The Dynamics of the Post-Truth Era in Africa:
History and Critical Thinking

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Keywords: post-truth, politics, media, history, Africa

Abstract: The revival of Post-Truth terminology in 2016 marked the new phase of international politics. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US) and the British Exit (Brexit) from the European Union events have turned into Post-Truth events. Although the terminology has thrived in society recently, history has demonstrated that the Post-Truth era has been taking place since post-colonialism in Africa. African leaders have utilised their power to construct the truth, notably at the national level. They were acting on behalf of independence to spread partial truths through state-owned media. However, the continuation of post-truth dynamics in Africa has developed variously and impacted on both national and international politics. This paper elaborates on the dynamics of the post-truth era historically and explains the implications and challenges in a critical way. The results found that the post-truth era in Africa had various contexts for each region. The factors that gave rise to the diffusion of fake news included authority over the media, rumours during the election and post- electoral crises, political and economic instability and the national interest in international politics. The countermeasures in each state were different. The African government has restrained the spread of fake news through legal frameworks, regulation, fake news reporting services and even so far as internet disconnection or internet shut-down.

1 INTRODUCTION

The post-truth era is an epoch when the boundary between truth and lies became blurred. The current generation increases their self-capabilities by lying. People tend to rule out the truth to hide self-deficiencies and guilty feelings (Modreanu, 2017). Ralph Keyes, in The Post Truth Era, explained that youths tend to lie to improve their sense of self-ability or to cover up mistakes in order to become famous (Keyes, 2004).

Post-truth can be studied in political communication and other derivative studies such as journalism and communication technology. In the perspective of journalism, Post-truth politics engender fake news as the primary object (Hannan, 2018). Fake news can be overspread virally in quick time by creating a sense of false reality or propaganda. In this case, the communicators, categorised as the government, political parties, individuals and political institutions, play a role in propagating the alternative facts that contribute to mass consumption. At a further level, a society who consumes false news has the potency to transmit it to others. Currently, fake news is becoming widespread and is used to drop or disparage individuals, parties, or institutions. Fake news also causes a debate between objective fact and subjectivity.

Studying post-truth politics in term of the media as a form of communication technology (not media as a content) creates an understanding of how the development of communication technology creates an easiness in fake news propagation. The flow of information and communication is spread at large through the internet. Unfortunately, it is hard to identify and verify the information. With the emergence of social media, the fake accounts become an alternative to hoax dissemination (Al-Rodhan, 2017).

Deception over facts is not a new phenomenon. In the post-colonialism era, African leaders are accustomed to manipulation. Manipulations were habitually propagated by African leaders to gain mass support. Government-owned national media is the legacy of colonialism. Therefore, African Government manipulated facts and spread false truth through mass media easily. They acted on behalf of anti-colonialism and violence in order to construct

society stating how imperialists have committed cruelty. On the other hand, private media - which did not support the partial facts by the government - were suppressed by the ruling party (Gumede, 2017).

In fact, some regions in Africa are still suffering political conflicts ranging from post- election quarrels up to the worst civil war. Political conflict is the primary target of social media in order to disseminate information to construct interest from the conflicting parties. In this case, society has questioned the truth about the scattered information.

This paper will elaborate on the dynamics of the post-truth politics that occur in the African continent. The choice of Africa as the main object of this study is because the post-truth era in Africa had a high level of complexity rendered by political and economic stability. This paper provides shreds of evidence based on historical facts to analyse how the post-truth era has been occurring since post-colonialism up until recent times. The discussion has continued with critical thinking on how the African government can resolve this phenomenon.

2 THE DYNAMICS OF THE POST-TRUTH ERA IN AFRICA

2.1 The History of Media Development in Africa

This sub-section will describe the history of the media's development in Africa. History has proven that the media had a significant role in disseminating post-truth in the African continent. Dynamically, every region in Africa has a similar history focused on media development.

In North Africa, France was the initiator of the establishment of the media. In the 19th century, French-published newspapers sought to create an attractive society due to their occupation. Almost all printed media in North Africa was owned by the French and only some of them were owned by indigenous people. The first Moroccan newspaper was "African Liberal" in 1820 and the first newspaper in Algeria was established in 1830.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Muslims and nationalists rose up in North Africa. The revival of Muslim and nationalists evoked content focused on independence, reformation, and democracy in the newspapers. At the time, France banned a media reformation by nationalists. This century was a historical turning point of the nationalist press.

The nationalist press disseminated anti-colonialism as the main content of the newspaper. A newspaper in Tunisia announced to society the ruthlessness of French colonialism. In Algeria, the nationalist newspaper named "Moudjahid" was the first newspaper that supported independence. In Morocco, the highlighted topics in the newspapers were about anti-colonialism. In the 20th century, some states gained independence which rendered a turning point in the media. Before independence, journalist's activities were done secretly because of the colonialists, but after independence, they ended their concealment and began to publish independence articles.

After independence in North Africa, media became under the state's ownership. The state had a centralised media management system that it could use to spread ideology. States also controlled radio and television. They used the media as an instrument to construct society under the new regime.

When the reformation happened at the end of the 20th century, journalists fought for the freedom of the media. In this period, the emergence of private media was inevitable. In Morocco, the mass media issued different opinions on politics. Private media in Morocco sometimes informed the public of the different points of view compared to the state's media. In Tunisia, the freedom of the media had an impact on their government. The government was criticised by the citizens who were affected by the state limitations in national and international policies. Therefore, the journalists who revolted against the government were threatened and imprisoned in this era (Zaghlami, 2010).

It also happened in Kenya; Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi were the leaders of the first and second regime. They controlled the media by determining which news could be spread to society. The fourth president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, dominated the newspapers, television and radio. After the liberalisation era, there were several private media platforms in Kenya. However, the government restricted the advertisement of private media. This limitation was the main technique of the African government against the private media which had criticised the government (Ogola, 2018).

Globalisation formed friction in the media's development. Currently, every individual can be a journalist who disseminates their news through social media accounts or blogs. In Africa, the use of social media is utilised to express different political opinions. A study explained that the potential use of social media n Africa concerning politics exceeds the potential of the US and the United Kingdom

(UK) on the same topic (Portland, 2017). Social media facilitated rumour and fake news without knowing the truth behind the information. It is hard to find the people behind the social media accounts and to verify the validity of the information.

The next section of this paper explains how post-truth phenomenon took place in Africa. It examines post-truth in every region ranging from South Africa to North Africa. The purpose of this examination is to understand the dynamics of the post-truth era in the African continent and to analyse how the media history of post-colonialism can lead to the emergence of post-truth in Africa.

2.2 Post-Truth Politics in Africa

The history of media development in Africa led to the establishment of post-truth politics. State control over the media gave rise to the creation of partial facts, history manipulation, and social construction. Mostly, African leaders concealed their corruption, failures and other mistakes through wrongful information disseminated by the media. Otherwise, they used alternative facts to topple down their political opponents. The African government took advantage of the failings of society in consuming information through the news. Citizens easily trusted what their leader said without knowing the propaganda behind the news (Gumede, 2017).

Other factors such as political instability and the transformation of traditional media into social media created a new step for disseminating alternative facts. In this sub-chapter is described qualitatively how representative cases from the regions in Africa where information was outspread became questionable. The author acquired the data from journals, news, books and articles regarding what happened in Africa in the context of post-truth.

Jacob Zuma is the fourth president of South Africa. He used the media to explicate African economic problems rendered by the inequity created by the West. Zuma alleged that the failure of the African economic transformation was due to Western imperialism. He also claimed that the West Country had constructed economy racially so then South Africa was required to clear up racists from within the economic aspect. Morover, he stated that South Africa was a victim of white monopoly capital. Zuma revealed the statements by using national media. However, Zuma's declarations were used to cover his failures in leading South Africa. Economic transformation was exploited to enrich his family and other elite politics (even though they were black elite) (Gumede, 2017).

White monopoly capital was spread as a fabricated issue by President Zuma through social media. He used fake accounts so then society would find it hard to find out the origin of the news. By using social media, there were widespread issues regarding salvaging government rottenness. The impact of the fabricated issue was that South Africans campaigned against white monopoly capital.

In the other hand, there was debate among society about white monopoly capital. Activists criticized Zuma's leadership and the campaign. However, Zuma succeeded in creating confusion in society about the truth of white monopoly capital. Some citizens believed the menace of colonialism in terms of the economy (Wasserman, 2017).

Similar phenomenon happened in Zimbabwe. President Mugabe blamed British Colonialism for the failure of his government. Mugabe disseminated information about Britain's tyranny to cover up the corruption, thus ensuring his regime. Apart from corruption, Mugabe's government had poor public services. He needed to divert political issues away from societal accusations (Gumede, 2017).

There was also several fake items of news propagated in Namibia. President Hage Geingob was poorly reported through the media. First, he was reported to have met with North Korean President, Kim Jong Un in China (Mare, 2018). Second, there were issues before the Swapo Party Congress that brought Geingob down in relation to fighting for the secretary general position. In these cases, the partial truth was propagated by his political opponents from his cabinet. One of the rumours circulating ahead of the Swapo Party Congress was the triumph of the Minister of Youth, Sports, and National Services, Jerry Ekandjo, over Geingob. This rumour was disseminated, even though the election had not yet been implemented at the time (Confidente, 2017).

Shifting from South Africa, Ethiopia had a different post-truth phenomenon. The South African government had mostly salvaged themselves by using propaganda and alternative facts, but it was contrary to what happened in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, the government became a victim of fake news attacks. There was news about aggression toward the diaspora when they were celebrating through a ceremony. After attacking the issue, activists in Ethiopia protested against what their government did to the diaspora. The impact of the protests by activists impacted on the piracy of the government website. The government deactivated the internet connection in some areas. In fact, the aggression issue was not confirmed as the truth, and foreign

journalists confirmed it. However, the actual news was questionable because the issue was politically constructed and addressed the tyrannical government.

Another item of false news in Ethiopia was the termination of diplomatic relations between Ehtiopia and South Sudan. The news was detrimental to the political stability of both countries. Lately, the issues were confirmed to have been incorrect (Yilma, 2017).

In West Africa, the Ivory Coast experienced post-truth politics during the election in 2010. After there had been no election for ten years, the election turned into a civil war in 2011. The election pronounced Alassane Outtara as the winner. On the other hand, Laurent Gbagbo also claimed victory. Gbagbo's supporters protested the election result. They closed down the media and prohibited the news spread about the election's result. Journalists hid themselves and there were no newspapers. Because there was no verified information from the national media, false news spread quickly, and the internet was the leading source of alternative information that could be absorbed by society. Social media became an alternative to communicate and was used to propagate issue. The predominant problem of using the media as an alternative to get information about politics consisted of the undetected accounts of news spreaders. Whether the news spreaders were from citizen, diaspora, or foreigners, debate about the unverified information generated into debates and disputes that raised hatred among both sides of political supporters. Civil war in the Ivory Coast was inevitable compounded by fake news (Schreiner, 2018).

Civil war in the Ivory Coast demonstrated that rumours and false information could escalate conflict intensity. Transformation from traditional media to social media set the dilemma within the context of society because of the unverified sources of information. Conflicting political parties propagated issue through social media and created mass opinions that caused misunderstandings.

Muhammadu Buhari, the fifteenth president of Nigeria, was poorly accused through news dissemination. An issue spread about the closure and relocation of Aso Rock Villa Church. The closure of the church was alleged to Buhari because the church did not represent Buhari's religion. In fact, Buhari claimed that the church was not closed to society. Muhammadu Buhari was also reported as being sick and having medication treatment abroad. In fact, Buhari went to the UK for a state visit (Adoyo, 2016).

Fake news not only attacked political actors but also business institutions. False news was used by society and business opponents to drop other companies. The Guardian reported that the Kia Automobile company ended his company's presence in Nigeria because of the state's poor economic. This news was classified as false news.

Another alternative fact by The Guardian was attacking an airline from Rwanda named Rwand Air. The Guardian reported about fake visas that incurred losses of about eight billion for Rwand Air. The fake visas were reported for the Lagos-Dubai Route. The report was subsequently confirmed by Rwand Air as false news (Adeleke, 2016). Fake news in the economic and political sphere turns into a dilemma, whether or not the confirmation from the company or political actor honestly justifies and clarifies the news or they retrieve their true image.

Issues of religion and politics are sensitive. If there is a trigger issue, then it can spread extensively. In Angola, there was news about the state being the only state that banned Muslims. Several mosques were closed and destroyed by the government. Islam was considered to be a form of worship, and not a religion. Islam was still growing in Angola. Only mosques which did not have a permit were torn down. Some mosques were re-opened. The government also tore down many churches that were without permits. Muslims were a minority in Angola who did not have any recognition from the government. Besides, anti-Muslim movements were also not recognised at the same time.

The issue of banning Muslims by Angola was spread during the election in the US. By disseminating the news of banning Muslims, Angola was considered to be a supporter of one of the presidential candidates, Donald Trump. Trump assumed Muslims to be a threat to the States. In this case, Angola was regarded as continuing Trump's policy of banning Muslims (BBC, 2016).

Switching from Angola to South Sudan. The insurgency in South Sudan could be exacerbated by fake news among the government supporters (Dinka) and in the rebellion (Nuer). If there was news about the violence done by one group, then another group would directly respond critically and show revenge. It got worse if there was the distribution of photos that contained an assassination from one group, and the war became horrible. The news about violence and assassinations was not accurately verified. The photos that were distributed were edited photos. Rumour spreaders usually added an accurate media logo to the obsolete photo and

edited it to make it look like it was a recent photograph. Conflicting groups easily believed the news and condemned the opponent. False information prompted war to enter its worst phase. Because of the high trust from society in the news, if someone confirmed it to be false news, then they would be coveted as being a creator of fake news (McCarthy, 2017).

In Egypt, there was fake news during the election. Fake news generally described the government's crackdown on dissidents (Egyptian Streets, 2018). Although the election was potentially won by the existing leader (because there were almost no opponents), fake news remained scattered. It caused the president to become furious toward both national and international media (Islam, 2018). The government also targeted the reduction of false information exploited by extremists.

Egypt also experienced being reported on by the international media related to the approval of the displacement of the capital of Jerusalem. The news revealed that Egyptian intelligence along with the US's media promoted a plan to move the Israeli Capital to Jerusalem. However, the Egyptian State Information Service denied the news and considered the news to be a false story (El-Sayed, 2018).

In the next sub-chapter, the author elaborates on the efforts of the African Government in responding to post-truth politics. The explanation of the government's efforts to overcome the phenomenon of partial truth or false news will be explained in detail. Some examples from representative states will be mentioned to make for a more comprehensive understanding.

2.3 African Response to Quell the Post-Truth Politics

The sustainability of post truth is related to the emergence of anti-media and anti-post truth. As an effort to overcome the post-truth phenomenon, it often focuses on oppressing the media and the internet, as both of them act as information providers, such as through media closure, arresting journalists, internet shutdown and other restrictive actions. Policy, law and other forms of regulation are also categorised as efforts from the governments of African countries in facing the existence of post-truth dynamics.

The government of Ethiopia tried to reduce the occurrence of fake news by restricting websites and cyber tool usage. However, cyber tool usage was viewed as a short-term countermeasure since there were no clear procedures on website restriction.

It also restricted internet usage by using spyware. This action proved to bring in disadvantageous effects, since it cost a lot out of the government budget. Hence, as Ethiopia was considered to be a diplomatic representative in Africa, it would be difficult if there was an internet restriction in the area (Yilma, 2017).

Internet shutdown was one of the African government's effort to reduce rumours. In several countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia and the Republic Democratic Congo, the government issued a kill switch or internet shutdown during election and post-electoral crises (Lees, 2018). In the last three years, 11 countries in Africa had implemented an internet shutdown. Even though this effort on some level was able to prevent rumours, it also potentially created unnecessary damage in several sectors, especially in the economic enterprises sector (Mare, 2018).

Several countries decided to close down private media with the conviction of distributing fake news. In Tanzania, four media platforms were dismissed for allegedly spreading false information (Lees, 2018). In Egypt, the government blocked several media outlets such as Mada Masr, Daily News Egypt, Human Rights Watch, and the BBC (Egyptian Streets, 2018).

Moreover, the increase of media restrictions in Egypt occurred at an alarming level. Egypt also arrested several journalists who created a particular image of the Egyptian government under Abdul Fatha As- Sisi's. Under Sisi's leadership, the regime was considered to be opposing the freedom of the press (Islam, 2018).

Another action used to verify and crosscheck news circulation was exercised by using tools for filtering and figuring information. In Africa, "Africa Check" was commonly used as a news checking tool that provided web–based services for those who wanted to crosscheck news validity. Africa Check also provides training on how people should filter news (Africa Check, 2018). "African Check" also collaborated with the media to validate news circulation. This method was good for African society in the terms of gaining accurate news. However, since this organisation was independent and funded by philanthropists, some people argued that fact checking was another way to spread fake news.

Meanwhile, Kenya has been ranked as the society with the highest rate of news consumption. Based on a research study which was conducted through a survey of 2000 citizens in Kenya, it showed that 67% of Kenyans prefer to read detailed

information and 78% of them believed it to be accurate news. Kenyan citizens were inclined to seek and compare news to verify it. Generally, the news which was disseminated frequently was considered to be the best indicator of news validity in Kenya. Thus, when a contrasting item of news appeared, it was hardly believed by society. This phenomenon shaped how the Kenyan people consumed the media.

Another impact of the high level of activity by the Kenyan people was that it affected the election results. Getting closer to the election, the level of media consumption in Kenya had risen. Youths became the group who had the highest level of news consumption in the context of political news. A research study resulted in determining that 88% of youths had consumed news. This condition was able to reduce the absence of voters from the youth age group. In this context, post-truth became a new politic reality that should be faced by all of us, and we should save democracy which could be damaged because of this discourse (Portland, 2017).

An effort to save democracy in the dissemination of information during the election in Kenya was the establishment of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). This institution worked by identifying reports from the public and social media which had hate speech content (NCIC, 2018).

Egypt also worked in helping society to report and verify circulated information. The Egyptian Government released a hotline to help people report fake news through WhatsApp and a message service. The Egyptian government also designed a new social media platform to replace Facebook (Egyptian Streets, 2018).

Apart from the above efforts to resolve fake news problem, Egypt also had a judicial platform named anti-cybercrime which passed through parliament for further discussion (El-Sayed, 2018).

3 CONCLUSION

Regulation regarding the dissemination of fake news mostly targeted only the media and journalists. Journalists often distributed false news under government instructions (which also frequently happened in African countries). But, government regulations had not yet succeeded in regulating citizen journalists where rumours were distributed through accounts maintained by individuals or informal groups. Democracy in Africa was prone to conflict, especially during elections. Thus, fake news

distribution could trigger increased conflict. Besides, history also described how the media was often occupied by the government post-colonialism. African leaders tended to exploit the media to create news which supported them.

It is essential for the international society, especially in developing countries, to introduce and apply a better curriculum in the digital era, especially related to digital information. The importance of this curriculum is laid in how society consumes, understands, classifies, believes and distributes valid information. A digital literacy program will help society to consume news content wisely and to better understand the position of digital media in society.

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