

Audience perception of fake news in Zambia: Examining the relationship between media literacy and news believability

Gregory Gondwe¹

This study examined the perceptions and attitudes of media literate individuals and their ability to critique and analyze fake news in Zambia. Using focus groups, the findings suggest that individuals who considered themselves, media literate, particularly, those with higher education qualifications, exhibit more confidence in identifying fake news. However, the same individuals were found to be strongly opinionated and inflexible in their own beliefs, making them impervious to change. This rigidity was observed in political debates determined to have a stronger correlation with 'fake news.' Overall findings suggest that formal education was less significant in the detection of fake news, and that source credibility as a criterion for news trustworthiness was insignificant in Zambia.

Keywords: Zambia, fake news, perceptions, attitudes, trust, source, education level, news verification, news detection.

Discourses on fake news, mis/disinformation have continued to occupy a broader paradigm in recent media scholarship. In Africa, these discourses are situated within the frameworks of social media use and consumption (Wasserman, 2020; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019; Rodney-Gumede, 2018). To date, there is no consensus as to who should be held responsible or accountable for the negative effects of fake news in our communities (Tully, et. al., 2021). Chakrabarti, et. al., (2018) and Tully, et. al., (2021)'s studies are probably the most compelling works on fake news in Africa as a social phenomenon, rather than merely a technological one. Their studies ask the pertinent questions about who is responsible for spreading and the correction of fake news. These questions mirror Tandoc, et. al., (2017) who asked whether fake news could exist without the consent of the consumers/audience. These questions place the audience at a significant position in defining the concept of fake news.

However, the consumers/audience are characterized by many variables that make it hard for one to study them holistically: age, gender,

¹ **Gregory Gondwe** (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor of Journalism at California State University-San Bernardino, USA. He is also a Harvard Visiting Scholar with the Institute for Rebooting Social Media.

education, income levels, etc. Most studies have used age and social status to predict how the audience critique fake news skills (Gondwe, Muchangwe, & Mwaya, 2021; Madrid-Morales, et. al, 2020). This is because fake news is often exacerbated by social media use. And many studies have shown a correlation between different age groups and social media use, therefore, concluding that individuals that consume more social media are more prone to becoming victims of fake news (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2020). Such an understanding rules out individuals with little or no access to the internet. Nonetheless, within social media, a schism exists between those who can critique news content (media literate individuals) versus those who cannot (media illiterate individuals).

In Zambia, and like most sub-Saharan countries, media literacy is directly linked to education in the sense that those with formal education have (a) access to social media, and (b) are able to critique news content as either fake or factual (Gondwe, 2018; Madrid-Morales, et. al, 2020). Given the assumption, this would suggest that there is little or no fake news creation and consumption in Zambia. Yet this is far from the truth as most research have shown. Therefore, this study set out to understand the meaning of “fake news” in the Zambian context and to assess whether education levels are a criterion for combating the use and consumption of “fake news”.. This research examines how people define fake news, what leads them to believe in fake news despite their media literacy levels, and how they attempt deal with this phenomenon. This study employed two focus groups among two group categories that the Zambian society would call “the educated.” The purpose is to show how the audience perceives fake news in Zambia, and whether education plays an intervening role in the fight against fake news.

Literature Review

Fake news in Africa

The notion of fake news in most African scholarship is still fluid and belongs to a complex and contested terrain. However, several scholars have come to a consensus that a better understanding of fake news starts with the definition of news (Mare, Mabweazara, & Moyo, 2019;; Wasserman, 2020). A traditional and working definition for news is that “it is the break from the normal flow of events” in the sense that when a dog bites a person, it is not news because it is an expected and normal occurrence. However, when that person bites a dog, that becomes news because of its abnormality. But this does not make it easier since what constitutes news is also a contested phenomenon. For example, Schultz (2007) asserts that news is a “gut feeling” phenomenon. Edwards (2012), citing the famous British publisher, Lord Northcliffe, held that “news was what somebody somewhere wanted to suppress,” in the sense that real news, for the most part, did not go well with people in power and authority.

Scientific and empirical works such as those of Bell (1991) and Kepplinger and Ehmig (2006), have also emphasized the notion of values in the news. Yet none of these help in understanding the concept of fake news. Tandoc, et. al., (2017) and Wasserman (2020) studies are so far the closest attempts to understanding the notion of fake news in Africa. Tandoc et. al. (2017) proposes a typology that assesses fake news through story genres. In their study, they argue that “a news story is fake if it is inaccurate and does not fit into the following categories: news satire, news parody, news fabrications – articles that have no factual basis yet are published in the style of news articles to create legitimacy” (p. 148).” Accordingly, the authors ask, “Does fake news remain fake if it is not perceived as real by the audience? In other words, can an article, which looks like news, but is without factual basis, with an immediate intention to mislead, be considered fake news if the audience does not buy into the lie?” (p. 148). These questions introduce the audience as an important variable in the definition of fake news. But this definition is only important if fake news can be detected and established among the audience.

Essentially, most studies provide general strategies for fact-checking and source verification. Mutsvairo and Bebawi (2019) argue that this approach is unreliable in most African countries because it is almost impossible to verify the news sources. In their study, Chen et. al. (2015) also provided evidence that the reliability of a news source was not an exclusive guarantee for “real news.” A better understanding, therefore, requires the acknowledgment of the latent problems affecting modern-day journalism and society, i.e., the relationship between political propaganda, governance, and fake news (McGonagle, 2017). Essentially, the force that a government exerts on the press, the propaganda disseminated through the media, and the trust that people have about the media are variables that shape the criteria for understanding fake news, and the tools needed in detecting fake news. Mutsvairo and Bebawi (2019) and Mutsvairo (2019) consider assessing the motivation for news consumption as the first major criterion for fake news detection.

To understand the phenomenon of “fake news” and consumption in Zambia, an obvious starting point is to examine the relationship between the media as a whole and their audience. Research has shown that the relationship between the media and society has always been dwindling (Wahutu, 2019; Wiasboard, 2018; McNair, 2017;). In Zambia, for example, the media was introduced not to serve the public, but to surveil the public and entertain the colonialists, and the subsequent elite independent government leaders (Gondwe, 2018).

The rise of social media changed the entire scenario, for it was when people in society started seeing themselves as being part of the media and contributing not only to the consumption but the creation of content (Mare, 2013). According to Mare (2013), the convergence between the two public

spheres has necessitated the emergence of collaborative journalism practices, making heard the voices of previously silenced and delegitimized activists. This understanding brought in a nuanced yet overlooked point of view about the role of social media. This perspective also introduces to us an understanding of the roles that “fake news” might be playing in the Zambian context where press freedom is regarded as limited.

News Reporting and Public Trust in Zambia

Generally, news trust in most countries in sub-Sahara African media systems is perceived as low and dwindling (author, 2018; Moehler, & Singh, 2011; Cushion, 2009). In Zambia, for example, studies have shown that media trust is multifaceted to include not only the entire process of how and why people choose to trust one media over the other but also consisting of “those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of a particular kind of news genre” (Chilcote, 1981, p. 63). In their study, for example, Bratton, Alderfer, and Simutanyi (1997) observed that media consumption in Zambia was punctuated by three-dimensional elements: Contacting, Communing, and Consuming. These three elements are rooted in the notion that community-based action and face-to-face interactions with the media are considered more important than receiving articulate, but far-fetched media stories (Baldwin, 2013). In other words, stories with direct impact on a particular community (i.e., sensational stories discussing ‘petty/irrelevant’ issues within their communities) were perceived more important than stenographic stories focusing on government corruption, the financial situation of the country, public policies, and international relations, etc. This implies that Zambian people trust news that they feel connected to regardless of how it conforms to the traditional news values.

News writing and reporting in Zambia is not as simplistic as many textbooks portray (Kasoma, 1996). To understand it, one needs to interrogate the historical underpinnings of the media in Zambia: How it came about, whom it was designed to serve, and how people perceived it. Until recently, what characterized the definition of news was never contentious. Gans’ (1980) “Enduring values” and Melvin Mencher’s (1997) understanding of news became a defining factor for what ought or ought not to be characterized as “news” in Africa. “Accuracy! Accuracy! Accuracy!” as Mencher, emphasized in a reference to Pulitzer’s words, became the main criterion for news (accuracy is more pronounced now in the age of the internet where haste rules the field of journalism). Proximity, relevance, and impact as news values were considered less important by journalists.

Under many circumstances, Zambian journalists were considered to have fulfilled their roles as “educated” professionals satisfying the market models by how much they followed the textbook guidelines, and not by how

much impact they made to the local community (Chama, 2017). In short, journalism and the media as a whole, in this case, were rooted in elitism that paid less attention to the impact a story had on the entire population except in circumstances where that story was able to draw the attention of advertising agencies. For the most part, the media were perceived as a tool for entertainment and not a voice for society (Soko & Shimizu, 2011). Subsequently, the media as a tool for grassroots communication were never realized. The closest to what people would consider as providing reliable information, were the religious media outlets, which unfortunately but predictably, only focused on religious matters.

Although most religious media operated among the locals, Kasoma (2002) noted that most of them lacked in representing the local people for many reasons. First, they operated on certain principles that advanced religious ideologies for a particular group within the communities. Second, religious media condemned certain acts/behaviors, some of which served as the cultural pillars of some communities. For example, some religious media discouraged people from participating in certain social-cultural events, contending that they were evil (Shoko, 2016). When “tabloid” and sensational media came into form, people felt represented (Isaac, 2014) for they addressed pertinent issues without stratifying the community into ethnic or religious affiliations.

Bratton, Alderfer, & Simutanyi (1997) assert that media trust in Zambia is punctuated by three dimensions of Contacting, Communing, and Consuming. This implies that stories with direct impact to a particular community (not limited to authentic news) might be weighted as more important than stenographic stories. The implication is that this people are likely to consume fake news because it comes from a source that does not categorize them. But when it comes to the critical analysis of fake news, some levels of media literacy about news content are required. As in most cases, media literacy is a privilege for the educated. In a country like Zambia with low literacy level, it is appropriate to suggest that the ability to critique news resides among a few elites who are in most cases, the educated few. Given the incessant nature, the ask the following questions are posed in this study:

RQ1: How do news consumers (audience) in Zambia (a) define, (b) perceive the notion of fake news?

RQ2: What approaches do the Zambian audience use to critically analyze news content for fake news?

RQ3: To what extent are Zambian news consumers responsible for preventing made-up stories from gaining attention?

Method

This study builds on previous works by Wasserman (2020), Madrid-Morales, et. al (2020), Tully, et. al., (2021); Mutsvairo and Bebwi (2019), and Mabweazara (2019), which explored “fake news” in sub-Saharan Africa. Several issues arising from these studies were left unresolved, particularly the perspectives of the audience. As Tandoc et. al. (2017) had asked, “Does fake news remain fake if it is not perceived as real by the audience? In other words, can an article, which looks like news but is without factual basis, be considered fake news if the audience does not buy into the lie?” (p. 148). Taking up these unanswered questions, this study examined how the audience in Zambia perceive fake news and whether media literacy has a predictive power in determining who consumes fake news content.

Sample Selection

The research questions addressed in this study were answered through two focus groups each of which had eight (8) participants. This sampling method was both convenient and purposive. First, as a convenient sample, I employed data that was at our disposal and not collected for this research design. Second, the sample selection was purposive in the sense that I targeted individuals in universities and the working class. The original dataset had six focus groups classified as graduate and undergraduate students, two groups of individuals above age 50 from rural and urban areas, and two groups of individuals below age 50. To capture the targeted sample of the educated elites, I created two groups, each comprising of eight (8) individuals. The criteria were that they are either degree-seeking students or working individuals with at least a university degree. Therefore, a complete sample included eight (8) first-degree seeking students, three master’s students, one (1) Ph.D. student, and four (4) working-class individuals with three (3) bachelor’s degree holders and one (1) master’s holder. A research assistant was used to recruit the participants.

Data collection procedure and analysis

The focus groups were conducted in Lusaka, Zambia’s capital city, in December 2019. We used a rather structured approach to our questions although some follow-up questions were equally raised. Our questions were organized in blocks to identify several key issues that involved media consumption tendencies, perceptions, and attitudes, responsibility, and confidence in detecting and analyzing “fake news.” The two focus groups that lasted for about an hour each were audio-recorded and then transcribed into a word document. The software, Descript.com, was used

in the transcription process. Essentially, Descript.com is an all-in-one tool for audio transcription, podcasting, screen recording, audio, and video editing.

The process of data analysis followed a thematic coding strategy with QSR Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software package that helps make sense of, and theorizing about large quantities of textual information (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). We began by preparing a list of codes as we listened to our recordings and used them in a preliminary round of coding during which other codes were noted down as they emerged. In alignment with our research questions, we identified 50 codes which we grouped into the themes we organized as blocks during the focus groups. Using the codebook, the researcher and research assistants separately coded 10 pages each of the randomly selected transcripts. Comparing the different transcripts, 15 themes were generated, accompanied by 38 sub-themes. The final version of the codebook created by three individuals was then used to code the entire sample. Ultimately, each of the 15 themes and 38 sub-themes were placed in three major themes to reflect our research questions, namely, individual attitudes and perceptions towards fake news, Individual approaches to analyzing fake news (Fact-checking), and the Responsibility for combating fake news. These themes are discussed at length in the findings.

Measures

Measuring an individual's ability to analyze fake news is still a fluid attempt. As Walter et al (2021) writes: "skepticism toward new information and fact-checking are often lauded as positive behaviors (p. 4749). Yet, verifying information can be time-consuming and can require significant effort to complete (Tandoc et al., 2017). As a result, actual fact-checking behavior may require stronger motivations to complete than self-reported fact-checking intentions (Edgerly et al., 2020). Nonetheless, several studies have outlined some steps, which include the ability to verify the source of information through fact-checking. In Zambia, this is a privilege found among a few media literate individuals, particularly the educated. Consistent with several other studies, we asked participants to indicate:

1. Their level of knowledge on the topic in the news. We provided a sample of a news story that was circulating in the Zambia news and asked them to indicate how much information they had about the topic
2. to rank their levels/degrees of integrity by honestly spotting the biases in the news story they are claim to be knowledgeable about. Integrity in this sense was connected to their confidence in their response.
3. Whether they spend time in taking an organized approach to seeking out the best possible truth to the story. Here, we asked the respondents to indicate whether they took their time to confirm that the story they just read

was reliable and accurate. Those who indicated that they did, were further asked to explain how they did it.

4. Their tolerance to listening to views that are different from their beliefs, and the openness to reconsidering a new appraisal when the evidence points to the opposing view. Under this objective, we wanted to know whether the respondents were open to other news sources – for instance, if one did not believe in abortion, how open were they to listen and learn from someone who believed in it? The same was true about political affiliations and whether they were willing to listen the opposing views. Rather, did they automatically assume that the information was fake?

Results

Perceptions and attitudes

Research question 1 (RQ1) sought to understand the perceptions and attitudes the audience has towards fake news. Given that Zambia is a country with a level of press freedom that is perceived as suspicious, low, and ranked number 120 by the 2020 World Press Freedom index, most respondents showed a positive attitude towards fake news and supported it as a necessary evil. Positive attitude in this sense referred to how they felt about news they believed to be false, or they were not sure about. Many thought it counteracted government information that came out as draconian. But, after breaking down fake news by defining it in terms of misinformation and disinformation and highlighting the underlying consequences, most respondents in both focus groups had negative attitudes against it. Nonetheless, most respondents indicated that fake news was entertaining, and provided an alternative perspective to the controlled media. As one participant put it, “for a long time now, the government has controlled the media and its information, providing us with propaganda and only information that they want us to consume. Although unreliable, I do not blame fake news at all...after all, what is fake to me might not be fake to the other...instead, I blame the government for providing us with less options to the consumption of fake news”. This comment was captivated by the respondents experience with fake news and the belief that the government provided them with fake news to intimidate criticizing their incompetence.

Essentially, most respondents began to perceive the study through their political experiences. As a result, a group of other respondents counteracted those who seemed to favor fake news. Their understanding was based on the argument that fake news misguided society and thus impeded the success of government plans. As one had averred, “The government has plans for its citizens, and sometimes people are there just to criticize without giving the leaders an opportunity. Such people create fake news to disarray and confuse small-minded people” In other words, this group of people blamed the opposition for government for orchestrating

and creating fake content to misguide the local people. Although the questions were not political, the debates in the focus groups turned political to suggest that most information perceived as fake in Zambia was rooted in political issues. Further, we showed the participants in the group two news stories about China and Zambia that were presumably false or written out of context. The aim was to assess their understanding of the two stories. The figures below present the excerpts of the two stories.

Figure 1a: News from Zambia



Figure 1b: News from South Africa



Source: Mwebantu Media and SA News

After the respondents were shown the images above and the headlines accompanying the two stories, there was a split between those that condemned the story about Lungu as inciting violence versus those who said it was disappointing that the President of Zambia could say that. In both focus groups, the question about fake news was less pronounced. Instead, the debates became preoccupied with politics, therefore exposing the political affiliations of the respondents. In other words, it no longer became a question of whether the information presented was fake or not, but whether the President was justified to say what he said or not. On aggregate, both who were for or against seemed to believe in the story. On the other hand, figure 1b was less contentious. Most participants were quick to joke about how blatant Malema was with his post-colonial approaches and ideas.

On both accounts, the question of verification of information, or even the idea of questioning the authenticity of the information did not come up. Nonetheless, when we divided the responses based on the levels of education, most undergraduate students showed less confidence in their responses and the knowledge about fake news than the degree holders, graduate students, and the working class. Our quick analysis suggested that because of being less confident in their ability to analyze the news, most undergraduate students were more likely to verify the information.

Approaches to analyzing news content

Research question two (RQ2) was aimed at examining the participants' ability to critique fake news. As most studies have shown, fact-checking and verifying the source of information are probably the most common measures to determine fake news. We used the same, and therefore asked the participants to indicate their level of knowledge of the topic in the news, whether they could spot the biases in the news, whether they spend time in taking a systematic approach to seeking out the best possible truth to the story, their tolerance to listening to views that are opposed to their beliefs, and the openness to reconsidering a new appraisal when the evidence points to the opposing view.

With regard to the answers given in response to RQ1, RQ2 seemed to remind the respondents about the need for verification. However, the majority indicated that it was hard to verify information in Zambia because of the credibility of the mainstream media. As one participant said, "I know what I will find when I go to verify with the mainstream media...information that automatically supports the government and the president...it's not what I want. I want true information and not just something that counteracts the other". Similarly, another responded argued, "verifying this information against what information? What you are trying to tell me is that I check if this information came from the government sources, and if it did not, then it is fake...I would rather stick with what I know because it is true...the only

reason someone will say it is fake is because it does not support the government agenda". For this reason, the majority indicated that it was safer to perceive the information as entertainment and an alternative other than spending time trying to assess whether it was fake or not.

Regarding the Malema story from South Africa, most participants indicated that it did not seem necessary for them to start fact-checking it because the information did not have a proximal impact on them. They indicated that they would share and redistribute the information for entertainment reasons. One participant offered the view that one way of verifying information like that was by sharing it with several people, stating that, "Usually, I share information that I am not sure about and hear how people respond to it... I assume that if I shared it, let's say on Facebook or WhatsApp, surely there will be someone that knows something about the topic because of the diversity of the groups". Further, most of the participants did not seem to show tolerance of opposing views as shown in the debates that emerged from the Lungu story in figure 1a.

The general interpretation was that the more affiliated the individual was to the story, the more closed up they appeared in accepting opposing views. Similar to the findings in research question one (RQ1) individuals with little academic qualifications in the groups presented themselves as having less knowledge when compared to those with higher qualifications, therefore, allowing for further skills to detect fake news. Similarly, individuals who had not yet acquired their academic degrees seem to be more tolerant of other opinion views. The assessment was that most of them were either not partisan or did not just care about politics in the same way they cared about their education.

Responsibility to combat fake news

Research question three (RQ3) was aimed at getting the participants' views on whose responsibility it was to combat fake news. This question provided divided responses between student participants and those in the workforce. Most students indicated that it was the responsibility of the government to combat fake news. However, their responses did not support the imposition of laws, but that the government, which in this case interchangeably meant the mainstream media (ZNBC and other powerful media in Zambia), should help to restore the media's lost credibility. As articulated by a participant, "We consume fake news but not with pride, but because we have no other alternative...the media that is supposed to provide us with real information is now unreliable because of the government's repressive laws...Therefore, I implore that the government helps the media regain its credibility by allowing it to have the diversity of thought".

On the other hand, participants representing the workforce in Zambia seemed to suggest that it was up to the individuals like them to combat the

creation and sharing of fake news. One of the said this: “Because of the privilege we have as educated and working class, we have the duty to educate people about the dangers of fake news and the possible ways to detect fake news...honestly let’s discourage people from sharing information that they are not sure about”. Others in this group indicated that leaving this task to the government was dangerous because, according to one of them, “It was not in the interest of the government to combat fake news...while the government is against the spread of fake news, fighting it would also entail fighting their propaganda...also, what the government might call ‘fake news’ could just be some information that does not align with their propaganda, so the task is on us.”

A few participants either disagreed or agreed with either opinion above for various reasons that did not amount to the voices of the majority. For example, one participant asserted that it really did not matter whether the information was true or false. Those who shared this viewpoint argued that the judgment about fake news should be left to the consumer.

Discussion

This study examined the perceptions and attitudes of Zambians and their ability to detect, critique and analyze fake news in their country. The main aim was to determine whether formal education was a significant variable in critiquing and detecting fake news. Although this was not a comparative study between the educated and the uneducated, this study was able to use the focus group approach to show that education played little to no significant role in the process of critiquing and analyzing fake news.

Overall findings suggest that the more formal education the individual has, the more complacent and obstinate that individual would be to what could be considered as “fake news.” This is because people who were highly educated showed more strongly opinionated behavior towards certain issues, and were less open to change. Framed differently, individuals with higher levels of education showed a lot of confidence and knowledge about the topic, yet provided less evidence that they were concerned about fact-checking and the verification of information. Regarding the perceptions of fake news, most participants that were yet to acquire their first university degrees were hesitant about ascertaining the negativity or positivity of their perceptions. In other words, they did not clearly indicate whether the information presented to them was fake or not. The reason was not because they could not distinguish fake news from non-fake news, but because they had a problem agreeing whether the information presented as fake, was fake. As one respondent had put it, “We know what our president is capable of...I am hesitant to rule out that information as fake”. Although their responses were aligned to positive

perceptions and attitudes, their confidence levels in responding seemed to be rooted in chorus answers.

The doubts about fake news were more vividly found in participants' responses to research question two (RQ2) that sought to assess the ability to critique information. In particular, most individuals who are in the process of acquiring their first degrees showed less confidence in their skills and ability to analyze news. As indicated above, the irony in this study is that despite the variations in actions and assumed perceptions between participants with academic degrees versus those in pursuit for their first degrees, the ability to critique news was not indicated as the most important thing. Even after showing them presumably false information, most respondents could not consider the notion of fake news as being the subject matter. It was only after the mention of fact-checking and verification in news reports that the participants considered the notion of fake news the subject matter in their focus groups. This experience tends to suggest that unless the information had a very proximal impact on individuals, they were less likely to verify the authenticity of that information. This is regardless of one's level of education.

The findings in this study align with most literature that looks at what constitutes fake news and media trust. This study was able to demonstrate that even among the educated and elite, the definition of fake news was still fluid. The ability to understand that information was inauthentic did not seem to predict the skills for one to critique fake news. In the same way, the study demonstrates that fake news was not always contingent on the kind of source as most studies suggest, but on the credibility of a particular source in the eyes of the consumer. These findings are consistent with Mutsvairo and Bebwi (2019) who argued that the Western theorization of "fake news" as rooted in the authenticity of a source was fraudulent in the sense that it was difficult to measure the trustworthiness of a source in the proliferated age of information. In the same way, this study was able to show, like Mabweazara (2019), Mutsvairo and Bebwi (2019), and McGonagle (2017), that there was a very significant relationship between what would be considered as "fake news" in Zambia and government political propaganda. As Simons (2018) argued, "contemporary research has focused on the quagmire presented by 'fake news' instead of acknowledging the latent problems affecting modern-day journalism and society (p.153)." Another notable observation is the motivation for news consumption which is rooted in both entertainment and the desire to consume alternative information from the government propaganda.

The overarching results presented in this study show the need to challenge and interrogate "education" as a predictor variable, or the possibility that one could learn the skills for critically analyzing fake news as a result of advance in levels of education. Just like Mutsvairo and Bebwi (2019) had argued, the phenomenon of "fake news" should be

contextualized to include the understanding of the relationship between fake news, audience consumption, and government/political propaganda. In relation to Zambia, this study did not produce significant evidence to suggest that education is strongly correlated to the critical analysis of news. Another important outcome in this study is that people who consider themselves as having the ability to critically analyze and detect fake news are more likely to overrate their ability to do so, given other factors that cloud their judgement, such as political affiliation.

Conclusion

This study was aimed at contributing to the literature on fake news by examining and highlighting the perceptions that the elite and educated audience have about fake news in Zambia. It interrogated the ability of the so-called elite and educated in Zambia to critically analyze news content for fake news in the country. The results contradict the outcome of some studies, particularly by Western scholars, that posit that one could learn, through formal education, the process of detecting fake news. The findings in the present study suggest that education was not a significant variable in this process. Second, in the case of Zambia, the issue of fake news did not appear to be a major factor of concern to the audience, even when the news content provided to them was presumably false. It was only after the participants were asked about fake news that they were able to relate the content to fake news. The dominant debates were more about the differences in political beliefs that were rooted in two major political parties in Zambia, than in identifying and analyzing fake news content.

References

- Akinyemi, B., Adewusi, O., & Oyebade, A. (2020). An Improved Classification Model for Fake News Detection in Social Media. *International Journal of Information Technology and Computer Science*, 2020, 1, 34-43
- Bell, A. (1991). *The language of news media*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Bratton, M., Alderfer, P., & Simutanyi, N. R. (1997). *Political Participation in Zambia, 1991-1996: Trends, Determinants, and USAID Program Implications*. Zambia Democratic Governance Project.
- Chakrabarti, S., Rooney, C., & Kweon, M. (2018). Verification, Duty, Credibility: Fake News and Ordinary Citizens in Kenya and Nigeria. *London: BBC News*. Accessed January 17, 2023 [chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/bbc-fake-news-research-paper-nigeria-kenya.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/bbc-fake-news-research-paper-nigeria-kenya.pdf)
- Chama, B. (2017). Global Journalism Practice. In *Tabloid Journalism in Africa* (pp. 31-59). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Chen, Y., Conroy, N. J., Rubin, V. L. (2015). News in an online world: The need for an "automatic crap detector." *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 52(1), 1-4.

<https://asistdl.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pra2.2015.145052010081>

- Cushion, S., & Lewis, J. (2009). Towards a Foxification of 24-hour news channels in Britain? An analysis of market-driven and publicly-funded news coverage. *Journalism*, 10(2), 131-153.
- Edwards, T. (2012, November). Defending the indefensible: Phone hacking and press freedom. Huffington Post. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/2066162?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlMnVbS8&guce_referrer_cs=H3ZFfR3-tio6H869-eC59Q
- Gans, H. J. (1980). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Gondwe, G., Muchangwe, R., & Mwaya, J. E. (2020). Motivations for Social Media Use and Consumption in Zambian Online Platforms. In Wamuyu, P.K., (2020) *Analyzing Global Social Media Consumption* (pp. 204-215). IGI Global.
- Gondwe, G. (2018). News believability & trustworthiness on African online networks: An experimental design. *International Communication Research Journal*, 53(2), 51-74.
- Ireton, C., & Posetti, J. (2018). *Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training*. UNESCO Publishing.
- Kasoma, F. P. (1996). The foundations of African ethics (Afriethics) and the professional practice of journalism: The case for society-centred media morality. *Africa Media Review*, 10, 93-116.
- Kasoma, F. P. (2002). *Community radio: Its management and organisation in Zambia*. Zambia Independent Media Association.
- Kepplinger, H. M., Ehmgig, S. C. (2006). Predicting news decisions: An empirical test of the two-component theory of news selection. *Communications*, 31, 25-43.
- Madrid-Morales, D., Wasserman, H., Gondwe, G., Ndlovu, K., Sikanku, E., Tully, M., ... & Uzuegbunam, C. (2021). Comparative approaches to mis/disinformation| motivations for sharing misinformation: A comparative study in six Sub-Saharan African countries. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 20.: 1200–1219.
- Mare, A., Mabweazara, H. M., & Moyo, D. (2019). “Fake news” and cyber-propaganda in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recentering the research agenda. *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 1-12.
- Mare, A. (2013). A complicated but symbiotic affair: The relationship between mainstream media and social media in the coverage of social protests in southern Africa. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 34(1), 83-98.
- McGonagle, T. (2017). “Fake news”: False fears or real concerns? *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 35, 203-209.
- McNair, B. (2017). *Fake news: Falsehood, fabrication and fantasy in journalism*. Routledge.
- Moehler, D. C., & Singh, N. (2011). Whose news do you trust? Explaining trust in private versus public media in Africa. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(2), 276-292.
- Mencher, M., & Shilton, W. P. (1997). *News reporting and writing*. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark Publishers.

- Mutsvairo, B., & Bebawi, S. (2019). Journalism Educators, Regulatory Realities, and Pedagogical Predicaments of the “Fake News” Era: A Comparative Perspective on the Middle East and Africa. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 74(2), 143-157.
- Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2018). Fake it till you make it: The role, impact and consequences of fake news. In *Perspectives on Political Communication in Africa* (pp. 203-219). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Schultz, I. (2007). The journalistic gut feeling. *Journalism Practice*, 1, 190-207.
- Shin, J. (2020). How Do Partisans Consume News on social media? A Comparison of Self-Reports with Digital Trace Measures Among Twitter Users. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(4), doi.org/10.1177/20563051209 .
- Simons, G. (2018). Fake news: Can there be a positive side? In Labarre, F., Niculescu, G. (Eds.), *Between fact and fakery: Information and instability in the South Caucasus and beyond* (pp. 143-166). Vienna: Austrian Ministry of Defence.
- Simutanyi N. (1997). Democracy on trial: Political opposition and the 1996 Zambian elections, *Conference on African Renewal*: Institute of Economic and Social Research, University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia. Accessed on January 17, 2023. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/1037111150>
- Soko M, Shimizu M. UNDP: Deepening Democracy in Zambia through citizen active participation, 2011. File://C:\users\doc\deepening democracy in Zambia through citizen’s active participation.
- Tandoc Jr, E. C., Lim, D., & Ling, R. (2020). Diffusion of disinformation: How social media users respond to fake news and why. *Journalism*, 21(3), 381-398.
- Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., Richard, L. (2018). Defining “fake news”: A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism*, 6, 137-153.
- Tully, M., Madrid-Morales, D., Wasserman, H., Gondwe, G., Ileri, K., (2021). Who is responsible for stopping the spread of misinformation? Examining Audience Perceptions of Responsibilities and responses in Six-Sub-Saharan African Countries. *Digital Journalism*: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1965491>
- Walter, N., Edgerly, S., & Saucier, C. J. (2021). “Trust, Then Verify”: When and Why People Fact-Check Partisan Information. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 21.
- Wahutu, J. S. (2019). Fake News and Journalistic “Rules of the Game”. *African Journalism Studies*, 1-14.
- Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is what happens to news: On journalism, fake news, and post-truth. *Journalism studies*, 19(13), 1866-1878.
- Wasserman, H. (2020). Fake news from Africa: Panics, politics and paradigms. *Journalism*, 21(1), 3-16.
- Wasserman, H., & Madrid-Morales, D. (2019). An Exploratory Study of “Fake News” and Media Trust in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. *African Journalism Studies*, 40(1), 107-123.