitions (Jalli & Idris, 2024) with the aim of propagating political narratives and influencing public opinion, especially near elections. While in Russia, similar operations are conducted by government agents, tasked with spreading politically divisive content, generating high levels of user engagement, and interfering in the 2016 US Presidential election (Howard, 2020). In addition, in Indonesia, such operations tend not to involve organizations or companies, but rather rely on temporary, project-based connections between individuals. However, PR agencies may sometimes also be involved in such activities, previous research has only found reports of ad-hoc connections between coordinators, influencers, cyber troops, and content creators (Wijayanto et al., 2024).

The use of buzzers is carried out to support several policies decided by the government. For example, the empowerment of palm oil (Abbiyyu & Nindyaswari, 2022), handling of the Covid-19 pandemic (Pambudi et al., 2021), Omnibus Law on Job Creation Bill (C. A. Putri, 2020), presidential imaging before the end of term through #10thnJokowiPrabowolanjutkan, and moving the National Capital. In the context of maintaining its power or authority, as research results conducted by Sugiono show, the government is indicated to have used political buzzer attacks to fight against attacks from the opposition. Even the actors managing the government buzzers are revealed to have received compensation in the form of positions in an institution (Sugiono, 2020). The presence of buzzers in mainstream media creates a perception as a "shield" for the government against social media resistance. The presence of political buzzer attacks during and after the general election has resulted in a negative reputation and damaged the basic principles of democracy. Buzzers essentially contribute to the worsening of democracy in Indonesia (Camila et al., 2024). This condition certainly has a damaging impact when viewed from a political perspective, the use of buzzers is undoubtedly detrimental to the sustainability of democracy in Indonesia because it reduces trust in the democratic process due to the manipulation of public opinion.

The involvement of buzzers in the political realm has caused polemics in society. With the development of features on social media, makes it easier for buzzers to do various activities they want, such as making a hashtag a trending topic or making keywords go viral so that they enter the trending list, positive, negative, and black campaigns, and opinion formation (Purnamasari & Wijanarko, 2024). Buzzer activities that spread manipulative and negative content can substantially affect public opinion and election results. Buzzers divert the dynamics of digital space by setting trends and narratives widely disseminated on social media. Buzzers consistently violate ethics by spreading false information, black campaigns, and hate speech, which can damage the integrity of the democratic process (Ayu et al., 2024).

Research on political buzzer attacks has revealed how they operate to manipulate public opinion through disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech, which negatively impacts democracy (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Miqdad, 2024; Faulina, 2022). Studies in different countries show differences in operational structures, such as the use of click farms in Brazil and Colombia, and the involvement of government agents in Russia (Grohmann et al., 2022; Howard, 2020). In Indonesia, buzzers are more ad-hoc project-based rather than through permanent organizations

(Wijayanto et al., 2024). However, the work process and early detection model are still under-researched, so it becomes a novelty in this study.

Another novelty of this study is the use of the AISAS (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share) marketing communication strategy. AISAS model is a change from the previous consumer behavior pattern, namely AIDMA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory, and Action), which was used in traditional marketing. In the internet era, internet users can easily access and share information, leading to the evolution of the AIDMA model into AISAS. Until now, the AISAS model has been more focused on building the reputation of a specific brand (Fahmi, 2023), reflecting the changes in consumer behavior in the era of big data (Luo, 2019), digital marketing for skateboard clothing line (Kusumah, 2024), strategies to improve the competitiveness of social e-commerce platforms (Li et al., 2024), and interactive elements in social media marketing (Wang, 2018), not on preventing the use of political buzzer attacks. The purpose of this research is to formulate an early detection model in anticipating the damaging impact of using political buzzer attacks on social media.

Research Methods

This research article discusses the use of qualitative research methods, which involve collecting data in the form of words, pictures, or sentences and include quotes and examples. The key goal of qualitative research is to explore new settings or develop new theories. This process often involves developing new concepts and analyzing the relationships between them, which may result in a longer report. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative researchers use less standardized techniques to collect and analyze data. These methods may vary depending on the individual researcher or unique settings. As a result, researchers in qualitative studies provide detailed explanations of their research process and rationale, as their methods may be novel and have not been done before (Neuman, 2014). The research begins by looking for research problems and formulating the objectives of this research, then collecting data through a literature review and then analyzing the data using the AISAS (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share) model. Finally, the research findings are presented in the conclusion sub-chapter in the form of an Early Detection Model for Preventing the Damaging Impact of Using Political buzzer attacks on Social Media.

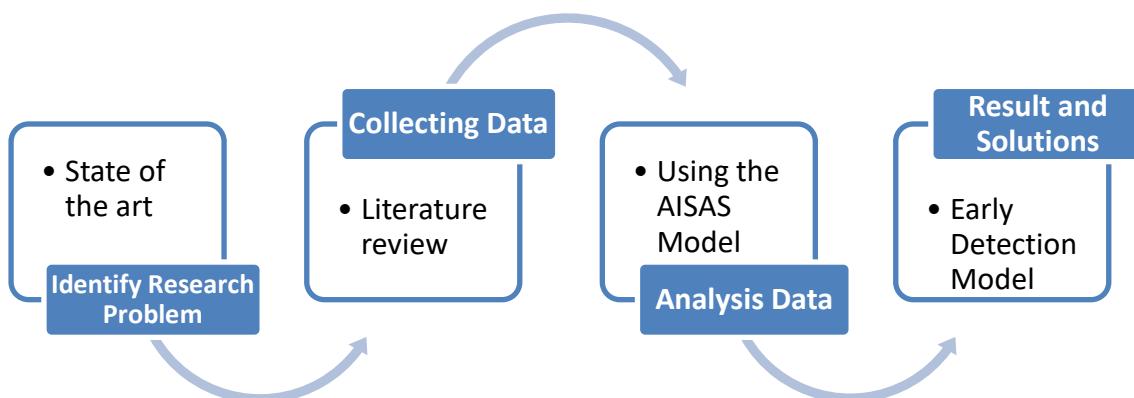


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework
Source: Processed by author, 2025

This research refers to the AISAS model, a marketing communication strategy. The model consists of Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share. Attention refers to attracting consumer attention to a product or service, while Interest is the process of generating consumer interest through effective communication. In the digital era, consumers' interest can also be piqued by the information presented on online media platforms. Search involves consumers seeking information about a product or service through search engines. Reviews about products can be easily found on various online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and blogs. Action refers to the actual action of consumers making a purchase or taking the desired action. Share is the outcome where consumers share their experiences with the product or brand through online media (Sugiyama & Andree, 2011). In the context of this study, the focus is on social media users who are targeted by buzzers.

Results and Discussion

Sabotage of Buzzer Work Process

In the process of working, buzzers require attention and specific efforts to spread the message to their followers. In the Indonesian context, messages usually come from opinion leaders and get amplified by buzzers to make the message go viral. The primary goal of buzzers is to build a public agenda that the message or issue they are building is an important issue and should be discussed by the public, influencing the public agenda is important to gain legitimacy for a program or policy. In addition, buzzers are also often used to silence criticism by attacking critics (including netizens, opinion leaders from the opposition, and mass media) collectively, so that the conversation does not continue and the critic's reputation becomes unfavorable in the public eye (Jalli & Idris, 2024).

Understanding the role and impact of buzzers, as well as taking steps to monitor and control their activities, becomes crucial to preventing conflicts (Iskandar, 2024). There are key actors in a network of paid buzzers, also known as professional political buzzer attacks. In contrast to volunteer buzzers, there are no main actors at all. Non-human elements in the activities of political campaign buzzers on social media, both volunteers and professionals, are smartphones and laptops. Meanwhile, human elements are the general public and students who act as potential actors and actors in the political buzzer network on social media (Felicia & Loisa, 2020).

The contribution of all forms of involvement to the virality of content requires a strategy to make a post go viral, including manipulating the spread of information on social media and using social media troops or what is known as buzzers, the primary role of buzzers is to spread political propaganda. The services of these buzzers are hired by parties who want to attract public attention (Jalli & Idris, 2024, 2019). This political propaganda can use various issues, such as the electoral system issue (Samad et al., 2023), citizen support for the government (Huang & Cruz, 2022), feminist movement (Wastitya et al., 2023), political marketing (Baines & O'Shaughnessy, 2014), support for climate policy (Setiawan et al., 2024), internationalization of the papua separatist issue (Samad & Indrajit, 2022), to complexity of digital propaganda and its impact on public perception and geopolitical dynamics (Marigliano et al., 2024).

Referring to research conducted by Santoso on how buzzers work in Indonesia, the work process begins with the emergence of an issue, then public sentiment is monitored. After that, interested parties, including the government, will use buzzers and instruct them to form public opinion according to their wishes regarding policies

that will or have been decided. These buzzers create content specifically designed to influence public opinion according to existing issues, then spread it through various channels, especially social media. Buzzers will play an active role in spreading this content (Santoso, 2022).

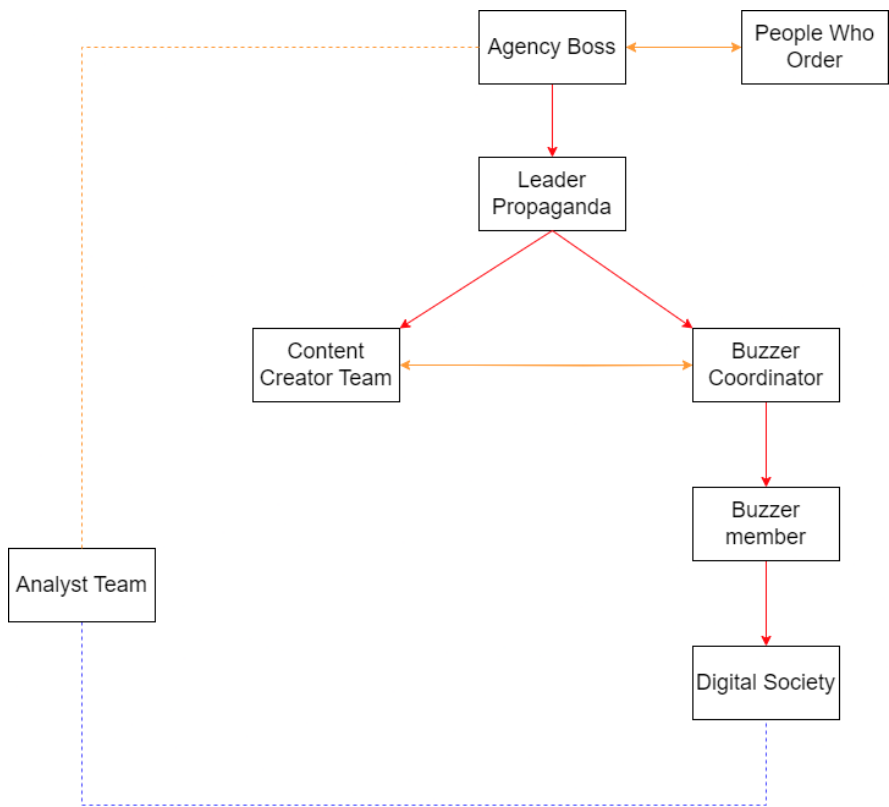


Figure 3. Organized Buzzer Work Unit
Source: Processed by author from Santoso (2022)

This work process is slightly different from the work process of buzzers in the Philippines. In the Philippines, groups like troll armies or click armies are organized by advertising and PR agencies in a clear structure. This hierarchy includes clients, advertising bosses, anonymous influencers, KOLs, and fake account operators who work together to spread disinformation. Their strategy resembles marketing campaigns used to influence public perception through influential figures. Whereas in Indonesia, the buzzer approach is more flexible and responsive to emerging issues. It is more network-based than a hierarchical structure. The Philippines has a more organized buzzer system with a corporate approach, while Indonesia relies on buzzers as a communication tool that is more reactive to changing issues. Both methods show how social media can be used to shape public perception and influence policy.

Based on the marketing communication strategy of the AISAS model and associated with the work process of buzzers in Indonesia, the agency boss and the people who ordered the buzzer services in the image above represent the party that wants to influence public opinion. They play a role in the Attention stage by determining the main message and target audience. The propaganda leader or individual is responsible for designing a strategy to achieve the propaganda goal. They determine the best way to attract Attention and generate Interest in the audience. The content creation team is tasked with creating content that is interesting and relevant to the target audience. This content is designed to generate Interest and encourage the

audience to do further Search. The buzzer coordinator refers to those who organize and coordinate buzzer activities. Their role is significant in the Action stage, namely encouraging buzzers to spread messages and influence public opinion. Buzzer members are the spearheads in spreading propaganda messages. They are active on social media and online forums to create buzz and encourage Share. The analyst team plays a role in monitoring the effectiveness of propaganda activities. They analyze data to see how far the message has succeeded in attracting Attention, generating Interest, and triggering Action. The digital community is the main target of propaganda activities. Targets will be influenced by messages disseminated through propaganda networks and are likely to Search, Action, and Share. The propaganda network structure described is very effective in utilizing the AISAS model. Each element in the structure has a clear role in influencing public opinion. This propaganda network seeks to engineer public perception systematically. They create the desired narrative and spread it widely through various channels. In this context, buzzers are very important in spreading propaganda messages. They act as influencers who can significantly influence public opinion.

The entire process or way the buzzer works will continue to be monitored and evaluated by the analyst team to ensure the effectiveness of the use of buzzers. The effectiveness of the use of buzzers can be seen from the public response, the analyst team analyzes the distributed content whether it is effective or not. By examining the data, the analyst team can identify what works and what doesn't so that they can adjust their strategy. Based on this, this study provides an alternative to silencing buzzers by not responding to messages/content uploaded by buzzers. That way, it is difficult for the analyst team to conduct an analysis, and the analysis tends to be biased because the analyst team does not get an accurate picture of how the public responds. On the other hand, building your own or counter-narrative then strengthening engagement from the content through comments, likes, re-sharing content, saving, etc., according to the character of the social media used.

Sabotage of the buzzer work process can also be done by strengthening regulations related to the use of the Buzzer. Strengthening regulations is done through two aspects. First, legal security in Indonesia is still vulnerable to the buzzer phenomenon due to the lack of concrete regulations. Currently, offenses committed by buzzers are handled through defamation and fake news laws, resulting in legal uncertainty (Neyasyah, 2020). For this reason, regulations need to be tightened in terms of law enforcement (Prianto et al., 2021). Second, sometimes many irresponsible buzzers create special social media accounts with anonymous identities. These anonymous buzzers then spread fake news (hoaxes), which are usually accompanied by hate speech and sensitive issues aimed at opponents or competitors of the candidates they support. This is done by buzzers to reduce the image of competitors and trigger the public to distrust their competitors (Maharani & Nurafifah, 2020). For this reason, to strengthen regulations and combat the damaging impact of social media, it is suggested to collaborate with social media platforms to enhance the account registration process, ensuring users provide real identities for easier monitoring. However, solving the problem of conflict and negative buzzer activities requires more than just legal rules and actions against violations. It requires a long-term plan that focuses on education for the community (Fransisco, 2021).

Digital Literacy

The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (now the Ministry of Communication and Digital), established a national digital literacy program called "Siber Kreasi" in 2018. Through this program, the literacy program reached 125,00 people in 350 locations. Furthermore, "Siber Kreasi" will be divided into a digital literacy scholarship program and a talent scholarship program. In 2021, the digital literacy program had reached around 12 million participants through 20,000 online literacy classes. This is the largest literacy program in Indonesia when compared to literacy programs organized by schools, universities, digital technology companies, and others. The focus of digital literacy in the "Siber Kreasi" program is digital skills, digital culture, digital safety, and ethics. The program primarily utilizes a webinar format, inviting up to six resource persons. However, this program is ineffective because its format limits interaction between speakers and participants, and it does not foster critical thinking. The program is not designed as a learning program but rather a government socialization program (Jalli & Idris, 2024).

Another digital literacy program is "Lambe Hoaks". This program is based on the social media platform Instagram (@misslambehoaks) with the goal of enhancing digital literacy and combating the spread of hoaxes. However, there is a gap between the goals of the literacy program and its actual results. With around 9,000 followers, minimal likes, and no comments on posts, the @misslambehoaks Instagram account failed to become a significant tool in reducing the spread of hoaxes on social media. This condition then has implications for the low public interest in the content presented in @misslambehoaks's posts, which is inversely proportional to the "Lambe Hoaks" program's focus on digital literacy through a creative and educational approach to netizens (Putra et al., 2024). One way to improve digital literacy is to use chatbots to help verify hoaxes by directing users to websites that can be used as references to validate information (Samad et al., 2025).

The use of buzzers exemplifies a situation where the freedom of communication in cyberspace becomes more destructive than constructive due to negative comments lacking good behaviour. Buzzer groups pose a threat to the democratic process in cyberspace as they continue to spread negative opinions and thoughts to the public. By addressing these issues through improved regulations and educational initiatives, the adverse impacts of social media can be mitigated, and constructive dialogue can prevail (Dwiyasa et al., 2022). To address this issue, character-building within the community is necessary. It is a long-term effort aimed at improving the culture of social media use in Indonesia. This can be achieved by implementing social engineering strategies, such as conducting socialization efforts and incorporating social media education into the education curriculum (Neyasyah, 2020).

In addition, the phenomenon of using buzzers shows that the government is unable to convince the public in deciding a policy, the government needs a third party, aka buzzer, to manipulate public opinion to give the impression that the policy taken is a policy that has received a positive response from the public. This finding is in line with research conducted by ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, the results of the study show that improving the quality of democracy cannot start from the lower level, but must start from the elite level first. The behavior of political elites that damage democracy needs to be reformed first, so that it becomes a good example for young people to prioritize public interests (Halimatusa'diyah & Adam, 2024).

The government, as part of the user client, must also acquire digital literacy in

order not to abuse the existence of buzzers. Some buzzer activities appear to be funded by the Indonesian government or at least by people close to government ministers, such as the COVID-19 pandemic issue paid for by people from the circle of ministers responsible for the government's pandemic response and promoting the Omnibus Law for Job Creation with the client coming from someone close to the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs. This indicates that both political and economic elites in Indonesia actively utilize the services of buzzers to serve as tools for influencing public debate in their favor (Wijayanto et al., 2024).

In the context of the AISAS model, various digital literacy efforts can be carried out by referring to the model. Attention, through organized campaigns to raise awareness of digital literacy, attention can be directed to the importance of distinguishing between valid information and information that is spread with manipulative purposes. Interest, if digital literacy is introduced correctly, people will begin to feel interested in understanding more deeply how they can recognize correct information. Good digital literacy education can foster public interest in learning how to identify credible sources of information, criticize opinions that are unclear in their origin, and understand the impact of the spread of hoaxes or disinformation. Search, with increased digital literacy, information consumers can be trained to search for more diverse sources and criticize the information they find. Good digital literacy encourages individuals to seek supporting evidence, refer to credible sources, and distinguish between opinions and facts. In this context, search engines and social media platforms can be optimized to help people find accurate information. Action, if digital literacy is implemented correctly, people's actions will be more driven by accurate and critical information. For example, when people can evaluate the veracity of information and understand the broader context, they are more likely to make wiser decisions based on valid evidence. Share, with increasing digital literacy, people can share information more responsibly. When someone better understands how to evaluate the veracity of information, they are more likely to share correct information and help educate others about the importance of verifying information before sharing it. The public can also take advantage of the digital 4.0 mitigation movement in the form of fact checking through the reporting website to deal with hoaxes and disinformation, then the results of fact checking are then shared as a form of independent education carried out by the community (Prianto et al., 2022). This will slow the spread of disinformation and create a more constructive and helpful culture of sharing information.

Thus, both the public and the government need to receive digital literacy education to increase public awareness about the dangers of disinformation, such as hoaxes which are widely spread due to buzzer activities (R. D. U. Putri, 2024), this education can be done early, starting when studying at school (Malik et al., 2020). Improving good digital literacy enables individuals to differentiate between true and false information so that ultimately digital literacy can improve national resilience (Putra et al., 2024). By increasing digital literacy, every individual can fight against attempts to control public opinion through propaganda.

Early Detection Model

Based on the explanation above, this study formulates a simple model for anticipating the damaging impacts of using buzzers on social media. This model is formulated by referring to the AISAS model, which is associated with the buzzer work process and digital literacy. The figure below shows how sabotage of buzzer work processes and digital literacy impacts the digital communication ecosystem. With

proper intervention through regulation and digital literacy, people can participate more responsibly and safely in the digital space. This model is formulated according to the analysis results presented in the previous sub-chapters. More details can be seen in Figure 4 below.

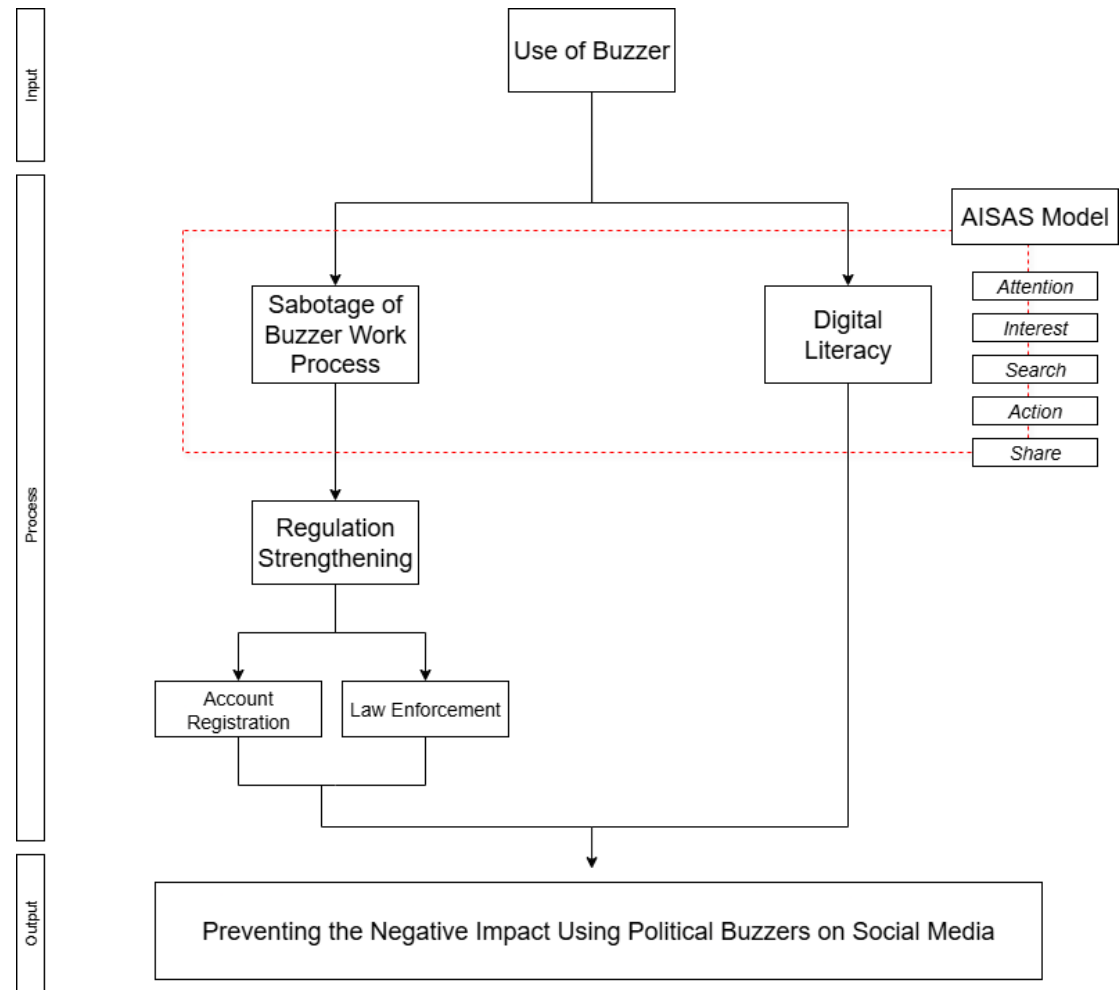


Figure 4. Early Detection Model
Source: Processed by author, 2025

The irresponsible use of buzzers can be sabotaged in various ways, both internally and externally. The AISAS model is used as a framework to understand how the process of sabotaging buzzer activities can improve digital literacy. By disrupting the stages in the AISAS model, such as attracting attention, arousing interest, and encouraging action, it can reduce the effectiveness of messages disseminated by buzzers. The implication is that both the public and the government will be more critical and intelligent in consuming information to distinguish between fact and fiction. This approach highlights the active role of every level of society in fighting disinformation. In addition, the prevention model also shows that efforts to improve digital literacy must be carried out comprehensively, involving various parties such as the government, civil society, and technology companies. Thus, a digital society can be built that is more resistant to information manipulation. In this context, the AISAS model-Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share-plays a role in explaining the stages of digital interaction, where users go through the process of understanding, searching for, and disseminating information.

On the other hand, the model proposed in Figure 4 describes the digital communication ecosystem, involving buzzers, regulation, sabotage, and digital literacy, and how these elements influence one another. Buzzers play a role in disseminating information with various purposes, including the purpose of influencing public opinion, but their existence also risks strengthening disinformation if not properly controlled. The buzzer phenomenon should encourage the strengthening of regulations, such as law enforcement and account registration, to increase transparency and prevent misuse of digital identities. As regulations tighten, buzzers who operate unethically will face obstacles, from access restrictions to algorithms that reduce their visibility, so their activities can be significantly reduced.

Conclusion

The Early Detection Model proposed in this article integrates the sabotage of buzzer work processes with digital literacy, referring to the AISAS (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, and Share) model. By understanding how the AISAS model works on the sabotage of buzzer work processes and digital literacy, it is hoped that it can counter propaganda carried out by buzzers and form a digital society that is more critical and intelligent in consuming information in cyberspace. Sabotage of buzzer work processes is also carried out through strengthening regulations by tightening account registration rules and clarifying the law enforcement for the use of buzzers.

This study has several limitations, including this study formulating a model that is quite simple and not specific to society or government alone, so it is necessary to carry out development through research on anticipating the damaging impacts of using buzzers on social media, which is specifically for the government or society alone, then the two models are combined so that the model formulated is more comprehensive. In addition, this research also suggests that research data sources be developed by not only conducting literature studies but also conducting in-depth interviews with experts and even conducting focus group discussions using the Delphi research method.

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