



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

Theses & Dissertations

5-2021

An exploratory study of fake news and the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya

Anthony Kuria Wanjiru Mr

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#), and the [Social Media Commons](#)

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FAKE NEWS AND THE 2017
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN KENYA**

By

ANTHONY KURIA WANJIRU
535168

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in Digital Journalism.

Nairobi, Kenya

May, 2021
© Copyright

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2021, Anthony Kuria Wanjiru

APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communication

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in Digital Journalism

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of
ANTHONY KURIA WANJIRU-535168, find it satisfactory and recommended that it
be accepted.

Peter Kimani, PhD.,
1st Supervisor

Joseph Nyanoti, PhD.,
2nd Supervisor

Nancy Booker, PhD.,
Director, Academic Affairs

Member,
Thesis Evaluation Committee

May, 2021

DECLARATION

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FAKE NEWS AND THE 2017 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN KENYA

I, **ANTHONY KURIA WANJIRU-535168**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my own research endeavours.

Signature

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is a result of an intense period of research and study. It is a product of massive professional and intellectual support from numerous people. Profound gratitude to the Aga Khan University – Graduate School of Media and Communications (AKU-GSMC), without their support, this work would have not been possible. Special gratitude to my supervisor's, Dr. Peter Kimani and Dr. Joseph Nyanoti, for their guidance, invaluable scholarly advice, and encouragement towards the completion of my research. To the entire AKU-GSMC family, I say a big thank you for your invaluable support and input during my study. Sincere gratitude to the participants who generously gave vital input for this study. Finally, special appreciation to my family for the constant encouragement throughout the process.

ABSTRACT

This study explored the proliferation of fake news in Kenya and sought to uncover if fake news affected the 2017 Presidential Election outcomes. Just like in the two previous elections (2007 and 2013), the 2017 presidential polls were closely contested. The use of social networking sites and other online platforms like websites for campaigns was common during the 2017 Presidential Elections. Presidential candidates did not only set up websites, but also employed bloggers, social media savvy individuals and public relations firms to manage their social media accounts and other parody accounts that they used for their online campaigns. Thus, the study was guided by the following objectives: (i) to determine how fake news manifested before and during the 2017 Presidential Elections, (ii) to determine how fake news manifested before and during the 2017 Presidential Elections, (iii) to explore the sources/genesis/origins of fake news during the 2017 Presidential Elections, and (iv) to determine the nature of fake news during the 2017 Presidential Elections. The study employed social responsibility theory as theoretical framework. The researcher adopted qualitative research approach and descriptive survey design to investigate fake news and the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya. Data was collected through key informant interviews aided by an interview guide as a tool for data generation. The study's findings showed that politicians had well-organised fake news campaigns that targeted opponents and that fake news was manifested on social media in the form of fabricated photos, screenshots, deep fakes, screen grabs, doctored videos, fake newspaper front pages, and posters. Further, bloggers, social media influencers and public relations firms also generated fake news while mainstream media spread fake news in the form of planted stories. Moreover, representatives of presidential candidates shared falsified information with journalists, leading to the deliberate publication of sensationalized stories. The study concluded that fake news was majorly circulated on social media platforms with Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp being the leading channels in that order. The study recommended that there is a need for journalists to be trained on social media content verification while media organizations need to set up well-staffed verification desks. Additionally, social media platforms need some form of regulation. The researcher suggested further investigations on the nature of false information in Kenya.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE	iii
DECLARATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	x
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the Study	1
1.2.1 Kenya’s History of Fake News and Elections	11
1.3 Statement of the Problem	12
1.4 Objectives of the Study	13
1.4.1 Specific Objectives	13
1.4.2 Research Questions	14
1.5 The Rationale of the Study	14
1.6 Significance of the Study	16
1.7 Scope of the Study	17
1.8 Limitations of the Study	18
1.9 Operational Definition of Terms	18
1.10 Summary	19
CHAPTER TWO	20
LITERATURE REVIEW	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Theoretical Framework	20
2.2.1 Social Responsibility Theory	20
2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review	23
2.3.1 Defining Fake News	23
2.3.2 Consequences of Fake News	24
2.3.3 Philosophical Foundations based on Donald Trump and the Birther Conspiracy	26
2.3.4 A Brief History of General Elections in Kenya	27
2.3.5 Fake News and the 2017 General Elections in Kenya	28
2.3.6 Online Campaigns Before and During the 2017 General Elections	28
2.3.7 Fake News and Reputations of Institutions and Key Personnel	30
2.3.8 Fake News used as a Weapon to Cause Tension, Unrest, and Chaos	31
2.3.9 Arguments Advanced by other Scholars about Fake News and Elections	33
2.4 Summary	34
CHAPTER THREE	35
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	35
3.1 Introduction	35
3.2 Research Approach and Research Design	35
3.2.1 Research Design	36
3.3 Population	37
3.4 Target Population	38
3.5 Sample Size	38
3.6 Study Site	39
3.7 Sampling Procedures	39
3.8 Research Method	40

3.9 Data Collection Tools	40
3.10 Data Collection Procedures.....	40
3.11 Pre-testing of Data Collection Tools.....	41
3.12 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools.....	41
3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan	42
3.14 Ethical Considerations	42
3.15 Summary	43
CHAPTER FOUR.....	44
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION	44
4.1 Introduction.....	44
4.2 Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretation	44
4.2.1 Response Rate and Demographic Results.....	44
4.2.2 Key Informant Findings.....	45
4.2.2.1 Research Objective One.....	45
4.2.2.2 Research Objective Two	47
4.2.2.3 Research Objective Three	49
4.2.2.4 Research Objective Four.....	50
4.3 Summary of Key Findings	53
4.4 Summary	55
CHAPTER FIVE	56
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
5.1 Introduction.....	56
5.2 Discussion of Key Findings.....	56
5.2.1 Research Objective One.....	56
5.2.2 Research Objective Two	57
5.2.3 Research Objective Three.....	59
5.2.4 Research Objective Four.....	61
5.3 Conclusion and Implications for Practice	63
5.4 Recommendations.....	64
5.5 Areas for Future Research	65
REFERENCES	66
APPENDICES	71
Appendix A: Interview Guide	71
Appendix B: Research Budget	72
Appendix C: Research Timelines.....	73
Appendix D: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter	74
Appendix E: Introductory Letter from AKU.....	75
Appendix F: NACOSTI Research License	76

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Showing the number of fact-checkers in major fact-checking organizations in Kenya</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Table 2: Shows the sample number of participants for the in-depth interviews from every fact-checking and mainstream media organization</i>	<i>39</i>

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFP:	Agence France-Press
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
BC:	Before Christ
BTP:	Business Transformation Partners
CIA:	Criminal Investigations Agency
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
CNN:	Cable News Network
EU:	European Union
FT:	Financial Times
IEBC:	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
JP:	Jubilee Party
KANU:	Kenya African National Union
KTN:	Kenya Television Network
NASA:	National Alliance
NCIC:	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NMG:	Nation Media Group
NSA:	National Security Agency
TNA:	The National Alliance Party

USA: United States of America

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

UK: United Kingdom