

Social Media, Dis-misinformation and Impact on Political Developments in Sudan After the December 2018 Revolution

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Abstract:

The fall of Sudan's former regime in 2019 marked the beginning of a new era of political activism and information dissemination driven by social media in the country. The focus of this study is on the spread of fake news and incorrect information on social media in Sudan and its effects, with emphasis on the actors, motivations, and strategies employed by individuals and groups to distribute false information. Drawing on a theoretical framework that combines social movement theory with the concept of "fake news" as a form of political manipulation, this study argues that the spread of fake news and incorrect information on social media in Sudan, that is driven by a complex interplay of ideological, social, and economic factors. The study reveals that extremist groups, ideological activists, and political parties utilize social media to disseminate hate speech and promote their own agendas, frequently with the aim of generating support for their causes. The study employed a qualitative methodology, including in-depth interviews with social media users and content analysis of certain online posts. This approach aimed to examine how fake news and misinformation have been created; disseminated, and consumed on social media in Sudan. The findings highlight the need for policymakers and civil society organizations to develop effective strategies to



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combat the spread of fake news and misinformation, as well as to promote critical thinking and media literacy among the Sudanese public.

Keywords: Social media, dis-misinformation, political movements, Sudan, revolution.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has garnered increasing attention from researchers, particularly regarding its political implications, especially in the Arab region post-2010 Arab Spring, where it served as a crucial mobilization tool. Despite a growing body of literature examining the impact of social media on political and social movements, gaps remain, particularly in understanding why some users intentionally share false information. There is also a need to evaluate whether current methodologies effectively capture user behaviors related to dis/misinformation. While extensive research exists on the influence of fake news on political action, questions remain about the effects of such misinformation on recipients and the mechanisms through which social media connects individuals and facilitates collective action during uprisings.

In Sudan, the significance of social media has surged as a primary source of social, economic, and political news, yet research in this area has lagged. With approximately 11 million smartphones and 13.38 million internet users by January 2020, social media has permeated various aspects of Sudanese life, influencing personal relationships and broader political discourse. Recognizing the potential negative impact of social media on public stability, the government has attempted to regulate communication through legislation, such as the Information Technology Law, aimed at combating misinformation and promoting responsible dialogue.

This paper investigates the role of social media in spreading misinformation in Sudan, examining both the pre- and post-Bashir regime periods, as well as during the ongoing civil war. It identifies key actors and analyzes the messages they disseminate, exploring why some users persist in sharing disinformation despite knowing it is false. The study argues that the sharing of fake news often reflects the political and ideological motivations of various actors, particularly after the December 2018 uprising. To better understand these dynamics, the Theory of Informative Fiction (TIF) provides a framework for analyzing how individuals seek and share information based on self-interest or altruistic motives. The paper is organized into five sections, detailing the theoretical framework, the role of social media in the revolution, the actors behind misinformation, and key findings from the study.

1.1 Study problem

In Sudan's turbulent political landscape, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for both mobilization and misinformation. The Arab Spring inspired activists to utilize platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to rally against the long-standing totalitarian



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regime. This dynamic raised critical questions about how social media influences political narratives, shapes public discourse, and facilitates both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements. The rapid spread of information both accurate and misleading has complicated the public's understanding of events, leading to the proliferation of hate speech and ideological divisions among various factions.

Moreover, the fragmentation of the revolutionary movement following the regime's overthrow in 2019 underscores the challenges faced by Sudanese political actors in navigating a polarized environment. The emergence of two distinct discourses those advocating for radical change versus those favoring negotiation demonstrates how social media platforms serve as battlegrounds for competing ideologies. This polarization raises concerns about the evolution of political engagement in Sudan, as factions leverage social media to promote their narratives while often resorting to misinformation to undermine their opponents.

The significant negative role played by social media in spreading a culture of discrimination, racism, and violence has contributed significantly to the expansion of war, violence, human rights violations, the undermining of the regime, and the lack of respect for the rule of law in Sudan.

1.2 Study Objectives

This study seeks to examine the complex role of social media in shaping political dynamics during Sudan's revolutionary period. It will analyze how platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp facilitated mobilization, focusing on the spread of both accurate and misleading narratives, especially regarding hate speech and ideological conflicts.

Additionally, the research will explore the fragmentation of the revolutionary movement post-2019, highlighting the emerging divide between those pushing for radical change and those advocating for negotiation with military forces. This analysis will shed light on the challenges Sudanese activists face in maintaining unity amid political polarization.

Finally, the study will assess the declining trust in traditional media and the growing influence of social media as an alternative information source. By investigating how political parties and individuals utilize these platforms to shape public opinion, the research aims to enhance understanding of the role of digital media in modern political movements.



1.3 Study Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing interviews and content analysis to investigate the role of social media in Sudan's political dynamics. Data will be collected from key activists and participants within various Facebook and WhatsApp groups, focusing on their experiences and the narratives they share. The analysis will include examining the prevalence of misinformation, ideological conflicts, and the strategies employed by political actors to leverage social media for mobilization and public engagement.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

The study examines the critical role of social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, in shaping Sudan's political landscape from 2018 to 2025. It focuses on how these platforms empowered activists, facilitated the spread of both accurate and misleading narratives, and contributed to the emergence of diverse ideological factions. The research aims to illuminate the effects of social media on the fragmentation of the revolutionary movement and the broader political discourse across various regions of Sudan, encompassing both urban centers and rural areas.

1.5 Synopsis of the Chapters

The study begins with chapter one: introduction to the revolutionary context, which outlines Sudan's historical political landscape, emphasizing authoritarian rule and the Arab Spring's influence. Chapter two includes the conceptual framework, legal framework and literature review social media as a mobilization tool investigates how platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp facilitated activism during key uprisings, will take space in chapter three. Chapter four will examine the influencing factors, motivations, ideological groups, and political discourse with some case studies. Chapter five is including conclusion and future implications summarizes key findings, offering insights into social media's role in political movements and recommendations for future research.

2. The Conceptual, Legal Framework and Literature Review

2.1 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the Theory of Informative Fiction (TIF), which posits that individuals engage in communication for both self-interested and altruistic purposes. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding how users share information on social media, especially in the context of political mobilization and misinformation. In Sudan, social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have emerged as influential tools for activism, allowing users



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to disseminate narratives that align with their ideological positions¹. The motivations behind sharing information range from a desire to influence political outcomes to a genuine intention to inform and support others. However, the rise of misinformation complicates this landscape, as users often propagate content that may lack credibility, driven by ideological biases or the allure of social status within their networks. These dynamic underscores the multifaceted nature of information exchange in a politically charged environment, where the boundaries between activism and trolling frequently blur.

2.2 Legal Framework

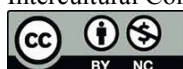
The legal framework surrounding social media in Sudan is characterized by efforts to regulate information sharing to maintain public order and mitigate the impact of misinformation. In response to the challenges posed by the digital landscape, the Sudanese government has implemented measures such as the Information Technology Law and established specialized courts to address information-related crimes. These regulations aim to combat the spread of false news and extremist narratives that threaten social cohesion and political stability. However, the application of these laws raises concerns regarding freedom of expression and the potential for governmental overreach. The legal landscape is further complicated by the declining credibility of traditional media, prompting political parties and organizations to leverage social media for propaganda and mobilization. Consequently, while the legal framework seeks to address the negative implications of misinformation, it also reflects the ongoing tension between regulating harmful content and preserving individual rights to free speech in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

2.3 Literature Review

Kubin and Von Sikorski (2021) examine the transformative power of social media in political mobilization, emphasizing its role in the Arab Spring and subsequent movements across the Arab region. They highlight platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp as crucial tools for grassroots activism. **Moldovan** (2020) reinforces this notion, arguing that social media democratizes information dissemination, allowing diverse voices to emerge². **Tucker** (2018) provides an in-depth analysis of these

¹ Hassan, M. & Kodouda, A. Sudan's uprising: The fall of a dictator. J. Sudan, Democracy, 2019, pp 30, 89.

² Moldovan, R. The social media revolution that failed: Lessons from the Arab Spring, Redefining Community in Intercultural Context, 9(1), 2020, 257-269.



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dynamics during the Arab Spring, illustrating how social media acted as a catalyst for collective action¹.

In the context of Sudan, *Abu Shouk* (2021) details how social media became vital in mobilizing support during the revolution against Omar al-Bashir. *Daffalla et al.* (2020) also note that social media facilitated both accurate and misleading narratives, contributing to the complexity of political discourse. However, *Li et al.* (2021) caution that while social media can mobilize, it also risks fragmenting movements as competing narratives emerge.

Within the framework of misinformation and its Effects the literature on misinformation highlights its detrimental effects on political action and social movements². *Shen et al.* (2020) explore how false narratives shape public perception and political legitimacy, while *Foust and Hoyt* (2018) argue that misinformation fosters polarization by appealing to individuals' existing beliefs³. *Poell and Van Dijck* (2018) emphasize the rapid spread of misinformation on social media, complicating the political landscape⁴. In Sudan, *Rydzak et al.* (2020) discuss the government's attempts to regulate social media due to its potential for destabilizing public order. These regulations often lead to a complex interplay between authority and activism, where misinformation flourishes in the absence of credible information.

In terms of ideological conflicts and fragmentation, the ideological landscape in Sudan remains deeply polarized. *Perthes* (2024) suggests that social media serves as a battleground for conflicting ideologies, with the proliferation of hate speech and extremist narratives complicating public discourse⁵. Case studies, such as those conducted by *Mansour*, illustrate how ideological divisions manifest in heated exchanges on social media, highlighting the challenges of fostering unity among activists. Despite this focus, several gaps persist. Most studies emphasize the mobilization aspect of social media without adequately addressing the long-term effects of misinformation on political engagement and public trust. Additionally, while ideological divides are documented, there is limited analysis on how these conflicts affect grassroots movements and their sustainability.

1 Tucker, J. A, Guess, A, Barbera, P, Vaccari, C, Siegel, A, Sanovich, S. & Nyhan, B. social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature. Political polarization, and political disinformation: a review of the scientific literature, March 19, 2018.

2 Shen, F, Xia, C, & Skoric, M. Examining the roles of social media and alternative media in social movement participation: A study of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, *Telematics and Informatics*, 101303, 2020, pp 47.

3 Foust, C. R, & Hoyt, K. D, Social movement, 2.0: Integrating and assessing scholarship on social media and movement, *Review of Communication*, 18 (1), 2018, pp 37-55.

4 Poell, T., & Van Dijck, J. social media and new protest movements. *The SAGE handbook of social media*, 2018, pp 546-561.

5 Perthes, V. Sudan's Transition to War. In *Survival: Routledge*, 66.4, 2024, pp. 127-147.



2.4 Gaps in Research

The current literature reveals several critical gaps that need to be addressed. First, there is a notable lack of longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of misinformation on political behavior and public trust, underscoring the necessity for research that tracks these dynamics over time. Additionally, much of the existing work focuses on specific case studies without employing a comparative framework, which limits insights into how social media functions across various political contexts. Furthermore, while ideological conflicts are well-documented, the impact of these divisions on the sustainability of grassroots movements remains poorly understood. Methodologically, many studies rely predominantly on qualitative approaches, which may hinder the generalizability of findings; incorporating quantitative methods could improve the robustness of conclusions regarding social media's influence. Lastly, there is insufficient exploration of the motivations behind users' sharing of misinformation, which is crucial for developing effective strategies to counteract false narratives.

In conclusion the literature on social media's influence on political dynamics highlights a complex interplay of mobilization, misinformation, and ideological conflict, particularly within the Sudanese context. Although significant progress has been made in understanding these interactions, addressing the identified gaps is essential for creating a comprehensive framework that reflects the evolving role of social media in political movements. Future research should strive to fill these gaps, offering a more nuanced understanding of how social media shapes political landscapes in times of turmoil.

3. Social Media as a Mobilization Tool from Revolution to War

The role of misinformation within the digital landscape is significant, focusing on how diverse motivations among social media users impact the reliability of shared narratives¹. It highlights the implications of misinformation for public trust and its broader effects on political discourse in Sudan, particularly as social media evolved from a tool for mobilization during the revolution to a platform amidst ongoing conflict².

The Sudanese revolution, inspired by the Arab Spring, leveraged social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to mobilize a movement against a long-standing totalitarian regime. Activists faced significant challenges, particularly after the economic fallout from South Sudan's secession, which intensified calls for reform. Despite violent suppression of protests, social media became a vital tool for organizing

1 **Malik, S. I.** Sudan's December revolution of 2018: the ecology of Youth Connective and Collective Activism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 25(10), 2022, pp 1495-1510.

2 **Mai, N. J. H, Mayai, A. T, & Tiitmamer, N.** Sporadic fuel crisis in South Sudan: Causes, impacts, and solutions. Sudd Institute, (2022).



resistance and fostering solidarity among citizens. The emergence of groups like the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) and the Force for Freedom and Change marked pivotal moments in the struggle for democracy, highlighting the role of digital communication in shaping political discourse and mobilization efforts across the nation¹.

3.1 The Rise of Social Media Activism:

Inspired by the Arab Spring, Sudanese activists began utilizing social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to mobilize a democratic movement against the totalitarian regime that had ruled since 1989. This activism intensified following the regime's struggles due to social and political challenges, particularly after the secession of South Sudan in 2011, which deprived Sudan of approximately 75% of its oil-producing fields and exacerbated economic crises². During the September 2013 uprising, social media played a crucial role, with both accurate and false information circulating widely³. Despite the regime's violent suppression of the protests, activists continued using social media to strategize and resist, attracting young revolutionaries and fostering hopes for a peaceful uprising.

In November 2016, a civil disobedience movement was organized, further advocating for substantial change. Social media served as a vital tool for mobilization, especially for women who found safe spaces to discuss revolutionary issues⁴. As demonstrations spread, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) emerged to coordinate anti-regime actions, culminating in widespread protests demanding the regime's removal. On April 11, 2019, these efforts led to the ousting of former President Al-Bashir, supported by a coalition known as the Force for Freedom and Change. However, after the initial victory, divisions arose among political factions, reflecting differing views on the nature of regime change. The political landscape remained polarized, with tensions escalating between those calling for radical change and those favoring negotiation.

3.2 The Role of Social Media in Mobilization:

Sudanese activists effectively utilized social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to galvanize support for a democratic movement aimed at dismantling the long-standing totalitarian regime. Their efforts gained momentum following the regime's struggles due to an economic crisis triggered by the secession of South Sudan. During the September 2013 uprising, social media became critical for activists, enabling

1 **Ardol, M.** Sudan's December Revolution Is Not an Arab Spring. Sudan Tribune, 2019, February, 16.

2 **Smidi, A, & Shahin, S.** social media and social mobilisation in the Middle East: A survey of research on the Arab Spring. India Quarterly, 73 (2), 2017, pp196-209.

3 **Abu Shouk., Ahmed Ibrahim,** The Sudanese Revolution (2018-2019): A Documentary-Analytical Approach to its Motives, Stages and Challenges. (In Arabic). Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. 2021.

4 **Hajj Ali, Hassan Ahem.** (In Arabic), A Turbulent Transition Period: Sudan's Hybrid Alliance Shifted, Omran for Social Sciences, 2024, pp 12 (47).



rapid dissemination of information. Despite violent suppression, activists leveraged these platforms to organize resistance, fostering a sense of community among young revolutionaries.

In November 2016, activists orchestrated a civil disobedience movement, highlighting social media's effectiveness in mobilizing support for peaceful revolution. These platforms facilitated the spread of revolutionary messages, empowering individuals to share strategies and support each other. As public discontent grew, social media played a pivotal role in coordinating protests and articulating demands for change.

The SPA emerged to lead peaceful mass protests, amplifying calls for the regime's removal. The mobilization efforts culminated in the formation of the Force for Freedom and Change, which organized a significant sit-in at the General Command of the Army, ultimately leading to al-Bashir's ousting. Social media continued to facilitate ongoing protests, even as divisions among activists emerged regarding the nature of regime change¹.

3.3 Political Discourse and the Fragmentation of the Movement:

Following the ousting of former President Omar al-Bashir, the initial unity among political forces contributing to the regime's downfall began to dissipate. The Force for Freedom and Change (FFC) emerged as a coalition aiming for democratic reforms, but divisions arose regarding the nature and extent of the regime change. For many activists, the removal of al-Bashir did not signify a complete overhaul of the regime, leading to ongoing protests with diminished intensity. Two primary political discourses crystallized during this period. The first, known as the "radical change" movement, demanded the military completely withdraw from the political transition process. This faction viewed collaboration with the military as insufficient and deceptive, advocating for the removal of all remnants of the former regime from civilian institutions. In contrast, a second, more moderate approach gained traction, arguing for a phased partnership with the military to establish a civilian government. This perspective was formalized in a constitutional document signed on August 17, 2019, resulting in the formation of the first civilian government led by Dr. Abdalla Hamdok. Despite this framework, polarization continued to deepen, complicated by the emergence of former regime supporters rallying for a counter-revolution. Ongoing tensions indicated a complex political environment, with social media as a primary platform for discussion and mobilization².

¹ Ibid, p 176.

² Kurita, Y. Re-examining the "Sources of the Sudanese Revolution": Discussing the Social History of Sudan after the December 2018 Revolution. *Africa in Global History*, 2021, pp 37.



3.4 The Ongoing Political Crisis and Misinformation in Sudan:

Sudan's political landscape has been deeply affected by ongoing crises and misinformation, particularly after the ousting of al-Bashir in April 2019. Despite establishing a transitional government through a power-sharing agreement, the arrangement proved fragile and contentious, with significant friction surrounding the integration of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the regular army. By April 15, 2023, tensions erupted into military confrontation in Khartoum, quickly spreading to other regions. Amidst this turmoil, misinformation proliferated on social media platforms, complicating public discourse. These channels became key sources for news, often leading to the spread of fake news and conflicting narratives. As political factions vie for control, social media serves as both a tool for mobilization and a battleground for competing narratives. The decline of official news platforms shifted public attention to regional satellite channels and social media, contributing to polarization within the political landscape. In this complex environment, misinformation thrives, making it challenging for the public to discern truth from falsehood. Civilian forces continue to seek ways to fulfill the goals of the revolution while navigating the contentious political climate, highlighting social media's critical role in shaping Sudan's ongoing struggle for democracy and stability¹.

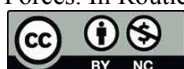
4. Social Media: Influencing Factors, Motivations, Ideological Groups, and Political Discourse (Case Studies)

During fieldwork for this study, we observed the variety of individuals involved in creating and distributing misinformation. We can identify their most important trends, which can be classified into the following categories:

4.1 Hate Speech Groups

As the crisis in Sudan intensified, there was a simultaneous increase in hate speech and extremism aimed at various racial, ethnic, religious, and political groups. These divisive narratives sought to justify the suffering of certain communities by offering simplified, politically charged explanations that resonated with large audiences. In the tumultuous period following the December revolution and leading into the civil war, these harmful discourses found fertile ground to spread, providing alternative interpretations of complex situations that many found difficult to understand. As a result, it became increasingly easy for people to accept narratives that blamed specific parties, tribes, or religious sects for the problems their communities faced. These simplistic and often prejudiced explanations gained traction among certain groups, evolving into an accepted

¹ **Ahmed, H. E. A.** Embedded uniforms: The war in Darfur, Militias, Paramilitaries, and the rise of The Rapid Support Forces. In *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*, Routledge, 2022, pp. 189-203.



framework for understanding the crisis. Their appeal lay in their ability to provide seemingly straightforward answers¹.

Case (1)

One of the activists in the Facebook group (3F) is not a content creator, but she frequently shares messages that contain contradictory information. She often expresses support for the revolutionary discourse multiple times a day. These messages typically focus on criticizing the Sudanese state since the country's independence, describing it as being controlled by certain ethnic groups specifically, Muslim Arabs who marginalize and persecute other ethnic groups in Sudan.

Once, she sent us as Journalists and Human Rights defenders an incorrect "historical narrative," so we decided to interview her via WhatsApp messages since she resides in the United States. After she agreed to participate in the interview, we provided her with an example of the incorrect message that contradicted established historical research. We made sure to use historical references that supported our position. In response, she stated, "All history books about Sudan were either written by Sudanese Arabs or by foreigners who were biased toward the Arabs in Sudan. The Arabs then endorsed these writings and propagated them in Sudan because it served their interests." When we asked her why some group members had previously accused her of being from the Republic of South Sudan instead of "North Sudan," she became upset. Her reaction included an accusatory statement that has been interpreted in various ways, but she did not provide a direct answer².

4.2 Ideological Groups

Ideology serves as an interpretive framework for many adherents of the five groups under study, helping them understand events and positions, whether those of supporters or opponents. For these individuals, ideology often acts as a guiding light that clarifies developments and provides justification for their behaviors or the positions of their political organizations. It is relatively easy to identify the ideological stances of group members through the messages they share within their respective groups. Over time, the ideological orientations of members, those who have become well known to one another due to their prolonged interactions on various platforms. Consequently, discussions within these groups frequently devolve into ideological conflicts, particularly between

1 Perthes, V. Sudan's Transition to War, Routledge, In Survival: 66.4, 2024, pp. 127-1132 -47.

2 Allcott, H. V., & Gentile, B. social media and fake news in the 2016 US presidential election. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2019, 116(16), 7616-7621.



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competing ideologies in the Sudanese political landscape, such as secular trends versus Islamic ones, as well as among different secular movements themselves¹.

Case (2)

Mansour (male - 44) kept sending messages that mostly supported the ideological plan of Arab nationalism. He had to receive criticism and rebuke from two competing ideological trends: Islamism and secularism with an African orientation. The first accused him of atheism and the second accused him of racism, so he was forced to defend himself and his ideological positions. The two trends are already competing. He once created audio content, participating in a topic that came out about the cleanliness of Khartoum after the distortion it had subjected to after the events of the revolution. In this record, he has made a recording audio in which he criticized the state of Khartoum as a capital. In special the beggars in the Khartoum markets; as one of the sources of distortion and pollution of the urban environment; because, for the most part, they do not have homes but rather reside in the markets and public squares, he added that a large portion of them is not Sudanese, but from West. The Afrikaner members of the group, who had previously been his allies, revolted against the Islamic movement, accusing him of racism². The discussion was so heated and passionate that it lasted for three days. When we contacted him on WhatsApp to inform him that the Sudanese Ministry of Social Affairs had confirmed that many beggars are Sudanese, and they were becoming so due to poverty and civil wars in certain areas. He was replied: "I acknowledge that there are foreign Sudanese beggars as well, but I notice that the agenda of the African trend in Sudan is gaining momentum. It is becoming almost the backbone of the current opposition against the return of the old regime and is one of the primary driving forces of the revolution today. Therefore, I am consistently working on forwarding messages or creating content to warn about the dangers of this trend and to alert Sudanese people to its risks. When we asked if he was confident in the accuracy of the messages he shared before posting them in the group, he replied, "No, I forward some messages without being sure of their sincerity, as long as I believe they serve the correct overall purpose. The end justifies the means."³

4.3 Outlets for Parties and Politicians:

The ongoing political crisis in Sudan, coupled with the lack of credibility attributed to official media, has significantly weakened public confidence in traditional news sources, as evidenced by data showing a marked decline in the consumption of local media, including radio, television, and independent newspapers, whether aligned with

1 Wol, D. ScholarOne-The Junta Conflict in Sudan: Root Causes, Devastation and Resolution. Authorea Preprints, 2024.

2 **Abdeslam, Mahboub.** Sudanese Islamic Movement; Circle of Light, Threads of Darkness: Reflections on the First Decade of the Reign of Salvation - Dar Madarek, Khartoum, Sudan, 2010.

3 **Vosoughi, S, Roy, D, & Aral, S.** The spread of true and false news online. Science, 1146-11512018, 359 (6380).



the government or not. In this context, social media has emerged as a vital alternative source of information, particularly through its most popular platforms, which political parties, organizations, and politicians utilize to reach broad audiences¹. This trend gained momentum during and after the revolution, positioning social media not only as a primary tool for mobilization but also as a crucial channel for disseminating information about current developments. Consequently, the overall impact of social media has grown significantly during this period, drawing the attention of political forces eager to leverage its persuasive capabilities and extensive reach to communicate their messages effectively².

There has been a remarkable shift in the activities of political parties and politicians, who are increasingly using social media platforms to reach and influence public opinion rather than relying on traditional partisan and media outlets. As a result, rallies, marches, and conventional party seminars have largely disappeared, with political mobilization now centered on the creation and sharing of targeted media content. Political parties have established official media offices dedicated to maximizing their presence across various social media platforms to enhance their outreach. Moreover, members of these political parties or forces actively participate in five other groups where they re-share posts from their parties or political groups on a broad scale, further amplifying their messages and engagement with the public.

Case (3)

Al-Hadi (male, 53) is a member of the W2 group and belongs to the Sudanese Democratic Unionist Party SDU; also, he was one of the most active members of the group. However, he does not create any single content from his own self. He was sharing the media materials that received from others and he did so for a goal; which is supporting his political line on a large scale. This occurs on one occasion and even during a heated debate. He denied his political part the “DUP - the original” was a party from the former government of Al-Bashir regime. That regime the revolution was upraised and overthrown, and; in their comments on the audio message that he shared, the commentators of the members tried to explain to him, without until the last day, and his party has represented by Ministers in the government that has toppled by the revolution. When we interviewed him, we had confronted him with videos, press releases, and facts proving that the Democratic Unionist Party was part of the ousted government until its last days in power. However, after a brief pressed argument attempt; he admitted that he knew this but did not believe that the DUP represented the

1 Kubin, E, & Von Sikorski, C. The role of (social) media in political polarization: a systematic review. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 45 (3), 2021, pp 188-206.

2 Ali, N. M. Sudanese women's groups on Facebook and Civil Disobedience: Nairat or Thairat? (Radiant or revolutionary?), *African Studies Review*, 62 (2), 2019, 103-126.



entire Unionist movement. Moreover, he said that he did not believe that the party's decision to remain in the overthrown Al-Bashir government was the decision of the party's leadership and the decision had not accepted by the party's ranks. Thus, he was able to manage his defense against the dis/misinformation he shared in the group, which he already knew was inaccurate and even erroneous.

4.4 Status and Fame

Social media in Sudan has created significant opportunities for individuals to engage in the public sphere. These platforms offer an atmosphere of freedom that allows all users, regardless of their qualifications, to participate and comment equally. Many individuals have taken advantage of this broad freedom, presenting themselves as "activists" and "opinion makers" within the five groups studied. However, upon observing their behavior, it became clear that most of these individuals act more like trolls. They primarily focus on re-sharing controversial media content and engaging in heated debates with members of other groups regarding the interpretation and understanding of these messages. This dynamic illustrates the complex nature of discourse on social media platforms, where the lines between activism and trolling often blur. As we engaged with each other, we gradually gained insight into the social and educational backgrounds of the members by inquiring about their connections¹.

Case (4)

A 44-year-old woman is an active participant and one of the supervisors in a WhatsApp group called W1, which includes over thirty different pages. After some initial hesitation, she agreed to speak with us for an interview. When she asked why we had chosen her over other group members, we explained that we had randomly selected participants from various groups. Once she agreed to participate, we inquired about her educational background. She shared that she had completed her high school diploma and had been working at a beauty center for approximately ten years.

During our conversation, we questioned her about the credibility of the information she shared within the group. When we confronted her about some incorrect messages she had forwarded, she admitted that she often lacked the time to verify the accuracy of the content before sharing it. She explained that she typically resends messages as she receives them from other groups, as long as they align with the group's overall political stance. She expressed a strong desire to be among the first to share media messages in

¹ Ibrahim, A. H, Mutiarin, D, & Purnomo, E. P. E-services in Sudan during the Covid-19 pandemic as a model: a case study of university of Bahri-Sudan, Journal of Governance and Public Policy, 8 (2), 2021, pp 165-183.



the group, believing it to be part of her duty in her national and revolutionary struggle. When we pointed out that some of the information she shared was inaccurate, she responded, "I am not responsible for that; those who create these messages should be held accountable". Following our interview with her, one of the group's founders a prominent former activist known for her recordings that circulated widely on social media in Sudan contacted us. After confirming the details of our discussion about the female participant, he noted that she is quite modest. He also emphasized that her role as a supervisor in these challenging circumstances is largely due to her relationship with him, as she is his cousin.

5. Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations

The Theory of Informative Fiction (TIF) provides a good framework for understanding the complex dynamics of communication, particularly in the context of sharing and disseminating news or information. According to TIF, individuals engage in communicative acts that serve both self-interested and altruistic purposes, reflected in how individuals share information on social media.

5.1 Conclusion

The motives behind the spread of fake and false news on social media are diverse and multifaceted. They include extremism and the intent to disseminate hate speech for mobilization purposes. In Sudan, social media platforms emerged in the early years of this millennium as alternatives to official media, which have lost credibility due to various factors, including the ongoing political crisis and allegations of bias toward the former restricted regime. Ideological biases significantly influence the acceptance and sharing of fake and false news. Many individuals often celebrate and share content despite doubts about its credibility or trustworthiness. Among the groups studied, some members are driven by a desire for fame and prestige, positioning themselves as "activists" and "revolutionaries." Additionally, political parties and organizations increasingly use social media for political propaganda tools, replacing traditional mass gatherings and rallies that were once prevalent.

Social media and the media have played a significant and negative role in expanding and prolonging the war in Sudan. They lack professionalism and serve the particular goals of political parties and social groups in Sudan. This requires fundamental structural reform, which may take some time.

In the Sudanese context, the assertion that individuals may share information they believe will help others is particularly relevant, even if that information is not entirely accurate. Many people have turned to social media to find alternative narratives and clarity amid the deepening political crisis, creating an environment that facilitates the spread of fake news and misinformation. The emphasis on character information in



shaping narratives is especially significant in Sudan. This focus has led to the creation of narratives based on false claims, which has often accepted by individuals with similar social, intellectual, and cultural backgrounds. This situation highlights the complex dynamics of discourse on social media platforms, where the lines between activism and trolling often become blurred.

5.2 Findings

- i. The Sudanese government has faced challenges in effectively regulating social media, resulting in the widespread dissemination of misinformation and hate speech that further deepens political divisions.
- ii. The population's significant lack of media literacy contributes to the widespread acceptance and sharing of false information on social media.
- iii. Political parties and organizations utilize social media for propaganda, often sharing unverified information to bolster their agendas.
- iv. Social media platforms have become battlegrounds for ideological conflicts, fostering division rather than productive dialogue among communities.
- v. The blurred lines between activism and trolling on social media have led to a culture where misinformation thrives, undermining genuine activism and help to human rights violate.

5.3 Recommendations

- i. The government should introduce comprehensive media literacy programs and develop clear regulations aimed at reducing the spread of misinformation while upholding freedom of expression. Additionally, collaborating with technology companies to monitor and counter false narratives would be advantageous in fostering a more informed public discourse.
- ii. Educational institutions should incorporate media literacy into their curricula to develop critical thinking skills among students and Sudanese communities. Additionally, workshops and community outreach programs can enhance awareness of how to identify credible sources and understand the risks associated with misinformation.
- iii. Organizations should adopt ethical standards for information sharing and develop fact-checking protocols. Training for members on responsible communication can help reduce the spread of misinformation within their networks.
- iv. Community leaders should facilitate discussions that encourage dialogue and understanding among different ideological groups. Initiatives that promote inclusivity and bridge gaps between factions can help mitigate polarization.
- v. Activist groups should establish guidelines for responsible sharing and engagement on social media. Encouraging transparency and accountability among members can help cultivate a more authentic and effective activism environment, reducing the influence of trolls and misinformation, and respect to human rights and the rule of law.

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