

Real Issue or Propaganda? Students' Perspectives on Post Truth Phenomenon in Films

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Abstract

The development of information technology has led an era called post truth, when a particular viewpoint is published, accepted as true, and causes other alternative truths to be rejected. It is important for digital citizen to be aware of the existence of such phenomena. This research aims at revealing the perspective of university students semester 6 at English Letters program, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta on post truth phenomenon emerging through social media as reflected in two films, Missing and Don't Look Up. Using reader response approach and McIntire's theory about post truth, the finding shows that students can generally notice post truth phenomenon in the society and are able to analyse how post truth are circulated. From the last steps of the research, it can be seen that more than half of the students demonstrated a critical and neutral stance, while the rest showed indifference, arguing that they did not know the person involved in the news. Meanwhile, most students showed greater concern and critical thinking when responding to the global issue presented in Don't Look Up. This indicates that, in general, students demonstrated the necessary attitude—being critical and evaluative of the narratives circulating in the digital platforms.

Keywords: *post truth, digital information, reader response*

Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi informasi telah memunculkan era yang disebut post truth, yaitu ketika sebuah sudut pandang tertentu dipublikasikan, diterima sebagai kebenaran, dan menyebabkan kebenaran alternatif lainnya ditolak. Penting bagi masyarakat digital untuk menyadari adanya fenomena tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap perspektif mahasiswa semester 6 program studi Sastra Inggris, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta terhadap fenomena post truth yang muncul melalui media sosial yang tercermin dari dua film, Missing dan Don't Look Up. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan respon pembaca dan teori McIntire tentang post truth, temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa secara umum dapat melihat fenomena post truth yang ada di masyarakat dan mampu menganalisis bagaimana post truth disebarkan. Dari langkah terakhir penelitian, terlihat bahwa lebih dari setengah mahasiswa menunjukkan sikap kritis dan netral, sementara sisanya menunjukkan sikap acuh tak acuh, dengan alasan tidak mengenal orang yang terlibat dalam berita tersebut. Sementara itu, sebagian besar siswa menunjukkan kepedulian dan pemikiran kritis yang lebih besar ketika menanggapi isu global yang disajikan dalam Don't Look Up. Hal ini mengindikasikan bahwa, secara umum, mahasiswa menunjukkan sikap yang diperlukan-sikap kritis dan evaluatif terhadap narasi yang beredar di platform digital.

Kata Kunci: *post truth, informasi digital, respons pembaca*



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INTRODUCTION

Since its early development during the industrial revolution in 1800s (More, 2000), the second industrial revolution (2.0) in the 1900s to the fourth industrial revolution (4.0) (Xu, 2018), technology has continued to evolve. Today, various conveniences are available to society, especially with the presence of information technology. This continuous development leads humanity to different phenomenon including one called post-truth. The term first emerged in 2006, used to indicate that we now live in an era where the truth that is conveyed is sometimes disregarded and can be replaced by other "truths" that are deliberately constructed (manufactured truths) (Schaberg, 2018). Post-truth refers to a view that is accepted as truth by the public. Unlike misunderstanding, post-truth involves a discourse being presented to influence the audience, regardless of whether it is true or not (McIntire, 2018). When such "truth" is accepted by the audience without undergoing a validation process, it can lead to negative consequences. Post-truth is when a particular viewpoint is publicized, accepted as true, and causes other alternative truths to be rejected (Sim, 2019). Although believed to be different from propaganda (Poulakidakos, Veneti, & Frangonikolopoulos, 2018), post truth may lead to the same result, in which people are manipulated by a certain narrative. Once this constructed narrative is accepted by society, it becomes very difficult to change that public perspective.

The domino effect caused by post-truth can actually be prevented or minimized if society is aware of its dangers, especially social media users. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram are among the social media platforms with the most users (Dixon, 2023). A single piece of information from one social media account can be accepted as truth and widely accepted by the masses who read and share it. The case of a journalist covering news of "Burning Sun" in South Korea is an example of how media can be used as propaganda, using post truth phenomenon and its domino effect to lead public opinion to certain direction. The journalist's career came to a halt in 2018 because the public believed the more powerful and well-known figures involved (emmamadison24, 2019). Five years later, when new evidence emerged in the form of traceable digital conversations, South Korean media once again exposed the wrongdoing of the famous artist, who was later investigated and found guilty. The journalist's career slowly recovered, but the five years of hardship she endured could not be undone (Damiana, 2024). During election periods, the post-truth phenomenon is even more strongly felt. Various media outlets were filled with news about



the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, ranging from positive coverage to narratives aimed at discrediting them. TikTok as one of popular social media in Indonesia is said to be a powerful space of political contestation and considerably influenced public opinion (Indainanto, Bangun, & Nasution, 2025)

The most popular social media platform, Facebook, is mostly used by people aged 24–30, while Instagram is dominated by users aged 18–24 (Barnhart, 2023). In Indonesia, the largest group of internet users also falls within the productive age range of 25–30 years (Annur, 2023). It can be concluded that active social media users are primarily university students and young professionals. For digital users in this age group, being aware of the post-truth phenomenon is important. Thus, this research explores the perspective of university students—who are generally in their productive years and frequently exposed to digital media— on the post-truth phenomenon as depicted in films.

Film is a medium that is widely regarded as a powerful tool for shaping discourse— both political and sociocultural (Kellner, 1993). Numerous films depict the post-truth phenomenon. *Don't Look Up*, for instance, tells the story of the world's destruction and the emergence of various narratives about it on social media, highlighting the post-truth theme. Another film covering similar issue is *Missing*. It tells a story of a child whose mother is kidnapped, leading her to conduct her own investigation using digital tools. Both films which were released in 2020 explored post-truth theme in different contexts. Therefore, they are taken as the subjects to discuss in Movie Criticism class to see students' perspectives on post truth phenomenon.

Students, who are inherently digital media users, are vulnerable to the negative impacts of post-truth. Analysing students' perspectives as “readers” of film, in relation to post-truth, can reveal how they respond to various narratives evolved in the post truth era. Using a reader-response approach, the study investigated whether students are aware of the post-truth phenomenon in society and whether they recognize the impact of social media in the spread of post-truth narratives. This study attempts to measure students' awareness of post-truth—a phenomenon where objective facts become less influential than personal beliefs that evolve into public “truths.”

This research is a descriptive qualitative study conducted with thirty-five (35) sixth-semester students from the English Literature study program who were enrolled in the Movie Criticism course. The approach used for data collection and analysis is the reader-



response approach, which was also used by Peter Rupert (1981) to study his students in literature and film classes. In this case, film is regarded as a text—similar to a novel—since both share common elements such as character, plot, and dialogue, which construct a narrative (Eliot in Stam, 2004, p. 2). It was chosen because it allows each respondent to express their perception of a text (Ali, 1993).

Several steps taken in the data collection process were (1) providing context in which the researcher, acting as a facilitator, ensuring that students have adequate knowledge to understand the text or film. The films used in this study are *Don't Look Up* and *Missing*; (2) initial discussion, when students freely discussed the film in small groups; (3) repeated reflections in the form of free writing, where students could express their opinions about the film openly; (4) group assignment by in the form of FGD (Focus Group Discussion) to explore students' perspectives on the impact of post-truth as presented in the films; (5) project work which is completed individually or in groups. This represents the final stage of the reader-response process, where students concretize their understanding and appreciation of the film. The assigned project was to write a letter or diary entry as if the student were one of the characters in the film. The data analysis method used in this research is the Miles, Huberman, & Saldana analysis model. In the first stage, data condensation, students' perspectives on the post-truth phenomenon in social media are mapped. In the second stage, data display, the student's answers are presented in the form of chart and quotations. In the third stage, discussions and conclusions were generated.

The concern on post truth was raised in multiple discussions, including by a political analyst in an article titled "Analyst Warns of 'Negative Campaign' and 'Black Campaign'—What Are They?" (Darmawan & Pratiwi, 2024). Lewandowsky (2017) and Yalcinkaya et al. (2018) respectively explored the concept of post truth and how students in Turkey evaluate misinformation in social media today. Meanwhile in Indonesia, Wahyono et al. (2020), Purba & Sitorus (2023) studied the types of audiences that receive false information within the context of post-truth have and the impact of post-truth. Research on how university students view post truth and responded to it is understudied. Therefore, this research is important to determine whether students are aware of the risks posed by post-truth and to understand whether film as a popular medium can effectively convey messages about the dangers of post-truth's impact.



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To understand students' perspectives on the post-truth phenomenon in the films *Missing* and *Don't Look Up*, reader-response approach was conducted through five stages. The first stage was contextualization, which involved discussing what post-truth is, how it emerges and spreads, the impacts it causes, and the steps that can be taken amidst the discourse of post-truth. This stage also included watching the films to be discussed. The second stage was an initial discussion where students freely shared their thoughts. This stage aimed to help students process the storyline of the film by highlighting aspects they found interesting and listening to others' opinions about the film.

The third stage was repeated reflection in written form. This was intended to strengthen students' understanding of the narrative and prepare them to express their views in the FGD more confidently. The fourth stage involved group activities through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to explore students' perspectives on the post-truth phenomenon in the films. The final stage was an individual project, in which students concretized the film's narrative by writing a short story. Students were required to write from a first-person perspective, choosing one of the characters in the film—either a main character or a random digital society member—imagining themselves as if they were in that situation.

The data analysed in the study were derived from stages four and five. The FGD results were used to explore students' perspectives on the post-truth phenomenon, specifically how post-truth spreads in society, its impact, and how the main characters respond to the phenomenon. The short stories served as a means to assess what students would do when confronted with competing narratives of truth in the post-truth era.

Students' Perspective on the Emergence of Post Truth Phenomenon in *Missing* and *Don't Look Up*

Both *Missing* and *Don't Look Up* carries post truth phenomenon in its story. The first film is about a single mother, Grace Allen, who was kidnapped and left her only teenage daughter named June in the blind. From the FGD, it can be seen that the students can grasp the post truth phenomenon in the film. There are two manufactured truth that was brought in the discussion. The first is the truth about the kidnapping was obscured by various narratives spread through news portals and digital media opinions. The circulating reports claimed that Grace faked her own kidnapping for various assumed motives—such as avoiding debt, adopting a new identity, or abandoning her daughter. These stories were

supported by the fact that Grace had used a different name in her youth. The post-truth atmosphere was strongly felt here, as multiple narratives of “truth” circulated through mass media. Meanwhile, June, being closely tied to the subject of the news, could not confirm the real truth due to a lack of family support and solid evidence.

Second, the truth that Grace Allen had been kidnapped was deliberately obscured by a false narrative constructed by Kevin, Grace’s boyfriend. Kevin fabricated a story by sending June a photo implying that her mother was on vacation with him, hiring an actress to impersonate June’s mother, and staging a fake kidnapping abroad. In reality, this was part of a narrative he created to prevent Grace from being found and to avoid being identified as the suspect. The false narrative Kevin built was a form of deception intended to manipulate multiple parties—including Grace, the police, and even the FBI. This was noted and expressed by the students when they mentioned “*June believed that Kevin went on a holiday with her mom, but turn out he didn’t*”. This statement is implying their understanding about the existence of post truth, the emergence of truth manufactured by Kevin.

Third, the truth that June’s father was still alive was obscured by a lie deliberately created by June’s mother. One student identified this as a post-truth phenomenon and explained:

“Her mother said her father had passed away, but in the later scenes, June seems to miss him and keeps remembering him. On Father’s Day, she even uploaded a childhood photo with him. Then it turns out at the end of the film that her dad wasn’t dead, but imprisoned. Ibunya bilang kalau ayahnya sudah meninggal, padahal dalam scene-scene selanjutnya June kaya kangen keinget sama ayahnya. Dan waktu hari Ayah, dia upload fotonya waktu kecil sama ayahnya. Trus ternyata di akhir film ada penjelasan kalau ayahnya nggak meninggal tapi dipenjara”.

This phenomenon was identified as a form of post-truth within the family sphere, where the truth is deliberately obscured by a lie. The fact that June’s father was in prison was altered into the story that he had passed away. Grace Allen, June’s mother, changed this fact so that June would not feel sad or search for her father. As a result, June believed this newly constructed truth—that her father had died. She even shared this narrative on her social media and people around her also believed that her father had passed away. Only Grace Allen and her lawyer, Heather, knew the actual truth.

Fourth constructed truth is made by Heather, Grace Allen’s friend, who helped conceal Grace’s past. The truth that Heather was assisting June’s mother was obscured by the “fact” that June discovered when she hacked Kevin’s email. June then reported her findings—which she believed to be the truth—to the FBI. This represents a form of falsehood, where

inaccurate information is spread unintentionally, without the deliberate aim of deceiving others.

The emergence of various versions of “truth” in society, when connected to McIntire’s post-truth theory, can be classified into three general causes: falsehood, wilful ignorance, and intentional lying. In the Focused Group Discussion (FGD), students were asked several questions that reflected their understanding on post truth phenomenon in the films. Direct questions like “Among three causes of post truth that McIntire postulated, which do you think is the main cause of post truth happening in the film?” shows exact answer. Then they were asked to elaborate to show deeper understanding on the case. Based on the FGD results, 51% of students stated that the primary cause of post-truth in the film *Missing* was falsehood. In this case, falsehood is presented through the ignorance of readers who then acted upon the misinformation, such as by commenting on posts and news about Grace Allen on social media, spreading certain opinions about her, or retelling what they had read without considering facts or other possible explanations. From their discussion, the students are able to analyse how the post truth circulated

“Falsehood came from influencers who were livestreaming on TikTok explaining the timeline, podcasters saying the mom was just taking time to calm down and start a new life, and also from tons of tweets. There were so many new theories, even though people didn’t actually know if they were true or not, everyone seemed to support the new speculations.

Falsehood dari influencer yang lagi live Tiktok yang ngejelasin kronologi, podcaster yang bilang kalau ibunya lagi menenangkan diri dan memulai hidup baru, tweet-tweet juga banyak. Kaya banyak teori-teori baru, padahal orang-orang tu ngga tau bener atau ngga tapi orang-orang kaya ngedukung”

Meanwhile, 9% of students believed that the primary cause of the post-truth phenomenon in the film *Missing* was wilful ignorance, where the audience showed no concern for the actual facts about Grace Allen, something that also appeared in social media comment sections. The remaining 40% of students believed the main cause was deliberate lying, manufactured by June’s father, who was the actual kidnapper, and Kevin, who collaborated with him.

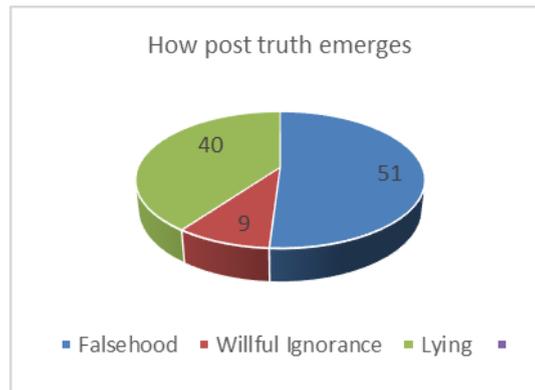


Figure 1. How *post-truth* emerges in the film *Missing*.

In the film *Don't Look Up*, students also identified several forms of post-truth circulating throughout the story. First, the truth about a comet heading toward Earth with catastrophic potential to is distorted by the President's statement claiming that no such comet is on a collision course with Earth. This presidential claim was promoted with the slogan "*Don't Look Up*", while scientists and astronomers—relying on data and scientific calculations—campaign for the truth using the slogan "*Just Look Up*." The President and the U.S. government attempted to obscure the facts about the comet with belief-based statements aimed at gaining public sympathy during the presidential election period. This perspective was expressed by students during the FGD

"The phrases "*Don't Look Up*" and "*Just Look Up*" illustrate a terrifying post-truth era, because the astronomers used "*Just Look Up*" to encourage the public to think realistically—that we are facing a major disaster if the comet is not properly dealt with. However, the President said "*Don't Look Up*" because they refused to accept the consequences

Dalam kalimat 'Don't Look Up' dan 'Just Look Up' menunjukkkn era post truth yang mengerikan karena itu berarti para astronom membuat kalimat itu supaya masyarakat berfikir realistis bahwa kita akan mendapat bencana besar (kalau komet tidak ditangani dengan benar). Tetapi Presiden mengatakn 'Don't Look Up' karena mereka tidak menerima konsekuensinya."

Another truth that was distorted involved how to handle the impending collision with the comet. The President and the wealthy owner of the BASH Corporation believed the impact could be prevented by detonating explosive drones owned by the company. However, the scientists unanimously agreed that the comet needed to be destroyed immediately using a rocket strike to minimize the catastrophic effects on Earth. According to the students, there were two versions of the truth in this situation, but these differing narratives did not arise with the intent to manipulate the public. Instead, they were based on misguided beliefs that were then spread (falsehood). This was expressed

during the FGD

“When the President and BASH CEO were overly confident that they could blow up the Dibiasky comet and extract its minerals. But it turns out, they had their own spaceship prepared—just in case.

Ketika Presiden dan CEO BASH sudah percaya diri banget bisa meledakkan komet Dibiasky dan mengambil mineralnya. Ternyata mereka malah punya pesawat luar angkasa sendiri untuk jaga-jaga.”

The explanation reflects the students’ perspective that the truth about how to handle the comet collision was obscured with falsehood. This is because the BASH Corporation was “overly confident” in their ability to destroy the comet using their latest technology, without sacrificing the valuable minerals contained in it. They only realized their mistake when the technology malfunctioned and failed during the process.

In the FGD, 20% of the students stated that the post-truth phenomenon in *Don’t Look Up* emerged because of *falsehood*, manifested through BASH Corporation’s misplaced confidence in handling the collision, the general public’s support for one side without knowing the actual truth, and social media comments that showed fanaticism toward a particular version of the “truth” being spread. Meanwhile, 34% of students believed the spread of post-truth in the film was due to willful ignorance, as seen in characters who stated they did not care about the comet’s existence because they could not see the Dibiasky comet with the naked eye—at least not until it was already close to Earth.

Most students, however, considered the main cause of post-truth in the film to *be deliberate lies*, particularly those spread by the government.

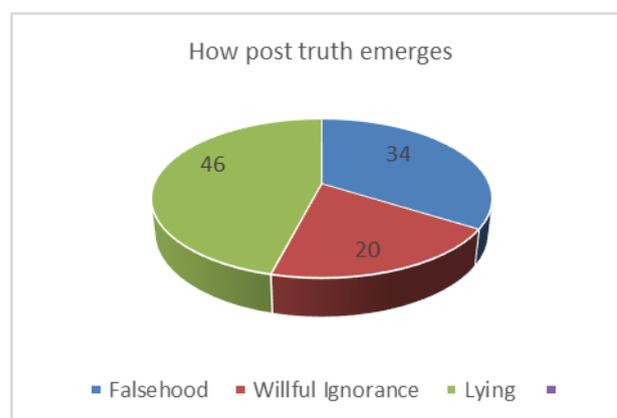


Figure 2. How post truth in the film *Don’t Look Up*

Students' Perspective on the Impact of Post Truth Phenomenon in *Missing* and *Don't Look Up*

Students had different opinions about who was most affected by the obscuring of truth in the films *Missing* and *Don't Look Up*. Based on the students' perspectives, the following are the parties impacted by the post-truth phenomenon in the film *Missing*. The first is general digital users. In the film *Missing*, the majority of students believed that netizens, or the digital public, were the most affected by the obscuring of truth presented in the story. It is reflected in one of their explanation:

"The film reflects what's happening on social media right now, like how June doesn't just accept all the news about her parents directly. We as viewers also learn not to believe in the news blindly." (Student 1)

Filmnya mencerminkan apa yang terjadi di media sosial sekarang, kaya si June yang ngga nerima mentah-mentah semua berita tentang orang tuanya. Kita sebagai penonton pun juga tau untuk ngga nelen berita mentah-mentah" (mahasiswa 1)

"Netizens realize that there are cases that are actually distorted, and many people believe in them, so it's like viewers can now be more selective and aware of the hoaxes being spread." (Student 2)

Netizen menyadari ternyata ada kasus yang sebenarnya ngga sama persis tapi disimpangkan dan banyak juga yang percaya, jadi kaya penonton tu bisa pilah pilih dan aware sama hoax yang disebar" (mahasiswa2)

From the students' perspective after watching the film, digital media users are in the end the most affected because although many versions of the truth emerged at the beginning of Grace Allen's disappearance, it was eventually revealed that she was indeed kidnapped by June's father. Grace's past, which involved changing her name, was also explained—not because of fraud, but because she was fleeing June's father, who had a history of domestic violence and drug abuse. According to the students, social media users ultimately learn that when a case is reported in various conflicting ways, it is important not to judge based solely on opinion. Strong evidence is needed to believe in a particular narrative, and news readers must carefully filter the information they consume.

The second party impacted is the people directly related to the issue. In this film, it is June, as the only family member of the person at the centre of the media discussion. June was also seen as being impacted by the various speculations circulating in the media, particularly when the real truth had not yet been revealed.

"June got angry at her friend who suggested she stop looking, because there was a chance her mom wasn't really kidnapped. When June got angry, she felt even more alone since she only her friends to talk to. (Student 4)

June jadi marah pada temannya yang menyarankan untuk berhenti mencari, karena kemungkinan ibunya tidak benar-benar diculik. Saat June marah ini dia jadi lebih sebatang kara karena tidak punya keluarga dan hanya teman-temannya yang bisa diajak sharing tentang

masalahnya.” (mahasiswa 4)

“In the film, it is June (who is mostly affected), but from the viewer’s point of view, we are also affected because we feel what June is feeling.

Dalam filmnya June, tapi point of view dari penonton juga terkena dampak karena ikut mempercayai apa yang June rasakan” (Mahasiswa 5)

The next party affected is the content creator. When speculation about Grace Allen’s kidnapping started to spread in the media, many content creators began covering the case. In the final part of the film, a narrative is shown depicting Grace and June’s life several months after the kidnapping was uncovered. Their story was turned into a TV series that portrayed the kidnapping and how a child tried to find her mother using the internet. This was also seen by students as an indirect consequence of post-truth.

“Looking at what the podcaster said, it shows that content creators benefitted from clout-chasing. With a case like that, anyone who wants attention just jumps on the trend. And then there’s Javier, who got paid a lot.

Melihat apa yang dibilang podcaster, berarti kan menguntungkan content creator untuk pansos. Dari kasus tersebut, yang pengen pansos ya tinggal ikut aja. Kedua Javier, kan bayarannya gede” (mahasiswa 6)

The speculation around Grace Allen’s kidnapping highlights how news and information can become distorted in the post-truth era. The media often focuses on sensationalism and drama to attract attention, sometimes resulting in the spread of information that is not entirely accurate. Even unverified speculations can shape public perception and influence how people think about a case.

Meanwhile, in the film *Don’t Look Up*, all students agreed that the impact of post-truth was felt across all of society, from the government to everyday citizens who were otherwise uninformed. The consequences of the obscured truth about the astronomical phenomenon led to global chaos, which in the film is illustrated by the Earth’s destruction after colliding with the comet. In addition to the large-scale devastation, the film also depicted several personal impacts. According to the students, the affected groups include the following. First and foremost is Kate Dibiasky, the first scientist who noticed the comet. She and her professor, Dr. Randall Mindy, conducted a media interview to inform the public about the comet. However, the TV hosts responded too casually, turning the information into a joke. This caused Kate, already anxious about the potential planet-destroying collision, to panic and shout during the interview. After the interview aired, social media users posted various reactions, with Kate receiving harsh criticism for her emotional outburst.

Students see what happened to Kate Dibiasky as the impact of post truth phenomenon.

This can be inferred from their statements in the discussion:

“On social media after the interview, because she came off too harsh, she ended up getting bullied by netizens.” (Student 1)

Di social media selepas interview karena dia terlalu brutal akhirnya jadi bulan-bulanan sama netizen” (mahasiswa 1)

“Kate became the talk of the town everywhere because her statements were seen as too intense—even though she was telling the truth. She acted that way so people would believe how serious the situation was. But for the public, the issue was overshadowed by pointless memes, and the talk show host just laughed and didn’t support the guest to gain public trust.” (Student 2)

Kate, dimana-mana jadi bahan gunjingan karena statemennya yang terlalu keras padahal itu kebenarannya, dia begitu supaya orang-orang percaya bahwa itu memang sebahaya itu dan bagi masyarakatnya sendiri, isunya tertutupi sama meme yang ngga penting dan presenter acaranya malah ketawa-ketawa dan ngga support sama narasumber agar mereka bisa dipercayai public” (mahasiswa 2)

“Kate was trying to tell the truth, but on social media she was turned into a meme and ended up being the one who got hit the hardest.

Kate karena dia berusaha untuk mengungkapkan fakta tapi di social media dia dijadiin meme dan dia paling dapat dampaknya” (mahasiswa 3)

The students think that Kate is not only affected negatively because her true statement about the comet was negated intentionally by the government, but also because she got the backlash of public opinion who were misled by the other truth.

The other scientist mostly affected in this film is Randal Mindy, Kate’s Professor at the University. He was affected by the post-truth climate in both positive and negative ways. Initially, his calm demeanor when explaining the comet gained positive public reception. His appearance and profession contributed to this favorable response during the first interview with Kate. One student explicitly stated that Prof. Mindy benefited from the post-truth narrative:

“Kate & Prof. Randall (are impacted)—Kate became a meme, while Randall became ‘the hot professor’; no one talked about the actual content.

Kate & Prof Randall; Kate jadi meme sedang Randall jadi professor yang ganteng, ngga ada yang membahas substansi” (Mahasiswa 4)

Other students referred to scientists more generally, including Kate, Prof. Mindy, and other academics seen in the meeting discussing how to prevent the comet’s collision.

“The scientists were the most affected because they couldn’t convey the truth. It felt like their access was cut off, and they didn’t have the freedom to share their findings.

Para ilmuwan yang paling terdampak karena mereka tidak bisa menyebarkan kebenaran karena aksesnya seolah-olah ditutup dan mereka tidak punya kebebasan untuk menyampaikan hasil penelitian mereka sendiri.” (mahasiswa 5)

“Scientists didn’t get public trust because of the conflicting information coming from the government, so it was hard for them to distribute or broadcast their discoveries to the general public.

Ilmuwan tidak mendapatkan kepercayaan karena adanya berita simpang siur dari pemerintah sehingga sulit untuk menyebarkan atau memberitakan temuan mereka kepada masyarakat luas” (mahasiswa 6)



Students agreed that the general public suffered the most from the effects of post-truth in *Don't Look Up*. People were left confused by the dual narratives in the media and did not know whom to trust. This ultimately created not just believers and skeptics but also a third group of people who simply did not care.

"Netizens were already being presented with facts, but they were overshadowed by other kinds of information. People cared more about the person behind the facts than the facts themselves." (Student 1)

Netizen yang sudah disuguhi fakta cuman karena ketutupan informasi lain dan mereka lebih peduli ke pribadi orang yang ngasih fakta itu daripada fakta yang disampaikan" (Mahasiswa 1)

"Netizens (are most affected)—because whatever they saw on social media is what most of them believed. So, when scientists were turned into memes, and Randall was glorified as the handsome professor, that's what netizens focused on. That's what distracted them from the idea that a world-ending comet was heading for Earth." (Student 2)

Netizen, karena apapun yang mereka dapatkan di media social ya itulah yang mayoritas percayai jadi ketika di medsos ilmuwan jadi meme, si Randall diagung-agungkan sebagai professor yang ganteng, itu lah yang dipercayai netizen, itu lah yang menutupi pemikiran tentang akan adanya meteor yang akan menghancurkan bumi" (Mahasiswa 2)

Students noted that apathy emerged due to the overwhelming amount of information, which caused the public to shift their focus from the real issue to the personalities of those delivering the truth, such as Prof. Mindy and Kate Dibiasky. The comet was no longer the centre of conversation. Kate's emotional reaction and Mindy's looks took over headlines and comment sections.

Additionally, students observed another kind of apathy shown through characters who were completely indifferent to the news about the comet. One such character is Yule, a teenager involved in a street gang. Yule and his group continued partying, shoplifting, and engaging in typical juvenile behavior, completely ignoring the impending comet. Only after meeting Kate and developing a close relationship with her did Yule finally come to believe in the threat of the Dibiasky comet and understand its potentially apocalyptic impact.

Students' Attitude on post truth

Students' attitudes toward the post-truth phenomenon can be observed in the final stage of the reader-response approach. In this final stage, students wrote short stories related to the films. They were asked to compose a brief fictional narrative from a first-person point of view, imagining themselves as someone existing within the film's reality. In this assignment, students were free to choose any character from the film—whether a main character or a random internet user within the general public depicted in the film. From these stories, students' responses and attitudes toward the post-truth phenomenon could be inferred.



However, not all of the students' fictional stories reflected a clear stance. Some chose to write from the perspective of main characters or criminals involved in the kidnapping, so the focus of their stories was more on how those characters dealt with the kidnapping in *Missing* and the meteor impact in *Don't Look Up*—rather than on the post-truth phenomenon.

Out of a total of 35 stories, 16 student attitudes toward the post-truth phenomenon could be identified in relation to the film *Missing*, and 31 in relation to *Don't Look Up*. Thirteen students (37%) who chose the perspective of internet users or June's friends expressed sympathy for the victim's family. Seven of them stated that, as ordinary people who only knew about the incident through news and social media, they felt the need to help the victim by at least spreading information about Grace Allen's disappearance.

As internet users with no personal connection to June, they tried to help by sharing news they believed to be true. The goal of this action was to ensure that the information they believed to be accurate could be more widely disseminated, so more people would recognize the faces of both the victim and the kidnapper. In the film itself, Kevin Lim's involvement as one of the kidnappers was also uncovered thanks to a digital user who recognized his face after it went viral on social media.

Two students took action by posting comments online, expressing their sympathy and hopes that Grace Allen's case would be resolved soon. This was done to show support for the victim's family. From the narratives written by the students, it was clear that they noticed the presence of inappropriate negative comments in response to the tragedy. Their actions were not only meant to express empathy for the victim but also to counteract hate speech that arose due to various speculative narratives about Grace Allen.

They expressed their sympathy and tended to believe the reports claiming that Grace Allen had been kidnapped, rather than the ones suggesting she ran away or staged her own kidnapping, as speculated by some media outlets. Although they did not take further action to support the family, they also refrained from blaming any party. They expressed concern about the hate speech triggered by the spread of speculative information, even though no verified facts had been released by authorities. This shows that students were aware of the negative effects of the post-truth phenomenon and attempted to validate information by conducting further research and consulting various sources.



Meanwhile, three other students who used the perspective of supporting characters in the film offered views based on those roles. One student, writing from the perspective of Javi—the TaskRabbit courier who helped June search for information in Colombia—said that June should stop looking for her mother, as there was a possibility her mother was fine. Javi tried to comfort June by saying this, which indicates that he believed the speculative news circulated by the media regarding Grace Allen. Another student, using the perspective of Heather—Grace Allen’s friend and lawyer—modified the story slightly by stating that Heather was actually in cahoots with James, the real kidnapper. In the short story, the student claimed that Heather refused to help June hack Kevin Lim’s email because it was illegal. The real reason, however, was that she didn’t want to help June, fearing that her involvement in Grace’s kidnapping would be exposed. These three indifferent perspectives cannot be said to represent the students’ attitudes, as the stories were merely repetitions or elaborations of what had already been depicted in the film.

On the other hand, students’ attitudes toward the post-truth phenomenon in *Don’t Look Up* were more clearly observable, even when they chose the perspectives of main characters—since the characters’ lives were heavily influenced by post-truth narratives in social media. Only four students did not show any discernible stance toward post-truth discourse in their stories. The majority of students (69%) stated that they would validate information by consulting various news sources about the meteor predicted to hit Earth. They expressed scepticism toward news, especially those issued by the government.

Trust in the government within the fictional reality of *Don’t Look Up* was very low among students. This distrust stemmed from President Orleans’ questionable conduct on other occasions, including scandals such as infidelity and being caught smoking on camera during her campaign. The students’ attitudes toward the post-truth phenomenon in the film were significantly influenced by their doubts about government statements—particularly those made by the president.

Some students even described themselves participating in protests after the government cancelled the comet destruction mission due to BASH, a company supporting the government, discovering rare and valuable minerals inside the meteor. Through short stories written from the perspective of the general public, students expressed distrust toward both the government and the BASH corporation. While they didn’t portray themselves as the leaders of the protests, they did describe themselves joining protest



movements questioning the government's decision to cancel the mission. In addition to the meteor posing a potentially catastrophic threat to humanity as a whole, students were naturally skeptical of the government's policies. The existence of two conflicting narratives—one from the government and the other from scientists—gave students a strong reason to take action and demand that the government respond to scientific data shared by astronomers and researchers.

Meanwhile, seven students (20%) demonstrated a critical attitude in the short stories they wrote. The abundance of conflicting information about the meteor left them unsure of what was actually true. These students showed an understanding of the need to validate data by gathering information from multiple credible sources. By not relying on a single narrative, they felt that they could better determine which account was most likely to be objectively true.

Scepticism was also evident in stories where students wrote from the perspective of ordinary citizens. This scepticism was sometimes directed at the government and sometimes at Kate Dibiasky and Professor Randal when they first spoke about the meteor on TV. Although the stories didn't always show the characters taking further action, it can be concluded that students did not blindly trust the news presented by mass media regarding global issues.

Scepticism is indeed necessary when dealing with newly emerging facts or when multiple versions of the "truth" exist. If people were to accept the news about the comet without question, it could lead to widespread panic. Such panic, if spread, could have broad negative consequences. When the news about the comet first broke, some students stated they didn't fully believe it because it came from two academics who claimed to have seen the comet without providing sufficient evidence or data. Therefore, they did not immediately trust the report. Similarly, when the government claimed that no meteor would strike Earth, students remained sceptical due to their pre-existing distrust in the government.

Overall, it can be said that students were able to take appropriate stances when facing the post-truth phenomenon. None of them fully believed in narratives presented by the media without first validating them. They validated information by seeking out additional sources, which allowed them to consider alternative versions of the truth that provided more objective data and facts. This attitude was evident in the students' responses



expressed through their short stories as part of the final activity in the reader-response approach

CONCLUSION

In general, students were able to grasp the phenomenon of post-truth in the films *Missing* and *Don't Look Up* well. All students who participated in this study explained how post-truth can emerge within society and the impact it could have if this phenomenon continues. The impacts discussed during the FGD (Focus Group Discussion) varied, ranging from personal effects as depicted in *Missing*, to broader and catastrophic consequences shown in *Don't Look Up*. All students stated that the post-truth phenomenon has negative effects resulting from the distortion of facts and the manufacturing of truth for the benefit of certain parties. Information technology was also mentioned in the FGD as one of the mediums that accelerates the spread of post-truth. The digital era has made it easier for people to manipulate information, spread falsehoods, and ultimately shape or influence public opinion. Public perception of truth, influenced by these various "truths," often becomes the commonly accepted truth.

Students were also able to analyse the impacts of post-truth on various parties. Generally, students considered the public to be the most affected, both directly and indirectly. The public, as consumers of truth narratives on social media, struggle to distinguish and validate objective truths. This often leads to divisions in public opinion and can spark debates and hate speech online. Another consequence of this split in opinion is a growing scepticism within society, where people no longer trust any side—even when the actual truth is revealed.

The attitudes students adopted in post-truth situations can be seen through the essays and short stories they produced as the final activity in the reader-response approach. For the film *Missing*, more than half of the students demonstrated a critical and neutral stance, while the rest showed indifference, arguing that they did not know the person involved in the news. Meanwhile, most students showed greater concern and critical thinking when responding to the global issue presented in *Don't Look Up*. This indicates that, in general, students demonstrated the necessary attitude—being critical and evaluative of the narratives circulating in the digital platforms.

From the findings of this study on students' perceptions of the impacts of post-truth as depicted in the two films, it can be concluded that film is an effective medium for raising



public awareness about certain issues. In this case, the issue is the post-truth phenomenon, where objective truth is obscured by other narratives that are presented as though they are the real truth. A sceptical and critical attitude is essential for people in the digital era, as various forms of information can be spread by anyone and accessed by everyone. It is therefore crucial to develop the ability to guard oneself against propaganda, manipulation, and lies produced by parties who distort the truth for personal or group interests. This is especially true for students of English Letters study program of UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta semester six as the respondents in this research. It is interesting and advisable to conduct further research that involve university students of early semesters to see whether or not the semester taken and age group of the students influence the result.

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