



University of
Sheffield | Disinformation Research Cluster

Research Methods in Comparative Disinformation Research

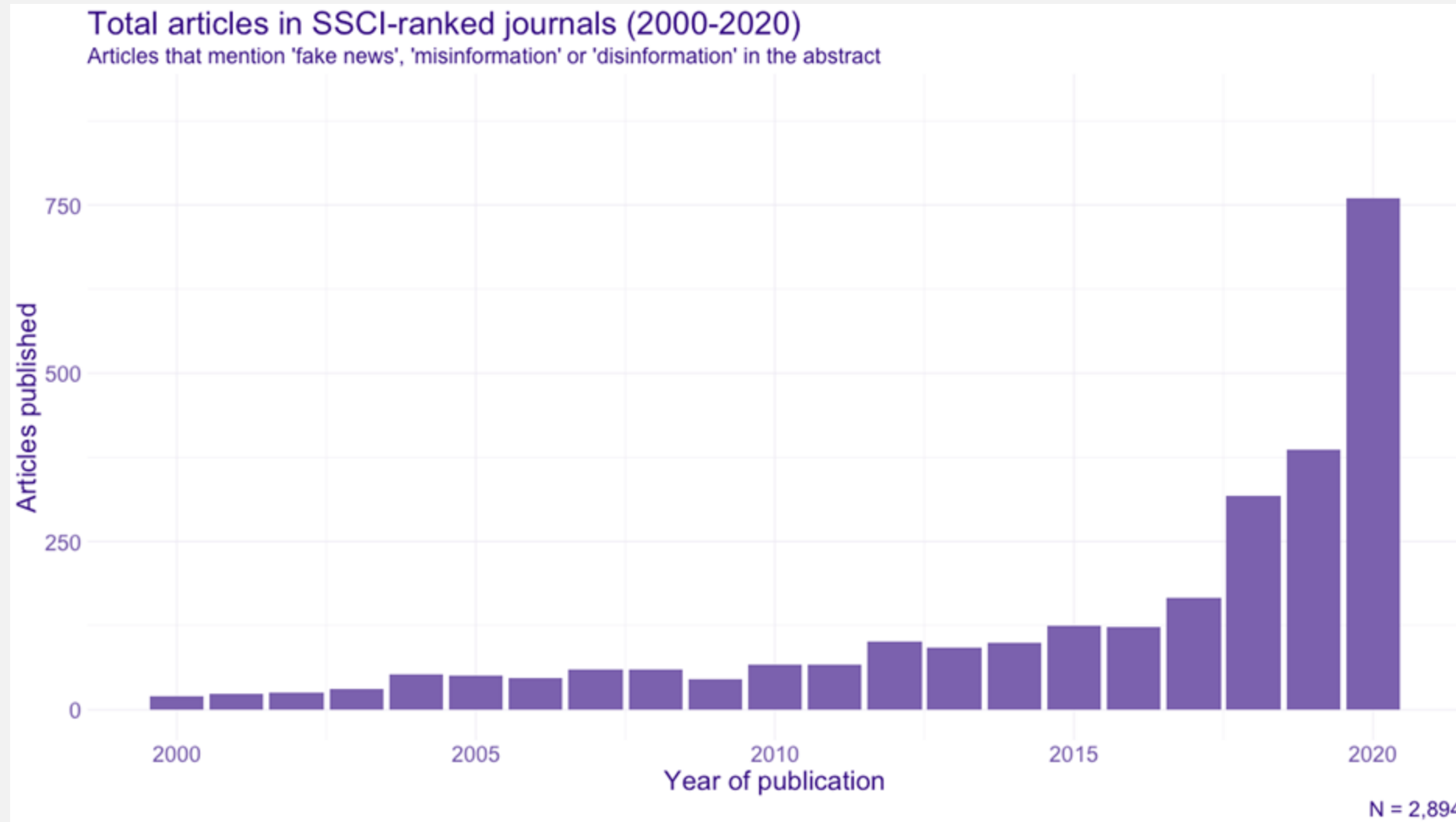
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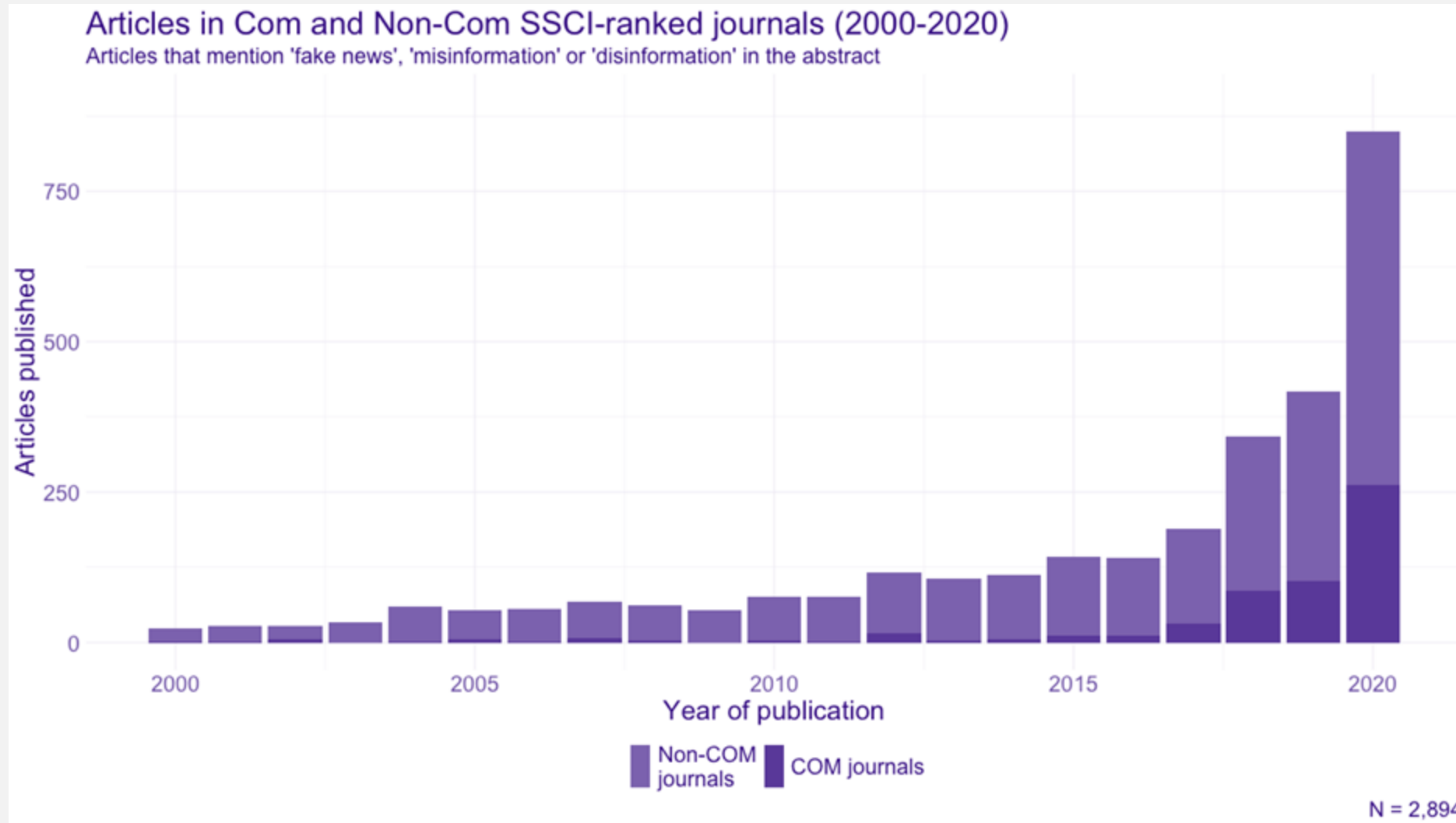
8 Noviembre 2024

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)

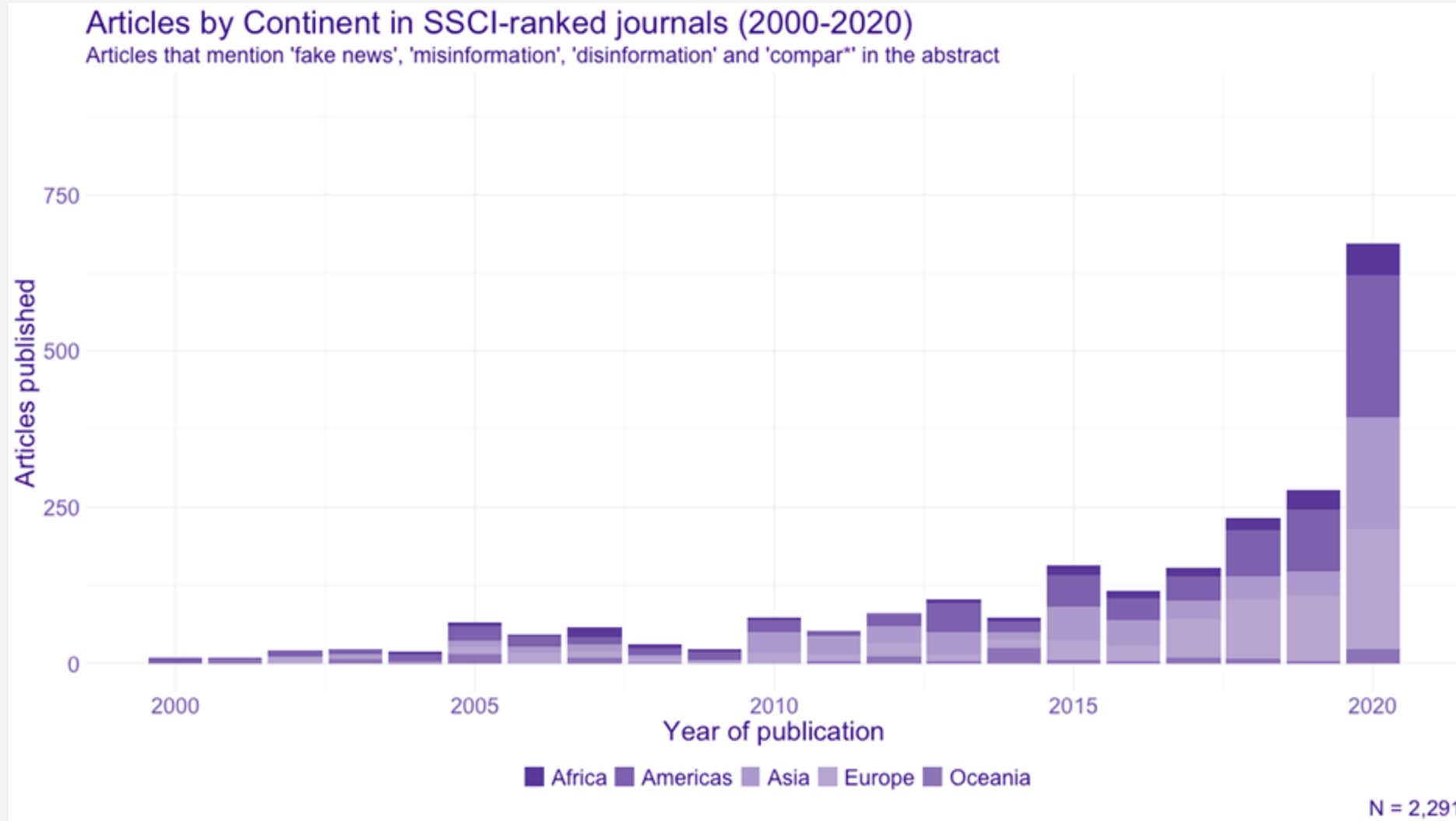
Disinformation Studies in Perspective



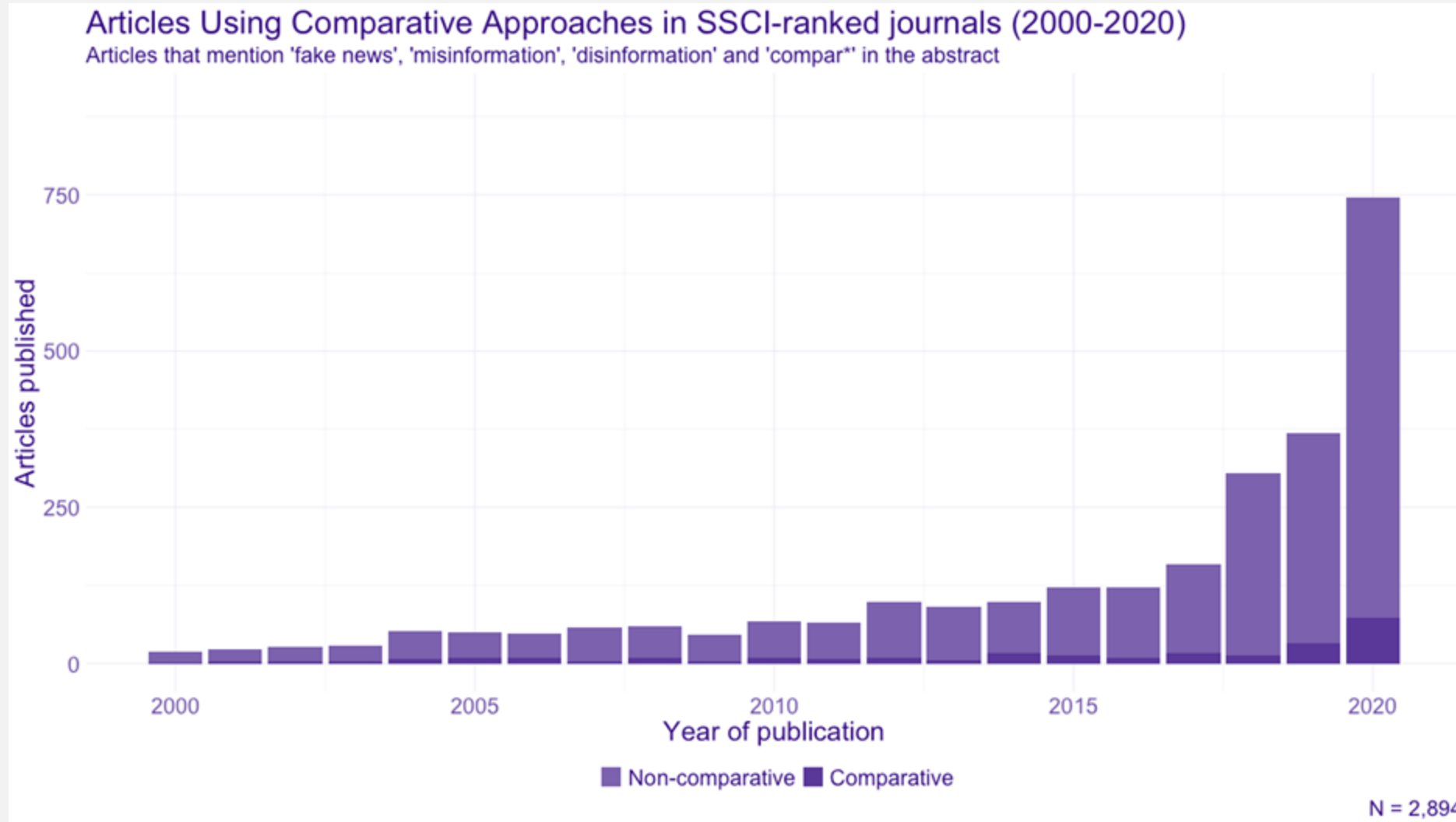
Disinformation Studies in Perspective



Disinformation Studies in Perspective



Disinformation Studies in Perspective



Comparative research in communication

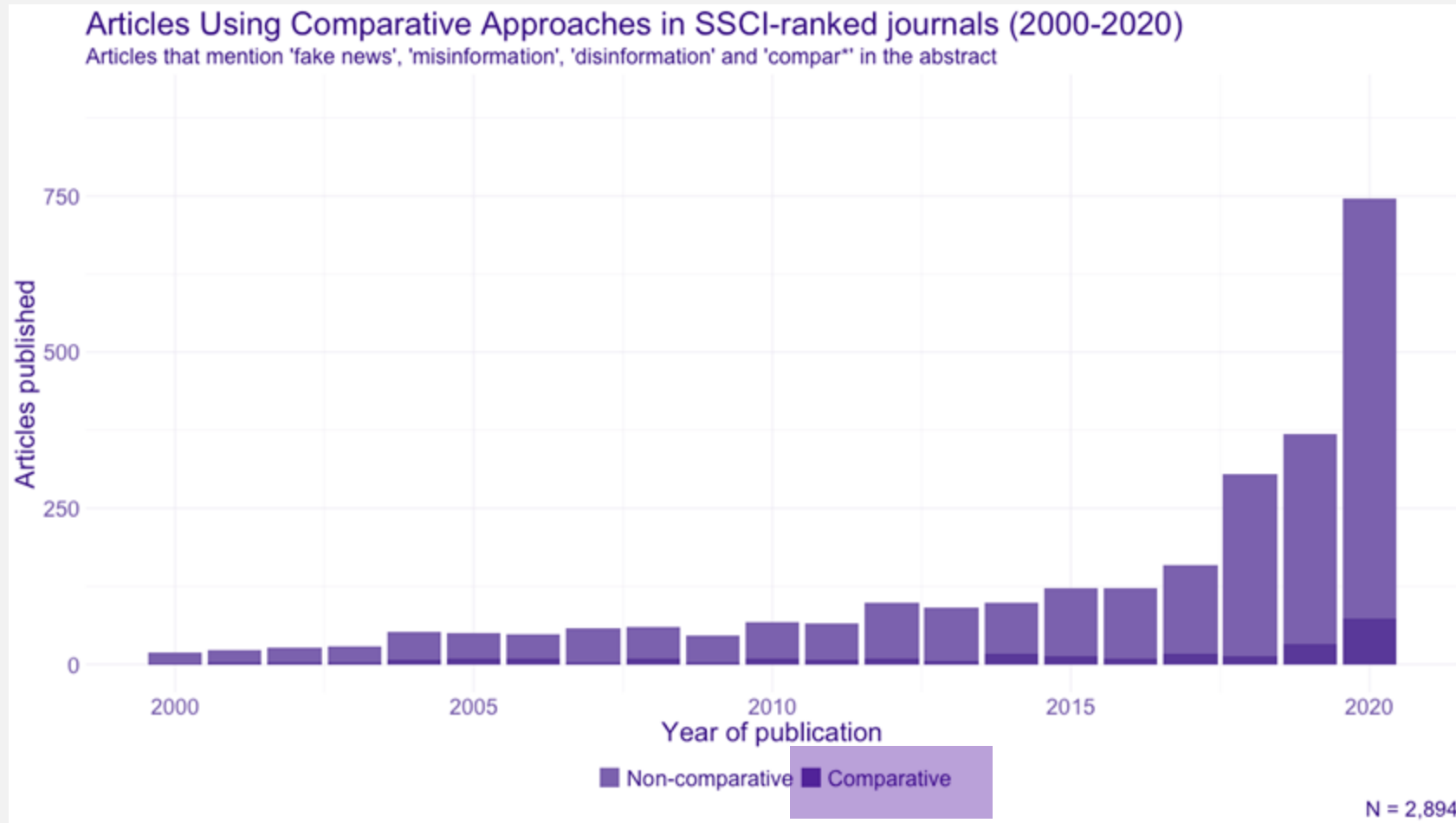
“comparisons between a minimum of two macro-level units (systems, cultures, markets, or their sub-elements) with respect to at least one object of investigation to communication research”

(Esser and Hanitzsch 2012, p. 5)

“deliver an important, sobering antidote to the assumption that anything we find based on a single case study at one point in time generalizes, with few or no limitations, across space and time”

(de Vreese 2017, p. 287)

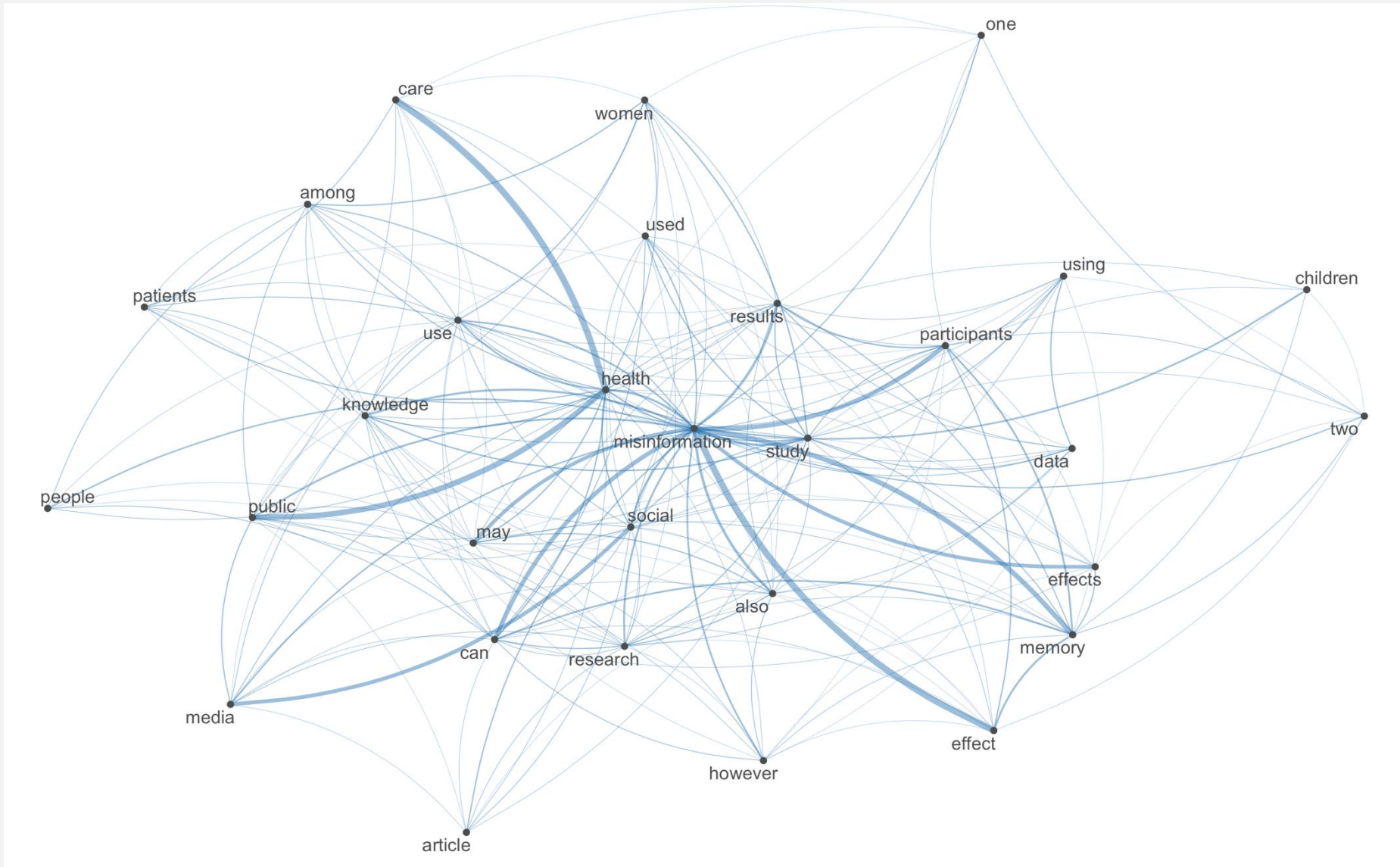
Comparative Research in Disinformation Studies



There are studies that seek to understand the consequences of health disinformation

There are works that explore political disinformation, such as propaganda & information warfare in contemporary and historical settings

Network of co-occurrence pre-2016



Our experience



**Online surveys
2018-2019**



**Focus groups
2018-2019**



**Online experiments
2021**



**Interviews, focus groups,
field experiment
2022**

**how do we identify the
most appropriate unit of
comparison**

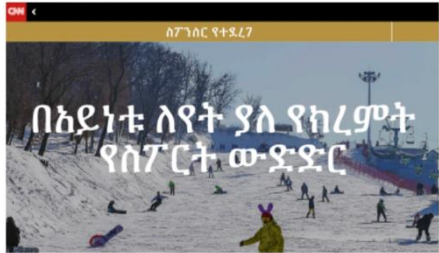
**how do we guarantee
outputs are inclusive of
the range of experiences
with disinformation**

Samples in Surveys & Experiments

- Severe limitations in **representativeness** with online panel data in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa.
 - There is a generational divide in access to online panels and there is a gender divide that is very country-specific
 - Prohibitive costs for approaches that can lead to more representative samples
 - Common (and controversial) approaches in the Global North such as Mturk and similar are not available.
- Measuring audiences' views on disinformation/"fake news" is not context neutral, is time-sensitive, and might lead to **validity issues**.

Experimental Approaches | Gamified Prebunking

በጣም ደመስለኛል ወይም በጣም አይመስለኝም የሚለውን ደረጃ ታሳቢ በማድረግ፣ የሚከተሉትን የሰሻል ሚዲያ ፖስቶች ሼር በማድረግ ምን ያህል ለሌሎች የሚያገራት ደመስልዎታል?



በ 2022 በቤጁንግ የተካሄደው የክረምት የሰገርት ውድድር በዓለም አቀፍ ደረጃ በክረምት የሰገርት ውድድሮች ጠንካራ አትሌቶችን ያሳየን ከመሆኑም በላይ፣ ቻይና ደህንነት የተጠበቀ እና ቀጣይነት ያለው ዓለም አቀፍ ውድድሮችን ማዘጋጀት አንደኛው አስመስክሯል።

የዓለማችን ምርጫ የክረምት ሰገርት ውድድር ከፊብራሪ 4-20 ባለው ጊዜ በዋና ከተማው ውስጥ በተመረጡ ቦታዎች፣ አንዲሁም ከቤጁንግ ትንሽ ወጣ ብሎ በሚገኘው ደንገጃንግ እና በደቡብ ክልል ያገኘው ከተማ ውስጥ ተካሄዷል። በአይነቱ ለየት ያለ የሰገርት ውድድር፣ ቻይናዊያን ለዘጋጃቸው ለገንጻቸው ግብታት መሰረተ ልማት ላይ ትኩረት አድርገዋል። ለመጀመሪያ ጊዜ ከካርቦን 19 ዓመት ውድድር ለማዘጋጀት በርካታ ቴክኖሎጂዎች በጥቅም ላይ ውለዋል።

- በጭራሽ አይመስለኝም
- በመጠኑ አይመስለኝም
- ደመስለኛል ወይም አይመስለኝም ማለት አልቻልኩም
- በመጠኑ ደመስለኛል
- በጣም ደመስለኛል

Imagine you came across the following four social media posts. Of these four posts, which one would you most likely share with others?

Preview question

Option A

Gray Smithson @graysmithson143215

Five people found guilty of rhino poaching at Kruger were handed down sentences ranging from 16 years to 18 years behind bars. | @J_chabalala

news24.com
Kruger Park rhino poachers slapped with hefty jail sentences ranging from 16 to 18...
Five people, found guilty of rhino poaching and related charges, were handed down jail sentences that ranged from 16 years to 18 years.

9:41 AM - Mar, 28 2022

9 Retweet 60 Likes

Option C

Gray Smithson @graysmithson143215

FINALLY!!!! Rhino crooks sent to jail! Some justice for poachers who slaughtered rhinos as judge puts them away for a long time.

Option B

Gray Smithson @graysmithson143215

Five people found guilty of rhino poaching at Kruger were handed down sentences ranging from 16 years to 18 years behind bars. | @J_chabalala

9:41 AM - Mar, 28 2022

9 Retweet 60 Likes

Option D

news24 News24 @News24

Five people found guilty of rhino poaching at Kruger were handed down sentences ranging from 16 years to 18 years behind bars. | @J_chabalala

Experimental Approaches | Example Facebook

6:22 PM

COVID-19 Vaccine

Home Posts Videos Photos Community

National Department of Health (South Africa) ...
2 hrs · 🌐

Will you get the COVID-19 shot? That's our best chance to beat the pandemic. Watch!

152 430 Shares

Like Comment Share

6:22 PM

COVID-19 Vaccine

Home Posts Videos Photos Community

MyANC ...
2 hrs · 🌐

Will you get the COVID-19 shot? That's our best chance to beat the pandemic. Watch!

152 430 Shares

Like Comment Share

6:22 PM

COVID-19 Vaccine

Home Posts Videos Photos Community

World Health Organization (WHO) ...
2 hrs · 🌐

Will you get the COVID-19 shot? That's our best chance to beat the pandemic. Watch!

152 430 Shares

Like Comment Share

6:22 PM

COVID-19 Vaccine

Home Posts Videos Photos Community

Democratic Alliance ...
2 hrs · 🌐

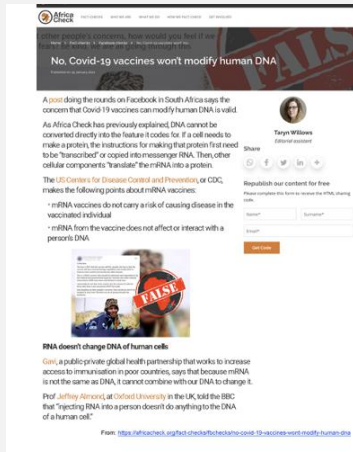
Will you get the COVID-19 shot? That's our best chance to beat the pandemic. Watch!

152 430 Shares

Like Comment Share

Experimental Approaches | Example WhatsApp

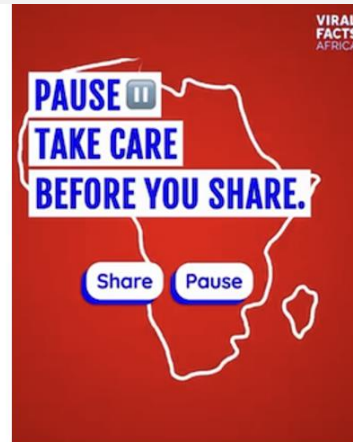
Treatment group



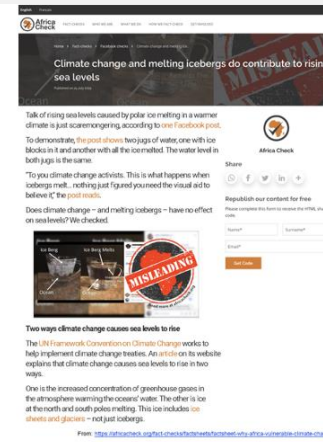
Fact-checks



SNS posts



Media literacy messages

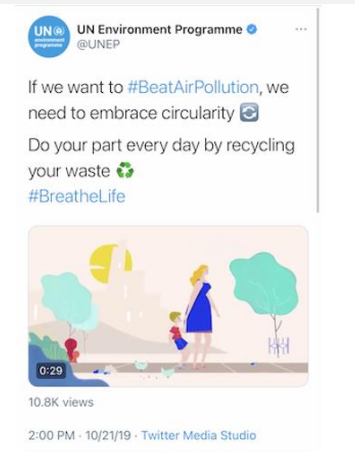


Fact-checks

Control group



SNS posts



Recycling advocacy messages

Comparing countries?

- Lack of shared experiences around disinformation online within countries and across countries.
 - Complicates the design of research materials that would allow meaningful comparisons of research data.
 - Requires more “complex” research designs that take into account the diversities within groups.
 - Puts into question and reinforces the “nation” as the most suitable unit of analysis.
- Highlights differences in **types of disinformation**, where the topic and the target group determine how much shared experience there is between countries.

Focus Groups | Comparing “fake news”

DAILY ACTIVE KENYA

HOME NEWS_SPORTS NEWS_ENTERTAINMENT NEWS_POLITICS NEWS_LIFESTYLE BUSINESS CRIME

OTHERS RELIGION NEWS_SPORTS.SOCCER

Raila is harvesting, now feted as ‘Person of the year in Africa.’

October 23, 2018 11:12 am GMT+0000



RAILA ODINGA
GREATEST AFRICAN STATESMAN

Critical time for Bandari after barren draw with Al Ahly Shendi at Kasarani

Ruto's Luhya Point-man Launches Mud Houses in a Modernisation Program (Photos)

Yet another gay couple takes Kenyan social media by storm after Proposal Photos

Did Martha Karua seal her own fate?

Video of TZ Residents Siphoning Petrol Before Explosion Saddens Kenyans

Passaris Tears Tweep Accusing Her of Pocketing NASA Contributions

SalaJa rejects plan to build palatial homes for Governors

Esther Passaris serves boy child a 'yellow card' for shooting his shot

Uproar as Chemical Found in Colgate Toothpaste is Linked To Cancer

Former Gor Mahia star in Tusker's travelling squad to Tanzania

Kenyan Chief Opposition and Now the African Union Special Envoy, in charge of Infrastructure, Raila Odinga voted the greatest persona of the year.

The Times defined Mr Odinga as a statesman whose efforts in Kenya and entire Africa cannot be ignored.

In their Statement, The Times pointed out special cases and occurrences Mr Odinga has been involved before.

GLOBAL NEWS

HOME GENERAL NEWS POLITICS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT OMG SI

BREAKING NEWS: President Of Namibia, Hage Geingob Dies At 75 From Food Poisoning



TO GO

GENERAL NEWS

Firefighter who evacuated hundreds on 9/11 dies of cancer

GENERAL NEWS

Egypt: At least 4 troops, 36 Islamic militants killed in Sinai battle

POLITICS

Zimbabwe's president threatens to prosecute forex culprits

GENERAL NEWS

Officials say 1 body found after Kenya building collapse

OMG

At least 13 hurt after car rams into nightclub in Britain

POLITICS

Putin wins fourth term with 73.9 percent of vote - exit poll

GENERAL NEWS

British inner-city teacher named world's best, wins \$1m prize

The President of the Republic of Namibia, Hage Geingob who acted as the head of state and the head of government of Namibia, as well as the commander-in-chief of the Namibia Defence Force, according to the Constitution of Namibia is reported dead last night.

NaijaLive TV

Test Drive A Genesis G90 Today

With Modern Ergonomic Seats Featuring Power Lumbar Support For Ultimate Driver Comfort.

TOP NEWS BUSINESS POLITICS EDUCATION SECURITY SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIVE TV

Breaking News: President Buhari Orders immediate arrest of Obasanjo

By News Agency - July 29, 2019 - 7:25 a.m.



Information started flying around from the first hour of Monday, July 29th, that former President Olusegun Obasanjo's arrest has been ordered by President Muhammadu Buhari.

The yet-to-be-confirmed arrest is said to be in connection with the recent open letter written Obasanjo to the incumbent president, touching on very sensitive state issues, most especially, the wave of insecurity in the nation.

What can be compared, then?

- Growing importance of **Pan-African** (and to a certain extent global) organizations & networks that work on combatting disinformation.
 - Shifts in the unit of analysis, again, where differences might appear more along linguistic communities rather than national borders.
- Platforms and mobile phone apps as **transnational spaces** for the growth of disinformation.

Surveys | Strategic Disinformation Narratives

“The war in Ukraine is a consequence of NATO’s expansion in Eastern Europe”



NEWS POLITICS OPINION

West must share the blame for Ukraine crisis



Ukrainian servicemen are seen next to a destroyed armoured vehicle, which they said belongs to the Russian army, outside Kharkiv, Ukraine. Picture: Maksim Levin/Reuters

By Gert Grobler | Published Feb 25, 2022

It is very unfortunate that many in the West, also in South Africa, are inclined to want to place all the blame for the recent developments in Ukraine on Putin and Russia.

Source: iol.co.za

“Sanctions against Russia are the main cause for the current food and energy crises”

NEWVISION

HOME NEWS MEDIA SUPPLEMENTS TENDERS NOTICES PODCASTS

VISION TVS & RADIO BUKEDDE AMAWULIRE KAMPALA SUN

Russia will withstand Western sanctions, will the West be able to survive them?

© Jul 15, 2022

In fact, Russia has been living under sanctions for more than a hundred years now - since the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922.



Vladlen Semivolos Russian Ambassador to Uganda.

Source: newvision.co.ug

Computational Approaches | Social Media Taxonomies

```
"Amadou Ba": "Amadou Ba|Amadou_Ba|Ba_Amadou",  
"electoral registry": "registre électoral|liste éle  
"killed": "tué|mort|ndem",  
"demonstrations": "manifestations|protests|tapale",  
"macky sall": "Macky Sall|Macky_Sall|Sall_Macky",  
"debate": "débat|discussion|réunion|jàngat",  
"constitutional council": "Conseil constitutionnel|  
"participation": "participation|sant yitte|yokkuté"  
"conviction": "condamnation|jugement|màndarga",  
"sponsorship": "parrainage|soutien|jaamoo",  
"state security": "sécurité d'État|sañaan reew|mbëg  
"jihadist": "djihadiste|jihadi|mujahid|kat yi leen  
"electoral violence": "violence électorale|karab jë  
"polls": "sondages|questions vot|daje yi",  
"electoral map": "carte électorale|ndégal bi",  
"polling stations": "bureaux de vote|fépp jiñaat",  
"location": "lieu|xawaare|seenu",  
"nationality": "nationalité|mbokk mi|reemew",  
"ethnicity": "ethnité|njàng",  
"electoral fraud": "fraude électorale|njàng ba taxa  
"release": "libération|boole|naanal",  
"political prisoners": "prisonniers politiques|diis  
"illegal immigration": "immigration clandestine|jég  
"youth unemployment": "chômage des jeunes|jigéen ya  
"debt": "dette|suukër",  
"oil": "pétrole|leyye",  
"gas": "gaz|kepp",  
"north": "nord|dëgg bi",  
"south": "sud|feneen bi",
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Senegal

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"ethnicity": "ethnicity|ukabila|mtu wa kabila",  
"ethno-nationalism": "ethno-nationalism|utaifa wa kikabil  
"Kikuyu": "Kikuyu|Agikuyu|Mgikuyu",  
"Luo": "Luo|Jaluo|Mluo",  
"Luhya": "Luhya|Abaluhya|Mluya",  
"Kamba": "Kamba|Akamba|Mkamba",  
"Kalenjin": "Kalenjin|Wakalenjin|Mkalenjin",  
"ethnic politics": "ethnic politics|siasa za kikabila|uka  
"Cambridge Analytica": "Cambridge Analytica|kampuni ya Ca  
"2017 violence": "2017 violence|vurugu za mwaka 2017|ghas  
"#TribelessYouth": "#TribelessYouth|#VijanaWasioNaKabila|  
"hostilities": "hostilities|ugomvi|uadui|mizozo",  
"gender slurs": "gender slurs|matusi ya kijinsia|maneno y  
"physical appearance": "physical appearance|mwonekano wa  
"marital status": "marital status|hali ya ndoa|hali ya ki  
"mother": "mother|mama|mzazi wa kike",  
"Umra Omar": "Umra Omar|Dkt Umra Omar",  
"governor": "governor|gavana|kiongozi wa mkoa",  
"Lamu": "Lamu|Eneo la Lamu",  
"Martha Karua": "Martha Karua|wakili Martha Karua",  
"Raila Odinga": "Raila Odinga|Baba|Raila",  
"Anne Waiguru": "Anne Waiguru|Gavana Anne Waiguru",  
"Kirinyaga": "Kirinyaga|Kaunti ya Kirinyaga",  
"stereotype": "stereotype|dhana potofu|taswira isiyo sahi  
"Judy Kengo": "Judy Kengo",  
"Kwale": "Kwale|Kaunti ya Kwale",  
"kiss": "kiss|busu|kumbusu",  
"#ShePersisted": "#ShePersisted|#AmeendeleaKupambana|#Ame  
"Kristina Wilfore": "Kristina Wilfore",
```

Kenya

Multi-layered comparisons

- There is a need to actively shift across levels of analysis. An approach could involve three layers of analysis:
 1. Evidence and data can first be compared to **previous research** (most of which is from countries in the Global North)
 2. Consider **transcending the “national”** to explore both larger units (e.g. regions, linguistic communities...) and sub-units (e.g., comparing urban and non-urban settings).
 3. Explore **differences between groups** of the population (e.g. gender identity, race and ethnicity, language, income levels) and compare those across larger units of analysis (such as nations, provinces, states).

Ways forward

- Socio-technological approaches
- More mixed methods, particularly critical scholarship
- More historically-rooted analysis to understand disinformation not as a new but as a long-standing phenomena
- A clear understanding of real media use before "solutions" or "interventions" are created.



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