

Tony Roberts and George Karekwaivanane (eds). 2024. *Digital Disinformation in Africa: Hashtag Politics, Power and Propaganda*. London: Zed Books. 256 pp.

Digital Disinformation in Africa: Hashtag Politics, Power and Propaganda, edited by Tony Roberts and George Hamandishe Karekwaivanane, provides a comprehensive exploration of how disinformation is shaping African politics. Through a series of case studies from Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and other African contexts, the book illustrates the increasingly significant role digital platforms play in disseminating both disinformation and counter-narratives.

The book consists of eleven chapters, with each focusing on a distinct African context where disinformation is shaping political outcomes. One of the central themes of the book is how political elites use disinformation to manipulate electoral outcomes and suppress opposition. In Angola, for instance, the ruling MPLA party employed a combination of media manipulation and digital disinformation to discredit opposition leader Adalberto Costa Junior by falsely questioning his academic qualifications and nationality. As Edmilson Angelo points out in Chapter 10, this disinformation strategy followed a familiar pattern where a story would be planted in foreign media, then circulated online by MPLA supporters and “presented as ‘news’” through state-controlled media (p. 201). However, young Angolans countered these falsehoods through the creative use of online memes, thus “disrupting state control of the political narrative” (p. 195).

The book frequently references John Gaventa’s framework of “power and space,” which helps to analyze the ways digital spaces serve as new arenas for political activism. In authoritarian contexts like Angola, where offline spaces for civic engagement are limited, social media has become a vital platform for youth to challenge state power. As the editors highlight in their introduction, these digital spaces offer opportunities for citizens to bypass traditional media controls and voice dissent. The chapter on Zimbabwe demonstrates how online platforms were used to push back against state-sponsored disinformation during the 2018 elections.

Wambui Wamunyu’s chapter on the 2022 Kenyan general election illustrates how local politicians and their supporters hired social media influencers to spread disinformation in a highly commercialized manner. Wamunyu notes that social media had become a battlefield for “mercenaries for hire” who would spread false narratives for a price (p. 224). In one instance, misinformation about Kenya’s national debt, promoted by a deputy presidential candidate on *Inooro FM*, was widely shared and only debunked later by fact-checkers (p. 223). This underscores how easily mainstream media can become complicit in the spread of disinformation, especially when under-resourced or lacking robust editorial oversight.

The book also traces the historical roots of disinformation, showing how contemporary digital disinformation builds on long-standing tactics used by colonial powers and post-colonial regimes. For example, Wamunyu recounts how the British government falsely branded Kenyan leader Jaramogi Oginga Odinga as a communist in the 1960s, an early example of state-sponsored disinformation aimed at manipulating public perception. This historical context enriches the reader’s understanding of how disinformation strategies have evolved but remain rooted in similar objectives: undermining political opponents and maintaining power.

A key strength of the book is its attention to how citizens resist disinformation. In Angola, for example, young people use memes and online satire to counter state narratives, creating a form of “counter-disinformation” that undermines the ruling party’s propaganda efforts (p. 206). In Kenya, fact-checking organizations played a critical role in debunking false information spread during the election period, though Wamunyu emphasizes that these efforts were often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of disinformation.

While the book successfully highlights the problems posed by digital disinformation, its exploration of potential solutions is somewhat limited. The chapters mention fact-checking initiatives and digital literacy as countermeasures, but these discussions are relatively brief. Given the scale of the problem, a deeper exploration of how to combat disinformation, especially in resource-limited contexts, would have added further value. Additionally, while the book briefly touches on gendered disinformation, particularly the targeting of women politicians, this aspect could have been explored more comprehensively.

Overall, *Digital Disinformation in Africa* is a timely and necessary contribution to the growing body of literature on digital politics in Africa. It offers a nuanced understanding of how disinformation is reshaping public discourse and electoral processes, while also showcasing the resilience of African citizens in pushing back against propaganda. The book is an essential resource for scholars, journalists, and policymakers interested in the intersections of technology, politics, and media in Africa.

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