Disinformation as a threat to Kenya's National Security in the Contemporary Information Environment

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Abstract

The 21st-century disinformation has become a significantly under-reported issue, even though the security risks it may create to the international system are very severe. This situation has been worsened by the introduction of social media sites, which are usually used to control the opinion, perception and behaviour. This paper investigates disinformation in Kenya and the potential security threats that the phenomenon presents to the country. It is based on the agenda-setting theory and the application of the qualitative research method, which involves non-numeric information. Primary data was complemented with secondary data to strengthen the inquiry and foster richer data collection and analyses. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with subject matter experts, including security officials, scholars, communication experts and Kenyan citizens who are active users of the social media websites. The primary and secondary data was triangulated in the analysis, revealing that the disinformation on social media has been used to the benefit of radical activists and anti-government actors in Kenya. This form of disinformation is detrimental to the core components of human security, which are freedom from fear and freedom from want. This action, in effect, compromises the security, integrity and welfare of the citizens. As a result, the paper proposes a review and improvement of government communication policies and invest in new and better technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, to combat disinformation.

Keywords: *Disinformation, Governance, Misinformation, Propaganda, Security*

Introduction

Policymakers in the 21st century have had to respond to the increasing trend of disinformation, which has become a major threat to global security. The emergence of online media has only made the phenomenon worse because they are commonly being utilised to further mutual division as well as polarise societies. Certainly, misinformation is not a modern phenomenon at all; it has been used since ancient times. For instance, in the Roman Empire, public discussion and the manipulation of politics were via what could be called a nascent social media. One striking instance is the manipulative scheme that Octavian employed to discredit and murder Mark Antony, whom he continuously depicted as a traitor and opponent of Rome. This long-term campaign played a major role in the destruction and elimination of Antony and Cleopatra, thus making room for Octavian to become Emperor Augustus (Ward, 2021). In the modern world, the primary factor influencing the intensification of disinformation is undoubtedly the increasing number of online media outlets worldwide.

The rapid development of technology has dramatically altered the information environment, thereby facilitating the proliferation of disinformation over the last several decades. The threat of disinformation has therefore become an international problem that heightens during elections and in war situations. The 2016 Brexit referendum was one of the cases of disinformation spread on social media to achieve political and financial benefits. Presidential campaigns that led to the election of Donald J. Trump in the first and second terms of the US presidency were also characterized by disinformation (West, 2024). Social media platforms have also been used to disseminate fake news by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has been able to advance its extremist beliefs, attract followers and terrorize the population using online media.

Comparatively, Russia has distributed and spread disinformation across the world. The US Global Engagement Centre (GEC) reports the primary techniques Russia employs to promote disinformation. This has been through the weaponization of social media, an activity enabled by technology, official government communications, non-state-run websites with hidden connections to Russia and state-funded sources like Sputnik and Russia Today (RT), the most popular channels of the Russian media (US Government Accountability Office, 2024). The vastness of Russia's disinformation campaign has already raised concerns throughout Europe at times, prompting the European Union to take decisive action against Russia. As an example, the European Council banned Sputnik and Russia Today (RT) after Russia invaded Ukraine in March 2022. These two Russian media outlets had been cited as the key propagators of fake news and the EU decided to suspend their broadcasting in the EU (Council of the European Union, 2022).

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has resorted to disinformation campaigns to increase its content and curb criticism. According to GEC, the PRC produces and disseminates disinformation, propaganda and censorship, takes advantage of international organisations and bilateral relations and advertises PRC surveillance equipment. They also employ information control strategies, coerce influential persons to shape their views on how the PRC wants stories used and utilize norms to the PRC's advantage in domestically controlling the digital space. The report also notes that the PRC has control over the Chinese media, including China Media Group, Xinhua and People's Daily, to further its disinformation agenda (GAO, 2024).

The problem of disinformation also persists in the Middle East. A case in point is Iran, which has been very aggressive in its disinformation campaigns, especially those that seek to provoke war and destroy trust in the American democratic institutions. Iran has been using online influencers, social media and state-controlled media to disseminate disinformation frequently. For example, the English and Spanish state-owned TV channels are aimed at foreign audiences to promote narratives in line with the Iranian government's leaders. The disinformation has also been employed by Israel in peacetime and during war (GAO, 2024).

There have also been serious challenges of disinformation on the African continent. One such instance is the disinformation that resulted in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The radio was also one of the main propaganda

media used to disseminate fake information during the genocide. This is mainly because, around the 1990s, the use of social media like Twitter and Facebook was not yet widespread and radio was one of the primary channels of communication. Thus, the Hutu extremist government disseminated disinformation through Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), a privately operated radio station. RTLM failed not only to spread false news but also to dehumanise the Tutsis by likening them to cockroaches. The disinformation process created fear in the minds of people as it made them think that Tutsis had been planning against the Hutus. Each of these examples illustrates the persistence of disinformation threats in the international arena.

Although Kenya has long been a beacon of peace in the region since its independence, it now faces complex security challenges, primarily due to non-traditional military threats. Indicatively, disinformation is also becoming a significant concern for the Kenyan society. Its audience is large, and more than a third of the population is on social media; X (previously Twitter) is the most significant site for discussing anything online. In Kenya, social media use exceeds the global average of 2.5 hours per day (Data Reportal, 2024). Social media has become increasingly popular in Kenya, yet there are gaps in addressing disinformation and propaganda issues, which make the nation vulnerable to domestic and foreign individuals seeking to manipulate online communication and promote their self-serving interests (Oronje, 2025).

Key political discourses have been promoted through social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter). This provides both local and foreign players with a platform to shape political discourses and events, especially during elections or in other political matters, such as demonstrations. These multinational actors influence the perceptions, opinions and behaviour of people through disinformation and misinformation. They often pay for the misleading stories shared by social media influencers and other non-state actors with the intention of shaping public opinion and influencing choices. This paper, therefore, aims to analyze the operation of disinformation in Kenya and the potential security risks it poses to the nation.

Theoretical Framework

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) advance the theory of agenda setting which postulates that the media can determine the agenda of conversations that will take place in society, highlight relevant issues and prepare people to anticipate what lies ahead. The theory further states that the media plays a critical role in influencing issues that capture the interest of both state and non-state actors. Consequently, the media is capable of shaping public opinion by focusing on specific matters. The way information is released through the media affects public opinion, as the majority of the population relies on the media as their primary source of information. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw argue that, as the agenda setter, the media tends to dictate how events are understood (McCombs & Shaw, 2021). The media dictates reality, which is one of the assumptions of this theory. The media not only mediate reality but also manipulate the truth in a manner that they wish to be perceived by the people, as seen in Kenya. Media highlights certain issues or topics; in other words, the more the media focuses on a particular issue, the more people will consider it a significant issue and thus demand action (Robertson & Williams, 2019). The biases that the media has toward other matters, such as politics, culture and the economy, affect people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. When an issue is raised in the media, people are more likely to believe it is a significant matter. For instance, although individuals may not have a strong urge to join the demonstrations in Kenya, they are likely to believe in the idea when it is popularized in the media.

Although the agenda-setting theory was initially developed to explain the impact of media on political behaviour and attitudes, especially during election periods, additional research has presented more nuanced discourses on how the media constructs different issues for their viewers, not only in politics but also in security and the economy, among other areas. This framing influences people's opinions, whether deliberately or inadvertently. Later studies built on the work of McCombs and Shaw and established that the media shape or predetermine the agenda of the population on most matters (Griffin et al, 2023). Studies into agenda-setting theory have consistently reached the same conclusions: the media establish agendas that influence the perceptions, opinions and behaviour of the audience. Thus, unless it is adequately regulated, the media will

tend to trigger a negative agenda in Kenya. The theory proves to be most applicable in the study of disinformation, which has been facilitated by social media platforms and their potential impact on the integrity of fundamental security dimensions in Kenya.

Methodology

The research employs a qualitative approach, which bases its analysis on the opinions, emotions and feelings expressed by respondents. The study is primarily desk-based, but the use of primary data was intended to reinforce the secondary data and support the thesis. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique whereby the respondents were selected willingly, depending on their level of familiarity with the topic at hand (Patton, 2015). A total of fifteen (15) semi-structured interviews were conducted with subject matter experts: security officials, communication experts, scholars, employees of social media organizations and some Kenyan citizens who actively use social media. The number of interviews was determined to be adequate, depending on the claim that data saturation in a homogenous population may be attained using only twelve (12) interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Fifteen of them also concur with the thematic analysis design adopted in this research that suggests a sample size of 12-20 participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The primary and secondary data collected for this study were thematically analyzed, whereby essential themes were identified based on the transcripts of interviews with respondents and secondary sources. The documents outlining the topic of disinformation and national security were analyzed. In order to address the ethical considerations, secondary data are used and the respondents are anonymised.

Discussion of Findings

This section studies the effect of disinformation activities in Kenya and the possible security threats they may pose to the nation. It explains how misinformation can be converted to disinformation and how social media is very important in the propagation of this vice in Kenya. The section further highlights the impact of disinformation on good governance, key elements of human security and the dialogue surrounding the issue of ethnicity, thereby contributing to the country's insecurity.

Fake News and Social Media

Before describing operational and security ramifications of disinformation in Kenya, setting some terms straight is a must. The scholars' opinions mostly meet on one definition: deceitful information is an untrue, erroneous, or misleading piece of info, which is purposely produced, displayed, and circulated with the idea of harming the public or making a profit (Durach et al., 2020; Brites et al., 2022; Hedling, 2021). Elsa Hedling (2021) goes on to clarify that digital disinformation specifically means digital tools usage in this context. To put it simply, the terminology refers to the dissemination of utterly misleading content with the objective of blurring the truth and causing division in thought among people. Such concepts as misinformation are also related and they can be described as the intentional or unintentional sharing of wrong information (Zeng & Brennen, 2023). Nevertheless, misinformation is, in most instances in Kenya, passed without any realization. Another similar term is propaganda, which refers to information presented in a biased manner to influence people's opinions, views, or thinking (Hedling, 2021).

The recent advancement of online media platforms has had a significant influence on the information environment, whereby traditional means of communication, such as newspapers and radio, have given way to a high reliance on social media. In the first quarter of 2024, social media penetration rate in Kenya was approximately 23.5 percent, meaning that every four Kenyans had active access to social media platforms (DataReportal, 2024). Although the penetration rate is relatively low, the average time that social media users in Kenya spend daily online is three hours and 43 minutes, which is higher than the global average of two

hours and 30 minutes (DataReportal, 2024). The hours Kenyans spend on social media make the nation more susceptible to disinformation, misinformation and fake news.

Respondents in Kenya have utilized social media platforms to disseminate information, disinformation, fake news, misinformation and propaganda, which have permeated most major social media platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp and X (93.3 percent of respondents). X has particularly come to be of great help in influencing or managing political discourses by virtue of its large-scale coverage. The service also enables individuals to stay updated on what is happening or what constitutes a crisis. Due to this, disinformation, misinformation and fake news are also propagated through these mediums. The spread of disinformation in Kenya is primarily online, with organisations and individuals, including radical activists, anti-government actors, foreign bloggers and influencers with ulterior motives, creating fake social media accounts (Participant 1). These organizations often use multiple accounts under different names. They produce and spread disinformation that has the potential to endanger national security. After these organisations and individuals create and disseminate fake information, social media users, including those in Kenya and elsewhere, often remain unaware of this misinformation (Participant 7).

As a result, the rest of the population is propagandized through disinformation on social media. The disinformation tends to evolve into misinformation, propaganda and fake news, resulting in a distorted information environment. This kind of environment offers a good breeding ground for hate, disrespect and other forms of prejudice and breeds divisions among individuals. Where a government becomes unreliable due to disinformation, the citizens can then distrust the government and this may eventually result in subversion. Anarchy is even a possibility in instances when the validity of a government is undermined due to disinformation (GAO, 2024). During the elections, particularly in 2017 and 2022, disinformation, which came in different forms, accentuating ethnic and other complaints, was drafted and disseminated on the internet. The information spread to millions of voters within minutes, including disinformation, which tainted the minds of many with unreliable information. Politically motivated actors used X to disseminate disinformation using hashtags. For example, the hashtag #KOT (Kenyans on Twitter) has evolved over the years into an online community with a good reputation for popularizing various social and political issues that often make headlines in mainstream media. Other hashtags were used to provoke ethnic violence, such as the one that translates to "spot" or "blemish," which was widely used in the Rift Valley during the 2007 elections to refer to non-Kalenjins, namely, #Madoadoa (Weighton & McCurdy, 2017).

Those who seek self-interest often bribe individuals to sell their stories. When these kinds of narratives reach a large audience, the dissemination of information is not the form of disinformation but rather the promulgation of misinformation. In 2021, it was reported that specific influencers were hired to market predetermined hashtags by using fake accounts to create the illusion of widespread popular support for the constitutional reforms suggested at the time. The court was also the target of disinformation campaigns on Twitter, which utilized the hashtag #JusticeForSale, aiming to undermine the judiciary's independence after the Supreme Court dismissed the initiative as unconstitutional (Oronje, 2025). Influencers can also earn a substantial amount of money by promoting content for at least a few hours (Participant 7). Consequently, a significant percentage of Kenyans are ready to receive payment as a result of publishing fake or misleading content. According to one of the respondents, it is common that opposing sides of the political divide use such influencers simultaneously as long as they are paid. He has emphasised that they often use fake accounts, which may be operated by humans or programs (bots), to flood the information space with repetitive hashtags and phrases, giving an impression which is not representative of reality (Participant 2). This can be done to disseminate such disinformation for political, economic, or security motives.

Although the majority of disinformation campaigns originate on X, the information is often spread on other social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp (Adebesin et al., 2023). Such disinformation threatens the integrity of elections and, therefore, the domestic unity of the nation due to its potential widespread dissemination. Such disinformation, particularly during election periods, increases insecurity, mainly in societies like Kenya, where rumours have often led to violent cycles.

The Issue of Disinformation and Governance

The security threat of disinformation has a governance perspective as the propagation of false information via social media affects the population and denies the principles of good governance. It may also influence other democratic activities through creating social unrest or instability as a whole (Romanova et al., 2019; Datzer & Lonardo, 2022). The political disinformation has been applied by the non-state actors in Kenya, including the Al-Shabaab and other criminal gangs, to radicalise people into their criminal behaviour. It is such radicalisation that makes citizens lose confidence in good governance institutions (Participant 7). There could also be strategic disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining trust in the legitimacy and integrity of the democratic process. Such campaigns have been conducted in Kenya, particularly during presidential elections, in an attempt to demonstrate that they would not be free and fair (Participant 9). This creates an atmosphere reminiscent of post-election skirmishes, which have been witnessed in Kenya during every election cycle. Skirmishes have been sparked by disinformation, which is particularly prevalent during campaigns in Kenya, thereby negatively impacting good governance.

In most cases, Kenyan citizens have been victimized by disinformation to persuade them against supporting a particular candidate. During the 2022 presidential elections, social media platforms were used to give some candidates a bad image. Most respondents indicated that social media was also used to portray Raila Odinga, the presidential candidate, as an antichrist who did not deserve to be president (Participants 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14). Such an atmosphere of disinformation hinders good governance, as a significant proportion of voters make electoral choices without due consideration. Electioneering disinformation distorts facts and characterization of assassination, which negatively affects democracy in Kenya (Gabielkov et al, 2016).

It was established that disinformation has compromised democratic processes by fostering tribalism, which negatively impacts good governance (Participant 11). Disinformation shapes the behaviour of people, which is fuelled by the power of the media, as demonstrated by the agenda-setting theory. Other respondents, as indicated by some, such as the Social Health Authority (SHA) and the affordable housing project, have been victims of disinformation. They observed that this has contributed towards youth unrest, which negatively impacts good governance in Kenya (Participants 1, 4, 6, 6,7). On the other hand, the fight against disinformation in Kenya has, in many cases, led to infringement of democratic rights, including freedom of speech (Bayer, 2024).

Disinformation has also resulted in the destabilisation of the population and simultaneously, it disrupts the operation of the fundamental state organs (Sługocki & Sowa, 2021). This solidifies the perception of the government's illegitimacy in the eyes of the population, leading to civil disobedience, leadership crises and even conflicts (Participant 15). This subsequently contributes to the making of bad decisions by the different arms of the government, thereby compromising good governance. Liberal democracies are especially vulnerable to disinformation, as it compromises democratic values such as the rule of law. It causes individuals to lose confidence in organizations and undermines trust in government systems. Hence, disinformation undermines democracies internally (Kozlowski & Skelnik, 2020). It is slowly undermining political and social stability and citizen resilience. One of the respondents highlighted this fact by saying that disinformation causes more disaffection toward the government and negatively influences decision-making (Participant 12). Therefore, despite the lack of militaristic elements and the aspect of surprise typical of military interventions, disinformation remains a threat to the existence of democracies.

Disinformation has altered the way individuals process information and their ability to think critically in Kenya. It encourages citizens of Kenya not to trust anything the state does and not to believe anything the government says. The goal of disinformation is not only to undermine faith and trust in the government, but also to erode the principles of rational thinking. This phenomenon also makes one wonder whether it is possible to understand social reality and act in relation to it (Bjola & Papadakis, 2020). This angle is a habit that is frequently directed towards the creation of greater proficiency in democracy; hence, a nation that offers poor governance. Such an information environment complicates the process of the citizenry to distinguish facts from disinformation.

Disinformation and Security

The problem of disinformation is a direct and indirect challenge to the national security of Kenya. It will affect various government policies, such as those concerned with Defence and Security. Disinformation has also affected the political stability of the country as it has undermined the operations of the security agencies and jeopardised the security of the state. This situation has impacted negatively on different elements of political security, such as human rights, political order, ideology and the political willingness of the people to engage in the political process. It is also exacerbated by the fact that citizens feel more tense, nervous and scared under the impact of disinformation, hence they are less eager to participate in significant political activities, like voting (Participant 3).

Disinformation has played a critical role in political mobilization in Kenya. (Kaczmarek, 2024) It spreads toxic messages that gradually diminish public trust in the government and the political system, thus, it has a great impact on people's feelings and actions taken by the masses. Besides, the participants of the current research said that online disinformation has been repeatedly used to draw public unrest by making the issues or the basis of the conflict more controversial. One of the examples that the participants mentioned is that distorted stories about the 2024 Finance Bill sparked the Gen-Z protests in June, and the demonstrators are said to be misled by misinformation (Participant 2, 5, 8). Consequently, the national government was perceived negatively by the public at large, and this, in turn, led to outbreaks of public unrest and insecurity that claimed lives.

Other respondents observed that disinformation disrupts counterterrorism operations, especially when politicised. They also noted that disinformation is not only damaging Kenya externally, but also creating havoc in the economy. It undermines the economy by affecting the government programs and initiatives that affect the services that are offered to citizens. Disinformation also creates fear and hopelessness among the people, thus affecting the key economic activities. They pointed out that the disinformation during the 2024-2025 demonstrations caused people to live in fear and many of them dared not open their businesses (Participant 1, 2, 5, 7, 9). This scenario has a great impact on economic security. Disinformation poses a threat to health security by reducing people's willingness to participate in health programs. In the case of health-related behaviours like vaccination, disinformation can pervert people's beliefs and reduce their susceptibility to health guidelines. This has led to numerous deaths that can be avoided both in Kenya and globally (van der Linden, 2022). An example of this is that disinformation through social media is associated with a drop in vaccination rates (Wilson & Wiysonge, 2020). As the theoretical basis of this research explains, once individuals become susceptible to online disinformation, their behaviour and attitudes shift, which in some cases results in an unwillingness to be vaccinated. This poses a threat to others around them, particularly when the disease is highly contagious (Sternisko et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic was also characterized as an infodemic due to the massive disinformation surrounding the virus. This misinformation comprised the unreported facts on the causes of the virus, the safety of the administered vaccination and the alleged threat of other treatments, most of which were fatal in the majority of cases (Yang, 2020). The fake news that followed the pandemic demonstrated that the aspects of security that are not necessarily connected with the military can potentially make a whole country unstable or even weaker. The impacts of disinformation were pointed out by one of the respondents, as they explained that the health security of Kenya has been largely impacted by this phenomenon. She pointed out that the example of misinformation about the Social Health Authority (SHA) and the government-backed vaccination of cattle in Kenya can be viewed as an illustration of how disinformation undermines health security. Also, the disinformation threatens the health security by deterring the use of protective measures, such as using masks and other means of abating the disease (Participant 4).

There is also the challenge of spreading false information, which is a big security threat in the case of disasters. It usually escalates the situation by restricting access to correct information within communities (Berger & Richards, 2024). According to one of the respondents, the fabricated news that was spread by the majority of

Kenyans on social media during the 2013 Westgate attack caused much panic among the citizens and confusion among the responders. This misinformation, among others (in reference to the number of terrorists and the casualties, among others), led to a lack of coordination in the response, thereby creating a greater insecurity (Participant 6).

Anti-scientific disinformation has also dominated the Kenyan society, and as a result, some individuals have discarded scientifically proven facts to embrace potentially harmful and dangerous beliefs (Harman et al., 2025). This situation diminishes the ability of people to make informed choices regarding the situation around them. One of them is the fake news that has been propagated during the past decades regarding the question of whether human activities contribute to climate change. Some individuals are sceptical, even given the scientific consensus that such activities play a significant role in climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2023). One of the respondents gave a reference to Kenyan politicians who asserted that rain had nothing to do with forests, as God is the one who brings rain (Participant 5). Although they are often used as an excuse to engage in selfish activities, such as land grabbing, this undermines the validity of policies aimed at preserving the environment.

When disinformation strengthens propaganda against the state and society, it may seriously threaten all the dimensions of human security. Disinformation creates a lack of trust between the government and civilians in terms of human security, which is characterized by the absence of want and fear. It has also been used to formulate imaginary threats, which helps win the masses' support for military action, where such actions are considered essential in defence. This defensive stance is considered essential to the nation's survival by the country, which can undermine the state-based view on security (Participant 8). Unless the disinformation originates from Kenya, it could be used in the future as a tool against a foreign opponent, potentially compromising Kenya's foreign policy.

Disinformation and Negative Ethnicity

Negative ethnicity in Kenya has been propagated by disinformation, especially during election periods (Agbele, 2023). Consequently, disinformation is a direct threat to life and security when it is utilized to promote negative ethnicity, as this action may give way to life-threatening behaviour, including ethnic war or even genocide. The disinformation can provoke the killing of members from particular ethnic or religious communities (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020). In Africa, religion-based and ethnic disinformation has been used to propagate fatal attacks, which have led to the deaths of many people in many parts of Africa (Gupta & Wilkinson, 2019; Jaffrey, 2021; Samuels, 2020). This has even compelled the minority groups to run out of their homes in a bid to evade victimization.

In Kenya, online disinformation has been a major factor in influencing public perception. According to Participant 10, such narratives usually aim at making groups look like outsiders or threats through lies. Campaigns like these very often do the opposite of what peacemaking wants by increasing divisions between groups, mainly along ethnic lines and in this way, they strengthen the negatives and the prejudices that lead to ethnic violence—especially during elections. In some cases, politically motivated falsehoods not only indirectly but also directly attack one ethnic group and this is done so that the other is made weak, with entire communities being labeled with tags such as "unfit to lead," "traitors," or other similar derogatory terms to discredit their political candidates (Participant 14).

Several respondents were concerned that online disinformation could impact every aspect of Kenyan society. They noted that, as online disinformation has already led to divisions along ethnic lines, unless curbed, it might be employed in the near future to divide on religious grounds, thereby bringing about deep-rooted conflicts (Participants 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14). According to another respondent, one day, the disinformation circulating on the online platform will promote a very misguided agenda in this country. She feared that, since it had become a natural occurrence at the county level among various sub-tribes and clans in deciding whether to vote or not, the same might be applied to spark a religious war. This may lead to an increase in insecurity within the country, as religion is often highly emotive (Participant 13).

In Kenya, the use of disinformation has been employed to imply that some communities have received more government services than others, creating significant resentment among the unserved communities. This is regardless of the intention of devolution to lead to equal allocation of resources among counties. Some leaders have also been represented through disinformation as favouring particular communities (Participant 15). This has been very instrumental in contributing to ethnic segregation and the eventual conflicts. As the theoretical underpinnings of this paper have pointed out, online disinformation has been instrumental in building a fake narrative that separates people based on ethnic lines. This has destroyed social interactions between different ethnic and religious communities (Gabielkov et al, 2016). When it is spread via social media, this phenomenon has become a lethal weapon that can annihilate a society, especially during times of crisis. The 2007 campaigns had used the "41 against one" narrative to spread hatred against the Kikuyu nation. Kikuyu were targeted to be assassinated in some areas, especially the Rift Valley, which had been targeted by violence in January 2008, an action which triggered retaliatory attacks (Participant 5).

Disinformation has also served to rouse hate, discrimination, violence and occasionally, the killing of perceived enemies (Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020). This disinformation would be directed towards ethnic, religious, or racial minorities and they will tend to be branded as immoral in their actions and hence justified to be punished. In Kenya, every electoral process has been rife with disinformation that has always triggered ethnic hatred, which results in violence (Starr, 2024). These periods are usually used to make use of online disinformation to recruit, radicalise and justify actions that at times involve killing, mutilation and property destruction, among others, as part of criminal activities (Participant 4).

Online disinformation has been applied in several African nations, such as Kenya, to dehumanise certain ethnic minorities, which resulted in ethnic clashes and even genocide, as was observed in Rwanda (De Forges, 1996). Hateful disinformation has been presented as a threat to the right to life, personal security and equal treatment of different ethnic groups, which are the main arguments of the paper in Africa. The paper also notes that this disinformation affects the enjoyment of various freedoms, including freedom of thought, religion and culture, among others, hence indirectly leading to insecurity in the country. The vulnerability of government communication systems has created a loophole that has been exploited by non-state actors in Kenya to pursue their own interests by disseminating misinformation and sparking ethnic tensions. These are the non-state actors that tend to work in the interest of foreign parties, which may even hold subversive motives (Participant 10). Such activities of these actors have played a significant role in promoting negative ethnicity, which results in ethnic fights, cattle-raiding and other criminal acts among the various ethnic groups. As this paper will argue, disinformation has been a means through which non-state actors have advanced their agenda, as touched upon by the theoretical framework behind this paper.

Conclusion

Disinformation is a security threat when viewed through the prism of governance. This is because the spread of fake news influences the opinion of the people and undermines the necessary principles of good governance. Disinformation also impacts other democratic processes since, in most cases, it is known to cause social turmoil or instability. It causes tribalism, loss of trust in the democratic process as a legitimate and honest one and poor implementation of government projects. As shown in the paper, disinformation disrupts the effective functioning of the basic organs of the state. All these facilitate ill governance and thus, insecurity is the outcome. Furthermore, disinformation is a direct threat to the national security of Kenya since it compromises the pillars of human security, which include freedom from want as well as freedom from fear. It has an impact on political, personal, health, community and environmental security of human beings. This requires a multipronged approach to address the challenges posed by this emergent security challenge.

Recommendations

Given the substantial findings of the study, the article recommends the need to invest in modern technology, such as Artificial Intelligence, to control the discourse and remove fake news on social media. It also states the necessity to reduce the existing policy gaps and gaps in the legislation and make citizens more aware of the outcomes of disinformation. Besides, the article recommends implementing the law to punish the perpetrators of disinformation and stop the actions of people with this kind of attitude. Finally, it also means that the government and other concerned agencies should strengthen their communication strategies to overcome disinformation. Lastly, it is recommended that the government and other relevant agencies must enhance their communication tactics to counter disinformation.

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