

FOREWORD

Why Africans Must Come Together against Fake News and Hate Speech

Fake News and Hate Speech: Narratives of Political Instability is a timely book given the rapid rise of fraudulent news across Africa. Fake news with local and global dimensions is everywhere. Africans are targeted by blatant lies, hoaxes, conspiracies and misinformation being peddled as news on legitimate sites. It can be mixed with truth to create controversy which in the digital era can be spread wide with immeasurable consequences. Even the top regional body has not been spared. The African Union was forced to issue a permanent notice on its website against what it describes as “Scams implying or claiming association with the African Union or any of its organs” in the “forms of email, text messages, websites, on social media other digital platforms, text messages and / or facsimile, falsely stating that they are issued by, or in association with the AU and/or its officials.”

Fake news or misinformation is a problem in every African country, especially at election time. There is increased concern about the scope and impact of such fake news stories, particularly how it affects institutional processes and electoral outcomes. In 2019 Nigerians were shocked by fake news spread by Twitter and newspapers purporting that Atiku Abubakar, a 2019 Nigerian candidate, had been endorsed by gay rights groups. This was sensational news in the context of the country's strict laws against same-sex relations. The stories had originated from a fake Twitter account purportedly owned by Abubakar. How many Nigerians were able to discover that it was a fake news story? How did it influence the results of the vote? What impact does the sowing of confusion cause among voters? Added to this are a multitude of fake news stories, reporting the illness or alleged deaths of political leaders. Texts and visuals that have been used to instigate violence. Fake stories and hate speech has caused political, social, economic mayhem in Africa, with loss of investment and share value. Clearly fake news stories impact upon the economic, political and social fabric of societies. These are good reasons to tackle this menace.

What is significant, new and different about *Fake News and Hate Speech: Narratives of Political Instability* is how it focuses our attention on the Nigerian context, providing in-depth analyses of specific cases and linking the issue of fake news to privacy, hate speech and freedom of expression. The book also reminds us that it is not just text but also digitally manipulated images that sow confusion among Nigerian audiences. Some chapters engage with how Nigerian audiences cope with fake news. The book includes media education and literacy as ways of countering the influence of fake news in Africa's most populous country. Altogether, the book offers fresh and nuanced dimensions of the challenge of fake news and hate speech in the Nigerian context.

What can Africa do about fake news and hate speech? Laws and regulations are clearly not keeping up. Digital and global factors make the problem more widespread and more difficult to tackle. The challenge of fake news in Nigeria points to the need for a coordinated response by governments and other stakeholders. Media education and digital literacy is urgently needed. The private and third sectors will need to invest in initiatives to tackle the problem to promote accuracy in media in Africa. The book informs required debates about fake news and hate

speech using solid evidence. It shows why Africans must come together against fake news and hate speech. It is ultimately a clarion call for action to safeguard the quality of news in Africa.

Dr Winston Mano
Reader and Director,
Africa Media Centre,
University of Westminster,
London, UK
August 2019