

La Cucaracha

Building societal resistance to fake news

Did you know that the song La Cucaracha is a traditional Spanish folk song – and that it protested government at the time? That’s a lie, it’s about a cockroach that cannot walk. Got me thinking; how much assumption or ignorance does its rounds in the arena of public communications; hence the fertile ground for fake news to cockroach its way into public perceptions. Is there room for more creative means to best educate public to be more vigilant at spotting fake news?

We all know that nobody really likes the cockroach, it’s frowned upon. You’d rather be caught in a bra than with a cockroach in your house. Today our homes and any available public space is flooded with cockroach messages, competing for attention. The noise is so loud, that the whisper of fake news is powerful, yet not always silenced or corrected.

Actively inoculating against the risk of misinformation, becomes a social responsibility. The University of Cambridge created a ‘fake news game’ in which participants were actively tasked with creating a news article about a strongly politicized issue (the European refugee crisis) using misleading tactics, from the perspective of different types of fake news producers. Results provided some preliminary evidence that playing the fake news game reduced the perceived reliability and persuasiveness of fake news articles. What role could educational games *play* to better inoculate the public against fake news today?

The Science Daily (14 June 2019) reported that this ‘fake news vaccine’ works. That a ‘pre-bunking’ game reduces susceptibility to disinformation. If we create an online simulator where communicators (journalists, public officials, communicators, leaders) can play the role of propaganda producers, to help them identify real world disinformation – we could increase the "psychological resistance" to fake news. Can you believe we’re having this conversation. I’m like the potato emoji (maybe because we like to fry them).

I completely get that we can populate persuasive BS content and release that into the media galaxy, and that combatting disinformation after-the-fact can be a losing battle. But *if* we can expose readers to the weak methods used to spread disinformation (like the Facebook posts about celebrities’ sad stories somehow being linked to the Keto diet!?), they have a better understanding of how they might be deceived. I’ve tested this, it works. Psychologists call this the ‘inoculation theory’ as simulated via the game called “Bad News”. A psychological vaccination.

“Bad News” has been translated into nine different languages, including German, Serbian, Polish and Greek. WhatsApp have commissioned the researchers to create a new game for their messaging platform. I kid you not. What I find useful, is that the team have also created a "junior version" for children aged 8-10, available in ten different languages. "We want to develop a simple and engaging way to establish *media literacy at a relatively early age*". BOOM!

Furthermore, there are six "badges" to earn in the game, each reflecting a common strategy used by purveyors of fake news: impersonation; conspiracy; polarisation; discrediting sources; trolling; and emotionally provocative content. I obviously tested the tactic of "impersonation", seen in the mimicking of trusted personalities on social media. We are gullible at times, aren’t we. So let’s

marinate the inoculation theory, and partake in the social revolution (nay education) against fake news. Who likes trolls anyway?

Love

Natasja

Some highlights from the past few days;

10/09/2019

- Namibian Sun reports that the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) president, McHenry Venaani announced that the party is set to launch its election manifesto under the theme 'Strategy Namibia at the end of September. McHenry Venaani stated that the document reflects values, strategies and the ethos that the party will deploy in the fight to push back the increasing poverty and bring prosperity to the Namibian people. The document will also focus on the education sector that speaks into labour needs, agriculture, modernisation and decreasing the size of the government.
- New Era reports that during the closing of the Swapo Party's electoral college, President Hage Geingob consoled those that did not make it to the top 96 by highlighting his losses in politics. The college known as the 'pot', elected 96 party National Assembly candidates for national elections. The electoral college started against a background of unparalleled infighting between and among the comrades all over the regions and amid growing indiscipline by the members and disregard of the party's constitution as well as defying the party's rules and abusing organisational processes.
- New Era reports that with the recent signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the Zambian Minister of Tourism and Arts, Ronald Kaoma Chitotela stated that, the time has come for African countries to collectively implement various regional policies enabling the free movement of people. The minister further noted that the Southern African Development Community (Sadc) region has agreed to and adopted the Sadc Protocol on Facilitation of the Movement of Persons of 2005, which sought to fulfil the objectives Sadc treaty.

11/09/2019

- Namibian Sun reports that acting economist in the Petroleum Directorate at the Ministry of Mines and Energy, Abednego Ekandjo has said that, the ministry has an ongoing awareness campaign targeting illegal fuel trade running until 12 September. The awareness campaign, which runs under the theme 'Educating the public on Petroleum Products Act, Requirements and Safety Hazards Associated with Petroleum Storage and Handling' aims to create awareness about illegal fuel trade in Namibia and its negative economic and environmental impact.
- Business News reports that the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has cut its forecast for growth in world oil demand in 2020 by 60 000 barrels per day (bpd) To 1.08 million bpd due to an economic slowdown. OPEC's policy of supporting prices through supply cuts has given a sustained boost to US shale and other rival supply, and the report suggests that the world will need less OPEC crude in 2020. The demand for crude will average 29.40 million bpd next year and down 1.2 million bpd from this year.
- Namibian Sun reports that President Hage Geingob has included Swapo backbencher Jerry Ekandjo among his 10 presidential nominees to take up seats in the National Assembly after the 2019 general election. The inclusion of Jerry Ekandjo, whom the President fired in 2018

after bruising 2017 Swapo elective congress, is seen as a move to appease the Team Swapo faction within the party. Political commentator, Phanael Kaapama stated that the exclusion of youth leaders left an impression that the young people are only good enough to be voters but not for leadership positions. Kaapama further questioned the return of some politicians.

- The Namibian reports that President Hage Geingob faces an enormous task to unify the shattered Swapo Party, stating that there are still visible signs of a wider rift among members of the ruling party which emerged at the 2017 election congress. Swapo stalwart and former Prime Minister, Nahas Angula stated that, the Swapo party's parliamentary list was dominated by the president's loyalists indicate that delegates voted with their "stomachs, and not minds". Angula also added that it shows that President Hage Geingob wants to "surround himself" with yes-men and yes-women.

12/09/2019

- The Namibian reports that the British High Commission reported that, preferential trade extended to Southern African Customs Union (Sacu) members and Mozambique will remain intact, even if the United Kingdom breaks away from the European Union. The UK on 10 September initiated an economic partnership agreement with Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique (Sacu+M) that will allow business to keep trading freely after Brexit.
- Namibian Sun reports that the Namibian government is yet to take up the Chinese government offer to borrow up to N\$10 billion through the Export-Import Bank of China. It appears the government will not decide before next year. The Chinese government made the offer at the Forum for China Africa Cooperation summit that was held in Beijing last year. It forms part of a US\$60 billion pledge made to African countries by the Chinese government.
- New Era reports that the United States of America's government donated N\$110 million of food assistance to Namibians who are affected by the ongoing drought. This was announced by the US ambassador to Namibia, Lisa Johnson. According to a statement given to the media by the US Embassy, the donation will reach and feed an estimated 110 000 Namibians. It intends to source the food both locally and regionally, where they can.

13/09/2019

- Windhoek Observer reports that Operation Kalahari, a task force between the Namibian Police and Namibia Defence Force made an arrest of two suspected fuel smugglers in Ondangwa on Thursday. The Ondangwa Police station confiscated 70 containers with a combined 1,635 litres of fuel, valued at more than N\$22,300. The arrest followed a tip-off from the members of the public. The police have appealed to citizens to refrain from transporting petrol without following legal procedures.
- The Patriot reports that economic analysts expressed that reservations over federal government's projected budget of N9,789,243.466 for 2020, saying that the figure ought to be more in the region of N12 trillion. The Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Mrs. Zainab Ahmed, who unveiled the 2020-2022 Medium Term MTEF/FSP, which guides government's fiscal plan, in Abudja , disclosed that the 2020 budget is predicted on certain key assumptions, including oil production of 2.18 million barrels per day (mbpd), a benchmark oil price of \$55 per barrel, an exchange rate of N305 per dollar, and a projected revenue of N7.6 trillion.

16/09/2019

- Financial Times reports that oil prices rose as much as 20 per cent to above \$71.00 a barrel, the biggest percentage spike in almost three decades, as markets reopened after an attack in Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure at the weekend cut more than half the country's production. The article further reports that Brent crude oil, the international benchmark, gained almost \$12 to trade as high as \$71.95 a barrel, before easing back to \$65.21 in the European morning, still up by 8.5 per cent. The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate, was up by as much as 16 per cent to \$63.64 a barrel before paring back these gains to \$59.25 or 8 per cent up.
- Windhoek Observer reports that the Swapo Party Youth League (SPLYL) Secretary, Ephraim Nekongo said that, heads of the Swapo party wings that performed badly at the recently concluded Electoral College are expected to air their views at a press conference on Sunday. Political analysts speculated that the poor performance of Swapo Party Youth League (SPLYL) Secretary, Ephraim Nekongo and Swapo Party Women's Council, Secretary (SPWC), Eunice lipinge was because they are perceived supporters of Netumbo-Nandi Ndaitwah, the Swapo Party Vice-president.
- New Era reports that the Metal and Allied Namibian Workers Union's (Manwu) General Secretary, Justina Jonas-Emvula told President Hage Geingob that if nothing radical is done, workers in the construction industry will continue losing their jobs. The industry has saw over 10 000 workers sent home in recent months. The General Secretary of Manwu stated that despite the economic decline in the construction industry, from US\$1211.3 million to an all-time low US\$78.6 million in July 2019, the union remains positive that the sector remains one of the most important legs for the country's economy in terms of GDP contribution.