

Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales (Eds.), **Disinformation in the Global South**, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022, 272 pp., \$59.95 (paperback), \$48.00 (Kindle).

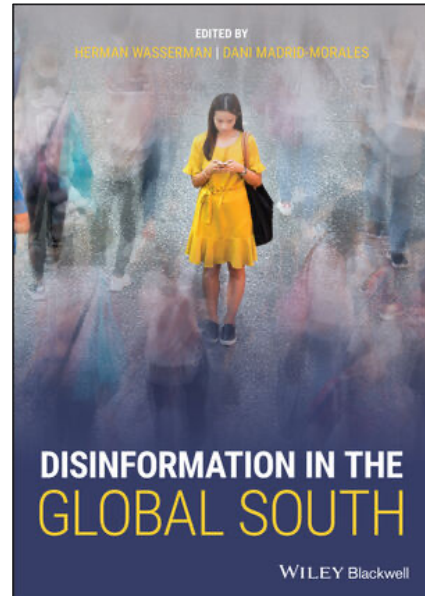
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It is hard to deny that mis- and disinformation studies is fast becoming a subfield in communication (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). Its emergence is largely attributable to the U.S. presidential election of 2016 and the Brexit referendum, when the terms “fake news,” “post-truth,” and “alternative facts” entered the global lexicon. Likewise, the staying power of populist regimes in the 2010s, coupled with the outbreak of COVID-19 and Russia’s war on Ukraine in the next decade, have resulted in the fourth estate continuing to be weaponized.

This “infodemic,” or “disinfodemic,” predates the digital era, but what is quantitatively and qualitatively new is the rapidity with which propaganda and disinformation circulate in the current media ecology. A key aspect of disinformation is that insofar as it comprises a global phenomenon, researching it requires avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches. This is especially the case when it comes to the enormously diverse region of the Global South, where there are already all kinds of structural challenges in the media sector. For example, in many of these countries, limited Internet access is a reflection of broader social inequities. When these struggles are coupled with misinformation, even more problems emerge. Fortunately, there has been a growing amount of such judicious academic investigation in that region (Douai, 2019; Winston & Winston, 2020). One of the latest entries is **Disinformation in the Global South**, edited by Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales, the first book collection of its kind.

Readers in communication, media studies, and journalism studies will be interested in this volume, whose overarching theme is that disinformation thrives in the Global South principally because of predigital historical problems, often legacies of postcolonialism. The book’s cases cover the regions of the Americas, Asia, the Arab world, and Africa. It is divided into three sections: “Histories, Theories, and Methods” (chapters 1–4), “Cultures of Disinformation” (chapters 5–10), and “Responses: Southern Perspectives” (chapters 11–13). Theoretically and methodologically, the book offers perspectives from postcolonial studies, political economy, propaganda studies, rhetoric, ethnography, and historiography.

One of the merits of this excellent book is that its contributors offer practical solutions on how the infodemic can be confronted, such as coordinated campaigns for media literacy. However, something that feels underappreciated by the volume’s contributors is the role of Russia. The exception to this absence, as explained below, is chapter 10, by Jairo Lugo-Ocando and Alessandro Martinisi. One of the discursive strategies of the Kremlin is an appropriation of “global justice” rhetoric (Benedikter, 2022, p. 16). It is precisely through



platforms such as Russia Today that the Kremlin presents itself as an anticolonial, "multipolar" counterweight to Western hegemony, while at the same time making inroads in the Global South and in Ukraine.

In the first chapter, "Contextualizing Fake News: Can Online Falsehoods Spread Fast When Internet Is Slow?" Edson C. Tandoc Jr. considers the socioeconomic factors of disinformation in the Philippines, where social media are deeply imbricated in social life. Tandoc maps out some of the difficulties of combating online falsehoods in the Filipino context, among them the collectivistic cosmopolitanism characteristic of many Asian cultures.

In the second chapter, "Disinformation in Arab Media: Cultural Histories and Political Dynamics," Saba Bebawi situates the infodemic in the Arab world by contextualizing it in the history of Arab journalism, which like its counterpart in Arab literature, is predicated on a highly emotive form of expression. When affect trumps facts and evidence, this can be the perfect storm for disinformation.

In chapter 3, "Manipulated Facts and Spreadable Fantasies: Battles Over History in the Indian Digital Sphere," Sangeet Kumar places India's ecology of fake news in the context of that country's postcolonial legacy, showing how a host of amateur historians forcefully use online images, videos, and texts to contest empirical facts of the Asian giant's history. By creating alternative versions of the past, these amateur "historians" are trying to make the present palatable.

In the fourth chapter, "Research Methods in Comparative Disinformation Studies," Dani Madrid-Morales and Herman Wasserman historicize misinformation studies in the context of mass communication research. The authors call for a less media-centric approach to studying the infodemic but rather one in dialogue with the sociopolitical and economic idiosyncrasies of each Global Southern context.

The second part opens with chapter 5, "Noise in Kinshasa: Ethnographic Notes on the Meanings of Mis- and Disinformation in a Post-Colonial African City" by Katrien Pype and Sébastien Maluta Makaya. The authors argue that disinformation is deeply enveloped in the social fabric of the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and they explain how these falsehoods circulate economically.

In chapter 6, "Aliens, Spies, and Staged Vandalism: Disinformation in the 2019 Protests in Chile," Ingrid Bachmann, Daniela Grassau, and Claudia Labarca contextualize the emergence of disinformation in the country by arguing that it has to be appreciated as a byproduct of the legacy of the Pinochet era, which sowed an enormous distrust in the media among the public. As with the other studies, this chapter underscores that in the Global South, the disinformation problem did not start in 2016 but rather has roots specific to the site of each case.

In the seventh chapter, "Encountering and Correcting Misinformation on WhatsApp: The Roles of User Motivations and Trust in Messaging Group Members," Ozan Kuru, Scott W. Campbell, Joseph B. Bayer, Lemi Baruh, and Richard Ling draw on empirical research for their sociopsychological analysis of misinformation flows via WhatsApp groups in Singapore, the United States, and Turkey. They conclude that trust, a common sentiment shared among these group members, in part explains the dissemination of misinformation in these contexts.

In chapter 8, "‘Rumor-Debunking’ as a Propaganda and Censorship Strategy in China: The Case of the COVID-19 Outbreak," Kecheng Fang argues that Xi Jinping’s state apparatus has coopted fact-checking journalism. Fang considers how official state media used that term in an Orwellian manner during the pandemic to crack down on independent journalism.

In the ninth chapter, "Media System Incentives for Disinformation: Exploring the Relationships Between Institutional Design and Disinformation Vulnerability," Jose Mari Hall Lanuza and Cleve V. Arguelles note that Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) landmark media systems approach has been underutilized in the Global South. Turning their gaze to Southeast Asian countries, the authors argue that by considering these complex media flows as systems, one can observe the sociocultural variables that can either facilitate or hinder the spread of disinformation.

In chapter 10, "Lies, Damned Lies, and Development: Why Statistics and Data Can No Longer Confront Disinformation in the Global South," Jairo Lugo-Ocando and Alessandro Martinisi argue that the history of journalism in the Global North is inextricably tied to positivism, where numbers and statistics are seen as unimpeachable iterations of the truth, as well as colonializing instruments. However, with the rise of post-truth discourse, positivism’s influence has waned, which has resulted in Machiavellian figures such as Putin using manipulated statistics for unscrupulous ends. This is one of the exceptional chapters of the volume.

The third part opens with chapter 11, "Online Misinformation: Policy Lessons from the Global South" whose authors, Anya Schiffrin and Peter Cunliffe-Jones, demonstrate how localized versions of media literacy, fact-checking, and media regulation can be used to confront disinformation. As stressed in other chapters, inasmuch as this is a global problem, local and global contingencies must be considered at once.

In the twelfth chapter, "Responses to Misinformation: Examining the Kenyan Context," Melissa Tully emphasizes important ways in which Global Southern publics are not always passive victims of misinformation campaigns but rather have agency. In her case, Tully analyzes how Kenyans, many of whom know they are being lied to, respond to the infodemic with humor and satire.

Finally, in chapter 13, "How Three Mission-Driven News Organizations in the Global South Combat Disinformation Through Investigation, Innovation, Advocacy, and Education," Nabeelah Shabbir, Julie Posetti, and Felix M. Simon discuss how three digital-born outlets in the Philippines, India, and South Africa have taken concrete actions to confront the disinformation problem. In each of the cases, there have been innovative forms of collaboration with readerships and civil society organizations.

In conclusion, this collection is a substantial addition to the nascent infodemic literature. Students and scholars will walk away from the book with the notion that disinformation can only be understood by looking at how it is produced and consumed in any given context, which in the Global South entails appreciating the ways that its emergence is imbricated with longstanding socioeconomic polarizations.

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