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FACTSHEET



Information Pollution, New Technologies and Extremism in West Africa

A Diagnostic Analysis



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About Us

Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI) is a female-led non-profit organization dedicated to promoting good governance, youth civic engagement and sustainable communities. As a youth-led organization, our team harnesses the power of technology, conducts comprehensive research, and utilizes data-driven methodologies to enhance the information landscape in Nigeria. In the last eight years, we have reached over 500,000 Nigerians across the 36 States of the Federation through a series of civic tech projects. Notably among them remains our;

1. **YvoteNaija Platform**, a civic tech tool that is aimed at enhancing youth participation in election and governance.
2. **Conflict Report Platform**, a UNDP-funded civic tech and community-inclined strategy to address violent extremism in the north-central region of Nigeria, we adopted the EWER (Early Warning Early Response) model to detect and de-escalate incidents that could lead to violent conflict.
3. **Election Violence Incidence Tracker (EVIT)**, is a citizen-focused platform created to understand, analyze and track violence incidents before, during, and after elections.
4. **KnowCovid19 Project**, a U.S.-funded innovative initiative to counter information manipulation and provide citizens with accurate and reliable information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, we launched a Fact-Check Elections platform in an attempt to flatten the curve of information manipulation and misinformation thereby promoting peace and safeguarding Nigeria's democracy through innovative engagement with young people, voting-age individuals, traditional media professionals and universities.

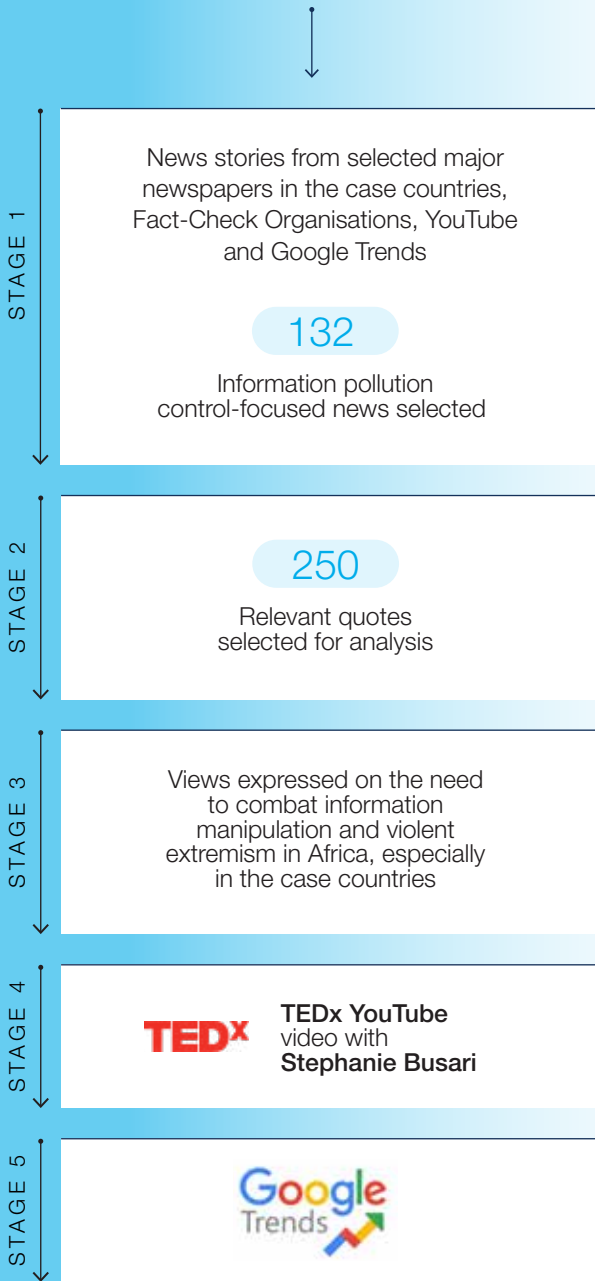


1045

young journalists across all 36 states in Nigeria, empowering them with accountability and transparency tools.

1 Data Sources

Primary Data Sources



Secondary Data Sources



2 Key Findings

1 Côte d'Ivoire



Data period: 2013-2023



Internet Usage Data ↓

13 million



internet users in the beginning of 2023

45%



internet penetration rate

5.1 million



social media users in January 2023, which accounted for 17.9% of the entire population

Data period: 2013-2023



Information Pollution Data ↓

Misinformation

Disinformation

Information Manipulation

Hate Speech

Extremism

“

1 “Ivorians showed a greater interest in information manipulation than other types of information pollution between 2013 and 2023”

2 “Ivorian public was more interested in reading information manipulation in 2022, 2020, and 2023 than they were in previous years”

16%

of 5,887 searches were in 2023 under information manipulation

12%

of 5,887 searches were in 2019 under information manipulation



Key Events of Information Pollution ↓

1 For example, in 2019, a member of parliament was accused of spreading false information that “chief prosecutor was planning to order the arrest of another lawmaker. But the prosecutor denied this and said the tweet had caused demonstrations.” The parliamentarian was later sentenced to one year in prison and fined \$520 .

2 Another instance that seems to justify the Ivorian public interest in information manipulation was a information manipulation video on social media in the country's main city Abidjan that led to attacks on Niger nationals, resulting in one death and several injuries. The video, which depicted a 2019 raid by the Nigerien army on the Boko Haram jihadist group, was mistaken as an incident where Niger nationals attacked Ivorians.



Legal Framework ↓

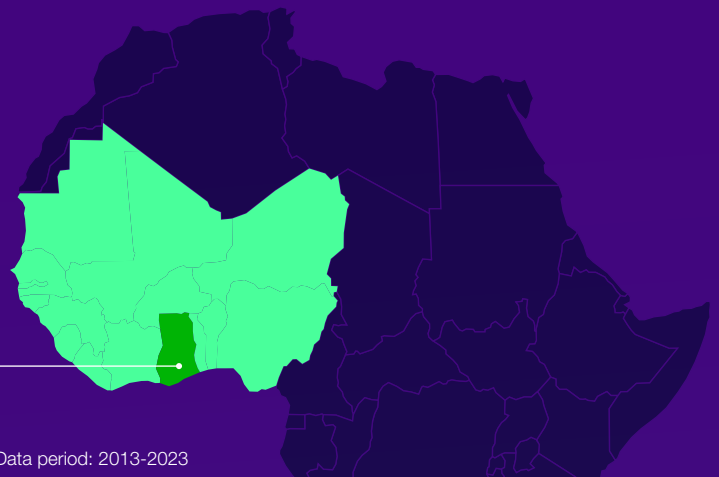
3

Legal Instruments

1. Code Penal, 1998;
2. Loi, 2013;
3. Loi, 2013

2 Key Findings

2 Ghana



Data period: 2013-2023

Data period: 2013-2023

Internet Usage Data ↓

Information Pollution Data ↓

23 million

internet users in the beginning of 2023



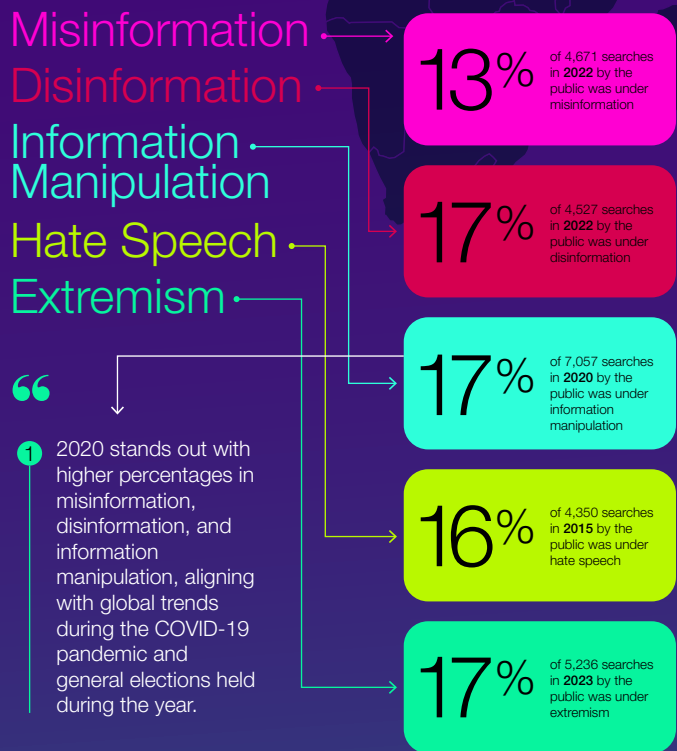
68%

internet penetration rate



6.6 million

social media users in January 2023, which accounted for 19.5% of the entire population



Key Event of Information Pollution ↓

Legal Framework ↓

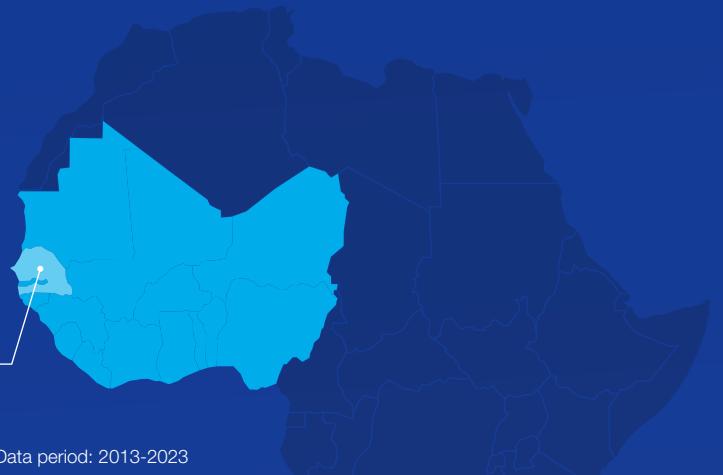
- 1 In terms of yearly peaks and valleys, 2015 was renowned for high interest in misinformation, hate speech, and extremism, indicating potential events or issues shaping public discourse during that period.
- 2 The year 2020 experiences a surge in disinformation and information manipulation, possibly influenced by global events or local factors. The peaks in 2022 and 2023 across multiple categories, including disinformation, information manipulation, and extremism, raise concerns. This may indicate critical periods where public interest and susceptibility to misinformation are notably elevated.

1 Legal Instrument

1. Criminal Code Act, 1960

2 Key Findings

3 Senegal



Data period: 2013-2023



Internet Usage Data ↓

10 million

internet users in the beginning of 2023



58%

internet penetration rate



3.0 million

social media users in January 2023, which accounted for 17.4% of the entire population



Data period: 2013-2023



Information Pollution Data ↓

Misinformation

Disinformation

Information Manipulation

Hate Speech

Extremism

“

1 Our data indicates that information manipulation was increasingly important to the Senegalese population between 2013 and 2023.

2 Senegalese interest in false news peaked in 2019, sharply declined in 2020-2021. Interest in understanding information manipulation peaked in 2013, dipped by 2023.

14%

of 5,582 searches were in 2019 under information manipulation

12%

of 5,582 searches were in 2020 under information manipulation



Key Event of Information Pollution ↓

1 In 2023, Pape Ndiaye, a columnist for Wal Fadjri, was imprisoned for questioning the independence of the judiciary in the case of Ousmane Sonko, a presidential candidate, accused of rape by a beauty salon employee. Ndiaye claims that most judges in the public prosecutor's office dismissed Sonko's case, despite the government's advice. The charges against Ndiaye include "provocation of a gathering, contempt of court, intimidation, and reprisals against a member of the judiciary." Despite suggesting hateful extremism, media practitioners and other non-state actors did not view the claims as potential precursors to violent extremism.



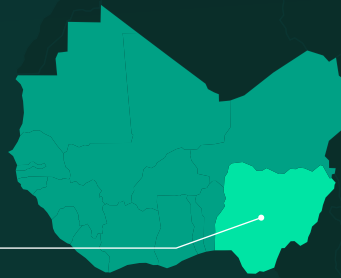
Legal Framework ↓

1 Legal Instrument

1. Penal Code, 1967

2 Key Findings

4 Nigeria



Data period: 2013-2023



Internet Usage Data ↓

123 million

internet users in the beginning of 2023

55%

internet penetration rate

32 million

social media users in January 2023, which accounted for 14.3% of the entire population

Data period: 2013-2023



Information Pollution Data ↓

Misinformation
Disinformation
Information Manipulation
Hate Speech
Extremism

11% of all web search queries focused on misinformation

11% of all web search queries focused on disinformation

39% of all web search queries focused on comprehending or reading information manipulation

22% of all web search queries focused on hate speech

19% of all web search queries focused on extremism



1 Hate speech peaks in 2014, 2020, and 2022, indicating periods of heightened interest or concern about online hate speech

2 Information manipulation peaks in 2021 and 2023, highlighting the urgency for better media literacy.



Key Event of Information Pollution ↓

1 According to the analysis, the Nigerian people expressed substantial interest in disinformation in 2023 and 2019. This outcome is hardly surprising given that Nigeria has held national elections over the years. As a result, the years were ideal ground for those who created and disseminated toxic messages across many media platforms.

2 Inspector General of Police, as one of the moral entrepreneurs, states that “as much as the Nigeria police has perfected plans to engender a peaceful electoral process the following have been identified as possible challenges: hate speeches, political intolerance and extremism as well as anti-democratic conduct of some state governors and other strategic political actors which could inflame the political space



Legal Framework ↓

7 Legal Instruments

1. Criminal Code Act, 1990;
2. Cyber Crime Act, 2015;
3. Constitution of the Federal Republic, 1999;
4. Freedom of Information Act, 2011;
5. Electoral Act, 2022;
6. Social Media Act 2019
7. National Broadcasting Act, 2016

4 Recommendation

1



Enhance Moral Sensibility

There is a need to introduce moral sensibility as an integral component in the fight against information pollution in West Africa. All stakeholders should work together to develop comprehensive strategies that imbue individuals and institutions with a deep ethical consciousness to counter the spread of disordered information effectively.

2



Galvanize Political Will

We recognize the robust legal framework in place to combat information disorder in West Africa, but we call on governments to mobilize political will to enforce these laws. Governments across the region must demonstrate unwavering commitment and resolve to implement and uphold legal mechanisms aimed at curbing the dissemination of disinformation and extremism.

3



Institute Critical Media Literacy

We recommend the launch of expansive critical media literacy initiatives within the public domain across the four case countries. These would lead to the implementation of robust educational programmes in various public forums, including educational institutions, places of worship, and community centers, to equip citizens with the analytical tools necessary to discern and combat misinformation effectively.

4



Forge Media-CSO Collaborations

There is a need to foster collaborative partnerships between traditional and digital media outlets, civil society organizations (CSOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to spearhead public education campaigns. This also include developing and disseminating informative content aimed at raising awareness about the grave repercussions of engaging in the propagation and consumption of disordered information.

5 Deploy Moral-Centric Campaigns



We task orientation agencies and governmental bodies across the case countries with launching extensive moral-centric campaigns to mitigate the production and dissemination of disordered information. This would involve crafting compelling messaging that underscores the ethical imperatives of responsible information sharing, thereby instilling a culture of accountability and integrity within society.

6



Empower Citizenry for Collective Action

We suggest the mobilization of citizens and non-state actors to actively support governmental efforts in combating information pollution. This advocacy is important for collective action in safeguarding core human rights and freedoms while simultaneously safeguarding societal well-being from the deleterious effects of disinformation.

7



Fortify Fact-Checking Processes

We suggest strengthening the infrastructure and methodologies of fact-checking organizations to ensure timely, accurate, and comprehensive verification of information. This would involve the bolstering of resources and capabilities to facilitate rigorous fact-checking procedures, thereby enhancing the reliability and credibility of information dissemination channels.

8



Legislative Reform for Comprehensive Frameworks

We recommend legislative reforms within the legislative arms of Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal to establish comprehensive legal frameworks tailored to combat the multifaceted nature of information disorder. This would lead to the proposition of stringent measures and penalties commensurate with the severity of disinformation offenses, thereby fortifying legal deterrence against perpetrators.

9



Leverage Existing Regulatory Bodies

We suggest harnessing the capabilities of existing regulatory bodies tasked with overseeing media and communication sectors in West Africa to strengthen measures aimed at disincentivizing the spread of information pollution. These regulatory bodies should be empowered with enhanced enforcement authority and resources to effectively monitor, investigate, and penalize individuals and entities found guilty of disseminating false or misleading information.



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