DEMOCRACY REPORT

• BY FREDERICO LINKS   Namibia Votes 2019 Issue 1

FAKE NEWS
and Namibian elections

Misinformation

Disinformation

Fake News

False information

Propaganda

Malinformation

VOTE

FAKE NEWS
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CONTENTS

1. 'Fake news' and Namibian elections – key aspects

'Fake news'* – as denoting of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda – is very much a reality in Namibian political and electoral processes. Various social media platforms have become the preferred battlegrounds on which disturbing, divisive and even dangerous campaigns and content are being publicised and shared. These often prey on and exploit existing political, ethnic and socio-economic divisions.

In this regard, the Namibian experience is no different from what has transpired in other parts of the continent and the world, especially as the effects of 'fake news' have become very pronounced around elections and election related processes. In fact, 'fake news' – and by extension social media – has increasingly become viewed as a threat to human rights and the maintenance of democracy, considering how the phenomenon has been deployed to sow confusion and heighten socio-political fractiousness.

This scoping study assesses and describes what 'fake news' on Namibian social media looks like and where it is mostly found, and sounds a cautionary note as the country moves towards elections in late 2019.

A secondary aim of this study is to add the Namibian experience to the global picture and literature on the topic of 'fake news', especially in the context of general electoral politics and processes.

Thirdly, it should be noted that this report constitutes the first phase of an initiative to map, monitor, archive and ultimately understand the phenomenon of 'fake news' in Namibian political and electoral processes.

The fourth aim of this study is to make the following recommendations.

> * The term 'fake news' is always used in single inverted commas in this report in order to signify that even the term itself remains controversial in academic and intellectual circles as descriptive of the misinformation, disinformation and propaganda phenomena that it refers to or is used to label. The term 'fake news' is far from being a widely agreed upon term. The jury is still out whether this term has a future.

1.1 Recommendations

The following are general recommendations that speak to the responsibilities of various stakeholders.

- Political parties and related actors should refrain fromengaging in negative campaigns that involve the production and dissemination of 'fake news' – misinformation, disinformation and propaganda – in furtherance of their political objectives. Additionally, they should actively discourage their supporters and associates from producing and sharing such content;
- In order to avoid being accused of/perceived to be spreading 'fake news', political parties and related actors should ensure that their statements and pronouncements are factual, accurate and realistic, and their engagements civil, open and transparent;
- All political parties participating in elections should commit, via a signed, binding agreement, to not engaging in information campaigns that amount to creating and spreading 'fake news' and other harmful content;
- Electoral law should be reviewed, amended and strengthened – in an open, multi-stakeholder process – to include clear provisions that speak to regulating the informational activities, both online and offline, of political parties and their supporters and associates;
- As an example of such regulatory measures, Namibia could look to emulating the wording and intent of Section 89 (2) of the South African Electoral Act of 1998[1] ;
- Furthermore, the code of conduct for political parties participating in elections should be reviewed and amended to include provisions regulation the creation, spread and general use of 'fake news' in their election campaigns;
- In strengthening the electoral regulatory framework to deal with 'fake news', electoral authorities should be given powers to police and penalise political parties and actors for contravening sections of the electoral law that speak to regulation of the informational activities of political parties and their associates;
- To this end and towards ensuring the achievement of a human rights based and respecting approach to regulating 'fake news' in the context of elections, electoral and relevant legal drafting government authorities are urged to use as a guide the *'Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda'[2]* created by several international organisations, including the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR);
- In order to effectively counter 'fake news' in the Namibian information ecosystem, media literacy campaigns and programmes should be rolled out through all educational institutions and civil society at large, which would empower the general public to identify, report and/or counter 'fake news';
- As the phenomenon of 'fake news' can, in part, be attributed to declining media and journalistic standards, journalists and media organisations are called upon to be proactive in re-evaluating their standards as well as passing on knowledge to the next generation of journalists.

2. Fake news! – What are we talking about?

In a news and information sense, almost everywhere one turns these days there is talk of 'fake news' corrupting news and information landscapes and ecosystems, impacting everything from social cohesion to elections and political governance. And in some parts of the world, it has real life and death consequences.

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1. The South African law states: "No person may publish any false information with the intention of-
   * disrupting or preventing an election;
   * creating hostility or fear in order to influence the conduct or outcome of an election; or
   * influencing the outcome or conduct of an election."
2. https://www.osce.org/fom/302796?download=true

The term 'fake news' has become a catch-all to refer to the phenomena of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda of all sorts, all of which the Council of Europe has recently appropriately and collectively dubbed an "information disorder" that has as a consequence "information pollution".[3]

In recent times, the terms 'fake news', misinformation and disinformation are often used interchangeably when discussing information phenomena. As a result, many people assume that they all describe the same type of thing.

However, the distinction is important; misinformation, disinformation as well as propaganda may speak to related and overlapping phenomena, but are also different in important respects.

The Council of Europe, for instance, rejects bundling these phenomena under the convenient umbrella buzzword 'fake news', and rather opts for the term "information disorder" – with the concept of mal-information added – as it argues that 'fake news' "is woefully inadequate to effectively capture the complexity of the phenomenon of information pollution, not to mention that it [the term itself] is increasingly becoming politicised".

Table 1: The Council of Europe's three (3) types of "information disorder" a.k.a 'fake news':

Mis-Information is when false information is shared, but no harm is meant.
Dis-informatIon is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
Mal-Information is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private Into the public sphere.

Taken from: 'Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making'

Vosoughi et al[4] (2018) also view the term as problematic and contend that while, "at one time, it may have been appropriate to think of fake news as referring to the veracity of a news story, we now believe that this phrase has been irredeemably polarized in our current political and media climate. As politicians have implemented a political strategy of labeling news sources that do not support their positions as unreliable or fake news, whereas sources that support their positions are labeled reliable or not fake, the term has lost all connection to the actual veracity of the information presented, rendering it meaningless for use in academic classification".

These definitional concerns have a long history. A 2018 study[5] – 'Defining "fake news"' by Tandoc Jr et al – that attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of and summarises the definitions and types of 'fake news', states that while the term is not new[6], there are varying definitions of it and understandings of what it captures, and that "current references to it seem to define it differently from earlier definitions". It notes that earlier studies "have applied the term to define related but distinct types of content, such as news parodies, political satires, and news propaganda. While it is currently used to describe false stories spreading on social media, fake news has also been invoked to discredit some news organizations' critical reporting, further muddying discourse around fake news".

It should be noted, as the previous quote illustrates, that contemporary understanding of 'fake news' posits that it is a distinctive feature and consequence of the ubiquitousness of digital social media. Venturini (2019)[7] even suggest that the most prominent feature of 'fake news' is its online virality, arguing that any definition should be "based on its circulation rather than of its contents".

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3.   https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/information-disorder
4.   Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. Science, 359(6380), 1146-1151.
5.   Tandoc Jr, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining "fake news" A typology of scholarly definitions. Digital journalism, 6(2), 137-153.
6.   According to Marcus (1993) the phenomenon has been around since the emergence of early writing systems, but has only really gained prominence with the growth of mass communication systems in the first half of the 20th century (Cantril, 2005).
7.   Venturini, T. (2019). FROM FAKE TO JUNK NEWS. Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights.

What the above brief discussion illustrates is the difficulty of defining 'fake news', and the resulting confusion around both the concept and its occurrences in the real world. Against this backdrop, this paper does not seek to define the term 'fake news', but rather references the term in what is construed to be its popular sense (although this is also debatable) – basically what the lay person would perceive and articulates as 'fake news' – and manifestations to situate the concept in the Namibian social media context. While the arguments against using the term 'fake news' are persuasive, the term nevertheless remains useful and resonates for the purposes of this discussion. To be clear, what this paper is aimed at discussing, analysing and visualising are instances of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda, primarily in the realm of politics and elections. Misinformation and disinformation are the two main legs of what is now popularly referred to as 'fake news'.

As already indicated, 'fake news' is not new to Namibia, but there have been no home-grown studies of the phenomenon to date. This study is a first, but still preliminary, attempt to situate the phenomenon on the public discourse and academic landscape.

Understanding the Phenomenon of 'Fake News'

Fake news can be defined as the dissemination of false information via media channels (print, broadcast, online). This can be deliberate (disinformation), but can also be the result of an honest mistake or negligence (misinformation).

By positing fake news as an unprecedented phenomenon, we fail to acknowledge its relation to long-existing tensions and developments in society that can help us understand the issue at hand and put it into perspective.

There is a growing danger of the development of and support for, policies that only consider a limited array of evidence. What has been described as the practice of post-truth politics has to be considered alongside a sceptical attitude in society toward academia, journalism, science, and other sources that were previously considered authoritative.

The importance of 'truth' and 'evidence' has not declined in our current society. Rather, it has been politicized by the increased questioning of what qualifies as a 'legitimate' source of truth. The medium rather than the phenomenon of fake news has changed. Information has become easier and cheaper to share, leading to a 'democratisation of information'.

What can be identified as particular to our current environment is the effect of fake news in an era of rising populism, reinforcing its impact on discourse in politics and the media. A focus on political promises and shared visions, and strong personal and emotional involvement are central to this.

Political institutions have less control over what information is shared among their population, making politicians in Western democracies more exposed, and image-management increasingly difficult.

Source: Fake News: A Roadmap @ https://www.stratcomcoe.org/executive-summary-fake-news-roadmap

2. 1 Typology of 'fake news'

In order to fully appreciate the occurrence and impact of the concept and phenomenon of 'fake news', it is important to understand what drives it and where it comes from. First Draft[8], an initiative specifically set up to trace, study and find solutions to effectively counter 'fake news', has identified eight (8) reasons – the **8 Ps** – for the rise and creation of 'fake news' content and why the phenomenon has garnered so much traction, especially on social media. The **8 Ps** are:

- Poor journalism;
- To Parody;
- To Provoke or to 'punk';
- Passion;
- Partisanship;
- Profit;
- Political influence;
- Propaganda

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8. https://firstdraftnews.org/

Tandoc Jr *et al*[9] (2018) proposes that 'fake news' is motivated by two factors, namely financial and ideological, stating that viral fake stories provide content producers with clicks that translate to advertising revenue. On the other hand, other 'fake news' generators promote specific causes, ideas or people, by often discrediting others.

Importantly, the study, along with others, also points out that in order to achieve the financial and/or ideological objectives of 'fake news' purveyors, it is imperative that 'fake news' mimics or "appropriates the look and feel of real news; from how websites look; to how articles are written; to how photos include attributions." In other words, by trying to appear like real news, 'fake news' creates a veneer of legitimacy. The report adds that, while this clearly indicates how important the media is, this veneer of legitimacy is a threat to the credibility of news and journalism, "especially in a social media environment when the actual source of information often gets removed, or at least perceived at a distance".

In short, as Lazer *et al*[10] (2018) indicate while making the same point as above, 'fake news' "is parasitic on standard news outlets, simultaneously benefiting from and undermining their credibility".

In light of all this, it is necessary to specifically identify the types of 'fake news' in order to superimpose them on occurrences on the Namibian news and information landscape in the context of political and electoral processes.

Going a step further than the Council of Europe's definitions (see Table 1), First Draft, building on earlier efforts[11], argues[12] that there are seven distinct types of misinformation and disinformation (see Table 2).

Table 2: First Draft's types of 'fake news':
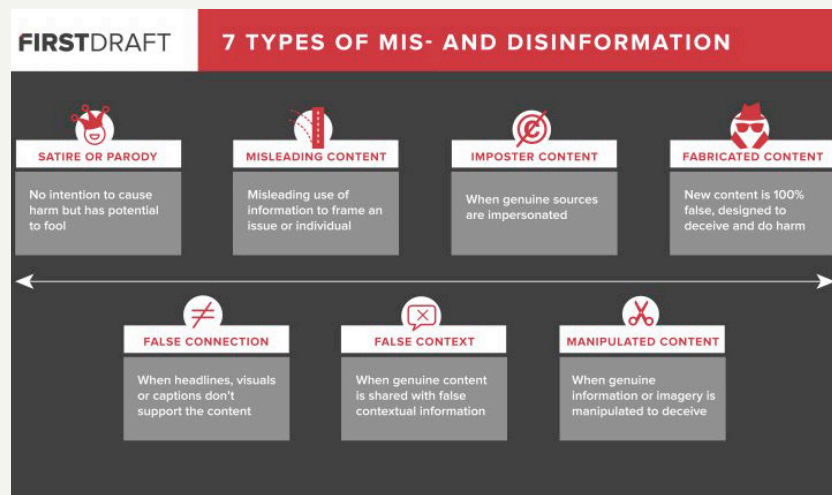
Taken from: 'Fake news. It's complicated'.

The 'Defining "fake news"' report of 2018, following its review of numerous papers on the topic, found that the reviewed studies identified six types/dimensions of 'fake news', specifically: "(1) news satire, (2) news parody, (3) fabrication, (4) manipulation, (5) advertising, and (6) propaganda".

9. Defining "fake news": A typology of scholarly definitions.
10. Lazer, D. M., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., ... & Schudson, M. (2018). The science of fake news. Science, 359(6380), 1094-1096.
11. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/6_types_election_fake_news.php
12. https://medium.com/1st-draft/fake-news-its-complicated-d0f773766c79

And, similarly, under its now ended NewsFrames project over recent years, Global Voices[13] has also come up with a list of six types/dimensions of 'fake news', specifically: 1. False connection between title and content; 2. false content; 3. false context; 4. false description; 5. counterfeit news source; 6. satire / irony that was misunderstood and shared.

Against this backdrop, what makes First Draft's approach attractive for studying the 'fake news' phenomenon is that they created a "Misinformation Matrix" (see Table 3), incorporating the eight (8) reasons – the 8 Ps – and its seven distinct types/dimensions of misinformation and disinformation to generate a credible identification tool for 'fake news' content.

Table 3: First Draft's Misinformation Matrix

FIRSTDRAFT — MISINFORMATION MATRIX

	SATIRE OR PARODY	FALSE CONNECTION	MISLEADING CONTENT	FALSE CONTEXT	IMPOSTER CONTENT	MANIPULATED CONTENT	FABRICATED CONTENT
POOR JOURNALISM		✓	✓	✓			
TO PARODY	✓				✓		✓
TO PROVOKE OR TO 'PUNK'					✓	✓	✓
PASSION				✓			
PARTISANSHIP			✓	✓			
PROFIT		✓			✓		✓
POLITICAL INFLUENCE			✓	✓		✓	✓
PROPAGANDA			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Taken from: 'Fake news. It's complicated'.

It is the First Draft method – specifically the 8 Ps – that was used to identify and categorise the examples of 'fake news' captured in this report in order to test the applicability of the methodology. We are grateful for this valuable resource that has enabled this preliminary foray into 'fake news' on the Namibian news and information landscape in the context of political and electoral processes.

The dangers of 'fake news'

In today's context of disinformation and misinformation, the ultimate jeopardy is not unjustifiable regulation of journalism, but that publics may come to disbelieve all content – including journalism. In this scenario, people are then likely to take as credible whatever content is endorsed by their social networks, and which corresponds with their hearts – but leaves out engagement with their heads. We can already see the negative impacts of this on public beliefs about health, science, intercultural understanding and the status of authentic expertise.

This impact on the public is also especially concerning for elections, and to the very idea of democracy as a human right. What disinformation seeks, particularly during a poll, is not necessarily to convince the public to believe that its content is true, but to impact on agenda setting (on what people think is important) and to muddy the informational waters in order to weaken rationality factors in people's voting choices. Likewise, the issues of migration, climate change and others can be highly impacted by uncertainty resulting from disinformation and misinformation.

Excerpt from: Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation. UNESCO. 2018

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13. https://newsframes.globalvoices.org/investigations/false-and-fabricated-news-international-dimensions/fabricated-news-experiment/

2.2 Fake News! – A brief Namibian history

'Fake news' is not something new to the Namibian news and information landscape and has been a constant feature of Namibian political processes since shortly after the turn of the century with the emergence of fictional email writer Ananias Nghifitikeko – whose sole aim appeared to be the smearing of former Swapo Party heavyweight and Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) leader Hidipo Hamutenya – ahead of the land-mark 2004 Swapo Party extraordinary congress at which former president Hifikepunye Pohamba was nominated to stand as the party's candidate in the presidential election of November that year.

The Nghifitikeko emails, in the period before the emergence of social media, were said to be the handy work of various senior ruling party operatives[14] and relied on those who received the emails to send them on, as well as on the media[15] to pick up the emails and disseminate their content through regular news coverage[16] .

The reincarnation of the notorious Ananias Nghifitikeko on Facebook since 2012
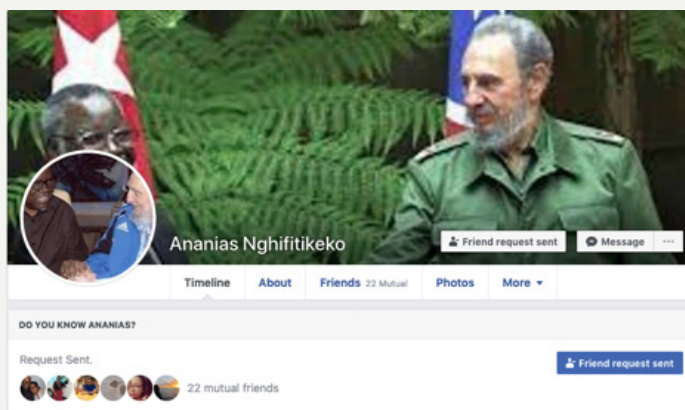
 A few years later saw another intense period of 'fake news' campaigns with the Swapo Party break-away Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) emerging as a political force to challenge the ruling party ahead of the 2009 presidential and National Assembly elections.

However, the real social media 'fake news' wars, although very crude by today's standards, followed the emergence of the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement in 2014 and reached various high points throughout 2017 as AR and its associates within ruling party structures attempted to wrest control[17] of the Swapo Party Youth League (SPYL) away from Veikko Nekundi and other pro-Geingob elements ahead of the par-ty's November 2017 elective congress at which President Hage Geingob was elected president of the ruling party.

The 2017 period in Namibian political 'fake news' was marked by two opposing cam-paigns, primarily on messaging app WhatsApp – spilling onto Facebook and Twit-ter – that emanated from the factions vying for power in the ruling party. These two opposing campaigns, mimicking news reports, were published in WhatsApp groups and channels, and the content was shared onto other social media platforms, under the designations "Breaking News" and "This Reporter".

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14. See 'Bogus Swapo convention list still a mystery' at https://www.namibian.com.na/print.php?id=8510&type=2
15. See 'Who's afraid of Ananias Nghifitikeko? At http://www.insight.com.na/whos-afraid-of-ananias-nghifitikeko/
16. See 'Email scandal rocks Namibia' at https://mg.co.za/article/2006-06-02-email-scandal-rocks-namibia
17. See court documents concerning a case challenging the legitimacy of the SPYL leadership at the following: https://namiblii.org/na/judgment/high-court-main-division/2017/224-14

Remarking on the ruling party's 'fake news' wars in an article in February 2017, a writer for the now defunct Insight Namibia magazine wrote[18] : "In general, both sides in this pre-congress social media phony war do little to enhance or promote the more serious political points that could be raised ahead of congress. Instead most of the posts emanating from both camps are infantile rather than effective. However, both the frequency and nastiness of these social media exchanges are likely to increase as the year progresses. Things are ugly and they will likely get uglier."

By mid 2019, the ugliness of the 2017 internal ruling party campaigning had yet to dissipate and the political climate had become poisoned by an incessant stream of increasingly toxic 'fake news' related to internal Swapo Party and national politics.

It should be noted, as this section illustrates throughout, that up to mid 2019, politics and election related 'fake news' around ruling party internal divisions and machinations have tended to enjoy prominence across various social media, and speak to the dominance of the national political space by the ruling party. Thus, most of the examples of political 'fake news' referred to in this report concern ongoing negative informational running battles within ruling party circles, which have spilled into and polluted the broader public discussion space, especially on social media.

SMEAR … This media release was issued at the height of the November 2017 Swapo Party congress when factional 'fake news' campaigns were used in counteracting campaigns seemingly aimed at disorienting delegates and smearing opposing factional leaders.

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18. hInsight Namibia magazine folded in 2018. The article is available as a photograph in a Google file at the following link: https://drive. google.com/file/d/1L1G3mWqFQNIGmUy1wjEoseNq-N7nB4hm/view?usp=sharing

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Social media and social cohesion

"A new epidemic has broken out in Namibia where young people use social media to fuel propaganda and insult national leaders. Today people garnering for power have deployed armies of fake accounts to do so," said ruling Swapo Party chief whip in the National Assembly, Evelyne !Nawases-Taeyele, in July 2019 while motivating a motion she had introduced on regulating social media.

"I trust that this bill will make provision to criminalise the distribution of data messages that are harmful to fellow citizens," !Nawases-Taeyele emphasised, while accusing social media of threatening "decency, patriotism and morality".

In subsequent statements in support of the !Nawases-Taeyele parliamentary motion, a string of ruling party ministers also castigated social media for being a cesspit of degenerate behaviour.

"Our society should reclaim the moral space we seem to have gladly surrendered with the advent of social media. We have sacrificed our moral fortitude on the altar of freedom and rights," said Information and Communication Technology minister Stanley Simataa in an impassioned speech on social cohesion and social media in the National Assembly in mid-July 2019. "It's impossible to agitate for social cohesion whilst suffocating from the stench of an environment adversely polluted by social media," added the ICT minister.

In his contribution to the motion, justice minister Sakeus Shanghala asked: "Do we see deterioration in our societal dialogue through our utterances which exhibit xenophobia, homophobia, tribalism and pure and utter disregard for the feelings of others?" And Home Affairs minister Frans Kapofi lamented that 'One Namibia, One Nation' was losing its meaning, saying: "It is a very sad thing to observe that lately in our society, we are experiencing tribal remarks and in such an open manner over social media networks."

What these politicians were commenting on was how social media – overwhelmingly Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp – were being used by ordinary Namibians, and especially the youth, to discuss the failures of government and political leadership. According to them, rhetoric that was overly critical and insulting gained the most traction online. This so-called 'poisoning' of social media, claimed these senior politicians, constituted 'fake news' generated to inflame, mislead, misrepresent and manipulate.

The social media occurrence of 'fake news' around elections was and has been very pronounced in the lead up to, during and in the intervening period since the November 2017 elective congress of the ruling party.

So divisive and unrelenting did the barrage of 'fake news' seem around that event – which given the near all-powerfulness of the ruling party, made it something of a national political event – that at the end the congress resolved, amongst others: "That a Ministry of Cyber Security be established in order to control information in the social media and guard against cyber crimes such as hacking and monitor illicit flows."

The ruling party congress also resolved that: "Members of the Swapo Party are urged not to use social media against the party, its leadership, members and the public."

2.3 Fake News! – African experiences and responses

While 'fake news is not a new concept or phenomenon, it has become an increasingly prominent global political concern since the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016 and the Brexit referendum in Britain in the same year.

Africa has not been spared. A 2018 study[19] assessing audience exposure to 'fake news' in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria found that "African audiences have low levels of trust in the media, experience a high degree of exposure to misinformation, and contribute – often knowingly – to its spread".

In fact, the study suggests that African audiences – especially on social media platforms – have a higher rate of exposure to 'fake news' content than audiences in most other parts of the world.

A report on the findings of the study states: "In sub-Saharan Africa, mainstream media have long struggled to gain their independence and freedom. State control[20], either through ownership or suppression, over media remains strong. The high levels of perceived exposure to misinformation and disinformation, if left unaddressed, could further undermine the precarious foothold of independent media on the continent."

The threat is especially real in authoritarian and borderline authoritarian states, such as Egypt, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, where anti-'fake news' laws or other measures have been enacted or introduced over the last few years to ostensibly deal with the phenomenon, but have since come across more as attempts to censor[21] legitimate political expression.

In this regard, a 2019 report[22] on how anti-fake news laws are being used for repressive purposes states: "The will to clamp down on fake news that will feed hatred and unleash violence serves as an excuse and is used, for example, when there is an attempt to prevent the spread of images of police violence or, even, when aiming to hamper a civil society from taking responsibility for its own political fate."

International digital rights advocacy organisation Access Now, in a recent report[23] on internet shutdowns around the world in 2018, found that "many governments shut down the internet as a response to violence related to the spread of misinformation and disinformation".

Access Now reported that 21 African governments shut down the internet in 2018 and that the third most common justification for shutting down the internet was stopping the spread of 'fake news'.

While the responses from African governments to the spread of 'fake news' is generally trending in the direction of increasingly concerning interventions with regard to human rights, not all experiences on the continent have followed this trend.

For instance, in the run-up to the South African presidential and national elections in early 2019, the Electoral Commission of South Africa (ECSA) partnered with South African civil society organisation Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) to create and manage a website – real411.org – where the public could report election related 'fake news' content. By all accounts, the initiative, amongst others, made a difference in countering the spread of election related 'fake news'.

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19. https://theconversation.com/study-sheds-light-on-scourge-of-fake-news-in-africa-106946
20. Namibia also has a dominant state-owned media sector, with the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) towering over the media landscape. The state also dominates the telecommunications sector with its total control of both Mobile Telecommunications (MTC) and Telecom Namibia. In the print media space, New Era Publications Corporation (NEPC) and the Namibia Press Agency (NAMPA) are also significant.
21. Rwanda is one of the frequently cited examples of an African country where legitimate and critical political engagement is met with repression.
22. http://lab.cccb.org/en/fake-news-and-censorship-in-africa/
23. https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/06/KIO-Report-final.pdf

In spite of such positive examples though, African publics and civil society need to be vigilant as state-led interventions to date on the continent have predominantly tended to be human rights violating. In the process, Africa has become a litmus test for resolving the challenges and related tensions to effectively deal with and counter the surging spread of 'fake news' on African media and information landscapes.

Digital Disinformation

The always-on social media world of bots, likes and shares has become the new battlefield of what's real and not real in the news and information we read. What appears to be truth can sometimes be propaganda being peddled to derail elections or sway public opinion with the intent to cause harm. This is called DIGITAL DISINFORMATION.

Digital disinformation is false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm.

From: Real411.org

3. Statistics on Namibian social media use

Social Media	Percentage Market Share
Pinterest	47.15%
Facebook	38.58%
Twitter	8.46%
Youtube	3.58%
Instagram	1.71%
Tumblr	0.22%

**Social Media Stats in Namibia 2019
June 2018 - June 2019**

Source: StatCounter Global

On MTC's network, about 98% of Instant Messaging (IM) was done by utilising WhatsApp as can be seen in Figure 2 below.
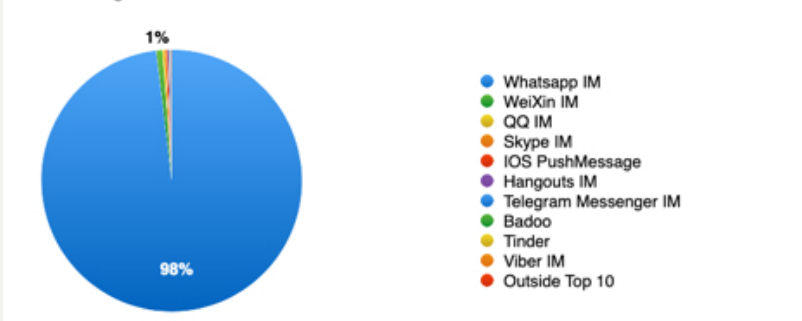
Source: CRAN Telecommunication Sector Performance Review for 2017/18

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3. Fake News! – A Namibian reality visualised

What does Namibian 'fake news' look like? Who is spreading it? Where are they spreading it? These are the questions that this scoping study attempts to answer, in order to try and visualise how the phenomenon has manifested in Namibia.

The **8 P's** as outlined above by First Draft are of use to illustrate the various ways that 'fake news' can be categorised.

The **8 Ps** are :

- Poor journalism;
- To parody;
- To Provoke or to 'punk';
- Passion;
- Partisanship;
- Profit;
- Political influence;
- Propaganda

The following sections attempt to appropriately visualise the phenomenon of 'fake news' with relevant examples that speak to each category and also mostly to the unfolding and ongoing socio-political and electoral processes at the time of writing.

3.1 Poor journalism

Poor journalism in all its forms is disturbingly and increasingly evident on the Namibian news media landscape and has become a growing concern in the context of media sustainability in the country. While there are numerous examples of poor journalism on a weekly and daily basis to pick from, a story and its fallouts from early 2018 exemplifies in this instance how poor journalism drives and contributes to legacy or mainstream media being viewed as and accused of being purveyors of 'fake news'.

In response to a question about what the news media sector in general is doing to address the issue of poor journalism and its eroding effects on media trust, Editors' Forum of Namibia (EFN) coordinator Elizabeth M'ule said that the issue was a concern for Namibian editors and that training around 'fake news' and journalism had been identified as a way to counter journalists' role in spreading 'fake news'. However, at the time of writing no such training initiative existed, but M'ule indicated that a proposal for funding such training had been submitted to potential donors.

The Namibian newspaper's Monique Kröhne saga[24]

In early 2018, The Namibian newspaper published a story of a young woman – Monique Kröhne – who claimed to have excelled at the prestigious Harvard University in the United States. However, all her claims turned out to be false[25]. The fact checking of Kröhne's claims, as published in The Namibian, was done on social media and the newspaper was publicly called out and heavily criticised for its poor journalism on the platforms. In the wake of the Monique Kröhne controversy, the veracity of the newspaper's coverage of various other topics has also been repeatedly questioned on social media, illustrating how instances of poor journalism continue to follow and damage journalism's reputation and those of news media organisations.

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24. The initial article that started the controversy was published under the headline 'Namibian scoops Harvard best student award', which is accessible at the following link: https://www.namibian.com.na/175460/archive-read/Namibian-scoops-Harvard-best-student-award
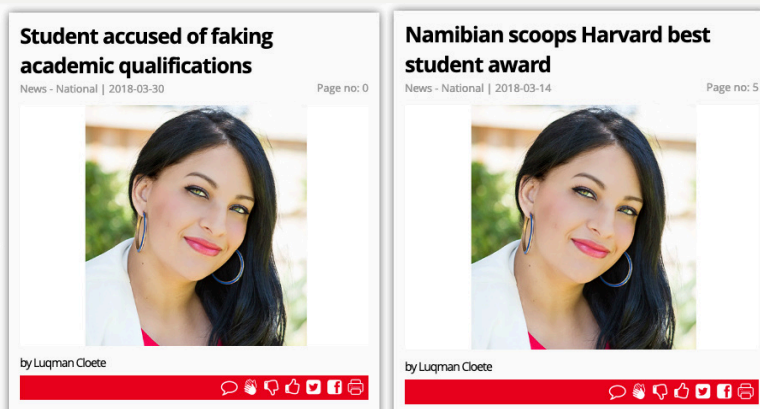25. See 'Student accused of faking academic qualifications' at: https://www.namibian.com.na/175951/archive-read/Student-accused-of-faking-academic-qualifications

NOTE: It is not the intention here to single out one newspaper or news organi-sation for criticism. The example of The Namibian newspaper is being used here because of the prominence of the newspaper, as both a media organisation and a brand, with wide reach and influence in Namibia and an impressive history of and reputation for quality, independent and courageous journalism. It is precisely because of this that the issue of poor journalistic practices and standards at this or any newspaper should be of immense concern.


Student accused of faking academic qualifications

News - National | 2018-03-30   Page no: 0

by Luqman Cloete

Namibian scoops Harvard best student award

News - National | 2018-03-14   Page no: 5

by Luqman Cloete

POOR REPORTING … On the left was the initial story in mid-March 2018 and on the right a follow-up a few weeks later, after the initial story had already attracted consider-able criticism and other newspapers had also reported on the issue.

Callipygian @2leepurplefairy · 1h
How do we know this is the truth and not fabricated? This has Monique vibes all over it.

The Namibian ✓ @TheNamibian
Students funded between 2010 and 2014 owe NSFAF N$309 million. buff.ly/2q3uSmX

4   2

#CHUABINESS FISHUR @shaningwaF · 2h
Did y'all learn your lesson or nay?

The Namibian ✓ @TheNamibian
NUST has denied awarding qualifications to a former student who has claimed to have obtained the qualifications from the institution. buff.ly/2q3QvUj

HECKLING … The Namibian was heavily and continuously criticised on social media for how it reported the Monique Kröhne fake qualifications saga.

Other instances of poor journalism have also been pointed out on social media, often in response to stories about the Namibian economy, and politics in the country. In cases where experts in various fields are called upon to give comment, it is even more crucial that good journalistic practices be prioritised. The public relies on the media for accuracy and insightful analysis, and this trust is easily jeopardised when poor standards are exposed. Examples of such responses are included below:
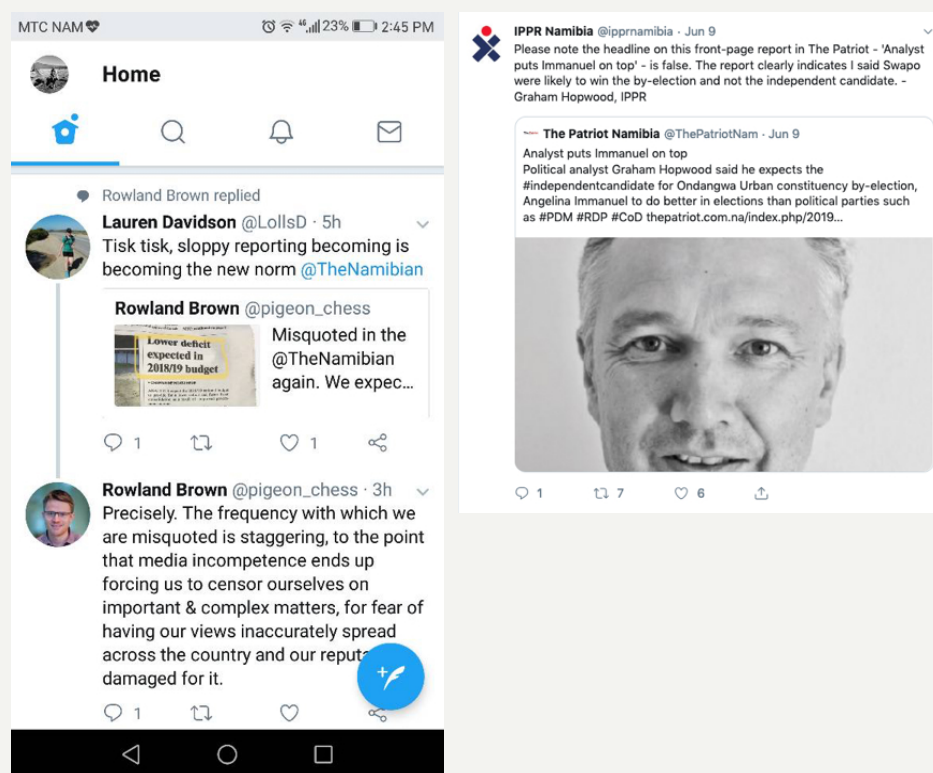
3.2 Parody

Namibian social media is fertile ground for parody and a fair amount of such content pervades these platforms, discussion groups and fora. Most people do not take parody content on topical issues of the day seriously and see such content for what it is – a light-hearted, mostly tongue-in-cheek commentary on normally serious daily or weekly current affairs happenings, and especially around political issues. However, some actors might use parody maliciously, while some audiences might perceive such content as serious in tone and substance and share it as actual news.

Some parody content is actually media created (see example below), while most is social media user generated (see examples below). Much of the parody content feeds into existing political discontent and is spread and shared, often to mock or ridicule the political establishment.

The July 2019 conviction and sentencing of former education minister Katrina Hanse-Himarwa on corruption charges, for instance, also generated a lot of parody content on social media, as the examples below illustrate.

Media generated parody content – The Rambler is a weekly satirical column in the The Weekender supplement of *The Namibian* newspaper.

Social media user generated parody content – These examples of parody content appeared on social media following the conviction of education minister, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa, on charges of corruption in July 2019.

3.3 Provoke

'Fake news' content is often created and disseminated on social media in order to provoke a response out of the public and/or various authorities, whether in the public or private sectors.

In order to achieve this goal, the 'fake news' is dressed up as information coming from what would conceivably be considered credible sources, such as a newspaper, a telecommunications company, a government department and even a hospital. The following are examples of how 'fake news' has provoked engagement and responses out of social media users, private companies and government.
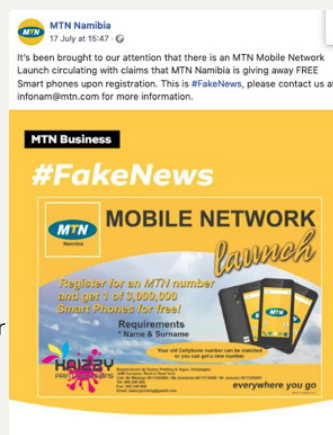
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In the case above, a Facebook post was manipulated to appear to come from a reliable source - the *Namibian Sun*, a national newspaper, and the comments posted to the article clearly have an angry tone, illustrating that the fake text touched a nerve amongst some social media users who viewed the post.

The public statement left by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) was issued in early 2018 in the wake of a viral message on various social media platforms that stated that the Namibian government had introduced a law to invasively spy on citizens. The viral hoax message has been circulating on social media for a number of years and keeps surfacing.

This statement by telecommunications service provider MTN Namibia was sent out on social media in mid-2018 to debunk a viral message that the company was giving away smartphones.

The media statement right was issued by a private hospital following a hoax message going viral on social media, especially WhatsApp, that warned the public against drinking Windhoek's tap water.

In each of these examples a response was provoked out of various audiences or entities.

MEDICLINIC
EXPERTISE YOU CAN TRUST.

MEDIA STATEMENT

7 FEBRUARY 2018

FALSE SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGING REGARDING WATER QUALITY

Mediclinic notes with concern that the company is being falsely associated with a message circulating on WhatsApp that cautions against the quality of Namibia's tap water.

We would like to state that this message did not originate from any of our hospitals and is not supported by any clinical information. We discourage the community from spreading any health related messages that have not been verified by a reliable media source.

>END<

EDITOR'S NOTES

For more information please contact:

Dezne Colmer
Patient Experience Manager - Mediclinic Windhoek
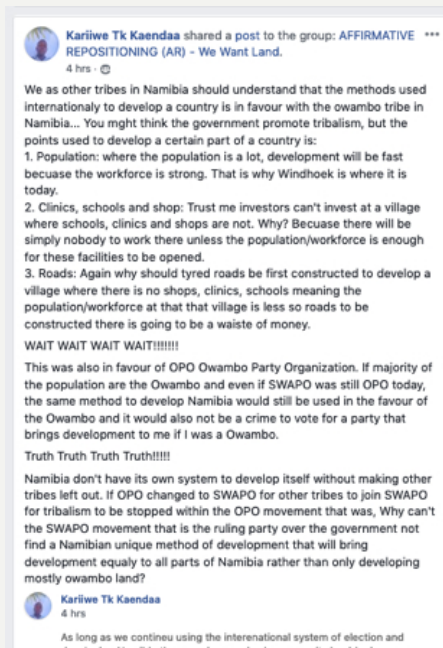E-mail: Dezne.Colmer@Mediclinic.co.za

3.4 Passion

Ethnic or tribal identities are historically highly emotive issues in Namibia – as in other parts of the continent and the world – and have anecdotally become increasingly influential in general socio-political discourse. Tribalism is an especially extreme example of identity politics and has become increasingly and concerningly pronounced on social media, reflecting what is happening offline, and is feeding into the divisiveness of contemporary Namibian politics, which has become marked by strong undercurrents of ethnic nationalism.

In response, senior political figures[26] have variously come out and called on Namibians to denounce tribalism and ethnic nationalism as threatening Namibia's peace and stability, even though as late as August 2019, Namibian President Hage Geingob stated that tribalism was not a problem in the country[27].

Social media have become a hotbed of the issues of tribalism and ethnic nationalism, as the following examples of social media user generated 'fake news' content illustrate:

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26. See 'Stop blaming Aawambo – Kapofi' at: https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ijN09jBI6tMJ:https://www.namibiansun.com/news/stop-blaming-aawambo-kapofi2019-07-16+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=za
27. See 'Tribalism is not rife in Namibia' at https://www.namibian.com.na/82206/read/Tribalism-not-rife-in-Namibia

3.5 Partisanship

Political factionalism emanating from within the ruling Swapo Party has fuelled much of the perceived surge in 'fake news' evident on social media over the last five years or so. The divisiveness and acrimony between and amongst factions within the ruling party reached a high point ahead of and during the party's elective congress in November 2017.

What is striking about the following examples of 'fake news' are the implied threats of violence against a journalist, Sonja Smith – a Namibian national who appears to have been intentionally misidentified as a Rwandan refugee – at one of the weekly newspapers, Windhoek Observer, who had been assigned to cover the political machinations around the ruling party congress. To emphasise, there's an unmistakable undercurrent of incitement to violence that attaches to some of these examples.

Notably, in many instances, such as these examples also show, the same individuals are prominent in various discussion groups or fora on various social media platforms. (See also 5.7 Political influence)
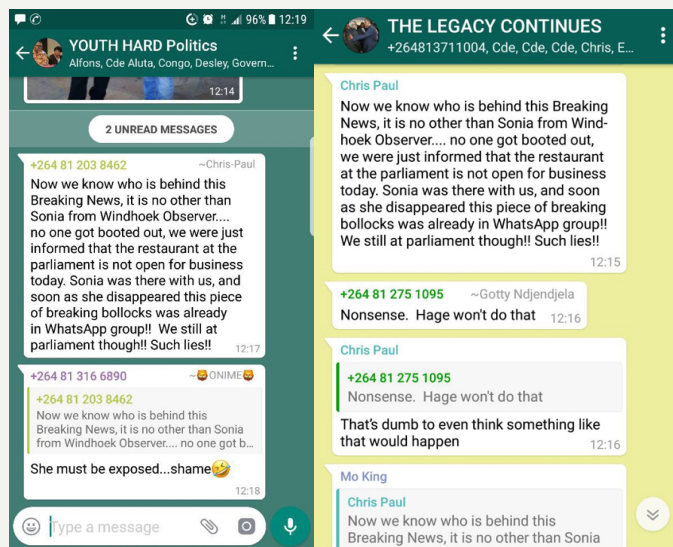
20
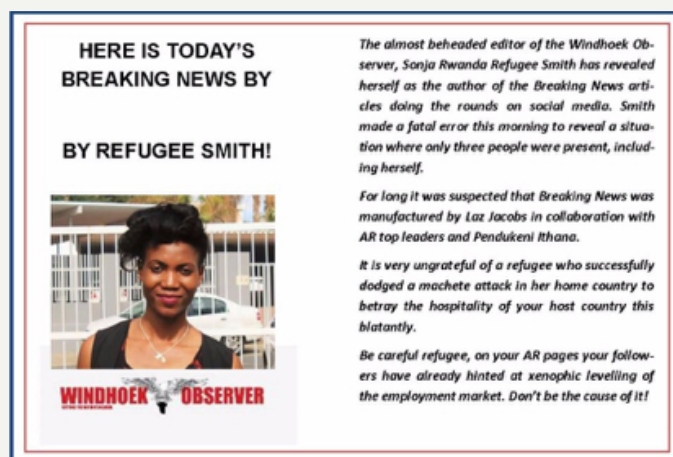
Other 'fake news' campaigns around the November 2017 ruling party elective congress sought to downplay and ridicule each other. And in the wake of the congress, since end 2017 to the present, the ruling party's internal animosities and factionalism have continued to fuel tit-for-tat 'fake news' counter-campaigns on social media, such as the following example illustrates:

3.6 Promotion

Promotion of politicians, political movements and causes is popular on social media, and aside from the actual political parties promoting themselves through their own social media pages, much of the 'fake news' content related to political movements is supporter generated. The following example was supporter-generated and is a

platform mostly used to sing the praises of the ruling party and Namibian President Hage Geingob. Pages such as this one are also used to share propaganda and mis- / disinformation content to other discussion groups.

It has to be noted that, concerning political activity on social media, ruling Swapo Party operatives, associates and supporters appear to be very active. While other political parties and related actors do also have profiles, groups and discussion boards on social media, the more prominent groups and discussion fora (see section 6) tend to often devolve into and be dominated by argumentative engagements around internal ruling party politics or insult-laced discussions of the performance of the ruling party government and politicians.

3.7 Political influence

Another way that 'fake news' makes an appearance on Namibian social media is through the efforts of individuals who use their social media profiles and visibility to advertise that they are politically connected or associated, broadcasting that they have political influence.

One such profile is that of Patrick Chris-Paul Angelo Haingura (see also 5.5 Partisanship). The accounts connected to this name on various social media – Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp – are not only used to praise and promote particular ruling party politicians, but also to launch attacks against political opponents of those politicians, as is illustrated by some of the following examples.

The above examples illustrate how Patrick Chris-Paul Angelo Haingura, because of his demonstrated proximity to power (exemplified by the Facebook profile photo of him in close company with the Namibian president), appears to use the implied mantel of having the presidential ear to attack a political opponent of the president. The subject of the attack is liberation stalwart and former long-serving Cabinet member Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana.

Note: The most disturbing language in the images was blacked out so as not to continue the spread of what is borderline hate-filled content.

3.8 Propaganda

Propaganda is arguably the oldest form of 'fake news'.

Once again, during negative campaigns on both sides, striking but crude examples of 'fake news' propaganda were visible in the period before, during and after the divisive Swapo Party elective congress of November 2017. The main purpose of the congress was to install then Swapo Party vice president and Namibian head of state Hage Geingob as party president, following the stepping down of former party and national president Hifikepunye Pohamba in 2015. However, Geingob's ascent to the party presidency was fiercely opposed and contested by a bloc of senior party stalwarts, who called themselves Team Swapo. The Geingob camp was labelled Team Harambee.

Much of the propaganda was meant to sow confusion within the competing factions and amongst congress delegates. Following are some of the examples of factional propaganda – meant to undermine the Team Swapo faction – from that period. These examples also speak to partisanship and were widely shared on various social media platforms.

Part of the 'fake news' propaganda campaigns involved discrediting the media reporting (see also 5.5 Partisanship) on what was happening within the various camps competing for leadership positions and control of the ruling party in the lead up to and during the November 2017 ruling party elective congress. The following crude example, meant to disparage the main daily and weekly newspapers around the time of the ruling party congress, is illustrative of that.

Other forms of propaganda permeating social media aim to cast political leaders and their political activities in a positive light. The following example was meant to praise Namibian President Hage Geingob for the government's drought assistance interventions in early to mid-2019.

4. The 'fake news' battlegrounds

Much of the 'fake news' that has been shown here is also shared into and/or from various popular Facebook pages (groups and forums), and then gets disseminated through other social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Twitter. Three of the most prominent such pages – through which much of the politics-related 'fake news' appears to pass – are the following:

Description:
AR is a YOUTH led Movement that aim to restore the dignity of our people as it relates to the Master means of Production, Land! NB: Views Posted on the Group Do not Represent the views of AR unless so stated!

Description:
A forum for the discussion of Namibian politics

Note on Politics Watch Namibia:

This page was created by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and IPPR director Graham Hopwood explained: "It was first called Election Watch Namibia and was set up before the 2009 national elections. We only changed it to Politics Watch Namibia after the 2010 regional and local elections. The idea was to provide a discussion platform on politics and policy issues. We pulled out afterwards and handed it over to a new set of administrators (previously it was me and a couple of IPPR researchers)."

He added: "We had set some ground rules which included barring the use of insulting language. However, despite threats to remove people from the group members continued to insult each other and make potentially libellous claims. In the end we didn't think IPPR should be associated with it and it proved impossible to impose basic rules about civility. Some members were even threatening each other with violence. At that point the conflicts were mainly political or race-based."

Description:
The Aim Is To Build Our Country As Youth, Politically and Economically. Party differences are not part of this group but lets say it all that: "ONE NAMIBIA, ONE NATION!"

There are a few other such prominent Facebook discussion pages, but these three are the biggest by number of members and most, if not all, of the politics related, and other, 'fake news' content examples presented here, as well as a whole lot more gathered for this study, pass through these pages initially or at some stage and is shared from there onto other social media discussion groups and fora. When considering this, it becomes clear that the moderators of these discussion groups largely tend not to be interventionist or censorially minded, given that much of the 'fake news' that passes through their groups are not taken down or the disseminators not called out or censured.

5. Conclusion

As this report demonstrates throughout, 'fake news' is a reality of Namibian public and political discourse, and it seems clear that the phenomenon in all its guises is contributing to the souring, and even poisoning, of the commons and the Namibian news and information landscape.

What is also increasingly clear is that much, if not most, of what can be identified as 'fake news' on Namibian social media is politically motivated and driven, and is seemingly fuelling and erupting long simmering animosities and divisions, as well as amplifying general socio-political acrimony and discontent, online and offline and giving rise to tribalist and ethnic nationalist barricading in sections of society.

Furthermore, the apparent increase in the occurrence of 'fake news' does contribute to audience and public confusion around the facts and truths concerning the state of Namibian society, which will drive a decline in trust in governance authorities and the media. This is what has happened and continues to happen in other countries in other parts of the continent and the world, and the signs of such trends are visible in Namibia too.

'Fake news' thrives in environments that are marked by less than optimal transparency and accountability – pouring fuel on the fires of rumour, conspiracy and innuendo – in socio-economic and political relations and contexts.

It is against this backdrop, and with a view to the November 2019 presidential and National Assembly elections, that this briefing paper cautions against the public, civil society and state authorities not appropriately and effectively engaging in efforts, which must surely be multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary in nature, to counter the spread of this informational scourge.

To underscore, given what the situation already looks like, it has become high time for Namibian society to grapple and engage with the issue of 'fake news' in order to prevent its political, social and economic degenerative effects from further weakening an already considerably fragile Namibian socio-political discourse space and relations amongst Namibia's various socio-economic and cultural communities.

Not adequately confronting the 'fake news' scourge could have far-reaching impacts on the stability of the still nascent Namibian nation.

ABUJA DECLARATION ON FAKE NEWS, MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION AHEAD OF THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

In August 2018, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) with support from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and MacArthur Foundation hosted a two-day conference in Abuja, Nigeria, under the theme 'Democracy and Disinformation: How Fake News Threaten Our Freedom and Democracy'.

At the end of the two days the conference issued a declaration which included the following recommendations. The recommendations are the following:

1. Transparency in governance should be encouraged so as to discourage rumour-mongering and the spread of fake news;

2. Structures of national unity through which programmes and policies that advance cohesion and integration should be promoted;

3. To counter hate speech and fake news, we need to promote traditional media freedom, safety of journalists, pluralism and so forth;

4. People should apply tools of verification to unbundle fake stories and realise the mechanisms of manipulation that are being applied. Recipients of fake news should apply common sense and verify the source of any news stories before they are shared;

5. To tackle fake news, digital education and literacy is very important;

6. One of the biggest solutions to fake news is strong, vibrant and credible media houses because if there are credible and trusted sources, citizens will go to those sources for information and disregard other sources;

7. As a longer term strategy, civic and political education is incredibly important;

8. Training whatsapp group administrators to ascertain the veracity of information shared;

9. Election monitoring/observation in a coordinated manner;

10. We need to be clear about the definitions of fake news before we talk about regulation;

11. There is a need to look at data protection and privacy;

12. Enhance people's involvement on political issues;

13. How do we make messages appeal to our audience, we need to think about partnerships;

14. There is a need for transparency.

The full declaration can be viewed at: https://www.cddwestafrica.org/abuja-declaration-on-fake-newsmisinformation-and-disinformation-ahead-of-the-2019-general-election/

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Frederico Links has been an IPPR Research Associate since 2009. He has focussed on democracy and elections, party political finance, empowerment policies, internet governance, cybersecurity and public procurement. He has previously worked as a journalist for a range of Namibian publications. He is the current Chairperson of the ACTION Coalition which campaigns for greater access to information in Namibia.

About Democracy Report

Democracy Report is a project of the IPPR which analyses and disseminates information relating to the legislative agenda of Namibia's Parliament. The project aims to promote public participation in debates concerning the work of Parliament by publishing regular analyses of legislation and other issues before the National Assembly and the National Council. Democracy Report is funded by the Embassy of Finland.

About IPPR

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research into social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia. The IPPR was established in the belief that free and critical debate informed by quality research promotes development.