


Fake News and Misinformation in the agriculture sector

Thematic Policy Brief N° 3/10



Fake News

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About FARA

The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) is the apex continental organisation responsible for coordinating and advocating for agricultural research-for-development. (AR4D). It serves as the entry point for agricultural research initiatives designed to have a continental reach or a sub-continental reach spanning more than one sub-region.

FARA serves as the technical arm of the African Union Commission (AUC) on matters concerning agricultural science, technology and innovation. FARA has provided a continental forum for stakeholders in AR4D to shape the vision and agenda for the sub-sector and to mobilise themselves to respond to key continent-wide development frameworks, notably the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

FARA's vision is to "Reduced poverty in Africa as a result of sustainable broad-based agricultural growth and improved livelihoods, particularly of smallholder and pastoral enterprises" its mission is the "Creation of broad-based improvements in agricultural productivity, competitiveness and markets by strengthening the capacity for agricultural innovation at the continental-level"; its Value Proposition is the "Strengthening Africa's capacity for innovation and transformation by visioning its strategic direction, integrating its capacities for change and creating an enabling policy environment for implementation". FARA's strategic direction is derived from and aligned to the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A), which is in turn designed to support the realization of the CAADP vision.

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Background

Politicians may have just caught on about 'fake news,' but farmers have known for years what it's like to live in a world where anything can and does get said and believed. In the era of information overload, restiveness, uncertainty, and implausible content abound; information credibility or web credibility refers to the trustworthiness, reliability, fairness, and accuracy of the information. Information credibility is the extent to which a person believes in the content provided on the internet. Every second of time passes by millions of people interacting on social media, creating vast volumes of data, which has many unseen patterns and behavioural trends inside. One of the most common terms for misleading non-true stories is "fake news". In the context of globalization, the mass media are undergoing fundamental changes in terms of structure, form, and content. Within today's media landscape, theorists and practitioners of journalism are increasingly often confronted with the phenomenon of fake news, i.e., false, in most cases sensational, information spreading under the guise of news. "Fake news" is defined as fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent.

It is a situation when misinformation takes the form of a news story to approximate the legitimacy which society associates with real news. Fake-news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is purposely spread to deceive people).



Fake News

Fake News

The term 'fake news' has emerged as a global construct among leaders, media professionals, and consumers of media content, capturing a new trend of doubt and disbelief towards mainstream media organizations which, in the past, maintained a capacity to establish the salience of news stories while advancing dominant agendas. Some of this capacity is currently claimed by alternative, hybrid mediated entities while influencing users' perceptions and behaviours. The notion of fake news is all the rage in politics these days, as lawmakers, pundits and others struggle to sift through what's real and what's not in the headlines. But fake news and its often-ugly consequences are nothing new in agriculture and food production. Farmers and food processors have, for years, been dealing with false reports designed to scare consumers about the safety of agricultural production practices and foods. Fake news in agriculture range from climate change, pesticide usage, fertiliser use, food safety and agro-processing. Fake news can be deliberately created or the result of an error, mistake, or misinterpretation. Deliberate fake news is created and posted with the intent of generating as much engagement as possible, usually to increase financial gain.

Types of fake news

- Satire or parody (“no intention to cause harm but has potential to fool”)
- False connection (“when headlines, visuals or captions don’t support the content”)
- Misleading content (“misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual”)
- False context (“when genuine content is shared with false contextual information”)
- Impostor content (“when genuine sources are impersonated” with false, made-up sources)
- Manipulated content (“when genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive”, as with a “doctored” photo)
- Fabricated content (“new content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm”)

Issues and Challenges

- Increased incidences of security breach of data in agriculture
- AI-Enhanced information threats
- Necessity of privacy and data, information protection regulations
- Lack of knowledge management expertise
- Difficulty in tracking fake news and misinformation criminals

Identification of fake news

- Consider the source (to understand its mission and purpose)
- Read beyond the headline (to understand the whole story)
- Check the authors (to see if they are real and credible)
- Assess the supporting sources (to ensure they support the claims)
- Check the date of publication (to see if the story is relevant and up to date)
- Ask if it is a joke (to determine if it is meant to be satire)
- Review your own biases (to see if they are affecting your judgment)
- Ask experts (to get confirmation from independent people with knowledge).



Gaps

Lack of deliberation: Individuals do not take the time and energy to deliberate over the accuracy of the news they are exposed to. Individuals are less likely to believe fake news when they are given the time and mental space to deliberate over the accuracy of different news headlines. People fall for fake news online because they are encountering it as they scroll quickly through their newsfeeds.

Repeated exposure: Individuals are more likely to deem a false statement true the more times they are exposed to it. This may be because we recognize the information as familiar, but don't necessarily remember where or in what context we encountered it before.

Novelty: False news is often more novel than true news, and inspires strong emotions such as fear, disgust, and surprise. Novel information grabs our attention and gives us the impression that we are updating our knowledge of the world, thus serving to encourage its spread.

Rationale

Fake news in agriculture is currently an issue of global interest; this is so because globally discussions about fake news and its impact on global affairs are being held. This century sadly has seen the use of information as a weapon in rather unprecedented scale. The

exploitation and falsification of contents have simply become rather easy with the presence of Powerful new technology. This has also given easy rise to the use of social networks in intensifying the rate falsehoods in rather very dramatic fashion especially as peddled by States, politicians, deceitful corporate entities, and individuals who go about sharing uncritical public stories, these and other forms of misinformation are perpetrated with the intent seeking or gaining platforms to pursue financial gains in the advertising section. There is a high spread of the fake news phenomenon on the internet, social media and this is so because of the internet's ever connected nature and a major function of the masses' preference for speed over accuracy thus affects farmers and agro-processors greatly. Fake news stories are usually thrilling in nature and by this factor, are very likely to spread quickly; since these blogs or platforms by their nature contain a high level of followers, making the news possess an existing number of massive reader base that have their notification on, looking up to them for second to second information.

Vision and goals

To raise an awareness on fake news detection in social media using a novel paradigm. The goal is to identify the most common media literacy practices in the face of fake news (news that conveys or incorporates false, fabricated, or deliberately misleading information).

Recommended actions to be taken

1. Organise seminars about the rise of fake news, particularly those information behaviours that perpetuate its spread,
2. Learn ways to identify fake news,
3. What impact it creates on humans and society?
4. Cybersecurity tools to help ensure data integrity,
5. What role can the cybersecurity sector play as a whole in preventing its spread?
6. Stop: Before consuming a piece of news, consider where you have found this information. Also, reflect on your purpose for evaluating the source.
7. Investigate the source: Ask yourself who is producing this information and what their motivations might be.
8. Find better coverage: Reliable information will be available from more than one source. Look for one you know you can trust to see if they make the same claim, and/or determine whether multiple sources agree.
9. Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context: Does the source that you're looking at tell the whole story? By tracing such information back to the original context, you can see what was left out and might have been reframed to fit a different narrative than was originally intended.

Conclusion

In one way or another, media environments around the world are changing. The change is not only a change in content but also a change in the ways in which citizens discover, use, consume, and interact with content. These new conditions have significant implications for what the media report, the way in which the content is consumed, and, finally, the quality of informed citizenship. It has been observed that alternative and misinterpreted news has caused a lot of fear/anxiety/panic and damages among farmers and populace. Despite these, the consequences of fake news has been outlined as follows; aggravate distrust, violence and

division among farmers and weakens confidence and certainty of the people in the media. From the above we can clearly see that alternative news and misinterpretation is our today's reality, causing more harm and no good at all, thus we must strive to encourage media literacy as it is very paramount in this regard. More so, people should invest more in making sure that media specialists' partner with good, reputable and credible international media organizations.



References for further reading

Lamprou. et al, 2021. Characteristics of Fake News and Misinformation in Greece: The Rise of New Crowdsourcing-Based Journalistic Fact-Checking Models. <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-5172/2/3/25/htm>

About the KM4AgD Challenge

Under the frame work of the KM4AgD Challenge, ten core challenges were identified as critical to the advancement of knowledge in the agricultural sector and knowledge management awareness being one. As such, through this knowledge and sharing opportunity event, the Knowledge Café hosts and joined by other audiences (institution or department, researchers, and other KM practitioners) including 25 participants across Africa were engaged to critically brainstorm on what works should be done in line with the challenges identified, and to operationalize the vision, objectives of KM4AgD. Knowledge Management Awareness, was identified to be critical and much attention needs to be made in this regard. It is in this regard that KM4AgDChallenge participants in groups 3 through the KM-Café session have successful develop this policy brief that will be implemented. A lot of thanks goes to Mr. Benjamin Abugri Knowledge Manager, Knowledge Management and Outreach Officer for FARA and Dr Andreas Brandner Founder and Managing Director of KM, for providing direction, guidance, technical and administrative support on this project.



Development
Symbol



Growth Arrow



A leaf signifying
Agriculture



Knowledge
Management





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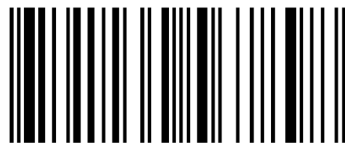
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