

HANDBOOK
#PeriodismoÁfrica

Verification and New Narratives on Fact-Checking for African Journalists

A guide based
on the content of the
III African-Spanish
Journalists Meeting,
held in Nairobi,
December 1st and 2nd,
2021

Organized by Casa Africa, Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation
and the Media Council of Kenya



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Consortio Casa África, April 2022

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#PeriodismoÁfrica is a Casa África initiative, supported by Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation that aims to facilitate in African countries advanced formation to journalist on the issues of disinformation and fact-checking, with the collaboration of Spanish media specialized on digital verification.

#PeriodismoÁfrica and III Africa-Spain Journalist Meeting

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Youtube playlist with interviews to teachers and participants on the Advanced course held in Nairobi, december 1st and 2nd, 2021.
[III Encuentro de Periodistas África-España - YouTube](#)



III AFRICA SPAIN JOURNALIST MEETING - PRESENTATIONS
OneDrive link to the Power Point presentations of the Advanced course



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José Segura Clavell

Director General de Casa África

Casa Africa is a Spanish Public Diplomacy Institution, a tool of Spain's Foreign Policy directed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation that yearly organizes more than 600 activities in order to make Africa and Spain ever closer.

Since its creation in 2006, Casa Africa has worked with Spanish and African journalists, with a clear double vision: to create networks between Spanish and Africa journalists and to foster a more balanced, unstereotyped image of Africa in Spain.

This handbook you are now reading is the result of three amazing days of collaboration between Spanish and African journalists in what we called the III Africa-Spain Journalist Meeting, held on December 1st and 2nd, 2021 in Nairobi (Kenya), organized with the support of Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the partnership and collaboration of the Media Council of Kenya.

This meeting, conceived as an Advanced course on verification and new narratives on fact-checking for Kenyan journalists, was an amazing experience. Spanish fact-checking media are awarded and recognized worldwide for its innovation and knowledge on fighting misinformation, probably one of the most important challenges that democracies face in our days.

It was, without a doubt, an intense and beautiful experience for Spanish fact-checkers: they came back to Spain with the sense that the exchange with Kenyan journalists had provided much more learning than the one they taught on the different aspects of fact-checking you can now see in this Handbook and that we hope can be useful for all Kenyan journalists.



David Omwoyo Omwoyo

CEO Media Council of Kenya

Media Council of Kenya appreciates the partnership with Casa África on building capacity for journalists on Fact Checking. The advanced course was timely in equipping journalists with necessary skills on fact-checking to navigate the ever-changing terrain of disinformation. We, as the Council, are committed to ensure that accurate and verifiable information is disseminated to the public.

The media has been the most affected by 'Fake News' which raises credibility and trust issues. With the proliferation of propaganda in politics, the only solution is factual reporting. Legacy media must provide high-quality journalism to build public trust and correct false content and disinformation without legitimizing them. Good journalism is expensive. Yet only professional journalism will ensure the possibility of a good society, an accountable democracy, and a transparent government. To combat misinformation, stakeholder partnership is needed.

With the understanding that fake news is sophisticated and problematic in democratic systems, the handbook will provide journalists with practical ways in fighting misinformation and disinformation. We call on journalists to be Fact ambassadors by embracing journalistic attributes of verification and accuracy.



Cristina Díaz Fernández-Gil

Ambassador of Spain to Kenya

In December 2021, the Embassy of Spain in Kenya had the privilege to contribute to the organization of the advanced course on disinformation and new narratives on fact checking for African Journalists, which took place in Nairobi, with the collaboration of Casa África and the Media Council of Kenya. This high-level course, which I can fairly describe as a resounding success, is at the origin of the Handbook that I have the honor to preface, and, I trust, showed the way for a reinforced collaboration in this field between our two countries, both institutionally and in the field of civil societies.

This course also showed that the issue of disinformation and fake news is a global one, from which no society is fully protected, and with extremely complex and changing features. Furthermore, it allowed for an open exchange of experiences which was mutually enriching and provided to all the participants, teachers and students, Spanish and Kenyan, with new instruments and insights in order to fight one of the great scourges of our times.

I must also mention, with great pride, that Spanish media have pioneered the development of instruments and techniques to counter disinformation and fake news: I am referring to leading companies such as Efeverifica, Newtral or maldita.es, which, among others, honored us with their presence in Nairobi in the advanced course and enjoy remarkable international prestige, including several high-profile awards in this field.

This year 2022, the elections that will take place in Kenya on August 9th can be highlighted as one of the main challenges among many others. I am convinced of the great utility of this handbook for all those interested in helping good journalism prevail, and through it and ultimately to a solid democracy.

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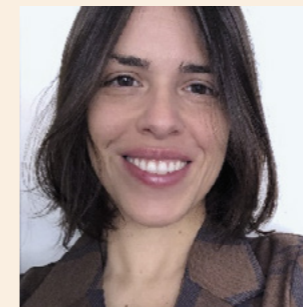
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01.

Fact-checking as a citizen service

By Desirée García,
Head of EFE Verifica



DESIRÉE GARCÍA is the head of EFE Verifica. She previously worked as a correspondent for sub-Saharan Africa, based in Nairobi, and specialises in international news. She has received grants to report on conflict and development and has produced the documentary "Owino", which has won awards at international festivals. She holds a BA in Journalism and a Masters in Politics and Democracy.

AGENCIA EFE

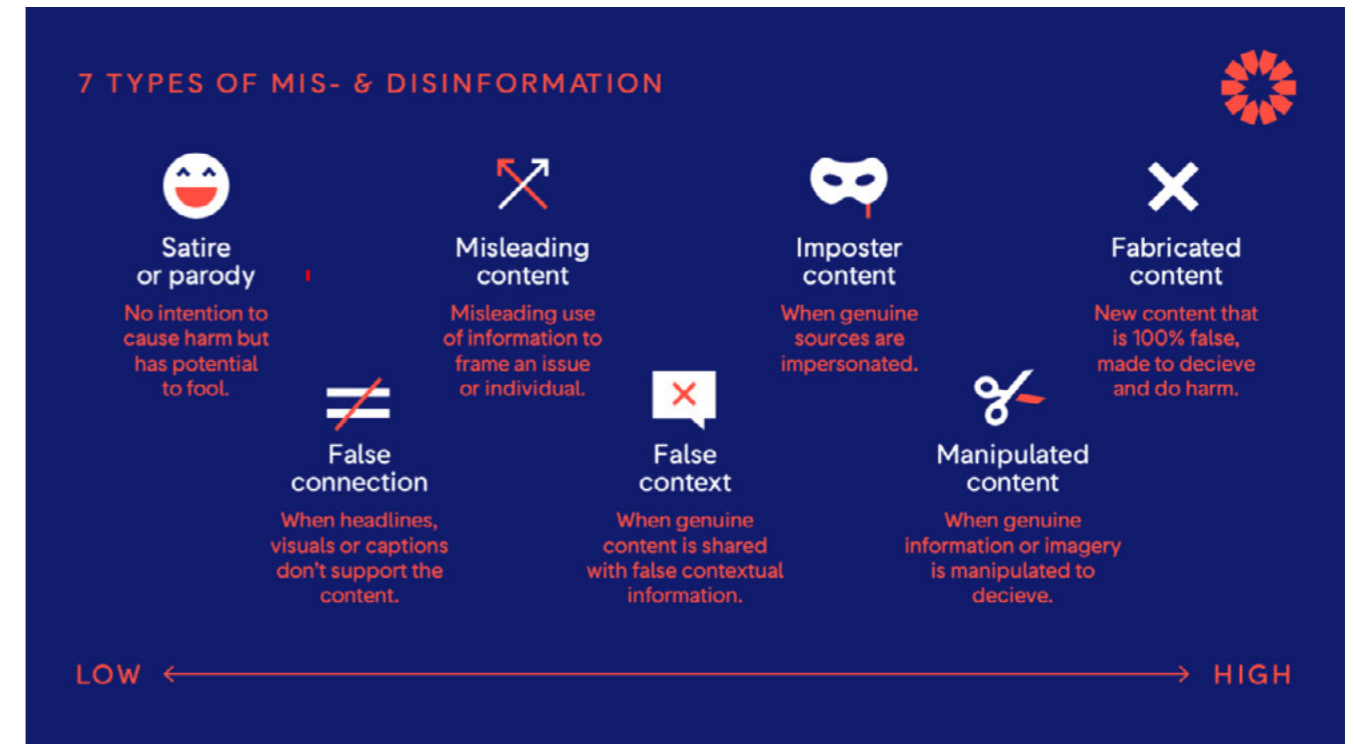
EFE is the **first news agency in the Spanish language** and its main mission is to offer the Latin vision of the world. EFE has over 1,100 journalists working in 120 countries and produces 2.5 million news per year.

Its main values are scope, trust and immediacy, and those are reflected into EFE's journalists day-to-day work. A news agency reporter is always at the origin of news, trying to be at the place where things happen because a news agency is a primary provider of news for the rest of the media, whether in the country or abroad. Then, EFE's journalists write their stories telling the facts and data, never including opinions or subjective words. That's the basis for credibility.

Disinformation: is it really something new?

Fact-checking is used here as a way of contrasting the facts by consulting sources. If a story is false, journalists don't report on it. However, this has proven not to be enough after the advent of disinformation in the last years. Although lies were always used by political, economic and all kinds of power to shape public opinion through the media, with the upsurge of social media networks almost everyone is able to do the same.

So a **new kind of fact-checking is needed**, one that proves wrong stories that become viral even when they are false. If many people are talking about these false claims, then we must report on them and fact-check the available data to show that they are false.



OLD AND NEW FACT-CHECKING



Traditional fact-checking: before publishing, internal procedure, it helps to discard information.



New fact-checking: after publishing, external, helps unmask misinformation.

What's disinformation about?

The so-called **information disorder** consists of the spread and circulation of three types of harmful and/or false information:

- **Disinformation** is content that is intentionally false and designed to cause harm.
- **Misinformation** is content that is shared without realizing that it is false or misleading.
- **Malinformation** is genuine information that is shared with an intent to cause harm.

Disinformation has an impact.

In the 90's, an article published in the Rolling Stone magazine, claimed that HIV had originated from the polio vaccine. The hypothesis established that these polio vaccines were prepared in chimpanzee tissue cultures, accidentally contaminated with the AIDS virus. And then they would be administered to up to

one million Africans between 1957 and 1960 in experimental mass vaccination campaigns. Later studies rejected this hypothesis. But this is how the story of one of the great hoaxes in history begins, the consequences of which continue to this day.

Fact-checks from AfricaCheck (left) and from the #CoronaVirusFacts database (right).



health • hiv/aids • hoax
African researchers dismiss claim that Gallo 'invented HIV' to 'wipe out African race'

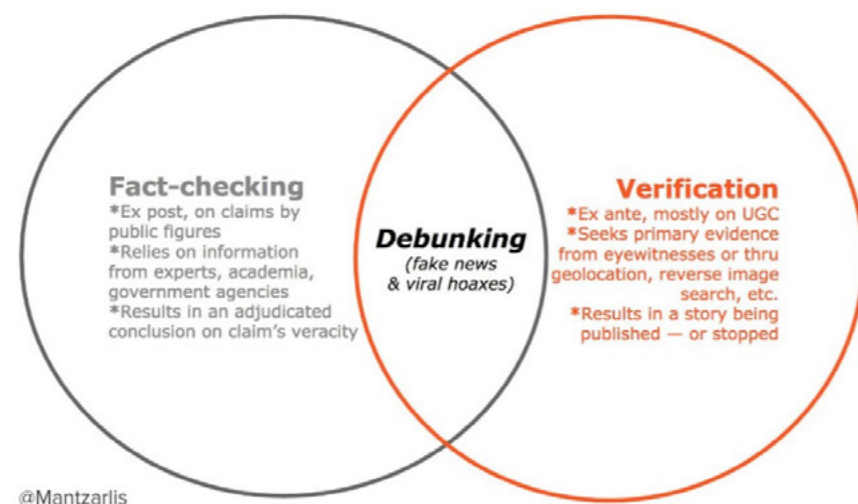
FALSE: Australian vaccine against COVID-19 infects people with HIV

FALSE: SARS-CoV-2 has insertions of HIV which means the virus was fabricated in a laboratory, according to Luc Montagnier.

False: A video claims that there is a connection between the HIV virus, that causes AIDS, and the COVID-19

Fact-checking: the best tool against disinformation so far

There are different ways to check truth and reality.



What do we do at EFE Verifica?:

- EFE Verifica was established in 2019 with a focus on debunking and fact-checking.
- We also publish explanations on which we expose all information available about a controversial or confusing topic. This is also information that citizens can make a good use of by learning, for example, what are the most dangerous covid variants, what are the chances of getting covid on an airplane or what is a deepfake.
- EFE Verifica is a signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) Code of Principles and has joined the main international verification initiatives, such as the #CoronaVirusAlliance or #LatamChequea.
- We work with social platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to surface verified information and provide data. We have a WhatsApp chatbot where we get queries and claims to verify: + 34 648 434 618.

Fact-checking at an international news agency.

Fact-checking at an international news agency has advantages:

- Deeply-seated fact-checking practices.
- High specialization. Our journalists cover all areas of information.
- International network with journalists in 120 countries.
- First agency in the Spanish-speaking world. We have a privileged vision of disinfo spreading in Spanish.

Why is it fact-checking a citizen service?

We don't just fact-check:

- We help Internet users to find verified information easily.
- We identify false or misleading content on social media.
- We detect disinformation campaigns.
- We contribute to public policies against disinformation.

- We teach how to verify.
- We raise awareness of the importance of doing it (among journalists, institutions and the general population).

Fact-checking has a big impact on public opinion and public policies, sometimes getting to the point of fostering the confidence on vaccines or changes on political speech and decisions.



Useful links



"Understanding information disorder", First Draft



The CoronaVirusFacts/DatosCoronaVirus Alliance Database



Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training. Module 5: Fact-checking



02.

Verification, social networks and new narratives in FACT-CHECKING

By Irene Larraz,
Newtral.es



IRENE LARRAZ (Newtral). Journalist with 11 years of experience in media. Graduated in Journalism at the University of Navarra in 2010 and Master in Political Science at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 2016. She has spent 10 years working in media in Latin America and the United States, such as El Tiempo in Colombia, La Estrella de Panamá, Voice of America as correspondent from Argentina for the United States or Grupo Expansión in Mexico. In these media, she has covered various areas, combining reporting with editing and the production of in-depth reports, such as a profile for which she won the national Forum of Journalists Award in Panama in 2013, or the participation in an investigation for which she received a mention in the same competition, and an infographic for which she won the IAPA Award in 2016. Since 2016, she has worked in the area of fact-checking in media such as Ecuador Chequea (Ecuador), Verificado, a project in alliance with Animal Político, AJ+ and PopUpNewsroom (Mexico) and now, since January 2020, in Newtral as coordinator of the area of fact-checking and data. She is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Navarra to research how artificial intelligence can contribute to verification.

Disinformation is not new, what is new is its capability of getting viral and, with this, being potentially harmful. That is one of the reasons why verification platforms had a huge growth in the last few years.

When FactCheck.org started, in 2003, Brooks Jackson published an article explaining that it was something that *somebody had to do*, a duty. He finished by saying that the mission can't be to find the truth, but to hold politicians accountable for getting the facts right. "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion but not their own facts," he said.

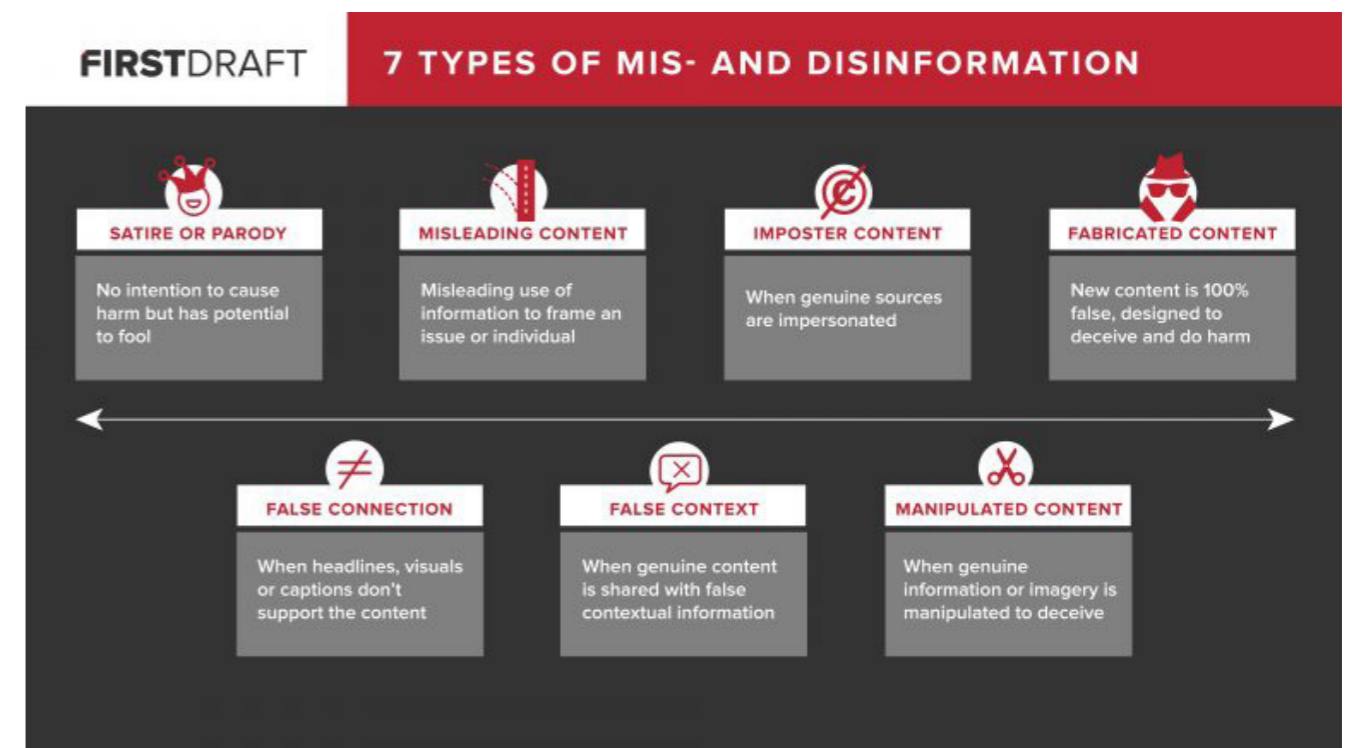
The number of platforms escalated from 44 in 2014 to 300 in 2020 operating in 84 countries (Duke University Reporters' Lab). This growth of fact-checking was also followed by the adoption of a methodology, which is shared by many verification platforms.

The verification process

At Newtral we divide our job in two different parts from the verification work.

First, we focus on the **debunking of disinformation**. In this part, we analyze the information that circulates on social media and we deal with it trying to dismantle it, when it is the case, or explain it if it's a problem of interpretation or lack of context.

We call it disinformation, but it has many different faces. Claire Wardle, editor at First Draft News, identified seven types of misinformation such as misleading content, false context, fabricated content or manipulated content.

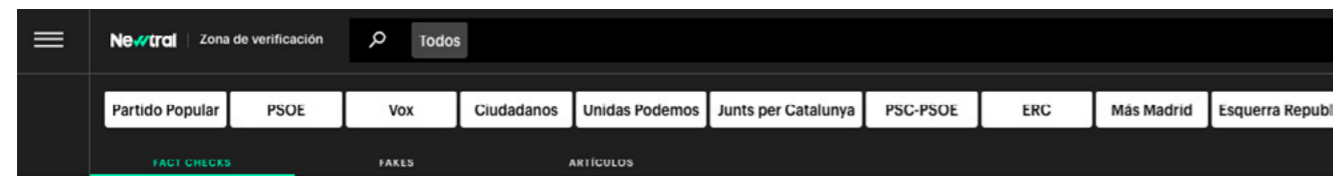


On the other hand, we have the **fact-checking of the political debate**. We monitor the statements of politicians to detect when they say something that could be false or misleading. To verify it, every day we prepare an agenda where we note the political events. From here, we start the listening part, writing on Slack the claims that we call 'verifiable', which includes phrases containing information that can be verified and fact-checked. For example, the position on a ranking, comparisons with other countries, the dates of a measure taken. Then, we contrast the information: we go to the official sources and verify if it's correct or not. When we see that one of these verifiable claims doesn't correspond with the data we found, we start the process.

First, we consult the person or party who made the claim to know which is his source for the data he used; the original source. We give them

24 hours to answer before publishing. Then, we look for the official numbers and we contrast them with other sources of information, such as international organizations, think tanks or associations. For instance, the World Health Organisation, the United Nations or the IMF. We also look for experts on this topic to put the claim into context. With all that, we write the article in a completely transparent way. We follow a different structure from the traditional media, explaining who, where and when the claim was made, and describing the process we have followed to verify it, with all the links to the sources consulted.

For the final part, in which we give a rating to the claim, we also have to adjust to the definition of the rating we provided. We also look at what we did in previous cases with similar false claims.



Fact-check (654)

What elements or data are susceptible to be verified? Which sources should be used?

- Is the statement rooted in a fact that is verifiable?
- Is the statement significant? Does it have the power to be harmful?
- Is the claim being repeated by the same politician or others as well?

On the opposite side, we do not verify statements which are:

- Opinions, political rhetoric, exaggerations, or future predictions
- Minor "errors" or slips of the tongue
- Non relevant political actors
- Is the claim likely to be passed on and repeated?
- Sarcastic or satirical

We always fact-check with official sources, in political discourse and debunking disinformation. We seek direct access to government reports, academic studies and other data. It's not sufficient for us to get something second-hand. We don't rely on what a campaign or elected official tells us, we verify it independently.

The final decision of the rating contains these elements:

- The verification depends on the data available to the moment when the claim was made.
- Three fact-checkers evaluate the verification and the team reaches an agreement on the rating after a discussion."
- Did the author provide the source or explained what he meant?
- What have we done with previous similar cases?

Managing social networks in verification

We manage social networks for verification in two different ways. First, as a place to build a community around verification, we use to interact with the audience and receive messages for what they want to be verified. People usually tag us to check content in which they think there can be a misleading claim or any other type of disinformation. But we also have other ways of interaction. On the fact-checking side, we have a participation module. On the debunking part, we count on a Whatsapp number where we receive contents shared in other closed platforms, to further the debunking with the help of an artificial intelligence system.

Second, we use social media to spread the verifications with the goal to make them more viral than the misleading content. We cannot verify intentions or when a politician is lying intentionally, but we can underline when they **continue repeating** false claims, even after we ask them their source and publish the verification. In 2018, overwhelmed by these 'repeated lies', the Fact Checker, from the *Washington Post*, created a new rating to show false claims repeated at least 20 times, the '**bottomless Pinocchio**'. The Fact Checker has counted more than 50 lies, some repeated hundreds of times and social media was an ally to reinforce these verifications.

There are few ways to measure the impact of fact-checking, but one of the clearest is when politicians **correct themselves** as a result of a verification. In Full Fact, for instance, they proved that when politicians correct themselves it is more effective than publishing the verification. That's why they chase them on social media in order to get them to correct themselves. "This helps us change attitudes and behaviors, foster a culture of accuracy, and gather evidence on how well systems are working to prevent bad information from reaching the public."

Electoral process, alliances and new narratives

The elections are one of the most important events for fact-checkers. Many projects emerged around them, since it is the critical moment to challenge what the candidates say. And among this period, the most critical moments are the presidential debates. At that point, there is a greater risk in letting the candidate tell a lie without correcting them.

There are different ways to face the fact-checking of the debates. One of the first to test live verifications was Univisión in 2016, when it launched its 'Detector de mentiras' as part of the data unit to verify electoral debates. The initial goal was "to interact with the candidates and ask the moderators follow-up questions after verifying some of their claims."

Some years later, they became more sophisticated. At Verificado, in Mexico, which was an alliance of 80 media, organizations, universities and NGOs, and we gathered together on the day of the electoral debate. Around 40 people joined in a pop-up newsroom and we prepared teams for each one of the topics of the debate. We also invited experts and academics from these specialities. We were listening, and when the politicians said something that seemed wrong, a journalist, a data analyst and an academic started verifying together.

At Newtral, we keep following the debate, but we only publish at the same moment of the debate when the claim is repeated and we already have verified it before.

The alliances among fact-checkers are usually linked to electoral processes. For example, Electionland, in the US; Verificado, in Mexico; Reverso, in Argentina; or Ama Llulla, in Peru. However, there are also other types of alliances. For example, during the pandemic, the IFCN launched a partnership to debunk disinformation against the infodemic.

There are also thematic and regional alliances such as AfricaCheck or Latamchequea, in Latin America. In this last case, Laura Zommer, the editor of Chequeado, explains that they found that there were no representation of other countries with the same problems as them in

Argentina related to the lack of data and the quality of data, and that's the main reason why they launched LatamChequea. There are also organizations such as Meedan or Pop-up Newsroom that help to create these projects and collaborative newsrooms.

How to generate a community?

In any of those cases, new narratives are needed to reach a broader audience. At Newtral, we explore many different ways to deliver our verifications, such as the use of audio in Twitter, illustrations to disprove hoaxes on Instagram, short and dynamic videos for TikTok, and explanatory videos called "What the fake" for Youtube.

In this same line, we rely on *contextual fact-checking*. Part of what we do as fact-checkers is to explain and give context to misinterpretations worthy to be clarified. Certain statements or topics considered relevant, but not subject to the application of the ratings. We have a section called "The Explainer".

The goal of fact-checking should be to correct areas of confusion and misperception, but not just negative claims. Professor Emily Thorson explains that "by shifting the focus from misinformation (false information) to misperceptions (false beliefs), news organizations can simultaneously correct misperceptions among the public and potentially increase readers' ability to meaningfully interact with the news." Furthermore, she notes, "at the same time, by moving away from highly politicized 'fact-checks', they minimize the potential for partisan reactions."

Fact-checking is about accountability, and there are many other issues to be verified besides the claims, such as electoral promises. We developed the 'PactoCheck': we selected 100 promises to be followed and analyzed. Politifact also has its own Obameter and Trump-O-Meter to track the promises. But it is not the only thing. New narratives to spread the verification include other ideas, such as videos, newsletters, gamification, and, a very relevant part, education for media literacy.



Recommended readings



Here's How the First Fact-Checkers Were Able to Do Their Jobs Before the Internet



Fact-checking: A curated guide to resources and ideas



Fact-checking 101 by Alexios Mantzarlis, UNESCO



When False Claims Are Repeated, We Start To Believe They Are True – Here's How Behaving Like A Fact-Checker Can Help



Who decides what's true in politics? A history of the rise of political fact-checking



There are hundreds of fact-checkers around the world. Here's what some of them look like, Poynter



Verification Handbook



Explainers are tedious. Fact-checks can feel partisan. Is there a third way?, NiemanLab



03.

It's all in the detail: the impact of fact-checking and why it matters in Africa

By Alphonse Shiundu,
Africa Check's country editor in Kenya



ALPHONSE SHIUNDU: Kenya editor. Alphonse Shiundu joined Africa Check in January 2017 as Kenya editor. He was previously parliamentary editor of Standard Group Plc. Before then, he was a journalist at the Nation Media Group. He has experience and expertise in new media training, newsroom convergence and publishing technologies. He holds a Master's Degree in Media and Development from the University of Westminster, London; a Bachelors in Information Sciences from Moi University in Kenya. He's a Chevening scholar; an alumnus of the School of Authentic Journalism (Mexico), the Professional Fellows Exchange Programme (Washington DC), and the Young African Leaders Initiative (Nairobi). He believes in holding power accountable. In his free time, he climbs mountains.

In many countries in Africa, fact-checking is a relatively new phenomenon for journalism, politics, policies, and public debate. Public figures in the policy sphere often have an official legitimacy which grants automatic credibility to their public statements. However, not everything official is correct. For that reason, it is not unusual for public figures to make unverifiable claims and to fight off, or ignore, questions about the verifiability of their claims.

Fact-checking, therefore, is the lone voice in the wilderness pushing for accuracy on the public record. This chapter will take a closer look at the impact of the work of fact-checkers in Africa, including several case studies of how Africa Check has stopped misinformation from polluting the global development conversations within countries and in bilateral and multilateral organisations.

Introduction

The very premise of keeping the public debate honest is to improve the quality of governance. With facts, governments and lawmakers make policies and laws that reflect the lived reality of the people—and attempt to solve existing problems without downplaying or exaggerating the extent of the problem and the efficacy or effectiveness of the proposed solution. Unfortunately, due to political, economic, and structural systemic reasons, facts, which are a primer to evidence-based policymaking, do not inform the governance in many countries on the continent. Further, data agencies and research institutions that ought to generate much of the data to inform governance suffer from budget cuts, staffing inadequacies, and political interference, especially when it comes to census data.

For a long time, think tanks, journalists, activists and non-governmental organisations led the role of placing facts at the centre of governance. As the information sphere evolved, the politics changed, and priorities shifted. In that unpoliced environment, information pollution grew. The weaknesses in the old model of keeping the public debate honest created a niche that non-partisan and independent fact-checkers occupy, with the single mission of creating ample space for evidence-based public conversations.

Why fact-checking matters in Africa

Capturing the impact of fact-checking is difficult. Usually, public figures or their aides react in three ways when(ever) they are caught spreading unverified and often false information. Frequently, they:

- 1) Dig in and continue to repeat the falsehoods, banking on their popularity and knowing that false information spreads far and wide quickly¹, and, by the time the truth catches up, they'd already have achieved their objectives—accessing power, smearing opponents, pushing through unpopular and, in some instances, deadly policies.
- 2) Surreptitiously – without acknowledging the role of fact-checkers—correct the false information but don't correct the policies based on the false information, leading to awkwardly incongruent policy positions
- 3) Correct information and change the policy positions—the ideal response, but very few public figures have the political spine to admit it when they are wrong publicly and change course to policies that reflect the lived realities of the population

¹ Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151. DOI: [10.1126/science.aap9559](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559)

Case 1: Tanzania and Covid-19 response

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020, many countries in the continent deployed public health measures as recommended by the World Health Organisation. The most popular was the restriction of movement, wearing of masks, and shutdown of schools, churches, entertainment and recreation facilities. However, the Agrarian nature of African economies meant that the presidents and governments issuing these unprecedented directives were giving their people a false choice. Stay at home and starve, or go out to eke a living and contract the deadly disease.

In a country heading to a general election later that year (October 2020), prolonged lockdowns would hurt the incumbent's popularity. Put another way, condemning voters to a struggle for survival while telling them that you are saving their lives, was a risky political policy position.

President John Pombe Magufuli (2015-2021), a politician with a PhD in Chemistry, chose politics, the moment data showed casualties in Africa were lower than had been predicted. He lifted the public health measures, declared his country free of COVID-19, and ordered the health ministry officials to stop giving the daily statistics to the WHO. He stepped up a public campaign for "herbal steaming" and other traditional remedies, including the concoction of lemon, ginger, pepper and garlic as a remedy against COVID-19 and the coronavirus. When Madagascar announced that it had found a drug that cures the disease, Magufuli ordered a paneload of the unverified cure².

Africa Check, the continent's leading fact-checking organisation, debunked many claims about false cures³. Even the WHO had listed these claims about special diets and steam therapy as myths on its website. The Tanzanian president ignored the medical evidence and

spread his narrative about a global conspiracy. He played down the seriousness of the disease using anecdotal examples of his son, whom he said, contracted the disease, but got better within days after steam therapy and using lemons and garlic concoction⁴.

He explained how herbal steaming worked, urging people to inhale steam at 100 degrees celsius to kill the virus.

"Scientifically, that is very clear. That's because steam comes from boiling water at temperatures above 100°C. And because the coronavirus is made up of fats, when exposed to such high temperatures above 100°C, it will just disintegrate. It is a scientific treatment." Magufuli said

Africa Check investigated⁵ the claim and after conversations with linguistic experts (Magufuli had spoken in his country's official language Kiswahili), epidemiologists, and physicists, it found inaccuracies.

First, there was no known treatment against COVID-19. Second, yes, the boiling point of water was 100°C, but inhaling steam at that temperature was dangerous, as it would scald the nasal cavities. Third, the virus doesn't stay on the surface of the nasal cavity, where it is likely to be reached by steam. And, fourth, no matter how hot the steam one inhales is, the body has mechanisms to lower the temperature to the body temperature.

The awful news is that even after the fact-check was published and shared in Tanzania's then restricted media space, the country's health ministry still held a press conference advocating for these unproven remedies. On live television, the minister, Dr Dorothy Gwajima, a medical doctor, blended the concoction of garlic, ginger, pepper and lemon and drank it; and even conducted herbal steaming, indicating that these were alternative traditional remedies to the disease. In that press conference, she ruled out plans to administer COVID-19 vaccines in Tanzania⁶.

Therefore, it was refreshing that after Magufuli's death, the new president Samia Suluhu Hassan appointed a taskforce that recommended a change of tack in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision to follow facts and scientifically proven methods to combat the pandemic, including the mandatory wearing of masks, and even the acknowledgement of the disease in Tanzania, was a win for evidence-based policymaking.

Case 2: UNICEF and non-existent data

In September 2020, British newspaper, The Independent, published a viral story which claimed that "New exclusive research by UNICEF found 65% of females in the Kibera slum - an area of the capital of Nairobi which is the largest urban slum in Africa - had traded sex for sanitary pads".

When Africa Check reached out to the newspaper and to UNICEF for the source of the data, the whole story unravelled. UNICEF pointed Africa Check to two studies. But there was a problem. None of the studies was done in Kibera slums, they were done in Western Kenya. Only one study had gauged transactional sex-for-pads and found the figure was 10% among 15-year-old girls. The number was lower –1.3%– for females aged 13-29. UNICEF promised a third study, but it never came.

When Africa Check published the fact-check⁷, the Member of Parliament for Kibra, the location of the Kibera slum, Ken Okoth (he died in July 2019), reached out to explain that the fact-check had stopped a potentially dangerous and misleading narrative. He said it was a hot topic in WhatsApp groups in the slum, as his constituents sought to know how the research was conducted. Kibra, he told this editor in several telephone conversations⁸, always had "poverty tourists" who exaggerated the problems in the slum to attract funding. The

signal that the story was a fundraising primer for some initiative was the wrong label "biggest slum in Africa", which continued to persist even after it was debunked.

The false and unverifiable story from a multilateral organisation was likely to make the world think that sanitary pads were the biggest problem for the women and girls living in the slum, and skew government priorities, leading to unhelpful intervention.

Okoth publicly reached out to different UN offices, including the office of the UN Secretary General on Twitter, urging them to push UNICEF to correct the data. After multiple follow-ups for the data source, UNICEF admitted that it did not have any such data. Consequently, the Independent corrected the story and attributed the correction to Africa Check's fact-check.

In that way, fact-checkers had managed to interrupt a global policy conversation about the people's lives in a slum.

Case 3: Kenyan president and affordable housing policy

After winning re-election in 2017, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta made affordable housing top of his agenda. He unsuccessfully tried to introduce a tax to support the policy. This was widely opposed, but the president dug in. In one of the interviews with journalists on his policies, he defended the policy by two claims: 1) That most Kenyans don't own homes, they rent; 2) That since independence, the country had less than 500,000 mortgages.

Africa Check vetted⁹ the president's claim and found that he did not have the data. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics had data showing 60% of Kenyans owned homes and only 35% rented homes. The Central Bank holds the data on mortgages, and it showed 26,178 mortgages in 2018. The data on home acquisition by the statistics bureau revealed that 88% of the homeowners built their homes and 5%

2 Richey, L. A., Gissel, L. E., Kweka, O. L., Bærendtsen, P., Kragelund, P., Hambati, H. Q., & Mwamfupe, A. (2021). South-South humanitarianism: The case of Covid-organics in Tanzania. *World Development*, 141, 105375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105375>.

3 <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/live-guide-all-our-coronavirus-fact-checks-one-place>

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cad5jpUo4UI>

5 <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/fact-checking-tanzanian-president-john-magufuli-inhaling-steam-treat-covid-19>

6 <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/blog/analysis-tanzania-changes-tack-covid-19-leaders-have-role-play-pushing-accurate>

7 <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/65-females-kenyan-slum-traded-sex-sanitary-pads-unicef-uk-newspaper-pull-stat>

8 Alphonse Shiundu and Ken Okoth interacted professionally long before Okoth became a lawmaker, and Shiundu a fact-checker, and kept having policy conversations from time to time.

9 <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/500000-or-200000-presidents-numbers-mortgages-kenya-both-wide-mark>

bought them. Further data from the Kenya Bankers Association had shown that mortgages were unpopular, and that most Kenyans built their homes incrementally.

After the fact-check was published, we shared the link with State House and the president's aides. His speechwriters began using the updated figure, yet the policy, obviously premised on wrong data, remained active. Its implementation is running into headwinds, but at least those involved know enough to know that the decision was not based on factual information.

Conclusion

Fact-checking saves lives, but public figures in a politically existential crisis, especially those facing re-election, are likely to go for populist and popular policies rather than those that are essential, factual, but unpopular. It is also valuable for fact-checkers to remain vigilant whenever international media and multilateral agencies share statistics likely to influence policy. Vetting that information for accuracy will allow for proper policy interventions that solve actual problems in society, not imaginary contrived solutions to serve multinationals and their acolytes in the aid industry. In the end, it makes sense for a leader to have all the facts, and to allow for factual information to be gathered and only make decisions once they have all the information. Fact-checkers have a duty to find out the most recent credible information on important subjects and expose public figures to this information. There's also a need for media literacy to increase the number of people familiar with fact-checking and its protocols to build a critical mass of audiences to break the cycle of misinformation on the continent.



04.

Disinformation. How the bad guys work

By Clara Jiménez Cruz,
CEO Maldita.es



CLARA JIMÉNEZ CRUZ is a Spanish journalist and Maldita.es' CEO. In 2018, after 9 years of professional experience at La Sexta TV, together with Julio Montes Moreno, they created a non profit organization dedicated to fact-checking and transparency: Maldita.es. She holds a Degree in Audiovisual Communication from the Carlos III University of Madrid and was awarded Best Young Journalist in 2020 by Madrid's Press Association. She was selected Ashoka Fellow in 2019 and is a member of the Advisory Board of the International Fact-checking Network.

What is Maldita.es?

Maldita.es is a non-profit media outlet that fights disinformation in Spanish and promotes transparency through fact-checking and data journalism techniques. Our main mission is to provide citizens with tools, technology and information that allows them to build informed opinions and make informed choices. We are the only Spanish organization appointed by the European Commission to take part in its High Level Group on Fake News and Disinformation and approved signatory of the [International Fact-Checking Network's Code of Principles](#).

Maldita.es is divided into sections which target specific themes and audiences:

Maldito Buló (hoaxes)	Maldita Hemeroteca (archive)
Maldita Ciencia (health and science)	Maldito Dato (data journalism and FOIA)
Maldita Tecnología (technology)	Maldita Migración (migration)
Maldito Feminismo (gender)	Maldita Alimentación (feeding)

We also have a media literacy project called [Maldita Educa](#), which develops and creates educational content on critical thinking and fact-checking and trains over 2000 people each year.

How do people get information (and disinformation) in Kenya?

The way we get and consume information has changed over the last years. Online and social media occupy a very important place as a source of information in Kenya, as revealed by the [Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2021](#).

The rise of the Internet and social networks has served to democratize information, but it has also made it easier to create and spread hoaxes and disinformation. In Kenya, the "so-called" 'fake news' is a phenomenon of deep concern for consumers, with the majority (75%) of those surveyed agreeing that they found it hard to distinguish between what is real and what is fake when it comes to news on the internet", states the [Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2021](#).



How do the bad guys work?

Journalists and citizens need to know how disinformers work, in order to identify hoaxes and stop their spread. The bad guys benefit from the lack of anchor and context that often characterizes the content we receive through social networks. We continually get decontextualized images and videos or WhatsApp messages without source or with questionable sources. We need to know the keys and take a little time to identify disinformation and stop its spreading.

Why do people generate disinformation?

We have identified 3 reasons. First: to make money. It is the case of disinformers clickbaits, phishing and scams. Second, and very dangerous: ideological reasons, for example, to spread hate or to influence with lies in political processes. And third, it can be for pure evilness.

Some formats of disinformation

Fake Quotes: There is a lot of talking about deep fakes but many times a photo of a personality with a fake quote is enough to spread a hoax. This was the case for a fabricated quote of Kenya's interior minister secretary, Fred Matiang'i, [debunked by PesaCheck](#).

Fake Tweets: Fake quotes can also appear in the form of fake tweets. An image of a fake tweet can be very easily fabricated in web pages like Tweetgen, without Photoshop or design knowledge. These are some tips to identify fake tweets:

- Does the supposed tweet have a link or is just an image?
- Search if the tweet exists: from:@XXXX + word in the tweet
- Is it a verified account?
- Look at the date or the tweet: did the account exist at that date?
- How many characters? 280 or 180 if before November 2017
- If there is only one image circulating with the same RT and Likes... suspect!

Events from the past or with fake geo context: The spreading of past events as if they were actual is also a way to disinform. It happened with a two years old video that some people tried to relate to Uganda's 2021 election and later debunked by [Africa Check](#). A hoax can also be easily created saying that an event occurred in a different place than it actually happened, [as we can see in this example](#). To fact-check images you can start by observing and notice every detail that can give you a clue on when and where the picture was taken. You can also use the reverse image search from [Google](#), [Bing](#), [Yandex](#) or [TinEye](#).

Media manipulation and impersonation: Hoaxes can also be created by the manipulation of screenshots from a media outlet or broadcast. That can be done, for example, using meme generators, as in this hoax related to COVID-19 cases in Nigeria, that was also debunked by Africa Check.



Another way to do it is by a little and easy manipulation of the code of a newspaper's website and taking a screenshot of it. Doing this, the title or the text of a news article can be changed to disinform.

Scams

As we have already mentioned, there are also misinformations that seek to steal people's data or money, a practice known as phishing. To achieve this, scammers impersonate official institutions or companies.

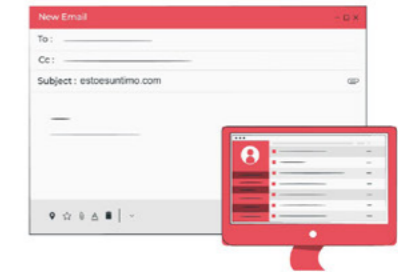
Phishing attempts can come through SMS, e-mail, Facebook post, etc... Many times scammers simulate a raffle to obtain personal data or generate a subscription. Other times, scammers impersonate a bank requesting the passwords of an account, or a delivery company asking to pay a small amount to deliver a package. Scammers can also impersonate a social network to steal the passwords of an account and impersonate its owner. Here are some tips to avoid these kinds of scams.

Beware of the freebies, raffles and offers that you receive on your phone.

BE CAREFUL WHEN GIVING YOUR PERSONAL DATA!

Here some recomendations:

1 Analyze the address of the person who sent you the email. If you feel that something isn't quite right, delete the email.



2 If you click on the link, check the website's address. If it doesn't belong to the company that allegedly sent you the email or if it's a long combination of letters, numbers and the company's name, avoid giving them your personal information.

3 If an institution appears to contact you but doesn't call you by your name, suspect.

4 Remember that you can always get in touch with the company itself, the Police or **Maldita.es** via our WhatsApp service: **+34 644 229 319**



How to engage with audiences?

At Maldita.es we use many media and formats to reach all kinds of people: articles on our website, infographics, videos, WhatsApp messages and audios, podcasts.... We have a WhatsApp chatbot (+34 644 22 93 19) that automatically sends denials. We also collaborate with national and regional radios, we share content on [TikTok](https://www.tiktok.com/), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/) and [Telegram](https://www.telegram.com/) and we make daily broadcasts on [Twitch](https://www.twitch.tv/). Every audience is different and our work is useful only if it reaches as many people as possible.



Useful links:



Twitter Advanced Search: <https://business.twitter.com/en/blog/how-to-advanced-search-on-twitter.html#:~:text=Start%20by%20doing%20a%20simple,to%20the%20advanced%20search%20options.>



Google Advanced Search: <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/35890?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop>



Verification Handbook: <https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-3>



Digital News Report about Kenya: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/kenya>



Google reverse image search video tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5e9wTdAulA>

HOW TO SPOT A FALSE TWEET



Is it a screenshot?

Yes

No



Is it a link?

If it takes you to Twitter, then the tweet is real.

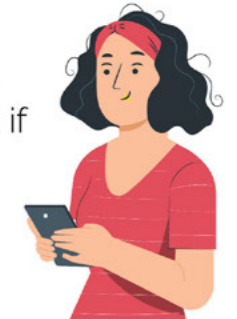
Does it include a link to Twitter?

Yes

No

Go to that link and verify if the tweet is the same as the one that appears on the screenshot. If it's the same, the tweet is real.

Follow these steps to find out if it's false.



1 How many characters has the tweet got? It can't have more than 280 characters, or 140 if the tweet was posted before september of 2017. If the alleged tweet is longer than Don Quixote, it's false.

2 Look for the user that appears on the tweet. If it exists, check their profile to see if it's a parody account. If it doesn't, it may be false or the account may have been deleted.

3 If the alleged tweet belongs to a public figure and has hundreds of RT's and FAV's there should be more than one screenshot of it. If that's not the case, you should suspect.

4 Look out for the details: Check if the person who allegedly posted the tweet even had an account back then. You can also find out if he was a public figure at the time or if the tweet had an impact or was followed by a conversation.



SUSPECT OF ANY TWEET THAT IS SHARED IN A SCREENSHOT!

5 TIPS ON HOW TO AVOID BEING FOOLED BY YOUR OWN BRAIN

WITH CRISTINA LÓPEZ TARRIDA,
EXPERT IN SOCIAL ENGINEERING AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL HACKING

1 Keep your **own bias** in mind.



We tend to believe hoaxes that we **see often.**

3 The fact that a **family member or friend** shared an information with you doesn't make that information real.



Bad actors use **pictures** to deceive us as they know our brain loves them.

5 Beware of contents that directly **appeal to our emotions.**



THE 10 CHARACTERS OF DISINFORMATION

Disinformation has many formats: websites, screenshots, audios, videos, etc. and behind them there are always people who create them, all of whom have different intentions.



1 HATE GENERATORS
They create false messages to attack specific groups such as women, the LGBT+ community, migrants or minority groups. Their goal is to make hate go viral.



2 CONSPIRACISTS
They create theories with no scientific evidence or backed data. They are consumed and shared as real during situations of crisis or unrest.



3 IMITATORS
They imitate real news outlets or pretend to be journalists. They want you to visit their website, which is often full of adverts that provide them with money. Sometimes they also want their political message to go viral.



4 SCAMMER
They create false content by impersonating brands or taking advantage of a situation of crisis in order to obtain data or money with their scam.



5 THE POLITICIAN
Power comes with credibility, and some politicians take advantage of the trust they have gained to spread lies and try to reshape the public debate.



6 FAMILY
People usually trust their families and close friends, which makes them vulnerable to disinformation and contents with no evidence that are shared by these family members or friends.



7 THE FAKE INFILTRATOR
They claim to have real information on where somebody lives or works and ask you to trust them as they've got "insight" on the matter. They do so without evidence.



8 THE PRANKSTER
They create jokes, but some people don't get them and they share them as if they were real. The joke becomes a hoax.



9 THE CELEBRITY
Their notoriety gives them credibility, but they share disinformation or content with no evidence.



10 BOT
Someone who has been hired to manage false social media accounts to spread disinformation, as an attempt to influence the public discourse.





05.

VerificaRTVE: responsible and public digital verification

By Myriam Redondo,
Head of VerificaRTVE



MYRIAM REDONDO. With a PhD on International Relations (IR) earned with a thesis on “Internet as a source of information”, which won Complutense Extraordinary Prize in 2006, Redondo has a long trajectory as a freelance journalist, analyst and trainer specialized in international and online information/disinformation. As a pioneer of digital verification in Spain, journalists have been attending her related workshops since 2012 at universities, professional entities, civic associations and newsrooms (in-company courses). These have included professionals working for the most renowned national media: RTVE, ATRESMedia, EFE Agency, El País, El Mundo, Europa Press, ElConfidencial.com, Eldiario.es. She collaborated with Deutsche Welle Akademie for verification workshops in Africa and Asia and authored the book “Verificación digital para periodistas. Manual contra bulos y desinformación Internacional”, UOC 2018 (Digital verification for journalists: handbook against fakes and international disinformation). Currently, she is in charge of VerificaRTVE, collaborates frequently with several TV and radio programs and is associate lecturer on IR at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain.

Verification has become an essential activity in many editorial offices, but for a public media it is important to balance the “need for proving the untruthful” and the need for avoiding making lies and liars relevant or popular. Here, we give advice on how we manage this double mission in VerificaRTVE, the verification unit of the public broadcaster RTVE. What we call “responsible checking”.

In this corporation, we have been applying techniques and resources of digital checking systematically to departments like Documentation for more than five years. RTVE has acted as a counselor on this matter for other European televisions. After two pop-up team experiences of political digital verification created by LabRTVE during the two Spain’s general elections of April and November 2019, a permanent team has been carrying out that task since 2020. The team works inside the website (RTVE.es/verificartve) but with a crossed view (website, radio, television).

What does VerificaRTVE do?

We work independently, without guidelines on what to check each day, which responds to journalistic criteria and, again, responsibility. We use low and high beams. First, we carry out usual tasks which are based on publishing and denying journals in rtve.es and we adapt that work to the different emission windows. To do so, we monitor social media looking for fake contents daily, we “listen” to our citizen alert service via WhatsApp (659800555), we write denials (which are proofread by three people), and we publish the results with the tag #VerificaRTVE on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. We also adapt the denials to radio and TV programs (informative as well as entertainment).

With “high beams” we mean deep research and educational projects. For example, in the summer of 2021, VerificaRTVE revealed a networking scam of people who pretended to be a family with a very ill child to collect money from caring people. On the educational side, we give lectures in some RTVE’s masters for students of radio, television, and multimedia, and we also take part in external courses.

We know that in order to stop lies, collaboration is key. VerificaRTVE is a part of the EBU Newswire, the digital platform in which members of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) share tips, contents, and experiences about digital verification. Some of the biggest experts on digital verification work on this forum, because of the importance of User Generated Contents (UGC), and civilian images in the history of television. We only need to remember that, because of the amount of UGC that arrived with the Tsunami of Asia in 2004, the BBC launched its UGC Unit to handle this kind of content. There are other examples of digital verification efforts on previous decades.

We are also members of the European Observatory against Misinformation (EDMO), which does transnational analysis of the situation. This helps us verify how misinformative tendencies have internationalized, and many members of the observatory share the same problems and even the exact same fake contents distributed in different languages.

Topics

Topics on VerificaRTVE depend on journalistic criteria, but the idea of responsibility is always present when it comes to choosing them. We prioritize the public interest. According to EDMO, in October of 2021, 31% of fake contents reported by members were still about COVID-19 and, at this moment, contents about health and science prevail. We work against pseudoscientific contents or those that deny scientific proof, either with regards to the vaccine or to climate change.

Secondly, we handle matters that can alarm the population unnecessarily. For example, we denied a very viral tsunami warning that spread after the volcanic eruption in the island of La Palma. In this section, we can include verifications about contents sent by users as possible frauds (phishing, smishing, etc.). These are rising crimes. Thirdly (and not firstly), we handle viral tabloid contents that people are talking about a lot, from the fake video of a giant moon, which is a digital manipulation, to the hoax about three young singers that are the sons of three famous European tenors, which is one of the most persistent hoaxes that we are aware of.

Other hoaxes that we handle are those of topical issue. There are a lot of them because misinformation follows the news, trying to crawl and take a spot in the media. Therefore, after the chaotic evacuation of Kabul in the summer of 2021, following the EEUU withdrawal, many hoaxes arrived at the editorial office of VerificaRTVE. We wrote some denials about them.

Political checking

We work against the weaponization of digital verification, focusing our efforts of political checking on electoral periods and trying not to fall in well-known political traps:

- **The “political *echosystem*”** (notice the italic that comes from echo, sound, and not from ecosystem, environment). We avoid the “he said she said”, dialectical battles with no clear resolution for having ideological points of view and that are just confusing for the citizen. We are also on our guards when a candidate makes controversial statements trying for the media to reply and give them their five minutes of fame. We don't address these lies, only when it is especially relevant, affects groups that suffer from discrimination like migrants or jeopardizes the exercise of fundamental rights like the right to vote.
- **Amplification.** We avoid enhancing “parallel arguments”. For example, on one occasion, there was this viral hoax involving a Catalan independence leader (Catalonia is a Spanish region with pro-independence tensions). After spending time in jail and being released, he was captured walking near a polling station on an election day. The hoax stated that this was illegal, but it wasn't, and we denied it. But, before denying it, we considered the fact that we were about to give light to the image of this leader being free. This was something that other political parties were also doing to artificially create irritation between citizens that were not pro-independence. We always make this kind of considerations before denying and, sometimes, we see something that prevents the denial. We also make the accounts spreading fake contents anonymous

(We cross out the name and profile picture on the screenshots published) so that they cannot gain more fame. We just mention them if it's strictly necessary. Another usual method is combo images: when a politician or an agitating influencer publishes a hoax, we share its screenshots next to other citizens posts. This way, we don't personify, we refuse to give them their five minutes of fame and we avoid accusations from victimhood against us. We focus on the lie, not the liar.

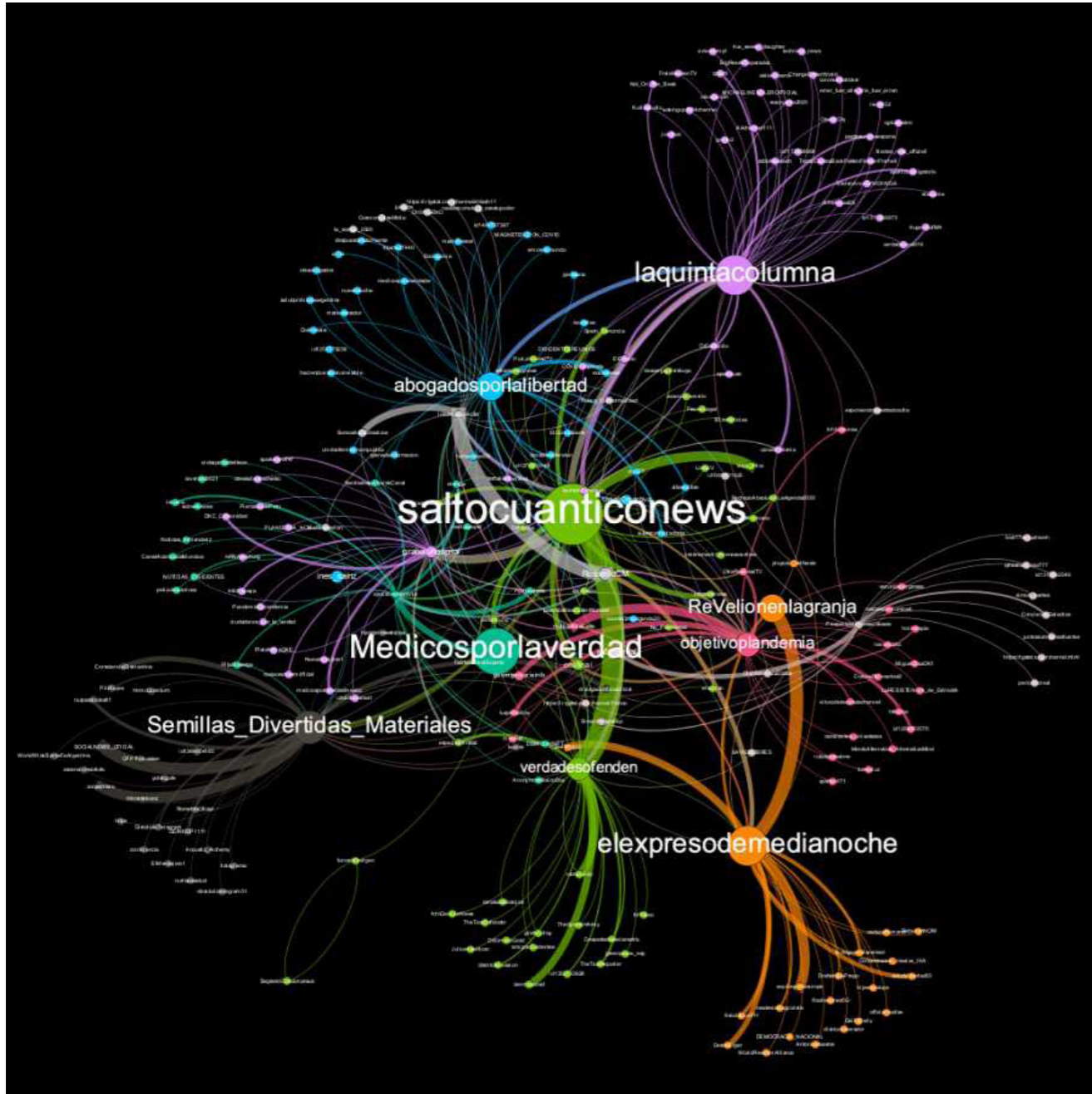
- **Imitation.** In May of 2021, a political crisis between Morocco and Spain ended in the arrival of thousands of Moroccan immigrants to the Spanish city of Ceuta, located in the North of Africa. There were a lot of fake contents spreading around and some users that were creating them felt successful while being in the spotlight, even if their claims were being denied. When we identify this kind of interests, we focus the light on something else, or we give citizens the tools to identify fake contents that are spreading rather than denying them one by one.
- **Hack-and-leaks.** Leaking controversial content of a candidate just before the election to cause an electoral overturn has become something common (EEUU elections in 2016, France in 2017). From personal emails to a compromising video. These contents should not be published by the media or checkers without a previous evaluation and can only be played if their authenticity has been proved. We must warn users that truth is often mixed with lies, so it's not convenient that they believe everything they find.

- **Radical agenda.** As political advisors know, the agenda is one of the most important matters in the whole election campaign. It is often said that “if you win the agenda [the range of topics under discussion by voters], you win the election”. Radical politicians usually tend to get behind polarized matters, like migration or, like in Kenya, they would use ethnic differences. To avoid falling for self-serving agendas, it is recommended to make “pre-bunking” or explanatory texts before fake contents form about a matter that will be soon subject of hoaxes. By this, we boost our own thematic agenda, with the chronology that the checker decides, not the liar. To avoid toxic agendas, another characteristic method of VerificaRTVE consists of analyzing who is promoting false information before denying it. We do this mainly by analyzing social media.

Analysing social media

This technique consists of downloading all possible data derived from the expansion of a tag or fake content on a social network, mainly from Twitter: How many users have tweeted about that, what tags did they use, at what time, from which cities, in what languages. With that information, and using treatment and visualization of information programs like Gephi, we determine who are the most influential

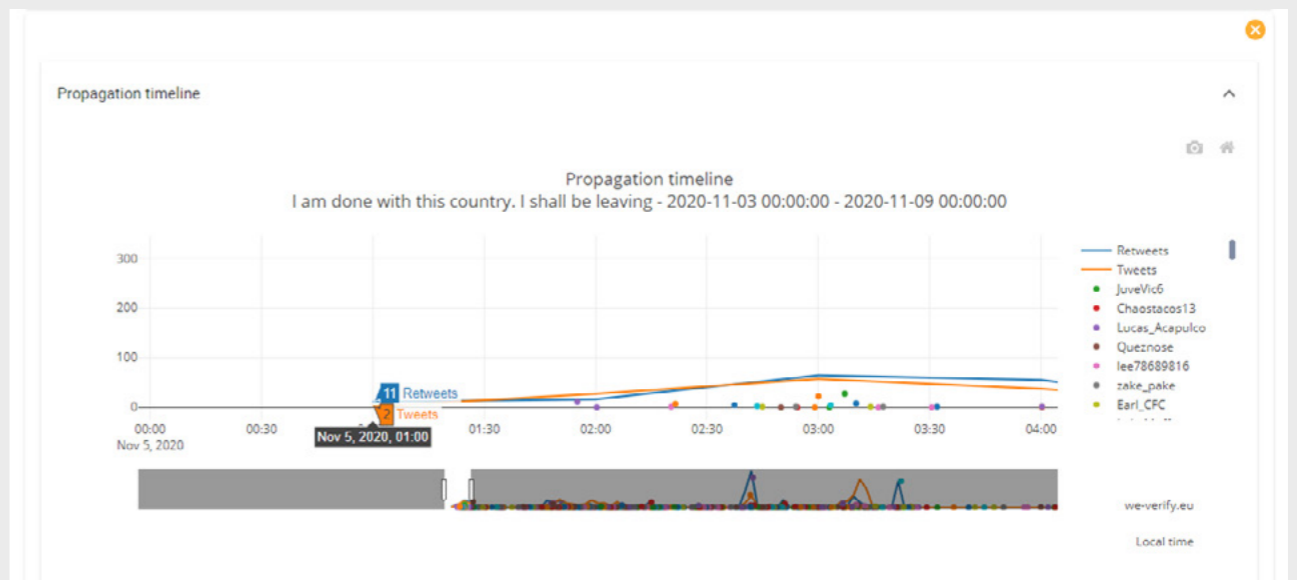
users (nodes) in the phenomenon, as well as the links (edges) between them. And something important: We can see if the users are part of communities with specific interests, thus, the spread of that lie wasn't a natural or organic process, but motivated by that community. You can find [a lot of resources](#) in Github to practice this discipline.



Example of social network analysis by VerificaRTVE using WeVerify plugin. The dots in the line are users pushing for a given misinformative content.

Network analysis and content analysis allow us to uncover people who are exploiting fake narratives. For example, in 2021, an immigrant hit a health worker in the metro of Madrid. The story was true but racist groups shared it adding some fakery. Among the lies, they had it that the Police had issued a wanted notice to find the offender, so citizens should help on the mission. It was a lie: actually, the Police had not asked for help and those racist groups were trying to find the immigrant before the Police did with the purpose of beating him.

Network analysis is one of the best ways to fight disinformation. If Github, Python or Gephi are too difficult resources for your team, [WeVerify plugin](#) is a very good free Chrome extension that allows basic network and content analysis. Hoaxy (by the University of Indiana) and Crowdtangle Link Checker (by Facebook) can also help you investigate, at a preliminary level, who is boosting a fake content in social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Reddit.



Example of social network analysis by VerificaRTVE using WeVerify plugin. The dots in the line are users pushing for a given disinformative content.

Recognizing misinformative trends in electoral processes is very important. Since 2016, foreign interference is a possibility and recent campaigns are becoming more and more sophisticated in order to gain credibility. Nowadays, besides the use of bots and fake human accounts, it has been noted the creation of fake media and even of fake companies disguised as consultancy services to spread fakes, as in this case analysis of [Russian disinformation in Sudan](#). There are examples of fakers gaining the confidence of local influencers and turning them into useful idiots, and in some occasions, they even deceive local freelance journalists to make them write about misinforming topics. They do it for the money, ignoring that they are collaborating with a propaganda operation. Beware that non-authentic influence operations on the social networks are not only launched by foreign actors, and Russia is not the only country to blame (there are examples of that in [81 countries](#)). On many occasions, they are the product of very local politicians, parties or entities that want to push polarization and violence forward.

Images and language

Language is another very important tool to fight disinformation. Use it wisely and structure your texts in a clever way that helps your purpose of myth-busting.

Since RTVE is a public broadcaster, we care about the language. We try to express ourselves with absolute neutrality, avoiding words from foreign languages, excessive use of adjectives or tabloid terms.

About the images, we have already said that we usually hide those that identify liar users. We blur or cross out their faces and we also do that with children. We don't show triggering or bloody pictures to avoid curious searches. We always include a screenshot of the hoax in our denials to show what we are denying, but we cross it out with a stamp that warns about its veracity (or out of context, deceptive, manipulated, etc.). This way, we stop the spread. This is especially important if the denial is being broadcasted on television: we can never show a screenshot without its stamp. Another tactic that we use is not linking directly fake content so that we don't give more views to those websites. We link an intermediate copy generated by [Archive.is](https://archive.is) or [Archive.org](https://archive.org).

Even though writing is not an exact science and there can exist variations, in general, we consider useful letting "the sandwich of the truth", that the linguistic George Lakoff suggests, guide us. Many media recommend it: 1) lead with the truth, avoiding putting the lie in the headline; 2) describe the falsehood in the middle of the text; 3) debunk it and end your report with the truth again.

Don't spread misinformation unintentionally by writing a bad debunking text. Respect this kind of structure, or other useful one that encapsulates the lie, in every adaptation of your digital verification, whether it is for radio, television or the Web. Talk about the lie but return to the truth as soon as possible and, especially, always repeat the truth more than the lie.

Remember: it does not matter if you work as a freelance, for a small or large media, a radio, a newspaper or a television. As a journalist, you will always have a leading role in fighting disinformation and misinformation. Play your cards to debunk lies in the most effective way, this is the informative battle of our times. Have fun but be responsible when taking part on it. Consider verification as a public service.



Recommended contents



VerificaRTVE: <https://rtve.es/verificartve>



First Draft Education: <https://firstdraftnews.org/training>



Quiztime: <https://twitter.com/quiztime>



Digger. Sharpen your senses: <https://digger-project.com/sharpen-your-senses/>



Reuters. Identifying manipulated media: <https://www.reuters.com/manipulatedmedia/>



06.

Fact-checking in Africa: working when information is scarce and experts are hard to find

By Alphonse Shiundu,
Africa Check's country editor in Kenya



ALPHONSE SHIUNDU: Kenya editor. Alphonse Shiundu joined Africa Check in January 2017 as Kenya editor. He was previously parliamentary editor of Standard Group Plc. Before then, he was a journalist at the Nation Media Group. He has experience and expertise in new media training, newsroom convergence and publishing technologies. He holds a Master's Degree in Media and Development from the University of Westminster, London; a Bachelors in Information Sciences from Moi University in Kenya. He's a Chevening scholar; an alumnus of the School of Authentic Journalism (Mexico), the Professional Fellows Exchange Programme (Washington DC), and the Young African Leaders Initiative (Nairobi). He believes in holding power accountable. In his free time, he climbs mountains.

How do you practice fact-checking when experts and data sources are not available?

The “most recent publicly available data” in much of Africa is usually a few years old. Further, experts are few and the best subject matter experts are always busy with their research or co-opted into political or business interests that it makes them unavailable to speak with fact-checkers to clarify disputed realities. What do African fact-checkers do? How do they ensure that they get data from the government vaults into the public domain? How well do the Access to Information protocols work? What other data sources can help when in-country data is unusable or unavailable? What other data do African fact-checkers think will add value to evidence-based policymaking, and what options do they have to push for better data collection? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions as it illustrates how fact-checkers work within different contexts and under difficult circumstances to make sure that public figures in the continent speak the truth.

Introduction

Before 2012, fact-checking in Africa was relatively unknown. Africa Check, the continent's first independent and non-partisan fact-checking organisation, was set up in 2012 in South Africa. In just ten years, the organisation has inspired at least 23 fact-checking projects across the continent¹. Even global news agency, AFP, set up a fact-checking initiative on the continent.

Fact-checking in the continent covers varied subjects such as elections (checking manifestos, claims about deliverables of incumbents, and assesses premises of election pledges), politics, health, migration, employment, education and claims about “development”, specifically infrastructure and socio-economic progress, are some of the key themes that fact-checkers on the continent focus on.

However, the relative novelty of the practice of fact-checking has fallen prey to the same problems that investigative journalism has faced for decades – lack of data, conflicted official sources, lack of access to information, and incoherent data that makes sensible storytelling difficult. Using examples of fact-checking reports, this chapter analyses some of the

¹ Africa Check runs the Africa Facts Network, a group of fact-checking organisations in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

problems fact-checkers at Africa Check run into when trying to hold public figures accountable for the claims that they make.

Case 1:

Data on roads built in Kenya

In most of Africa, there is an infrastructure deficit. Therefore, building roads, railways, schools, power stations and electricity distribution lines are significant ingredients of campaign promises, and form part of disputed realities. In 2017, in Kenya, the country's president Uhuru Kenyatta claimed that his administration had built 1,950 kilometres of roads since April 2013 when he took power².

However, this was not the first time the president made a similar claim. A year earlier, he had claimed that his administration built 1,000 kilometres of new roads every year, and in three years that figure had reached 3,000 kilometres.

² <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/fact-checked-kenyattas-2017-state-nation-address>

The National Treasury, which provided funds for building the roads, gave a figure of 1,950km in the 2017 budget speech. However, ten days after the speech, the infrastructure minister put the figure at “over 2,500km”. The trouble came when treasury data released in January 2018 showed that only 1,658 kilometres had been built. A year later, in February 2019, the deputy president spoke at Chatham House in the United Kingdom and claimed the administration had built 7,000km in five years, only for the National Treasury in January 2020 to put the figure at 3,939km. It was clear that the publicly available government data on roads built was incoherent.

When we sought to vet this data, we reached out to the Kenya Roads Board to list all the roads built, as well as their length and location. The agency took us in circles until we filed an official Access to Information request. At first, they ignored the request but, when the Ombudsman wrote to them to honour it, they escalated it to the Ministry of Transport. Africa Check was invited to speak to a senior official at the ministry, who listened to our request, promised to deliver the data, and then kept quiet. He ignored subsequent reminders. As per the Access to Information law, the next step was to go to court, but there was no budget for litigation.

We tried another approach to check cement consumption data, and even the capital expenditure to the ministry of roads, to see if these had increased in tandem with the claims made in the speeches³. But the data showed the ministry did not have enough money to build the declared kilometres, based on the known average cost of building a road, and there was no marked improvement in cement and steel consumption. In short, there was no supporting evidence that we could use as a proxy to vet the claims.

On November 30, 2021, in a speech about his legacy, the president said he had built 10,500km of new roads. The big question arose: Is it possible that in the year of a pandemic that had shut down the economies of most countries, Kenya had built 6,500km of new roads between 2020 and 2021? That was implausible, unlikely.

³ <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/why-it-s-difficult-to-trust-data-on-roads-built-under-jubilee-42604?view=htmlamp>

We know the data is incoherent, and the claim is unproven, but it is possible that it is because of that lack of coherent data that the president keeps repeating the claim, knowing that it will be impossible to prove him wrong. Perhaps, the government should put in place policies that demand its officers and agencies to collect accurate data to help with planning and prioritising government projects.

Case 2:

Jobs data in Kenya

Every year, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics releases an economic survey documenting progress in different areas of the economy. One of the most-watched statistics is the data on the new jobs created. The numbers are often above 700,000 new jobs but, the problem is, the data agency attributes these jobs to the “informal sector”, which accounts for 83% of all the economy. It is not easy to audit this information because it is difficult to determine where these jobs were created. Unlike other countries in the North which record every job created, in Kenya, and much of Africa, what are used are estimates derived from models and survey data.

When we tried pursuing these numbers, we hit roadblocks. First, the definition of a job was problematic. It assessed people who had worked for pay over the past seven days. It does not assess the nature of the job. A senior official of the statistics bureau confessed that the question if asked during harvesting season, when people in rural areas are engaged to harvest produce such as maize and beans, it will register those people as “employed”, whereas they don’t have jobs. Also, he confessed that many young people in Kenya are engaged in any form of work to make a living—they hawk merchandise, work in farms, and get by. They may be considered “employed” in the informal sector, but the nature and quality of their jobs is temporary, fleeting. They do not have a stable income, no health insurance, they even do not pay taxes. Trying to audit the number of jobs created by looking at the variables in income tax, only captures those employed in the formal sector.

While this is the most recent and credible data in our context, perhaps, the time is nigh for the data agency and government to work out a way to capture those working on the huge chunk of the economy. If 83% of people work in the informal sector, then, that is the economy, and the government has to figure a way to formalise that sector.

Whenever fact-checkers at Africa Check encounter questions about jobs created and the employment rate, they rely on available data, but make sure that they get subject matter experts to point out the data deficiencies and contextualise the data.

Case 3:

Finding sources and experts to help explain the facts

The fact-checking process in Africa Check has one key cog: reaching out to subject matter experts to help debunk a claim. The experts point fact-checkers to the most recent and credible data, explain the context of the data, and alert fact-checkers if there are any gaps in the data, or any information they should take on board when interpreting the data. Unlike journalists, fact-checkers do not look for soundbites or talking heads. They go for subject matter experts familiar with contemporary trends in their field. Usually, these are researchers in think tanks, university lecturers and researchers, and government department officers. A track record of research establishing one as a key subject matter expert is vital.

However, in Africa, it is not easy to get many experts who are keeping up with the research trends in their field. With its colonial tropes, the North-South divide makes it difficult for African researchers to publish and publicise their findings. It is not unusual to find African experts in foreign universities who have never set foot in the continent, but who instead use African academics as their field researchers. The inadequate funding for research departments and think tanks on the continent also hampers the quality and volume of research. Additionally, the way universities are structured in some

countries like Kenya, one is promoted based on the number of publications they have put out. It is commonplace for lecturers supervising masters and PhD students to append their names as co-authors of the students’ papers without any input. We once reached out to a lecturer who had listed lots of publications in a subject area, and packaged himself as an expert. But when we asked him a question about a specific paper he had published, he was honest enough to tell us that he did not work on the paper, but instead it was written by a student he supervised. In other words, he did not know what the paper was about, yet his name was listed as a co-author!

The other challenge for African fact-checkers is that subject matter expert also work as consultants for the government, political parties, and multinational agencies. When contacted, some respond honestly about their conflict of interest, but most prefer not to be quoted for fear of losing livelihoods if their names are published in a fact-check that finds their client has spread a falsehood. Others prefer not to speak for fear of jeopardising future consultancies.

Further, accessing credible data from government sources is a nightmare in most African countries because essential information is published or publicised, or, the governments do not have the infrastructure to publicise the information. Sometimes, the available data is too old to be useful. A case in point is that, in 2021, the “most recent” health data is the Kenya Demographic Health Survey published in 2014. Also, the Cause of Death data is so bad that African fact-checkers have to rely on the World Health Organisation estimates⁴.

⁴ <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/hit-or-miss-5-claims-kenyan-governors-fact-checked>

What options do African fact-checkers have?

For experts, most African fact-checkers reach out to those listed in curated databases as +Quotethiswoman+, Chatham House, or any researcher listed in international databases as an expert in a given area. These are few, but they do respond quickly in a manner that illuminates the debate. There are also alternative data sources such as the World Bank Development Index, the United Nations Statistics Division, peer-reviewed academic journals, and prospectus to foreign governments and bodies.

For instance, when Africa Check set out to vet a claim by Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni that “Finland is a place which is so cold that a tree takes 120 years to grow”⁵, we had to rely on the World Agroforestry Centre, and the Natural Resources Institute of Finland. Questions to the Kenya Forest Service and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute were not responded to, and it was easy to understand that perhaps, the researchers interpreted the pursuit of truth as a potential for bureaucratic trouble.

Conclusion

To navigate the information environment in pursuit of publicly available credible data to keep the public debate honest, fact-checkers in Africa have to work with national statistics agencies to track and measure recurring subjects in public debate. If the cause of death, for example, is disputed, the statistics agency can fundraise and collect this data. If the demographic health survey data is old, the government departments must work overtime to raise money and expertise to conduct surveys at close intervals. If there is a dispute about the number of jobs, or information about the roads built, fresh and targeted data collection, can be done to ensure that policymakers make decisions on these important issues based on credible available data.

African experts must continue the fight to decolonialise knowledge, and they can do this by being vocal on their subject matter expertise, especially in conversations with fact-checkers, so as to cement their position as the experts in the continent and shatter the notion of having foreign experts with no sense of context on African affairs. Also, African governments must be deliberate about reporting data to their people, with the same zeal and accuracy that they report to multilateral agencies. It is frustrating for fact-checkers to find credible and up-to-date data about countries such as Ethiopia on multilateral agencies’ websites, but not in the websites of the government ministry concerned. African governments owe their citizens accurate reports and data about the measurable socio-economic indices.

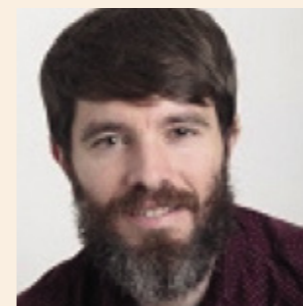
5 <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/spotchecks/ugandas-museveni-right-trees-finland-can-take-120-years-mature-these-are-not>



07.

Online tools of Verification and Investigation

By Óscar Gutiérrez,
EL PAÍS staff writer



OSCAR GUTIÉRREZ (El País). Trained as a journalist with a Master’s Degree in International Relations (Universidad Complutense, Madrid), during the last decade of work at EL PAÍS, he has focused on information in conflict and post-conflict areas, as well as on the terrorist and jihadist phenomenon, both in the Middle East and in Africa. After travelling to Syria and Iraq during the outbreak of the last war in Mesopotamia and the birth of the Islamic State, he has worked on analysing this jihadist group, its evolution and the threat to the West. This journey forced him to systematise the use of tools for verifying sources and online information, both in his work as reporter and in journalism classes in the EL PAÍS master’s degree. Prior to this newspaper, he worked in digital press (20minutos.es), radio (Onda Cero) and as a researcher for Amnesty International.

IDEA behind this way of reporting

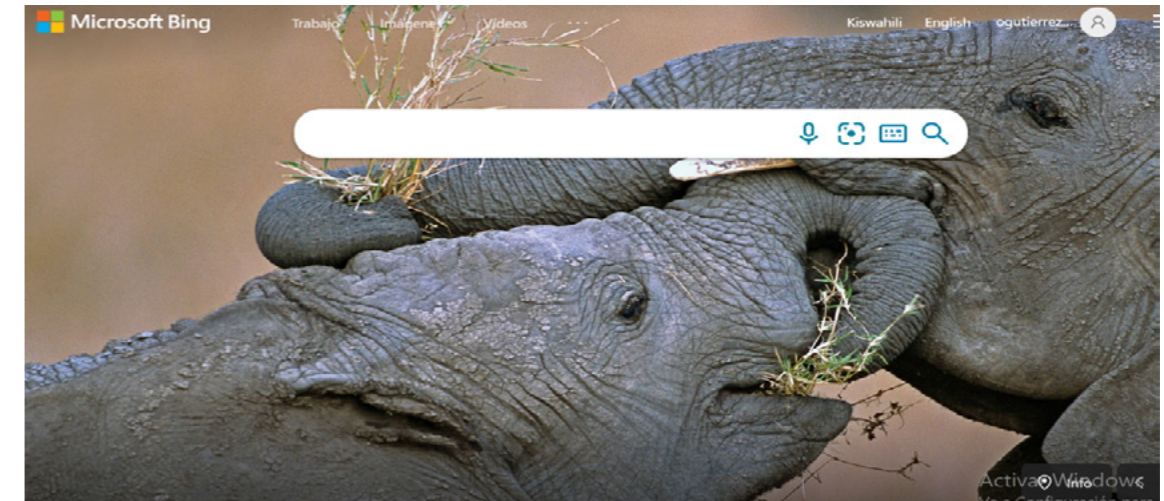
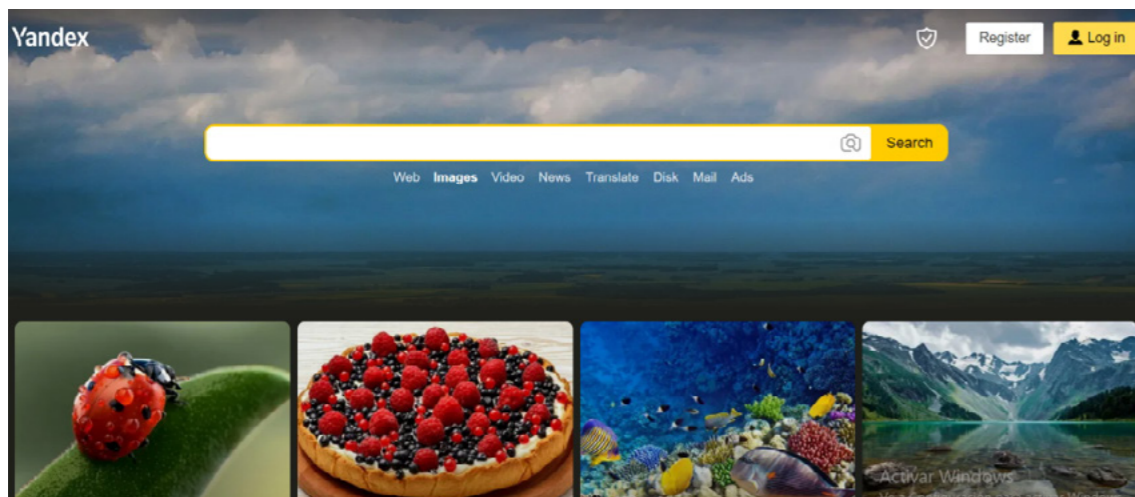
- Point of view: look differently, look like a forensic.
- Process: follow a good methodology. Context, documentation, tools and writing.
- New narrative: Details and sobriety are the unique rule when reporting from the desk.
- Best work: Anatomy of a killing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvE56R2Vowg>
- Work table: two screens, chrome, extensions, bookmarks (bookmark manager), hootsuite, tweetdeck... Again set up your own and forensic methodology.
- Another brilliant feature: Dylan Roof case (massacre in Charleston) <https://medium.com/1st-draft/finding-dylann-roof-977a206898d2>
- Concept and technique: **Reverse image.** Let's look for as much information as possible of the photo I am working with. Is this same photo indexed in any of the searching giants? Could I get any metadata of the image? More sizes? Different framing?
- **Google Image:** better to use the custome range.
- **Yandex, yandex and yandex:** best results when doing the reverse of an image. It is the best.
- **Bing:** visual searching to recrop the image and help the process of reverse. Eliminate what confuses the searching machines
- **Tineye:** tool ad hoc to do the reverse. Easy to use but lack of *finezza*.

But also...

- Fotoforensic & Foresincally: ELA analysis (doctored photos).
- Jeffrey metadata: the file and data inside of a digital photo.
- Other details: shadows and sun: Suncalc.org.

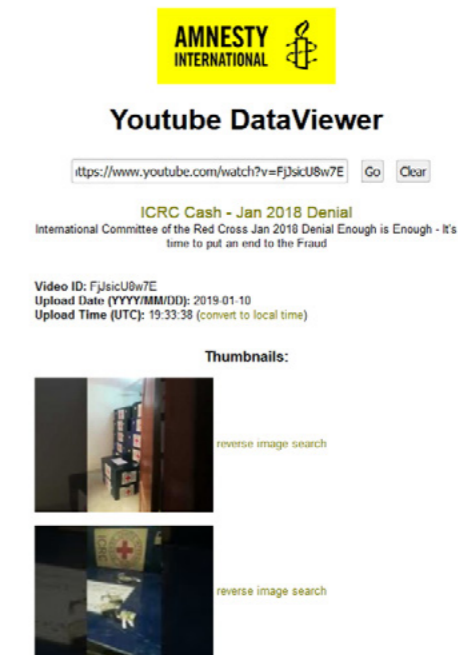
IMAGES

- Two things to consider: how to look at them and how to verify them. First step: look always for the unique component/piece/detail of information to narrow down the search. Help the tools to do their best.



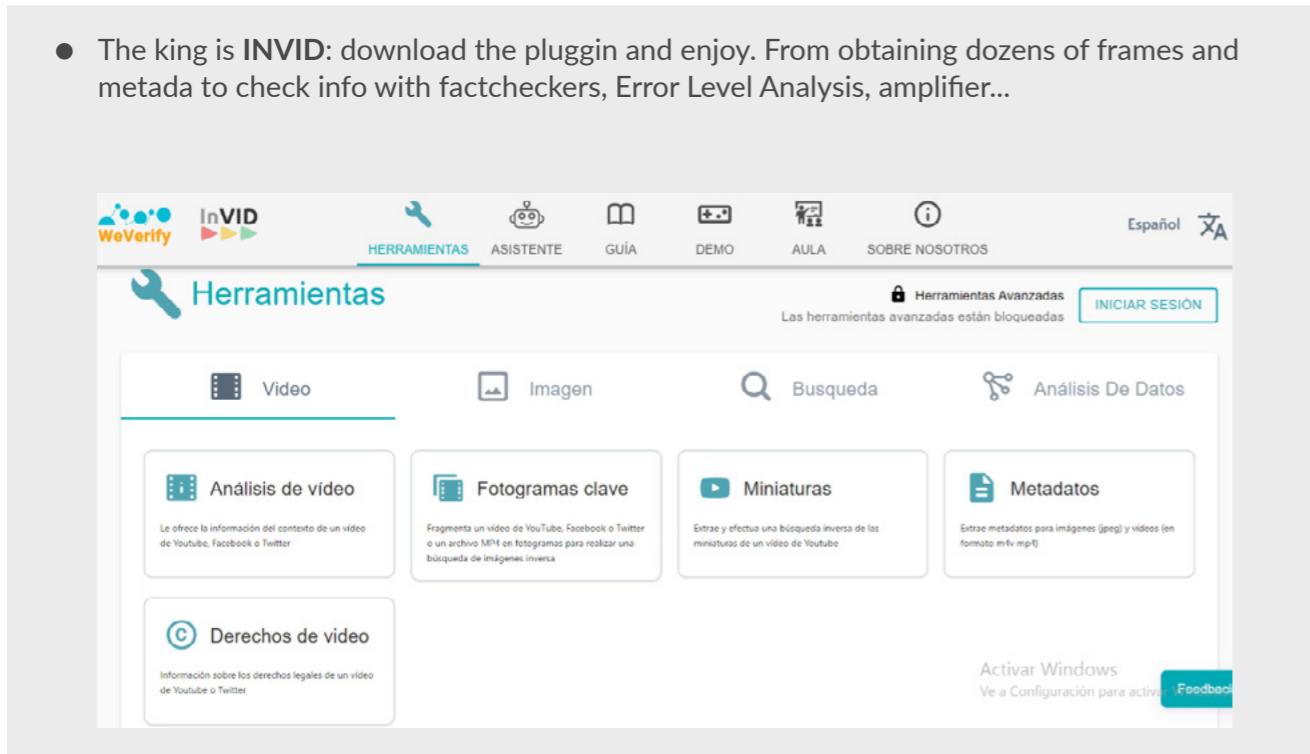
VIDEOS

- Philosophy: we cannot do the reverse image so get the best frame(s) from a video to go back to reverse machines.
- Fantastic work by Bellingcat: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2017/09/04/geolocating-libyas-social-media-executioner/>
- Quick and easy example to practice (ICRC cash video): <https://www.verify-sy.com/det/858/en> analyze the short video, look for another one, get some context and try to figure out what the paper says.



- First steps when working:
 - **AllDataViewer** (Developed by Amnesty): It is something but it depends on YouTube video, you only get four frames and the reverse image drives you to Google.
 - **Framebyframe**: allows you to work with every frame. Good to check doctored videos or looking for meaningful details.
 - **Deturl.com**: download and rotate.

- The king is **INVID**: download the pluggin and enjoy. From obtaining dozens of frames and metadata to check info with factcheckers, Error Level Analysis, amplifier...



MAPS

- Mapping and geolocation: last link to complete the verification (sometimes the first): **Google Maps/Earth Pro, Wikimapia, LiveUMap, Digital Globe, Planet, Geonames...** And the splendid **Map Switcher** browser extension.

- What to do, some advices:

- Draw what you see (photo, video) in a paper and compare to the map.
- Think on how a satellite would see what you are looking for.
- Get used to walking the geography with your eyes. You are probably too far to see something.
- Do you know what is the longitude or latitude of the coordinates? If not, check them out.
- When having the coordinates of your motive, use Map Switcher and see what different maps offer you.

- Try to have a good relation with the best satellite companies: **Maxar-Digital Globe** and **Planet Labs**. You may get good imagery to illustrate or lead your investigation.

- Watch these project:



- How to find a new drone base in Africa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14-JDZnhl0U>



- Example: Project 38 North: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/19/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test-volleyball.html>

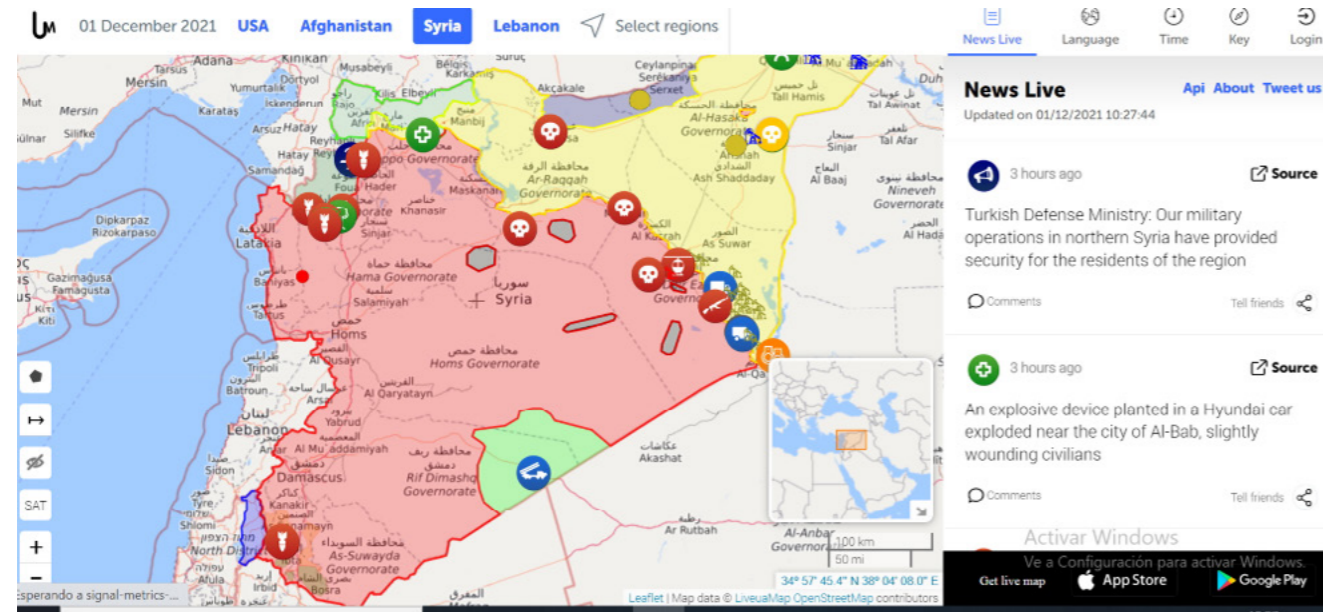


- Syrian mercenaries: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-10-11/mercenarios-de-guerra-por-1000-euros-al-mes.html>



- Drones/Ethiopia: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2021/08/17/is-ethiopia-flying-iranian-made-armed-drones/>

Other tools for tracking: Marine Traffic, Vessel Finder, Flight Radar...



And finally...

Two general and fantastic guides of tools consistently updated. One from **Bellingcat**, the best project of journalists using #OSINT techniques; and second, the manual of **First Draft** also a very interesting project working on disinformation and methodologies to do fact-checking. Try the tutorials and trainings of both of them.



Guide 1 (bellingcat): <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BfLPJpRtyq4RFtHJoNpvWQjmGnyVkfE2HYoICKOGguA/edit>



Guide 2 (first draft): <https://firstdraftnews.com/course/verification-curriculum/1/lesson-1-assessment/>





08.

How do African audiences engage with disinformation and what do they know about fact-checking?

By Dani Madrid-Morales



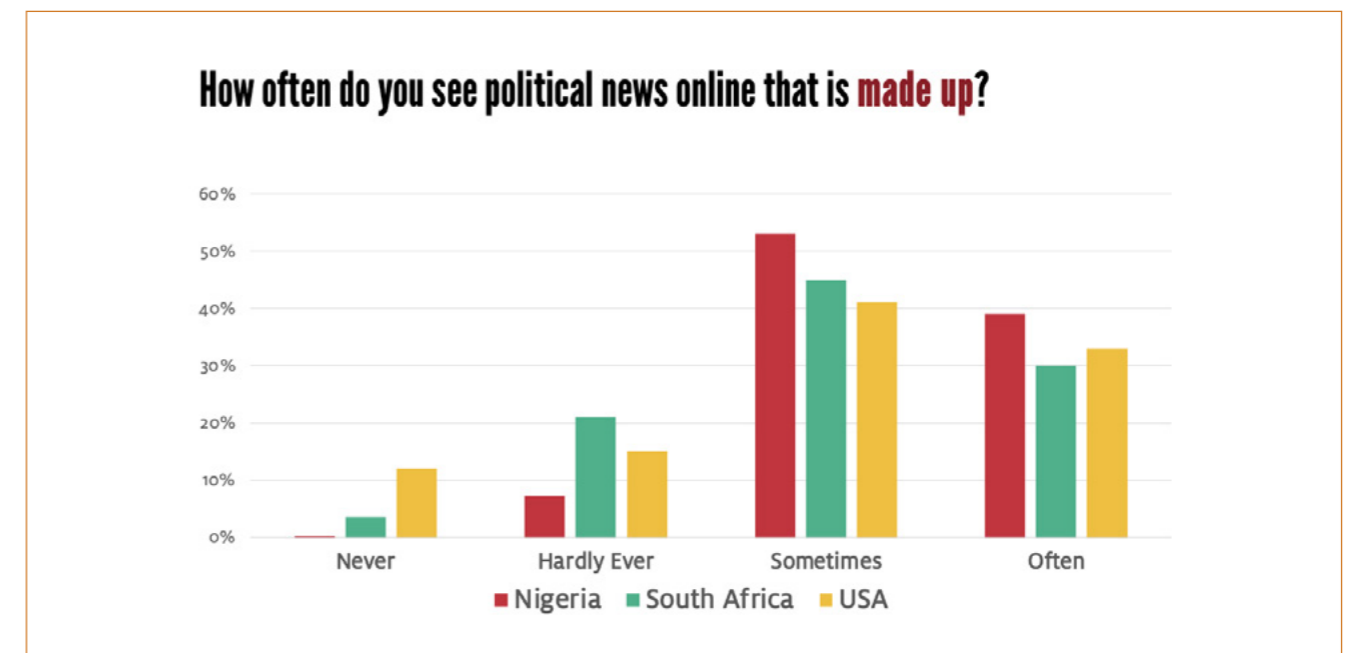
DANIEL MADRID-MORALES is a Lecturer at the Department of Journalism Studies at The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom. Prior to this, he was an Assistant Professor in Journalism at the Valenti School of Communication, University of Houston, and a Hong Kong PhD Fellow, at City University of Hong Kong. Dr. Madrid-Morales specializes in the study of global political communication, with a focus on the impact of new digital technologies in the production of State-sponsored news, global public opinion, and misinformation in the Global South. He has published extensively on Africa-China mediated relations, particularly on the reception of Chinese media content in Kenya and South Africa. His latest book, co-edited with Herman Wasserman from the University of Cape Town, is called *Disinformation in the Global South* (Wiley). Dr Madrid-Morales' holds a PhD in Media and Communication and MA degrees in International Relations from Free University of Berlin, and in East Asian Studies from Autonomous University of Barcelona. Before pursuing an academic career, he worked as a broadcast journalist covering world affairs in Spain for more than ten years.

The goal of this guide is to provide the reader with an overview of the way audiences in Kenya, and in other African countries, deal with disinformation, particularly on social media. The data presented in this summary come predominantly from surveys conducted between 2019 and 2021. Whenever a publicly available version of these surveys is available, a link is provided as a footnote.

African's views on disinformation

In most African countries, citizens believe that disinformation is significantly prevalent and problematic. Take South Africa as an example. There, close to 60% of people believe that disinformation is a serious problem, and 20% say it is a problem. That is, 8 out of 10 South Africans are perceiving disinformation as a problem. One possible explanation as to why this is the case, could be that a very large number of South Africans – and Africans in general – have the impression that they are exposed to disinformation regularly, even if their impression is just that, an impression. Because media trust levels are low, many citizens may perceive that a lot of the information they see is false, even if it is not.

Still using South Africa as an example, around 30% of respondents to a survey conducted in 2019 said that they often see political news online that is made up (see the chart below).¹ The number is even higher in Nigeria. In Kenya, the number of people who feel they often see false political news online is over 40%. In most African countries, social media users are seen as the number one source of false information, and WhatsApp as the platform where it spreads the most. This is not the case in other parts of the world, thus highlighting the importance of understanding domestic **contexts** when trying to find solutions to disinformation.

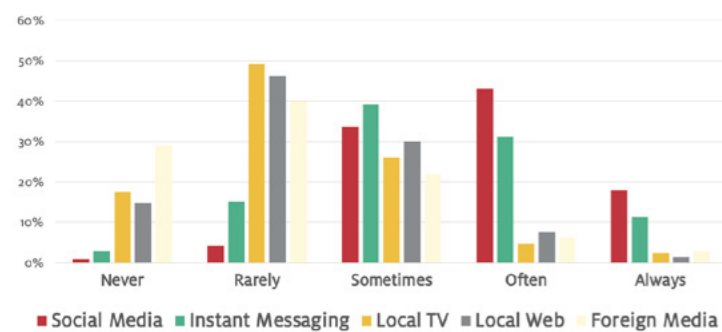


¹ This study on misinformation in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa was conducted in 2019.

Kenyans' views on disinformation and fact-checking

Kenyans are no exception to the description provided above. Around 80% of Kenyans surveyed in 2021, said that disinformation was either a somewhat serious or very serious problem. Disinformation was seen as a bigger problem than climate change or even COVID-19. In that same survey, we found that social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook, and instant messaging apps, such as WhatsApp and Viber, are the sites where Kenyans feel they are most likely to come across false news about politics.

How often do you come across false news about politics on ... ?



There are several important consequences of these high levels of perceived exposure to disinformation. One of them is that they may lead people to distrust important social and political institutions. Trust is a crucial component of any democracy; without **trust** in institutions, it is difficult for citizens to feel the government, the judiciary and the media are telling the truth. COVID-19 has made gaps in trust very apparent. For example, while doctors and international organizations like WHO and UN enjoy high levels of trust in Kenya, the government ranks much lower.²

² These data is based on data collected for an experiment on how to correct health misinformation in Kenya and Senegal conducted in 2021 with 300+ participants and funded by the [Waterhouse Family Institute](#) for the Study of Communication and Society. The results are still unpublished.

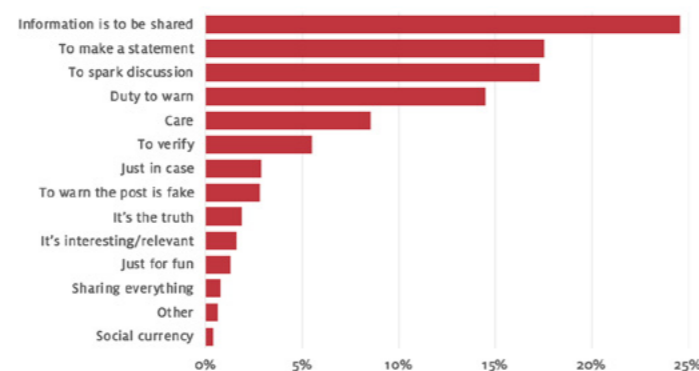
African audiences' engagement with disinformation

When social media users are exposed to disinformation, they are faced with the question: Should I engage with this piece of information? Engagement can mean sharing, correcting, reporting, verifying or, simply, ignoring false information. Not all people react in the same way to disinformation that they find online. When we asked people in South Africa and Kenya whether they would share certain examples of COVID-19 related conspiracy theories on social media, we found that a large number said they would likely share them, particularly with friends and family members.

Why would users share what might seem obviously inaccurate information online? Research has found that some reasons are more prevalent than others, as can be seen in the figure below. More often than not, people share conspiracy theories and other forms of disinformation online because they believe it needs to be shared, regardless of their veracity. In other cases, people want to spark a discussion online – even at the risk of spreading inaccurate information.³

Around 29% acknowledged in 2019 that they had knowingly shared a political news story online that was made up. Some were motivated

You said you would share any of these posts, can you tell us why?



³ For a more detailed review of these findings, the reader can refer to this report on a survey on China-related COVID-19 hoaxes conducted in 2020 in Kenya, South Africa and the US with 2,700 participants.

by social factors, such as desire to advance a certain political view, or because they wanted to feel connected with their friends and family. For others, the main driver to sharing disinformation online is their low levels of media and misinformation literacy.⁴ That is, they lack the skills to be able to identify content online that is not accurate. Increasingly, fact-checking organizations are incorporating media literacy programs and activities in their routines.

Evidence-based strategies to address disinformation

Faced with increasing levels of perceived exposure to disinformation, declining levels of trust, and with such diversity of user experiences related to disinformation, developing interventions that can help improve the quality of information is crucial. Media users are increasingly expecting that media organizations play an active role in addressing these problems.

However, there are **no fit-all solutions** to combatting disinformation – interventions are going to depend on platform, medium, target-audience. That is why knowing one's audience is crucial to designing strategies and products that are going to be effective in achieving the goals one is trying to achieve. While all activities that help tackle disinformation are good and important, those that are going to be most effective are those that are based on evidence.

⁴ For a longer list and discussion on what drives people to engage with disinformation, the reader could refer to a summary of the results of a series of focus groups in 2019 and 2020 in six African countries, including Kenya, involving over 200 participants.



To read more about the topics in this chapter, scan the QR code below





09.

Collaborating with foreign media, how to sell your work

By Carla Fibla



CARLA FIBLA is a Spanish journalist and writer, specialized on the Arab world and Africa. She has lived and travelled in the Arab world for more than 15 years and has been a correspondent for Cadena SER and La Vanguardia, among other media outlets. She studied journalism in Madrid. At the age of 22, she settled in Cairo where she started working as a freelance journalist for various print and radio media. After obtaining a Degree in International Information and Southern Countries from the Complutense University of Madrid, she worked for two years at Diario 16 in Madrid. In September 2001, she set up a regional correspondent's office in the Maghreb, based in Rabat (Morocco), from where she covered current affairs in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania for Cadena SER and La Vanguardia. In mid-2008, she moved to Amman (Jordan) to open a new regional correspondent's office. She is currently editor of the magazine *Mundo Negro*, reporting for the last six months from South Africa. In 2020, she was awarded with The Saliou Traoré Journalism Award for Information on Africa in Spanish.

"Afro-pessimism is too prevalent in Europe, not just in the circles of power, but in public opinion, too. Africa continues to be regarded as a 'problem'. In counterpoint to this perception is the moralizing, charitable approach that ultimately provides a blinkered view of the relationship with Africa".

Louis Michel, former EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid

African news in the European media

African current affairs are as complex and rich as those of any other continent. The functioning of African local and national media is in some respects similar to that of European media, although there are some particularities, due to political systems and socio-economic development, that need to be understood.

Like news from any other part of the world, news from Africa are subject to a hierarchy, with geographical proximity and the effect on the lives of the people living in the country where the news are broadcast being prioritised in the publication of an issue.

In recent years, the lack of specialisation in journalistic practice with respect to international reporting has led to the African continent being analysed as homogenous. Although it is a mistake to believe that one can generalise when reporting on a continent with more than 50 countries, this is common practice in radio, television, newspapers and news agencies. Sometimes the continent is divided into regions (Sahel, Southern Africa, West Africa...), in a new attempt to unify the view on very different countries.

Among the general aspects to be taken into account when reporting on Africa:

- Journalism versus reality. Good and bad practice.
- Consequences of editorial and economic crisis in European and American media since 2008.
- Media policies and discourses all sit within the broader Europe-Africa relations.
- Compassion fatigue.
- Negative and racist attitude in terms of how the West interprets and perceives Africa.
- Could we hope for more balance in European reporting on Africa?
- A story that would include words like "recovery", "improvement" and "progress".

Nowdays European International Desk

In order to be aware of the situation in which the International section of the European media evaluates Africa news for subsequent publication, the following factors must be taken into account:

- 1. Closing of correspondent offices/desk.** Over the last decade, many newsrooms have opted to cut costs by closing correspondents' offices and opting for special envoys at specific moments in the news or by using the work of freelance journalists who are paid on a piece-by-piece basis and with whom there is no stable employment relationship.
- 2. Cuts in travel for special envoys.** There have also been cuts in the number of coverage and travel, with more events being covered with information provided by agencies, through social networks and from newsrooms.
- 3. Access to local information.** The Internet has allowed access to local media, online interviews and contact with experts and analysts.
- 4. The editor in-chief.** It is a figure similar to the one in African media newsrooms, who decides the content of the section. In large media, there are editors who divide up the continents and regions of the world to make the first sift when the contributions arrive.
- 5. Between breaking news and analysis.** Is there a space? In the information battle between current affairs or what is happening live, and analysis and reflection, the former has undoubtedly won out. The priority for what is happening at that moment has also been set by social networks and the clicks that position each media outlet.
- 6. Fight against stereotypes.** There is a concern to avoid stereotyping both in language and in the approach to issues related to African countries, although the result is not always positive.

Ins and outs of foreign media not to forget

- Same profession. Different continents. Not that different.
- Main trick: Knowledge and have enough information about the media you are selling your contribution to.
- There is no one Africa and either not one Europe. Fortunately.
- The negative and the positive. What is news?
- Understand our common history, historical claims, from different points of view.
- The perspective of news. A story needs to be told from all possible points of view.
- Old stereotypes of Africa prevail as a problem.
- What are the human stories?
- Impact of social media and citizen journalism.

Western media at a glance

- MEDIA: Contributions as freelancer with radios and TVs are more complicated by the language. But the press (newspapers on and offline; magazines specialized or not) it's a field full of opportunities.
- English: BBC (Focus on Africa), France 24, Afrinews (euronews), German Deutsche Welle (Africa on the move).
- TOPICS: blood, deadly blast/terrorism, victims, state of emergency and catastrophic levels of things, illness, politicians traveling to the continent, corruption, African people always in need... dependent of the white and the industrial society EUROPE (see QR references)
- English: The Guardian, The Independent.
- French: Le Monde, Liberation.
- Spanish: El País, La Vanguardia, El Mundo.
- Italian: La Repubblica, Corriere de la Sera.
- Portuguese: Público, Diário de Notícias.

Role and benefits of local journalists towards Western media

- To be where the news happens.
- Access to contacts.
- Comprehension of local, national and regional reality.
- Ability to be interested in issues occurring in other countries.
- Why not talk/write about... suggesting your own topics with local approaches.
- Role that Western companies play in scandals.
- Challenges present in the continent: security, fight against corruption, fiscal discipline, poverty, natural disasters.
- Local action, experience... to address the problem.
- From "hotbed of terror" to "hotbed of creativity or innovation".

What does local news bring?

- Provide the context of the news.
- Local information sources. The reality.
- The value of testimonies.
- Work on objectivity.
- The advantage of being from and knowing the country.

Sources of information that you can cite and use in your journalistic work

- Train and develop the observation capacity or skills.
- Space of opinion makers and sources that must be interpreted to obtain verified and updated information.
- Debates, talk shows, cartoons... alternative sources of information.
- From the local to the national, to finish in the regional.

Case study: Kenya in foreign media (January-December 2021)

Media:



- BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c40rjmqdlzst/kenya>



- Africanews: <https://www.africanews.com/country/kenya/>



- France24: <https://www.france24.com/en/tag/kenya/>



- DW: <https://www.dw.com/en/kenya/t-19038344>



- RFI: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/tag/kenya/>



- Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/where/kenya/>



- El País: <https://elpais.com/noticias/kenia/>

MUNDO NEGRO magazine (www.mundonegro.es)

I work in the only monthly magazine (print run: 40,000 copies) specialised in information on Africa published in Spain. It is a publication open to external collaborations in which proposals from African professionals are especially valued. The magazine accepts texts in English, French, Portuguese, Italian and Arabic thanks to the network of Comboni missionaries who have been living on the continent for decades, in direct contact with the population.

These are the news items that have been published in recent years on the magazine's website:

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)

MUNDO NEGRO



[Kenia, el negocio de la salud](#)



[Kenia: un ejercicio de censura sutil](#)



[Kenia vuelve a las urnas en 60 días](#)



[La foto más inesperada en Kenia](#)

Omicron on the news

As an example of Western and African media coverage of the emergence of the COVID Omicron variant in November 2021, a different approach is observed.

From Western media perspective: panic, ban traveling, close borders...

Examples:

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/11/27/germany-reported-first-suspected-case-ofomicron-covid-19-variant>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/a-look-at-omicron-variant-s-spreadin-south-africa-127462469816>

From African media perspective: scientific research, increase of cases, analysis of symptoms.

Examples:

<https://www.enca.com/news/sapunisheddetecting-omicron-covid-variant-dirco>

<https://gambakwe.com/2021/12/01/watchtrevor-noah-slams-western-leaders-forbanning-flights-from-african-countries/>



European media to check

• In English



The Guardian:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/africa>



The Independent:
<https://www.independent.co.uk/>

• In French



Le Monde:
<https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/>



Liberation:
<https://www.liberation.fr/international/afrique/>

• In Italian



La Repubblica:
<https://www.repubblica.it/argomenti/Africa>



Corriere de la Sera:
<https://www.corriere.it/argomenti/afrika/>

• In Spanish



El País:
<https://elpais.com/noticias/afrika/>



La Vanguardia:
<https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional>



El Mundo:
<https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/afrika.html>

• In Portuguese



Público:
<https://www.publico.pt/pesquisa?query=afrika>



Diário de Notícias:
<https://www.dn.pt/tag/Internacional.html>



To watch and think

Celebrities and Aid



VIDEO: Dambisa Moyo: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-9b_GulbYE&t=94

Satirical essay

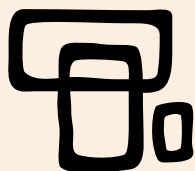


«How to Write About Africa», written by Binyavanga Wainaina and performed by Djimon Hounsou.

VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-jSQD5FVxE>



Spanish and Kenyan journalists at the end of the 'III Africa Spain journalist meeting: Advanced course on verification and new narratives on fact checking', held in Nairobi, December 1st and 2nd, 2022.



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