



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**AN AUDIENCE ANALYSIS OF HOW THE YOUTH FACT-CHECK 'FAKE NEWS'
CIRCULATED ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN OMBILI AND HOCHLAND PARK, NAMIBIA**

BY

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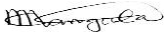
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Declaration

I, *Rafael Hangula*, hereby declare that the work contained in the thesis entitled, *an audience analysis of how the youth fact-check 'fake news' circulated on social media in Ombili and Hochland Park, Namibia* is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in the past submitted it at any university or other higher education institutions for the award of a degree.


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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of "fake news" have massive implications, especially at the times of elections. People who live in marginalised communities are the most exposed to fake news and least armed to decode coordinated information campaigns (information disorders). As a result, it may affect the practice of active citizenship by news consumers as their voting decisions may base on misconceptions. The net effect of this is that, their voting behaviours are done on the basis of highly distorted information whereby those who are most privileged are in a position to make voting decisions on the basis of truthful and credible information. This study explored how the youth in Namibia fact-checked news and information circulated on social media platforms during the 2019 electoral campaign. Firstly, it examined the major forms or types of fake news produced in Namibia before, during and soon after the elections. Secondly, it examined the criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information. Thirdly, it assessed the newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news on social media. This research employed virtual ethnography, qualitative content analysis, to understand, and document the types of fake news produced, and circulated in Namibia. Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs), and face-to-face interviews were then employed to get a sense of how young people sift through fake news. Grounded in Hall's Encoding and Decoding model, fabricated contents, manipulated contents, misleading contents, conspiracy theories and imposter contents were observed in 2019 elections. The study revealed that there was systematic abuse of mainstream brands to spread information disorders to confuse and disorient voters. In addition, these types of fake news were fueled by the poor coordination, and delays in communication from the Electoral Commission. Most of the fake news were aimed at discrediting and casting aspersions on the candidature of Dr Hage Geingob of the Swapo Party, and Dr Panduleni Itula, who was an Independent Candidate at the time. This study found that young citizens' ability to decode fake news is influenced by the level of education, literacy skills, class differences and media exposure as pointed out by Hall's theory. Therefore, this study would add that availability of resources to fact check online news and information and political affiliation are also key in fighting fake news. The study recommends that government should ensure that its citizens have access to quality information through tasked institutions, to avoid fabrications, and distribution of information disorders, and provide a room for media and digital literacy campaigns in order to enhance skills of citizens of deconstructing coordinated information disorders, especially on social media platforms. News consumers need to embrace the concept fact checking before agreeing, and distributing information from social media as this would protect them from making decisions that are based on misconceptions, which could affect others.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the whole study. The first section of this study outlines the research background. The second section deliberates on the problem statement. The third section looks at social context of the study. The fourth section explores the theoretical framework guiding this study. The fifth section examines the objectives of the study. The sixth section discusses the methodological methods used in the study. The seventh section outlines the significance of the study and research questions. The eighth section teases out the delimitations of this research. The ninth section presents the structure of the thesis. The final section concludes this Chapter.

1.1 Background

This study explored how young news consumers, engage with “fake news” in their everyday life in Namibia. In particular, it investigated how youth in the two Windhoek Suburbs, Ombili and Hochland Park sift through fake and truth. The study further investigated the kind of fake news produced in Namibia and its thematic content, including how young people fact-check information before sharing it with others. As fake news spreads, many people are turning to fact-checking (Mengzhe, Nathan & Francis, 2021). While some of these practices serve partisan purposes, few have studied how online news consumers, fact-check news. With free space brought by new media, the monopoly of fact checking, gate keeping, news production, distribution and control of everything that goes into public space no longer lies in the hands of fact checkers, editors and journalists. As a result, news consumers are now forced to carry out their own evaluation of news coming their ways, but how do they fact check online news when faced with political uncertainty, and citizen journalism in the world of contemporary “fake news” and ensure that information they are consuming is authentic? Fact-checking is a process utilised by journalists, hired in the buildup of producing news articles to examine the truthfulness of claims made by politicians, pundits, and public figures. It is commonly performed by news organizations and is usually done by freelancers (Mengzhe et al., 2019).

However, independent fact checkers such as Namibia Fact Check have also emerged. Fact checking process is known to be very time consuming. as result, the world at some point held discussions of automating this process in the context of computational journalism (Vlachos & Riedel 2014). Due to concerns about the circulation of misleading information on social media platforms, and populist politicians boosting “alternative facts” and being critical on everything against their belief as “fake news”,

the number of fact-checkers has grown dramatically (Tompkins, 2020). The objective of fact-checking is to provide accurate information, and in doing so, it holds elites accountable, impart audiences on how to deal with doubtful information and promote good journalistic practices. Fact-checkers are independent third-party organizations that review and rate content for its accuracy. In doing so they, the procedure includes calling sources, consulting public data, verifying pictures and videos and many more (Tompkins, 2020). Therefore, this research aimed to explore how young people fact check “fake news” circulated on social media.

Different scholars have attempted to define fake news. For example, Fallis & Mathiesen (2019) define fake news as counterfeit news. They explained that a story is real news if and only passes through the customary journalistic procedures comprising of professionally trained reporters, fact checkers, and editors. And a story is counterfeit news if and only if it is not genuine news with the aim and propensity to deceive (Fallis & Mathiesen, 2019). As for Golbeck, Mauriello, Auxier, Bhanushali, Bonk, Bouzaghrane, & Falak (2018) the term "fake news" covers intentionally false, deceptive stories and factual errors, satire, and at times, stories that an individual just does not like. Writing in African context, Mare, Mabweazara, & Moyo (2019) define fake news as a deliberate creation and distributing of misleading and false information with the exclusive purpose of deliberately gaining political, economic and ideological points.

Information disorders such as fake news are against goal 16.10.2 of United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which calls for public and private access to information and protect fundamental freedoms (UNESCO, 2015). Over the time, the environment of fake news has been shifting from different mediums such as newspaper to broadcasting and, now, to digital media platforms (Shu, Sliva, Wang, Tang & Liu, H, 2016; Barone, 2018; Vasu, Ang, Jayakumar, Faizal, & Ahuja, 2018). However, the recent outburst of fake news especially on digital media platforms, as well as its possibly damaging effects on democracy, justice, and public trust has increased scholarly interest in the subject. As a result, the issue has been recognised as one of the biggest hazards to social equality, journalism, freedom of speech and has caused harm to community confidence in government (Zhou & Zafarani, 2018). Because of the advent of digital media technologies, news consumers are now exposed to an avalanche of information from different sources, most of which appeals to their emotions. Scholars like Bruns (2007) talks of “produsage,” which suggests that there is a simultaneous process of news production and consumption in the era of digital journalism.

Scholars (Kim, Schölkopf & Gomez-Rodriguez, 2017; Zhou & Zafarani, 2018) discuss that the discussion surrounding the issue of fake news came to the forefront of public discourse during the United States of

America Presidential elections in 2016. It has since become a global phenomenon associated with the widespread of misleading and false news and information related to politics, technology, public health and so forth.

Drawing from Farkas and Schou's (2018) work, Mare et al. (2019) "fake news" is generally a phenomenon associated with the growth of populist politics, digital capitalism, revolution of the public sphere and fundamental weaknesses of liberal and mainstream media. Mare et. al. (2019) discover that the use and flow of information disorder, untruth and cyber-propaganda is befalling as a result of the low barriers to media and creative expression connected with the internet and its supplementary digital technologies. In predominantly closed societies like Eswatini (Lunga and Mthembu, 2019), Uganda (Strand and Svensson, 2019) and Zimbabwe (Ncube, 2019; Moyo, 2018; Mare and Matsilele, 2020), emphasise that the entrance of social media into the news and information atmosphere, has created new news system containing true and made-up news production and distribution (Ogola, 2019). Leve (2012) asserts that the members of the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) fashioned the Circuit of Culture (the Circuit) as a tool of cultural analysis, and later advanced as a conceptual basis to the 1997 Culture, Media & Identities series. It emphasises five basic elements which are: production, representation, consumption, regulation and identity, and the interrelated articulations of these components, and is considered for its present importance and possibilities for considering the increasingly complex multiple modes of each of these mutable moments (Leve, 2012).

In Western community for example, Colomina, Margalef, and Youngs, (2021) write that the European Parliament has considered disinformation as an 'increasing systematic pressure' on its societies and their electoral stability. The European Commission's Shaping Europe's Digital Future strategy considers that disinformation grinds down trust in institutions, digital and traditional media and troubles its democracies because it hinders the capacity of electorates to take informed decisions. The EU Parliament further warns that disinformation is set to polarise democratic societies by the means of crafting or expanding tensions as well as undermining democratic pillars like electoral systems (Colomina, et. al 2021). In support of the above sentiments, Martin-Rozumiłowicz and Kužel (2019) argue that the occurrence of disinformation, which is mainly through social media, has central impact on electoral integrity, and has now become a worldwide issue. They argue that mis/disinformation, on social media, has involved into an accumulative problem to electoral integrity and electorates' trust in their democratic institutions, and that there is a concern of the sheer volume of information, which has become a huge problem as electorates tussle to make sense of all the contrasting sources, irrespective of levels of expertise.

Therefore, the Namibian experience is similar to other parts of Africa and the world, particularly as the effects of “fake news” have become very noticeable around elections and election-related practices.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has been recently developed interest on the development of “fake news” in Namibia, and in 2019 published a report on titled fake news and Namibian elections in which it discusses that the contemporary issue of fake news is not a new kid on the block to the Namibian news and information landscape.

The presence of “fake news” in Namibia has been a regular feature on Namibia’s political processes since early 2000, and has been noted with the arrival of fictional email writer Ananias Nghifitikeko who focused on the smearing of former Swapo Party heavyweight and Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) leader Hidipo Hamutenya, forward to the landmark 2004 Swapo Party extraordinary congress. Before the emergence of social media, his emails at the time, were said to be the handy work of various senior ruling party operatives and count on email recipients to share them further, including on the media for publishing (IPPR, 2019). According to IPPR (2019) report, mutual misinforming is prevalent across social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Members of WhatsApp groups appear to be involved in or susceptible to sharing / forwarding mis-/disinformation, whereby news consumers with low levels of exposure or engagement with traditional channels of receiving news and current affairs appearing the most susceptible (IPPR 2019).

The danger of “fake news” not only in developing nations like Namibia, but globally is that electorates, especially those with low level of digital literacy are heavily challenged, when faced with floods of false information on social media which would have impacts on their political participation, and compromise their civic rights as their voting could be based on misconceptions. As fake news continued to pressure the information space, there has been a worldwide rise of independent fact-checking organisations (e.g. Full Fact and PolitiFact) and data-driven non-profits (e.g. Code for America and Hack/Hackers) that advocate for data-driven practices. By February 2018, there were 149 active fact-checking organisations around the globe, including Code for Africa, Open Up and Africa Check, according to Duke University Reporter’s Lab (Cheruiyot et al. 2018). In 2019, Namibia joined the rest of the world with the launch of Namibia Fact Check Website by IPPR, an independent fact-checker to deal with fake news.

In view of the above contextual background, this study seeks to investigate how young people between the ages of 18-35 in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek fact-check false and misleading news related to the 2019 elections in Namibia, which were predominantly circulated through social media platforms. This

study adopts the African Youth Charter's definition of youth as every person between the ages of 15-35 years. This allows the researcher to capture the period of "waithood", whereby young people struggle to transition into adulthood because of overdependence on their parents and guardians partly because of unemployment and other structural barriers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The contemporary phenomenon of fake news has exposed news consumers to a wide range of false and misleading information especially during electoral processes across the globe (Mare, Mabweazara and Moyo, 2019; Mare and Matsilele, 2020). The spread of not only political mis-/disinformation via social media has become an undeniable Namibian reality, with potentially far-reaching consequences for healthy political discourse and engagement in the present and into the future, both online and off-line (IPPR, 2020). This body of development has recently been growing ever since social media became a popular means of communication. Fake news in Namibia has been noted and on rise, especially within the ruling party's factionalism and it has now multiplied to national politics as witnessed in the 2019 national elections. When IPPR (2020) tracked disinformation related to 2019 elections in Namibia, its findings reveal that fake news is a contemporary issue and a reality in Namibian political and electoral processes, driven in social media vehicle which have become the chosen fields of battle whereby distressing, divisive and hazardous campaigns and content are being publicized, produced and distributed.

It further revealed that news consumers, whether individually or in groups, when faced with false content on social media seemed unable to distinguish between credible and false information and sources (IPPR, 2020). Additionally, it was discovered that most users who share political mis-and disinformation content do not attempt to verify information before sharing with others (IPPR, 2020). The danger of "fake news" not only in developing nations like Namibia, but globally is that electorates, especially those with low level of digital literacy are heavily challenged, when faced with floods of false information on social media which would have impacts on their political participation, and compromise their civic rights as their voting could be based on misconceptions. As fake news continued to pressure the information space, there has been a worldwide rise of independent fact-checking organisations. Due to concerns about the circulation of misleading information on social media platforms, and populist politicians boosting "alternative facts" and being critical on everything against their belief as "fake news", a number of fact-checkers has grown dramatically (Tompkins, 2020). The objective of fact-checking is to provide accurate information, and in doing so, it holds elites accountable, impart audiences on how to deal with doubtful information and promote good journalistic practices. Therefore, given the prevalence of fake news in Namibia, it is

important to understand how news consumers, particularly young people, who consume most of their news and information via social media platforms fact-check fake news in their every day's lives.

The effects of information pollution on the political and electoral landscapes have been laid bare by what appeared to be something of a flood of political mis-/disinformation in the periods immediately before, around and after Namibia's national and presidential elections of 27 November 2019, (IPPR, 2020). Research (Barone, 2018; Tee and Murugesan, 2018; IPPR, 2019) points out that fake news has negative impacts such as influencing political and countries' elections, generate hate and discrimination, and poses serious outcomes on the views of people. On the other hand, Lunga & Mthembu (2019) in Eswatini highlight that the presence of "fake news" is endangering the reliability of the media and intimidate the self-governing role of the media in building an informed community.

As a result of few accesses to various news sources, ordinary people often (mis)take "the popularity or virality of a shared piece of information as indication of its veracity" (Chakrabarti et al. 2018: 44). Given that, there is a gap in terms of opportunities and tools for news verification and it is important to understand how young people engage with online content. As fake news spreads, many people are turning to fact-checking (Mengzhe, Nathan & Francis, 2021). While some of these practices serve partisan purposes, few have studied how online news consumers fact-check news.

Therefore, it is important to understand how young people who are mostly consuming news via digital media platforms are sifting through grains from chaff when it comes to fake news in Namibia. The production and distribution of fake news has led to disastrous electoral democracy consequences (UNESCO, 2018). Ordinary people including young and old have been misled, confused, misinformed and even made to believe unverified news and information. The impact has been felt at the electoral democratic level where voters have been manipulated such as in the United States of America and Africa (Kim, Schölkopf & Gomez-Rodriguez, 2017; Zhou & Zafarani, 2018; Wasserman, 2018; Mare and Matsilele, 2020). Furthermore, most of the studies (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017, Kim, Schölkopf, & GomezRodriguez, 2017; Zhou & Zafarani, 2018 and Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019) thus far have focused on the production and distribution of fake news in the global North. A heavy focus on the production and motivations for sharing fake news has meant that another important element of the "circuit of culture," which is the end user fact-checking of news, has been under-researched. There is concern that the sharing of news on social media platforms can negatively reshape online culture and the ability of the internet to contribute to liberal democracy (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019, p. 7).

In general, literature on fake news still reflects a lack of geographical diversity (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2019; Mare et al. 2019). Besides the unprecedented circulation of fake news during the run-up to the November 2019 elections in Namibia, there has not been any published academic work on the issue with the exception of civil society reports (IPPR, 2019). In the Namibian context, very little is currently known about how the youth fact-check political news and information circulated via social media platforms. Extant research has sought to catalogue the various types of fake news produced and circulated during the electoral campaigns (IPPR, 2019). This study seeks to fill up this academic lacuna and provide contextualized and rich empirical data on the phenomenon of fake news in Namibia.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research aimed at exploring how youth in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek fact check (or verify the authenticity) of false and misleading news and information circulated on social media platforms during the 2019 electoral campaign in Namibia. The sub-objectives of this research are:

1. To document the types of fake news, which are circulated on social media platforms by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek.
2. To examine the criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information.
3. To assess the newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their friends, family and relatives on social media.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study aims to add a Namibian perspective on fake news consumption to the global debate and help organisations like the Media Literacy Learning Initiative (MiLLi), the Namibia Fact Check, Namibia Youth Council (NYC) and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) to understand the levels of digital media literacies amongst the Namibian citizens as well to assist with critical media literacy campaigns and add to a limited body of literature on fake news in Namibia. It is also worth pointing out that this research can serve as a capacity building for the electorate on what to do when faced with a barrage of news and information during electoral campaigns.

1.5 Context of the study

Namibia is a developing nation in Southern African continent with a population size of about 2.5 million. It attained its independence in 1990. In 2019, the country observed its sixth democratic elections, which were conducted through the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for the second time, first time being in 2014. In 2019, the country witnessed a new political wind in its political sphere when a member (now former) of South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) Dr Panduleni Itula, stood as an Independent Candidate (IC) for Presidential elections to compete against the President of his party, a first of its kind in Namibia. The IC used a loophole in the country's electoral act, and adamantly claimed to have the right to challenge the ruling party candidate as an alternative and remained defiant to leave the ruling party, SWAPO, using the analogy of a family feud, which still allows you to stay in the family while seeking solutions (Melber, 2020 p 14). The rise of IC changed the political atmosphere of electoral politics and shocked many political observers in the country. The main contest was between Dr Hage Geingob (leader of SWAPO) and Dr Panduleni Itula (IC). Dr Itula's registration to stand in the presidential election and his confirmation as a candidate in late October 2019 has fueled a lot of political dis/misinformation.

The high volume of fake news circulated on different social media platforms ahead of the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Namibia was unprecedented in the history of post-independence elections. It is worth to note that access to accurate information is of paramount importance at all times and during national elections is of no exception.

Fake news articles around politics exacerbated and escalated on social media platforms mainly on WhatsApp and Facebook due to political differences and as an attempt to discredit election contestants. Such events created a tense atmosphere in the run up to the elections. Given the role of citizen journalism and social media, fake news stretched out under profile pictures and names of well-known and trusted mainstream brands, such as Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), *The Namibian* newspaper, *Namibian Sun* newspaper to mention a few. Most fake news was circulated on social media during elections period involved the in-fights between Swapo party candidate President Geingob and Dr Itula, a Swapo party member who stood as an Independent Candidate. Geingob emerged victorious with 56.3%, a huge decline from 87%, which won him first term in 2014 whilst his closest rivalry Dr Itula obtained 29.4%. This election saw a generous turnout of 400 000 young people, especially those born after independence, known as "born frees," and the Millennials, (Tlhage, 2020). Young people were mainly supporters of IC. IC campaign was merged with protests due to high level of corruption, unfair distribution of resources, high unemployment amongst others. It also came at the time when *Al Jazeera* television

news channel exposed one of the biggest corruption scandals in fishing industry in post-apartheid Namibia, in which Cabinet Ministers and members of the ruling party are alleged to be implicated.

This research explored young news consumers in Ombili and Hochland Park make sense of what is 'true' or 'false' in a changed media ecology. This includes fake news reports in the run up to 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Namibia. This study looks to add a consumption perspective to the latter as many studies in Africa (IPPR 2019, Wassermann, 2018, Lunga and Mtembu, 2019) centered on production, fabrication, and sharing of fake news. Furthermore, most studies (Mavridis, 2018, Kim, Schölkopf, & Gomez-rodriguez, 2017; Zhou & Zafarani, 2018 & Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019) on fake news were done outside Namibia and Africa. This research tries to establish how young citizens in the two locations (Ombili and Hochland Park) fact check what is true or false and how they reacted to some of the collected fake news articles that were shared and published on social media during the period of 2019 elections.

Content creation and agenda setting is no longer determined, set and in the hands of traditional media platforms. More importantly, the media ecology has changed drastically, whereby citizen journalism has now entered in a free space of creation and distribution of content. Due to the relatively free and open space created by social media, it is now difficult for ordinary news consumers to separate facts from fictions. As a result of new media, everyone can produce and distribute content for different purposes. News consumers can absorb this content, but how they engage with such content depends on the digital literacies, knowledge and social context of the consumer. Therefore, in this study, I endeavored to establish how young people fact-check fake news accessed and consumed via social media platforms.

1.6 Study Sites

This is a comparative study of how young people from two case studies, Ombili and Hochland Park fact-check news and information accessed and circulated on social media platforms. These two locations are different in terms of history, education and socio-economic context. Comparative studies permit for analysis and explanation of similarities and differences across societies or socio-cultural settings, and allows one to establish whether shared phenomena can be explained by the same causes (Mare, 2010, p. 77).

1.6.1 Ombili Location

Ombili location is an informal settlement in Katutura. One part of the location falls within Tobias Hainyeko Constituency, whilst the other is part of Moses Garoeb Constituency. For this research, the section of Tobias Hainyeko was selected to form part of this research. In *Oshiwambo*, the local language, Ombili

means “peace”. In the local language, *Otjiherero*, the name Katutura means “the place where people do not want to live.” According to Pendleton (1996: 29), this name was offered to the township to air dislike to the resettlement measures (Steinbrink, 2016). Katutura was established in 1950s, under the Odendaal Plan of South Africa’s apartheid administration that was established immediately for the establishment of two new residential areas, called townships, Katutura for dwellers categorised as Black, and Khomasdal for those classified as coloured (Steinbrink, 2016). However, the Odendaal Plan was not well received, and was met with great resistance amongst the categorized citizens. As a result, this gave birth to boycotts and uprisings in 1959 in which a dozen persons were killed and injured by the police (Steinbrink, 2016). The constituency has a population of over 45 000 residents, mainly from a low class (Khomas Regional Council, n.d). Majority of families, depend on social grants and informal employment for survival.

1.6.2 Hochland Park location

Hochland Park is formerly known as Old Location, is a residential suburb in Windhoek West Constituency, and it was named after the German Khomas Hochland. It borders the suburbs of Acacia in the east, Dorado Park in the north, Windhoek West in the West and Pioneers Park in the south (Khomas Regional Council, n.d). Previously, the location was intended for whites-only, and currently the location is a well-off residential area for Windhoek's upper middle class, both black and white. This, former residential area set up during the colonial period by the German occupation power for the “black” population groups; its cemetery, now out of usage, works as a national monument retelling apartheid history, the resettlement to Katutura and Namibia’s liberation struggle (Steinbrink, 2016). The constituency has over 53,000 inhabitants (Khomas Regional Council, n.d). These places were randomly selected but considering the level of economic and education.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study used the Encoding and Decoding model developed by Stuart Hall. Hall introduced this theory in 1973 as an approach to textual analysis, with a special focus on the scope of dominant, negotiation, and opposition positions. The theory has been applied in audience research studies over the years. This theory suggests that consumers can perform an active part in interpreting communications. Hall provides a theoretic method of how media communications are created, distributed, and understood. The relevance of this theory to this study lies in the three positions (in chapter 3, I will discuss at length the implications of this theory). Morley (1980) criticises this model that interpretation cannot be measured solely in terms of the lifestyle or class location of the consumers. This theory will enable the researcher to

examine whether social classes, backgrounds, locations, and education have an impact on news audiences such as that of the youth.

1.8 Methodological Approach

This study is anchored in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism emphasises the need to understand or interpret the beliefs, motives, and reasons of social actors in order to understand social reality (Scauso, 2019). The study draws on a qualitative research methodology. The population of this study was youth aged 18-35 residing in Ombili and Hochland Park suburbs in Windhoek. The two areas were chosen because of geographical diversity (lower and upper class). For this research, I used non-probability sampling techniques. The study used Virtual ethnography, qualitative content analysis, Focus Groups Discussions, and Face-face interviews for collection. Results of this study were analysed through Thematic analysis. This part of methodology is thoroughly dealt with in a methodology chapter 3.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

Fake news: Fake news is news stories that are intentionally and verifiably false, and has the potential to deceive readers (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017).

Youth: The African Youth Charter defines youth as a young person between the ages of 15-35 years.

Fact-checking: Refers to the verification and critical assessment of the truthfulness of claims rendered in public (Nieminen and Sankari, 2021).

News consumption: A process of enthusiastically in seek of news and information from different media (Clark, 2010).

1.10 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter one focused on introduction and background of the research. It also looked at the context of this research, and areas of under study. It also briefly explained methodology used to collected data, as well as the theoretical framework.

Chapter two presents the existing body of knowledge, and draws up on the experiences of other continents and countries. It also touched on theoretical framework.

The third chapter discusses the methodology used in generating data, as well as the philosophy guiding this research.

In the fourth chapter, I looked on data presentation and analysis of findings, in which themes were developed.

In the last chapter, I provided conclusion, areas for further research and recommendations as per the findings of this research.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter laid down the foundations of the thesis. The chapter briefly introduced the context of the study, its research problem, theoretical framework, and its significance. Additionally, the chapter also provided definitions of key terms for this study. It also briefly touched on the methodology employed, and proceeded to outline the structure of the thesis. In the next chapter, I looked at the existing body of knowledge related to the subject under discussion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. Introduction

In the first chapter, I looked at the background, and objective of this study, with regards to the phenomenon under discussion. In this chapter, I will discuss various definitions of fake news, various types of fake news circulated on social media, criteria to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information, as well as newsworthy factors to consider before sharing news. Additionally, I will also try to locate the issue of fake news in the changing media ecology across the world, Africa and in Namibia. It will outline why it is important to understand how young citizens' fact check news on social media platforms in the Namibian context. Towards the end, the chapter presents the theoretical framework guiding this study. Therefore, this study builds on the work of other scholars who have written extensively on the subject under investigation. It also relies on periodic reports and news articles published during the electoral campaign season in Namibia.

2.1 Conceptualising Fake News

To date there has been little agreement on what constitute 'fake news'. As for Caplan, Hanson, & Donovan, (2018), one of the main cause why the terms is so ubiquitous is because it is fantastically contested. The term 'fake news' has been widely studied across the globe (Wagner and Boczkowski 2019, Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019, UNESCO 2018, Mare, Mabweazara, & Moyo, 2019, Caplan et al., 2018). UNESCO (2018) asserts that the term fake news has become an emotional term used to weaken and discredit journalism. Since the 2016 US election, the definition of the term "fake news" has continued to evolve from being described by journalists as fabricated news during the period of voting campaign, to info published in a news outlet that is fake, to a terminology that is currently co-opted by politicians and commentators to describe whatever they disagree with, and as such it made the term fake news in actual fact meaningless and largely of a stick to beat the mainstream press with than a phenomenon in itself

(Brummette, Distaso, Vafeiadis, & Messner, 2018). Also, a number of scholars have attempted to define fake news (see Wahutu, 2019, Junior. et al., 2017; Mare et al, 2019; Wasserman, 2018).

In concurring with the above sentiments, Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, (2019) affirm that “fake news” is regularly understood in a broader socio-cultural situation which is now termed “post-truth” period. Understanding what constitutes fake news is fast becoming key in every sector, particularly in the world of journalism, politics, health and social media. Many efforts to define what constitutes fake news have focused on academic discourse (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019 and Wasserman-Morales 2019) or on perceptions in industry. Although the majority of research on “fake news” has focused on defining what should be considered as “fake news,” as for Brummette et al., (2018), the recent evolution and rampant misuse of the term in various political environments have created the need to identify what should not be considered as “fake news.” For example, Klein and Wueller (2017) claim that various traditional media outlets, which have recently started to receive the “fake news” label, should be excluded from the “fake” category because “they are not intentionally or knowingly false in nature” (p. 6).

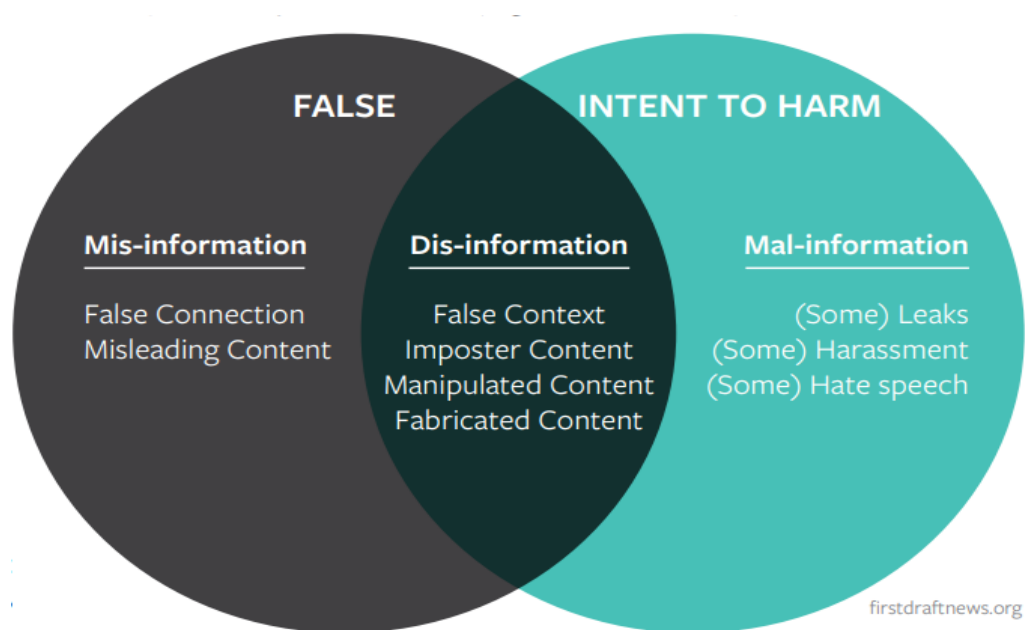
Other occurrences like accidental mistakes in reporting, rumors that originate outside news articles, “conspiracy theories, satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued as factual, false statements by politicians and reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false” also fall outside of the “fake news” category. Initially, it was shown that from 2003 to 2017 the term “fake news” has been used to refer to things as varied as news satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). Others explored how U.S. newspapers have understood fake news in the last few years (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019) and have argued that within journalistic discourse fake news is conceived as a recent phenomenon that occurs mostly due to social media dynamics.

Some scholars (Sadiku, Eze & Musa, 2018) argue that fake news is a type of propaganda that consists of deliberate misinformation. This false information is mainly spread through journals, magazines, mainstream media or social media. With the increasing popularity of social media and mobile phone, more and more people consume news from social media instead of traditional news media. Thus, social media has proved to be a powerful source for fake news propagation.

Wardle and Derakhshan in 2017 at First Draft news provided a typology called “information disorders” for information pollution. Under this term, there is misinformation, which is when fabricated information is shared, without intention to damage and the person sharing it thinks it is true. The other type is disinformation which has to do with untruthful information distributed with the intention to hurt, and the

person sharing it knows it is not true, and lastly is mal-information, which is defined as the distribution of true information with the intention to cause injury, usually by touching material meant for privacy and making it known to the society, Wardle and Derakhshan (2018). For them, the conversation on ‘fake news’ conflates two notions, namely: misinformation and disinformation (Wardle and Derakhshan 2018). The next diagram is showing information disorders, and outlining the categories of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information.

Figure 1: showing information disorders: Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation



Source: Wardle and Derakhshan (2018)

IPPR (2020) observe that in Namibia, the spread of political mis-/disinformation through new media has become an undisputable reality, with potentially extensive concerns for strong political discourse and engagement currently and into the forthcoming, both online and off-line. IPPR (2020) defines disinformation as the intentional dissemination of information that is false, inaccurate or misleading; and that is designed, presented and promoted to cause public harm, political confusion or social panic. In this particular study, ‘fake news’ is defined as “media reports that are deliberately and provably untrue, and can deceive audiences” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

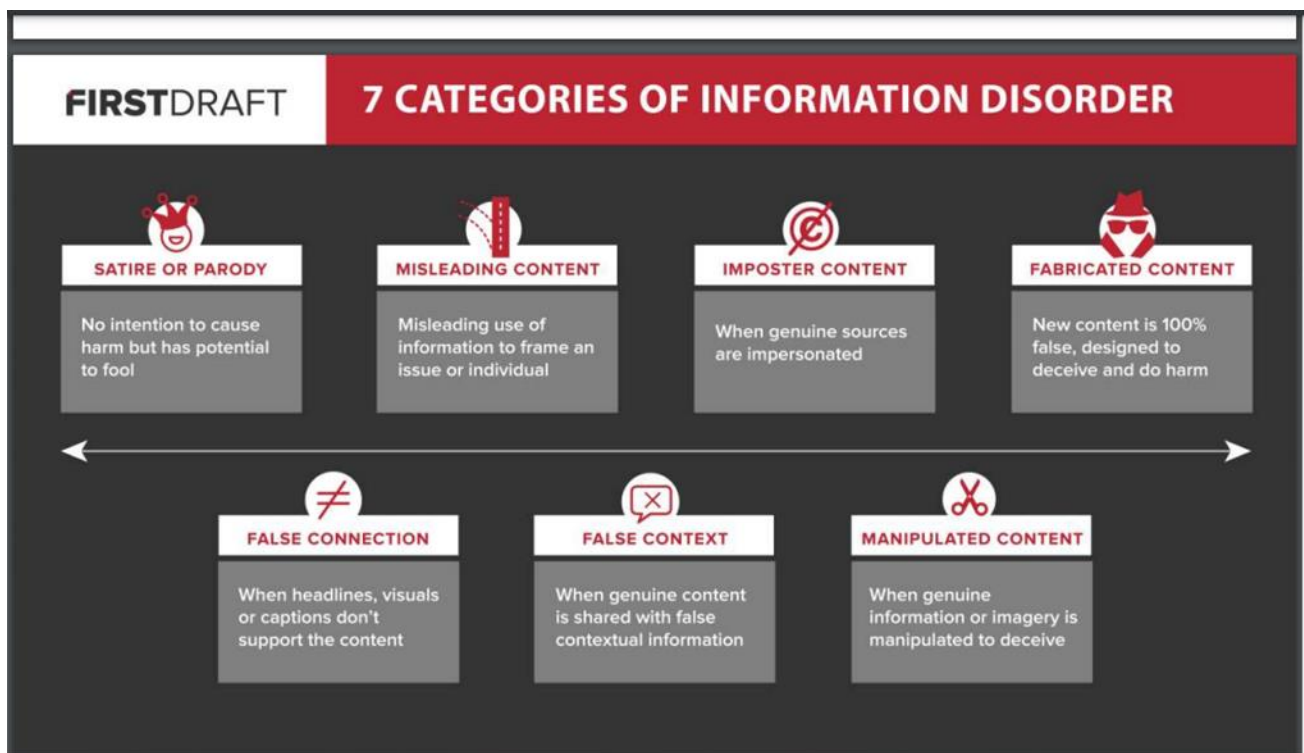
The and Frame (n.d.) write that over and over again, the purpose of disinformation is to influence electorates' decisions to vote or to desist from voting. The use of disinformation during the period of elections is possibly only slightly younger than representative democracy itself, however the reach, speed, and low cost of disseminating disinformation over social media has intensified this crisis (The & Frame, n.d.). Subnational political individuals or organizations, even though state organs are sometimes complicit are mainly the targets of disinformation. For example, in South Korea, the role of government spread disinformation at the time of that nation's 2012 presidential election was exposed following an enquiry which discovers that the National Intelligence Service made more than 1.2 million Twitter messages in favour of the now-impeached South Korean President Park Geun-hye or else, as in mostly the situation with disinformation, denigrating her rival. Coming back home to Africa, the 2017 Kenyan elections provide a valuable scenario in the extensive use of locally, sourced disinformation in an electoral context (The &Frame, n. d).

Outside Africa again, the Philippine situation rival political factions fashioned sophisticated digital operations, conscripting influential social media personalities, paid commentators, and armies of bot accounts (The & Frame, n.d.). The two writers contend that the distribution of hate speech and disinformation aimed at political challengers is intensified by digital advertising techniques, and that hoax websites mimicking real media houses created disinformation at an industrial scale, with one study finding that nine in ten Kenyans had seen false information about the election online. For the purpose of this research, my focus is on political mis- and disinformation. As stated in chapter 1, the 2019 elections were accompanied by an avalanche of political information pollution circulated on various social media platforms, hence it is important to the democracy of Namibia to understand and dig deeper on what has transpired during that period when it comes to political information circulation.

2.2 Typologies of 'fake news' circulated on social media

Bedard & Schoenthaler, (2018) discuss that their research revealed numerous articles that were produced with the solitary focus to educate the news consumer into understanding the fake news world terminology. "The attention that our mainstream online media outlets are giving to the education of these fake news phenomena is heartening, and in doing so they are also attempting to shore up their own credibility,"(Bedard & Schoenthaler, 2018 p 615). In order to understand the types of fake news circulated on social media, this research is guided by the First Draft's seven (7) categories of information disorder, as indicated, and explained by the figure below.

Figure 2: showing 7 categories of information disorders.



Source: Wardle and Derakhshan (2018).

Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) discuss where on the spectrum of information disorder the seven typologies of fake news sit and fit. These are:

Satire and parody

Having satire in a category of disinformation and misinformation, could be surprising, satire and parody may possibly be considered as a form of art. On the other hand, in a sphere where news consumers

increasingly receive information via their social feeds, there has been confusion when it is not understood a site is satirical.

False Connection

False connection is when headlines, visuals or captions do not back or supporting the content. The most common exercise of this type is clickbait headlines. Now that there is high demand for audience attention, gatekeepers all the time have to write headlines to attract clicks, even if when people read the article they feel that they have been deceived. Furthermore, this can also take place when visuals or captions are used, mostly social media like Facebook, to provide a certain thought, which is not supported by the text. This type of fake news is also supported by Sadiku et al., (2018) Which they discuss that clickbait is an exaggerated or false story created with the intent of generating clicks to increase ads revenue. The other type is opinion whereby it is the story of the author's commentary intended to influence the reader (Sadiku et al. 2018).

Misleading Content

This is when there is a misleading use of information to frame issues or individuals in certain ways by cropping photos, or choosing quotes or statistics selectively. This is called Framing Theory. Visuals are particularly powerful vehicles for disseminating misleading information, as our brains are less likely to be critical of visuals. "Native' or paid advertising that mimics editorial content also falls into this category when it is insufficiently identified as sponsored (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018, p47).

False Context

On this type they discuss that one of the motives the term 'fake news' is so unhelpful, is for the reason that genuine content is frequently got re-circulated out of its original context. They gave an example of an image from Vietnam, captured in 2007, and was re-circulated seven years later, and shared under the pretense that it was a photo from Nepal in the aftereffects of the earthquake in 2015.

Imposter Content

This is one of the concerns that journalists go through by having their bylines used together with articles they did not compose, or organisations' logos used in videos, articles or images that they did not create or authored.

Manipulated Content

Manipulated content is when genuine content is manipulated to deceive, such as images or contents.

Fabricated Content

This type of content can be text format, such as the completely fabricated 'news sites' or it can also be visual.

2.3 Social media and fake news

The concept of fake has been noted to be present ever since the beginning of the first lettering process (Junior, Lim, & Ling, 2017). Many scholars (Shu et al. 2016; Barone, 2018; Vasu, Ang, Jayakumar, Faizal, & Ahuja, 2018; Cooke, 2018) similarly believe that the subject under investigation is not a new kid on the block nor its relations, However, Berlin (2018) argues that fake news is a new phenomenon which has evolved rapidly and it must be situated for situations that are intentionally made-up or distorted statements as media reports. Over the time, the environment of fake news has been shifting from newspaper to broadcasting and, now, to new media (Shu, Sliva, Wang, Tang & Liu, 2016; Barone, 2018; Vasu, Ang, Jayakumar, Faizal, & Ahuja, 2018). In the 1990s when the Internet was first made accessible for public use, its main purpose was for accessing of information.

The concern of "fake news" around the world has received attention during a number of various topical events, unrests such as in the U.K. in 2011, shootings in Newtown, the US in 2012, the bombing at the Boston Marathon in 2013 (World Economic Forum, 2014), the Ukrainian crisis, the Brexit referendum, and the 2016 and 2017 presidential elections in the U.S respectively (Himma-kadakas, 2017; Manalu, Pradekso, & Setyabudi, 2018). The concept of 'fake news' in Namibia can be traced in 2004 with the arrival of fictional email writer Ananias Nghifitikeko, when he seemed to shame a former Swapo Party heavyweight and Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) leader Hidipo Hamutenya forward to the historic of 2004 Swapo Party extraordinary congress where former president Hifikepunye Pohamba emerged victorious. In 2017, Namibia witnessed two opposing campaigns, that originated within the Swapo Party competing for power in the ruling party when they imitated media reports and distributed the content on other social media platforms, under the designations of "Breaking News" and "This Reporter" (IPPR, 2019). Manalu et al. (2018) indicate that one of the key forces that raise the increase of false information of fake news is the change in media ecosystem. Scholars (Kim, Moravec, & Alan, 2019) maintain that the occurrence of fake news has not only surprised the public's trust in journalism but also encouraged criticism towards social media for not taking more proactive countermeasures.

Bontcheva and Posetti (2020) in the policy brief on deciphering COVID-19 disinformation, highlights that currently, the internet is the key distribution mechanism for both disinformation and mal-information. It underpins the transmission function in the flow of messages, by means of which the production of both disinformation and trustworthy information connects through to the reception of this content and engagement with it. Some of the fake news reports that were circulated on social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook include before, during and after the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections are:

President Geingob says if there will be 2nd election he will vote litula finish and klaar, (in this case Itula was his opponent), Theo Mujoro (Chief Electoral Officer) of ECN has been arrested, it is unclear why he was arrested this is a developing story. The independent candidate Itula won the ballot with 77.7 percent of the votes. Defeated president Hage Geingob called on his successor Itula to concede the defeat and congratu

late him for being elected as the new president. The outgoing president told New Era newspaper that he betrayed the Namibian nation, especially the youth by not tackling corruption and unemployment, Breaking news: President Geingob voted litula by mistake after pressing 4, Independent candidate Dr. Panduleni Itula has allegedly struck a power deal with RP President Henk Mudge who recently threw his weight behind the runaway swapo member. (some of these fake news articles were collected from WhatsApp and Facebook, and Namibia Fack-Check 2020 report). These fake news articles generated hundreds of comments in the process of election.

Studies (Pangrazio, 2018; Sharma, Qian, Jiang, Ruchansky, Zhang & Liu, 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Mavridis, 2018) indicate that monetisation, speedy sharing of media reports by means of online channels, poor journalism, partisanship, political influence are some of the key drivers of fake news. Casero-Ripollés, (2012) and Espinoza, Cevallos, & Tusev (2017) believe that news consumption habits are experiencing great changes than anyone would have predicted only decades ago because of the progress of digitisation and it has brought alterations to the communicative system, with content production, work routines, media and distribution strategies and business models all undergoing important alterations. Struckmann & Karnoeski (2015) say that these days, major change in the media ecology which is the rise of mobile (online) media is influencing news media consumption by being able to bring news consumption into niches in time and space (see also Budiman & Ahmad, 2015).

Fake news about current social or political issues is circulated on social media with tremendous speed (Mavridis, 2018). These fake stories or hoaxes – deliberately or not – misinform or deceive audiences, hence a need to understand how people, particularly young people in Namibia fact-check news to avoid sharing misleading information. The agenda of fake news is pushed to one or the other to influence people's views, push a political agenda or cause confusion and can often be a profitable business for online publishers (Brennen, 2017). A similar study done by Lungu & Mthembu (2019) in the Kingdom of Eswatini discovered that the distribution information intended to deceive can be partly attributed to a secretive way of society, and in the end, citizens spread fabricated news using new media to mock those with power. Given the above scenario in Eswatini, Namibia will soon pass Access to Information Law, to minimise the damage of fake news and speculation (Beukes 2019).

During the State of Emergency on account of the outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19, the spreading of fake news about Covid-19 is a crime in Namibia, following an amendment to the Covid-19 state of emergency regulations (Menges, 2020). In terms of the amendments to the regulations, published in the *Government Gazette*, people publishing any false or misleading statement in connection with the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), including on social media, are committing an offence for which they can be fined up to N\$2 000 or be given a prison term of up to six months, (Menges, 2020).

2.4 News consumers and fact checking of news and information in the social media age

Cheruiyot, Ferrer-conill, Cheruiyot, & Ferrer-conill, (2018) discuss that fact-checking was taken as a data-powered tactical tool in the campaign to fight public misinformation through the spread of fake news on social media. They further argue that although this process is a practice frequently found in organisations outside traditional news media, now it is essential quality within the heart of journalistic dialogue. Though, in an environment where misinformation intimidates news organisations, the method of fact-checking in itself has become an epistemological tool that several actors beyond traditional journalism propose (Cheruiyot et al. 2018).

A guide book developed within the Bosch Alumni Network (2019) recommended to news consumers that it is important to recognize the “WOW” effect of the news (if it sounds too good or too crazy to be true, it possibly isn't true), take off your bias hat but also, if you have enough time, pick up and check the info, talk with the experts or witnesses, check if the website, article or image have been debunked previously, check the source of the news, check the website's URL, because there are some websites that emulate more conventional, well-established media to distribute fake news. Sometimes you can easily spot them

by checking their URL - fake news site might have a different extension (.org instead of .com or similar). Image, and video verification is another way to fact check the authenticity of news as well as Google.

Research in Kenya, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Nigeria shows that most participants source news and information through social media platforms although they occasionally visit online sites of media organisations (Wasserman, Madrid-Morales, Mare, Ndlovu, Tully, Umejei & Uzuegbunam, 2019). The study also found that participants do not consider fact-checking websites, although there is consensus that locating the origin of news on social media is regarded as best way to check misinformation on social media platforms (Wasserman et al, 2019).

Sadiku et al. (2018) recommend that citizens are duty bound to be eternally vigilant and to correct questionable news when encounter it. These scholars advise that there are at least two things news consumers can do. The first is to evaluate the source of the news and other stories coming from the same source (Sadiku et al. 2018). If the source is not credible, the message may be fake news. They recommend that news consumer check the author, supporting sources, the date, and biases, and to refrain sharing fake news with friends or loved ones (Sadiku et al. 2018). The other criteria that can be used is to consult experts or consult a fact-checking website. Information professionals, including librarians and journalists, can play crucial roles in helping the public to become informed consumers of information products and services. Widely trusted fact-checking websites (Sadiku et al. 2018).

Pamment, and Lindwall (2021) developed a guide that can help to deal with disinformation. They described fact-checking as the long-standing practice of checking that all facts in a piece of writing, news article, speech, etc. are correct. Fact-checking is deriving from a need to hold those in power to account for their claims, and is traditionally conducted by journalists, newsrooms and political analysts. As for Cazalens et al., (2018) fact-checking is the investigative procedure containing in: (1) dig up claims from some discourse, (2) investigating for the facts the assertions are centered on, (3) evaluating the correctness of the statement with regards to those backing facts, and (4) providing standpoint to assertions for which there is no straightforward settlement.

In a study done in Romania to test children and adolescents' ability to identify "fake news" Dumitru, (2020) writes that the free and effortless access to information also requires a serious need for fact checking. Thus, to be sure of the accuracy of the information, it is vital that people evaluate the online news they come across and consider to be noteworthy (Dumitru, 2020). Therefore, the issue of people's capacity to

differentiate fake news from truthful information arises, the situation of youth being a significant one, because this age group is tremendously exposed to online information (Dumitru, 2020).

2.5 Criteria used by news consumers to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information

In African countries, there is a fast-growing population of internet and mobile media users, and this means they have access to distribute information quickly and easily, however, they can also spread disinformation and misinformation. Lack of more research in an African context would pose a challenge for scholars and policy makers to bring up answers to the specific problems of false information faced on the continent (Uzuegbunam, Madrid-Morales, Umejei, Sikanku, Gondwe, Wasserman, Ndlovu, and Tully, 2021). Sadiku, Eze, & Musa, (2018) demonstrate that over the years, the internet has grown with plenty of untruthful and misleading information. Now that fake news has found its way into the internet space, it becomes challenging for people to find truthful information. Current social media is a fertile ground for the spread of fake news. Users of social media play a major role in feeding into misinformation. Content can be relayed among users with no third-party fact checking or editorial judgment. Misinformation amplified by new technological means in the Internet age poses a threat to open societies worldwide (Sadiku et al.2018).

Traditionally, the mainstream media had the monopoly of performing as gatekeepers for true and verified information today find it difficult to fight the disinformation. In fast-paced newsrooms of today, although exposed to disturbed flux of information on the internet, both 'new' (digital) and 'old' (radio, TV, and print) media journalists from time to time struggle to spot false information (Check, News, & Network, 2019), and if this is the case with people entrusted to feed news consumers, how do news consumers themselves cope with the situation? In America, Bedard & Schoenthaler (2018) explain that satire and fake news are clearly shaping the next generation of American citizens. As the technologically born generations grow older, they bring a unique fashion in media content. These youths frequently pursue more engaging sources of news and information, they are enjoying political satire and becoming more politically engaged.

Furthermore, research (Uzuegbunam et. al 2021) reveal that other cues used in determining the accuracy of news and informed involve the number of followers, the lack of likes, comments, retweets and other metrics, the poor writing style and editing, and the use of excessive punctuation, as well as when participants had no recall of the identical story being published in mainstream news media. In a *“Social Media & COVID-19 global study of digital crisis interaction among Gen Z and Millennials”* conducted by

World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020), It was found that young people rely on various sources for their COVID-19 information, however, national mainstream media is still tops. When asked where they go first for Covid-19 news and information, 43.6% of respondents overall say national newspapers, TV and radio; 36.2% indicate that they actively pursuit on search sites and 35.2% pick international news media. Personal interaction came out lower, with 22.4% getting COVID-19 information first from family, 19.8% from friends and 16.1% via their friends' social media content.

Similarly, research done with Kenyan adults through focus groups submit that Kenyans consume news from multiple sources, however, trust in these mediums differ, with participants finding "mainstream" news media most trustworthy. Moreover, participants indicated that when confronted with misinformation, their decisions to engage with the content was influenced by personal interest in the subject, perceived resonance within their social networks and perceived importance. They also indicated that they check with multiple sources, the source of news, and verifying content to navigate complex media ecosystems (Tully, 2021).

Research conducted by Bedard & Schoenthaler (2018) in America found that the higher the education level completed, is interconnected with a higher score in identification categories of satire and fake news, with two interesting discrepancies to this correlation. Identification of satirical news sites by name showed the Graduate Degree category significantly lower than all other levels. Identification of fake news sites by name showed the high school graduate category with significantly higher scores than all other levels. Focus group participants from the incoming freshmen groups supported this result when discussing fake news topics in general. "We, as researchers were not able to determine any reason for the graduate level respondents having less awareness of satirical news sites but can suppose that traditional legacy media has a greater influence on this category than more popular press items such as satire and social media," (Bedard & Schoenthaler, 2018, p 618).

Manalu et al., (2018) assert that the ability to process information, and the ability to discern whether a particular piece of information will be beneficial or harmful, are often limited in people. Literature (Leeder, 2019, Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders, 2010). Traditional media sources offer credibility and authority via professional gatekeepers such as editors and reviewers, which are often lacking in online sources (Rieh & Danielson, 2007). The proliferation of social media, however, means that information spreads rapidly, and unchecked, among users without significant filtration, fact-checking, or editorial oversight by third parties (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Because of that, the responsibility of assessing the accuracy of online information lies with news consumers rather than the traditional expert intermediaries as accustomed.

Therefore, the roles of authenticating or fact-checking that was invested in professional media practitioners has been now shifted on the shoulders of social media users themselves (Wineburg et al. 2016). Manalu, Pradekso, & Setyabudi (2018) acknowledge that one of the important factors that shapes pattern of information selection and consumption and tendency in believing or sharing false information is age or generational difference among users.

The spread of “fake news” stories on social media has become a huge concern all over the world recently. Social media platforms enable the rapid spread of such misinformation and also make evaluating the credibility of online information more difficult. A survey was conducted with 63 undergraduate students in which they identified and evaluated examples of both fake and real news stories and reported their associated information behaviors (Leeder, 2019). Results demonstration links between accurate identification of fake news stories and specific critical evaluation behaviors and strategies. However, students were unable to accurately evaluate their own skills, and their willingness to share fake news stories on social media was not related to accurate identifications or evaluations of trustworthiness (Leeder, 2019).

A study conducted by Wagner & Boczkowski (2019) in the US on the reception of fake news discovered that participants are being more suspicious of news circulation on social media, and were mostly concerned with how its consumption could affect others. To counter perceptions of misinformation consumption, participants relied on different strategies and practices (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). Firstly, they rejected media outlets that are too opinionated and seek traditional fact-based media. Moreover, they drew upon their personal experience and knowledge, long-term relationships with media, repetition of information across outlets, consumption of cross-ideological sources, and fact-checking (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). In addition, participants found reading news on social media useful since they trusted certain personal contacts who were perceived as assessors of news quality (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019).

In a quantitative study conducted by Portland (2017) in Kenya, it reveals that Kenyans doubt the information that they see and hear on social media hence they enthusiastically evaluate the trustworthiness of information by consulting numerous media. Research in Kenya and Nigeria (Wasserman, Madrid-Morales, Mare, Ndlovu, Tully, Umejei & Uzuegbunam, 2019) shows that participants who were undergraduates source news through social media platforms, and also visit online sites of media organisations to look for news. However, participants do not use fact-checking websites, because there is a consent that tracing the origin of news on social media is top way to check misinformation on social

media platforms. In the US, Shirsat (2018) discovered that citizens detect and distinguish between 'fake news' and 'real news' by using the fact-checking websites in addition to main news sources. Therefore, this study will help to advance a Namibian perspective on how young news consumers fact-check fake news that is circulated on social media.

In this much changed media ecology with enormous misleading media content, young people are particularly likely to be exposed to fake news, since they are frequent users of social media. In a study of 6000 college students at 11 universities in the US, 89% of respondents reported that they get their news from social media (Leeder, 2019). Some scholars Kim et al. (2019) discover that there are three important differences between news articles on social media and traditional media that make it harder for social media users to recognise fake news. The first is the mind-set of users (people go there to have fun and connect with friends) rather than a useful mind-set, as they would when they visit the news site or open a newspaper. Second, on social media, anyone can create news real or fake and the news spreads throughout the Internet as social media users read it and share it with their contacts third, users do not choose the source of the articles they.

Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019) argue that harms instigated by news consumer's incapacity towards accessing authentic governmental details and come up with good choices, which are central to the self-governing approach are some of the possible small- to lasting concerns of bigger points of dis-information and mis-information. Because of fake news, journalism has moved on with fact-checking, and it is considered as the best tool to counteract the power of fake news (Vizoso & Vázquez, 2019). Other scholars (College, 2017, Morales and Wasserman, 2019) suggest that in order to deal with misinformation, media literacy, can be one of the approaches to restore trust in the media, as a result, media organisations would have to work hard at rebuilding relationships with audiences.

Shivam, Parikh & Atrey (2017) demonstrate that automatic discovering of this problem has become too difficult to resolve because a media report mostly consists of pictures and film than words only. On the same wave length, Marchi (2012) argues that younger generation of media users, have the ability to monitor multiple media sites simultaneously, while the older adult users put more attention to one source of news at one time. However, younger generation's ability to obtain limitless information in the current Internet era is not always followed by their ability to evaluate the quality of information. Studies (Özgöbek & Gulla, 2017; Kumar, 2018) concur with Shivam et al., (2017) argument that because of overwhelming information especially on social media, news consumers are not very good at distinguishing 'real' news from 'fake' ones. In line with the above discussion, Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019) discover that

there is minimum academic research concerning exactly how African consumers really absorb misinformation and disinformation, how popular the concept under study is among African news consumers, and how they navigate thinking of fact, misinformation and disinformation and news.

Namibia's IPPR tracked disinformation circulated before, during and after 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections. This desktop research reveals that, many recipients, whether individually or in groups, when confronted with false content appeared unable to distinguish between credible information and sources and information or sources, which were not credible. The report further detailed that most users who share mis-/disinformation content do not bother to attempt to verify the information they share and simply seem to 'forward' such content to as many groups as they can.

Research (Mavris 2018, Ncube 2018, Lungu and Mthembu 2019) has shown that locations and educational achievements have a role to play in terms of decoding information. Research outside the borders, (Özgöbek & Gulla, 2017; Kumar, 2018) shows that because of overwhelming information especially on social media, news consumers are not very good at distinguishing 'real' news from 'fake' ones.) Furthermore, there are no studies that have looked at audience analysis on fake news in Namibia. In Namibia, there is only a briefing paper by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2019) that tried to broadly discuss the concept of fake news. The report is not based on empirical research, but rather desktop research of fake news in other countries. Hence, there is a research gap that can only be plugged by conducting an empirical study in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek on the consumption of fake news amongst young people, who are viewed as 'digital natives' because of their heavy use of digital media technologies. Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019) note that there is minimum academic research concerning exactly how African consumers really absorb misinformation and disinformation and how they navigate thinking of facts, misinformation and disinformation and news.

2.6 Factors that are considered by young news consumers before sharing news

Literature reviewed has shown that there is a significant link between social media and fake news. Manning (2014) defines social media as a phrase frequently employed to point out to new means of communication that consist of interactive partaking. Junior et al. (2017), argue that, social media have simplified the spread of fake news, change news distribution and threatened old-style views on how news should be. In a similar study conducted in Greece, Mavridis (2018) indicates that since recent attention has been drawn to social media's role in disseminating fake news and misinformation about current political and social issues, it is important to understand how audience members interact with disinformation on social media. Manalu et al. (2018) argue that there is a tendency that users who are

disseminating information through social media is often based on personal motive to reinforce her/his beliefs and influencing others to have the same belief. Furthermore, in relation to evaluation of information truthfulness based the context of information, in the current situation that is characterized with 'information overload.'

Research (Uzuegbunam et. al 2021) on spotting hoaxes in six African countries: Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, shows that in all countries, except for Zambia and Zimbabwe, participants make use of cues to determine what content to share, although in some cases, these cues led them to share incorrect information. For instance, a blue check next to a Twitter username was an indication that the account had been verified and that the news was possibly true. For some participants, this cue was enough to persuade them to distribute a post, and for some participants would investigate further.

With regards to evaluation of news content or story, Manalu et al. (2018) state that individual tends to believe news that is not in contrary to his/her vision of the world as well as his/her personal beliefs and further reinforces existing beliefs. This is because individual would pay more attention to this kind of information and because it is easier to comprehend (Manalu et al. 2018). This often leads a person to only read and disseminate coherent information with his/her beliefs and worldviews of the world.

Research (Kim et al. 2019) indicates that 23 percent of social media users have reported to have spread fake news, and their research has shown that false articles spread faster than true ones, primarily because users tend to believe articles that align with their beliefs due to confirmation bias, making them more gullible when faced with posts crafted to their point of view. Due to this, Leeder (2019) advises that social media users must make evaluative judgments about the credibility of information that they encounter online and make decisions about whether to share such information with others. A regression analysis was employed to analyze why do people share news on social media, and the results of the data collected from 203 undergraduate and graduate students show that informativeness was the strongest motivation in predicting news sharing intention, followed by socializing and status seeking, (Lee, Ma, Hoe-Lian Goh, 2011).

In study by the World Health Organisation (2020) respondents when asked what COVID-19 information (if any) they most likely post on social media, 43.9% of respondents say "scientific" content. Others indicated information "relevant to me" (36.7%) and content that is "concerning" (28.5%) see (Madrid-morales, Wasserman, Gondwe, Ndlovu, & Umejei, 2021).

IPPR (2020) reveal that mutual misinforming is prevalent across social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups in Namibia, in which members of such groups, especially, WhatsApps appear to be involved in or susceptible to sharing / forwarding mis-/disinformation, with those consistently demonstrating low levels of exposure to or engagement with traditional channels of receiving news and current affairs appearing the most vulnerable (IPPR, 2020).

In the same report, traditional media were found to make mistakes through bad reporting practices, which appears to contribute to suspicions of the credibility of media sources and reports, as well as the overall spread of mis-/ disinformation (IPPR, 2020). Additionally, politicians and government officials, including the presidency and the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), through their statements and the issuing of misleading information, considerably contributed to further drenching a landscape already flooded with mis-/disinformation and low on trust in available information concerning political and electoral processes (IPPR 2020). Furthermore, the report debunked that suspect or false information is forwarded / shared by many individuals in WhatsApp groups with the disclaimer 'forwarded as received,' and given that it seems that the fact that some individuals suspect that the information they are sharing might be false does not dissuade them from forwarding / sharing such information. IPPR (2020) Aside from clearly satirical political content produced by some notable and popular pages / profiles on Facebook, the vast majority of mis-/disinformation content is serious in tone. Therefore, it is important to understand how the youth engage with fake news, which is accessed and circulated on social media during electoral campaigns (IPPR 2020).

In general, research has shown that literature on fake news still reflects a lack of geographical diversity (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2019). Besides the unprecedented circulation of fake news during the run up to the November 2019 elections in Namibia, there hasn't been any published academic work on the issue with the exception of civil society reports (Institute of Public Policy Research, 2019). Even more importantly, very little is currently known about how the youth fact-check news and information consumers via social media platforms in the Namibian context. This study seeks to fill up this academic lacuna and provide contextualized and rich empirical data on the phenomenon of fake news in Namibia. After the review of the literature, this research aims to explore how youth in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek fact check (or verify the authenticity) of false and misleading news and information circulated on social media platforms during the 2019 electoral campaign in Namibia.

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks

This research uses the Encoding and Decoding Model developed by cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall. Cultural studies is a method for studying culture that lies at the crossing of the social sciences, particularly sociology, and the humanities, especially literature (Hall, 1996). Hall came up with this theory in 1973 as an approach to textual analysis, with a special focus on the scope of dominant, negotiation, and opposition on the part of the consumer in contrast with the traditional model of communication which is criticised for its linearity sender/message/receiver, and his theory has been widely used in the field of reception. Hall provides a theoretic method of how media communications are created, distributed, and understood. He suggested that the consumers could perform an active part in interpreting communications. Therefore, this theory was used to understand how young people decode, and engage with news they consume on social media, and at what positions of this theory they digest information coming their way. It also aims to understand what measures these young people who are from different localities employ in terms of separating fiction from the truth, when confronted with large amount of information which appeals to their emotions possessing different agendas on social media, and or are they confined to agree to the agendas as pushed to them by the encoders.

Kropp (2015) made one key observation that encoding and decoding theory permits for changes in interpretation of and acceptance of (or complicity with) the dominant ideological meanings of a work of media. Hall's concepts stimulated successive audience research into two themes. The first one is investigation, first, into the content produced by the media and, secondly, into the audience themselves to attain better insight of how messages are decoded, why people interpret communication in certain ways, why different people can interpret different and often contradictory meanings from the same messages and how these people form communities or social groups around others with shared interpretations (Kropp, 2015). Hall's theory improved understanding about the phenomena of audiences and contributed to the field by producing a new paradigm that concentrated on active audiences (Kropp, 2015).

According to this theory, audiences can decode a message as per their social classes, background, and as the background differs, the decoding also differs. The theory, Hall (1973) explains that equally as a message is broadly created, distributed and consumed, distortions and misunderstandings are founded during this process. Research by scholars (Mavris, 2018; Lunga and Mthembu 2019) have shown that locations and educational achievements have a role to play in terms of making sense of news and

information. Therefore, this research has tried to establish how young people from different background locations in Namibia interpret information, as per the arguments of this theory that and literature.

The relevance of this theory to this study lies in the three positions. These are: the dominant position, which is when an end user captures the main meaning directly, and interprets it precisely, and completely distributes the meanings of the message and agrees and replicates the planned meaning, (Hall 1973). The other is the negotiation position- here readers recognise the main communication, and in some ways distribute the message codes and mostly agrees to the chosen theme, at the same time he/she opposes and changes the communication in a direction which displays one's understandings and hobbies (Hall, 1973). And lastly, the oppositional position- here an audience grasps the exact idea, however because of diverse experiences, everyone has personal approach of interpreting communications, whereas creating personal understandings one obtains precisely contradictory of the planned goal (Hall, 1973). Morley (1980) has criticised this model. He argues that interpretation cannot be measured solely in terms of the lifestyle or class location of the consumers (Morley, 1980).

Awan (2007) argues that regardless of the above criticism it should be stressed that this theory allows the news to be explored as a segment of, and a source of, dominant philosophy; and it examines the consumers regarding their interpretations other than their mental wishes. Hall (1973) argues that "researchers should direct their attention toward analysis of the social and political context in which content is produced (encoding) and the consumption of media content (decoding). The position of the scholar is that mass media content producers can produce their message in a particular way and assume that the audience will understand it in the same way they intended, but the audience members can assign meanings and interpretation to the media content in accordance with their various backgrounds (Nwokwu, Nwafor, & Alegu, 2018). The important of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model is that audience members are not docile or passive, but are capable of giving varying interpretations to the media content they have exposed themselves to, based on their experiences (Nwokwu,et.al 2018).

2.8 Conclusion

The first section of the chapter looked at the literature on "fake news". The literature also presented how young people fact-check news and information in the world of digital age, which was the core focus of this research. It also looked at scholarly views on factors young people consider before sharing news with others. The chapter also discusses the theory guiding it, which argues that people can play an active role in decoding communication, with areas such as exposure, experience, education and class defined as key in interpreting media communication. The next chapter discusses the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

This chapter presents the research methods that were used in this study to explore how the youth fact-checked 'fake news' circulated on social media in the run-up to 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Namibia. This exploratory study looks at the reasons for qualitative approach and the selected research areas. The chapter looked at research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, pilot study, data analysis and ethical considerations. It also looked at data analysis strategies, ethical considerations and methods to ensure validity, transparency and trustworthiness. This research was conducted during the difficult time of Covid-19, hence Covid-19 protocols such social distancing, wearing of masks and using hand sanitisers were adhered to during the process of data collection.

3.1 Research Design

A research design is defined as the conceptual blueprint within which research is piloted and can be considered as the structure of research which is the "Glue" that holds everything of the elements in a study together, therefore, to narrow it down, it is a strategy of the planned research work (Akhtar & Islamia, 2016). This study adopted exploratory research design, which is one, the designs under qualitative research approach. The advantage of using this design was to allow the researcher to explore how young people fact-check mis-and disinformation. This research aimed at exploring how youth in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek fact check (or verify the authenticity) of false and misleading news and information circulated on social media platforms during the 2019 electoral campaign in Namibia. Siswasih (2007) describes exploratory research as investigation conducted when enough is not known about a phenomenon and a problem that has not been clearly well-defined. Exploratory research does not intent to offer the final and conclusive answers to the research questions, but merely explores the research topic with varying levels of depth. Therefore, its theme is to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done (Brown, 2006).

The study focused on Ombili and Hochland Park areas in Windhoek. These two locations were chosen due to their geographical locations, with Ombili being an informal settlement, whilst Hochland Park is an upper-class location in Windhoek. The targeted areas are different in terms of history, education and socio-economic context as alluded to in chapter 1. Ombili location is an informal settlement in Katutura.

It falls within Tobias Haiyeko Constituency. Ombili means “peace” in a local language *Oshiwambo*. In the local language, *Otjiherero*, the name Katutura means “the place where people do not want to live” (Steinbrink, 2016). Ombili is the informal settlements, and one of the low-class locations, as most of the people are in informal employment, and with low /medium level of education. Majority of the families also depend on informal employment for survival, and the location is also known to have lack of basic services (Nhongo, 2019).

As discussed in chapter 1, Hochland Park location as formerly known as Old Location, is a residential suburb in Windhoek West Constituency, and it was named after the German Khomas Hochland. It borders the upper-class suburbs such as Acacia in the east, Dorado Park in the north, Windhoek West in the West and Pioneers Park in the south (Khomas Regional Council, n.d). Previously, the location was intended for whites-only, and currently the location is a well-off residential area for Windhoek's upper middle class, both black and white. This, former residential area set up during the colonial period by the German occupation power for the “black” population groups.

Therefore, the phenomena of electoral mis/disinformation have not been widely studied in a Namibian context, and this research therefore strived to fill the gap in literature and offer additional knowledge within the Namibian space, however this was not the final conclusion to the matter. Chapter two has provided an analysis of research done in the area of fake news, which mostly focused on production, sharing of fake news and neglecting the importance of fact-checking information. It has also provided a room/ gap/ questions over the issues of fact-checking online information.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Different scholars have attempted to define paradigms in different ways, for example Rehman & Alharthi (2016) define paradigm as a basic belief method and theoretic framework with notions around 1) ontology, which refers to the nature of our views about reality, 2) epistemology, which has to do with the part of philosophy that engages the nature of knowledge and the procedure under which knowledge is obtained and validated, 3) methodology about leading the investigator in determining the sort of data needed for a study and which data collection instruments are likely to be suitable for the study and 4) methods, which are exact ways of collecting and analysing data. As for Kamal (2019), paradigms represent the researchers opinions and values about the world, as well as the system they operate in within the world. When it comes to research, the researcher’s thoughts and beliefs with regards to any matter explored would consequently lead their actions. Therefore, the chosen paradigm directs the researchers study such as data collection and analysis procedures.

As for Rehman and Alharthi (2016) investigators can investigate different phenomena under any paradigm (Positivism, Interpretivism and Critical Theory) and they should not avoid the option of agreeing to other paradigms due to any worries that they have to be mutually exclusive. Instead, the pronouncement of selecting a philosophical position to investigate a phenomenon should be led by necessities and requirements of a study than the obdurate claim of obeying to one particular philosophical outlook to the exclusion of others (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

The study is anchored in the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism emphasises the need to understand or interpret the beliefs, motives, and reasons of social actors in order to know social reality (Scauso, 2019). Thanh, Thi, & Thanh (2015) assert that it's widely agreed that interpretive paradigms allow researchers to view the world from participants' perspectives and experiences. They went on further to say that in pursuing the answers for research, the investigator who follows interpretive paradigm make use of such experiences to create and interpret the understanding from gathered data.

Interpretivism is a reaction to the over-dominance of positivism. Interpretive ontology rejects the idea that there is a single, independent reality. Interpretive ontology refuses to impose any permanent underlying assumptions, unvarying (or foundational) standards by which truth can be universally known. Instead, interpretivists believe in socially constructed multiple realities. Truth and reality are created, not discovered. It is not possible to know reality as it is because it is always mediated by our senses. Interpretive epistemology is subjective. External reality cannot be directly accessible to observers without being contaminated by their worldviews, concepts, backgrounds etc” (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p 55). They further assert that the goal of interpretive research is not about discovering universal, context and value free knowledge and truth but strives to recognise the interpretations of persons about the social phenomena they engage with. Additionally, they set that the goal of interpretive methodology is to understand social phenomena in their context (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

3.3 Research Approach: Qualitative Research Methodology

The study draws on a qualitative research methodology. Authenticating words from (Creswell, 2014, p. 32, and Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) Kamal (2019) has described qualitative research as an approach for exploring and considering the meaning persons or groups attribute to a social or human setback. Kamal further affirms that qualitative research discloses the meaning of an incidence for individuals who are part of it, and scholars are more focused on pinpointing how societies explain their own experiences. However, it is poles apart to quantitative study which deals with relationship among measured variables to test objective theories, (Kamal, 2019).

Qualitative research methodology is very useful to this study because as Daniel (2016) put it that qualitative research method is known for providing rich information with regards to the real life people and situations, therefore, this approach was necessary because its primary focus allows researchers to understand human beings' experiences through an interpretive tactic. Therefore, qualitative approach was appropriate to this study for the reason that it allowed the researcher to understand how the youth lived through the phenomenon of fake news, by addressing the research objective of how the youth fact-check fake news circulated on social media. Thus, the approach was necessary in understanding and exploring the experiences of young people, with regards to how they fact check news and information on social media.

3.4 Population

Majid (2018) defines the population of interest as the research's direct population that it aims to investigate. As for Taherdoost (2017), population is usually associated with the number of individuals living in a particular country/area. The population of this study was the youth aged 18-35 residing in Ombili and Hochland Park suburbs in Windhoek. The two areas were chosen because of geographical diversity (lower and upper class), therefore, the researcher chose these locations/participants from diverse backgrounds with the aim of getting more varied data. The Namibia Statistics Agency, (2014) projected the population of Khomas region by the year 2021 to be at 496 546 for both males and females, (245 442 males, and 254 104 females) with young people between the ages of 18-35 projected to be at 181 145 (87 123 males and 97 022 females) although this number could be on rise due to urban migration in the country.

The two chosen locations were significant for comparisons of data when it comes to the experiences of participants residing there. Esser and Vliegthart (2017) state that comparative research are different from non-comparative work as for the reason that it tries to arrive at decisions past particular cases and clarifies differences and likenesses between objects of analysis and dealings between objects against the backdrop of their contextual conditions.

Esser and Vliegthart (2017) further assert that comparative analysis take on numerous significant functions that are closely interlinked. To be specific they argue that, comparative analysis increases the understanding of someone's own society by way of placing its familiar structures and practices contrary to those of other systems as well as heightening our awareness of other systems, cultures, as well as

patterns of thinking and acting, thereby forming a fresh light on our own political communication preparations in addition to permitting us to contrast them critically with those prevalent in other countries (awareness). Comparisons are also important as they permit for the analysis of theories across diverse backgrounds plus the evaluation of the possibility and importance of certain phenomena, in so doing, they contribute to the progress of generally applicable theory (generalization) and prevent researchers from over-generalising centered on their own practices and challenges claims to ethnocentrism or naïve universalism.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

Showkat and Parveen (2017) describe sampling as the technique of choosing a representative subgroup of the population known as sample. Sampling creates a more accurate and economical research, and it's the sampling system which actually defines the generalizability of the research outcomes (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). In general, sampling techniques can be split into two types, one being probability or random sampling and the other is non- probability or non- random sampling. According to Taherdoost and Group, (2017) probability sampling means that each piece in the population has the same chance of being included in sample. Unlike probability sampling technique, non-probability sampling method practices non-randomised systems to draw the sample. It is a method associated with judgment, so instead of randomisation, members are carefully chosen because they are widely available.

Therefore, for this research, I utilised non-probability sampling techniques, which were purposive and convenience samplings to recruit participants. Shakouri (2014) defines purposive sampling as the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. Taherdoost (2017) describes convenience sampling as choosing participants because they are easily available. In terms of the sample population, the target was to work with a total of 40 young people, (20 per location), however due to the danger posed by covid 19, and its protocols in the country, data was generated from 31 participants (15 from Hochland Park and 16 from Ombili). Therefore, participants for this study were selected through non-probability sampling such as convenience and purposive sampling for being available, as well as the qualities possessed by the participants respectively.

3.6 Data Collection instruments

3.6.1 Pilot study

A pilot study inquires whether to some degree something can be done, should the scholars go on with it, and if so, by what means. On the other hand, a pilot study similarly has a precise design feature; which

means it is carried out on a smaller scale than the main study. Therefore, the pilot study is significant for development of the value and efficiency of the main study (In, 2017). In the build up to data collection, a pilot study with Namibia Fact-Check was undertaken using qualitative method to see what was at play with regards to political disinformation and Misinformation in the run up to Namibia's 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections. This is because, Namibia Fact Check has been at the forefront of debunking fake news during the period of elections, hence, it was essential to engage the institution on this subject. The pilot study further enabled me to conduct a preliminary study to evaluate viability, and improve upon the study design prior to performance of a full-scale study. The purposive sampling was used as the sampling method. The semi-structured questions were used and were designed beforehand.

3.6.2 Virtual ethnography

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research that allows a researcher to be part of a particular community or organization to observe their behaviour and communications up close (Caulfield, 2021). It can also be described as a written report of the investigation that the ethnographer produces afterwards. This research method is flexible and it allows a researcher to gain a great understanding of a community's common culture, conventions, and social dynamics (Caulfield, 2021). Nowadays, this qualitative method is a common method in numerous social science fields, not just anthropology, and is used not only to research distant or unfamiliar cultures, but also to explore particular communities within the investigator's own society (Caulfield, 2021).

Due to my interest in the topic of fake news, and my background in the field of media and communications, I monitored the circulation of fake news on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter during the run up to the 2019 elections in Namibia. I kept asking myself on whether my fellow citizens, especially young people had capacity to identify fake news. Ahead of the 2019 elections, I would go on social media to see what is happening within the country. At the time, I would always come across misleading news, with hundreds of likes and comments, and widely circulating on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Since I had an idea of investigating how young people identify fake news on social media, I made use of the time, and archived such articles for my study. This virtual ethnography method allowed me to observe online behaviour of young people during elections, which informed me that there is serious problem of how young people engage with online news.

At the time, a number of news media houses such as *The Namibian*, Namibia Broadcasting Corporation, and *Namibian Sun* debunked any false news carrying their brand, and encouraged news consumers to be vigilant of fake news. Although this action is commended, at the time they would expose fake news, a lot of damage would already be done in the community as information is shared at fast pace and on different platforms, and their reaction cannot be 100 per cent safe in reaching out to everyone affected, a role many of the media houses need to improve on. Through virtual ethnography, I was able to get a clear understanding of how young people consume, and engage with online information. What also motivated me to keep an eye on such development is that some of these articles were debunked Namibia Fact Check website, and that informed me about the seriousness and prevalence of fake news in Namibia.

These articles were used as a stimulus during my four focus group discussions (FGDs) of data collection (two groups per location). Before I commenced with the discussions, I prepared FGDs questions, which were shared with participants. After the FGDs, face-to-face interviews were held with participants who had a better understanding of the phenomena. Questions for face-face interviews were also prepared beforehand and shared with the participants. All the discussions, both for FGDs and face-to-face interviews were recorded with an Audio recorder.

3.6.3 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is an investigation approach which deals with description and interpretation of textual data using the systematic process of coding (Assarroudi, 2018). Qualitative content analysis is a process utilised for analysing and interpreting data, and it aims to describe and interpret a phenomena (Io, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kyngäs, 2014). A successful content analysis method usually consists of creating categories, concepts, and models to describe a research phenomenon. Firstly, I carried out a qualitative content analysis of archived fake news articles, which were circulated on WhatsApp and Facebook in the run-up to the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Namibia. Some of these fake news articles were archived by the Namibia Fact Check. Through qualitative content analysis, the archived fake news stories were necessary in order to study the types of fake news circulated on social media in Namibia and its content in the run-up to the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Namibia the height of the most competitive elections since the dawn of democracy.

3.6.4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Masadeh (2020) defines the focus group discussions as a type of qualitative research method, mostly labelled as a designed discussion with a small group of individuals, managed by a facilitator or through a moderating team, to generate qualitative data on a specific topic of interest, by using a set of open-ended

questions. After studying the types of fake news circulated in Namibia, I then employed Focus Group Discussion (FDG) approach to gather data. A total of four FDGs (two groups per location) with participants between 6-10 were constituted. FDGs were used to examine the criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information as well as to assess the newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their friends, family and relatives on social media. Focus Groups have been noted to cover a large number of people in the same group, and an effective way of collecting a large amount of information and perceptions or attitudes in a short time (Masadeh, 2020). FDGs were used to gain in-depth understanding of perceptions/ opinions on how the youth fact-check fake news, how they understand fake news, what they consider newsworthy before sharing with others, as well as impacts of fake news to the country. The FDGs interviews lasted for 1h30 minutes. These participants were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling.

3.6.5 Face-to-Face Interviews

After FDGs discussion, I then selected 10 participants to have Face-to-face interviews with them (5 in each location) to gain more insight into the issue of fake news consumption in the Namibian context. The interviews lasted about 20-25 minutes. Unlike FDGs, face-to-face interviews allowed participants to explain more information in the comfort of their surroundings. It also ensures privacy and confidentiality. The interviews were semi-structured, in which a list of questions was prepared prior to the interview. Although some questions were similar to FDGs, this method allowed participants to freely express themselves on the topic of fake news. This was useful in understanding platforms that young people are likely to encounter fake news in Namibia, how they engage with fake news in their daily lives, and what informs their opinions in terms of separating fiction from the truth. It also assisted the researcher to understand from an individual point of view what measures they take when they encounter fake news articles. Face-to-face interviewing is one of the ancient and most widely used approaches of guiding primary research. Marshall (2016) writes that face-face interviews are used by a market investigator with a respondent in places such as the street, home, office, meeting place, etc. This method allows the interviewer to get a deeper understanding to particular answers. This is done by handling the inquiry form like a meaningful conversation and deducing the validity of each answer (Marshall, 2016). Even though this method is very effective, it can be costly and time consuming, because it requires a significant amount of time on the front end to identify, recruit, and arrange the meeting and the travel time and costs to meet the respondent in person (Marshall, 2016).

3.7 Data Analysis

This study used thematic content analysis to analyse the data. Interviews were recorded and transcribed into a raw data of 62 pages. The researcher then assigned preliminary sub-themes, which eventually turned into final themes. At the beginning, data with similar explanations of answers, and allows for combinations of ideas were united throughout the study and eventually transformed into themes. The researcher read the transcription several times, in order to arrive at the chosen themes and patterns. Themes were developed from the FGDs, and Face to face data. Themes are also known as patterns and are the finishing products of data analysis in this analytical approach. A theme is the subjective meaning and cultural-contextual message of data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by ethical considerations in social research such as informed consent, confidentiality and privacy concerns. An ethical clearance certificate was issued by NUST. Informed consent was sought from the participants. Permission letters were obtained from the Constituency Councillors where participants were drawn. Firstly, an Ethical Clearance Certificate to allow me to commence with data collection was obtained from NUST. I then wrote letters accompanied by the support letter from the Department of Communication to the two Constituency Councillors seeking permission to conduct research in their Constituencies, of which approval was granted by the two councillors. Furthermore, a letter to conduct a Pilot Study with Namibia Fact-Check, and collect archived fake news articles was also obtained from the Department of Communication.

Following the identification of potential participants, the researcher invited them to take part in the study. Before the commencement of the meetings, participants were presented with the information sheet about the subject under investigation. They were also informed about their right to refuse to participate in the study and that participation was voluntary. Participants were then informed of their right to withdraw from partaking in the FGDs and face – face interviews. They were further assured that the information that they would provide in the discussions and face- face interviews would be treated with confidentiality. Lastly, participants were made to sign consent forms for their participation. My study was concerned about the issues of trustworthiness. Same research instruments were used for data collection and similar results were received, therefore information can be trusted. Additionally, selected participants were well informed about the subject, hence information was credible.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with methodology, procedures and techniques used for data collection and how the outcomes were analysed, as well as the justification of using such methods for data collection. It further gives justifications of the chosen research design, and the paradigm under which the study is anchored. The chapter also touched on data analysis strategies as well on the pilot study, which was employed to test the viability of the methods and techniques used to generate data. The next chapter deals with data analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4. Introduction

This chapter presents research findings of this research, which aimed at documenting the types of fake news, circulated on social media platforms, examining the criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information, and assessing the newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their friends, family and relatives on social media. As highlighted in Chapter 1, the main aim of this study was to critically explore how the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park fact-check the authenticity of false and misleading news and information circulated on social media platforms during the 2019 electoral campaign in Namibia. This study was inspired by the unprecedented production and circulation of misinformation, disinformation and mal-information on various social media platforms during the November 2019 Presidential elections in Namibia. The study was conducted through four focus-group discussions (FGDs), which lasted for about 1 hour 45 minutes and face-to-face interviews which took place between 20-30 minutes, as well as qualitative content analysis of fake news articles circulated during on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms during the 2019 elections. The respondents were recruited via non-probability sampling techniques such as purposive and convenience sampling techniques.

Data was generated from a total of 31 young people from Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek. In order to understand the themes of fake news circulated at the time of elections, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of archived fake news articles, which I collected, and archived at the time I was using virtual ethnography approach. Some of the articles were archived by Namibia Fact Check in the run-up to the 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Namibia. This was crucial for investigating the various kinds of fake news that was produced and circulated in Namibia at the height of the most competitive elections since the dawn of democracy. Each group consisted of 6-10 participants. Face-to-face interviews with 10 participants selected from the four FGDs were then employed to gain more insight into the issue of fake news consumption in the Namibian context.

Information gathered was analysed through thematic analysis, and results are presented through theme-based approach. Themes were developed to answer the research objectives. All the interviews were transcribed manually, before developing numerous themes. Some participants who did not want their

names to be mentioned will be represented using a standardised numbering system in this study. The first number represents the participant's individual number while the second number corresponds to the participant's group (e.g. 7.1 means individual assigned code 7 and 2 belonging to group 2).

4.1 Types of fake news circulated on social media platforms during the November 2019 Presidential election campaign in Namibia

4.1.1 Conspiracy theories on the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)

The 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections took place under yet again the controversial Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). The EVMs are electronic devices used to cast, record, and count votes during elections. The election body introduced those machines in 2014 ahead of national elections with the sole intention to make elections easy and fast, and in that year Namibia became the first African country at the end of November 2014 to use EVMs in a national election. The EVMs were bought at a cost of over N\$60 million. At the time, ECN regarded EVMs as efficient and reliable method in casting votes, replacing the paper ballots.

The introduction of EV into the Namibian elections first started being discussed in 2004. With the challenges faced in the counting and tabulation processes in the 2009 elections, which led to a delay in the announcement of the election results, the use of EVMs found its way into the 2009 Electoral Act. As a result of this, the election body began buying batches of Indian-manufactured EVMs. These EVMs are stand-alone machines and are not connected to any computer network. They do not transmit or receive any signal, therefore cannot be intercepted. The EVMs use rechargeable batteries. They can be operated in areas with no electricity for the entire duration of the voting and counting process. The 2014 Namibian Electoral Act allowed the use of electronic voting, but introduced the requirement that the use of voting machines be subject to the simultaneous utilisation of a verifiable paper trail for every vote cast by a voter, and any vote cast is verified by a count of the paper trail. The introduction of this requirement in the Namibian Electoral Act of 2014 results from a court case (2013) in India, in which the Indian Supreme Court ruled that verifiable paper trail, should be indispensable for voter confidence in the system. The Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is intended as a verification system designed to allow voters to verify that their vote was cast correctly, to detect possible election fraud, and to provide a means to audit (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2014, p.4).

The lack of VVPAT attracted public criticism about credibility of such machines, and election results, as there is no accountability, and results cannot be verified should a challenge arise (see Smith, 2019). IPPR

(2014), the Law Reform and Development Commission (LRDC) in Namibia, recognised the VVPAT standard. On the other hand, the EVMs acquired by the ECN do not have the required standard of printing a slip for verification (IPPR, 2014). Since then there has been a number of court cases from Opposition Parties, who instantly refused to the use of EVMs without VVPAT. Ahead of the 2019 elections, there were also reports that at least three EVMs have gone missing two years before elections. The EVMs reportedly went missing during the Swapo Party Elders Council's 6th elective congress held at Outapi in July 2017 (Smith, 2019). This has led to the public and politicians concerned, that the tempering of the EVMs means elections would be rigged, and the integrity of its outcome would be compromised and questionable.

The Namibian newspaper reported that the returning officer at that election, Sacky Shanghala, (member of Swapo Party, and former Minister Justice who is now in jail for one of the biggest corruption scandal on Fishrot in Namibia) booked out the EVMs at the ECN to be used during the elder's council's elective congress (Smith, 2019). The reports indicate that it is not clear how many EVMs were taken out, however it is believed that not all of them were returned to the ECN. The newspaper reports indicate that one of the EVMs got vanished at Otjiwarongo at the time it was transported to the election venue. Namibian Police (Nampol) spokesperson, deputy commissioner Edwin Kanguatjivi confirmed the matter to the Namibian Newspaper (Smith, 2019). There has been so much controversy since the announcement of EVMs in Namibia. Just like the 2014 by-elections in Ohangwena region, and national elections, the EVMs received criticisms from Opposition Parties, who claimed that they were favouring the ruling Party, and they were not happy, because they were concerned that results cannot be verified, hence cannot be trusted, due to lack of accountability and verification of results. Their court challenge was dismissed by the Windhoek High Court in 2014 (Tjihenuna, 2014).

Dr Itula, backed up by Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) leader Hewat Beukes, and Freedom Fighters (NEFF) entered the corridors of the Electoral Tribunal for the Windhoek district to challenge against the use of EVMs without paper trail, and have them removed from elections (likela, 2019), however the case was dismissed due to lack of urgency. Itula who was supported by Republican Party (RP) president Henk Mudge, Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) president Epafrans Mukwiilongo, All People's Party (APP) president Ignatius Shixwameni and Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) president Mike Kavekatora, then appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court on 05 February 2020 gave a judgment that after 21 March 2020, and for any future elections with EVMs, ECN must ensure that the voting machines are combined with a verifiable paper trail if it wants to carry on using the them (Menges, 2020). The judgment gave the 2019 presidential election candidates from Opposition side a welcoming

answer when they won the argument on the legality of using EVMs without a paper trail that can be used to verify every vote casted. However, they lost on their appeal to have the 2019 presidential election and its outcome set aside, and getting the court to order a rerun of the election because of EVMs with paper trail (Menges, 2020). However, given many criticisms around the EVMs, some political opponents used the opportunity to frame the issue to their advantage, in an attempt to make people believe that the results will be tempered with because the missing EVMs were at Sacky Shanghala's (a Returning Officer and from the ruling party) house, and people were voting there.

Results of this study show that during the November 2019 elections, there were no organised or sophisticated fake news campaigns, but mostly various political disinformation, and misinformation with mostly manipulated political news contents, satirical news contents, misleading news, and smear campaigns and sort of fake news accompanied by tribalism and ethnic nationalist tones. What was at play during elections was various types of information disorders mimicking journalism reporting, which was being circulated around. The most troubling cases were manipulated, and fabricated contents of real news from real media houses, as well ethnic and tribal remarks as well as abuse of media brands. By looking at the types circulated, it is worth pointing out that political factionalism, political polarisation, political disillusion, political exclusion as well as social economic exclusion are some of the factors that led to fabrications and circulation of "fake news". This is because the context of the number of "fake news" circulated during that time had a tone of the above factors. Manipulated content mimicking media reports, satirical news content, misleading contents and disinformation were notably to have dominated fake news circulated on social media, in which they were presented as genuine news, especially on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Although, fake news reports tried to imitate the orthodox of journalism reporting, there were a lot of grammatical errors in the articles that any news media would never publish to its audiences. One of the key findings in this study is the abuse of mainstream brands, as most of the fake news circulated carried their brands, to send a message that the news is genuine. This study has discovered that young people are increasingly becoming/ engaging with political discussion because of their online engagement with political disinformation, and misinformation.

4.1.2 Satirical news content

Although news below has potential to fool, and not harm, it speaks volumes when it comes to voting. Dr Panduleni Itula, who was the main challenger of the ruling party candidate, was placed at number 4 on the voting machines (EVMs). Therefore, the announcement that the candidate of the ruling party

mistakenly voted for his main challenger is a joke, because there is no truth in it as no one else but the voter who stays in the voting booth. However, the story has no intention to cause harm, but has the potential fool those who do not understand the humor in it. This was also a way, to cause confusion amongst the supporters and followers of President Geingob.

Figure 1: The 2019 Presidential Candidate of the ruling Party, SWAPO Dr Hage Geingob preparing at to cast his vote.



In the next photo, (Figure 2) is a photo of the second and former President of Namibia, Hifikepunye Pohamba. In 2014, there was a video that went viral on social media of former President Pohamba angrily telling the National Housing Enterprise's Chief Executive Officer, Vinson Hailulu, how unhappy he was with the construction of mass housing projects, in which he called out Hailulu for abandoning the responsibility given to him by the government with the sole intention of making sure that the citizens got quality houses. Therefore, the tone used in this post is similar to that of the former president when he was speaking at that occasion. However, the message has potential fool, as the then candidate has been at the receiving end of the downfall of the economy of the country, and the terrible situation the country found itself in. He has been the scapegoat of all the wrong doings in the country, from corruption, to economic hardship of the country. Although those who are familiar with the video can laugh about it, this was a strategy of discredit the candidate of the ruling party. Even though this has been received by some as a joke, there

is a tone of tribalism, that President Geingob who is a non-speaking Oshiwambo candidate cannot be trusted to rule the country, because he is from a Damara tribe which has been regarded as tribe of people who don't think about tomorrow. During the FGDs, many youths have regarded it as a meme; however, there were those who admitted that the message could be true because since President Geingob took over things have been falling apart.

Figure 2: Former President of the Republic of Namibia, Dr Hifikepunye Pohamba who was succeeded by Dr Geingob in 2015.



In Figure 3, is the first couple, Dr Hage Geingob and Monica Geingos. The message, which seems to come from the First Lady, Monica Geingos was referring to former cabinet ministers (Sacky Shanghala and Bernard Esau) who were implicated in the biggest corruption case known as fishrot scandal few weeks to 2019 elections. Fish rot is multimillion-dollar corruption and fraud in Namibia's fishing industry in which ex-ministers Bernhard Esau and Sacky Shanghala and four co-accused are implicated. They are alleged kingpins in a fishing scheme that made kickbacks of at least N\$103 million from the Icelandic companies to get access to Namibian fishing quotas from 2014 to 2019, (Immanuel 2019, Menges 2020). This page is known for all the funny moments in the country; therefore, it is hard for people to regard that as true news than a meme. Ahead of 2019 elections, there was outcry by the people of Namibia for President Geingob to fire the implicated ministers from their portfolios, as well as from the Party. Instead, President Geingob offered them to resign as ministers, and let them to continue with their positions as members of

the Central Committee, and of the Swapo party while in custody. However, the decision to remove Shanghala as a member of the Central Committee, and Esau from Politburo and Central Committee of Swapo was only fulfilled after elections in April 2021.

Figure 3: The current President of Namibia, Dr Hage Geingob and his First Lady Monica Geingos.



4.1.3 Manipulated content

Figure 4: Swapo Party 2019 Presidential Candidate Dr Hage Geingob, at one his rallies ahead of the elections.



This study found that a number of fake news circulated during that period had genuine facts deliberately manipulated to run smear campaigns, cause confusion or discontent or as sensationalist propaganda to discredit election opponents. These stories were distributed through social media pages, designed to look like 'real' news brands or through screenshots of individuals. They used photoshop to either add or delete words to cause confusion and deceive others and make people believe since the stories are accompanied by real media brands. For example, the content of the first story, which says: "President Geingob calls on voters to give Dr Itula more votes to lead," was tempered with, whereby a word was deleted and replaced with some words that were not part of the story. The real headline read: "*President Geingob calls on voters to give SWAPO more years to lead.*" Dr Itula was the closest rivalry of President Geingob of the ruling party, and one could see how information was manipulated to favor him, so that he gains more votes.

In the second story below, the word "EVMs" was added because EVMs were at the center of elections as pointed out above, and their results were received with mixed feelings as they cannot be verified due to the absence of verifiable paper trail. Additionally, heading into 2019 elections where some voting machines went mission, people were already thinking that the lost EVMs were likely to be used to rig elections; hence people started speculating and created false information about the EVMs. The real headline from the national broadcaster was "*President Geingob grateful for congratulatory messages from world leaders after election victory.*" As pointed out above, the use of EVMs without verifiable paper trail was challenged in courts several times by the opposition candidates. The last challenge (appeal) by Dr Itula in the Supreme Court of Namibia won on the legality of using EVMs without verifiable paper trails as required by section 97 of the Electoral Act of 2014.

Figure 5: President-elect Dr Hage Geingob. Geingob will serve a five-year term, (2020-2025).



In the next post below, the real headline was: *“President Geingob asks party members to behave in a proper manner during the campaign.”* However, it was manipulated to fit and support a certain agenda which was to discredit the ruling party, in order for the voters to turn against the ruling party, and encourage voters to vote for opposition parties, because the ruling party has been labeled as a group of thieves who do not have interest of citizens, but rather feed themselves. It also came at a time where some members of the ruling party, and cabinet ministers are allegedly implicated in one the biggest corruption scandals in the country. Therefore, the tone of the message had a big impact on the choices for the electorate.

Figure 6: Swapo party senior members at one of the rallies ahead of the 2019 elections.



4.1.4 Imposter content

One of the critical results coming out of this research is the photoshopping, manipulation and outright abuse of mainstream media brands. This was done with a sole intention of making people to believe them that they are coming from genuine media houses. Most reputable mainstream media organisations that were at the receiving end were *The Namibian*, *Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)* and *Namibian Sun*. Additionally, one of the biggest international media brands, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* also featured in fake news posts circulated in Namibia. Although some media houses were quick to distance themselves from information disorders circulated under their brands, a lot of damage was done in the process, because news moves fast on social media platforms. Below are few examples of information disorders circulated under mainstream media brands:

Figure 7: Images below show how mainstream brands were abused during 2019 elections. The first one is for Namibian Sun newspaper, which is a tabloid daily newspaper. The newspaper has been running since 2007. Here a brand name of the newspaper was used to spread disinformation.



Figure 8: This is the brand of the national broadcaster, Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), which was also used to spread disinformation at the time of 2019 elections. NBC is the biggest broadcaster in Namibia. This logo here is mainly associated with TV, because the entity has a television station and various radio stations with their different brand names.



Figure 9: Below is one of the biggest brands in the world, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which was also used to spread disinformation in Namibia at the period of 2019 elections. BBC is the national broadcaster of the United Kingdom.



Figure 10: Below is a brand of The Namibian newspaper, which was also frequently used to spread information disorder. On this post, the name and brand long of one of the biggest newspapers in Namibia was used to spread fabricated content. The Namibian is also one of the daily tabloid newspapers in Namibia. The newspaper which was established in 1985, has a history of promoting Namibia's independence from South Africa.



4.1.5 False connection

This is a type of fake news where headlines, and visuals do not support the content. There were false articles where visuals or photos do not support the content presented in the post. Example in the photos below, when fake news was posted that some officials from ECN were using EVMs to campaign for the candidate of the ruling party. However, at the time, and photos presented was the period ECN officials were busy carrying out Voters Education campaign on how to use EVMs, and not campaigning for any political party or candidate, as indicated in the first photo. In the second photo, visuals presented are not showing anyone's residence as presented in the content, additionally, the two authors were the supporters of the Independent candidate who challenged the use of EVMs in that elections.

Figure 11: Cars and an official from the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) at the time of running Voters Education campaign, on how to use the Electronic Voters Machines (EVMs) ahead of elections.



Figure 12: Posts from anti-Geingob activists. These activists were supporting Geingob's closest rivalry, Dr Itula.



4.1.6 Misleading content

Following the registration of Dr Panduleni Itula on 8 October 2019, as an Independent Presidential Candidate for 2019 Presidential elections, a lot of misleading information was circulated around to dis-campaign him. Dr Itula who ran as an Independent Presidential Candidate was still a member of the ruling party when he contested and challenged his party president to presidential elections. Following the announcement that he will run as an Independent Candidate (IC), here are some few examples smear campaigns that were produced against him. In the photo below, he was labelled as part of the illuminati secret society. Illuminati is considered to be a mysterious organisation with supernatural powers in Namibia, and generates sense of fear, uncertainty and panic with the community. Many would run away from those associated with such association, and a campaign like would is likely to cost him huge support, especially from those who do not have a clear understanding is a smear campaign. The navy blue suit and

tie with a logo of medical field became his uniform during campaigns. The logo on his tie was linked to the sign of illuminati in order to scare people away from voting him.

Figure 13: Independent Candidate Dr Panduleni Itula, who was one of the Presidential Candidates in 2019 election. He was linked to Illuminati society as part of smear campaigns against him.



At the center of election were the EVMs. These machines have been for too long now in Namibia put the results of elections at stake, due to lack of verifiable paper trail as well as the ongoing debate that the results can easily be manipulated. This has led to a lot of misleading information presented into the society on how EVMs can be manipulated. One of the worst scenarios that led to lot of misleading information circulate around is the EVMs that went missing ahead of the 2019 elections. As stated above, the machines were loaned out to Swapo party to conduct elections Elder's Council, of which Sacky Shanghala was the Returning Officer. It was reported that not all the machines were returned, as some went missing. This has led to a lot of speculations over the credibility of election results.

Figure 14: Resemblance of the controversial EVMs, that were used in elections.

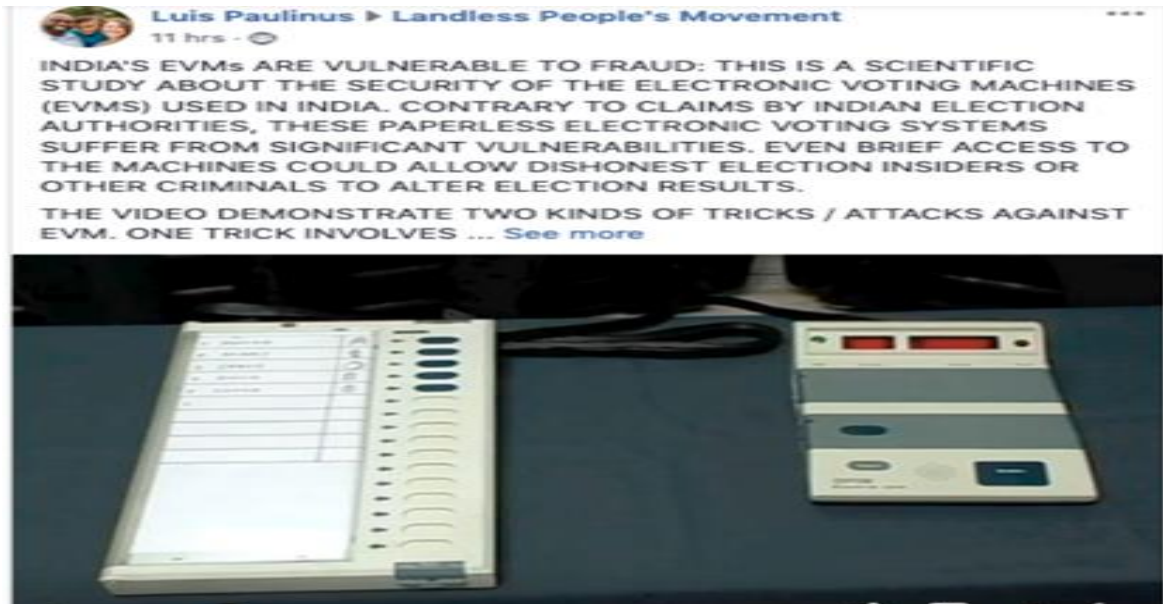
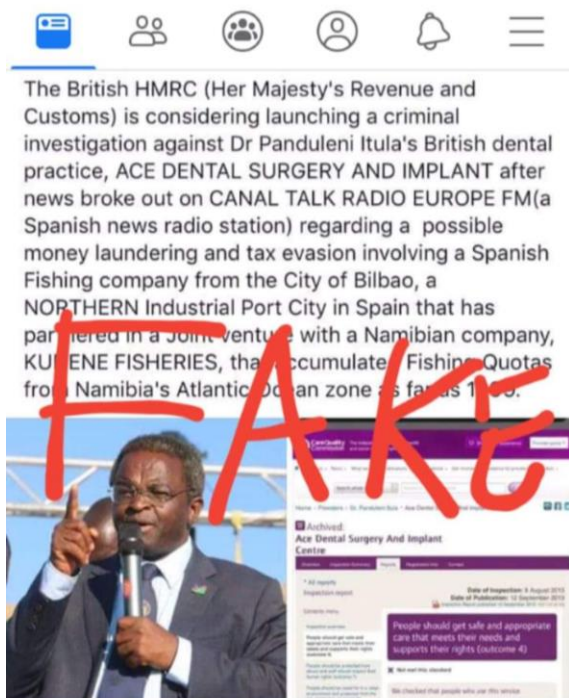


Figure 15: Presidential Independent Candidate Dr Panduleni Itula.



Apart from being a politician, Dr Itula is also a Dentist with his own Dental Practice. It is against this background that an attempt to label him against money laundering as part of smear campaigns was launched against him. This was an attempt to discourage electorates from supporting him in that election, and tarnish his image.

4.1.7 Fabricated content

The researcher also picked up fabricated content, whereby information was completely made up, and put in the public sphere in order to deceive or cause harm and confusion or push for certain agenda. In the first post below, the message intended to confuse followers of Dr Itula, as well as to campaign for Swapo party, which was under pressure from Dr Itula who emerged as the strongest challenger of the ruling party ahead of elections. The news was completely fabricated to deceive voters, and seek support for another party. Dr Itula was at the forefront of challenging the ECN not to use EVMs without verifiable paper trail, in which he and other opposition members who came to support him won in the Supreme Court of Namibia on the legality of the use of voting machines without verifiable print out. The decision was pronounced after the election results, however, the court did not order for a rerun of that election, but that should ECN wish to run elections with EVMs, it should apply section 97 of the 2014 Electoral Act, which compels the election body to use EVMs with verifiable paper trails. The news that Dr Itula withdrew from election was just to send panicking mode to his followers.

Figure 16: Although this post below has featured above under imposter content in relation to the abuse of media brands, here it is featuring under fabricated content whereby an untruthful report was fabricated in the name of Independent Candidate Dr Panduleni Itula, who was running for Presidential elections. He was the closest rival of the President-elect.

Itula had resigned



Namibian Sun
1 hr · 🌐

Independent candidate Dr Panduleni Itula has withdrawn from the 2019 presidential Elections today morning , however Itula said that SWAPO party is the only party that can truly lead Namibia and he just wanted to shake them abit by Challenging the president.



In the next post, news was invented that the Chief Executive Officer of the ECN, Mr Theo Mujoro, was arrested to imply that he tempered with the election results. This news broke out at the time of counting elections, and the ECN has been accused (several times) of rigging elections in favour of the ruling party, and regarded as pro-Swapo. The news below intended to send anxiety and confusion in the public, that election results were being manipulated, and that elections were not free and fair. However, this can also be attributed to poor management of communication and information sharing by the ECN as people waited for too long to hear the results, hence fabricated information.

Figure 16. Mr Theo Mujoro is the Chief Electoral and Referenda Officer. He has been accused of pro-ruling party (Swapo).

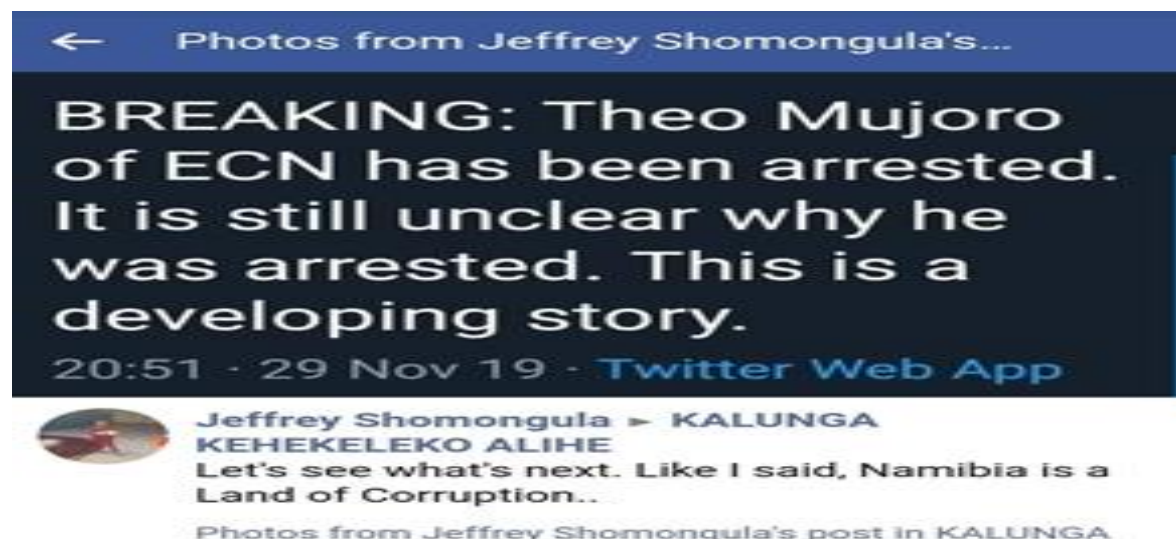
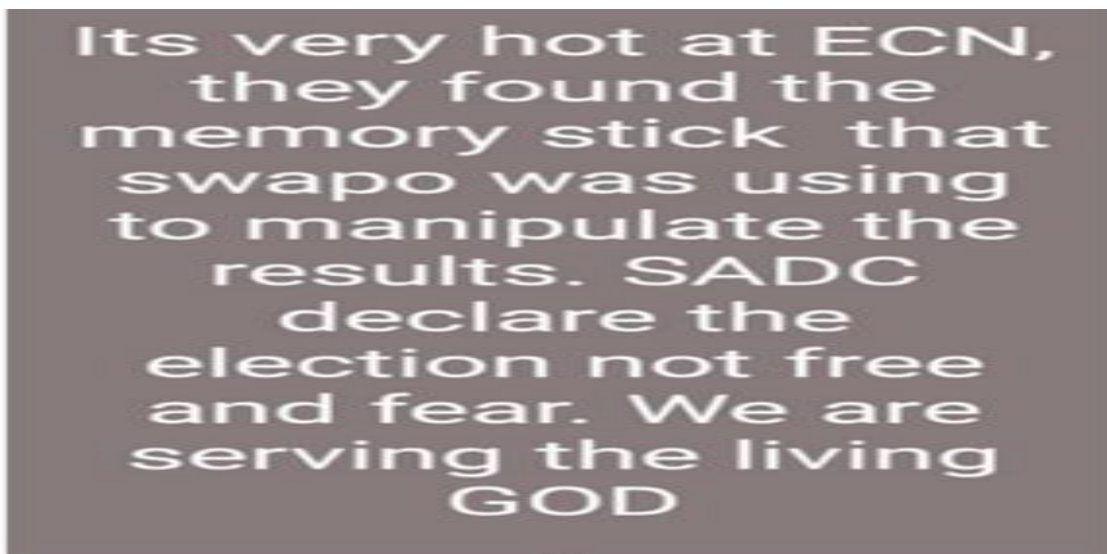


Figure 18: Frustratingly delay in the announcement of results for Presidential election led people to create disinformation.



Although President Geingob enjoys cordial diplomatic relations with the Chinese government, and given the role China played in assisting Namibia to attain its political independence, the ruling party candidate who was campaigning for his second term had been accused of “selling out” Namibia to Chinese people, this is due to a good relationship approach between the Chinese, government and the president. There were claims that there are too many Chinese people in Namibia because of President Geingob who has been accused of being captured by the Chinese people, due to the preferences of government tenders awarded to the Chinese nationals. The number of donations from China has also fueled the situation of

labelling President Geingob as captured, and that he cannot take drastic decisions against Chinese people in Namibia. Namibian Sun reported in 2020 that Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) opposition party threatened to stir up mass xenophobia attacks on Chinese nationals if the government continues to give preferential treatments to Chinese business community (“NEFF threatens to mobilise anti-Chinese xenophobia”, 2020). In 2018, a number of parliamentarians expressed worries over donated Huawei M3 Lite tablet from Chinese-based Huawei company citing security and privacy fears. A leader of Official Opposition Party McHenry Venaani rejected the donation. He rejected them on the basis that the company has business interest in Namibia, and wants to give bribes to politicians in return of winning certain contracts in the country, (Mumbuu Jnr 2018, “Politicians wary of spy-linked Huawei tabs”2018).

This was a form of de-campaigning President Geingob, and an attempt to fail him to run for a second as a President of Namibia. The news intended to plant a seed that if President Geingob gets another term he would sell the country to Chinese people. Katutura Hospital is of the two big state hospitals in Namibia, and this news would have serious impact in the society of Namibia, given the point that less privileged Namibians rely on that hospital for medical treatment.

Figure 19: President Geingob of Namibia with president Xi Jinping of China.

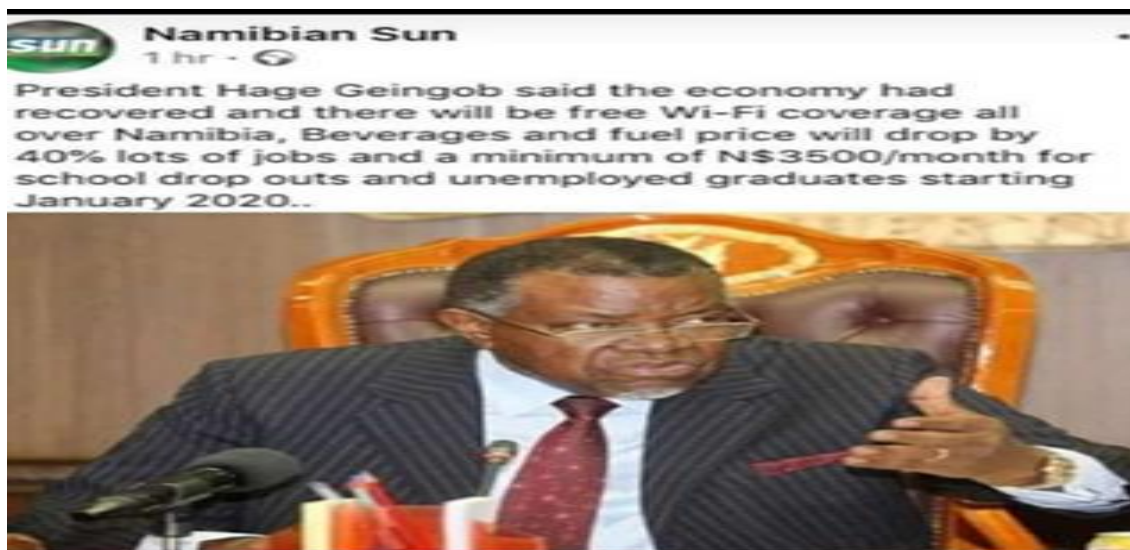


Figure 20: Although the post below featured under imposter content, here is presenting fabricated content under The Namibian brand. The content under this story is completely a made-up one. In the photo is the President of the Republic of Namibia, Dr Hage Geingob, with his business partner and friend Mr Jack Huang, second from left.



The fabricated news below was intended to deceive voters into believing that things would change once President Geingob is elected into power. This news came at a time where the country is in economic hardship, and the sitting president was under pressure to revive the economy. This clearly was a fabricated pro-campaign for the ruling party to get into power.

Figure 21: Swapo Party Candidate, and President of Namibia.



4.1.8 False Context

While addressing his followers at one of his rallies, Dr Itula who was challenging the incumbent President Geingob, narrated to his followers how he went through pain when he was brutally assaulted in exile. He told his supporters that it still pains him that he went through such experience because of the freedom of

Namibia. Dr Itula told his followers that he was beaten in exile and his brain is still at pain over inhuman treatment he experienced in exile. However, the context under which it is portrayed below false, he does not necessary mean that he is mentally sick as portrayed in this fake news post below. This was a strategy to decampaign him, that the country would be led by a mad person, and that his brain is not functioning well.

Figure 24: 2019 Independent Presidential Candidate, Dr Panduleni Itula.



4.1.9 Hate speech, ethnic stereotypes and tribalism undertones

This research has also observed a number of a number of political, and tribal alignments, and misconceptions on cultural and tribal diversity, directed towards election opponents, and other tribes in an attempt to discredit them from elections. Words regarded as derogatory were used such as a *kwankaras* (*Ovakwanghala*) which is an oshiwambo name, and it translates to a tribe or someone that doesn't think about tomorrow or future. It depicted one's hatred towards a specific tribe or individual.

Figure 25: Hate Speech from one of the supporters of Dr Itula.



Grace Itula

Yesterday at 10:50

We had a damara president for the past 5 bad poverty years, he didnot even do any improvement on his fellow 🙄DAMARA🙄 people, 90% of them are not educated and they are very poor, still living in bushes and shacks. Mr president you got no mercy; you have abandoned your own blood fellow damaras.. you did not even do anything at all.. No changes.. Do you guys think that this man gonna change the country if he didnot even share 1 of his million with his tribe? And yet he's one of the top billionaire presidents in Africa and yet the country is broke and people are hungry🙄🙄🙄 My Nam fellow let's bring up a change. Let's vote Dr Itula to rescure us🙄

Figure 26: Hate speecha and tribalism tones recorded at the times of elections.



Hike Ela

Yesterday at 11:20

Hage Geingob, Bernardus Swartbooi, Henry Seibeb, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa and others are Kwankaras.

Sam Nujoma, Hifikepunye Pohamba, Nahas Angula, Panduleni F B Itula and others are Aawambo.

Joseph Diescho, Elijah Ngurare, Kanyetu Vincent Kanyetu, Ignatius Shixwameni and others are Kavangos.

McHenry Venani, Kazenambo Kazenambo, Fanuel Kaapama, Peter Katjavivi and others are Hereros.

Tangy Mike Tshilongo and all the Activist are Namibians like the above-mentioned. If you are a Kwankara, you are just a Kwankara.

[#OneNamibiaOneNation](#)

[#Verstaan.](#)



4.1.10 Conclusion

As a result of fake news, a number of reputable media houses whose brands were used to spread information disorder are at risk of losing news followers due to lack of trust and credibility. This is because news consumers are likely to disassociate themselves with media houses linked with spreading misleading information, and therefore would choose either not to buy or follow news coming from media houses alleged to have spread fake news. This argument, as detailed in the next objective, has also emanated from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) I had with young people, in which some of them have discussed that they stopped buying and following some media houses due to misleading headlines in their news reporting. There is risk that when a brand name of a certain media is used to spread fake news, a number

of news consumers tend to reconsider their decisions, whether to keep following such media house or to disassociate themselves with such media house, as it deemed unreliable, misleading and causing confusion amongst citizens. This research has further learnt that a number of satirical news content carried real brands and logos of reputable media houses, with manipulated contents in which they were caught trying to imitate journalistic reporting.

Media houses need to be extra vigilant and strengthen their online monitoring and presence. This will help them in debunking any falsehood spread using their brand, and protect their image to avoid lack of trust amongst their audiences and strengthen their credibility with news consumers, to avoid any sense of confusion amongst their followers when their names are being used to spread lies and “fake news.” A lot of fake news were between the Swapo party candidate, Dr Hage Geingob, who eventually emerged victorious against his closest opponent, Dr Panduleni Itula, an Independent Candidate from the same party as well as the Electoral Voting Machines (EVMs) used in the elections and hate speech. Most of the manipulated images were photoshopped with mainstream media brands for news to look real. This is very dangerous to the society, especially those with low education and don’t have access to proper resources to fact-check news. This is because news is made to look real, and with low analytical skills such as to check language used, sources quoted it would be difficult for many people to spot them as fake news. The abuse of mainstream media brands was also at the receiving end of fake news to make news believable, a wakeup calls to media houses to strengthen their online presence and monitoring. Technological shift, which include social media, has aided the spreading of information disorder, because now with technology it is easy to manipulate, and publish information that would reach out to thousands of news consumers within a short period of time. People have taken advantage of social media being the fastest broadcast of news, as well as a first place of news consumption, especially for young people.

4.2 The criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information

This objective intended to find out how young people determine the truthfulness of news and information coming their way. As news consumers, young people engage social media for news consumption, because they regard social media as the fastest way of acquiring news and information, but how do the young people know that the information they are consuming is authentic or not? Under this research objective, young people discussed what they understand fake news is all about, topics that are likely to be the focus and center of fake news in Namibia, whether they have experienced fake news, how they distinguish

between real and fake news seeing that some fake news is accompanied by logos of real media houses, events /circumstances which would make a fake news story more believable, as well as what they know about fact-checking. They have also touched on the platforms they are likely to encounter fake news in Namibia, and what informs their opinion in terms of separating fiction from the truth?

Prior to focus group discussions, the researcher distributed various fake news articles that were circulated during the elections. The aim was to test their abilities to spot fake news. These articles were used as a stimulus in which participants were tasked to differentiate between fake news and real news. A number of them clearly demonstrated their analytical ability to make sense of what is true or fake. They did so by pointing to various factors to consider when faced with doubtful information such as grammar, choice of words, logos, source of information, and typing errors. Some of the young people couldn't make a difference between real and news, and they didn't indicate to take extra measures to go beyond what was posted to them. Some of them were confused and didn't know what they would have done with such false information. A number of them have indicated to share false articles to seek clarity from others. This research has discovered that a number of young people would struggle to differentiate between real and "fake news" due to lack of low literacy level, and inability to analyse information presented to them, and lack of media exposure, as well as low level of literacy. Some of them have indicated that they would share "fake news" as memes.

In this research, the youth defined "fake news" as information or data that is not authentic, and created with the intention to mislead or extort people of money to some extent. When asked about topics that are likely to be the focus and center of fake news in Namibia, the majority of young people pointed out issues that are trending issues (current affairs), as it stands Covid-19 vaccine has become now dominant in terms of "fake news." The other areas targeted by "fake news" are where people look desperate. On top of the listed items are politics and elections. Others are vacancies; this is where normally scammers are found, because people are so desperate for employment, and seeking for a better life. Elites (high-class individuals) and prominent figures have also been noted to be part of "fake news." Majority of young people from the two areas have cited Facebook, and twitter as platforms where one is likely to encounter fake news, with twitter and Instagram coming second. However, they indicated that with topics such as politics, corruption, elites, employment are mostly the center of fake news in Namibia, and they likely to be circulated on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, compared to entertainment topics which are more likely to be found on Instagram. However, research found out that fake news is mostly on centered on the current happenings.

All of the young people interviewed indicated to have experienced fake news in one way or another, especially on social media. They also pointed out fake news doesn't only happen on social media and mainstream media, but also in societies. A number of them during face-face interviews said the following:

When we cleared land in Kavango...we requested government tractor on a Friday, and on Saturday the next day, there was already news that the governor has hijacked government tractor for her own use..at that point we didn't even use the tractor, we just requested to use it, however it was already busy elsewhere, and it was also not fit to use it for the job we wanted. So, it was something completely taken out of proportion, because we just enquired on the price and its availability. When I saw it on one of the groups, I just put facts there. I actually just commented on it and that this is not the true reflection of what happened. I think the office of the governor should issue a statement to clear it...of which the office did. (Mr Tudiminapo Shindume, Hochland Park 21 April 2021).

Something I encountered recently was a post [vacancy] that the Ministry of Defence is recruiting in so many fields, so I looked at the advert, which was on twitter, I took it up and I started the process, which is to apply, but I did more enquiries. I called the Human Resources department, trust me I was so disappointed [laughs]... I was so disappointed. With regards to employment we are so desperate because you can even go to the extent of paying somebody, but it is just fake news, (Dennis Hangula, Ombili 25 April 2021).

What I have experienced when it comes to fake news is that, you would find community members coming to the Constituency Office after hearing (false) that the Namibia Defence Force, or the Namibian Police is recruiting. It wastes the people's money that they don't have already as they try to fork out their last money to make a lot of copies to apply for the job. Or people turning up to register for government grants (Mr Phillip Shikemeni ,23 April 2021, Ombili)

This research has found that young people in the two areas are not aware of the existence of Namib Fact Check, an institution responsible for verifying public statements and media reports. When asked about Disinformation and Misinformation participants didn't also understand what the two terms mean. This result resonates with the remarks made by the Editor of Namibia Fact Check, Mr Frederico Links during the pilot study on 23 December 2020, that if one is trying to reach out to an average person the term "fake news" does not resonate as people understand what one is referring to when using it. However, the Editor cautioned that people have to be careful with the term "fake news" because it doesn't capture the

dealings of the flood of falsehood. In that discussion Mr Links explained that he will use the term “fake news” when speaking to lay people or average day people who do not have knowledge of the wide range of the field of disinformation and information pollution that this term speaks to. Therefore, this clearly came out when participants who don’t have knowledge in the field information pollution were asked about the terms used to describe falsehoods.

4.2.1 Consulting multiple sources: verification and fact-checking

When young people from the two locations were asked how do they engage with fake news on a daily basis, they discussed during FGDs that they identify fake news and true information through conducting further research. They establish if social media account posting news is verified. A verified account has a blue check next to the account name, and as such any information posted by a verified account is deemed to be authentic. However, this cue can sometimes mislead news consumers as it is always not the case that information from a verified account is true, (see Morales et. 2019). Should information be shared with them through some platforms such as WhatsApp, they try to visit original pages where information was posted.

It was also discovered that with real news, the link provided under news posts customarily leads news consumers to real news website, which is contrary to fake news information which takes a reader to a totally different website. They also look at the types of accounts engaging in the comments, whether they are verified or not as well as bylines. They added that they contact media houses, whose brands have been used for news as well as through asking friends. For some, they run to social media accounts of activists and influencers to see if the news is posted there, trust their instincts, as well as consulting web sites, to avoid sharing, and consuming incorrect information. They also mentioned the issues of logos, and the source of information as key. Here is what a number of young people said during the FGDs:

One thing is, I do trust my instinct, because when you read an article you get doubt if the article is correct or not, so your instincts will lead you to do more research. Go to the author, and do more research, check followers, check whether the account is verified, unless the account is hacked (Mr Joseph, FGD 1, Ombili, 26 February 2021).

If a certain platform gives out doubtful information, I go to that specific account, and check how many followers are there, if the account has less than 100 followers then that means information shared might be not true, but if the account has thousands of followers, that could be believable,

for me personally I just check the followers (Ms Joyce Namuhuja, FGD 1, Hochland Park, 31 March 2021).

Sometimes it depends on who is backing up the information. Some participants run to the accounts of vocal people to see if information they have come across was posted there, and verify. However, with issues of logos, there are graphic designers who are bored, and have nothing to do hence easy to manipulate real logos (Ms Anna-Liisa Muleka, FGD1, Hochland Park, 31 March 2021).

One of the best ways is to fact-check through different media outlets, if it appears on all other media houses, it is likely to be true, however if it is from one media outlet that has shared the information, then it is better to go to the genuine page of the media outlet, if it appears there then it means that it could be true, at least if it is from a trusted media outlet then I can have a sense of trust in the news (Mr Ricky Simasiku 09, FGD 2, Hochland Park 09 April 2021).

You actually need to look at specific things, for example if it is on a specific page, you need to check the accounts and see what was posted that day or otherwise you can easily just call specific place, or check the website, because of the importance of the information, all these credentials would initially tell you is this fake? Example if nbc is broadcasting on specific issue they are not the only one we have, so have One Africa, newspapers...this is also one of the ways to find out whether information is reliable or not and carrying weight, and it is very important to call. I do call because I am so skeptical to information, Mr Dennis Hangula, 25 April 2021, face-face interview, Ombili).

The process of verifying news on social media through research, and consultation of various media houses has been noted to be significant in the process of engaging and identifying “fake news” on social media. Comments, bylines, grammatical errors, logos are some of the cues that assist young people in dealing with “fake news” in their everyday lives.

4.2.2 News of interest

During face-face interviews, a number of young people have indicated to dig deeper on “fake news” and information which only affect and have impacts on them and their associates, or on topics of interest, and

anything outside their interest doesn't deserve their time even if it has the potential to fool, and mislead. Here is how one of them put it:

If it is meme, you laugh, you scroll and move on. If I come across something interesting, such as a favorite celebrity you start to wonder and go into research, if it is my eye catching I would go further, if it is a celebrity not close to me I just scroll by. If it is on politics, if it catches my eye then I would want to dig deeper, I will choose to either go through sources on social media platform or ask my elders. If I get something on social media or from someone else, I would rather wait for news from media houses, because they are larger platforms, why would they lie? (Ms Joyce Namuhuja, Hochland Park, 05 April 2021).

A number of young people gave an indication that they only engage with "fake news" that is directly affecting them. Otherwise they let go of anything that doesn't interest them, in spite of the consequences it may have to others.

4.2.3 Cross-checking with traditional media sources

Despite the advancement of technology which has changed the media atmosphere through digital media, the research has discovered that traditional media still play an important role in people's lives, as some participants indicated that when there is doubtful information on social media they wait for traditional media such as newspapers and Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to report or break the news. Some participants have indicated that it is hard to differentiate between real and "fake news" on social media. However, the youth also underscored that the source of information plays a crucial role, in determining whether to believe the information, as it pushes them to verify the news with other media houses. However, some of them indicated that if news is from a certain media house, which they regard as their favourite, then they don't bother checking beyond what was reported because of the trust they have for it, hence some of them only believe news when reported by a certain media house. Below are some of the comments:

If I do read something on social media on politics related I would wait for news time, because I know what they would put up is for everybody, and they would not lie, because it will put them in jeopardy, Ms Joyce Namuhuja, 05 April 2021.

I consider myself not easy to convince, I am not the person who runs to believe. But if it has to be with serious news, such deaths or political news regarding our country, I normally check the traditional media or mainstream media, I go around their pages, I just follow up to see if I will see the same news. Or if it is international story I run to google if it doesn't appear, there are some news that looks real until you verify. If it doesn't appear anywhere else I hardly believe, but I don't run to believe something before I verify because I am very much aware of fake news. Not only that I do verification when news is affecting, but when something is interesting or something or national issue, (Ricky Simasiku, Face-face interview, 19 April 2021, Hochland park).

As users of social media platforms, it is difficult sometimes, however, when the story is one sided, that's how one differentiates false to real news. Furthermore, it is also easy to spot fake news when you are well vested and aware of the information and the subject placed under false communication (Mr Phillip Shikemeni, 26 March 2021).

Many of the participants from group 2 of the FGDs in Ombili location abstained from this question, compared to group 1 in that area. This can be an indication that the young people from this location may struggle and may lack explicit knowledge of distinguishing between real and fake news. This might also be attributed to the low level of education of people living in that area. Additionally, they have recognised traditional media as key in dealing with "fake news". The other important aspect of differentiating between real and fake news is by consulting multiple sources such as by cross-checking with what other media houses have reported on, as well as google when it comes to internal news for example.

4.2.4 Content and source of information

This research found out that a significant number of young people from Hochland Park compared to young people from Ombili differentiate real and "fake news" by conducting content analysis of the news articles. They look at content features such as facts presented, or quotes presented in the story. They also indicated research as a key component when dealing with "fake news" because sometimes people share "fake news" without knowledge that it is inaccurate information. But most importantly, their main concern is the source of information. Hence it is important to verify information before processing, and passing it on. Some of the responses are show below:

“For me it is a two-way street, the responsibility should be on both sides, firstly all media houses be it traditional or modern ones have the responsibility to share the news, normally in the media is that you want the news to go out first, fast and you want to be the first. There are now so-called influencers, celebrities, or public figures who are also becoming mini-media houses, they are sharing news and those at point blank might take it as accurate, by doing so, they are already surpassing many media houses. Therefore, as a consumer news, I need to look at who is sharing the news first, I go on their page, and I also try to see if other media houses have shared it, or if there is someone who is quoted in the article that is also very key, as well as the content of the article if it is coming media house. I would also check who is quoted and saying what, at what point then I can assess that maybe is accurate or maybe is something still developing” (Mr Twakulilwa Kayofa, 9 April 2021).

“I look at the content. I would read, and look at the content, and ask myself can this really happen, and decide after reading. Mostly people just write for the sake of writing, hence you can tell by the facts written down and sometimes it is good to also look at the source of information” (Mr Tudiminapo Shindume, 31 March 2021).

“It depends on who is giving the information. I personally don’t believe in individuals giving news, I bypass them before I even consider it as news, so if online media house gives news, and I see it on pages other media houses that’s how I look at it, but as for individuals I just pass by and ignore, until I wait for media houses to come out,” some types of news it is obvious others will have to come out, Some type of news I don’t need to react, as I will just wait for everything to happen, and wait for other media houses to come out, and then you know it is happening” (Ms Laimi Lot, FGD 1, Hochland Park 31 March 2021).

With floods of information pollution on social media, examining news articles by looking at voices of authority, quotes, and what is being said. However, this has been noted to be a challenge to those with poor education backgrounds, as they are unable to pinpoint such elements in “fake news” articles. This observation also covers the illiterate news consumers, who mostly consume their news via verbal communication, of which sometimes is from people with less understanding of how news ecosystem works. This present a challenge as news conveyed to them might be presented in a certain way to fit a certain narrative, of which they just consume.

4.2.5 Provide factual information to others

Research also found out that young people, mainly from Hochland Park are likely to alert other news consumers about information pollution. They further indicated to make it their responsibility of correcting and provide factual information to others, should they be in a position to do so. This is because they have a better understanding of the dangerous fake news can be. It is also worth mentioning that they caution others to take down “fake news” should they be in a position to do so, here is what they said during various face-face interviews held:

“When I come across an article that I think is fake news, sometimes I tend to just ignore, because it doesn’t affect me in any way. But I am also aware that some other person may not think like me and they may take fake news and spread it further, so I would try to report fake news. Let’s say it is something that has the potential to cause harm, I would try to report something like that. I would try to report maybe this particular piece of fake news, if I know the author who is spreading fake news I would ask them to stop because it has the potential to harm someone” (Roberto 20 May 2021, Hochland Park).

“Personally, like on Facebook, I don’t really comment on issues on Facebook, I would just look at it and dismiss it...I don’t really comment. I am not active on twitter I just go there to read. But mostly on the WhatsApp groups, that’s where we mostly have a lot of misinformation, there sometimes I comment on it, by sharing what is true, if I have the facts, but if I don’t, I would just probably say that this news is not factual, sometimes I just ignore. At times if I have information I would share it, if I don’t I just let it” (Tudiminapo Shindume, Hochland Park, 21 April 2021).

At times, a number of people may end up sharing, and posting “fake news” without knowing that information they are presenting is not accurate. However, if those with proper skills of decoding news and information can assist with accurate information, it would help to prevent the spreading of “fake news” and hence others will not be misled.

4.2.6 Traditional Media is the safety net for “fake news”

Some participants have indicated to find it very difficult to distinguish between real and “fake news,” on social media and therefore they only rely on traditional media such as newspapers, televisions and radios

to clear the air for them, especially when they are confronted with “fake news” pieces. This was captured as follows:

“The media houses at this point are our safety nets, to know whether the news is real or not. To be honest I wouldn’t know, I would struggle to know the difference, so I would always ask people that I know if it is true, because they [fake news producers] make it very.... very believable” (Ms Rushall Mutasa, 31 March 2021 FGD 1 Hochland Park).

4.2.7 Widely circulation of fake news

When asked which events or circumstances would make a fake news more believable majority of participants in Focus groups and face-face interviews agreed that fake news stories are more believable when they become the center of discussion everywhere, such as in communities and social media platforms, especially when there is element of the truth in it. They noted that the more “fake news” is widely shared on social media and discussed in the communities, the more it may cause confusion, and push people to believe that it is true. Fake news is also believable when it is reported by mainstream media, or passed by public figures.

Participants further pointed out that people who “fabricate news”, are smart this is because they base it on the most wanted or needed information, for example on recruitment, as people are so desperate to secure employment, hence fake news fabricators look at the most wanted information, and target where there is fear, panic and hatred. Others indicated that fake news is believable when mainstream media, or public figures report it. Others indicated that it is believable when it is centered something trending. This is how some participants put it during face-face interviews:

“Mostly they would include something that is juicy, something attracting or element of the truth just to induce you to believe the story. Mostly people would just believe, especially those who don’t check, and theirs is just to consume, because some people are just consumers, and some people are just forwarders of news. Whether it [information or news] is true or not they just forward. Some of them would just believe especially those who just consume information and those who don’t check, they can just believe” Tudiminapo Shindume, 21 April 2021, Hochland Park).

“Big national events, or events you don’t necessarily have enough media coverage or events that don’t have ways that they can be verified. I think those are the ones that are at risks of fake news starting up. People who share fake news are opportunistic they tend to be opportunistic, they take advantages of events that can have a lot chaos. They can also sneak in events that received a lot of coverage from media outlets” (Roberto Dirkes, 20 May 2021, Hochland Park).

This research also intended to find out what informs opinion of young people in terms of separating fiction from the truth on social media. Some participants indicated to be informed by the number of followers on a certain social media page, common sense/ judgment/ thinking capabilities, fact-checking, experience, news style (five Ws and an H) and the source of information.

4.3 Newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their significant others on social media

In this research I also attempted to establish what young people consider newsworthy before sharing news with others. In this, young people were tested to find out how well they know the concept of ‘fact-checking’ information, and its importance, what they do when encounter fake news, impacts of fake news in the Namibian society. They were also interviewed on what can be done to control the production, circulation and consumption of fake news in Namibia.

4.3.1 What is Fact-checking?

Majority of the participants from both locations have struggled to come to terms with this terminology during FGDs, especially young people from Ombili location. The researcher discovered silence in the boardroom when engaged all the two groups from Ombili location, as a number of participants couldn’t define what fact-checking is all about. A record number of them indicated not to know what the term is. But it shouldn’t be that shocking because no one from all the four groups knew the existence of Namibia Fact-Check institution. During the discussions, few participants have attempted to define Fact-checking as confirming information that has been received, by doing a mini research and verifying whether information is true. They added that fact-checking is also about scrutinizing facts, as well as the credibility of the information, whether it is trustworthy or can be trusted, by looking for the facts, logos, user’s pages, source of information, and identifying or checking what is true and not.

When asked during face-face interviews how important is the issue of fact-checking, the selected youth revealed that it is very essential to fact-check information because information spreads fast, and easy to manipulate. A number of them revealed that they only fact-check information that interest or affect them. For some, fact-checking is very important because it would prevent people from sharing inaccurate, and unreliable information. This they said, the problem is the damage that the incorrect information causes, and encouraged people to fact-check what they are sharing in order not to mislead others. Here is how few of them responded:

“Very import, we are seeing it now especially in this global age, we are seeing that it very easy to share information and it also easy to share misinformation. It is important because it would prevent you from being misled” (Roberto, 20 May 2021, Hochland Park).

“Since mostly fake news is made to cause harm, it is therefore important to fact- check in order to limit the effect of fake news for the intended person, because you have a decision whether to share the information further, by fact checking you reduce the effects of what the source intended to do” (Joseph Ndjaba, 20 May 2021, Ombili).

Although the concept of Fact-checking is traditionally associated with journalists, newsrooms and political analysts (Pamment, & Lindwall 2021), now the news ecology has changed, as media houses are longer the only gate keepers, producers and distributors of news. Therefore, now that information is widely available and spread fast, the concept of fact checking is now well living with news consumers to help them select, and engage with accurate news and information. For example, in this research young people discuss that it is very important to fact check information in order not to be misled into making inaccurate political decisions, as well not to share incorrect information with others.

4.3.2 Consulting other sources

When young people were asked how do they fact-check and verify news before agreeing and sharing it with their families and friends, a number of participants who indicated to engage in sharing news and online information, especially information affecting them, have underscored in FGDs and face-face interviews that they first establish if the news and information they are about to share is in the best interest of the public before engaging various sources such as google, social media pages, other media houses or asking friends about information they want to share. It was also discussed that small details such as typing errors or grammatical errors would encourage them to pursue information further. They

also discussed that they would share information if they were completely sure of the facts. The other significant part of it is that they only share news if it has information that people really need to know, this comment was mostly made during the FGDs and face-face interviews in by young people from Hochland Park. Some cited judgment of news and information content as key before sharing information with others. During the focus groups discussions, one of the respondents put it as follows:

“Check if the information you are about to share is good for the public. Check the date, as some information is always outdated, check the reference, and some statements are misleading, therefore you personally don’t want to be associated with some information” (Mr Dennis Hangula, FGD 1, 26 February 2021 Ombili).

“Like I said the easiest way to verify information is to check it through if it has appeared on a quite number of reputable media institutions. In some instances, I may ask a person to find out if they know something, but I still just rely on media institutions for verifications, it is like just comparing what the other media house has said as opposed to the other” (Ricky Simasiku, 19 May 2021, Face-face interview, Hochland Park).

“Usually it depends, if it is a reliable source, I don’t necessarily fact-check, or verify, I just share, but I am also now aware that people tend to use (manipulate) logos, and fabricate news, so in that case I would try to look at the tone of the piece of information I am presented with, because I have noticed that a lot of people who spread fake news you can pick up from the language or typing error. If I pick up that this tone doesn’t seem like it can be shared by reliable institutions, such as the media, or police [affected institution] then I can try to verify by checking if there is a newspaper article that can support that piece of information” (Mr Roberto Dirkse, 20 May 2021, face-face interview, Hochland Park).

“If I share something and later realise that it is fake, “would I really bother, I wouldn’t really bother, because at the end of the day I was also trying to find out if it is true or not.” Sometimes even your own fact checking may lead you to wrong places, that’s why I say you would rather wait or ask from someone you are sure of that will give you the right answer, if you don’t have anyone just wait” (Ms Joyce Namuhuja, 05 April 2021, face-face interview Hochland Park).

Although there could be other methods of fact checking apart from the ones mentioned above, fact checking is very crucial is every day’s dealing of a news consumer for accurate news, as information is

coming from all directions. Therefore, it is important that news consumers, media houses, fact check any information coming their way.

4.3.3 News sharing with close proximity people

One of the key observations from young people living in Hochland Park is that news is only worth sharing when it matters or affects their close people such as friends, families or colleagues, otherwise they would not share news with the rest of the people, as they regard news ever present everywhere. Two respondents had this to say during FGDs:

“Personally, I don’t share news, the only news I would share is only if it involves close people, but through calling, otherwise things that are far from me and things that are happening in the country can be shared by the media, and anyone” (Ms Laimi Lot, 31 March 2021 FGD 1, Hochland Park).

“My sharing of news depends on what the news is, if it involves information that people really need to know, if it is beneficial to my friends and colleagues, yes, as you will be concerned...if it is true then it is worth sharing but if it is false I won’t cos it might mislead the next person” (Ms Anna-Liisa Muleka, 31 March FGD1, Hochland Park).

4.3.4 News impact in the lives of people

When participants were asked what they consider newsworthy before sharing, many of them in face-face interviews have cited news that has impact on the lives of people, this include constructive news or anything that has potential to change the lives of others/ affects lives of people, news of national issue, current affairs. Those who share news do so because not everyone is well informed, or know where to get accurate news. Some of them noted that interest is one of the factors that motivate them to share news. Here is how one participant put it:

“Anything to do with economic hardships or that shed light on a particular situation, deserves to be in the limelight and deserved to be shared. Anything that has impacts on our daily lives” (Roberto Dirkse, 20 May 2021 face-face interview).

News sharing has been regarded as part of civic duty. Furthermore, many young people regard news sharing as only important if it impacts the lives of others. One of the motives of sharing news is interest.

This also pushes young people to carry further research on the subject matter, to ensure accurate sharing of news and information.

4.3.5 Share to verify and seek clarity

In this research participants discussed that they engage in news and online information sharing in order to establish if information is true or not. When they do this, some of the, indicated share news and information with “disclaimers” captions. They noted that they do so in an attempt to source correct information. Therefore, they explained that through sharing news with others on social media, for them is an attempt to seek and get clarifications as some of the information is confusing, requires clarity, and looks too good to be true, and they don’t know who and where to verify news with. Below is another comment:

“I don’t share things related to my work, but other stuff I share as they are coming but only when they are funny to spark the conversation, but not everything, sometimes you filter. But things related to my work are off limits, I don’t put myself on record. But by virtue of sharing, you will find out if the news is true or not as someone will comment that news or information is true or not” (Ms Rushall Mutasa, 31 March 2021 FGD 1, Hochland Park).

“I share some topics for clarity on social media, but when I do, my caption is always a disclaimer somehow, like is this true? Does anyone have such information because I don’t want to share something and later I am being attacked and questioned how do i know? My captions are always a disclaimer, because I don’t know too. I am looking for clarity as well if there is someone with information” (Mr Ismael Ismael, 31 March 2021, FGD1 Hochland Park).

This research has discovered that news sharing has been regarded a method of news verification, and information in times of uncertainty. This process assists in establishing whether information is accurate or not. A number of youth indicated to engage in this process, and they regard it as a trusted process.

4.3.6 Disapproval of sharing of news

A significant number of respondents from Hochland Park indicated to sit back when it comes to news and information sharing on social media due to various reasons such as job security, and lack of facts or unsure if the information is true or not. They acknowledged that if news is significant it would be all over mainstream media, and everyone would have access to such news. Many of them don’t share news to

avoid misleading people in case information shared is deceptive. Two of the most vocal participants observed that:

“...Personally, I don’t really share news, just for security reasons, because you would be held accountable. I would comment, especially in the WhatsApp groups, but I won't share the information. I just read and keep it there, I only share some memes, I am not that guy who shares news, I am scared to answer things, where did you get this?” (Mr Tudiminapo Shindume, 31 March 2021 FGD 1, Hochland Park).

“I am really a person who doesn’t share news, the only time you share news is at that point where first of all you have evidence, secondly it is not contradictory, and thirdly is not putting you in a position where anything can happen, and by anything I mean a lot of things. Also, one thing that discourages me a lot from sharing news, is you have got people who share very disturbing images, especially during car accidents, for example, imagine you are sharing images of a car accident, and it is somebody’s mother who is on your contact list and they didn’t hear about it, and they recognize the mother’s car, what does that say? That’s really what discourages me from sharing news, so it is a personal choice” (Participant 7.1, 31 March 2021 FGD 1, Hochland Park).

Due to floods of information pollution coming from all the directions, some people made a decision to be distant when it comes to news sharing. Because of what transpires in the world of information, some of them do not want to be implicated into things that may put them in trouble, hence they refused to share news as they don’t want to be held accountable, and put their jobs at risk for being involved in information disorder. The other motive of not sharing news is that, should news be critical it would be all over the platforms of all mainstream media, and everyone would have access to it.

4.3.7 Speaking out against “fake news”

On the question of what measures young people take to ensure that fake news doesn’t go viral, a number of young people responded that they speak out against false information presented online, especially if they were present at an event, and have facts about the misleading information published. They would do so by commenting on the subject, and confronting the person spreading false information to stop. One of my respondents had this to say:

“...If I was present at the occasion with regards to false information presented, I would inform others via comments, that I was present at that event and, I would tell them facts, and confront whoever wants to mislead others to stop spreading false information. If I was not present, I would start asking questions to the person communicating fake information just to establish the facts, and in the end that will discourage that person spreading false information. Speak up if you have facts, to stop fake news” (Ms Rusia Mthoko, 26 March 2021, FGD 2 Ombili).

Some young people indicated to interrogate people who post fake news. Otherwise, they would present the facts to news consumers to prevent them from agreeing, consuming and further spreading misleading information. Another respondent during FGDs added that:

“One thing is that you cannot delete someone’s post, all you can do is to post or let people know that the article is false, but only if you have authentic information and when you have confirmed. Sometimes, it is difficult once information is circulated on social media, but rather if you don’t have authentic information don’t post it in order to contain it within to avoid spreading fake news” (Mr Joseph, 26 February 2021 FGD 1, Ombili).

Majority of the young people from the two location have further demonstrated that to reduce the spread of false information one should alert the relevant/ affected body that is linked to false information, via telephones, emails or through other means so that it can act with regards to misleading information. Some of them indicated that they contain it by alerting others via their WhatsApp status that certain information is ‘fake’. Additionally, this research has discovered that the other way to ensure fake news doesn't go viral is to report the social media accounts which are spreading false and unwanted content, so that the owners of social media platforms can suspend, or block such accounts associated with posting harmful information.

4.3.8 Fact-checking

The other way the youth contain information and ensuring that it doesn’t go viral is to fact-check news and information coming their way. This allows them to verify information before distributing it further. To this, they discussed in face-face interviews that it would save them from embarrassing themselves by sharing misleading information, and ensure that it doesn’t spread further. One of the respondents in an FDG had this to say:

“...Do self-checking before, sometimes it depends on the type of information, if you are to share it, and you are not sure verify yourself or with individuals you know will get information you will need” (Ms Joyce Namuhuja, 31 March 2021, FGD1 Hochland Park).

Fact checking would assist in distributing correct information, and cut on the spreading of information disorder. This will help others to have access to correct information. Therefore, it important that should there be misleading news, those with verified information would always save others, and ensure that incorrect information is taken down.

4.3.9 Educating young people on the danger of “fake news”

In ensuring that “fake news” doesn't go viral, young people in Hochland Park give educational and moral instructions on the danger of “fake news.” However, the study found out that young people from Hochland Park only attempt to confront people who are close to them, to either remove “fake news” posted, or encourage them to stop spreading misleading information. In an event where someone spreading “fake news” is distant they don't bother confronting them over “fake news” posted. Participants further indicated that it should be a collective responsibility of the society to fight against “fake news” by the means of education, and speaking out against its danger. Others have narrated that the best way is to stop sharing news, especially if one doesn't have facts. In order to ensure misleading information does not go viral, some youth explained that if information is not clear, they hold back to establish facts. They first fact check news, but depending on the seriousness of the information in order not to mislead the next person. Two respondents observed the following:

“I think what I can try is to educate the person of the danger of circulating “fake news” because as easy as it is to press send, you never know what the end results can be, as things can change in any direction. I am not really someone who comments on things happening on social media, but if it is someone I know personally, I can confront them to stop spreading fake news” (Ms Ileni Shilongo, 09 April 2021 FGD 2, Hochland Park).

“I think a lot of us tend to abstain from trying to educate others, because it is fake news and it doesn't border me and doesn't have impacts on my life, so you just scroll down and like the meme under it, but I think we should mobilise and make it a tradition and social responsibility to say that take that down, that is not correct, maybe verify before you share this, because you don't know

what the end results could be. It is our collective responsibility to tell others to remove fake news” (Mr Roberto Dirkse, 09 April 2021, FGD2, Hochland Park).

Scaling down on the circulation of information disorder, would require a collective responsibility of everyone to educate others on the threat of “fake news”. This is because sometimes people don’t know what would be the end result of spreading information disorder, hence it is important that they are educated on the consequences of “fake news”. The concept of enlightening others would be key in controlling deceiving information, as many would not want to be associated with controversial information.

4.3.10 Silence on “fake news”

The study found out that a significant number of young people interviewed in FGDs in Hochland Park don’t take any action against “fake news” circulation. The research discovered that instead, young people ignore, choose to keep quiet, and let it go or spread, especially if it doesn’t affect them. However, the study further discovered that other young people look at “fake news” as memes, as a result they don’t prevent it or warn the person spreading “fake news,” because to them it is nothing rather than memes. One of the respondents explained it as follows:

“My perception of fake news is influenced by memes, because fake news in itself looks like a joke and I just end up scrolling and leave without telling the person to stop spreading fake news” (Mr Ricky Simasiku, 09 April 2021 FGD2, Hochland Park).

While others hold a strong view of educating others on the dangers of “fake news”, there are some who don’t bother correcting others, and simply choose to let it pass because it doesn’t interest or have impact on them.

4.3.11 Societal conflict and chaos

A number of young people have agreed and discussed that “fake news” has a negative impact on democracy such as that of deceiving electorates, especially during elections time, in which people are fed with floods of falsehoods and deceived into making wrong political choices. Majority of young people further indicated that “fake news” causes hatred amongst electorates and leaders of political parties. In society, young people added that “fake news” cause moral decay in the society, and can extremely hurt individuals, to the point of depression, and eventually suicide, because of false information created

against them, especially teenagers. In this regard, young people further noted that “fake news” lowers self-esteem of young people, as it tarnishes images of people in the society. In addition to destroying images of individuals, they also made reference to the images of companies, that falsehoods made against companies, would lead to reductions in profit, as customers would distance themselves from a particular company. They also added that during this pandemic of Covid-19, school kids are attending online classes, and they could easily consume false information being circulated online, which could influence their way of thinking.

4.3.12 “Fake news” creates uncertainty

A large number of young people pointed out how dangerous “fake news” and misleading information can be. They cited that falsehoods could destroy the relationships between the media, electorates and political leaders as well as damaging people’s lives in the society. Below is an interview excerpt:

“Fake news corrupts people’s minds and judgement. It motivates people to also look for ideas to use fake news to do something to gain something out of it...in nurture we are poisoning our society and generations to come, at the end of the day we are creating a dark cloud, this is what fake news does. Secondly fake news creates uncertainty and a lot of trust issues” (Participant 7.1, 31 March 2021, FGD1, Hochland Park).

It was also discovered that as generations come one would notice the way the production, circulation and consumption the change on how fake news would be impacting the society. This means that the impact is not the same on everyone, because for example as it was explained during focus groups that, with the older generation news doesn’t get to them that fast, unlike the upper youth and the youth. Some youth also pointed out they receive fake news information from their parents. Elders are part of the groups that spread a lot of fake news, because not many of them do background check when information comes to their cellphones. The other thing that came out in this research is that “fake news” is destroying the political landscape in the country, as it is being used to mislead the electorates, by the means of discrediting opponents in an attempt to gain more votes. They acknowledged that misleading information poses strong challenges to the society and the media industry as it becomes a chain and makes room for more “fake news” and people are forced to question and doubt information coming their way. This was captured in the following interview extract:

“If one starts with fake news, it will be a chain, as it gives more room for fake news, people won’t have the sense of truth and reality anymore in the story” (Ms Laimi Lot, 31 March 2021 FGD1, Hochland Park).

The research also found out that “fake news” is heavily impacting news consumers who don’t have any means of verifying information shared with them, and in the end they are forced to consume, believe and further distribute or share false information as it comes their way. Two other respondents pointed out, thus:

“... it becomes a chain. Sometimes you find people who know it is “fake news,” but they are just determined to pass it on and some people don’t have the other way of finding out the facts, and it is just not right” (Ms Joyce Namuhuja, 31 March 2021 FGD1, Hochland Park).

“... it is one of those things that fake news is bringing a lot of damage to the society, and you would find people deep down in the villages who would believe fake news because not all of them have access to information. Now they all go around the whole village sharing fake news, and it is damaging to society” (Mr Tudiminapo Shindume, 31 March 2021, FGD1, Hochland Park).

4.3.13 Deceives citizens, as media credibility at risk

Further responding to the question of the impacts of “fake news” in Namibian society, participants have indicated that “fake news” has disconnected the trust between news consumers and the media. This can be attested to as some participants made commitments to part ways with some media houses, whose names and logos were used to spread misleading information. Research has found that news consumers are slowly receiving such media houses as unreliable and untrustworthy with news. It also further put pressure on media integrity of the country, and paints a very bad image of the country especially to country representatives in Namibia, research has found. Two of the respondents explained it in the following verbatim words:

“For me if fake news is carrying out logos of media houses, for example NBC or Namibian Sun, then it would force me to detach myself from such media houses. For me it creates that impression that such media houses are becoming useless media, and this is serious because I even stopped buying The Namibian Newspaper. I have made a personal commitment to stop buying that newspaper because of misleading headlines...and to an organization they are losing N\$ 5

every day, and someone could have been getting that amount....and I don't know how many people are doing the same. "Fake news" has great effects on media houses, as it creates mistrusts amongst the readers, because at the end of the day we will stop looking at their news" (Mr Tudiminapo Shindume, 31 March 2021, FGD 1, Hochland Park).

"Personally, I have made a choice not to buy the newspapers so that I can rest. I don't read the news, I don't go on social media, the moment I see someone sharing the news I just avoid it by all means because it is disturbing, it is bothering, and weighing you down and draining" (Participant 7.1, 31 March 2021 FGD 1, Hochland).

The impact of "fake news" is felt in every corner it touches, from news consumers to the brands of mainstream media. A number of people would be deceived into making inaccurate political choices, especially those from marginalised communities because of political disinformation for example. The impacts of "fake news" can be short and long term, for both citizens and mainstream media, and each sector touched, because information reaches a wide range of audiences. However, it would take time to correct, and the amount damage done cannot be fixed within a short period of time. Many electorates are pushed in a corner, with deceiving information, which eventually forces them to make political decisions that benefit certain individuals and narratives. As for mainstream brands, their brands would be forever at risk, in terms of media credibility, therefore they need to strengthen their online presence. Additionally, the revenue of media could also be affected by this tragic act.

4.3.13 Legislation

As to how the country can control the production, circulation and consumption of fake news, the research has found out that one of the best ways to control "fake news" is to resort to legislation prohibiting people from fabricating and sharing false news and information. They indicated that strict measures, such as imprisonment and taking legal action against people found to be producing and spreading fake news should be enforced. Young people agreed that failure in controlling "fake news" is attributed to lack of cyber-laws in the country. They have recommended that strict measures resembling that of restricting people from spreading false information against Covid-19 be applied to all "fake news" offenders. Because as it stands, there are no grounds to stand on should a person decide to take legal actions against uninvited online activities.

Although a large number of participants have agreed to this proposal, especially participants from Ombili, some youths from Hochland Park were not in agreement are in disbelief with the proposal that it will yield intended results. They believed that the exercise would not be a walk in the park because it is its complexity, and it would require a lot of contraventions on human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of the press. However, they thought that holding people accountable could be one of the factors to deal with falsehoods.

Other means discovered in this research is an appeal to people to gather facts before publishing and sharing information with others. This research further discovered that in the whole thing of fake news, information is shared now at a very fast pace, hence young people made an appeal that whoever has the information needs to be their responsibility to create a platform where accurate information is being shared, and where people can run to in times of dark clouds of fake news. Participants discussed that it is a two-way street, hence the source of information should send out fast and verified information and they should have platforms, especially during elections where people can run when they are faced with falsehoods. Some of the verbatim accounts were captured as follows:

“It is not going to be easy to regulate fake news, it will require a lot of infringement on human rights and freedom of expression but it is possible. It will just come at the very high cost, and the cost of freedoms that we enjoy in the constitution. One of the ways can be to fine people who are sending out fake news. But it is going to be a very difficult exercise because you don’t know who was the first to send or create it, but if we have the laws in place, we may have people reducing or stopping with fake news” (Ricky Simasiku, 09 April 2021 FGD2, Hochland Park).

“The earlier we have certain regulations in place the better, and I think as a country we are very reluctant, it will get to the point of where we will not be able to control it any longer, and I think we have this mentality of healing the sick, rather than prevention is better than cure, and we have to change that mentality completely it is really getting out of hand. We cannot live without the media, because the media is the source of information of everything that is happening in the country, but who do we trust, I don’t know, because that’s the current situation we found ourselves in. the other thing is, with this current generation there is a need for strong mental advocacy, because the news that you get every day is damaging” (Participant, 7.1, 31 March 2021 FGD1, Hochland Park).

“So the earlier these things are controlled, and we put up mitigating factors just to hold people accountable for whatever they put out there, it could help us to go forward as a nation. You would realise that it could actually get worse, going forward...the next generation from now on, is going to be very different people, and it is very interesting as to how generations come up. The earlier we put up mechanisms to control these things the better it can be. These things can go to a certain level to destroy the nation” (Mr Tudiminapo Shindume, 31 March 2021, FGD1, Hochland Park).

However, some participants discussed the issue that “fake news” cannot be controlled because of its complexity, nor will law enactment stop the production and circulation of “fake news.” One of the challenges to control it is difficulty in tracing the originality of “fake news.” Here is how a number of them reacted to this:

“I think the creation of fake news can never be stopped because you never really know who the person behind it is. Because I can share something that was shared by a lot of people, and you won't really know who is at the center of such fake news post. I don't think there will be any control of fake news with all this social media thing that we have here” (Ms Michell 0009 April 2021, FGD 2, Hochland Park).

This is how some young people reacted to the issue of regulating social media:

“It is going to be difficult to regulate social media, because we have freedom of speech, are you saying people cannot express themselves, because to a certain extent fake news is people expressing themselves with a certain intent” (Ileni Shilongo, 9 April 2021, FGDs 2, Hochland Park).

She cemented her opinion during the face-face interview held on 16 April 2021, that it is difficult to control social media because Namibia prides herself as a champion of freedom of speech:

“It means you are basically controlling people, and you are taking that that right away, that you have given them to have freedom of speech. A lot of people of people use it as their way of communicating, so if you taking that away are you really allowing your people to speak. Unfortunately, there is no way to regulate it that would not infringe people's right, I think we must learn to deal with it on a daily basis”.

Legislation came out top as one of the key measures to curb “fake news” Namibia. Many believe that should government enact laws prohibiting people from spreading “fake news”, information disorder may drop down. However, some have rejected this notion as the process looks complex to achieve. However, countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa etc. have put up laws to deal with “fake news” however such laws have received a lot of criticisms, as they infringe on the freedom of the media, and freedom of speech. This is exactly similar to what young people Namibia argued that the process of using legislation would infringe on human rights in Namibia, as well as freedom of the press, and by regulating social media it basically means that the government is taking away freedom of the speech being enjoyed by citizens.

4.3.14 Content restriction on social media

A number of young people have recommended that social media companies should enforce a ban on fake news contents on their platforms to fight against floods of “fake news.” They pointed out YouTube as one of the examples where some contents are completely restricted, and taken down when they are uploaded. Some of the respondents recommended the following interventions:

“During this time is going to be very difficult due to the presence of the internet. Back then it was easy because news was only published in the newspapers/ traditional media, but now anyone can just publish anything, which can mislead others, unless social media owners come up with controlling mechanisms, hence it’s difficult in the current times because of the freedom each one has” (Mr Joseph Ndjaba 26 February 2021, FGD 1, Ombili).

“Social media platforms should do more to deal with fake news, because it is fire, once it catches [fake news] it is gone” (Mr Ismael Ismael, 31 March 2021 FGD 1, Hochland Park).

“Obviously, we can’t permanently erase fake news, I feel like there is no way because I feel like there would always one person who will post fake news, and encourage others to do. If other social media platform can emulate restrictions applied on You Tube, where infamous content is restricted then it might help, because on you tube you cannot appear on the platform with questionable content. “We can start there, putting up such restrictions. we can start with restrictions on social media platforms, it is the furthest we can go, it would help” (Joyce Namuhuja, face-to-face interview 05 April 2021, Hochland Park).

During the FGDs the youth also proposed that social media owners should make it compulsory that each user create an account with real personal details to help fight against the circulation and production of fake news, as this will be important for tracing the offenders. They further urged government to look into the issue of creating a body to regulate/ filter information that is fake and misleading or untoward. Now that everyone can be news producer, it has become too difficult for many people to decide which information to rely on and not. Therefore, in this fight of information pollution, social media owners need to come party and assist with measures to fight against unbecoming contents including “fake news”.

4.3.15 Education and Media and Information Literacy

Research in these areas has discovered that a number of young people who were interviewed have confidence in education, and media literacy as one of the key roles to rescue the country from the production, and circulation of fake news, this is because it would help people understand the harm of social media, fake news, and if can be incorporated at young age that would even much better as it can open the eyes of young people when they are still at development stage. They recommended that it should be included into the school curriculum whether at secondary or tertiary levels. In this, they also indicated that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) could play an important role, such as by running campaigns on radios, and Television to educate people. However, they indicated that this won't be achieved easily due to the presence of social media networks where everyone can publish news at any given point in time without going through the normative ways of journalism unless social media owners strengthen their rules and regulations. On education and media literacy, some of the respondents indicated that:

“I think knowledge is very important. A person from Hochland Park and someone from deep in location would not consume information in the same way, because access to information also plays a role. Someone who is educated, would have the know-how, that I need to fact check, compared to less educated person. However, in some instances someone from there “can also,” but they just might consume it. For them mostly news is always coming out from someone else, probably via mouth [verbal communication], compared to those getting it from their cellphones, or checking it for themselves. For them (people from deep locations), they might not have resources that can lead them to get right information. Also, your sense of judgment would also depend on what you know” (Tudiminapo Shindume, face-to-face interview 21 April 2021).

“If the Access to information Bill is passed, there is a possibility that fake news can grow out of hand, but it is also our right to have access to information. It is very difficult to say what we can do and not do. I think it would lie with the responsibility of the people who share for us to go verify, I think must have some sort of civic education, that they should try to verify before sharing news. Educate people on the importance of fact-checking and dangerous how fake news can be. Maybe with big media outlets we can tell them that they need to fact-check, to avoid publishing misleading information and prevent misinformation being spread, and reputation of the media outlet. Maybe the responsibility lies with ourselves, maybe we must educate people around us” (Mr Roberto Dirkse, face-to-face interview 20 May 2021 Hochland Park).

For some, media literacy may not necessarily help in the fight against fake news due to how people choose to react to situations. Here is how one participant put it:

“Yes, I think it would be making a difference, or it may not, kids are taught about condomising in schools yet they still don’t, it is like the same I could teach you the dos and don’ts of social media, you choose to listen it is up to you. You yourself choose to listen to what the teacher says, because for them they are just telling you that this happens, but it is up to you to take up the information and up to you what to do with information” (Ms Joyce Namuhuja, 05 April 2021, face-to-face interview, Hochland Park).

When young people from Ombili were asked how they engage with “fake news” on their everyday lives, many of those who didn’t go far with education struggled to come to party. Therefore, media, and digital literacy has been tipped off to save the next nation on how to deal with “fake news”. Although there were no sophisticated “fake news” in the last elections, that cannot written-off and therefore digital literacy would help in times of sophisticated “fake news”. The world and technology are moving at fast pace, hence Namibia should not be left behind. “Fake news” can cause serious political disastrous, therefore digital literacy campaigns for all demographics could help citizens in decoding and engaging with political disinformation, misinformation and mal-information.

4.4 Discussion and Analysis of Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore how the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek fact check or verify the authenticity of false and misleading news and information circulated on social media

platforms during the 2019 electoral campaign in Namibia. Its target was young people residing in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek.

This study used the Encoding and Decoding Model developed by Stuart Hall in 1973 as an approach to textual analysis. It pays special focus on the scope of dominant, negotiation, and opposition on the part of the news consumer in contrast with the traditional model of communication, which is criticised, for its linearity sender/message/receiver. According to this theory, audiences can decode a message as per their social classes, background, and as the background differs, the decoding also differs. The theory, Hall (1973) explains that equally as a message is broadly created, distributed and consumed, distortions and misunderstandings are founded during this process. The theory was useful in terms of understanding how young people from two different geographical locations decode online news, as literature (Mavris, 2018; Lunga and Mthembu 2019) have shown that locations and educational achievements have a role to play in terms of making sense of news and information. Adding to that, Bedard & Schoenthaler, (2018) discover that age, education, sex, and political affiliation can assist in the understanding of “fake news” and satire. Additionally, the capacity to pinpoint different types of misinformation when presented with screen shots from social media posts appears to be related to these variables (Bedard & Schoenthaler, 2018).

Results of this study are in conformity of this theory’s positions, and observations of Kropp (2015) that encoding and decoding theory permits for changes in interpretation of and acceptance of (or complicity with) the dominant ideological meanings of a work of media/information. Hall’s concepts stimulated successive audience research into two themes. The first one is investigation, first, into the content produced by the media. This part of action is reflected in those who are at more privileged point of view, in terms of education, exposure, resources, background and locations (in this case youth from Hochland Park-Upper Class location). These young people have been noted to be at media rich in terms of interpreting news contents, due to better factors such as education, background and exposure. As a result, they have a better fact-checking skill as they indicated to do investigation to get to the core of the messages before agreeing to them and distribute them further, compared to those at marginalised communities, who have been noted in this research to be exposed to more fake news due to: poor education, lack of exposure, poor backgrounds. As a result, political rights of those from marginalised communities are likely to violated as they are at risk of consuming information disorder due to poor deconstructing of information disorder.

Secondly, the other theme is into the audience themselves to attain better insight of how messages are decoded, why people interpret communication in certain ways, why different people can interpret different and often contradictory meanings from the same messages and how these people form communities or social groups around others with shared interpretations (Kropp, 2015). This research has shown that, people can deconstruct the same messages differently based on availability of resources, affiliations, backgrounds, interests. However, people who are at privileged have a better fact checking skills because of their education background, as well as resources compared to those from marginalised communities. Although there are some people with better education in marginalised community and better skills because of their education, the impact of “fake news” is felt at those without resources, including skills to fact check information and they are likely to be found in those areas.

Results of stimulus show that a number of young people from Ombili decode information from a dominant position. This a position where an end user captures the main meaning directly, and interprets it precisely, and completely distributes the meanings of the message and agrees and replicates the planned meaning. Many of them, especially from FGD 2 which had participants with low level of education and media exposure, indicated to capture and agree to a number of information disorder, and indicated to share them with same message presented by the author without fact-checking or going beyond that information. However, there were few of those who would not negotiate with the message presented, and indicated investigate through further research, and this can be placed at negotiation position of the theory, in which a reader recognises the main communication, and in some ways distribute the message codes and mostly agrees to the chosen theme, at the same time he/she opposes and changes the communication in a direction which displays one’s understandings and hobbies. Few of them reached the oppositional position of this theory. The first two positions are contradictory to the results of young people from Hochland Park who would mostly indicated to deconstruct information from an oppositional position of the theory which is when an audience grasps the exact idea, however because of diverse experiences, everyone has personal approach of interpreting communications, whereas creating personal understandings one obtains precisely contradictory of the planned goal. This has been criticized by various scholars, such as Morley (1980) who argues that interpretation cannot be measured solely in terms of the lifestyle or class location of the consumers.

Through virtual ethnography, this research documented the types of fake news circulated in Namibia during the last presidential elections, and discovered that the different types of fake news circulated during that period was mainly political smear campaigns, political disinformation followed by

misinformation and malinformation. The last three types are falling under the typology of information disorder developed by Wardle and Derakhshan in 2017 at First Draft news. The research found that the types of fake news circulated during that period resonate with the 7 categories of information disorders, such as political satirical content, imposter content, false content, manipulated content, false connection, as well as hate speech. These typologies were making waves on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook in the run up to 2019 Presidential, and National Assembly elections.

Many efforts to define what constitutes fake news have focused on academic discourse (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019 and Wasserman-Morales 2019) or on perceptions in industry. As for Brummette et al. (2018), the current development and rampant misuse of the term in various political environments have created the need to identify what should not be considered as “fake news.” For example, Klein and Wueller (2017) assert that many traditional media outlets, which have recently started to receive the “fake news” label, should be excluded from the “fake” category because “they are not intentionally or knowingly false in nature” (p. 6). Other occurrences like accidental mistakes in reporting, rumors that originate outside news articles, “conspiracy theories, satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued as factual, false statements by politicians and reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false” also fall outside of the “fake news” category. Initially, it was shown that from 2003 to 2017 the term “fake news” has been used to refer to things as varied as news satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019), and this is what this research has discovered with fake news information circulated on social media in 2019. This research has adopted a definition of The results of this research support claim by Lungu & Mthembu (2019) in the Kingdom of Eswatini that the distribution information intended to deceive can be partly attributed to a secretive way of society, and in the end, citizens spread fabricated news using new media to mock those with power. This could be attested to various political satirical news articles circulated during the 2019 elections.

This research has discovered a gap in knowledge by mainstream media in terms of educating news consumers on the correct terminologies of different types of fake news circulated. It was discovered that mainstream media in Namibia do not use correct terminologies when categorizing fake news, but rather put everything under one umbrella (fake news). This result sounds different to Bedard & Schoenthaler (2018) who found in their study. “The attention that our mainstream online media outlets are giving to the education of these fake news phenomena is heartening, and in doing so they are also attempting to shore up their own credibility” (Bedard & Schoenthaler, 2018 p. 615).

Although results may have demonstrated young people's ability to identify fake news, many of them from Ombili struggled to deal with a number of political disinformation articles presented to them. This was mainly observed with those with low level of education. Some of them tried to abstain from demonstrating their ability to engage with information disorder, while others indicated not to know whether is true or not. These results build and confirm on existing evidence of IPPR (2020) that many recipients, whether individually or in groups, when confronted with false content appeared unable to distinguish between credible information and sources and information or sources which were not credible. Research (Mavris 2018, Ncube 2018, Lungu and Mthembu 2019) has shown that locations and educational achievements have a role to play in terms of decoding false information.

In this research, the youth defined "fake news" as information or data that is not authentic, and created with the "intention" to "mislead" or extort people of money to some extent. The emphasis is on, "intention to mislead." Therefore, any information "internationally" created to "mislead" can be regarded as "fake news." This definition goes in hand with Berlin (2018) argument that fake news must be situated for situations that are intentionally made-up or distorted statements as media reports. This result also builds on the existing definition of Allcott & Gentzkow, (2017) adopted by this research in which they defined 'fake news' as media reports that are "deliberately" and provably untrue, and can "deceive" audiences.

Results also show that "fake news" in Namibia is likely to focus and center on trending issues (current affairs), as it stands Covid-19 vaccine has become now dominant in terms of "fake news." Other areas targeted by "fake news" are areas where people look desperate, for example on employment. The assertions of Bedard & Schoenthaler, (2018) on the need and importance of educating the news consumers into understanding the "fake news" world terminology is very crucial to this research. The two scholars discuss that "the attention that our mainstream online media outlets are giving to the education of these fake news phenomena is heartening, and in doing so they are also attempting to shore up their own credibility" (Bedard & Schoenthaler, 2018 p. 615). This is contrary to what this research found because respondents in this research do not know different types of "fake news", they referred to various subjects such as politics, elites, and entertainment as types of fake news circulated in Namibia. This element is also seen lacking in Namibia's mainstream media when debunking information disorder. They categorically put every type in the same pot, although information circulated is not falling under the same wing of disinformation, misinformation or mal-information. However, the editor of Namibia Fact Check, Mr Frederico Links, during the pilot study on 23 December 2020, that if one is trying to reach out to an

average person the term “fake news” does resonate as people understand what one is referring to when using it. However, the editor cautioned that people have to be careful with the term “fake news” because it doesn’t capture the dealings of the flood of falsehood. In that discussion, Mr Links, explained that he will use the term “fake news” when speaking to lay people or average day people who do not have knowledge of the wide range of the field of disinformation and information pollution that this term speaks to.

Manalu et al. (2018) discuss that people would tend to have limited ability to process the content of information, and less capacity to evaluate whether they would get negative impact or benefit from particular information. As for Leeder (2019), online information sources often lack the filters and markers of institutional credibility and authority, which promote reliability in traditional print sources (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010). In determining the truthful and accuracy of news in Namibia, young people demonstrated that they identify fake news, and true information through conducting further research, (multiple sources), and go beyond information they come across on social media. They establish if social media account posting news is verified, by looking at an icon in a form of blue tick next to account name as that can help in believing the type of information conveyed as well as establishing if the news has been posted on real pages. They also consult multiple sources, check logos, bylines, typing errors etc. These strategies confirm Uzuegbunam et. al (2021) findings on spotting hoaxes in six African countries: Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which found that in all countries, except for Zambia and Zimbabwe, participants make use of cues to such as a blue check next to a Twitter username was an indication that the account had been verified and that the news was possibly true.

For some participants, this cue was enough to persuade them to distribute a post, and for some participants would investigate further. This result is also confirmed by World Health Organisation, (2020) in a Social Media & COVID-19 global study of digital crisis interaction among Gen Z and Millennials. This result is not different to a Namibian context in which the interviewed participants indicated to look at the number of followers, types of accounts engaging in the comments, whether they are verified or not. Young people further indicated that sometimes the discussions in the comments could also be used to verify the information shared, because if they are not verified, that sometimes makes it difficult to agree to the information being shared. Sometimes they look at the bylines, and experience, and exposure because, according to them, not always mainstream media publish news for the first time. This result is similar to the findings of Uzuegbunam et. al (2021) who discover that other cues used involved in spotting hoaxes include the number of followers, the lack of likes, comments, retweets and other metrics, the poor writing

style and editing, and the use of excessive punctuation, as well as when participants had no recall of the identical story being published in mainstream news media. In some part of the world for example, Wagner & Boczkowski (2019) discuss that in the US to counter the perceptions of misinformation consumption, participants relied on different strategies and practices (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019). Firstly, they rejected media outlets that are too opinionated and seek traditional fact-based media. Moreover, they drew upon their personal experience and knowledge, long-term relationships with media, repetition of information across outlets, consumption of cross-ideological sources, and fact-checking (Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019).

Although results have shown that young people from these locations have demonstrated their critical abilities to deal with fake news, it is worth pointing out that those who have low education level especially from Ombili have struggled to really deal with the subject of how they engage with fake news. This can be observed by the number of questions they have abstained from. Many of them could only attend to the questions asked during the FGDs, and could only build on what those with better education said. This result fit with IPPR (2020) when their findings discovered that members of WhatsApp groups appear especially involved in or susceptible to sharing / forwarding mis-/disinformation, with those consistently demonstrating low levels of exposure to or engagement with traditional channels of receiving news and current affairs appearing the most susceptible.

A number of young people in this study indicated to carry more research and verification on fake news which only affect and have impacts on them and their associates, or on topics of interest. For them news is also shared with people that are close to them. This result can also be found in my literature (Manalu et al. 2018) that individual tends to believe news that is not in contrary to his/her vision of the world as well as his/her personal beliefs and further reinforces existing beliefs. This is because individual would pay more attention to this kind of information and because it is easier to comprehend (Manalu et al. 2018). This often leads a person to only read and disseminate coherent information with his/her beliefs and worldviews of the world (Manalu et al. 2018). Trust in traditional media in Namibia still tops than social media. Many participants praised the role of traditional media in today's world of advanced technologies. They outlined that traditional media is the safety net when it comes to accurate and dealing with fake news, and they cross-check with traditional media. This result is also coming out in the literature (Tully, 2021, WHO 2020).

Although this is just findings from a selected young people, the difference between the two locations is that most of the young people Hochland Park mainly carry out content analysis of the news articles than participants from Ombili. They look at content features such as facts presented, or quotes presented in the story. They also indicated to conduct further research on what was shared, as they believe that people share news and information based on their opinions, and that not everything shared is true, but sometimes those sharing such information regard it as the truth, because it aligns with their way of thinking. They also analyse the source of information. They are also likely to alert other users that information presented is false, and make it their civic role to correct and give factual information to others, should they be in a position to do so.

The main aim of the study was to explore how young people from the two locations fact-check false news and information circulated on social media. Building on existing findings of research (Cheruiyot, Ferrer-conill, Cheruiyot, & Ferrer-conill, 2018, Bosch Alumni Network, 2019, Shirsat, 2018) participants in this research use various sources such as Google, social media pages, other media houses or asking friends about information they want to share, and they first judge if the information they are about to share is in the best interest of others. It was also discussed that small details such as typing errors or grammatical errors would encourage them to pursue information further. However, this study contradicts Wasserman, Madrid-Morales, Mare, Ndlovu, Tully, Umejei & Uzuegbunam's (2019) findings that participants do not use fact-checking websites, because there is a consent that tracing the origin of news on social media is top way to check misinformation on social media platforms. Results of this study also is contrary to Marchi (2012) who argues that younger generation of media users, have the ability to monitor multiple media sites simultaneously, while the older adult users put more attention to one source of news at one time. However, younger generation's ability to obtain limitless information in the current Internet era is not always followed by their ability to evaluate the quality of information.

The few participants have attempted to define fact-checking as confirming the information that has been received, by doing a mini research and verification. They also indicated that fact-checking is also about scrutinizing facts, checking the credibility of information, facts logos, user's pages and the source. Selected youth indicated that it is very essential to fact-check information because information spreads fast, and is easy to manipulate. Research (Vizoso & Vázquez, 2019, Sadiku et al., 2018) can also confirm this result. A number of them indicated to fact-check information that only interest or affect them, but overall fact-checking is very important because it would prevent mostly people from sharing information that is not factual, and unreliable, the main issue here is the damage that the incorrect information causes.

Although results indicate the understanding of the term fact checking, all participants interviewed did not know the existence of Namibia Fact Check. Hence, some of them found it difficult, especially young people from Ombili to engage with the questions on fact checking.

While previous research (IPPR 2020) has found out that most users who share mis-/disinformation content do not bother to attempt to verify the information they share and simply seem to 'forward' such content to as many groups as they can; the results of this research demonstrate that majority of young people especially from Hochland park and few from Ombili would not share unverified information with others. And most of them mainly share information with close people and not everyone on social media.

Many of the participants from Hochland Park do not share news with others, this is because they are always mindful of the information social media, and they are scared to answer to things beyond their control if information turns out not to be true. They believe that news is everywhere, and it is not their responsibility to share news. For those who share news, news is only worth sharing when it has impact on the lives of people. This includes constructive news, public interest information or anything that has potential to change the lives of others/ affects lives of people, news of national issue, current affairs. Before sharing, young people said they evaluate the veracity of news and information. These results are in line with existing literature (Sadiku et al. 2018). Therefore, through sharing news with others on social media is regarded as an attempt to seek and get clarifications of news as some of information is confusing, requires clarity, and looks too good to be true, and they don't know who and where to verify news with. Duffy and associates (2019) as cited in Madrid-Morales, Wasserman, Gondwe, Ndlovu, & Umejei (2021) have more similar sentiments.

Participants expressed concern over production and circulation of fake news, as it can negatively impact on democracy. Fake news has potential to influence elections and voting behavior of the electorates especially during election periods (Brennen, 2017). It has potential to create uncertainty between media, news consumers, electorates and political leaders. Legislation, media and information literacy campaigns, and institutionalised fact checking are some of the solutions to curb fake news in Namibia. In this regard, social media companies should come to the party through flagging and deplatforming false and misleading information. Although they suggested media literacy, they demonstrated some media literacy skills such as consulting multiple sources, and fact-checking information they come across on social media, which is similar to the literature (Madrid-morales et al. 2021, Morales and Wasserman, 2019).

In short, this study has found that location, class, education achievements, access to media resources and exposure of 'media rich' environments has a role to play in terms of how youths in the two suburbs decoded false and misleading information. The study found that youths in Hochland Park were in a position to identify, debunk and decode the subtle cues of false and misleading articles during focus group discussions. On the other hand, youths from Ombili struggled to make sense of false political stories. Thus, youths who live in a media rich environment like Hochland Park are likely to have solid fact checking, literacy and critical media consumption skills when compared to those from a media poor environment like Ombili. Youth from Ombili had poor fact checking skills and as a result misinformation was likely to spread faster because people residing in high-density suburbs do not have the economic means, and skills to fact check news, and deconstruct information coming their way, especially from social media.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analysed the key findings from this particular study. This research has found that the most troubling cases of fake news during the last elections were manipulated contents, false contexts, fabricated contents as well as the imposter contents conspiracy theories on EVMs. It has revealed that some of the fake news and conspiracy theories was laced with hate speech, and tribal slurs. In terms of the major targets of fake news, it has discovered that Dr Panduleni Itula and Hage Geingob were the main victims. Local mainstream media organisations were also targeted. Their brand names were used to spread fake news, which could easily affect their credibility, and reputation in the eyes of their consumers. The research has also discovered that citizens at marginalised communities are more at risk of being exposed to information disorder, due to lack of education, and resources compared to those with media rich. During the FGDs, a number of young people mainly those without exposure, and low levels of education found it hard to engage with false and misleading information. Young people from the informal settlement of Ombili lacked the necessary critical media skills and knowledge in terms of fact checking true and false information. On the contrary, those from Hochland Park exhibited high levels of awareness. This could be partly to their news diets, access to digital media technologies and better levels of education.

A number of young people have demonstrated the importance of fact-checking news as a key pillar in the fight against misleading information, but most importantly is the case of trust on traditional media for accurate news, despite strong challenges it faces from new media. Another key observation in this

research is the fact that political affiliation and exposure have been noted to be key in spotting fake news. Although media literacy has been hailed as crucial to fight information disorder, there is potential setback that elderly people who have been noted to be at the center of spreading “fake news” would be at the receiving end of fake news due to lack of proper skills in decoding information, and they would share such information with others. Results of this study further demonstrated that it is important to fact-check information before sharing with others in order to not mislead others. Although some young people believed in sharing news with others, especially those who seem not to have or don’t know how to access accurate information, others made personal decisions to not share news at all for security reasons or only share with close people, but only when news have impacts on their lives. What is coming out is also that people share news to verify if information they got is true or false.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5 Introduction

This chapter gives a summary of the whole study. It also discusses the key research findings, and recommendations. It also looked at areas of further research. Literature around the world shows that in the aftermath of 2016 United States of America election, fake news became a global phenomenon associated with hacking democracies, manipulating electoral outcomes and sowing seeds of mistrust in the mainstream media. A lot of academics have focused on the production, and circulation of fake news on social media. This part of fake news consumption has not been widely studied around the globe; hence it was significant to investigate how young people in Namibia fact-checked election-related fake news. This study adopted exploratory research design, and a qualitative approach. The population of this study was the youth aged 18-35 residing in Ombili and Hochland Park suburbs in Windhoek. The two areas were chosen because of geographical diversity (lower and upper class). The researcher chose these locations/participants from diverse backgrounds with the aim of getting thick descriptions about the issue under investigation. This research utilised non-probability sampling techniques such as purposive and convenience sampling to recruit participants.

In terms of the sample population, the target was to work with a total of 40 young people, (20 per location), however due to the danger posed by Covid-19, and its protocols in the country, data was only generated from 31 participants (15 from Hochland Park and 16 from Ombili). This research also used ethnography method, which allowed me to observe online behaviour of young people during elections, and employed qualitative content analysis of archived fake news articles. A total of four FGDs (two groups per location) with participants between 6-10 were constituted, to get a sense of how news consumers sift through the truth and fake. A total of 10 participants were selected to have face-to-face interviews with them (5 in each location) to gain more insight into the issue of fake news consumption in the Namibian context. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. This study used the “Encoding and Decoding” theory of Stuart Hall.

5.1 Types of fake news circulated on social media during the November 2019 elections in Namibia

The staggering amount of fake news circulated prior to the 2019 Presidential elections has been flagged in this research as an indication of the prevalence of election-related information disorder in the Namibian public sphere. Ahead of the most competitive elections since the dawn of independence and democracy,

the country witnessed mainly political disinformation, misinformation and mal-information. Findings reveal that most of the fake news targeted Dr Hage Geingob and Dr Panduleni Itula, as well as conspiracy theories on the missing EVMs. Drs Geingob and Itula were the main opponents in 2019 elections and a record number of information disorder were about them. I can confirm that information disorder was circulated and tilted in favor of the top two candidates. As for the EVMs, there was a lot speculation partly because of poor communication strategy by the ECN. Unfortunately, this steered people to invent false and misleading information about the missing EVMs. They postulated that because there were a number of missing EVMs the final election results could not be trusted. Unfortunately, the ECN failed dismally to deal with the situation by reassuring the nation about the whereabouts of the EVMs. Lungu & Mthembu (2019) in the Kingdom of Eswatini discuss that the circulation of misleading information can be partially attributed to a secretive way of society, as a result, citizens spread, and fabricate news through social media to mock those with power.

Findings from the qualitative content analysis show that Namibia did not experience organised or sophisticated fake news campaigns during the 2019 elections like in other countries (see Mare and Matsilele, 2020; Maweu, 2019). However, what was troubling was mostly various smear campaigns, political disinformation, satirical news contents, misinformation, and ethnic hate speech that accompanied the brutal campaigning period. Politicians also attacked the media for not reporting favourably about their campaigns. What was at play during elections include various types of information disorders (mis/disinformation) mimicking journalism reporting, which was being circulated around to deceive electorates. A number of these fake news articles had grammatical and typographical errors.

The results also indicate a very interesting finding, which is the abuse of brands of mainstream media. A record number of information disorder were circulated under the banners of real media houses in Namibia, particularly *The Namibian*, Namibia broadcasting Corporation (NBC), and *Namibian Sun*, and even an international media brand (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was used to spread fake news in Namibia. This was made for people to believe the narratives, and intentions being pushed at the time. The other important issue to mention is how photo shopping was used to manipulate genuine news content. A number of fake news articles involved insertion and removal of certain key words to fit and push particular set of agendas. The producers manipulated brand names of real mainstream media organisations.

Interesting findings on this objective is that, young people do not know correct terminologies of various types of fake news circulated, they instead diverted to topics that mainly form part of fake news such as

politics, employment etc. When asked about the definition of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information, none of the respondents expressed any kind of knowledge of these high-sounding terms. This indicates failure by the mainstream media to educate news consumers on the correct terminologies. It is also safe to point out that a number media houses lacked experience in this field of using correct terminologies when referring to information disorders associated with their brand names. It is very important to educate news consumers on various types fake news, as Bedard & Schoenthaler (2018) pointed out that “the attention that our mainstream online media outlets are giving to the education of these fake news phenomena is heartening, and in doing so they are also attempting to shore up their own credibility” (p 615).

5.2 Criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information

The second objective of the study intended to find out how young people made sense of true and false information. The main aim was to investigate how young people determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information. Participants from Hochland Park clearly demonstrated their ability to differentiate between ‘false’ and ‘real’ news. It can be argued that high level of education plays an important role in the decoding of news and information. Although there were a few youths from Ombili who correctly pointed out information disorder, a serious gap was observed between them and those with low levels of education. Participants who could identify political disinformation/misinformation did so by pointing to various factors to consider when faced with doubtful information such as grammar, choice of words, logos, source of information, and typographical errors. What is important here is that, young people indicated to share ‘false’ news in order to verify if the news is true or not, as well as a civic duty. One of the key observations in identifying political fake news is political affiliation as well as exposure.

Although term “fake news” remains ambiguous, findings in this research placed emphasis on information created with “intention to mislead”. It was also discovered at some extent fake news is about people trying to express themselves through misleading and falsifying narratives. Politics, employment advertisements, elites (prominent figures) and celebrities are topics, which were found to be the main drivers of fake news in Namibia. Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have been regarded as the main distributors of “fake news”. Results show that different fake news is circulated on different social media platforms, for example fake news on politics, and elites is likely to be encountered and circulated on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp as opposed to fake news on entertainment, which is likely to be found

on Instagram. One of interesting point is that fake news is mostly based on trending issues (current affairs), for example, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results of how young people make sense of true and false information indicate that most of them go beyond information they encounter on social media in order to agree with it. They do that by verifying information by the means of conducting further research. The other significant observation is that; traditional media is still regarded as an important medium of news consumption. This can be attested when young people indicated to always cross check with traditional media when faced with uncertainty information. This is an indication that; despite the advancement of technology, and pressure from social media, young people still have trust in traditional media as a medium for news consumption. It was also discovered that, fake news is more believable when it is widely circulated or distributed on social media, and within communities. Interestingly, young people indicated to only engage and fact-check news that have impact on themselves, and those that are close to them. All those interviewed observed to have encountered fake news, which is an indication that the phenomenon is prevalent in Namibia. For them, if a story appears in most of the mainstream media then is likely to be true. Despite that, lack of capacity, and digital literacy was observed amongst those with poor levels of education as they could not explain how they engage with online information. This is to say that people decode, interpret and process information based on their level of experience (exposure), education which allows a person's ability to critically analyse information and make sense of its meaning, and not always to consume and agree to messages as they are.

5.3 Newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their friends, family and relatives on social media

Under this objective, young people were interviewed to establish how well they know the concept of 'fact-checking' information, and its importance, what they do when encounter fake news, impacts of fake news in the Namibian society. They were also interviewed on what could be done to control the production, distribution and consumption of fake news in Namibia. This has discovered that people living in low class locations are more exposed to "fake news", hence this affects their role as active citizens in a democratic country, especially during elections as they are fooled into making political choices because of misconceptions. People with means, and locations with rich media density are at advantage as they possess skills on deconstructing, and fact checking, compared to marginalised communities. The study found that young people who do not have better education struggled to even define what fact checking

is all about. Fact-checking was noted to be key in decoding information, as news spreads fast, and is easy to manipulate.

One of the interesting points is that young people who took part in this research did not know that there is a fact-checking website in Namibia known as Namibia Fact Check. This suggests that the fact-checking organisation needs to invest heavily towards its marketing communication to enhance its visibility. The term itself is not that popular in the ears of many, however they regard consultation of multiple news sources as key practice for fact checking news. Young people consult various sources when they want to fact-check news and information. They consult Google, social media pages, other mainstream media organisations, ask friends, and relatives. For them, news and information should be in the public interest to earn a recognition of further distribution.

Additionally, anything that has potential to change the lives of others/ affects lives of people, news of national issue, current affairs was regarded as newsworthy, and it therefore, deserve to be shared with others. Research also revealed that young people share news, including false information in an attempt to seek clarity on the matter. They explained that through sharing, they would be able to get the correct information. Some of them used disclaimers on their posts as a way of showing they were not sure about the veracity of the news. Despite this fact, there are a number of young people from Hochland Park who did not share news and information on social media. They said that they were afraid to be held accountable, as well as due to job security. They added that not everything “circulating on social media is correct and true”. And for them significant news will always reach audiences through necessary platforms such as mainstream media. This is contrary to young people in Ombili who regard news sharing as a news sharing approach for those who do not know where to find news.

Speaking out against fake news was regarded as one of the effective ways to ensure that fake news does not go viral. Many of the young indicated that speak out against false information, as well as give facts/correct those who spread fake news when they are in the position to do so. Other ways of ensuring that fake news does not go viral include, education others on the dangers of spreading fake news, as well as fact checking in order to correct the person spreading fake news. The difference between the youth from these two locations in Windhoek is that, majority of young people prefer to keep quite when they come across fake news, compared to a number of those who would speak up from Ombili.

Fake news has been identified as having the potential to cause societal chaos. Participants indicated that false news might also influence the electoral outcomes. This is because the electorate, especially those

who are unable to engage and digest information properly may be influenced into believing and voting candidates they were not ready to vote for. Falsehoods can destroy the relationship between electorates, media and political leaders. It has the potential to deceive citizens and put media credibility at risk. Most young people indicated that they have begun to distance themselves from certain media houses partly because their brands are associated with spreading false and misleading information. Strict measures such as coming up with legislative frameworks were proposed as some of the interventions that can be used to curb fake news in the country. However, some participants observed that the issue of “fake news” could not be controlled through criminalisation. They added that law enactment could not stop the production and circulation of the information disorders. One of the issues they highlighted was the fact that it is extremely difficult to trace the origins of a “fake news article.” Some respondents proposed that social media companies must be empowered to strictly regulate the production and circulation of ‘fake news’ on their platforms to help in fighting against the scourge.

The other measure to curb fake news includes media and information literacy campaigns. Clearly, critical media literacy and education has a role to play in conscientising news consumers on the dangers of information disorders. Although literature suggests that there is need for media and information literacy campaigns to deal with fake news, some of the participants noted that this might not necessarily achieve its objective because at the end of the day people will decide whether to apply what they have been encouraged to do or ignore the message. They compared this situation, for example, to when learners are advised to use condoms when engaging in sexual activities, however results show otherwise. Results also indicated that although young people, especially from Hochland Park might possess the educational skills and competencies to deal with fake news, they indicated that they received a lot of fake news from their parents. These findings are similar to the ones observed in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. In their study, Wasserman et al (2019) found that “older people” (e.g., parents and grandparents) share a lot of unverified information because they lack an understanding of how social media works and tend to trust content without verifying it. Literature also suggests that people spread fake news because the government is too secretive. However, on the contrary, in Namibia, although the country has not yet signed the access to information law, freedom of expression and limited media literacy skills could be contributing to the rampant sharing of false and misleading information on social media platforms.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings of this research have shown that a number of interventions need to be put in place in order to push against the resurgence of fake news during elections. Building from what has transpired in the

last elections, it is projected that the end the productions and circulation of information disorder in Namibia is expected to be on rise due to political change in the country. Below are some of the recommendations:

- Firstly, the government of the Republic of Namibia need to put its head up in ensuring that its citizens have access to quality information. This will help out citizens to make informed political decisions.
- The government has to recognise that digital literacy is now the order of the day as the world has leveled up with technology. This is where the government needs to step in and enhance capacity building, and boost media, and digital literacy campaigns of different nature to suit people of all demographics.
- The issue of “fake news” can be fought in different ways, not only through education, but legislation need can play a role, provided that it doesn’t infringe on citizens’ rights, and freedom of the media. There should be a limit, that any information created with the intention of misleading people, dangerous, and a threat to the public and access to quality information should not be released into public sphere. Just like how the government put up measures to fight against the spread of the Covid-19 misinformation, it would also be momentous to extend this gesture to political and election period, and any other element that is a threat to quality information.
- As a result, government can look into regulations to guide cyber space, although this could take time, money and may harm some human rights as well as media freedom, it is better to have a protected nation, and free from being misled, and have influenced democratic rights. It was reported by Africa Check (2021) website that a total of 11 countries through Africa – Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda in a period of five years from 2016, governments in these countries almost doubled the laws and regulations interconnected to “false information” – from 17 to 31. As for Namibia, there is no legislation in place that deal with information disorder, apart from Proclamation No. 9 of 28 March of 2020 which were amended in April 2020 to criminalise the spreading of COVID-19 related disinformation. Africa Check describe Namibia’s regulation as loosely-defined in its scope, and could allow the authority to take it to limit a number of speeches; due to its unclear creation.
- Additionally, the election body (ECN) has to improve its communication strategy from being a reactive, to proactive in its communication dealings. This will assist, and cut on amount of speculations being invented, and avoid confusion in the societies, because sometimes fake news

is fabricated due to a lack of responses from authorities, and such silence would always inspire people to fabricate news.

- This can be seen with the number of fake news related to EVMs, for example. Now that information spreads fast, the election body needs to have a very easy and accessible App or mode of communication where people can run to during elections for accurate news and results, and at times of uncertainty.
- Given the importance of fact checking institutions in times of uncertainty, they should expand their work, and roles to be known to everyone. This is very important because in times of information pollution people can run to their web sites to verify doubtful information and news. For example, participants in this research are not aware of the existence of Namibia Fact Check. Therefore, Namibia Fact Check needs to carry out public awareness campaigns on their role and functions to help citizens deal with information pollution.
- Furthermore, news consumers need to embrace the culture of fact checking before distributing and sharing news with others. This will help stopping distribution of fake news further that may fool and mislead others into making uninformed decisions. As discovered in this research that some participants do not have capacity of fact check news, it is important that fake news capacity building for news consumers on how to identify and fact check news could help in this regard, even at this times that the world is fighting 'infodemic' against the Covid-19 pandemic. The issue of fact checking as discussed in this research can play a huge role in decoding information if well promoted, and is regarded can be regarded as one of the safety nets of fighting fake news. This research has discovered incidents were some media houses published misleading news at the times of elections. Therefore, verification, and fact checking is very crucial to both media houses, and news consumers.
- It is important that media houses consistently monitor online engagements to protect their brands that have become the target of spreading fake news, in order to maintain trust between them and audiences.
- Organisations such as the Media and Information Literacy Learning Initiative (MILLi) ought to strengthen their visibility, and come to party to assist with critical media and digital literacy initiatives. There is hope that if media, and digital literacy is included in the school curriculum then it would help fighting information pollution, hence MILLi can assist in developing this course.

- And lastly, political candidates and political parties should appeal to their supporters and sympathisers to stop fabricating, and distributing information disorders, and educate them on the dangers of information pollution.

5.5 Areas for further research

This exploratory research aimed at investigating how the youth fact check fake news, and information circulated on social media ahead of 2019 elections. The study focused on documenting the types of fake news, which are circulated on social media platforms by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park, Windhoek. It also examined the criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information. And lastly, it assessed the newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their friends, family and relatives on social media.

Given that, young people in this research indicated that elderly people are part of the culprits of spreading fake news, due to the lack of digital literacy, and capacity to use social media, hence it is important to investigate how elderly people consume online information. Additionally, this research was done in urban areas (Windhoek), different data could be generated through exploratory study on how young people from rural areas fact-check news, given the level of poor network, and internet in rural areas. Also, a comparative study between those with tertiary education versus those with basic/poor education can be carried out to establish the types of media literacy campaigns needed in the country. Research by Bedard & Schoenthaler, (2018) in America found that the higher the education level completed, is interconnected with a higher score in identification categories of satire and fake news, with two interesting discrepancies to this correlation.

Identification of satirical news sites by name showed the Graduate Degree category significantly lower than all other levels. Identification of fake news sites by name showed the high school graduate category with significantly higher scores than all other levels. Focus group participants from the incoming freshmen groups supported this result when discussing fake news topics in general. "We, as researchers were not able to determine any reason for the graduate level respondents having less awareness of satirical news sites but can suppose that traditional legacy media has a greater influence on this category than more popular press items such as satire and social media," (Bedard & Schoenthaler, 2018, p 618). This research was limited to information decoding and not news consumption. Different methodologies can also be used to test the same research problem.

5.6 Conclusion

This research explored how the youth fact check fake news, and information circulated on social media ahead of 2019 elections. It documented the types of fake news, circulated on social media platforms. It also examined the criteria used by the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of news and information, and assessed the newsworthy factors that the youth in Ombili and Hochland Park consider before sharing news and information with their friends, family and relatives on social media. Findings show that during the period of 2019 elections, there were no refined fake news campaigns, but rather a number of smear campaigns mainly between Dr Hage Geingob who emerged victorious, his closest opponent Dr Panduleni Itula, and the controversial EVMs. Most of the “fake news” were tied to benefit the top two horses in the elections. What was at play was a number of information disorder with orthodox of journalism reporting, and abuse of mainstream brands. Young people have demonstrated the ability to fact check news, and verify before sharing with others by consulting multiple sources. It was also discovered that, despite technological advancement, young people still have faith in traditional media. They indicated lack of trust in news from social media. Fake news has been noted of depriving news consumers access to quality information, and can influence political decisions. Fact checking has been labelled key in verifying information, before sharing with others. In order to ensure to fight against fake news, media and information literacy, and legislation have been proposed by the research participants.

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Annexure A

Questions which guided this interviews:

The following are the research questions used to explore how young people in the two locations fact-check news and information circulated on social media. The set of questions below were for the Focus-Group Discussions (FGDs), followed by the questions for face-face interviews:

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Please share with us your name and your location?
2. What do you understand by the term fake news?
3. By looking at these articles that were published on social media, do you think these articles are true or false and why?
4. What topics are likely to be the focus and center of fake news in Namibia?
5. Tell us how and where have you experienced fake news?
6. How do you distinguish between real and fake news seeing that some fake news is accompanied by logos of real media houses?
7. Which events/circumstances would make a fake news story more believable?
8. What do you understand by fact-checking?
9. How do you differentiate real from fake news in your daily life?
10. How do you fact-check news before sharing with your families and friends?
11. What do you do when you encounter fake news to ensure that it does not go viral?
12. What do you think are the impacts of fake news in the Namibian society?
13. What can be done to control the production, circulation and consumption of fake news in Namibia?
14. Any other information you would like to share before we conclude this interview?

Face-face semi-structured questions

1. How would you define fake news?
2. Based on the fake news articles that you have encountered, what types of fake news are consumed and circulated in Namibia?
3. What personal experiences have you faced with regard to the issue of fake news in Namibia?
4. Which platforms are you likely to encounter fake news in Namibia?
5. How do you engage with fake news in your daily life?
6. What informs your opinion in terms of separating fiction from the truth?
7. As an individual, what measures do you take when you encounter fake news articles?
8. How do you verify the information before agreeing with it or sharing it?
9. In your own view, how important is the issue of fact-checking?
10. What do you think should be done to curb fake news in Namibia?
11. Any other comments?

Annexure B

Some of the circulated fake news articles at the time of 2019 elections



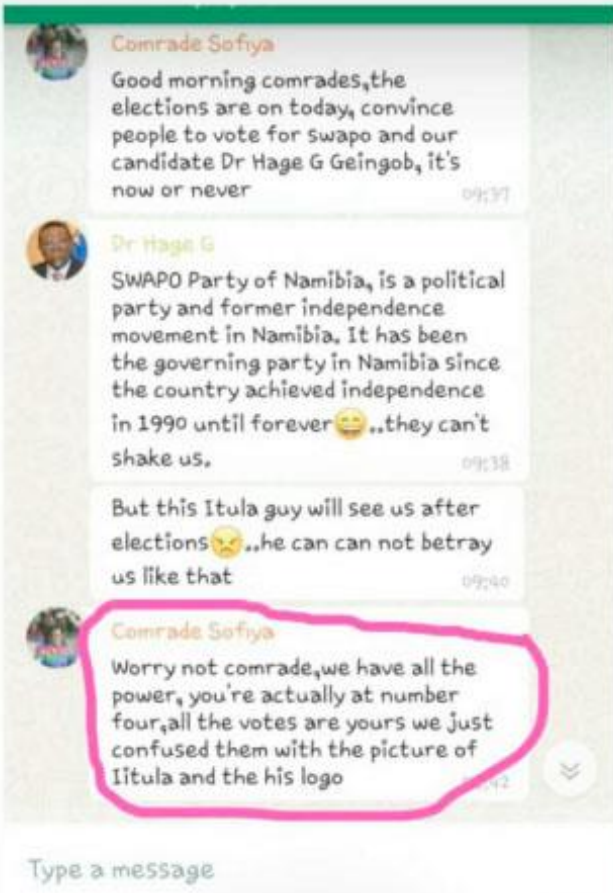
"Ironically, this is not the first time that Zimbabweans have been accused of being complicit in election rigging. A few months ago, disgraced exiled former Commissioner-General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, Augustine Chihuri, was accused of having an active role in the rigging of the Malawi elections".

CAN NAMIBANS UNITE AND TRY HARD TO DIG DEEPER IN ORDER TO CAST AWAY ANY SLIGHT DOUBT INTO THESE ALLEGATIONS? THESE ALLEGATIONS MAY NEGATIVELY AFFECT HAGE'S NEXT 5 YEAR TERM GIVEN THAT HE NO LONGER ENJOYS AN OVERWHELMING SUPPORT BY THE CITIZENRY.



Defence Minister Oppah Muchinguri fingered in Namibia election rigging storm
Advertisement Defence Minister Oppah Muchinguri fingered in Namibia election rigg ...

If this is true, i want our NDF to pronounce itself ASAP!
Remove that guy now



The screenshot shows a WhatsApp chat interface. At the top, there is a grey header with the text: "If this is true, i want our NDF to pronounce itself ASAP! Remove that guy now". Below this, there are three messages in a light green bubble. The first message is from "Comrade Sofiya" and says: "Good morning comrades, the elections are on today, convince people to vote for swapo and our candidate Dr Hage G Geingob, it's now or never" with a timestamp of 09:37. The second message is from "Dr Hage G" and says: "SWAPO Party of Namibia, is a political party and former independence movement in Namibia. It has been the governing party in Namibia since the country achieved independence in 1990 until forever 😊 ..they can't shake us," with a timestamp of 09:38. Below this is a continuation of the second message: "But this Itula guy will see us after elections 😊 ..he can can not betray us like that" with a timestamp of 09:40. The third message is from "Comrade Sofiya" and says: "Worry not comrade, we have all the power, you're actually at number four, all the votes are yours we just confused them with the picture of Iitula and the his logo" with a timestamp of 09:42. The text of this third message is circled in pink. At the bottom of the chat, there is a text input field with the placeholder "Type a message" and a send button.

Comrade Sofiya
Good morning comrades, the elections are on today, convince people to vote for swapo and our candidate Dr Hage G Geingob, it's now or never 09:37

Dr Hage G
SWAPO Party of Namibia, is a political party and former independence movement in Namibia. It has been the governing party in Namibia since the country achieved independence in 1990 until forever 😊 ..they can't shake us, 09:38

But this Itula guy will see us after elections 😊 ..he can can not betray us like that 09:40

Comrade Sofiya
Worry not comrade, we have all the power, you're actually at number four, all the votes are yours we just confused them with the picture of Iitula and the his logo 09:42

Type a message

Its very hot at ECN,
they found the
memory stick that
swapo was using
to manipulate the
results. SADC
declare the
election not free
and fair. We are
serving the living
GOD



The Namibian @TheNamibian · 20h

President Hage Geingob says the local and international media were attacking Namibians, and the ruling party in particular, by only exposing the people who had received bribes in the recent fishing scandal exposé. Photo: Sakeus likela





Presidency | Republic of Namibia @NamPresidency · 16m
 This is entirely false and fabricated. It is regrettable for a news media like yours to peddle and trade in disinformation and complete untruths.

Insight Namibia Mag @InsightMagazin1 · 1h

NEWS IN:
 Namibian Justice Comprised?
 It is being reported that President Geingob told his close associates yesterday that "we did it again just like in 2017." The President allegedly said "Namibians are stupid to think that they can run to court in his country and get...1/2"

[Show this thread](#)



PDM leader says too much freedom of information contributes to teenage pregnancies

Monday, 28. October 2019 - 18:39




LIVE breakyourownnews.com

BREAKING NEWS

ITULA WINS EARLY POLLS

12:33 INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE HAS WON EARLY VOTING IN AND OUTSIDE NAMIBIA




Polling Station	Dr. Itula	Dr. Geingob
Ariamsvlei	2	8
Dordabis	7	0
Kamanjab	5	10
Keetmanshoop	84	184
Kharas	18	17
Khorixas	6	14
Nakambala	303	198
Onayena	13	9
Onguhuwo Ye Pongo	17	57
Oranjemund Airport	68	8
SSN M Vessel	49	2
Swakopmund Hotel	31	25
Swakopmund Multi Purpose	28	13
Walvis Bay God Polling	347	198
Walvis Bay Rural	497	270
Walvis Bay Urban	285	235
WKH Rover Mall	74	184
Botswana	192	39
China	11	16
Germany	16	13
India	8	9
South Africa	1,407	4,033
Σ	3,468	5,542

14.11.2019, 09h50

Luis Paulinus ▶ Landless People's Movement
11 hrs · 🌐

INDIA'S EVMs ARE VULNERABLE TO FRAUD: THIS IS A SCIENTIFIC STUDY ABOUT THE SECURITY OF THE ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES (EVMs) USED IN INDIA. CONTRARY TO CLAIMS BY INDIAN ELECTION AUTHORITIES, THESE PAPERLESS ELECTRONIC VOTING SYSTEMS SUFFER FROM SIGNIFICANT VULNERABILITIES. EVEN BRIEF ACCESS TO THE MACHINES COULD ALLOW DISHONEST ELECTION INSIDERS OR OTHER CRIMINALS TO ALTER ELECTION RESULTS.

THE VIDEO DEMONSTRATE TWO KINDS OF TRICKS / ATTACKS AGAINST EVM. ONE TRICK INVOLVES ... [See more](#)



ECN Officials Caught with EVMs Campaigning for Hage. GOING into homes showing people where to Press, for Hage!

👍👎🗨️ 18 73 Comments

👍 Like 🗨️ Comment ➦ Share



👍👎🗨️ 3 5 Comments

👍 Like 🗨️ Comment ➦ Share



Forwarded:- Itula who is not making it a secret that he is an Atheist vows to remove bibles and prayers from school and to deal away with pentecostal churches once he has taken over the office of presidency. sources close to Itula informed this reporter that he was heard saying "Let us see which so called God will rescue the Christians once I become the next President of the Republic of Namibia".



BREAKING NEWS: Shaningwa Ropes In Hit Squad For Campaign



...The Secretary General of the Swapo Party Sophia Shaningwa has once again turned to her hit squad known for torturing and character assassinating political opponents or those known to be anti-SWAPO leadership; this time to lead the youth targeted campaign for the party for the upcoming elections. The highly paid group, led by the controversial and assassins for hire Chris-Paul Haingura, Roman Geingob (President's nephew) and a secret character named only as 'Doctor' known for not only publicly defending the Swapo Party and its corrupt leadership but also terrorizing those considered nemesis sometimes under the instructions of the Secretary General herself, it is alleged, will lead a contingent tasked with mobilizing the Namibian youths in turning up in numbers for the Swapo Party on Election Day. Shaningwa summoned the trio during the Electoral College last weekend at Safari Hotel and gave them instructions during a high level secret meeting. The three were also instructed to intimidate and harass delegates and candidates to the Pot who were presumed to be anti those who support President Hage. "Watch this space for more"



Ipinge Hofni

This white must go were they came from. Their uncles bankrupt Namibia in the mining sectors. Namibia is not for whites. They colonized our grannies now they are here making noise. We did not forget We can rule out that national reconciliation as young people if we want. They must not feel so much comfortable. I am just reminding them. Hage to go wher? He is in his own mother land. Those whites must pack and go to their country of origin. Bullshit.



Vijay Acharya, Nandjila Petrina and 26 others

35 comments



Omusamane Viva lipinge ▶ NAMIBIANS IN DEMOCRACY
5 hrs · 🌐

NBC News - 8
2 hrs · 🌐

Esau arrested while holding SWAPO flag at the rally
<https://is.gd/sHIPH0>

Omusamane Viva lipinge
5 hrs · 🌐

Priceless. SWAPO and corruption. As Swartbool said, corruption is in the DNA of SWAPO.

👍 🗨️ 🙏 5

1 share

Hike Ela
Yesterday at 11:20

Hage Geingob, Bernardus Swartbool, Henry Seibeb, Katrina Hanse-Himarwa and others are Kwankaras.

Sam Nujoma, Hifikepunye Pohamba, Nahas Angula, Panduleni F B Itula and others are Aawambo.

Joseph Diescho, Elijah Ngurare, Kanyetu Vincent Kanyetu, Ignatius Shixwameni and others are Kavangos.

McHenry Venani, Kazenambo Kazenambo, Fanuel Kaapama, Peter Katjavivi and others are Hereros.

Tangy Mike Tshilongo and all the Activist are Namibians like the above-mentioned. If you are a Kwankara, you are just a Kwankara.

#OneNamibiaOneNation
#Verstaan.





Amon Oiva Haimbangu

9 December at 15:43 · 🌐



Very bad and regrettable words from SPYL Secretary for Education and Culture and NEC Member Hofni Ipinge. Will he be forced to apologize and resign? The future will judge you Hofni.

-Corruption Day.

