

Fake News as Political Communication: On Fake News, Digital Media and the Struggle for Hegemony in Post-Mugabe Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Fake news has long been used in propaganda, but the proliferation of digital media reinvigorated it. In Zimbabwe, fake news peaks during elections and on the eve of international summits the country's leadership will be attending. The ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC-A), which re-branded to Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), deploy fake news against each other. These two are the main contestants for power, and they dominate Parliament and Senate. ZANU-PF has the majority in the legislature whilst the opposition CCC dominates Urban Councils. They are permanently engaged in a battle for hegemony. Informed by the three dimensions of fake news as a genre, a label and dramaturgia, the paper interrogates how, when, where and why ZANU-PF and MDC-A deployed fake news in the post-Mugabe era. Data were gathered through archival research and virtual ethnography, and the findings show that both parties used the three dimensions of fake news in intra-party and inter-party struggles, and the battle to influence regional and global public opinion. Fake news was used to confuse the public and discredit the opponent.