Information Disorders in Africa:

An annotated bibliography of selected countries

Scott Timcke, Liz Orembo, &

Hanani Hlomani

January 2023

Table of Contents

About the Resisting Information Disorder in the Global South Project

Principal Investigator: Herman Wasserman, Stellenbosch University

Despite information disorder being a widespread problem in countries in the Global South, the study of this phenomenon remains dominated by examples, case studies, and models from the Global North. A previous scoping project (Wasserman 2022) supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) made a start to map the actors, strategies and approaches working to counter information disorders across the Global South. In its study of organisations and actors in Sub-Saharan Africa, the MENA region, Latin America and Asia, the study found that organisations working in the Global South address information disorder as a multi-levelled problem embedded in a range of social, political, and economic conditions. These conditions map onto historical experiences and wider concerns among civil society actors about the quality of communication and public sphere governance in these regions – and actors and organisations working to counter mis- and dis-information increasingly link various issues such as freedom of expression, access to digital platforms, communication rights and media literacy together in their work. This project builds on this pre-existing research and its recommendations. It will take a thematic approach to identify the key drivers of information disorder in the Global South and evaluate appropriate responses and strategies. The goal is to support and influence future policy and governance interventions.

About Research ICT Africa

Research ICT Africa (RIA) is an African think tank that has operated for over a decade to fill a strategic gap in the development of a sustainable information society and digital economy. It has done so by building the multidisciplinary research capacity needed to inform evidence-based policy and effective regulation Africa. RIA's dynamic and evolving research agenda examines the uneven distribution of the benefits and harms of the intensifying global processes of digitalisation and datafication.

On this basis, we seek to provide alternative policy and regulatory strategies that produce different outcomes that will address digital inequality in Africa and enable data justice. Through rigorous research and analysis RIA seeks to build an African knowledge base in support of digital equality and data justice, and to monitor and review developments on the continent.

Acknowledgements

1   Introduction

This annotated bibliography compiles relevant literature on information disorders in Africa published in peer-reviewed academic journals in English. It is organised into several thematic sections, and has a particular focus on Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

While one must not lose sight of the discursive genealogy of information disorder, its political potency, and history of material arrangements that propagate its discourses, by information disorders we mean processes where rapid technological and media changes provide opportunities for revanchist forces to produce online content to stall democratic social change. Put simply, information disorders feed into de-democratisation processes (cf. Wardle and Derakhshan 2017, also see specific critique by Bontcheva and Posetti 2020). Similarly, Herman Wasserman (2022) speaks of information disorder as a phenomenon that coincides with the collapse of the independent commercial press. This collapse leaves few organised and professional sources of information about society, and can lead to authoritarians taking advantage of the situation. Given the variety of institutional and infrastructural arrangements, there are particular circumstances where platforms may amplify or reduce information disorders.

The digital transformation is an opportune window to re-evaluate the study of African public life and collective experience in all of its plurality, including its humanistic and alienating aspects. Concurrently African states are upgrading their surveillance technologies and so it is essential to pay attention to empirical and policy matters. Nevertheless, as the articles in this annotated bibliography demonstrate it is equally important to give consideration to concepts and their explanatory utility so that these changes can be better understood in their entirety. There is also value in focusing on the processes that are presently constituting life, events, and circumstances In asking what is forming, one must also address the ways these formations are significant in a qualitative sense.

There were two central questions that guided the compilation of this annotated bibliography. The first was: How are digital technologies involved in social change? And the second: What points of leverage can interested actors use to bring about a more egalitarian polis?

In an effort to help address these questions the journal articles included in this annotated bibliography are organised into several thematic sections. To a degree all categorisations are idiosyncratic and reveal preferences. In this case there some is a slight narrative arc. In our arrangement, we have sought to cover a selection of the early debates around how Africans used the Internet to shape their societies; we also look at how Africans conceptualised then addressed the contested change to their publics and norms; how they did so while navigating their respective state's exercise of security and surveillance instruments as a regime protective response to the Arab Spring; finally we sought to sample how platforms are involved in constituting the prospects for social formations across the African continent.

Cutting across these clusters of concerns are thematic questions around matters pertaining to the crystallisation of power in digital networks paired with efforts to understand who these networks disproportionately serve, as well as how the 'affective charge' of techno-nationalism is used to

mobilise groups for projects of coordinated harm. None of these issues can be bifurcated from long-standing inquiries of anthropology and sociology in African Studies; that said, the rollout of digital networks allows researchers to see these issues from another vantage point, thereby augmenting and providing a sympathetic critique of prior intellectual inquiry.

Several factors fed into the selection criteria for this annotated bibliography. This document favours peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles from the social sciences, legal studies, and cultural studies. For pragmatic purposes we began with material written in English. At no point do we suggest that any geography is less important than another. Nor do we deem Francophone, Lusophone, Hispanophone, or Arabic African scholarship to take second place on the continent. Rather we consider this a living document and so in time the team may revisit the project to add more material. The creative commons licence allows other researchers to do the same.

Notwithstanding our efforts to collect academic peer-reviewed literature from across the African continent this annotated bibliography does have a focus on Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. This attention does not necessarily reflect the leading edge of digitalisation in Africa. Rather there is a sociology to this knowledge production. Countries that have a diasporic intellectual community, are seeking to integrate with the international academic community, and have venues for dissemination, are some factors that account for this knowledge production. Even local disciplinary fashions within countries shape the outputs of specific academic communities. Well-documented locations also continue to receive more attention – despite there being interesting discussions on the Sahel and Somali Territories included in this selection. Lastly, in most instances we have tried to preserve the language used in the listed article in our discussion – so, for instance, if an article refers to 'fake news' or 'false news' our summary does the same, or if it refers to cellphones instead of mobile phones, our summary preserves that usage.

With all this said, as this annotated bibliography illustrates, it is premature to provide a summative evaluation of the ongoing constitution of African digital society through the reorganisation of social power. More sustained work is required, especially in places that have not been as well covered thus far.

Scott Timcke

Cape Town

January 2023

2 Impacts and uses

Alzouma, G. (2005). "Myths of Digital Technology in Africa: Leapfrogging Development?". *Global Media and Communication*, 1(3), 339–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766505058128.

International NGOs operating in Africa at the turn of the century were deeply committed to the idea that the use of consumer-grade digital technology would modernise African societies and states. In this conceptualisation social development could best be achieved via improving the technological capacity of countries to create more economic opportunities thereby helping these societies to 'catch up' with the developed world. The authors argue that this worldview deployed a one-dimensional view of history, was sociologically naive and traded primarily on a depoliticised rendering of African social formations.

Highlights:

- ❖ Usefully describes the once-prominent view that better access to technology creates better polities;
- ❖ Even at the time techno-optimism had no clear and convincing empirical support.

Etzo, S. & Collender, G. (2010). "The Mobile Phone 'Revolution' in Africa: Rhetoric or Reality?". *African Affairs*, 109(437), 659–668. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adq045.

Neoliberalism in the 1990s and 2000s in the telecommunication sector led to the rapid growth of mobile users. This development mostly caught businesses and politicians off guard in part because they were wedded to racist assumptions that posed African markets as inherently poor, static and corrupt. These same assumptions led people to believe that Africans were unable to build the infrastructure and customer base for market growth. In the 2010s, a growing mass of technologists, entrepreneurs, and activists were experimenting with platforms and apps, although there were still economic exclusions that shaped local experimentation.

Highlights:

- ❖ The authors propose that African states embrace public–private partnership models to build infrastructure.

Gagliardone, I. (2014). "New Media and the Developmental State in Ethiopia". *African Affairs*, 113(451), 279–299. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu017.

The author argues that successive Ethiopian governments between 1991 and 2012 developed one of the most restrictive regulatory system in Africa for new media. This regulatory effort sought to subordinate information flows to state- and nation-building projects. Media freedom existed to the

extent that it furthered the state's agenda, with those pursuing different agendas repressed. Efforts to evaluate the state's relationship with the media typically did not take into account the state's proclaimed project. Much criticism of the state offered little constructive guidance for state officials and development practitioners to respond to, and sometimes occurred without a sociologically grounded understanding of the ideological and institutional components of the state's developmental project.

Highlights:

❖ The Ethiopian government insisted on exclusive control over the telecommunication sector to extend services to unprofitable areas. Notwithstanding the merits of this approach, the government was unable to accomplish its goal, while silencing critics of its approach.

Paterson, C. (2013). "Journalism and Social Media in the African Context". *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 34(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2013.767418.

Widespread use of communication services have given rise to new ways for citizens to relate to one another, to the state, and to institutions. While this wave passed in the Global North in the 1990s and 2000s, most African countries began to experience this communication transformation and associated social turbulence in the 2010s.

Highlights:

❖ Through messaging services and platforms, citizens participated more in news-making;

❖ Blogs have been particularly influential in creating parallel online discussions about current events thereby bypassing gatekeepers;

❖ These new ways of relating critique, supplement, and push public discourse, and enable new kinds of stories about Africa;

❖ Journalists tended not to break stories or undertake long-term investigations; rather they tended to be reactive.

Moyo, L. (2011). "Human Rights, Citizen Journalism and the Right to Communicate in Zimbabwe". *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 12(6), 745–760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405469.

In the 2000s, the Zimbabwe political and economic crisis saw human rights campaigners adopt digital networking technologies to try to create a space free from state surveillance. In a context where the public broadcaster and other mainstream media was subordinated by the state, blogging generated a form of citizen journalism that was produced and circulated without deference to the norms of established journalistic practice. Due to inequalities and the costs of participation, online activism

tended to be elitist, and ultimately took the form of a liberal social movement which advocated against the political repression in the country, and that Zimbabwe become better integrated into the global neoliberal order. This activism sometimes expressed what could be called a subaltern, counter-hegemonic anger towards routine authoritarian political activity that frequently violated human rights.

Highlights:

❖ Bloggers on Kubatana, a civil society news and networking platform, prioritised anti-authoritarian politics over institutional journalistic norms;

❖ The bloggers also choose to target the injustices of the authoritarian state before the injustices of the market;

❖ Offering a kind of citizen journalism, Kubatana received 2,500 visits to the site per day in 2008.

Eltantawy, N. & Wiest, J. B. (2011) "Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory". *International Journal of Communication*, 5(2011), 1207–1224. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1242

This study of the 2011 Egyptian revolution treats platforms and messaging services as key resources for mobilising social movements and building street coalitions protesting the licence the government gave the police to brutalise citizens. These same services helped draw global attention to the political cause and scrutinise the actions of the Egyptian government. The study anticipates that platforms and messaging services would become instruments for collective action from below.

Highlights:

❖ There is a suggestion that the media of the Tunisian revolution which toppled Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in mid-January 2011 encouraged the mass protests in Egypt at the end of January 2011;

❖ Tunisia and Egypt shared a socio-economic context and citizen activists identified similar oppressive conditions;

❖ The Egyptian blogosphere in the 2000s paved a path for subsequent cyberactivism.

Salgado, S. (2012). "The Web in African Countries". *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(9), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.647044.

At a time where the exercise of media freedoms is conditionally set through a high degree of political control, this article uses the Angolan and Mozambican experiences to discuss how the Internet related to democratisation by enabling citizen involvement and a degree of widespread popular support for that process. The standing assumption was that online media reinforces mainstream media functions,

such as the reasonable exchange of ideas and information, thereby providing ideal models for citizenship.

Highlights:

- ❖ A study of the Internet in transitional democracies by looking at how online media represents political matters in Angola and Mozambique;

- ❖ Blogs represented one of the first ways for citizens to use their voice to be heard in public, and there were some cases of authorities wishing that anonymous bloggers ceased operations, especially when monitoring those same authorities.

Loudon, M. (2010) "ICTs as an Opportunity Structure in Southern Social Movements". *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(8), 1069-1098. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180903468947.

A study of advocacy thought technology in a context that does not feature ubiquitous Internet connectivity using the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa as a case example. Discussing the TAC's communication strategy (which included digital mediums) to create opportunities to pressure the government on equitable access to affordable treatment for all people with HIV/AIDS, the article focuses on the HIV/AIDS denialism propagated by the ANC government lead by Thabo Mbeki. The article provides an excellent example of the 'misinformation starts at the top' thesis.

Highlights:

- ❖ The TAC combined mass protest action, media campaigns, international pressure and legal action to mobilise and eventually win policy victories around material access to affordable health care, while at the same time tackling government sponsored misinformation.

Atton, C. & Mabweazara, H. (2011). "New Media and Journalism Practice in Africa: An Agenda for Research". *Journalism*, 12(6), 667–673. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405467.

When it comes to digitalisation, scholars of journalism in Africa tended to prioritise the effects of media practice in relation to democratisation over routine workplace practices. Neither are unimportant, but they are connected. Studies of journalistic practice, political participation and social movements can be augmented by studies of how newsrooms are adapting to technological change, and in turn what this means for vocational norms. This includes aspects such as the impact on the reliability of news, verification processes, and of the eye-witness accounts of citizens become part of the news.

Highlights:

- ❖ There is value in undertaking comparative studies between African countries on the impact of technology on journalism , as well as between African countries and those in Europe, South America, and South East Asia, among other regions;.

- ❖ The tension between local and the global media can be used to widen and deepen the understanding of African journalism during the process of digital transformation.

Mudhai, O. F. (2011). "Immediacy and Openness in a Digital Africa: Networked-Convergent Journalism in Kenya". *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 12(6), 674-691. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405470.

In the 2010s, in a context where there was corporate consolidation and some structural convergence in Kenya, the media environment was also becoming more open, with a range of socio-political and economic issues being discussed on different mediums and channels, and new participants entering this mediascape. One consequence of openness was that mobile and online news media shifted from impartiality to blatant support of preferred political movements. This instrumentality raised the chances of distorted information and misinformation being intentionally created and disseminated.

Highlights:

- ❖ Smartphones with cameras allowed African citizen journalists to produce eye-witness evidence by opportunistically capturing both ordinary and sensational events and sharing this online. This radically strengthened their credibility in the media ecosystem;

- ❖ In the 2010s, the use of blogs was uncommon, with some communities shunning the concept;

- ❖ Hoping to signal reliability and to distinguish themselves from citizen journalists amongst others using new media platforms to disseminate content , corporate media sought to become more transparent with their sourcing.

Manganga, K. (2012). "The Internet as Public Sphere: A Zimbabwean Case Study (1999–2008)". *Africa Development*, 37(1), 103–118. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ad/article/view/87543.

In the first decade of the 21st century, elite, wealthy Zimbabweans in the diaspora embraced Internet technologies to form online counter-publics to protest the state's administration of the economy and society. This was buoyed by the formation of a viable opposition party, but faced constraints including legislation designed to curtail the free flow of information and civil association. This embrace of online spaces coincided with the ruling party's crackdown on opposition, intimidation and use of other tactics intended to disincentives and otherwise punish political dissenters.

Highlights:

❖ In line with the political system, the media system asymmetrically polarised with state- controlled and independently owned media consolidating around different poles, with the state becoming hyper partisan;

❖ In 2007 the ruling party blacklisted 41 online publications which were deemed to be promoting regime change.

Lamoureaux, S. & Sureau, T. (2019). "Knowledge and Legitimacy: The Fragility of Digital Mobilization in Sudan". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 34–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547249.

Against the background of the Arab Spring and the role of digital mobilisation in the uprisings, this article charts the contention of knowledge, legitimacy and power in Sudan. It provides a conceptualisation of counter-publics, knowledge production and state legitimacy through considering the interplay of digital communications and people to identify the multiple technological and discursive arenas which subvert or challenge dominant discourses and state monopolies of knowledge. In 2011 the government formed a 'Cyber Jihad' unit staffed with 200 employees to monitor platforms used for communications by approximately 300 bloggers. This monitoring led to physical violence.

Highlights:

❖ The government positioned social media as promoting a "Western" morality that undermines the conservative norms in Sudanese society;

❖ The government used technical means alongside moral discipline to preserve what it referred to as national security and to silence critics;

❖ It also sought to control digital technologies by appealing to anti-terror measures;

❖ Provides a good assessment of the technical capabilities of Sudan's government during the 2010s.

3   Cultural logics of public life

Srinivasan, S. Diepeveen, S. & Karekwaivanane, G. (2019). "Rethinking Publics in Africa in a Digital Age". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 2-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547259.

Acknowledging that there are grounded empirical realities about the modernisation of communication systems in African countries, the application of ill-suited conceptual frameworks can also mean that researchers can have a poor understanding of the underlying processes that generate those same realities. Rigid adherence to these kinds of conceptual frameworks makes it more difficult to accurately track how African citizenry 'discuss matters of common interest', let alone the factional contests over the nature, exercise, and boundaries of, for example, authority and social organisation. Concurrently, the revolutionary and reactionary theses about or from Africa tend to be sweeping in scope. Both fail to account for themselves, let alone reflect whether these narratives help entrench existing dominant groups.

Highlights:

❖ Draws attention to the 'spatial boundaries of public discussions' and how these factor into the making of digital publics;

❖ Novel research agendas for African specifics are best served by avoiding both Eurocentrism and parochialism;

❖ Underscores how studies of African digital society benefit from embracing mutability and openness.

Archambault, J. S. (2013). "Cruising through Uncertainty: Cell Phones and the Politics of Display and Disguise in Inhambane, Mozambique". *American Ethnologist*, 40(1), 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12007.

A case study of the adoption of cellphones in Mozambique that focuses on the role of youth culture. Within these scenes young people compete for status and maintain appearances, while also conduct social activities with a degree of discretion. This last component is especially important for younger women who use cellphones to exchange sex for material goods, one livelihood in Mozambique's post-war economy.

Highlights:

❖ While cellphones can be objects for conspicuous consumption and display, their main function involves disguise in places where privacy is otherwise scarce; and

❖ Cellphone communications preserve public ideals of respectability even if most people do not adhere to those norms in private.

Wahutu, j. S. (2019). "Prophets Without Honor: Peripheral Actors in Kenyan Journalism". *Media and Communication*, 7(4), 127–132. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2552.

This commentary criticises the unsubstantiated claims about the growing influence of a networked Africa on how Global (North) journalism covers the continent. Rather than prioritising the external, attention can also be given to internal dynamics, like the relationships that media actors have with authorities and other sectors. This kind of sociology stands in contrast to mythic renderings of digital networks that turn on tropes of redemption. As scholarship tends to approach situations and issues on the continent with pre-packaged solutions for problems not yet fully known, a similar pre-packaged approach partly explains why 'fake news' narratives get naively shared and cynically deployed. A stronger sociological understanding of media in Africa would seek to understand how web analytics managers, developers, and webmasters help constitute national fields of journalism as these actors help shape audiences for advertisers.

Highlights

❖ Professional journalists use vocational ethics to deny the credibility of other information brokers;

❖ Kenyan social media users are quick to partner with the local press when they think the image of Kenya has been called into disrepute, even while these users also view journalists as enabling local political dysfunction.

Brinkman, I. (2019). "Social Diary and News Production: Authorship and Readership in Social Media during Kenya's 2007 Elections". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547262.

Blogs became an interesting medium during the 2007 Kenyan elections, illustrating some of the changes occurring in writing and readership. Through blogs a new genre of public intellectual writing emerged, with audiences participating in the conceptualisation and analysis of current events. Established categories of analysis, like the nation and ethnicity, were understood through effects and affects on authors and audiences. Accordingly, politics was understood through processes of self-narration of self-fashioning exercises.

Highlights:

❖ Kenyapundit.com was an active blog that covered the 2007 electoral period, featuring emotive personal observations and rumours;

❖ Blogs were deemed less elite than professional, unidirectional news productions; even so there were gatekeepers;

❖ The audience for blogs included Kenyans abroad with the participatory format catering to the voicing of nationalist sentiments married with indignation.

Chonka, P. (2019). "News Media and Political Contestation in the Somali Territories: Defining the Parameters of a Transnational Digital Public". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 139–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1548210.

The complex of state and private television, radio, and online broadcasters creates the possibility of shared engagement around issues in the Horn of Africa. This shared engagement is interwoven with politics in an area experiencing prolonged instability, and where people are trying to reconstruct states. Media production mediates these efforts to form states, states seeking to assert authority, and the exercise of influence from diasporic communities abroad.

Highlights:

❖ Media production in these conditions is a product of the post-colonial nation-building experience, but also a prerequisite for ideas about heterogeneity conducted via a relatively homogeneous Somali language.

Omanga, D. (2019). "WhatsApp as 'Digital Publics': The Nakuru Analysts and the Evolution of Participation in County Governance in Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 174–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1548211.

Set against the material development around the expansion of mobile Internet services in Africa under the auspices of neoliberal deregulation, this article presents a case study of how Kenyans built digital spaces in 2016 and 2017 to deliberate over the meaning of the country's formal devolution of political structures after 2010. As this devolution encourages mass public participation using means where people already congregate, WhatsApp became a site for political contests for county governance, caucusing, and coalition building.

Highlights:

❖ WhatsApp groups have the potential to mediate and constitute 'political personhood'.

Shepherd, M. & Shanade, B. B. (2016). "Citizen Journalism and Moral Panics: A Consideration of Ethics in the 2015 South African Xenophobic Attacks". *African Journalism Studies*, 37(4), 115–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2016.1256053.

A case study of co-ordinated harm using WhatsApp, with South Africans perpetuating xenophobia during the April 2015 crisis and causing distress in migrant communities. The images circulated were often from riots that occurred years before, or from other places on the African continent.

❖ Migrant communities also used WhatsApp to inform members of developments and advise each other of impending attacks.

Mutsvairo, B. & Bebawi, S. (2019). "Journalism Educators, Regulatory Realities, and Pedagogical Predicaments of the "Fake News" Era: A Comparative Perspective on the Middle East and Africa". *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 74(2), 143–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695819833552.

This study of 10 journalism curricula from universities based in Africa and the Middle East illustrates how journalism educators are treating the problem of fake news and positioning the issue relative to other standard topics like the circulation of information, the fabrication of sources and fact-checking. The findings show that the critical approaches to fake news are integrated throughout the curriculum, although there is room for broadening the topic from discussing state-sponsored exercises in Europe to include gossip and malicious rumour, issues that are more likely to affect African populations.

Highlights:

❖ Some discussion of the differences between Afrocentric and Eurocentric approaches to the study of fake news.

Moyo, L. (2015). "Digital Age as Ethical Maze: Citizen Journalism Ethics during crises in Zimbabwe and South Africa". *African Journalism Studies*, 36(4), 125-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1119494.

The rise of online citizen journalism is indexed to larger structural changes that have occurred during the neoliberal turn in Africa. One result is that citizen journalism is not bound to vocational ethics linked to the commercial press. Rather as an individuated or loosely confederated practice, citizen journalists appeal to higher values, like human rights, social justice, and democratic freedom. What commercial journalists see as a lack of professionalism is instead a de-institutionalised source of information production complimented by rapid interactivity with audiences.

Highlights:

❖ The debate about the legitimacy of citizen journalism was about which groups controlled the future of journalistic practice, with the commercial press holding the incumbent advantage;

❖ The rise of citizen journalism was in part a frustration with the commercial press not explicitly addressing first causes of repression in successive Zimbabwe elections and the multiple xenophobic riots in South Africa in the early 21st century.

4   Assertions of state power and citizen responses

Rydzak, J. Karanja, M. & Opiyo, N. (2020). "Dissent does Not Die in Darkness: Network Shutdowns and Collective Action in African Countries". *International Journal of Communication*, 14(2020), 24. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12770.

Digital state repression should not be thought of as a monolithic experience; rather there is a range of activities that vary by scale, scope, location, duration, and frequency and depend on the goals of the government at the time. Digital state repression is also connected to 'political structures, internal social relations, rates of economic development, Internet penetration, and usage of media'. Additionally, given that this form of political action does occur in the same region, there is value in looking at a 'diffusion effect' as governments learn from one another to address civil strife.

Highlights:

❖ Shutdowns aim to disrupt channels of communication, rather than block specific content;

❖ Although Guinea undertook the first shutdown in 2007, the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 altered the actions of many state authorities so that by June 2019, 26 countries in authoritarian and hybrid states had implemented shutdowns;

❖ Although they occasionally claim that shutdowns are the result of technical glitches – like Gabon's Ali Bongo in 2016 – orders for shutdown often come from the highest government authorities, with some having traceable links to Presidential offices.

Freyburg, T. Garbe, L. (2018). "Blocking the Bottleneck: Internet Shutdowns and Ownership at Election Times in Sub-Saharan Africa". *International Journal of Communication*, 12(2018), 3896–3916.
https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/8546.

The relationship between ownership and political outcomes of Internet service provision, including its temporary interruption at times of political contestation, has largely been ignored. This investigation of the link between state majority ownership of internet service providers (ISPs) and the politically motivated temporal interruption of access to the Internet during contentious events examines 33 presidential and parliamentary elections in sub-Saharan Africa between 2014 and 2016. In half of the sub-Saharan African countries in which presidential or parliamentary national elections were held in this period, the government ordered Internet shutdowns as voters headed to polling stations.

Highlights:

❖ The interruption of Internet services is facilitated by state ownership of ISPs; conversely it may be more challenging for a government to make ISPs comply with its request if the majority of ISPs were privately owned.

Skjerdal, T. S. (2011). "Journalists or Activists? Self-identity in the Ethiopian Diaspora Online Community". *Journalism*, 12(6), 727–744. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405471.

Online news production by diasporic Ethiopians tends to be oriented toward anti-authoritarian advocacy. As these citizen journalists are not subject to state reprisals in the same way as people living in Ethiopia, nor caught up in the everyday struggles in the country, they offer a different perspective and analysis of the state's nation- and state-building project that appeals to higher order values around the purpose and conduct of collective life.

Highlights:

❖ Historically there are limited opportunities for an independent press to be established and influence the Ethiopian public arena given how that space is policed by the state;

❖ Developments in 2007-2008 saw the nascent liberalisation of media opportunities; for example licence statutes were revoked.

Gagliardone, I. Stremlau, N. & Aynekulu, G. (2019). "A Tale of Two Publics? Online Politics in Ethiopia's Elections". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 191–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1548208.

A comparative analysis of the Ethiopian media system in the 2005 and 2015 election cycles, tracking both the role of digital networks as well as how the authoritarian state sought to influence online public spaces. While there are factors beyond the media system that explain mobilisation and outcomes, the character of the 2005 media system is described as one of effervescence, whereas in 2015 it was characterised by apathy. Apathy can be understood as citizens boycotting narrow, pre-figured political participatory modes.

Highlights:

❖ The 2005 election saw a reinvigoration of the state's desire to control all positions of authority and power while also extending its own power to the lowest social rung. This project included 'a massive re-ideologisation of communication across all constituencies';

❖ The article describes the online and offline mechanisms the state used to tame online debate.

Ekdale, B. & Tully, M. (2019). "African Elections as a Testing Ground: Comparing Coverage of Cambridge Analytica in Nigerian and Kenyan Newspapers". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 27-43. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1679208.

There was substantial international media coverage of Cambridge Analytica, questioning the firm's ethics and legality of its activities around the Brexit referendum and Trump elections. The reporting

also revealed Cambridge Analytica's interference in the Kenyan and Nigerian elections. This study analyses how the media in these two countries reported the event.

Highlights:

❖ Nigeria and Kenya's media depended on international media reporting for their own coverage;

❖ Nigerian media framed the issue as a contest between their presidential candidates, whereas Kenyan media framed the issue around data protection, whether Cambridge Analytica's activities may have exacerbated ethnic tension, and whether it could lead to bloodshed;

❖ African elections serve as platforms for proxy wars between global interests;

❖ Both of these countries passed data protection laws, but none of them addressed the interference of foreign actors in the elections;

❖ The Nigerian government opened investigations into Cambridge Analytica; Kenya did not.

Moyo, D. (2009). "Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election". *Journalism Studies*, 10(4), 551–567. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700902797291.

In the 2008 Zimbabwe general elections, citizen journalism influenced media reporting during an information vacuum around the announcement of the election results. Citizen journalism platforms such as instant messaging and blogs played a crucial election monitoring role by offering a parallel market of information which deterred state actions to interfere with the elections.

Highlights:

❖ Citizen journalism can shape spaces of political discourse by enabling non-hierarchical and informal communication;

❖ Traditional media is heavily influenced by citizen journalism as they take up cues from informal platforms of discussion;

❖ The influence of foreign actors, such as donors, to promote citizen journalism can take away the agency and autonomy of citizen journalists by influencing narratives;

❖ Citizen journalism is not emerging as an unmediated space, but as a hybrid one where both controlled and uncontrolled information is shared.

Mabweazara, H. M. (2011). "Between the Newsroom and the Pub: The Mobile Phone in the Dynamics of Everyday Mainstream Journalism Practice in Zimbabwe". *Journalism*, 12(6), 692–707. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405468.

Zimbabwean journalists were quick to adopt cellphones into their professional practice, with these devices soon becoming necessary in daily work routines. Concurrently, the cellphone redefined traditional news production practices to make these activities less state-centric and less reactive to day-to-day events.

Highlights:

❖ State-controlled newspapers created payment plans for their staff to purchase cellphone equipment;

❖ The commercial press used cellphones to liaise with sources, in turn skirting the state's gaze.

Mare, A. (2013). "A Complicated but Symbiotic Affair: The Relationship Between Mainstream Media and Social Media in the Coverage of Social Protests in Southern Africa". *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 34(1), 83–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2013.767426.

Rather than embracing social media, corporate journalists in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique treated it as a threat to their professional practice, and in turn portrayed digital journalists as merely activists. However in moments of organised protest around popular demands for better governance (and in phases the author defines as 'preparation', 'ignition', 'escalation' and 'post-protest') these same journalists drew upon the protest's social media products to make sense of the moment. As such corporate media verified, contextualised and amplified the claims of the protestors.

Highlights:

❖ Activists in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique kept abreast of movements like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street;

❖ Social media became another site of contestation in the 'running battles' between citizens and the state.

Simiyu, M. A. (2022). "Freedom of expression and African elections: Mitigating the Insidious Effect of Emerging Approaches to Addressing the False News Threat". *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 76-107. https://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/simiyu-ma.

African governments are passing legislation that criminalises 'false news' while also using tactics like internet shutdowns to curtail the spread of information during electioneering. There are adverse effects on rights of expression that also undermine democratic ideals around the utility of an informed electorate who have basic knowledge to exercise collective decision-making at the polls.

Highlights:

❖ Case studies of election law in South Africa and Tanzania;

- ❖ Spreading false news does threaten election integrity, but states are addressing this risk by 'illegally, unnecessarily and disproportionately' compromising rights of expression through criminalisation;

- ❖ Criminalising false news and using internet shutdowns creates a culture of fear and self-censorship;

- ❖ Public participation exercises seem to proactively identify and counter false news; this is a rights-based approach rather than responding through a punitive state apparatus;

- ❖ Criminalisation should be reserved for circumstances that cause severe casualties;

- ❖ States can profitably consult with members of civil society for guidance on proportional intervention if first efforts with civil sanction are ineffective.

Ncube, L. (2019). "Digital Media, Fake News and Pro-Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance Cyber-Propaganda during the 2018 Zimbabwe Election". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 44-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1670225.

In response to the project of using state-controlled media to create a 'patriotic media' for a 'patriotic citizenry' after the crises of the 2000s in Zimbabwe, early digital media content became a way for oppositional groups and parties to engage in contentious politics in an otherwise polarised media system. The 2017 coup against Robert Mugabe gave rise to elections in 2018. In a terse political environment, alternative, public interest and citizen journalism on social media platforms became coded as oppositional media production, and hence was labelled fake news.

Highlights:

- ❖ Digital produced, circulated, and consumed political content hostile to the government was deemed fake news;

- ❖ Humour, vulgarity and mocking of the government was commonplace in posts and memes;

- ❖ Memes and posts lowered the fear to engage in spirited public debate;

- ❖ Fake news thrived in an information vacuum. Zimbabwe's national broadcaster failed to release information on the election process in a timely fashion;

- ❖ Fake news was circulated to discredit the electoral body and the electoral process.

Mutahi, P. (2020). "Fake News and the 2017 Kenyan Elections". *Communication: South African Journal of Communication Theory and Research*, 46(4), 31–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2020.1723662.

The 2017 Kenyan election featured an increase in the use of platforms for partisan mobilisation and turnout. The increase was caused by more Kenyans coming online, the decrease in Internet costs, and

the availability of affordable smartphones. While the election featured the intentional circulation of fake news, to date there is little evidence that this swayed voters' decisions. Additionally, there is little data to support claims that fake news led to offline violence.

Highlights:

- ❖ Kenyan telecommunication companies subsidised costs of Internet bundles that included access to platforms like WhatsApp;

- ❖ WhatsApp groups became popular for online discussions and the dissemination of information;

- ❖ Safaricom, a private telecommunications company operating in East Africa, called attention to fake news distributed via platforms, and in 2017 funded efforts to monitor and correct false information;

- ❖ Fake news content sought to impersonate credible new organisations by attempting to copy visual aesthetics.

Maweu, J. M. (2019). ""Fake Elections"? Cyber Propaganda, Disinformation and the 2017 General Elections in Kenya". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 62-76. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1719858.

A study of how party members and allies (Jubilee and the National Super Alliance [NASA]) used platforms to spread propaganda during the 2017 Kenyan general elections, an extended and tense affair. The firm Cambridge Analytica was contracted to aid Uhura Kenyatta, while Aristotle Inc was contracted to aid Raila Odonga, the main rival. This contract with Cambridge Analytica provided 'proof' to partisans that the result of the presidential elections were fabricated through computational coordination.

Highlights:

- ❖ Evidence of the frequent uses of 'imposter content' that pretended to be the product of an established news organisation;

- ❖ Image manipulation was a common practice;

- ❖ Expectations around 'breaking news' meant journalists were taking shortcuts and not authenticating election-related information, while also faced coordinated campaigns to discredit their authority;

- ❖ For losing parties, new methods of electioneering, like data analysis of campaigning and coalition formation were coded as illegitimate regardless of merit;

- ❖ With input from professional election campaign consultants, parties and supporters used bloggers, influencers, and bots as tools to try to shape public opinion through negative viral content, amplification, framing, and talking-point memos.

Abraha, H. H. (2017). "Examining Approaches to Internet Regulation in Ethiopia". *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 26(3), 293–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2017.1374057.

The Ethiopian state maintained a monopoly over telecommunications and Internet services, in part because these revenues are used for developmental goals. The private sector's role was limited to re-sale. While undergoing an economic transformation, Internet penetration rates lagged comparable countries and the state treated social media as a vector for political instability. A year of protests in 2016 wherein platforms were used for mobilisation and coordination reinforced the state's perspective on the need to securitise the Internet. The view informed the character of regulatory exercises which was one of 'command and control.'

Highlights:

❖ Appealing to threats of terror and cybersecurity, the state adopted laws that expanded online surveillance for security forces and the intelligence community.

Jacob, J. U. U. & Akpan, I. (2015). "Silencing Boko Haram: Mobile Phone Blackout and Counterinsurgency in Nigeria's Northeast Region". *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1). http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.ey.

Rural rebellions use telecommunication technology to undermine state authority and this had implications for data governance. For example, mobile communication networks were at a time useful for Boko Haram to undertake strategic coordination and surveillance, as well as for planning and conducting both dummy and active raids. Even so the group in 2012 attacked network installations as part of their campaign against the Westernisation of Nigeria. During the 2013 state of emergency, the Nigerian government switched off the GSM network hoping to hinder Boko Haram's organisational capabilities and otherwise contain the group. But this created the conditions for more grievances and motivated fence sitters to join the rural rebellion. While state security officials used code division multiple access (CDMA) and global open trunking architecture (GoTa) systems, the technologically savvy used platforms like Skype and WhatsApp to circumvent the GSM blackout. The conclusion is that Boko Haram altered their organisational communications from open and networked to closed and centralised.

Highlights:

❖ Provides an analysis of the evolution of Boko Haram's telecommunication tactics;

❖ Boko Haram's operational tactics like the destruction of mobile phone masts suggests they use other methods of communication and that blanket mobile shutdowns may have been counterproductive.

Kirwin, M. Ouedraogo, L. & Warner, J. (2022). "Fake News in the Sahel: "Afrancaux News," French Counterterrorism, and the Logics of User-Generated Media". *African Studies Review*, 1-28. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.63.

Useful studies of fake news prioritise historical and cultural specifics in the analysis, addressing how local codes and customs shape the schema of meaning making. In the Sahel, due to postcolonial reparatory justice-seeking master narratives, France is often placed at the centre of news with negative social developments linked and attributed to its colonial character. The key issue is not fake news *per se*; rather it is 'Afrancaux News', a mode of explication, attribution and articulation that uses widespread anti-French sentiment to make sense of the workings of the world.

Highlights:

❖ Master narratives condition the formulations of expression and the meanings they convey;

❖ Sahel populations are suspicious of France's military presence in the region, believing that counter-terror actions are France's ways of protecting neocolonial extractive activities;

❖ Comprehending the cultural logics of what is deemed fake news requires linking sentiments with the 'historical arc'.

5   Platforms mediating social formations

Kperogi, F. A. (2022). "Social Media and the Demotic Turn in Africa's Media Ecology". *History Compass*, 20(2). https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12711.

The rapid adoption of social media across Africa shows that it is not a 'blackhole of informational capitalism'. Its wide adoption by ordinary people explains much of why specific authoritarian-inclined governments wish to censor these services and are otherwise suspicious of funding online cultural production lest it bring attention to political affairs. Some African governments are wary that social media is making politics and everyday life less hierarchical and more participatory.

Highlights:

❖ Media culture is a site of contention between elites and non-elites in Africa;

❖ A participatory media culture is built upon the importation of relatively cheaper Chinese devices;

❖ Due to demographics shifts, this same media culture is youth orientated and connected to the rise of an aspirant African middle-class consumerism;

❖ The media culture is further characterised by improved transnational connections between African countries and diasporic communities in the Western world.

Mare, A. Mabweazara, H. M. & Moyo, D. (2019). ""Fake News" and Cyber-Propaganda in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recentering the Research Agenda". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1788295.

Conceptualisations of fake news are so thoroughly interwoven with the Western political experience that any attempt to universalise, project, and identify these dynamics in Africa as such would be a mistake. This is not to deny that specific African societies, especially those undergoing social change, feature a great deal of deception from entities like state broadcasters. Rather it is to suggest that this deception is better explained by a politics conditioned by the inheritance of colonial state-subject modes of communication, state dysfunction caused by austere neoliberalisation, resource starvation of key institutions tasked with oversight, and neocolonial extractivism. Put simply, the cultural logics of fake news must be situated within these local dynamics for explanation to have any credibility and coherence.

Highlights:

❖ Contexts of production, circulation, and consumption set the parameters for criteria for adjudicating truth claims;

❖ Legacy news media is culpable in exaggerating the effect of fake news, often for status, market distinction, sensationalism, and revenue protection;

❖ Eurocentrism offers little to the study of Africa media systems. Rather intellectual labour must foreground contextual variations.

Wasserman, H. (2020). "Fake News from Africa: Panics, Politics and Paradigm." *Journalism*, 21(1), 3-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917746861.

The spectrum of fake news has to be understood with respect to the particular context. Satirical news sites in Africa serve the purpose of connecting the non-elite and marginalised populations like those in the rural areas to mainstream news that is often associated with the elite. They convey the truths that mainstream media are limited to cover due to restrictive regulations and state influence especially for authoritative regimes.

Highlights:

❖ Different ages and political communities are likely to respond differently to fabricated information;

❖ Fake news satire needs to be read against the background of broader questions on the role and distance between the mainstream media and the socially and economically marginalised;

❖ The definition of fake news has been politicised to deter the influence of satirical journalism;

❖ Although the aim of satirical news sites is to poke fun at current events reported on in mainstream media, they can be read in a way that has implications for politics and society.

Bosch, T. E. Admire, M. & Ncube, M. (2020). "Facebook and Politics in Africa: Zimbabwe and Kenya". *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3), 349–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719895194.

In conditions where the commercial press is 'significantly restricted', relatively high Internet penetration rates and local telecommunication companies offering social media bundles helped Kenyans and Zimbabweans actively create a digital culture. Due to demographics, this digital culture skews towards youth concerns, a population typically excluded from formal political decision making due to rigid hierarchies organised by age. Both counties have experienced partial or full Internet shutdowns to try mute free expression and coordinated assembly.

Highlights:

❖ In 2020, Kenya and Zimbabwe were at the forefront of using platforms for activism and campaigning;

❖ There is a relationship between digital culture and the political economy of connectivity;

❖ Corrupt political systems encourage citizens to withdraw from formal politics and instead conduct politics online;

- ❖ The web pages of political parties are unresponsive to public engagement, underscoring the trope that politicians do not listen.

Nothias, T. (2020). "Access Granted: Facebook's Free Basics in Africa". *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3), 329–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719890530.

Against the broader trends of industrial policy and investment into network infrastructure by Big Tech corporations, this analysis examines the impact of Facebook's (now Meta's) Free Basics project as it relates to the reproduction of digital civil society in Africa, as well as how these dynamics shape the tactics, modes of engagements, and topics of public concern.

Highlights:

- ❖ As of July 2019, Free Basics was available in 30 African countries;

- ❖ Rights focused digital civil society organisations have critiqued the Free Basics programme on the issue of data privacy, while also using Free Basics as an advocacy channel because that is where users and audiences are;

- ❖ Facebook is seeking to shape the agenda of civil society organisations through cutouts like the Praekelt Foundation.

Ngange, K. L. & Mokondo M. S. (2019). "Understanding Social Media's Role in Propagating Falsehood in Conflict Situations: Case of the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis". *Studies in Media and Communication*, 7(2), 55–67. https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v7i2.4525.

During a period of domestic crisis in 2017, the Cameroon government blamed social media for manufacturing tensions and the appearance of oppression of a minority population. This study finds that social media during the period was 'awash' with falsehoods, although no figures or evidence of this are presented. The authors stop short of looking at the underlying sociological conditions or political purpose the misinformation served. They support existing legislation where the state has the authority to impose 'heavy jail sentences and fines' for the production, circulation and consumption of misinformation.

Highlights:

- ❖ Claims that 'fake news producers' live in the diaspora, and that local consumers are 'in ignorance and acceptance of the content';

- ❖ Provides a discussion of why 'The Minister [of Communication] had become an epitome of government propaganda'.

Nounkeu, C. T. (2020). "Facebook and Fake News in the "Anglophone Crisis' in Cameroon". *African Journalism Studies*, 41(3), 20-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1812102.

A discussion of how fake news is employed to advance a separatist cause that features the military deployed against citizens. This content is often distributed by small groups or entrepreneurs who 'sell' sensationalist news online to a Cameroonian audience. Social media allows 'peripheral actors' to pose as journalists and distribute information without adherence to professional ethics, such as transparency with respect to sourced information. Where sources are identified, information is ambiguous and unclear, like whether the person was a witness or was briefed on the events in the news story.

Highlights:

❖ Under pressure newsrooms turn to social media and mill it for content, but being under-resourced they often do not verify this content;

❖ In the sample, fake news stories tended not to provide information about where and when events occurred.

Fombad, C. M. (2022). "Democracy and Fake News in Africa". *Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 9(1). https://www.jicl.org.uk/storage/journals/July2022/yh6wUa3o6YbfRkj6frWY.pdf.

Fake news has found fertile grounds in Africa, where a dangerous information gap has been allowed to develop in many countries because governments still monopolise the state media and control the information it disseminates. The credibility and integrity of elections in Africa is undermined through fake news as uninformed voters become misinformed voters.

Highlights:

❖ The manipulation of social media through fake news has reinforced authoritarianism in African countries;

❖ Paying social media influencers is seen as an equivalent to paying people to attend political rallies.

Diepeveen, S. (2019). "The Limits of Publicity: Facebook and Transformations of a Public Realm in Mombasa, Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 157–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547251.

Focusing on how platforms – specifically Facebook – reconfigure notions of publicity when mediating political discussion, this article examines the ramifications for shared imaginaries, oftentimes disrupting established categories involving belonging, membership, obligation, and affiliation. The

new publics have benefits, but are also a source of mistrust because they are seen as excessively selective through curation, and hence said to divert attention away from common causes.

Highlights:

❖ Cellular devices, digital networks, and Internet access altered who could and did produce public information, in turn altering the participants in debates about citizen-state relations;

❖ The value of publics comes from the potential ability to reconfigure shared social imaginaries.

Wahutu, j. S. (2019). "Fake News and Journalistic "Rules of the Game"". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 13-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1628794.

The rapid development of African digital spaces has included racist alarm that fake news will run rampant because African publics are not sufficiently familiar with the Internet to be discerning consumers of online content. The author argues that there is little empirical evidence that fake news is a menace on the continent, and that much of the global politics of fake news and its moral panic is a projection by US and EU states of their own internal sociological dynamics and limitations of self-understanding in those societies.

Highlights:

❖ As the continent is 'subordinate in the global media economy', Africans' self-appraisal of their concerns are displaced in favour of transplanted explanatory frameworks;

❖ Some state authorities have deemed fake news a encroaching threat, and so have passed pre-emptive 'cybersecurity laws', laws which are used to stifle legitimate dissent and human rights;

❖ In some counties, state actions against fake news erode hard-won media freedoms.

Chenzi, V. (2021). "Fake News, Social Media and Xenophobia in South Africa". *African Identities*, 19(4), 502-521. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1804321.

As platforms supersede broadcast and print news as a source of public information in South Africa, so there are cases of coordinated harm and stochastic terror against migrants. While there are other historical material factors that explain why people are primed to do harm, the final cause of xenophobic violence is false information designed to be inflammatory and affectively charged.

Highlights:

❖ Despite xenophobic violence being contrary to the rights in the South African Constitution, regulators seem to be continually flat-footed on the issue.

Garbe, L. Selvik, L., and Lemaire, P. (2021). "How African Countries Respond to Fake News and Hate Speech". *Information, Communication & Society.* https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1994623.

This article examines how fake news and hate speech is regulated in African countries through looking at news coverage of regulatory strategies. The article covers 47 African countries and concludes that the state is the main driver shaping content on the African continent. Furthermore, the type of polity greatly influences how questions and debates about content moderation are resolved, and whose interests these decisions prioritise. For example, media repression like blocking or censoring is often a tactic used by states without strong legislative constraint; whereas legal approaches are adopted by states that have a track record of respecting freedom of the press.

Highlights:

❖ Governance of information flows is polity specific.

Cunliffe-Jones, P. (2020). "From Church and Mosque to WhatsApp—Africa Check's Holistic Approach to Countering 'Fake News'". *The Political Quarterly*, 91(3), 596-599. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12899.

Most debates about misinformation neglect how offline spaces feed misinformation into – and bring misinformation from – online spaces. Researchers have an incomplete understanding of information disorders if they neglect community dynamics. While social media receives considerable blame for misinformation, in Nigeria, for example, public transit is a key site where misinformation is circulated. This article provides a self-reported case study of strategies used by Africa Check, one of the leading African fact-checking organisations, to work at the community level to address the spread of malicious fake news.

Highlights:

❖ In trying 'reduce the supply at source' and systemic impact of fake news, Africa Check has four goals. These are to identify and reduce the circulation of malicious misinformation; amplify accurate information; provide context for accurate information; and improve digital news and media literacy in the wider public.

Ahinkorah, B. O. Ameyaw, E. K. Hagan, J. E. Seidu, A.-A. & Schack, T. (2020). "Rising Above Misinformation or Fake News in Africa: Another Strategy to Control COVID-19 Spread". *Frontiers in Communication*, 5. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00045.

The fear, worry and anxiety around Covid-19 made the danger of everyday medical misconceptions more acute, and created conditions where the public sought out information, some of which was provided by opinion leaders who spread unsubstantiated information about causes, prevention and

treatment. A portion of this misinformation justified stigma, xenophobia and conspiratorial claims about the deployment of biological weapons of mass destruction. The authors make the proposal that government regulations allowing for content moderation actions such as the demonetisation of commercial channels on platforms could curtail the visibility and spread of misinformation.

Highlights:

❖ Providing accurate information early and in a timely manner provides an initial frame from which misinformation is encountered;

❖ Addressing misinformation strategies works well when face-to-face encounters with neutral frontline technicians are paired with fact-checking services.

Timcke, S. (2022). "WhatsApp in African Trade Networks: Professional Practice and Obtaining Attention in AfCFTA Policy Formation". *First Monday*, 27(10). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i10.11610.

WhatsApp is a key platform for African policy makers to build, consolidate, cultivate and reproduce their influence. Within exclusive invite-only groups, these elites form transnational connections to try to advance common goals around the deployment of science, technology and innovation for developmental objectives.

Highlights:

❖ These groups have members with advanced academic qualifications from around the world and from different disciplines. In combination with civility and respectable inter-personal conduct, these conditions help thwart the circulation of misinformation within the WhatsApp groups.

Oginni, S. O. & Moitui, J. N. (2015). "Social Media and Public Policy Process in Africa: Enhanced Policy Process in Digital Age". *Consilience*, 14, 158-172. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26188747.

Focusing on the formation and feedback processes for effective public policy-making the authors argue that 'conventional instruments of public policy' are ill-suited to the digital era and that this deficiency could be partly addressed through harnessing the civic engagement that digital platforms provide. That said, they argue that policy makers view these affordances with suspicion, in part because they surface and reinvigorate social struggles.

Highlights:

❖ A discussion of how the public policy-formation process tends to be conservative in African countries;

- ❖ Encourages governments to take to social media and use these as communication channels for government messages;

- ❖ The analysis found that social media use for civic engagement in the policy process in African countries was below the global average.

Gore, C. D. (2022). "The Politics of the Internet and Social Media in Africa: Three Bases of Knowledge for Advancing Research". *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2022.2058038.

While fake news, Internet and social media shutdowns, and violence against activists posting critical content online are important topics, these need to be appraised against more fundamental issues like how digital media forms are re-shaping influence. The article examines the evolution of research on the politics of Internet and social media in Africa and argues that three bases of knowledge must be prioritised. These are the physical character of the Internet networks, the meaning of Internet and social media access, and the characteristics of users and their engagement or disengagement.

Highlights

- ❖ While there are efforts to make the Internet accessible via satellite tech in Africa, the Internet remains largely dependent on physical infrastructure; the politics of the Internet is therefore connected to the geography of users;

- ❖ Low Internet penetration levels, and low access or use of social media for political purposes does not mean the Internet is without impact. As recent research in Sierra Leone and the Gambia reveals that even those not using social media gain access to the stories circulated on social media by word-of-mouth or through SMS;

- ❖ The relationship between mobile phone and Internet usage and political attitudes or political engagement remains uncertain;

- ❖ Large, multi-country surveys of African citizens are inconclusive about whether citizens who are more engaged in politics use their cellphones more frequently, or whether cellphone usage increases engagement.

6 Bibliography

Abraha, H. H. (2017). "Examining Approaches to Internet Regulation in Ethiopia". *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 26(3), 293–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2017.1374057.

Ahinkorah, B. O. Ameyaw, E. K. Hagan, J. E. Seidu, A.-A. & Schack, T. (2020). "Rising Above Misinformation or Fake News in Africa: Another Strategy to Control COVID-19 Spread". *Frontiers in Communication*, 5. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00045.

Alzouma, G. (2005). "Myths of Digital Technology in Africa: Leapfrogging Development?". *Global Media and Communication*, 1(3), 339–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766505058128.

Archambault, J. S. (2013). "Cruising through Uncertainty: Cell Phones and the Politics of Display and Disguise in Inhambane, Mozambique". *American Ethnologist*, 40(1), 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12007.

Atton, C. & Mabweazara, H. (2011). "New Media and Journalism Practice in Africa: An Agenda for Research". *Journalism*, 12(6), 667–673. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405467.

Bontcheva, K. & Posetti, J. (2020). "Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation While Respecting Freedom of Expression". International Telecommunication Union. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/1_introduction_17_35_balancing_act_disinfo.pdf.

Bosch, T. E. Admire, M. & Ncube, M. (2020). "Facebook and Politics in Africa: Zimbabwe and Kenya". *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3), 349–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719895194.

Brinkman, I. (2019). "Social Diary and News Production: Authorship and Readership in Social Media during Kenya's 2007 Elections". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547262.

Chenzi, V. (2021). "Fake News, Social Media and Xenophobia in South Africa". *African Identities*, 19(4), 502-521. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1804321.

Chonka, P. (2019). "News Media and Political Contestation in the Somali Territories: Defining the Parameters of a Transnational Digital Public". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 139–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1548210.

Cunliffe-Jones, P. (2020). "From Church and Mosque to WhatsApp—Africa Check's Holistic Approach to Countering 'Fake News'". *The Political Quarterly*, 91(3), 596-599. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12899.

Diepeveen, S. (2019). "The Limits of Publicity: Facebook and Transformations of a Public Realm in Mombasa, Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 157–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547251.

Ekdale, B. & Tully, M. (2019). "African Elections as a Testing Ground: Comparing Coverage of Cambridge Analytica in Nigerian and Kenyan Newspapers". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 27-43. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1679208.

Eltantawy, N. & Wiest, J. B. (2011) "Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory". *International Journal of Communication*, 5(2011), 1207–1224. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1242

Etzo, S. & Collender, G. (2010). "The Mobile Phone 'Revolution' in Africa: Rhetoric or Reality?". *African Affairs*, 109(437), 659–668. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adq045.

Fombad, C. M. (2022). "Democracy and Fake News in Africa". *Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 9(1). https://www.jicl.org.uk/storage/journals/July2022/yh6wUa3o6YbfRkj6frWY.pdf.

Freyburg, T. Garbe, L. (2018). "Blocking the Bottleneck: Internet Shutdowns and Ownership at Election Times in Sub-Saharan Africa". *International Journal of Communication*, 12(2018), 3896–3916. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/8546.

Gagliardone, I. (2014). "New Media and the Developmental State in Ethiopia". *African Affairs*, 113(451), 279–299. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu017.

Gagliardone, I. Stremlau, N. & Aynekulu, G. (2019). "A Tale of Two Publics? Online Politics in Ethiopia's Elections". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 191–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1548208.

Garbe, L. Selvik, L., and Lemaire, P. (2021). "How African Countries Respond to Fake News and Hate Speech". *Information, Communication & Society.* https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1994623.

Gore, C. D. (2022). "The Politics of the Internet and Social Media in Africa: Three Bases of Knowledge for Advancing Research". *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2022.2058038.

Jacob, J. U. U. & Akpan, I. (2015). "Silencing Boko Haram: Mobile Phone Blackout and Counterinsurgency in Nigeria's Northeast Region". *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1). http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.ey.

Kirwin, M. Ouedraogo, L. & Warner, J. (2022). "Fake News in the Sahel: "Afrancaux News," French Counterterrorism, and the Logics of User-Generated Media". *African Studies Review*, 1-28. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.63.

Kperogi, F. A. (2022). "Social Media and the Demotic Turn in Africa's Media Ecology". *History Compass*, 20(2). https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12711.

Lamoureaux, S. & Sureau, T. (2019). "Knowledge and Legitimacy: The Fragility of Digital Mobilization in Sudan". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 34–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547249.

Loudon, M. (2010) "ICTs as an Opportunity Structure in Southern Social Movements". *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(8), 1069-1098. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180903468947.

Mabweazara, H. M. (2011). "Between the Newsroom and the Pub: The Mobile Phone in the Dynamics of Everyday Mainstream Journalism Practice in Zimbabwe". *Journalism*, 12(6), 692–707. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405468.

Manganga, K. (2012). "The Internet as Public Sphere: A Zimbabwean Case Study (1999–2008)". *Africa Development*, 37(1), 103–118. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ad/article/view/87543.

Mare, A. (2013). "A Complicated but Symbiotic Affair: The Relationship Between Mainstream Media and Social Media in the Coverage of Social Protests in Southern Africa". *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 34(1), 83–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2013.767426.

Mare, A. Mabweazara, H. M. & Moyo, D. (2019). ""Fake News" and Cyber-Propaganda in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recentering the Research Agenda". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1788295.

Maweu, J. M. (2019). ""Fake Elections"? Cyber Propaganda, Disinformation and the 2017 General Elections in Kenya". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 62-76. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1719858.

Moyo, D. (2009). "Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election". *Journalism Studies*, 10(4), 551–567. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700902797291.

Moyo, L. (2011). "Human Rights, Citizen Journalism and the Right to Communicate in Zimbabwe". *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 12(6), 745–760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405469.

Moyo, L. (2015). "Digital Age as Ethical Maze: Citizen Journalism Ethics during crises in Zimbabwe and South Africa". *African Journalism Studies*, 36(4), 125-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1119494.

Mudhai, O. F. (2011). "Immediacy and Openness in a Digital Africa: Networked-Convergent Journalism in Kenya". *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 12(6), 674-691. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405470.

Mutahi, P. (2020). "Fake News and the 2017 Kenyan Elections". *Communication: South African Journal of Communication Theory and Research*, 46(4), 31–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2020.1723662.

Mutsvairo, B. & Bebawi, S. (2019). "Journalism Educators, Regulatory Realities, and Pedagogical Predicaments of the "Fake News" Era: A Comparative Perspective on the Middle East and Africa". *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 74(2), 143–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695819833552.

Ncube, L. (2019). "Digital Media, Fake News and Pro-Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance Cyber-Propaganda during the 2018 Zimbabwe Election". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 44-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1670225.

Ngange, K. L. & Mokondo M. S. (2019). "Understanding Social Media's Role in Propagating Falsehood in Conflict Situations: Case of the Cameroon Anglophone crisis". *Studies in Media and Communication*, 7(2), 55–67. https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v7i2.4525.

Nothias, T. (2020). "Access Granted: Facebook's Free Basics in Africa". *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3), 329–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719890530.

Nounkeu, C. T. (2020). "Facebook and Fake News in the "Anglophone Crisis' in Cameroon". *African Journalism Studies*, 41(3), 20-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1812102.

Oginni, S. O. & Moitui, J. N. (2015). "Social Media and Public Policy Process in Africa: Enhanced Policy Process in Digital Age". *Consilience*, 14, 158-172. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26188747.

Omanga, D. (2019). "WhatsApp as 'Digital Publics': The Nakuru Analysts and the Evolution of Participation in County Governance in Kenya". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 174–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1548211.

Paterson, C. (2013). "Journalism and Social Media in the African Context". *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 34(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2013.767418.

Rydzak, J. Karanja, M. & Opiyo, N. (2020). "Dissent does Not Die in Darkness: Network Shutdowns and Collective Action in African Countries". *International Journal of Communication*, 14(2020), 24. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12770.

Salgado, S. (2012). "The Web in African Countries". *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(9), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.647044.

Shepherd, M. & Shanade, B. B. (2016). "Citizen Journalism and Moral Panics: A Consideration of Ethics in the 2015 South African Xenophobic Attacks". *African Journalism Studies*, 37(4), 115–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2016.1256053.

Simiyu, M. A. (2022). "Freedom of expression and African elections: Mitigating the Insidious Effect of Emerging Approaches to Addressing the False News Threat". *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 76-107. https://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/simiyu-ma.

Skjerdal, T. S. (2011). "Journalists or Activists? Self-identity in the Ethiopian diaspora online community". *Journalism*, 12(6), 727–744. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405471.

Srinivasan, S. Diepeveen, S. & Karekwaivanane, G. (2019). "Rethinking Publics in Africa in a Digital Age". *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(1), 2-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1547259.

Timcke, S. (2022). "WhatsApp in African Trade Networks: Professional Practice and Obtaining Attention in AfCFTA Policy Formation". *First Monday*, 27(10). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i10.11610.

Wahutu, j. S. (2019). "Fake News and Journalistic "Rules of the Game"". *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 13-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1628794.

Wahutu, j. S. (2019). "Prophets Without Honor: Peripheral Actors in Kenyan Journalism". *Media and Communication*, 7(4), 127–132. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2552.

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making." Council of Europe Report DGI(2017)09, September 27, 2017. https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-towardan-interdisciplinary-framework-forresearc/168076277c.

Wasserman, H. (2020). "Fake News from Africa: Panics, Politics and Paradigm." *Journalism*, 21(1), 3-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917746861.

Wasserman, H. (2022). "Introduction" in Wasserman. H. (Ed.) Meeting the Challenges of Information Disorder in the Global South, IDRC, https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/60954/IDL-60954.pdf.

7   About the authors

Scott Timcke (PhD, Simon Fraser) is a political economist whose primary area of expertise is in democratic development policy, industrialisation, and the role of the state in promoting egalitarian social and economic development. He leads the Information Disorders and AI Risk and Cybersecurity projects at RIA.

Elizabeth Orembo works at the intersection of technology and public policy. She is currently working as a Research Fellow at RIA. Her previous work includes: Internet accessibility, gender inclusion and national cybersecurity capacity.

Hanani Hlomani (LLM, Cape Town) is a legal researcher and consultant at RIA. His key intellectual interests include innovation, tech regulation, digital equality, data regulation and financial technology. He has also worked on the IDRC-funded report on meeting the challenges of the information disorder in the Global South.