

Pre-bunking, de-bunking and counter-messaging to respond to harmful contents

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** Greetings to you all. My name is Jennifer Corso. I'm a fact check on the media monitor on the angry flight Sunday response and fact checking mechanism. Today I am joined by animals in southern africa. Executive Director allow him to introduce himself.

[00:00:36] **Speaker 2** Thank you very much, Janet. Greetings, colleagues. Thank you for taking time to attend this segment on preventing, debunking and messaging, which is one of the most important and proven effective ways of responding to misinformation, disinformation and dead speech. What's more, the feeling? I'm the executive director of Panels in Southern Africa, which is a communication forward development NGO that is working to amplify voices of what in the most analyzed communities. It is an organization that believes in the power of information in terms of shifting choices, in terms of influencing decision making. And it is an organization that believes that information can be used to create an environment where citizens can freely and effectively engage with decision makers. So as panelists Institute of Southern Africa, we believe that information integrity is at the center of the realization of democratic principles. It is at the center of the realization of the development agenda. We believe that when information is accessible, people are able to effectively participate. And we believe that when the information environment is political compromise, the right and ability of citizens to participate and make informed choices is grossly undermined. So in our quest to, you know, in the advancement of our mission as an organization, we are collaborating with the NDP to implement a fact checking in the response mechanism, the innovative Zambia mechanism, which is focusing on identifying and mitigating misinformation and disinformation and hate speech online and offline.

[00:02:24] **Speaker 1** Thank you so much for helping us understand what it's all about and how we're implementing the agriculture in Zambia. Make them using just that before they start writing about food, banking, banking, and as well as content messages. Let us know. Why should people be concerned about misinformation, disinformation and hate speech?

[00:02:43] **Speaker 2** Thank you very much. I think it is important for us to acknowledge that there is massive there is a lot of misinformation and disinformation and hate speech. There is a lot of managing information online and offline. And we also have to acknowledge that this content moves in, must address in other ways, and it involves a vast array of actors. In some cases, this spread of harmful and misleading content is intentional and well-planned. But there are also cases when it is not, in some cases thought that those that spread harmful and misleading content to do so knowingly and deliberately, when in some cases they do so out of ignorance. And there are also cases when they do so, maybe through the manipulation of other people who may have an agenda. So we must be concerned about this situation because we are in a in a time where the spread of misinformation, disinformation and speech has reached the epidemic proportions. I think last year or two years ago, the global community actually acknowledged that we now have an import damage because of the alarming proportions of misinformation, disinformation and information online. So one of the major ways of reducing misinformation, disinformation and hate speech is through true banking, debunking and counter messaging, as we all will see as we go through this segment. There is no one size fits all, but each piece of harmful or misleading content is unique in its own way, and because of that, it requires to be handed in its own way, in an appropriate way.

[00:04:31] **Speaker 1** Okay. So you have mentioned to us that one of the ways in which we can address misinformation, disinformation as well as hate speech is by preventing debunking and also countering. Is it just please help us understand what does that to people banking mean?

[00:04:46] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think when I talk, banking really means addressing misinformation and addressing disinformation before it actually occurs. So it means you have to anticipate that message because of they in preventing circumstances, because of what they can, preventing situations. There is potential there is a likelihood that misleading or harmful content may be produced. It may be disseminated. And you already addressed it before it actually occurs. You address it in anticipation.

[00:05:20] **Speaker 1** And as a mechanism. How have you addressed some of these issues before they actually occur?

[00:05:27] **Speaker 2** Yeah. Thank you very much. So maybe just to give a historical context to our colleagues who may not really understand the background of the E-Verify as long as it's checking and response mechanism. So this mechanism, we started rolling it out towards the general elections in Zambia that we held on the 12th of August in 2010. One, and what caused it to be tame was really on addressing misinformation, disinformation and hate speech around the electoral process. And it was really responding to the fact that misinformation and disinformation in their speech were threatening the credibility of the elections. They were just stepping over the free flow of information. They were undermining the ability of citizens to participate and to make choices. So we then came up with this mechanism specifically to focus on identifying any pollution on the information environment, quote, facilitating stakeholders, coordinating coordination, and also influencing the response of Medicare to mitigate to actions by the Defense Department. So as the I did a baseline checking in response mechanism, we created a technology based ecosystem that links and builds on various initiatives and enhances collaboration of state and non-state actors. Because we recognize that misinformation, disinformation and hate speech is a problem, is a crisis that is affecting both the state and the non-state actors. And we believe that efforts of addressing it also must involve what this did and non-state actors. And that is exactly what is the only two ways that the checking and response mechanisms we did. And also maybe just to emphasize that the work that we do through the oversight checking and response mechanism is the name of our initiatives. We don't tend to expect checking, but we actively follow up on stories on issues that affect check and influence responses. And these responses really range from a retraction to a counter-messaging, which we are going to speak to in a few moments. 21.

[00:07:49] **Speaker 1** Two other teams that you have actually message to us in terms of debunking and countering messages. Please help us understand the difference between the two. And also just cite for us some of the examples that the average face of any team has also experienced or has sort of done in the past months and years.

[00:08:09] **Speaker 2** Yeah. Thank you very much. In terms of debunking, this is a process for the action of exposing false content or mischief in an article, of course. So debunking. We are focusing on content that is already out there. We are focusing on content that is already one time content that has already been published in the newspaper, popular that that is what is being broadcast on radio or other platforms. So the content has is already out and has potentially already mislaid certain papers or we are coming in towards debunking it is where you are not ready yet. So what is preventing is proactive. Debunking is more reactive. Like you react to the content that is already out there. You address it by

indicating that this content is false. This content is misleading. Well, maybe there could be another two that suggest that some true content is false. So you are able to then come in and clarify that yes, this is true or maybe put in some it is not funded. So in the Zambian experience we look during the elections, a lot of our work are kind of focused on debunking. As you may understand that by their nature elections, they seem to attract all sorts of misleading and harmful content. The electoral actors, they may want to outshine each other in terms of reaching out to the audience. They may want to outdo each other in terms of maybe getting follow us online, in terms of getting listenership on the radio, in terms of attracting people to their rallies and others business. So you find that because of that and just by the nature of politics, there is a lot of false content that was disseminated around at the elections. And so we were able to, from time to time, identify misleading content, content that related to the electoral process itself, content that's related to some political. It does contend that three letter to help run it does a lot for other events and just the general electoral calendar where we were able to debunk as the ten things. There was little misconceptions that were being churned out, especially during the last election, which was held in very unusual circumstances of COVID 19. It was the fifth time that Zambia was hosting elections in a kind of a pandemic as they talk. And it was the first time that a big country was doing elections in an environment where campaigns could not be done in the way they would normally be done. So that one is one presenting a lot of challenges. But we I think our complete our debunking without rebutting and debunking was not fully informed by our understanding of the processes, the actors, the events that were involved and being able to generate evidence and to using that evidence now to counter any narratives that we're being peddled by the people that we're actively involved. Then I also spoke about counter-messaging. So when harmful or misleading content, when misinformation, disinformation and hate speech go out of it, in most cases they call out is when parties do messages which are designed specifically to convince people to believe as a narrative, to act in a certain way or to not act in a certain way. It may be designed to influence in the electoral process, maybe to influence people not to vote. Is it in party or candidate or to vote for? Has that impact to a candidate or not to play any particular role in the elections? So we find that it does to emphasize that pretty by it involves predicting disinformation narratives before they actually will get. And then it also means preventing certain misleading or harmful narratives ahead or before the disinformation occurs or as it occurs. So it means you don't have to wait until the damage is done. You don't have to wait until the content is out there for you to start addressing it. And in the Zambian context, we had a number of experiences where we were able to ClickBank certain narratives and around the elections there were narratives that that was the in addition to the COVID 19 challenges this election, there were also certain technologies that Zambia was using for the first time, that technologies such as the biometric voter registration audit of what ID machines, and because that even the locations of the voter just the way it was package and stuff like that, there were a lot of misunderstandings. And it was anticipated that on Election Day when people see, for example, the biometric voter registration badges, they would come up with other narratives, other misleading statements, other misleading positions. So we were able to immediately address those and we were able to anticipate those, and we addressed to them even before the narratives. Okay. So we were able to educate the public to say because of the nature of the biometric voter registration tools, because of the nature of the court, the equipment and other facilities that are in place, this is what should be anticipated and were able to provide that information after the elections. There were also other processes relating to the continuous development fund, the recruitment of people for the census. Again, because this was the first time in as much as Zambia has always had a policy on constituency development funding. This year, after the announcement of the national budget, it was increased by a very big percentage and because it was inclusive, the expectations were high and there were all kinds of narratives

that were likely to come up. So to prevent any misleading narratives, we were able to get to the study of guidelines, the guidelines really that inform the roll out of that mechanism. And we published them and started extracting specific aspects of the content and publicizing it before people even started the process of applying. So that to the people who understand, who outlines, how do you know what, what can you apply for and what are the policies, the processes involved in all that? That way we were able to anticipate that and we did see that there were some sections that didn't get the content that we published and we saw exactly the same problems that we had anticipated in in relation to the media. So it is very. Important when it comes to banking. For you to have reliable and verifiable data to predict trends and use it for print banking so it is not possible for you to just keep on stuff based on guesswork. But you must have that. In fact, you must give it an informed analysis of trends and other information that you would take into account and use that as the basis for your banking. The same applies to debunking, which is really like every active process in the process of exposing mischief. The process of exposing falsehoods after they have already been published. So what is pretty banking? You do something that does not work yet the debunking we are looking at something that is blotted out, the content that is already being published. If that is what it is, that is already one day. That is what being broadcast is. Whatever in the newspapers is already trending. So we then come out and tell people that what you said you saw and you potentially believe is not true. It is misleading, and then we are able to help them know. What then is the current position or what determines what aspects of that messaging content should be of concern? So when it comes to debunking are different stakeholders have an important role to play like it is not it, of course, as a fact checking mechanism. That is what we do most of the time. But you will find that we work a lot very closely with other stakeholders who are the custodians of some of the information, the official information, the official records. And you may have better experiences or better exposure to certain situations to such a narrative that we would be trying to debunk. So debunking it plays a big role in terms of countering or mitigating the effects of misinformation, disinformation and speech in as much as epochs after the misleading content has already been published or broadcast. It helps now to manage the effects. And then the third concept is that of counter messaging. And as the name states, it is about coming up with counter messages. So this misinformation, disinformation, hate speech is packaged as a message is that I believe it is packaged as messages that may be presented as news that may be presented as programs is all sorts of things. So the messages means you will see that the content that is out there or that you anticipate will be out there. And then you counter it by coming up with an alternative vision, coming up with a counter vision where you develop and disseminate in your vision or a new message to counter a narrative that is already out there or is likely to be out there. So when it comes to counter messaging, uh, you may find that, for example, a story in actually a program may be published with some elements of the truth, but maybe there could just be some aspect of it that may be misleading, that may be harmful. So we pick those and we come up with our own vision, which attempts to simplify the content. We attempt to bring out certain details that are not included in the original post, or which attempt to dispel some details that may be presented as fits in the original post. So just like in print banking and debunking, when it comes to counter messaging, it is important for different stakeholders to be actively involved both in the development and of the outside dissemination of the counter messaging. It is more effective when different entities, when different stakeholders work together because in the same way that misinformation, disinformation and hate speech affect different stakeholders in different ways, even counter messages, they will influence different stakeholders in different ways at different places. So it requires that consolidated, collaborative effort of different stakeholders to come together and come up with counter messaging that advance the public interest that's

going to bolster the right of certain stakeholders, and most importantly, that will promote participation in different processes.

[00:20:05] **Speaker 1** Dear friends, we have heard from you specifically who has explained to us that the banking group banking and counter messaging is one. Of the ways in which we can mitigate misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. I have been your host, Jennifer Koza, in Dallas during my family's history. Southern Africa executive director said. Mr. Watson, was this a feeling? Thank you so much for being with us.

[00:20:27] **Speaker 2** Thank you, Jennifer. Thank you, everyone, for following for attending this segment.