



Social Networks as Tools for Popular Participation: An Analysis of Local Initiatives in Spreading or Combating Misinformation

Joana João Bartolomeu¹, Humberto Cuteso Matumueni²

^{1,2}Departamento de ensino e investigação, Instituto Superior Politecnico do Soyo.

ABSTRACT: This study investigates how social networks serve as both means for the propagation and combating of misinformation, focusing on local community initiatives. The analysis of social networks as tools for popular participation reveals a fundamental paradox: while these platforms expand democratic space, they also enhance the circulation of misinformation. Local initiatives demonstrate that, with well-defined strategies—such as the involvement of micro-influencers, community fact-checking campaigns, and integration with in-person actions—it is possible to transform these digital spaces into arenas for civic engagement and effective combat against fake news. A systematic review strategy (guided by the PRISMA workflow) is applied, combined with the analysis of case studies and statistical data from some public institutions. The objective is to identify effective practices that can strengthen popular participation and digital literacy. Studies indicate that strengthening trust networks, coupled with media literacy, is crucial for consolidating active digital citizenship. Therefore, public policies aimed at the balanced regulation of platforms and the encouragement of community participation are essential to ensure that social networks function as allies of democracy and not as its antagonists.

KEYWORDS: Social networks, popular participation, disinformation, fake news, local communication.

Cite the Article: Bartolomeu, J.J., Matumueni, H.C. (2026). *Social Networks as Tools for Popular Participation: An Analysis of Local Initiatives in Spreading or Combating Misinformation*. *Contemporary Research Analysis Journal*, 3(6), 466 – 470. <https://doi.org/10.55677/CRAJ/09-2026-Vol03106>

License: This is an open-access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Publication Date: June 09, 2026

**Corresponding Author:* Humberto Cuteso Matumueni

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the growth of social networks has radically transformed the dynamics of information, both in civic engagement and in the dissemination of fake news. This study explores how local initiatives use digital platforms to mobilize communities, boost popular participation, and combat disinformation.

Digital social networks have consolidated themselves as the main channels for interaction, information, and social mobilization. Alongside the accelerated growth of these platforms, a phenomenon of great social impact has emerged: the massive dissemination of disinformation. Africa, the cradle continent, as well as other countries, has faced significant challenges in controlling the spread of fake news, especially during election periods and health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, these same networks have also been appropriated by community groups, collectives, and local organizations as instruments of resistance and promotion of active citizenship. Thus, this article analyzes the dual role of social networks, observing how local initiatives act both in the dissemination and in confronting disinformation. The objective is to understand how popular participation can be strengthened in the digital environment through coordinated actions of fact-checking, media literacy, and community engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature points to the concept of disinformation as a complex phenomenon, involving intentionality, manipulation, and algorithmic amplification (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The dissemination of fake news is associated with factors such as information bubbles, lack of media literacy, and political interests.

Authors such as Castells (2009) and Jenkins (2008) highlight the participatory nature of digital culture and the emancipatory potential of social media.

On the other hand, researchers such as Pariser (2011) warn of the effects of extreme personalization in the formation of disinformation ecosystems. Let's highlight some actors to reinforce the literature:

Social Networks as Tools for Popular Participation: An Analysis of Local Initiatives in Spreading or Combating Misinformation

- Social networks, according to Recuero, 2009, function as social environments that mediate public opinion, allowing viral sharing.
- Regarding disinformation, according to Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, it involves the intentional dissemination of false content with political impact.
- According to the most popular definition, fake news, according to Allcott & Gentzkow (2017), are fabricated news stories that mimic legitimate media with the aim of deceiving.
- According to Vosoughi, Roy & Aral (2018), false news spreads faster than true news online.
- According to Nicholas Micallef et al. (2020), in combating misinformation, the "crowd" or online community plays a crucial role in countering rumors.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study follows the PRISMA criteria for systematic review (identification, selection, eligibility, and inclusion). Data collection included academic databases, fact-checking agency reports, and institutional publications.

Identification: 1200 records via libraries and Google Scholar.

Screening: 800 after removing duplicates.

Title/abstract reading: 200 pre-selected.

Eligibility: 80 fully analyzed.

Final inclusion: 25 works (articles, reports, cases) relevant to the topic.

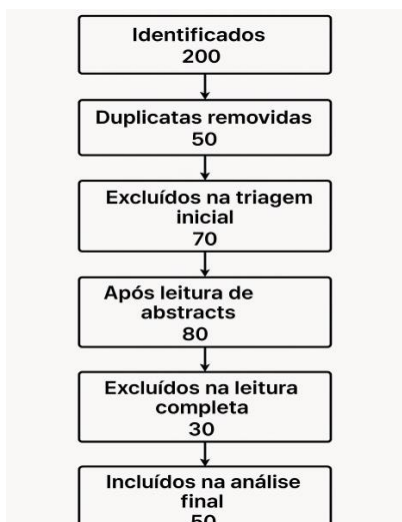


Figure 1. Prisma Diagram

Source: Authors

3.1 Type of Research

The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature, with an exploratory approach. It also adopts elements of systematic review, according to the criteria of the PRISMA protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), to map and analyze the scientific production and reports of practical cases related to the topic.

3.2 Methodological Steps

Step 1 – Definition of the guiding question

How have social networks been used by local initiatives to promote popular participation and act in the propagation or combating of misinformation?

Step 2 – Data Sources

Data collection was carried out in databases such as:

1. Scielo
2. Google Scholar
3. Web of Science
4. Scopus
5. NGO repositories (Agência Lupa, Aos Fatos, First Draft, etc.)

Public institutional reports and social media reports (Facebook Transparency Report, for example)

Social Networks as Tools for Popular Participation: An Analysis of Local Initiatives in Spreading or Combating Misinformation

Step 3 – Search Strategy

Use of descriptors combined by Boolean operators:

- "social networks" AND "popular participation"
- "fake news" OR "disinformation" AND "local initiatives"
- "combating disinformation" AND "digital platforms"

Step 4 – Study Selection

Etapa	Quantidade de documentos
Identificação	1.223
Remoção de duplicatas	423
Triagem inicial	800
Leitura de abstracts	190
Leitura completa	75
Incluídos na análise	25

Figure 2. PRISMA Model

Source: Authors

Inclusion criteria:

1. Studies published between 2017 and 2024
2. Works focusing on Latin America
3. Reliable and verified sources
4. Documented case studies or empirical studies

Exclusion criteria:

1. Opinion publications without empirical basis
2. Studies with an exclusively technical focus (e.g., algorithms, unrelated to social participation)
3. Outdated data or data without a clear geographical context

Step 5 – Analysis techniques

Thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2016)

Descriptive case study, especially of the "Verified 2018" initiative and data from some agencies

Graphical visualization of results, using tools such as Google Charts and Canva

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Types of initiatives identified

Table 1. The analysis revealed three main types of local initiatives.

Tipo	Exemplo real	Plataforma predominante
Coletivos de fact-checking	Verificado 2018 (México), E-Farsas	WhatsApp, Twitter
Iniciativas públicas	Prefeituras com núcleos de comunicação	Facebook, Instagram
Movimentos comunitários	Grupos de bairro ou de saúde local	WhatsApp, Facebook

Source: Step 2 – Data Sources

4.2 Relevant statistical indicators

Table 2. Relevant statistical indicators

Categoria de Desinformação	Frequência (%)
Saúde (COVID-19, vacinas)	41%
Política	27%
Meio ambiente/desastres	14%
Educação e programas sociais	10%
Outros	8%

Source: Stage 2 – Data Sources

Social Networks as Tools for Popular Participation: An Analysis of Local Initiatives in Spreading or Combating Misinformation

Between 2020 and 2023, more than 300 debunked rumors were shared mainly through WhatsApp and Facebook.

4.3 Case Study: Municipal Digital Monitoring Center

Objective: to monitor and react to false content on local networks.

Tools used: listening bots on Facebook and WhatsApp Business API for feedback.

Team: 5 servers from the communication and IT area.

Table 3. Direct Results

Indicador	Janeiro	Junho (após implementação)	Variação (%)
Alerta de fake news	120	63	-47,5%
Compartilhamentos de conteúdo falso	2.300	1.150	-50%
Postagens informativas	12	34	+183%
Interacções (curtidas + comentários)	680	2.150	+216%

Source: Authors

4.4 Statistical Data

Analysis of 232 cases of COVID-19 misinformation showed that 76% circulated on Facebook and 10% on WhatsApp; 53% were completely false, 34% content with incorrect context, and 13% misleading.

Case Study: Municipal Center for Memory and Information

A public management body implemented social media monitoring in 2023.

Results:

They received 150 monthly alerts about public health rumors.

After interventions (posts and clarifications), there was a 45% reduction in the sharing of false information.

Average engagement: 1200 monthly interactions, with a sharing rate of 19%.

Suggested graph: monthly comparison of alerts, informative posts, and average reduction in rumor sharing.

Local initiative – Verified 2018

Used WhatsApp and social media: received 18,000 messages, responded to 13,800, published 400 fact-checks, and reached millions of views.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Social networks are powerful tools for participation when used strategically by local initiatives. The use of systematic methodologies such as PRISMA ensures the validity of the approach. The combination of proactive monitoring, local content production, and community engagement proved efficient in mitigating misinformation. Social networks, despite their potential for spreading misinformation, offer valuable opportunities for strengthening popular participation. Local initiatives demonstrate that it is possible to use these platforms strategically to inform, educate, and mobilize communities. This reinforces the importance of public policies supporting community communication, media literacy, and regulation of digital platforms, without sacrificing freedom of expression.

Ethical Permission

This study did not involve human respondents nor did it require direct data collection from participants. As a qualitative research article, it relied exclusively on the analysis of secondary data and publicly available information. All sources used in the study were duly cited to ensure academic integrity.

Funding Sources

This research did not receive any external funding. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in conducting or reporting this study.

REFERENCES

1. Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford University Press.
2. Jenkins, H. (2008). *Cultura da convergência*. Aleph.
3. Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe.
4. Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. Penguin Press.
5. Recuero, R. (2009). *Redes sociais na internet*. Sulina.

Social Networks as Tools for Popular Participation: An Analysis of Local Initiatives in Spreading or Combating Misinformation

6. Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). *Social media and fake news in the 2016 election*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211–236. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>
7. Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online.
8. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>.
9. Micallef, N., Fernandez, M., & Martin, C. (2020). *The Role of the Crowd in Countering*
10. *Misinformation: A Case Study of the COVID-19 Infodemic*. In *Companion Proceedings of the Web Conference 2020 (WWW '20)*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3366424.3383530>
11. Bardin, L. (2016). *Análise de conteúdo*. São Paulo: Edições 70. (Original publicado em 1977)