Misinformation, Disinformation, and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Sudan

An insights from Digihub Africa Webinars and Partner Contributions

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1. Executive Summary

The conflict in Sudan is unfolding not only on the ground but also across digital platforms. Social media networks, in particular, have become key arenas where narratives circulate, compete, and shape how events are interpreted by the public. In this evolving information environment, online spaces increasingly influence public understanding of the conflict, often reaching audiences far beyond the immediate geographic context.

While these platforms can be valuable sources of information and channels for civic expression, they are also increasingly used to spread narratives that influence public perception, deepen polarization, and sometimes escalate tensions in already fragile situations. As rival groups attempt to shape the information environment, misinformation, disinformation, and harmful speech can quickly spread, leading to confusion, mistrust, and greater social divisions.

Digihub Africa held a series of working sessions, including expert webinars, bringing together partners actively working in Sudan alongside researchers, journalists, and civil society actors. These exchanges provided a space for collective reflection on how misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech circulate within Sudan's information ecosystem, especially amid the ongoing conflict. The discussions looked at how harmful narratives spread online, the actors and platforms involved, and the broader social effects on communities affected by the crisis.

These conversations were complemented by reports and insights from Digihub Africa's partners and individuals working directly in Sudan, who have closely documented the changing digital environment surrounding the conflict. Their on-the-ground perspectives provided vital context, helping to connect expert analysis with lived experiences and enhancing understanding of how the information landscape is evolving and being influenced by the conflict.

Several key insights emerged from these discussions:

- *The conflict in Sudan is accompanied by a parallel information war unfolding online.*

Digital platforms have become strategic arenas where competing narratives are produced, amplified, and contested by various actors.

- *False or misleading information spreads rapidly during moments of crisis.*
  In many cases, content circulates widely before verification is possible, allowing rumors and manipulated narratives to gain traction among online audiences.
- *Online narratives increasingly contribute to fear, polarization, and mistrust within communities.*
  The rapid spread of unverified or emotionally charged content can deepen social divisions and shape how communities interpret events related to the conflict.
- *Women and girls are particularly exposed to Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).*
  Online harassment, intimidation, and targeted attacks have become increasingly common, reflecting broader patterns of gendered harm within digital spaces.
- *Youth play a critical role within the information ecosystem.*
  As some of the most active users of social media, young people often act both as consumers and amplifiers of information, shaping how narratives spread across digital platforms.

The findings highlight the urgent need for *digital literacy, responsible information sharing, and further research on digital harm in conflict environments.*

2. Introduction

Digital technologies have changed the way information spreads during crises and conflicts. In Sudan, social media platforms are key channels for communication, citizen reporting, and raising international awareness. But they also serve as spaces where misleading narratives, rumours, and propaganda spread quickly.

Recognizing the increasing significance of digital harm in conflict environments, Digihub Africa hosted webinars and workshop sessions exploring the connection between:

- misinformation and disinformation
- conflict narratives
- online hate speech
- and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence.

The conversations brought together journalists, digital rights advocates, and civil society actors with direct experience in Sudan's information environment.

These discussions revealed how online narratives can influence social dynamics and contribute to the broader conflict ecosystem.

3. Methodology and Sources

This report relies solely on insights from Digihub Africa's expert engagements and partner contributions. The analysis is based on two main sources:

- Digihub Africa expert webinars and working sessions, which brought together researchers, journalists, civil society actors, and partners working directly on the ground in Sudan. These discussions focused on the dynamics of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and broader forms of digital harm circulating within Sudan's online information ecosystem during the conflict.
- Materials and reporting shared by Digihub Africa's partners, including documentation and analysis of online hate speech, misinformation, and digital narratives related to the conflict. These contributions, informed by on-the-ground observation and monitoring

of digital spaces, provided critical context for understanding how information flows and narratives evolve across social media platforms during periods of crisis.

The report further summarizes insights gathered from the webinar discussions, including:

- Panel discussions featuring experts and practitioners engaged in documenting the digital dimensions of the conflict.
- Participant interventions, which provided additional perspectives from researchers, journalists, and civil society actors contributing to the dialogue.
- Media analysis shared during the webinars, highlighting examples of misinformation, disinformation, and harmful narratives circulating across digital platforms.
- Partner reporting referenced during the sessions, offering on-the-ground observations of how digital narratives and online harms are evolving in the Sudan context.

This report does not aim to provide a statistical or quantitative analysis of the information environment. Instead, it seeks to document emerging patterns, observations, and insights identified by practitioners and experts working directly on issues related to misinformation, disinformation, online hate, and digital harm in Sudan.

Therefore, the report presents practitioner-informed perspectives on the evolving digital information landscape related to the conflict, based on the experiences and observations of those closely involved.

4. Sudan's Digital Information Environment During Conflict

Participants in the Digihub Africa discussions described Sudan's digital information space as highly dynamic, rapidly changing, and often emotionally charged. As the conflict develops on the ground, digital platforms have increasingly become vital spaces where information circulates, narratives are contested, and public perceptions are shaped.

Speakers in the webinars highlighted that Sudan's online space reflects the wider tensions of the conflict, with information often moving rapidly across social media platforms and reaching audiences both within the country and in the Sudanese diaspora. In this context, several factors contribute to the instability of the digital information environment.

- *Rapid Information Circulation*

Participants emphasized how quickly information spreads across digital platforms during crises. Social media networks, for example, enable images, videos, and messages to circulate almost instantly among large, interconnected audiences.

In conflict situations, such content is often shared before it can be verified. Webinar participants observed that this pattern increases the risk that false, misleading, or incomplete information spreads widely before corrections are available. Consequently, early narratives, whether true or not, can quickly influence how events are perceived and discussed online.

- *Emotional Amplification*

Another dynamic discussed during the sessions was the role of emotion in shaping the visibility of online content. Participants noted that posts triggering strong emotional reactions, such as anger, fear, outrage, or shock, tend to spread more rapidly across social media platforms.

This pattern can create an environment where dramatic or sensational narratives gain traction more quickly than balanced or carefully verified information. In times of conflict, such emotionally charged content can intensify anxiety and reinforce existing divisions within communities.

- *Narrative Competition*

Webinar participants and group discussion members also described Sudan's digital space as a battleground where numerous actors compete to shape how events are perceived and understood. In this environment, different groups spread conflicting narratives aimed at swaying public opinion of the conflict.

These narratives may seek to:

- influence public opinion
- mobilize supporters
- delegitimize opposing actors

This dynamic contributes to what several participants described during the discussions as a digital "war of narratives," where competing interpretations of events circulate simultaneously and fight for visibility across online platforms.

(Illustrative distribution based on themes discussed.)

5. Dynamics of Misinformation and Disinformation

The discussions revealed several recurring patterns in how false information spreads within Sudan's digital space.

- *Rumor Amplification*

Unverified claims can spread quickly during uncertain times. When shared across multiple accounts, rumors might seem trustworthy even without proof.

- *Visual Manipulation*

Images or videos might be shared without proper context or attribution to the wrong events. Such content can heighten emotional responses and fuel misinformation cycles.

- *Network Amplification*

Content spreads through interconnected networks where users rapidly forward information to friends, family, or community groups.
Participants noted that the speed of sharing often outpaces the speed of verification.

Graph 2 – Typical Misinformation Spread Cycle

Incident Occurs
↓
Unverified Content Shared
↓
Rapid Social Media Amplification
↓
Public Emotional Reaction
↓
Fact-Checking or Clarification (Often Late)

6. In-Depth Analysis of Technology-Facilitated Violence

6.1. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

A central theme that emerged during the Digihub Africa discussions was the increasing spread of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) within Sudan's digital information space. Participants pointed out that women and girls are more often subjected to harassment, intimidation, and targeted abuse online, especially when they take part in public discussions related to the conflict.
Speakers emphasized that digital platforms, while offering important opportunities for communication and civic engagement, can also become environments where gendered attacks are amplified. Women who express opinions, share information, or engage in public debate—especially journalists, activists, and civil society voices—often face disproportionate levels of hostility online.
During the discussions, various types of TFGBV were identified, including:

- Harassment through comments and direct messages, often aimed at discouraging participation in online conversations.
- Coordinated trolling campaigns, where multiple accounts target individuals simultaneously in an effort to intimidate or discredit them.
- Reputational attacks, including attempts to undermine the credibility of women by spreading harmful narratives or personal accusations.
- Threats and intimidation, sometimes directed at women journalists, activists, or commentators with the intention of silencing their voices in public discourse.

Participants observed that women who publicly discuss political, social, or human rights issues seem especially vulnerable to such attacks. Often, these forms of online harassment are designed to discourage women from engaging in public discussions, effectively reducing their visibility and influence in digital spaces.
The discussions highlighted that TFGBV should be understood not only as an individual harm but also as a broader challenge affecting the inclusiveness of the digital information environment. When women

face persistent intimidation online, it can reduce their ability to engage safely in public debate and contribute to the information ecosystem during times of crisis.

6.2. Youth, Social Media, and the Circulation of Narratives

During the discussions, speakers noted that social media platforms allow young users to access information, share perspectives, and engage in conversations about political and social developments. In many cases, youth contribute positively by sharing updates, raising awareness, and participating in digital discussions about the situation in Sudan.

At the same time, the fast pace at which content spreads online means that young users might unintentionally help spread unverified or misleading information. Participants noted that emotionally compelling images, short video clips, or simplified stories can be shared widely within youth networks before verification occurs.

Within this context, youth can serve as both consumers and proponents of information, influencing how stories spread across digital platforms. The discussions highlighted that increasing digital literacy and promoting critical thinking about online content may help young users navigate complex information environments during times of crisis.

Participants also observed that youth-led online discussions can shape how wider audiences interpret events related to the conflict. Consequently, the role of young people in Sudan's digital space presents both a challenge and an opportunity for promoting more responsible information sharing practices.

7. In-Depth Analysis of Impact

7.1. Impact on Communities and Social Cohesion

Participants in the Digihub Africa discussions emphasized that the dynamics observed in Sudan's digital information environment do not remain confined to online spaces. Instead, they increasingly influence how communities perceive events, interpret the conflict, and interact with one another.

Several speakers noted that the rapid spread of unverified or emotionally charged information can contribute to heightened levels of fear and uncertainty among audiences. In contexts where reliable

information may already be difficult to access, the circulation of misleading narratives can deepen confusion and make it harder for communities to distinguish between verified reporting and speculation. Participants also observed that online narratives can reinforce existing tensions within society. When narratives portray events through highly polarized frames, they may contribute to mistrust between different groups and strengthen perceptions of division. This dynamic can be particularly concerning in fragile environments where social cohesion is already under strain due to conflict.

Within this environment, the role of online communities becomes particularly significant. Digital platforms can both amplify harmful narratives and serve as spaces where individuals attempt to make sense of unfolding events. Participants highlighted that strengthening responsible information-sharing practices and encouraging critical engagement with online content may help reduce the spread of misleading narratives and mitigate tensions in digital spaces.

Overall, the discussions underscored that Sudan's information environment is closely intertwined with the broader social realities of the conflict.

7.2. Psychological and Social Impact of Online Narratives

Participants in the Digihub Africa discussions emphasized that the impact of the digital information environment in Sudan extends beyond the circulation of information itself. In a context where communities are already living under the pressures and uncertainties of armed conflict, the dynamics of online narratives can contribute additional layers of psychological and social strain.

Living in a conflict zone exposes individuals and communities to continuous stress, uncertainty, and concern for personal safety. Within this fragile environment, the constant flow of emotionally charged or misleading content circulating across digital platforms can intensify existing anxieties. Participants noted that the rapid spread of disturbing images, unverified reports, and conflicting narratives can make it increasingly difficult for audiences to process information in a calm and balanced way.

Speakers during the discussions highlighted that young people may be particularly affected by these dynamics. As frequent users of social media platforms, many young individuals are regularly exposed to conflict-related content through their digital networks. According to participants, this exposure can contribute to several forms of emotional and psychological pressure, including:

- *Emotional stress resulting from repeated exposure to graphic or disturbing content, including images and videos related to violence.*
- *Confusion and uncertainty caused by contradictory narratives, where different sources present competing interpretations of the same events.*
- *Heightened fear and anxiety when rumors circulate widely, especially when unverified information spreads rapidly across social media networks.*

Participants observed that these dynamics can create an environment in which online spaces amplify the emotional atmosphere surrounding the conflict. When alarming or sensational narratives circulate widely, they can reinforce collective feelings of fear, anger, or distress within communities.

As a result, the digital information environment does not only shape how events are interpreted; it can also contribute to broader collective emotional strain among communities navigating the realities of conflict. Understanding these psychological and social dimensions was highlighted during the discussions as an important step in addressing misinformation, reducing digital harm, and supporting more resilient engagement with online information.

8. Digihub Africa's Response

8.1. The "Hold Before You Send It" Principle

Participants in the Digihub Africa discussions highlighted the importance of encouraging more reflective and responsible engagement with digital content, particularly among young people navigating

complex information environments during conflict. In response to the rapid circulation of misinformation, emotionally charged narratives, and harmful online content, Digihub Africa's digital literacy work places a strong emphasis on digital mindfulness and responsible information sharing.
At the center of this approach is a simple but powerful question that Digihub Africa poses to young people during its digital literacy engagements:
"Will your digital action build a country — or burn it?"
This question encourages individuals to pause and reflect on the potential impact of their online behavior before sharing information across digital platforms. In contexts where images, messages, and narratives can spread rapidly and influence public perceptions, even a single post or forward can contribute to shaping how events are understood within communities.
Through this principle, Digihub Africa promotes the idea that digital actions carry real-world consequences, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected environments. Encouraging young users to pause, verify information, and reflect before sharing content can help reduce the spread of misinformation and harmful narratives while fostering more constructive online engagement.
Participants noted that such approaches are particularly relevant in environments where social media platforms have become central spaces for information exchange. By encouraging critical thinking and responsible participation in digital spaces, initiatives such as "Hold Before You Send It" aim to strengthen digital resilience and support healthier information ecosystems within communities affected by conflict.

8.2. Digital Resilience and Community Responses

Participants in the Digihub Africa discussions emphasized the importance of strengthening community-based digital resilience in response to the challenges posed by misinformation, disinformation, and harmful online narratives. As Sudan's information environment continues to evolve during the conflict, building the capacity of communities to navigate digital spaces responsibly was identified as a key priority.
Speakers highlighted that addressing digital harms requires a combination of awareness, collaboration, and sustained monitoring of the information environment. During the discussions, several approaches were identified as particularly important for strengthening resilience within communities and supporting healthier digital information ecosystems.

- Digital Literacy Training

Participants stressed the importance of strengthening digital literacy skills, particularly among young people and frequent users of social media platforms. Digital literacy initiatives focus on helping individuals better understand how information circulates online and how to critically evaluate the credibility of sources.
Training efforts often encourage users to question the origin of content, verify information through reliable sources, and reflect on the potential consequences before sharing messages, images, or videos. Such skills can play an important role in reducing the spread of misleading narratives and promoting more responsible engagement with digital platforms.

- Collaboration with Local Actors

Another key theme discussed was the importance of working closely with local actors who possess contextual knowledge of the information environment. Journalists, civil society organizations, researchers, and community actors often have valuable insights into how narratives circulate within specific communities.

Participants noted that collaboration with these actors helps ensure that responses to misinformation and digital harm remain grounded in local realities and informed by those directly observing developments on the ground.

- Responsible Media Practices

Independent journalism was also highlighted as an important component in addressing misinformation within the digital information ecosystem. Participants emphasized that journalists and media organizations play a critical role in providing verified information and contextual reporting, which can help counter misleading narratives circulating online.
In environments where rumors and competing narratives spread rapidly, credible reporting can contribute to greater clarity and provide audiences with more reliable sources of information.

- Research and Monitoring

Finally, participants underscored the importance of continuous research and monitoring of digital narratives. Tracking how information circulates across digital platforms helps identify emerging patterns, risks, and forms of digital harm.
Through ongoing observation and analysis of online discourse, practitioners and researchers can better understand how narratives evolve over time and identify opportunities for early responses to harmful information flows.

9. Implications for Research

The discussions convened by Digihub Africa also highlighted several areas where additional research, resources, and programmatic support may be needed to better understand and address the evolving digital information environment surrounding the conflict in Sudan. Participants emphasized that while important insights are already emerging from practitioners and partners working on the ground, further research and targeted initiatives could strengthen efforts to respond to misinformation, digital harm, and online violence.

- Research Opportunities

Participants noted that there are important opportunities to deepen understanding of how digital narratives evolve during periods of conflict. In particular, further research could focus on:

- Mapping patterns of digital misinformation and disinformation, including how misleading narratives emerge, circulate, and gain visibility across social media platforms.
- Documenting trends in online hate speech, particularly in relation to the conflict and the ways in which hostile narratives may influence online discourse.
- Studying the impact of digital narratives on community relations, including how online narratives may shape perceptions, fears, and tensions within affected communities.
- Analyzing the intersection between misinformation and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), especially how misleading narratives or targeted harassment may disproportionately affect women participating in digital spaces.

Participants emphasized that such research can help generate a clearer understanding of the evolving digital information ecosystem and inform more effective responses to digital harm.

- Programmatic Opportunities

In addition to research, the discussions highlighted several areas where programmatic support from funders and partners could play an important role. Participants suggested that initiatives could focus on:

- *Strengthening digital literacy in conflict-affected communities, helping individuals develop skills to critically evaluate information and engage responsibly with digital platforms.*
- *Supporting independent media and responsible journalism, which can contribute to providing verified information and contextual reporting in environments where misinformation spreads rapidly.*
- *Promoting safer digital spaces for women and girls, including initiatives that address harassment, intimidation, and other forms of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence.*
- *Encouraging research and monitoring efforts focused on information integrity in conflict-affected settings, enabling practitioners and researchers to better understand emerging risks and patterns in digital discourse.*

Overall, participants emphasized that addressing digital harms in conflict environments requires sustained collaboration between researchers, civil society organizations, journalists, and funding partners. Strengthening both research and programmatic initiatives can help support more resilient information ecosystems and reduce the impact of harmful narratives circulating in digital spaces.

10. Conclusion

The discussions convened by Digihub Africa illustrate how digital platforms have increasingly become central arenas in which narratives surrounding the conflict in Sudan are shaped, contested, and amplified. As information circulates rapidly across social media networks, online spaces play a significant role in influencing how events are interpreted by audiences both within Sudan and beyond.

Participants in the Digihub Africa discussions pointed out that misinformation and disinformation on digital platforms can greatly impact how individuals and communities understand developments related to the conflict. When unverified information spreads widely, it can lead to confusion, fear, and increased tensions in already fragile environments.

At the same time, the discussions drew attention to the growing exposure of women and girls to online harassment and intimidation, particularly when they engage in public conversations related to political or social issues. These forms of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) represent an important dimension of digital harm within the broader information ecosystem.

Insights shared during the webinars, along with reporting and perspectives from Digihub Africa's partners working on the ground, underscore the need for greater attention to the role of digital narratives in conflict environments. Addressing the challenges posed by misinformation, online hate, and digital harassment requires continued engagement from researchers, journalists, civil society actors, and community stakeholders.

Strengthening digital resilience, encouraging responsible information sharing, and supporting efforts to protect vulnerable groups from online abuse will be essential components in fostering safer and more informed digital spaces. As digital platforms continue to influence how conflicts are perceived and discussed, these efforts will remain critical for promoting healthier and more constructive information environments.