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"Fake News" and Cyber-Propaganda in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recentering the Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Dominant narratives about the contemporary problem of "fake news" and cyber-propaganda have focused on how its evolution and manifestation has been closely linked with the rise of populist politics, digital capitalism, the transformation of the public sphere and structural weaknesses of liberal and mainstream media. These narratives often use the Western gaze as an analytical and theoretical toolkit to understand a global phenomenon, thereby missing local specificities and nuances. In this special issue we argue that any attempt to make sense of the evolution, mutation and sharing of fake news and cyber-propaganda in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be done outside the determining and constraining context of the production and consumption of news in Africa. At the core of this context of production and consumption are resource-constrained newsrooms, an ever-shifting communication ecology, realignment of the relationship between producers and consumers of content, digitization of political communication, media repression, digital literacy and competencies and competing regimes of truth and non-truth. The special issue engages with the phenomena of "fake news" and cyber-propaganda in sub-Saharan Africa. It attempts to show that there are alternative ways of thinking about the normative and epistemological challenges facing both journalism and society, more generally, in the twenty-first century. The issue carries six theoretically driven empirical studies that use a wide range of qualitative evidence to closely explore a number of themes, including the production and consumption of "fake news" and cyber-propaganda in specific contexts within the continent.

Introduction

The contemporary phenomenon of "fake news" has gained unprecedented scholarly attention since the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America in 2016. It is important to underscore that "fake news" is an "age-old problem" (Rodny-Gumede 2017), which the Internet and social media platforms have refashioned as a "new threat". In other words, fake news has always been part and

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parcel of the news ecosystem, but the advent of digital media technologies has amplified the challenge even further. Ogola (2017) aptly captures it as follows: "Africa has a long history of fake news after years of living with non-truth". This view is reinforced by Msindo in his observation that fake news, which manifested itself as propaganda, at least in historical terms, dates back to the colonial era in Zimbabwe, where it was deployed by the colonial state as "a response to political paranoia and insecurity" (Msindo 2009: 663). Moyo similarly contends that that the "use of mass media as mouthpieces for state propaganda has persisted from the colonial through to the post-colonial era" (Moyo 2012: 180). This historical scenario in which the state was the main producer of fake news has continued into the postcolonial era in many sub-Saharan African countries. Fake news as a phenomenon in Africa also pre-dates the era of online news. As Mutsvairo and Bebawi (2019: 5) opine, "journalists have always had to learn to treat journalism as a contested area vulnerable to manipulation by governments and powerful social elites".

Writing in the European context, Luciano (2016) describes "fake news" as the "the 400-year-old problem", which must be resolved in order to avert what he calls "the post-truth crisis". While "floating signifiers" like "post-truth"[1] have accompanied the deployment of the term "fake news", it is noteworthy that such an imagined (post-truth) society or moment in history is not universally shared across space and time. Such universalizing language often serves the function of obfuscating context-specific nuances associated with the contemporary problem of fake news, which is wreaking havoc across the world. For instance, sub-Saharan Africa has its own peculiar challenges, which provide a fertile ground for the production and consumption of fake news. Although there are discernible similarities with the Global North, there are also countless differences, which require a sober analysis in order to understand the contemporary problem of fake news. Each news media ecosystem has its own specificities, and thus the manifestations of fake news, misinformation and disinformation must be understood within a given socio-political and economic context. Our argument, therefore, is that context matters. It gives form and shape to the recurring challenge of fake news.

The contemporary problem of fake news cannot also be understood outside of the recent digital transformation of the news media ecosystem. Although in the Global North, fake news has been represented as largely a phenomenon associated with the rise of populist politics, digital capitalism, transformation of the public sphere and structural weaknesses of liberal and mainstream media (Farkas and Schou 2018), little is known about the drivers of this scourge in sub-Saharan Africa. The mass production and circulation of misinformation, mal-information, disinformation and cyber-propaganda (the use of digital media to spread propaganda) has been made possible by the low barriers to media and artistic expression associated with the Internet and its ancillary digital technologies. The increasing mass availability and accessibility of various tools of mental production to "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006) has contributed immensely to the reconfiguration and "transformation of the public sphere" (Verstraeten 2000; Keane 1995). This suggests that the means of mental production have changed hands from being the exclusive preserve of professional journalists to also include citizen journalists (Rosen 2017).

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[1]The context in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

In short, ordinary people can now take pictures, write stories, capture videos and edit and upload audio broadcasts in real time via social media platforms and the Internet. These people formerly known as the audience have been reconceptualized as "media creators" (Jenkins 2006), and "produsers" (signaling the blurring of production and consumption) (Bruns 2007). In predominantly closed societies like Eswatini (Lunga and Mthembu in this issue), Uganda (Strand and Svensson in this issue) and Zimbabwe (Ncube in this issue; Moyo 2018; Mare and Matsilele 2020), the entry of social media platforms into the news and information ecosystem has opened new "sites of [real and false] news production and distribution" (Ogola 2017, our emphasis). As Moyo (2018) observes, mobile internet and social media have become vehicles for spreading a mix of fake news, rumor, hatred, disinformation and misinformation. Because of limited access to a multiplicity of news sources, ordinary people often (mis)take "the popularity or virality of a shared piece of information as indication of its veracity" (Chakrabarti et al. 2018: 44). Under such conditions, there are limited opportunities and tools for news verification. In a context where the state exercises a great deal of control or ownership over the media (Wasserman et al. 2019) alternative sources of information often assume the position of the "truth news media" whereas the mainstream public media become symbols of "false news media".

The dramatic shift in what Couldry (2001) calls "media power"[2] signifies a transformation of gigantic proportions in so far as the mediation of news and information is concerned. As a result of the power of "mass self-communication" (Castells 2009), the news and information ecosystem has been besieged by tons of unverified and misleading information competing for audience attention in both traditional and digital media platforms. Of particular importance is the fact that the cost for like-minded people to connect and locate each other has also tremendously declined over the last two decades (Rosen 2017), which has contributed to the normalization of echo chambers and filter bubbles especially on private social media platforms like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Gatekeeping practices as evidenced through rigorous verification and fact-checking traditionally associated with legacy media are struggling to cope with the mass production and circulation of content. Even on traditional media platforms, the speed at which information and news are being churned out via comment sections and social media platforms present serious challenges for gatekeepers. The fact that ordinary people can now reach a specified audience without the mediatory role of the traditional media indicates that it is now easier for unverified and misleading information to reach a lot more audiences (Rosen 2017). The long and short of it is that the relationship between the traditional media and their erstwhile audiences has been significantly reconfigured. This situation has obliterated "'the myth of the mediated centre' which claims that media (traditional mass media institutions) are privileged access points to our centre of social values and social reality" (Couldry 2014: 880).

The pronounced scholarly attention focusing on fake news has somehow been largely dominated by epistemological, definitional, theoretical and methodological approaches from the Global North (Farkas and Schou 2018; Giglietto et al. 2016; Waisbord 2018;

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[2]"Media power" refers to the concentration of symbolic power in media institutions, particularly those of television, radio and the press (the common-sense definition of "the media").

Bakir and McStay 2018). While "fake news" is not entirely a new phenomenon, in recent times, the term "has been used to refer to content featuring the style of conventional news intended to deliberately misinform. This version of 'fake news' fundamentally refers to fabricated information that astutely mimics news and taps into existing public beliefs to influence electoral [and other forms] of behaviour" (Waisbord 2018: 1867). Because of the loose and sometimes opportunistic appropriation of the term "fake news", Farkas and Schou (2018: 298) argue that the moniker has become a floating signifier, thus "a signifier lodged in-between different hegemonic projects seeking to provide an image of how society is and ought to be structured". In authoritarian regimes, the term has been deployed as a "mechanism by which the powerful can clamp down upon, restrict, undermine and circumvent the free press" (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017: 5). At worst, it has been used to justify unnecessary and disproportionate forms of state-ordered Internet shutdowns in Africa (Mare, 2020c). The weaponization of fake news and cyber-propaganda by political parties pose serious threats to electoral democracy (see Maweu, Ncube and Ekdale and Tully in this issue).

In view of the foregoing observations, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) refrain from using the term "fake news", choosing rather to coin the concept of "information disorders". By "information disorders", they refer to three types of false and misleading news and information. This includes mis-information (which is when false information is shared, but no harm is meant), dis-information (which is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm) and mal-information (which is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere) (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017: 5). While we acknowledge the complexities of defining the concept of "fake news", we argue that the (un)intentional mass production and distribution of false and misleading information and news by produsers has been the key driver of the recent debate. Consequently, we define fake news as the deliberate production and sharing of misleading and false information with the sole purpose of intentionally gaining political, economic and ideological points. We thus concur with other scholars that the complex and converged media landscape has made it difficult for audiences to separate "non-fiction and fiction" (Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016: 4).

Powered by digital technologies like bots (automated software used to carry out routine tasks on the internet), and social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter, "fake news" and cyber-propaganda have permeated into our everyday lives, making it difficult for users and audiences to sift chaff from grain. Elections in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria were marred by the indiscriminate sharing of fake news and cyber-propaganda by cyber troops, citizen campaigners and digital influencers on social media platforms. Examples include the use of bots by the Guptas in South Africa to divert attention from state capture allegations, the deployment of cyber troops by the ruling and opposition parties in Zimbabwe (Mare and Matsilele 2020) and the use of cyber-propaganda during the 2017 elections in Kenya (Maweu in this issue). However, while digital technologies, social media in particular, have played a key role in the propagation of fake news, an overly deterministic association of "fake news" with the "digital media" inevitably drowns in *ahistorical* complacency. It overlooks other key factors, especially the fact that fake news is not a new phenomenon in Africa and that it is also not exclusively propagated on digital platforms.

In Africa, fake news must also be understood within the broader and ever-shifting communication ecology (made up of formal and informal media). As Mare (2020) avers, popular forms of communication (such as music, jokes, rumor, street news posters, linguistic tricks, cartoons, and humor) provide non literate (and in most cases rural) Africans with the means to engage in the discussion of news events ranging from community news such as accidents and funerals, and national news about celebrities and sports, to global news events. Popular media does not only represent an alternative mode of news and information delivery in Africa but also illustrates the creative appropriation of existing technologies by situated actors with regard to engaging with news and information (Mare 2020a). These popular media genres also provide an outlet through which false and misleading news and information are circulated in sub-Saharan Africa. We should therefore guard against ahistorical approaches that fetishize contemporary understandings at the expense of critical and nuanced historical contextualization of the notion of fake news.

Extant research on this phenomenon has focused on the digitization of propaganda in the era of social media platforms. In the context of digital politics, it has been associated with attempts by the ruling parties, opposition movements and military units to manufacture consent and dissent (Mare 2020b) through the strategic use of digital media platforms. In Nigeria, self-styled "propaganda secretaries" were recruited by governors, parliamentary and presidential candidates in a bid to shape political narratives and spread false information (Hassan and Hitchen 2019). These cyber troops were responsible for pushing out political messages aimed at discrediting opponents on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter. In this issue, Ncube and Maweu look at this worrying phenomenon from the Zimbabwean and Kenyan elections perspective. While we acknowledge that propaganda is not a new phenomenon, we argue that the mass diffusion of smartphones and increased use of social media platforms has provided politicians and tech-savvy digital influencers with enough ammunition to set the political agenda. However, we argue that its corrosive effect on electoral politics, democratic processes and general trust in mainstream media and the potential nurturing of an uninformed and misinformed citizenry presents huge challenges for contemporary African countries.

Context of production and consumption

Empirical and theoretical studies that unpack the relationship between digital media and "fake news" in Africa are limited. As Wasserman (2017) observes, news—whether "fake" or "real"—should not be understood outside of its contexts of production and consumption, and therefore an investigation into the phenomenon of "fake news" in Africa needs to take account of local specificities. The context of production of fake news in particular in Africa must also be understood within the contours of media repression, digital literacy (or lack of it), resource-constrained newsrooms and the use of popular channels of communication. In hyper-partisan political contexts like Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Kenya, the production and distribution of fake news has been complicated by the rise of polarized and ethnicized politics. Furthermore, media repression through the enactment of draconian pieces of legislation and the brazen capture of traditional media infrastructures by political and economic elites have been followed by the mushrooming of fake online news sites, faceless social media influencers, pseudonymous social media accounts, and coordinated circulation of false and misleading news information through mostly Twitter, Facebook and

WhatsApp (Mare and Matsilele 2020). In the ensuing hegemonic struggles over the truth, the mainstream state-owned media has been discredited as a caricature of "fake news media" largely due to its partisan media coverage while the private and independent are deified as "purveyors of unadulterated truth". This binary construction of the "truth" and "false" news media has serious implications in terms of the credibility of the public and private media in the African context. This is partly because it feeds into media polarization, which balkanizes readers and audiences into specific filter bubbles.

The context of (fake) news consumption of Africa is also to a large extent influenced by educational levels, digital literacy and competencies, limited access to information and exposure to various kinds of self-sorting online groups. Thus, not everyone shares fake news with the intention to cause harm. In some cases, the sharing of fake news is influenced by ignorance and the sheer desire to inform friends, relatives and family members. Because of limited access to verified information, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, citizens are likely to share fake news without having the luxury to cross-check and verify its authenticity. This scenario is further complicated by the political economy of news consumption in Africa, which is increasingly shaped by the costs associated with access to credible and verified information, especially as most news organisations lock their content behind paywalls in an effort to survive economically. As a result of this, readers – the majority whom are of limited means – end up consuming unverified viral content, which largely circulates outside the trusted gated communities associated with paywalls. This directly points to the pervasive nature of what Britz (2004: 194) calls "information poverty" in Africa, a situation in which "individuals and communities, […] do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately. It is further characterized by a […] poorly developed information infrastructure". Thus, it is within this context of "information poverty" as Britz (2004) puts it that fake news and cyber-propaganda have found a fertile ground.

Decline in trust in the traditional media

The contemporary problem of fake news has also been closely connected with high levels of mistrust in the mainstream media across the globe (The Edelman Trust Barometer 2017). The statistics of people who trust that the media can report accurately, fairly and truthfully on newsworthy information has declined significantly over the last decade. Survey data (Newman et al. 2019; The Edelman Trust Barometer 2017; Conroy-Krutz and Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny 2019) suggest that public trust in traditional media has drastically fallen, as people prefer to rely on their friends and contacts on the Internet and social media as sources of news and truth. This fueled the emergence of various media-enabled echo chambers that reinforce personal beliefs while closing off opposing points of view (The Edelman Trust Barometer 2017). The current cycle of distrust has affected mainstream media organizations (Wasserman et al. 2019). "Fake news" has also found its way into the mainstream media largely through the weakening of gatekeeping infrastructure and overreliance on online sourcing practices and cultures. In the African context, the juniorization of newsrooms and recruitment of interns and correspondents have been identified as some of the reasons for the decline in quality news production.

This points to the culpability of the mainstream media in whipping up "fake news", an observation often overlooked in African journalism scholarship. In the West, the debate is

largely whipped up by the mainstream media—the tardy realization by the mainstream media that they no longer hold the sole power to shape and drive the news agenda. As David Uberti (2016) observes, "Fake news provided a catchall symbol—and a scapegoat —for journalists grappling with their diminished institutional power". Thus, as Wahutu contends in this issue, fake news should be seen as "intricately tied to traditional […] media norms, which have themselves been problematic". Part of the problem is the well-established fact that traditional mainstream media have always been averse to criticism or any form of close scrutiny emerging from outside institutionalized structures such as unions (see Wahutu's discussion in this issue). Following hard on the footsteps of the American president, Donald Trump, in some African countries, politicians have also used the discourse of "fake news" to delegitimize the mainstream alternative media. This is largely premised on the pervasive "informational moral panic" by the American press following the 2016 US presidential elections (Carlson 2020). We therefore need to distinguish between the political discourses circulating about fake news and the actual normative framework.

Against this background, this special issue of *African Journalism Studies*' African "Digital Media Review" offers an African perspective to the evolving debate on the manifestation of "fake news" and cyber-propaganda. In focusing on sub-Saharan Africa, we do not assume that the region is homogeneous, nor do we seek to obscure the diversity and dynamics of communicative and social experiences in the region. Thus, while situating our case studies within sub-Saharan Africa as a region, we equally aim to confront the homogenizing nature of this approach by highlighting important complexities and nuances within and between countries.

Why perspectives from Sub-Saharan Africa matter: recentering the research agenda

In exploring the intricacies of fake news and cyber propaganda in sub-Saharan Africa, this special issue aims to pave ways for bridging intellectual divides between the North and the South. There remains a gap in the empirical examination and theorization of the production and consumption of "fake news" and cyber-propaganda in Africa. Equally lacking are studies that examine how "fake news" and cyber-propaganda are produced in different political contexts, how they are consumed by demographically diverse populations, as well as how these phenomena are harnessed by politicians for political expediency through "manufacturing consent" (Herman and Chomsky 1988) and the creation of the necessary illusions or as an agenda-setting tool for reinforcing existing power relations.

As discussed earlier, current trends tend to be one-dimensional with much of the critical scholarship emerging along a Western axis that generally continues to frame key debates by means of Western concerns, contexts, user behavior patterns, and theories thus creating a universalism that glosses over differences. Western-centric conceptions cannot be taken as the sole point of departure when unpacking and conceptualizing social experiences across the globe. Equally, countries in the South cannot always be framed as inherently "different" and "alternative". The special issue therefore contributes to the dismantling of the continued intellectual imbalances in which questions about Africa are framed in the context of Western debates and empirical experiences. Case studies in this issue highlight the importance of understanding the broader socio-political and

cultural factors at play in order to critically appreciate the contemporary phenomenon of fake news and cyber propaganda in sub-Saharan Africa.

We recognize, as Nolte does, that "we cannot understand social phenomena without paying attention to the debates and ideas from which they emerge" (2019: 303). Social experiences must be understood against the backdrop of local context as well as within the context of the wider debates which they are part of. This way, we open up avenues for critically assessing utopian positions that have been made about the impact of digital technologies, which tend to essentialize or frame digital technology experiences in Africa as the "normative other", without carefully considering the implications of *localized experiences* and their contribution to theory. As Adams puts it, "importantly, globally marginalised debates afford an epistemologically privileged foundation from which we can rethink hegemonic forms of knowledge in mainstream research" (cited in Nolte 2019: 304). Consequently, while broadly acknowledging the general structural differences between the global North and the South, this special issue aims to transcend these boundaries by foregrounding the fact that there is not just one but multiple experiences and ways of understanding them in the era of fake news and cyber propaganda.

This special issue thus sets an agenda for understanding the fact that there are more ways (than mainstream) to imagine and conceptualize "fake news" and cyber-propaganda, and that a multiplicity of perspectives from a heterogeneity of experiences across the globe will serve to enrich our understanding of these slippery and contestable concepts. Such a complex scenario can only be effectively conceptualized through critical conversations across geographies and research areas that pull together to consider current and past experiences of the phenomena. This also speaks to calls to "de-Westernize" or "decolonize" media and communications research.

"Fake news" as a notion is in dire need of a sophisticated understanding that acknowledges and distinguishes its contextual variations. This suggests the need to ask critical questions, such as, what distinguishes the professional implications of the notion of fake news from the traditional ethical challenges that journalism has faced in Africa from time immemorial? What is the political economy of fake news and cyber-propaganda in Africa? What motivates the production of such content, and what are its implications for wider society? Who is producing it? What are their digital and educational competencies? And what are the dissemination mechanisms? These questions are not just restricted to the digital platforms, as the mainstream legacy media are also implicated. Studies in this special issue attempt to confront some of these questions in different ways across three key regions of sub-Saharan Africa—East, West and Southern Africa. However, we should hasten to highlight that the studies are not exhaustive. It is simply impossible for one journal special issue to capture the "complex mosaic of cultures [in sub-Saharan Africa] with equally varied socio-political, economic and historical experiences" (Mabweazara 2018: 3).

Studies in this special issue

The special issue carries conceptually driven empirical studies that explore a range of issues around the notion of "fake news" and cyber-propaganda in Africa. In "Fake News and Journalistic 'Rules of the Game'", James Wahutu argues that the notion of "fake news", which has been "fetishized" and defined mainly as a social media phenomenon, should not be separated from the workings of the mainstream press in Africa. The

study thus challenges the dominant discourse of "fake news", and reminds us that the pervasive "informational moral panic" which underpins conceptions of "fake news", has tended to overshadow the culpability of the mainstream press to whip up fake news. Thus, to address the problem, it is important to see mainstream journalism as playing a key role in defining and setting the agenda of news, thus shaping the boundaries of the range of issues acceptable in public discourse. This understanding, as Wahutu argues, should lead to a better understanding of "fake news" on the continent than the current fixation with social media as its primary context of incubation and circulation.

Through critical analysis of the coverage of Cambridge Analytica (CA)'s involvement in Nigerian and Kenyan elections, Brian Ekdale and Melissa Tully shift attention to growing concerns about data privacy and protection as well as unethical campaigning on social media, which have largely been associated with Western electoral processes, especially the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Ekdale and Tully observe that CA viewed the Kenyan and Nigerian elections as testing grounds for tactics the firm hoped to export into more lucrative markets. This resonates with growing concerns on digital colonialism by the exploitative and extractive foreign platform companies, which use African nations to make a profit without local investment or regard for democratic systems in the emerging democracies. For Ekdale and Tully, while Nigerian newspapers covered the scandal as an intranational conflict between competing political parties, the Kenyan press wrestled with the scandal's implications for the country's democratic institutions. Revelations concerning CA's involvement in Nigeria and Kenya further remind us how often African elections serve as proxy battles between powerful global interests of which social media and technology firms are now major players. While the CA scandal received significant international attention, it is just one example of foreign involvement in African elections that has broader implications for national sovereignty.

In his study on the production and consumption of fake news during Zimbabwe's 2018 elections, Lyton Ncube critically analyses examples of what he calls fake news and cyber-propaganda which was circulated on WhatsApp by opposition political party supporters. He argues that fake news and cyber-propaganda were ubiquitous in both mainstream and social media during the election, such that both the ruling party (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, ZANUPF) and the Movement for Democratic change (MDC) Alliance relied on them as weapons of political campaigning and public opinion formation. The study concludes that the MDC Alliance's humorous cyber-propaganda largely focused on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and ZANU PF's alleged electoral shenanigans aimed at manipulating the "people's will". The intention was to delegitimize the electoral process, insinuating that any result announced by ZEC not confirming a Nelson Chamisa (opposition MDC leader) victory would not be a true reflection of the people's will. This cyber-propaganda thrived largely because the ZEC and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) created an information vacuum by failing to give the nation regular updates during and after the voting process. This study corroborates Moyo's (2009) argument that when citizens are starved of information they often resort to the parallel market of information. Ncube challenges the mainstream media to be more aggressive and counter-fake news circulated by the social media.

Jacinta Maweu examines how social media platforms (such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp) were used to spread disinformation and cyber propaganda during the 2017 general elections in Kenya. Relying on data analyzed through qualitative textual analysis

of what she considers to be fake information and propaganda circulated on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp platforms by the government and ordinary citizens in the run up to the elections, Maweu argues that there were several cases of cyber propagandists using fake Twitter and Facebook accounts of leading mainstream media houses locally and internationally to spread false information. Her study points out that the 2017 general elections in Kenya were some of the most competitive and tense elections the country had ever seen, and elicited very active use of digital media technologies by political leaders and citizens. Like Brian Ekdale and Melissa Tully's study, Maweu analyzes how Cambridge Analytica engineered a digital campaign that painted incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta in a positive light while smearing the image of his main rival, Raila Odinga. Besides the role of Cambridge Analytica, the Jubilee administration used other aggressive online propaganda, which ran contrary to the Election Act. Maweu argues that social media platforms have become alternative popular fora for spin-doctors and public relations teams to sway the masses on behalf of politicians in Kenya.

By looking at whether and to what extent digital media platforms are used to counter misinformation and disinformation about LGBTI communities in Uganda, Cecilia Strand's paper provides some interesting insights into the power dynamics of the spread and mitigation of fake news. In a context where digital media offers sexual minorities opportunities to interrogate, reject and set the record straight on disinformation peddled through a homophobic mainstream media, the paper establishes that this potential is largely underutilized, as the Sexual Minorities Uganda website hardly engages with reports from mainstream media. This non-engagement is partly explained by the historic trend of state repression of media freedoms and intolerance of sexual diversity in Uganda.

Lunga and Mthembu investigate the sources and strategies adopted by mainstream media in combating fake news in the kingdom of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland). The study investigated the major drivers of fake news in the print media, focusing on *The Times of Swaziland* and the *Swazi Observer.* It reveals that fake news is prevalent in eSwatini, partly because of social media aimed at ridiculing those in authority, especially the King. The main drivers of fake news are ordinary people. The absence of a free and rational deliberative space in eSwatini has also provided fertile ground for the production and circulation of fake news. Because of the converged nature of the media environment, fake news has found its way into mainstream media, as journalists use the internet and social media such as Facebook and Twitter as sources of news without verifying their authenticity due to pressure of being the first to publish. The study found that these mainstream media organizations have come up with several strategies, including employing more fact-checkers, cautioning journalists to be more careful and responsible in their usage of social media for news-gathering purposes, introducing accountability measures for editors as part of their deliverables, denouncing fake news that circulates on social media, among others.

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