

The Evolution and the Landscape of Fact-Checking in Eastern Africa

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Abstract

Fact-checking is vital for combating online misinformation in East Africa, where emerging fact-checking platforms, such as those that have appeared since 2000, face significant challenges. The purpose of this Article is to systematically review the literature published between 2000 and 2023 to understand the problem of fact-checking development in the region. The findings reveal that while these platforms have successfully debunked false claims, their effectiveness is limited by issues such as scarcity of funding and trained personnel, low public trust in media, and restrictive media environments. To overcome these obstacles, the Article argues for a multi-pronged solution, including government action to create an enabling environment, targeted investments in training and capacity building, and collaborative efforts via NGOs and social media campaigns to enhance public trust and accountability.

Keywords: Accountability, Media Literacy, Fact-Checking, East Africa, Misinformation

Background of Eastern Africa and Fact-Checking

Colonial influence in East Africa, shaped by European powers, has had a profound impact on the present political landscape. Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda achieved independence in the 1960s, marking the end of post-colonial rule. The Cold War brought about authoritarian rule and single-party governments, with the United States and the Soviet Union providing assistance. Despite multiparty elections, most East African countries continue to experience corruption, electoral irregularities, and civil upheaval (Enns and Bersaglio, 2020; Kjekshus, 2022; Kimari and Ernstson, 2020). Political conflicts in East Africa arise from power struggles and inter-ethnic rivalries, which give rise to substantial human casualties and forcible migration.

Fact-checking has become a crucial tool for navigating the information landscape globally, particularly in Africa over the past decade. The rise of social media has opened doors for instant communication but also created fertile ground for misinformation and disinformation campaigns. These campaigns can have serious consequences, from swaying elections to fueling ethnic violence.

Africa, with growing internet penetration and a reliance on social media for news, is particularly vulnerable. Fact-checking initiatives like Africa Check (*Africa Check, n.d.*) have emerged to combat this. By debunking false claims around health, politics, and social issues, these organizations promote informed decision-making and hold powerful figures accountable. Studies have shown fact-checking can not only improve public knowledge but also encourage politicians to be more truthful in their pronouncements.

In recent years, fact-checking has become increasingly significant in East Africa due to the surge in fake news on social media, particularly concerning politics and health. Misinformation on these platforms has led to widespread misunderstanding and mistrust across many East African nations. Fact-checking and media literacy are crucial, especially as political leaders often leverage media sources to advance their objectives. Governments can control the narrative by licensing media outlets and maintaining state-owned media, which can disseminate propaganda and shape public opinion on critical issues. A 2020 report by African Journalism Studies underscores the vulnerability of the East African media landscape to political manipulation, highlighting how governments in the region impose content restrictions and wield their authority to silence critical voices (Sampaio-Dias et al., 2020; African Media Landscape Regional Study Report: The Case of East Africa – ACRP, n.d.).

Despite some progress in media literacy, a significant portion of the East African population still lacks the critical thinking skills necessary to discern misinformation, making them susceptible to manipulation. Addressing these issues requires tackling corruption, enhancing regulation and training within journalism, and ensuring the safety and security of journalists who face threats from state actions. Furthermore, improving journalism education and fostering a culture of critical inquiry are essential steps to fortify the media landscape in East Africa against the pervasive spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Fact-checking's usefulness has been studied, but the findings are conflicting: some studies show that fact-checking lessens misunderstandings (Porter & Wood, 2021; Nieminen & Rapeli 2019; Carnahan & Bergan, 2022; Nyhan & Reifler, 2012), while others find that corrections are frequently ineffective (Oeldorf-Hirsch et al 2020; Nyhan & Reifler, 2012). According to Nyhan & Reifler (2012) investigation shows that the AI fact-checker is detrimental in certain situations: it raises beliefs in false headlines that it is uncertain about

while decreasing beliefs in accurate headlines that it incorrectly identifies as false. The consistency and dependability of fact-checkers' conclusions and techniques are also up for debate (Mena, 2019; Nieminen & Rapeli 2019; Lelo, 2023).

Since traditional media channels have historically been the region's primary source of news and information, fact-checking is a relatively recent phenomenon in East Africa. According to a study about Misinformation and Disinformation in East Africa, the region has been highly impacted by a variety of false information, including propaganda, rumors, and hoaxes. Due to the diversity of East Africa's cultures, languages, and socioeconomic conditions, fact-checking is necessary to thwart false information, propaganda, and fake news. A survey by the Africa Check initiative also pointed out that false information is common in East Africa, especially on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter (Studies, 2021). To solve the issue, this report suggests spending more money on efforts on fact-checking.

In 2020, a group of journalists in Tanzania started the "Jamii Forums Fact-Check" website. This portal attempts to check material spreading on online social media and provide the general public the correct information. In order to establish fact-checking programs in the region, the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) has given grants to various fact-checking organizations in East Africa like 211Check in South Sudan, PesaCheck in Kenya and Africa Check in South Africa.

Country Case Studies

The analysis of the findings from the following eight countries drawn from Eastern Africa was informed by the fact that there was adequate information about them. The information was collected through a systematic review of existing literature from all the countries between the years 2000 to 2023.

Case Study: Fact-checking in Kenya

Initiatives like Pesa Check, based in Kenya, are crucial as they employ strategies specifically adapted to the local context. Founded in 2016 by Catherine Gicheru and Justin Arenstein, Pesa Check was initially incubated by Code for Kenya as an innovate AFRICA winner. The organization tracks political statements made by politicians, decodes budget and census data, and assists media organizations and NGOs in establishing their own fact-checking teams (Endert, 2020).

Pesa Check has garnered academic attention due to its significant contributions to the field. Chege (2019) analyzes Pesa Check's methodology, approach to claim selection, and its impact on the Kenyan media scene. The study identifies several research gaps, including the need for empirical data on the effectiveness of fact-checking in Kenya, a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by fact-checking organizations in the region, and strategies to foster collaboration between these organizations and media outlets. Chege highlights Pesa Check's diverse techniques, such as utilizing both online and physical methods to reach a wider audience, forming relationships with media sources, and engaging the public through social media platforms.

The impact of fact-checking during the 2017 Kenyan general election was also evaluated in the academic literature (Oluoch & Gachago, 2019). This analysis revealed how fact-checking organizations helped expose incorrect information, the challenges they encountered, and the effects of their efforts on the political process. The scholars provided several recommendations for policymakers, media professionals, and election observers, including increasing awareness and training, building local fact-checking capacity,

leveraging technology to enhance fact-checking speed and accuracy, and promoting fact-checking as a public good to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness.

Another study examines the influence of social media on public opinion, claim selection, and fact-checking techniques in Kenya (Mutua & Ondeng, 2019). It provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of social media for fact-checking, particularly in addressing misinformation and promoting media literacy (Khan & Idris, 2019). The findings urge both governmental and non-governmental entities to develop and implement robust fact-checking programs. However, concerns about the collaboration between governmental and non-governmental entities are growing (Meseret, 2024). Government-led fact-checking programs are often perceived as untrustworthy due to a lack of transparency and objectivity. For instance, Brazil's Brasil Contra Fake and Indonesia's KOMINFO have faced criticisms for their lack of transparency and inconsistent results, respectively. Similarly, India's Karnataka Information Disorder Tracking Unit has sparked controversy regarding its editorial independence. Fact-checkers argue that impartiality, objectivity, and openness are critical for the credibility of fact-checking efforts, emphasizing the need for independent organizations to ensure the reliability of publicly available information.

Using Pesa Check as a case study, Muriuki and Korir (2020) delve into the role of fact-checking in Kenya's battle against misinformation. They explore the organization's fact-checking methods, their impact on public perception, and the challenges they face. The study finds that Pesa Check significantly enhances the accuracy of news reporting in Kenya, despite encountering obstacles such as financial constraints and the proliferation of misinformation. The authors advocate for both governmental and non-governmental entities to support fact-checking initiatives and emphasize the use of social media platforms to broaden outreach. Additionally, they propose implementing media literacy projects to educate the public on identifying and dismissing misleading information. Ultimately, the paper underscores the necessity of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to effectively combat misinformation in Kenya.

Kenya has also been studied in relation to Nigeria and South Africa, two other prominent countries in Africa's fact-checking ecosystem (Chindamo & Masiero, 2020). This comparative study analyzes the background, challenges, and achievements of fact-checking across these nations and evaluates the impact on media and democracy. Interviews with representatives from various fact-checking groups and analyses of their websites and social media pages reveal common obstacles, such as funding shortages, lack of legal protection, and the spread of false information on social media. Despite these challenges, the study suggests that fact-checking organizations should collaborate with news organizations to expand their reach and influence. For instance, Kenya's government has created a task force to reduce the dissemination of disinformation and hate speech, comprising members from the government, civil society organizations, and media.

South Sudan

In 2011, the young nation of South Sudan declared its independence from Sudan. The country is therefore still developing its institutions and infrastructure, including its media sector. Fact-checking in South Sudan is a relatively new practice that has gained importance recently. Despite this, initiatives to create fact-checking systems to support accountability and openness have been made. In South Sudan, where there is little access to trustworthy information, fact-checking has grown in significance recently (ISPR, 2023). The current fact-checking organizations in South Sudan are 211Check and SafetyComm. The IFCN granted an

award to boost 211 Check's efficacy in South Sudan by adding staff, investing in online services, and improving social media technologies. It was also intended to create a "fact-checking for pay" initiative to train volunteers and journalists.

The South Sudan Media Authority (SSMA), which is in charge of overseeing and regulating the media sector, is one such initiative that was launched in 2015. A code of conduct for journalists has been prepared by the SSMA, and it contains recommendations for reporting impartiality and accuracy. Media outlets that disregard these rules could face sanctions from the authorities (211check, 2018).

In 2019, the Eye Radio launched a Fact Checking Unit that seeks to corroborate statements made by politicians and public figures. On the station's website and social media, the unit posts its findings. The unit published a series of fact-checks covering COVID-19 related claims in 2020, which helped to eliminate myths and incorrect information about the virus (Eye Radio, n.d.). Internews released a story that credited Eye Radio Fact-Check with helping to raise public awareness of the value of correct information and reducing the dissemination of false information concerning COVID-19 (Internews, 2021).

Despite these efforts, fact-checking remains a challenge in South Sudan due to a lack of resources and capacity (ISPR, 2023). The country has limited internet penetration, and many journalists lack the necessary skills and training to verify information. Moreover, South Sudan has experienced political instability and conflict, which can create challenges for journalists seeking to report accurately and impartially. Research from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) claims that journalists in South Sudan encounter severe barriers to information access, such as a lack of institutional capacity, a lack of government transparency, and restricted media freedom. Furthermore, many news outlets in the nation lack the funding necessary to carry out exhaustive fact-checking, and there is frequent pressure to break stories rapidly, even if the information is not entirely validated (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

The report proposed several strategies to tackle the challenges of disinformation and misinformation in South Sudan. These strategies included fostering collaboration among various stakeholders, enhancing capacity building for civil servants in media literacy, empowering citizens with critical thinking skills, investing in digital platforms for information accessibility, strengthening fact-checking mechanisms, supporting media education, conducting awareness campaigns, and improving government communication. These initiatives aimed to address the underlying issues of false information dissemination and cultivate a more informed and resilient society in South Sudan.

Djibouti

While fact-checking in Djibouti is still in its infancy, media outlets are making an attempt to combat false information. Nyabuti et al. (2021) discovered that while the number of fact-checking organizations in the region has grown recently; however, there is state control of the media, shortage of long-term funding and skilled fact-checkers. Djibouti's government, uses harsh tactics such as judicial harassment, illegal searches, arrests, and physical violence to control the media (Djibouti, 2020). Journalists who attempt to undertake independent reporting are constantly monitored, threatened, attacked, and occasionally jailed. Two journalists reporting for the Paris-based exile media LVD were held in late 2022 and early 2023, confirming a recent trend of journalists being unjustly jailed, typically to prevent them from continuing to report

(Djibouti, 2020). Re-entry of citizens into the territory is also now more harshly governed.¹ It was also unraveled that the main social media channels used in Djibouti according to most used are; X, YouTube, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Pinterest (Social Media Stats Djibouti | Statcounter Global Stats, n.d.).

Although Djibouti is not known to be home to any fact-checking groups (Stencel, 2023; 2023 World Press Freedom Index – Journalism Threatened by Fake Content Industry, n.d.), some media outlets have started their own fact-checking units. For instance, the news website Djibouti24 features a fact-checking section where they examine statements made by public figures and politicians (Djibouti24, n.d.). Furthermore, Radio Television Djibouti (RTD) has verified allegations made by lawmakers and the administration (RTD, 2020). The aforementioned are the only fact-checking media outlets as Djibouti is also under authoritarian leadership since 1999. In Djibouti, there are difficulties with fact-checking, including restricted access to information and a lack of resources. Djibouti was placed 170th out of 180 nations for press freedom in a survey by the Media Foundation for West Africa (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021).

Eritrea

Eritrea's lack of journalistic freedom and technological infrastructure severely restrict fact-checking with a press freedom index 174/180 in 2023 (Eritrea, 2023). There are no known fact-checking websites for Eritrea. Fact-checking services struggle to function in the nation since it has one of the most restrictive media environments in the whole globe (Eritrea, 2023).

Eritrea, as of 2021, has the lowest score (179/180) on Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index for the eleventh consecutive year. It is challenging for journalists and fact-checkers to work independently since the government carefully controls access to information and tightly regulates all media outlets. According to a report by Freedom House (Eritrea, n.d), "Eritrea's state-controlled media, coupled with the absence of independent journalism, create an environment in which false information is frequently disseminated and there are no formal fact-checking mechanisms." A journalist who reports independently runs the risk of being imprisoned, subjected to torture, or possibly killed (CPJ, 2021). Journalists find it challenging to verify information since they are unable to contact sources or cover sensitive topics as a result of this restriction on their freedom of expression.

Lack of technology infrastructure to facilitate fact-checking is another issue. With only 1.1% of the population having an internet connection in 2021 (Internet World Stats), Eritrea has one of the lowest internet penetration rates globally. It is challenging for journalists to fact-check information in real time due to their limited access to technology. In Eritrea, disinformation is frequently employed to further official propaganda, according to article by DFRLab, and there is little to no fact-checking or responsibility for inaccurate material (DFRLab, 2021).

Despite these difficulties, several media outlets and journalists are attempting to fact-check reports on Eritrea. For instance, Radio Erena, a radio station established in Paris and maintained by Eritrean exiles, offers news and fact-checking services to Eritreans both at home and abroad (CPJ, 2021). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), located at Uppsala University in Sweden, has also been monitoring and fact-checking material about conflict and violence in Eritrea (UCDP, 2021).

¹ Vertin, Z. (2020). Great Power rivalry in the Red Sea: China's experiment in Djibouti and implications for the United States. *Brookings Institution*, 1-30.

Ethiopia

Fact-checking has emerged as a vital tool for fostering transparency and accountability in Ethiopia, where the media landscape is evolving quickly (Endert, 2021). The field of fact-checking is relatively new in Ethiopia. The country did not see the emergence of fact-checking organizations until the late 2010s. The audit by the European Institute of Peace in 2021 revealed significant flaws within Ethiopia's media ecosystem, leaving it susceptible to fake news, misinformation, and hate speech. Among the contributing factors are undoubtedly historical aspects, such as the weak standing of private media in Ethiopia and the influential role of the Ethiopian diaspora in media ownership. Additionally, the proliferation and rapid surge in popularity of entertainment-news platforms like Facebook and Twitter have played a significant role (European Institute of Peace, 2021).

Addis Zeybe, introduced in 2018, was the first organization to work on verification of claims. Under Addis Zeybe, HaqCheck was formed in 2021 and based in Ethiopia (Home - HaqCheck, 2023). Ethiopia check is also another fact-checking organization based in Kenya established in June, 2020 and later became part of Internews' Ethiopia projects in August 2020 (n.d). To encourage the spread of factual information, fact-checking organizations and media outlets in Ethiopia are working together like the fact that Addis Zeybe has also been supporting HaqCheck which in turn has been collaborating with Africa Check. Fact-checking political assertions is the focus of the media organization Addis Zeybe, while fact-checking news stories is the focus of the Ethiopian Reporter. The Deutsche Welle Akademie and the EthioCheck ave collaborated to train fact-checkers.

Despite the fact that fact-checking is becoming more popular in Ethiopia, it still confronts many difficulties commonly found in other parts of the world. One of the major problems is hard to gain information access (Endert, 2021). Fact-checkers have a hard time confirming statements since the Ethiopian government has a history of limiting access to information (Endert, 2021). Lack of financing for organizations that conduct fact-checking is another issue. Currently there are many opportunities for grants for fact-checking organizations.

Again, the conflict in the Tigray region both exposed the difficulty of accessing accurate information. As Jima notes, there was no consensus even on the cause of the conflict itself.² Numerous testimonies on major abuses and killings of civilians and clerics by the occupying forces, as well as looting of key infrastructure, leading to a major humanitarian crisis could not be independently verified owing to continued fighting and access restrictions (See Pellet).³

In Ethiopia, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are widely used, yet they can also spread false information which has been a cause for concern by the government and other stakeholders (European Institute of Peace, 2021). Fact-checkers are using social media more and more to confirm the veracity of the news and information being shared on these sites. But as Wilmot et al note, even during the Tigray

² Jima, A. O. (2023). Ethiopian political crisis after reform: Causes of Tigray conflict. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), 2209991.

³ Pellet, P. (2021). Understanding the 2020-2021 Tigray conflict in Ethiopia—background, root causes, and consequences. *KKI ELEMZÉSEK*, 2021(39), 1-20.

conflict, competing narratives raged on social media regarding the war with two key online communities emerging to advance diametrically opposed, outwardly-looking campaigns.⁴

There are reasons to be positive about the future of fact-checking in Ethiopia, despite the difficulties it currently faces. The increasing relevance of fact-checking in Ethiopia and the collaborative efforts between the different initiatives is one of the key reasons for the positive outlook of the fact-checking landscape. Ethiopians are becoming more aware of the risks associated with false information thanks to the growth of social media (European Institute of Peace, 2021). The expanding number of fact-checking organizations in the nation is another cause for confidence.

Somalia

Due to decades of political turbulence, civil unrest, and terrorist assaults, Somalia, a nation in the Horn of Africa, has experienced a rise in mis- and disinformation (Khalif, H. 2023). The Federation of Somali Journalists has launched a campaign to combat the spread of misinformation, fake news, hate speech, and propaganda. The federation notes a significant uptick in social media misinformation efforts in Somalia, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming elections slated for the end of July 2021 (K. Mohamed. 2021). In Somalia, social media has taken over as the primary method of information dissemination. Unfortunately, this platform is also used to disseminate false or misleading information, which can exacerbate national tensions and wars (Gilroy, 2023); Khalif, H. (2023). Therefore, activities for fact-checking are crucial in battling false information and advancing the truth.

In Somalia, fact-checking is difficult for many reasons. However, there are obstacles and restrictions to the media's role in conflict resolution and management in Somalia. Access, bias, and security concerns can all have an impact on its effectiveness (Khalif, H. 2023). Lastly, violent extremist organizations that want to silence dissenting voices and spread their propaganda frequently pose a threat to fact-checking projects (National Endowment for Democracy, 2019; (A Matter of Life and Death: The Dangers of Being a Journalist in Somalia Today, n.d.).

Kenya's war against Al-Shabaab in Somalia also exposes an interesting fact checking conundrum. The Kenyan citizens right to information of their government's activities in that country.⁵ For instance as Molony notes, "drawing on Twitter posts, an official account of Kenya's military activities in Somalia, and – unusually for the study of social media – on 'offline' methods of qualitative data collection..." why the KDF did not provide real-time updates about the El Adde attack, but did provide information about the assault on Kulbiyow?"

Despite the difficulties, a number of activities are being carried out to encourage fact-checking in Somalia. The Somalia Media Development Program (SMDP), which assists media outlets and journalists in fostering factual reporting and fact-checking, is one of these programs. In the nation, the SMDP has instructed approximately 1,500 journalists and media workers on a range of media-related subjects, including fact-checking. Code Africa is also extending calls to train fact-checkers in Somalia (Ofa, 2024). The Puntland Fact-Checking Center is a different project that started in 2018 to ensure the accuracy of the information

⁴ Wilmot, C., Tveteraas, E., & Drew, A. (2021). Dueling information campaigns: The war over the narrative in Tigray. *The Media Manipulation Casebook*, 20.

⁵ Molony, T. (2019). Social media warfare and Kenya's conflict with Al Shabaab in Somalia: A right to know?. *African Affairs*, 118(471), 328-351.

and encourage transparency in the area (Somalia Media Association, 2019). There are a few fact-checking websites in Somalia, including Radio Ergo and the Hiraal Institute. While the Hiraal Institute focuses on fact-checking political assertions, Radio Ergo is a radio station that concentrates on fact-checking news reporting (Radio Ergo - a Critical Information Provider in Somalia | IMS, 2024). Notwithstanding these endeavors, fact-checking in Somalia still faces several difficulties, such as restricted access to trustworthy information sources, censorship, and dangers to journalists' and fact-checkers' safety. Furthermore, propaganda and false information are still pervasive, especially on social media platforms, making it challenging to confirm allegations and ensure the accuracy of reporting.

Uganda

Just like in many in other East African countries, the huge presence of false information, particularly on social media platforms particularly on issues touching on politics and health matters (ACME, 2024) has prompted the fact-checking movement. In 2020, UNESCO carried out research on Uganda's media and information literacy (MIL) programs. While some activities, such as media literacy groups and workshops, are geared toward enhancing MIL, the study also showed that there is a paucity of knowledge and resources, especially devoted to fact-checking (Nassanga & Tayeebwa, 2018). The report suggests stepping up efforts to encourage Ugandan citizens to practice fact-checking and critical thinking (Rwabu & Nassanga, 2018).

Debunk Media Initiative is Uganda's first fact-checking organization, using multimedia initiatives to disseminate information across multiple regions. Their objective is to help Uganda's media, youth, leaders, and communities confront disinformation. They offer video fact checks, podcasts, and fact cards, as well as training for journalists, organisations, and fact-checking aficionados. They also use a Debunk bot, a WhatsApp line with fact-checkers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and work with radio stations to translate fact checks into local languages (Debunking Misinformation in Uganda - CTIN, 2023). Similarly, the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) program offers materials and training to journalists to help them develop their fact-checking abilities (ACME, 2024).

Fact-checking may not be a priority for many Ugandan media outlets because of their tight funds. Additionally, neither journalists nor the general public are sufficiently aware of or comprehend the value of fact-checking.

Information is frequently withheld by the government, journalists and fact-checkers can encounter hostility when requesting it (REFERENCE). Additionally, it might be challenging to immediately confirm the veracity of information due to the propagation of incorrect information on social media platforms, which can lead to the spread of misleading information prior to fact-checking (Kyeyune, 2019). In Uganda, numerous initiatives are being taken to combat false information. The creation of fact-checking organizations like Africa Check, which seek to validate information about politics and elections, is one such initiative. Additionally, to ensure that material is accurate before it is released, media houses need to employ fact-checkers but because of the competitive "breaking news" climate, many media outlets in Kenya and Somalia are currently unable to do so (Wahlberg, H., 2018, November 28). Although there are worries that these rules could be used to limit free speech, the government has also taken action to prevent disinformation by creating laws to regulate social media (Asimwe, 2021).

Similar to other countries in the region, social media platforms are a fertile ground for mis- and disinformation to prevail. For instance, during the Ugandan elections of 2021, misleading information regarding the candidates and the voting procedure was disseminated via social media (Songa & Agabo, 2021). Activities for fact-checking can be extremely helpful in dispelling this false information, but more funding and support are required for these activities to be successful.

Strategies for Fact-Checking in Eastern Africa

The rise of social media has democratized information sharing but also created fertile ground for misinformation. Several techniques have emerged to combat this phenomenon, each with its strengths and limitations.

Crowd-Sourced Fact-Checking

This approach leverages the "wisdom of the crowds" by engaging large groups of individuals to verify information. It is particularly useful for user-generated content and social media posts. Platforms like PesaCheck utilize various methods for this, such as encouraging users to flag suspicious messages on platforms like Facebook and Twitter ([Platform Support for Fact-Checking, Meta]). These platforms also offer built-in tools like reverse image search, InVID (a video verification tool), QR code scanners, and business registration portal lookups to aid in verification efforts ([Garcia et al., 2019]). However, the effectiveness of crowd-sourced fact-checking can be limited by the information literacy and expertise of the participants.

Expert Review

For complex or technical information, consulting subject matter experts is crucial. This method ensures an accurate assessment of claims that may be beyond the expertise of the general public. For example, medical claims would be verified by consulting medical professionals, and scientific claims would be reviewed by scientists in the relevant field ([Horner et al., 2020]).

Non-Profit Fact-Checking Organizations

A network of independent, non-profit organizations has emerged dedicated to fact-checking information across various domains. These organizations provide a crucial service in holding powerful figures accountable and promoting media literacy. The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) plays a vital role in supporting and promoting best practices in fact-checking by providing resources and training to fact-checking organizations worldwide. Importantly, the IFCN does not conduct fact-checking itself ([International Fact-Checking Network, n.d.]). Individual fact-checking organizations, such as the UK-based Full Fact which specializes in political claims, conduct rigorous research to verify information and expose misleading statements ([Full Fact, n.d.]).

The process of fact-checking is vital to journalism since it helps to guarantee the dependability and accuracy of information. Due to the growth of misleading information on many media channels, particularly social media, fact-checking has become more crucial in East Africa. Some strategies used by East Africa fact checkers include:

Verification by means of witness interviews and eyewitness accounts: Fact-checkers in East Africa frequently use interviews and eyewitness reports to confirm facts. For instance, fact-checkers in Kenya and

Uganda used interviews with eyewitnesses to confirm information on political violence during the 2017 election campaign as part of research by the African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR) (ANCIR, 2018).

Utilization of technology: East African fact-checkers also make use of technology to validate information. For instance, fact-checkers in Tanzania and Uganda employed digital technologies in 2020 research by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) to confirm material on COVID-19. Reverse image search, Google Street View, and geolocation technologies were among the methods employed (ICFJ, 2020).

Collaborations and partnerships: Fact-checkers in East Africa frequently work with other groups to verify material. For instance, fact-checkers frequently collaborate with the media, civil society groups, and academia in Kenya to verify information. In order to confirm facts, the African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR) also works with fact-checking organizations in other African nations (ANCIR, 2018).

Fact-checkers in East Africa also make use of data and statistics to confirm facts. For instance, fact-checkers frequently use data from government organizations in Tanzania to validate information about government policies and initiatives (ICFJ, 2020).

Fact-checking organizations in East Africa also offer journalists and fact-checkers training and capacity-building opportunities. For instance, Africa Check trains and mentors journalists and fact-checkers in Kenya to help them develop their fact-checking abilities (Africa Check, n.d.).

Gains From Fact Checking to the Eastern African Information Ecosystem

Fact-checking in East Africa has boosted media credibility, fought misinformation, and encouraged civic engagement with Africa Check and PesaCheck as well as ACME leading the way in fact-checking. It has also increased accountability like the use of road-side declarations by politicians that are not consistent with facts are put to test. These developments have contributed to the emergence of a better-informed populace, which is necessary for advancing democracy and regional development. However, the involvement of the masses in familiarizing themselves with fact-checking organizations needs to be looked into (Kyriakidou, et al., 2023) Here are some examples with references:

Fact-checking has aided in making political and public figures in East Africa more accountable. For instance, fact-checking programs like PesaCheck, Africa Check, and Full Fact Kenya assisted in holding candidates accountable for their claims and remarks during the 2017 Kenyan presidential election. A more informed electorate resulted from some candidates being compelled to repudiate incorrect statements or offer proof for their assertions.

The credibility of the media: Fact-checking has also contributed to the improvement of the East African media's standing. Media outlets are more likely to be trusted by the general public and draw in a greater audience when they are recognized as trustworthy providers of accurate information (Sergeant et al., 2020). Jamii Forums, a fact-checking website, has developed a reputation as a trustworthy source of information and has assisted in exposing corruption and holding politicians accountable in Tanzania, (Facts, 2024).

Fighting Misinformation: In East Africa, fact-checking has been successful in battling mis- and disinformation. For instance, fact-checking programs like PesaCheck, Africa Check, and Full Fact Kenya helped disprove incorrect information regarding the virus, such as conspiracy theories and fraudulent treatments, during the COVID-19 outbreak (Studies, 2021; Chege, J., 2019). This made it easier to share factual information about the epidemic and stop the spread of false information.

Promoting civic involvement: In East Africa, fact-checking has also aided in the advancement of civic involvement. Fact-checking campaigns have enabled citizens to take part more actively in the political process by disseminating accurate information and exposing misleading assertions but on the other hand it is hard to change people's belief and actions (Tompkins, 2020).

Challenges of Fact-Checking in Eastern Africa

Fact-checking is a crucial measure in the battle against false information and fake news, which are increasingly prevalent in East Africa. However, there are specific challenges to effective fact-checking in the region. These challenges include resource constraints, language barriers, political sensitivity, lack of media trust, and restricted access to information.

Resources

Many fact-checking organizations in East Africa struggle with insufficient funding, making it difficult to address the widespread false information and news stories in the region (Tompkins, 2020). This lack of resources impacts on the quality of fact-checking, as organizations may not have access to the necessary tools and materials to perform their duties effectively.

Language Barriers

East Africa's linguistic diversity presents significant challenges for fact-checkers. With over 200 languages spoken, including Afro-Asiatic languages like Amharic, Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya, and Nilo-Saharan languages like Dinka, Luo, and Maasai, verifying information across different languages is difficult. Niger-Congo languages, including Swahili, Kikuyu, and Luganda, add to the complexity. Translations between local languages and formal languages like Kiswahili and English can result in altered meanings, complicating the verification process.

Political Sensitivity

Fact-checking is often politically sensitive, particularly in countries with authoritarian regimes. Fact-checkers in East Africa may face political interference from governments or powerful individuals who wish to suppress information or propagate false narratives (Swila, 2022). This can hinder the ability of fact-checkers to operate independently and effectively.

Lack of Media Trust

A significant portion of the East African population does not trust major media organizations, making it challenging for fact-checkers to reach their intended audience. This distrust can lead to people rejecting or disregarding fact-checks, undermining efforts to combat misinformation (Swila, 2022; "Media Freedom and Democracy: Africans in Four Countries Weigh up Thorny Questions About State Control," n.d.).

Restricted Access to Information

In some parts of East Africa, such as Djibouti, Eritrea, and South Sudan, access to information is severely restricted. Eritrea, for example, is one of the most tightly controlled information environments. Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda also face challenges with information accessibility, particularly in the wake of historical events like the Rwandan genocide, despite economic growth. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for fact-checkers to verify stories and hold those responsible for spreading false information accountable.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that include improving resource allocation, enhancing language skills among fact-checkers, ensuring political neutrality, rebuilding media trust, and advocating for greater transparency and access to information. These measures are essential for strengthening fact-checking efforts and promoting accurate information in East Africa.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Fact-checking websites have grown to be a crucial weapon in East Africa's fight against online misinformation and deception. However, these platforms encounter a number of difficulties, such as government sanctions and interference, a lack of resources and a lack of confidence in the media. To ensure that the media can continue to play a crucial role in advancing accountability and transparency, governments in the region must foster an environment that allows them to operate freely and encourages fact-checking platforms. These platforms assist in limiting the dissemination of false and misleading information, which can lead to social and political turmoil. From the above literature, some key recommendations are:

Investment in Training and Capacity Building: Fact-checkers in East Africa require investment in training and capacity building. This will aid in raising the caliber and precision of fact-checking initiatives in the area.

Media outlets and fact-checkers working together: Media outlets and fact-checkers working together can enhance the distribution of accurate information to the public. Fact-checkers might work with media outlets through partnerships to produce trustworthy information.

The creation of legal frameworks that support fact-checking can help shield fact-checkers from legal action and foster a supportive environment, especially political goodwill for fact-checking.

Investing in self-sustaining streams of income so that the work of fact-checking is not overrun by malicious donors and water down the impact of fact-checking. Organizations that have already maneuvered like Africa Check and PesaCheck should mentor upcoming fact-checking organizations on how to be financially literate and make proper decisions for sustainable funding solutions.

Increased Public knowledge: In East Africa, there is a need to raise people's knowledge of the value of fact-checking. Social media campaigns, public education initiatives, and community involvement can all be used to accomplish this.

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