

Seven fake news stories that rocked Africa

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There was a time where mainstream media were the conveyors of truth, keeping millions of people informed and on the pulse of all the relevant news. A time where investigative journalism exposed some of the biggest controversies and the media could be trusted.



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As the world changed it was only inevitable that journalism and the media would have to adapt or die. And adapt they did as the media's digital transformation has arguably been the model for moving a business into the digital sphere and optimising all the wonderful opportunities it presents.

This transformation has seen the media reach a whole new audience at a far greater speed than ever before. Then came social media and the various platforms gave their users the ability to create their own content. This meant that anyone with a device which can connect to the internet could now put their own, unverified, content onto the internet.

Fast forward to 2017 and the birth of the latest scourge facing the media, [fake news](#). Riddled with completely nonfactual reports which have sensationalised clickbait headlines, aimed at grabbing readers attention ensuring they click on the article, fake news is starting to have a significant effect on society.

With this in mind here are seven fake news stories to come out of Africa:

1. Barak Obama born in Kenya

On 2 August 2009, reports were circulated online where realtor/dentist/lawyer Dr Orly Taitz unveiled her latest piece of evidence in her long-running quest to demonstrate that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States of America. She released a photograph of a document purporting to be a Certified Copy of Registration of Birth issued by the Republic of Kenya in February 1964 which recorded a "Barack Hussein II" as having been born to Barack Hussein Obama and Stanley Ann (Dunham) Obama in Mombasa, Kenya, in August 1961. Said document was reportedly obtained by Taitz from "an anonymous source" who didn't want his name disclosed because he was "afraid for his life". It turns out the document was a fake as were all correlating reports.

2. White Holocaust in Zimbabwe

On 18 April 2014, the Diversity Chronicle published an article entitled “ZIMBABWE ANNOUNCES AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR A FINAL SOLUTION TO WHITE RACISM.” The article languished largely unnoticed by the wider world until late September 2014, when it suddenly tipped on social media and began to circulate widely through Facebook, Twitter, and email.

The article reported that Robert Mugabe the President of Zimbabwe announced plans for the beginning of a “Holocaust” against all whites in the country. The announcement was reportedly made in a speech attended by over 10,000 citizens and by several other African leaders and heads of state, as well as international observers.

No such remarks were ever made by Robert Mugabe. Although it is not as well known as the Daily Currant or Empire News, Diversity Chronicle is yet another of the multitude of fake news sites that has sprung up on the internet in recent years. The site’s disclaimer page notes that the “original content on this blog is largely satirical”.

3. South African HIV tattoo law

On 18 April 2016, the entertainment website WittyFeed published an article reporting that South Africa had passed a law requiring people with the human immunodeficiency virus to get a tattoo on or near their genitals marking them as HIV-positive.

WittyFeed is not explicitly a fake news publication, but the website allows anyone to post their own content with minimal (or nonexistent) fact-checking. In this case, someone aggregated a fake news article that was originally published in January 2015 (and then republished in January 2016) on the South African website SatireNews.

4. Ebola is fake

At the height of the Ebola outbreak in 2014, a report emerged claiming that the virus was a lie. On 8 October 2014, a man identifying himself as a nurse in Ghana named Nana Kwame posted a Facebook note titled “Ebo-LIE”. In the post, Kwame described an understandable climate of fear surrounding the Ebola outbreak of 2014 in his home country.

Kwame’s Facebook post was quickly picked up by a number of conspiracy blogs and was subsequently spread across various sites and social media platforms. In his writing, Kwame laid out a number of reasons he believes “Ebola is fake”. He claimed that the Ebola virus doesn’t exist, instead, victims of the disease got “shots” from the Red Cross, he also claimed that the Ebola crisis was invented to rob Africa of her natural resources.

5. Pretoria restaurant serves dog

In July 2016, a rumor emerged that Chinese restaurants in Pretoria, South Africa had been authorised to sell dog meat.

The report said that the restaurant successfully argued that the banning of consuming dog meat, which they pointed out, is in violation of their religious and cultural rights. The restaurant has been granted provisional permission to slaughter, sell and consume dog meat, while awaiting the Supreme Court’s final decision of their case. The restaurant is allowed to

slaughter up to 35 dogs per week, under the conditions that the dogs are killed properly and humanely.

As with any story about animals popularly seen as pets rather than food, the article generated a great deal of cultural outrage. However, it's completely untrue. The story is a plagiarised and repurposed version of a persistent article that was debunked in 2014 and again in 2016.

6. Buhari survives poison attack

In what was described as a foolish propaganda campaign, a report which claimed that Nigeria's president Muhammadu Buhari was poisoned, and he survived was spread across the various forms on the social media.

A fake site, called AlJazeera report clip, posted a story with no source on site and shared on the internet. The story was picked up by other fake news sites and soon a frenzy of fake reports about Buhari's health were being circulated. With Buhari's poor health common knowledge these fake news stories simply just created chaos and controversy around the matter.

7. Fake South African news social media accounts

On 21 January 2017, fake accounts emerged of top South African media organisations of Talk Radio 702, the Sunday Times, and the Huffington Post. The fake social media accounts posted false and misleading information, which included stories about then Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, which were seemingly aimed at discrediting the mainstream media in South Africa. Although this was not posted on a website, these fake social media accounts represent another side to the fake news pandemic.

With no end in sight when it comes to the fake news plague, it has become more important than ever that internet users educate themselves on the tell-tale signs of a fake news story to ensure they don't fall victim.

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