

Disinformation in South African elections

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The context of communication

- Digital/social platforms increasingly important for both pol comm and disinformation
- *Socio-technical approach* – technical and social context important
- *Social media networks* such as Facebook and Twitter and *messaging apps* such as WhatsApp and Telegram.
- *Video platforms* YouTube and TikTok have also been mobilized in disinformation campaigns.
- New platforms e.g. TikTok (cf Kenya, AI)
- Socio/economic context: Draw on schisms and tensions, long histories (Bell Pottinger, Kenya 2008 etc), geopolitics (interference)
- Social context also means broadening monitoring of disinfo *beyond* digital media, e.g. word of mouth, and consider *attitudes* towards politics, media etc.

...to Political Mercenary: How Disinformation O...

ABSTRACT

From Dance App to Political Mercenary: How disinformation on TikTok gaslights political tensions in Kenya

...n by Odanga Madung

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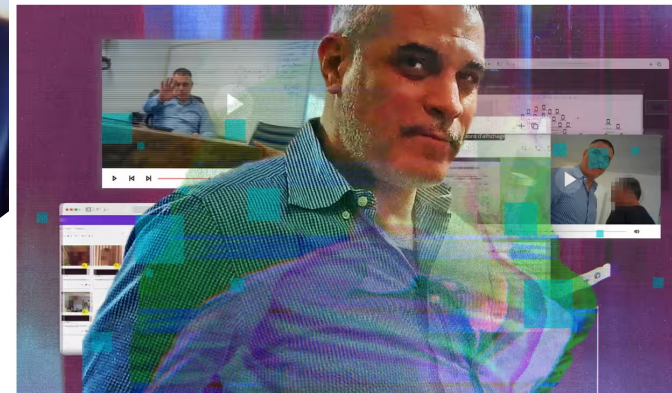
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Revealed: the hacking and disinformation team meddling in elections

- 'Team Jorge' unit **exposed by undercover investigation**
- Group sells hacking services and access to vast army of fake social media profiles
- Evidence unit behind disinformation campaigns across world
- Mastermind Tal Hanan claims covert involvement in 33 presidential elections



Deepfake of Zambian president Hakainde Hichilema



Weaponizing of attitudes, global/local nexus)

- Domestic – e.g. xenophobia, race, ethnicity (also by political parties)
- Geopolitical relations (influence) – e.g. Chinese media in Africa, Russian disinfo, often via domestic lens (e.g. MK)
- *Attitudes precede information.* Anti-western sentiment:

Survey 2022 in SSA (Angola, Ethiopia, SA, Zambia): Individuals' worldviews, particularly **anti-US sentiment**, more than **exposure** to certain news, strongest predictors of supporting Chinese and Russian strategic disinformation narratives.

Amanda!

HOME POLITICS/OPINIONS/ANALYSIS THE UNDERLYING AGENDA/OPINIONS/ANALYSIS OPINIONS/ANALYSIS THINK TANKS/OPINIONS/ANALYSIS SHOWBUZ/WTBT/ISSINGA/EMFUMALANGA MORE

Politics/Opinions/Analysis

South Africa a First World for whites and a Third World for blacks: OR Tambo condemns Bheki Cele and his cops from the grave for protecting the apartheid economy

Former Russian Commander: "The unceasing West aggression in Ukraine leaves Russia no other option but to take Zelensky out" After all the avenues to reach a

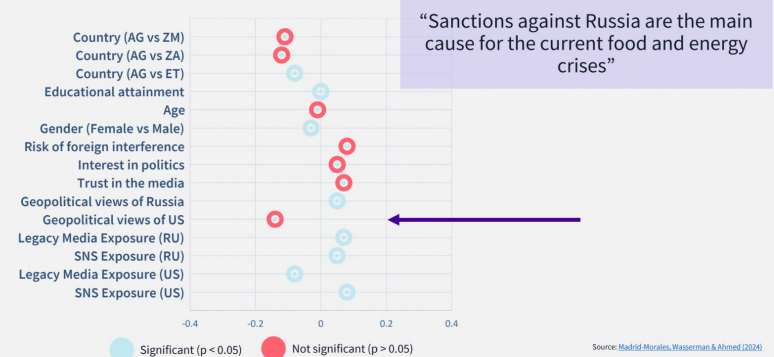
Putin: Meeting with Heads of Delegations of African States on Ukraine conflict It was not us, it was the Ukrainian leadership who announced they would not hold any talks. Moreover,

Jacques R Pauwels: "If peace ever descends on earth, it would be a catastrophe for America's big business" As long the poor still respect the rich, humanity will never be

Prevalence | Range of predictors



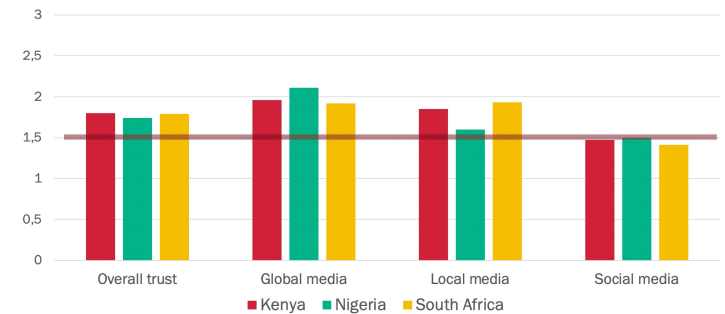
Prevalence | Range of predictors



Media and regulation

- Good journalism – not only combat disinformation, but good information (e.g. voter literacy)
- Elsewhere in Africa - Regulation as smokescreen (authoritarian creep – ‘fake news’ laws, shutdowns, freedom of expression)
- SA – strong freedom of expression, self-regulation, civil society organisations (e.g. recently against FPB overreach, agreements between SANEF, IEC, platforms)
- Media sustainability – competition commission PSB crisis
- Trust in media – Africa: low, decreasing levels of trust in local media, related to perceived exposure to disinfo (SA outlier)
- Attacks on media, journalists
- Moderation in African languages and for African context

How much do you trust *the following types of media organizations?*



Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019



Research agenda - multilevelled, not only tech

- Disinformation studies dominated by Global North perspectives
- Complex relationships between geopolitics, internet governance, legal systems, journalism and free expression in Africa remain severely understudied
- Appropriate , context-specific and historically-informed responses to the problem, the particular dynamics of African societies and political landscapes needed
- RQs could include:
 - Who are the actors and tools in political disinformation in each of the countries?
 - What is the impact of disinformation on trust in the news coverage of elections in each of these countries?
 - What approaches and strategies could be used to combat electoral disinformation?
- Methods could include:
 - Digital media monitoring and analysis
 - Ethnographic exploration of political disinformation – everyday life
 - Survey research with the general population
 - Interviews with subject experts