Information Pollution: Exploratory Analysis of Subs-Saharan African Media's Capabilities to Combat Misinformation and Disinformation

Authors : Muhammed Jamiu Mustapha, Jamiu Folarin, Stephen Obiri Agyei, Rasheed Ademola Adebiyi, Mutiu Iyanda Lasisi

Abstract : The role of information in societal development and growth cannot be over-emphasized. It has remained an age-long strategy to adopt the information flow to make an egalitarian society. The same has become a tool for throwing society into chaos and anarchy. It has been adopted as a weapon of war and a veritable instrument of psychological warfare with a variety of uses. That is why some scholars posit that information could be deployed as a weapon to wreak "Mass Destruction" or promote "Mass Development". When used as a tool for destruction, the effect on society is like an atomic bomb which when it is released, pollutes the air and suffocates the people. Technological advancement has further exposed the latent power of information and many societies seem to be overwhelmed by its negative effect. While information remains one of the bedrock of democracy, the information ecosystem across the world is currently facing a more difficult battle than ever before due to information pluralism and technological advancement. The more the agents involved try to combat its menace, the difficult and complex it is proving to be curbed. In a region like Africa with dangling democracy enfolds with complexities of multi-religion, multi-cultures, inter-tribes, ongoing issues that are yet to be resolved, it is important to pay critical attention to the case of information disorder and find appropriate ways to curb or mitigate its effects. The media, being the middleman in the distribution of information, needs to build capacities and capabilities to separate the whiff of misinformation and disinformation from the grains of truthful data. From quasi-statistical senses, it has been observed that the efforts aimed at fighting information pollution have not considered the built resilience of media organisations against this disorder. Apparently, the efforts, resources and technologies adopted for the conception, production and spread of information pollution are much more sophisticated than approaches to suppress and even reduce its effects on society. Thus, this study seeks to interrogate the phenomenon of information pollution and the capabilities of select media organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. In doing this, the following questions are probed; what are the media actions to curb the menace of information pollution? Which of these actions are working and how effective are they? And which of the actions are not working and why they are not working? Adopting quantitative and qualitative approaches and anchored on the Dynamic Capability Theory, the study aims at digging up insights to further understand the complexities of information pollution, media capabilities and strategic resources for managing misinformation and disinformation in the region. The quantitative approach involves surveys and the use of questionnaires to get data from journalists on their understanding of misinformation/disinformation and their capabilities to gate-keep. Case Analysis of select media and content analysis of their strategic resources to manage misinformation and disinformation is adopted in the study while the qualitative approach will involve an In-depth Interview to have a more robust analysis is also considered. The study is critical in the fight against information pollution for a number of reasons. One, it is a novel attempt to document the level of media capabilities to fight the phenomenon of information disorder. Two, the study will enable the region to have a clear understanding of the capabilities of existing media organizations to combat misinformation and disinformation in the countries that make up the region. Recommendations emanating from the study could be used to initiate, intensify or review existing approaches to combat the menace of information pollution in the region.

Keywords : disinformation, information pollution, misinformation, media capabilities, sub-Saharan Africa
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