

My thoughts on the Speak Up! Conference

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In Nigeria, fake news is a modified system of propaganda used by state actors. Even though, these state actors are at the forefront of the campaign against fake news and hate speech. In 2020, Nigeria witnessed the #Endsars protest – a call to end police brutality and extrajudicial killings. It could also be viewed as a manifestation of the citizen's discontent towards fake news on the issue of police brutality against the youths. I heard about the Speak Up! conference on the h-net website, and I decided to apply for the conference because there's an urgent need to speak up against fake news and hate speech, especially with the implementation of hate speech fines and the recent youth protests against police brutality across the country. My topic for the presentation was not farfetched as it steamed up from recent happenings in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country located on the western coast of Africa and the most populous country in Africa. It is a federal republic comprising of 36 states. The country operates democratic system of government with President Muhammadu Buhari as the head of state. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with hundreds of languages spoken, however the official language is English.

At first, I didn't think my paper could be accepted. Even though the theme was related to what was going on in my country. I was still kind of skeptical and my chances of participating were somehow low.

I have attended scientific conferences before, but the Speak Up! conference was indeed remarkable and exceptional. Right from the day I received an acceptance email of my abstract, the level of communication and expertise from Sabrina was professional and splendid. Though, the application form was in German, I was able to navigate easily through the whole application process with the amazing assistance of Sabrina, and all my questions were professionally answered. We also had a brief zoom meeting prior to the conference. Sabrina is such an inspiration, and I appreciate the opportunity to be part of the conference.

I expected my presentation to be a bit different from other conferences I have attended due to the language differences. Hence, I prepared for the

presentation nervously. However, to my surprise, there was no difference between my presentation at Speak Up! and my previous presentations at other conferences. It was an excellent conference as I didn't feel the language difference, and I presented my papers in English with translators on standby. I was also asked questions in German that was translated into English, which I answered. The unique difference was that I had translators, which made my presentation run smoothly without hiccups and the framework very clear.

In terms of the composition of the conference programme, it was both scientific and practical in nature. The hybrid conference was very organized and insightful, and the theme was a social issue – relatable to the contemporary technological age. It was a wonderful experience to be among amazing scholars from around the globe as I was opportune to learn, exchange and explore knowledge with great scholars. I also enjoyed sharing my research paper with them.

Papers for the conference were presented in English and German. The technical team was incredible; I had a smooth presentation without any technical hiccups. My paper was presented in English likewise the question and answer session. I got more research questions as did answers, and helpful feedback on how to address the phenomenon of fake news and hate speech.

I never expected anything after the conference, just like most conferences I have attended. However, the #speakupostbelgien conference was unique in its way. From communicating about the working groups, the process, and expectations, to how to participate (links to participating). The first time I got the message about it, I decided to get involved in the working groups from the great experience I had at the conference, but my schedule has been hectic.

All in all, I can say that I would apply for such an awesome programme again and again and again. The benefit of a conference such as Speak Up! Ostbelgien is the fusion of science with civil society and practice. I had the chance to discuss my paper with international audiences and exchange knowledge from disparate fields that calls for further research on my part on the issue of fake news and hate speech.

The conference was invigorating as I gained a greater understanding of the nuances of fake news and hate speech and the urgent need to address these social issues. The hashtag #speakupostbelgien was used on social media throughout the 3-day conference to document the theme for present and future research.

I'm so gratified to be part of such a fantastic, systematic, and exceptional conference. Thank you #speakupostbelgien !