



**Youth Excel**  
Our Knowledge, Leading Change



# Digital Media Literacy and Youth Civic Reasoning in Kenya

## Baseline Report

PREPARED BY:  
**THE YOUTH CAFÉ**  
2021

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of The Youth Café and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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# GLOSSARY/ ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- DLP** - Digital Learning Program
- ICT** - Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology
- MIL** - Media Information Literacy
- DMIL** - Digital Media Information Literacy
- NGO** - Non-Governmental Organization
- TYC** - The Youth Café
- YCMLH** - Youth-Centered Media Literacy Handbook

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was conducted and the report written by The Youth Café team. The writing team was composed of Caroline Wanjiku Kamau, Willice Onyango, Margaret Kiyo and Malika Pyarali. We are grateful for the input of young people who took part in the handbook co-creation and human-centered design activities including Focus Group Discussions, media literacy needs assessment, online surveys and key informants. We thank Marie Chepkirui and Ashley Rakatsinzwa who were the third eyes in this report. Last but not least, we are thankful for the guidance, feedback, and support of IREX Youth Excel Team. We hope that this report will form the basis of youth development programs on media literacy in Kenya in the future.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital/ media literacy has progressively become the docket for mobile operators, government, Non-governmental Organizations, and international organizations. In particular, East Africa has become a digital innovation Centre for some years now, especially in Kenya. Digital/ media literacy can be described as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that empower citizens to access, use, create, retrieve and understand information and media. Since digital/ media literacy can alter how people discern the media industry and appraise media messages, it could also lower the possible negative impact that the media can have on youth's political participation and voting behavior. Indeed, the online environment is now pivotal to political life, particularly for the youth. There are various prominent contexts for pursuits: sharing political perspectives, fundraising, mobilizing people, political debates, and exerting pressure on governments. Most of these activities happen within broader media ecology bounds that can be distinguished as a participatory culture. This research shows that there is enough evidence of a strong awareness among Kenya's youth regarding adverse communication types, including cyberbullying, hate speech, and disinformation though verification measures of such information are not robust.

# DESK REVIEW BACKGROUND

The Youth Café seeks to equip young people with critical media literacy skills: critical thinking, fact-checking, online safety, social media verification, and quality assessment of online information and their sources through a dedicated handbook. Now more than ever, we need to enhance the fact-checking skills of the youth to restore eroded trust by fake news, improve their civic online reasoning and encourage responsible social media usage. These skills are critical in the electoral context in a bid to reduce political incitement, political strife, and tarnished political images and hate speech. These skills are essential in restoring and consolidating democracy in Kenya. Evidence shows that digital tools and social media networks have been used to spread distorted narratives to shape public opinions. Through designing, developing, evaluating, and disseminating a **Youth-Centered Digital Media Literacy Handbook**, we hope to address digital threats to democracy in Kenya. In 2021, we're zooming in on the relationship between media and election participation among young people, showing its importance, and exploring the principles and role of media and information literacy in meaningful youth civic engagement. As a result, through this partnership, we will undertake collaborative inquiry with a wide range of youth-led organizational partners, utilize peer-to-peer networks, catalyze conversations and encourage the inclusion of diverse youth voices in discussions about digital misinformation in the 2022 Kenyan elections.

## METHODOLOGY

Data collection was dependent on secondary data sources. A desk review was conducted through an in depth review of online documentary sources availed by other organizations and researchers. We also supplemented the secondary data with a needs assessment survey and a focus group discussion.

# LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Unfortunately, as noted in the introduction, there have been relatively few studies (whether in or out of school) that have examined the degree to which efforts to develop young people's digital engagement literacies ultimately foster later civic and political engagement. More research in this area of work is needed but the information garnered provides sufficient preliminary data and gives a trajectory for future research.

## (1). Small Sample Size

The size of constituents in the study is determined by the nature of the research problem under analysis. As such, a very small sample makes it hard to recognize significant correlation in the data. On the other hand, a big sample size might not be economical in terms of finances and time. It was challenging to strike a balance between information on our pilot area Embakasi and recommendations for national and international audiences.

## (2). Self-Reported Data

Whether carrying out a qualitative research study by collecting the data ourselves or depending on pre-existing data, the fact remains that self-reported data is limiting since it cannot be independently confirmed. We had to work with responses from questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, and people comments.

## (3). Lack of Previous Studies in the Research Area

There is limited data relating to media literacy and civic reasoning directly in Kenya. Moreover, data on the Embakasi area, which is our project location, was very minimal. We however learnt a lot from areas with common characteristics. Also, considering that Embakasi has the largest population in Nairobi, we relied on research done in the outskirts of Nairobi.

## (4). Due to Covid-19,

we only established an online survey that only reached people who have access to the internet and hence leaving others out, especially those who are in the rural areas.

# THE PROCESS

## Scanning the Literature

There are many reports, articles, and journals on the topic of media literacy. While some discuss diverse demographics, some fundamentally look at Kenya. A blend of all these materials resulted in a wealthy literature review that we analyzed and selected to fit our context. The literature review included analyzing the current policies in Kenya on media literacy skills and how that translates to political participation. Understanding the existing access and use of digital technologies in both rural and urban areas also showed patterns that are relevant in this project scope.

The gender/cultural and economic aspects also illuminated the underlying issues intersecting with misinformation. While many youth in Kenya have access to technology, there is a digital divide accounting for differences in opinions, thoughts, and attitudes towards the socio-political environment as perceived by the youth. While access to technology enhances learning and understanding, there is a high possibility of exposure to misinformation which necessitates fact-checking, social media verification, and quality assessment of information. Analyzing opportunities of targeted misinformation and political incitement is crucial as young people are likely to change their political participation perspectives depending on the information they have. A review of the literature on evidence of fake news and tested strategies used in mitigating misinformation revealed the current trends and susceptibility of young people.

## Analyzing the literature

After identification of the relevant journals, articles, and publications, relevant data was reviewed. Many online global publications have readily available data, such as demographic and economic information, technology, the internet's reach, and behavioural tendencies of young people. Trends, predictions, and rooted occurrences were particular areas of concern for this media literacy research. The different resources had different data sets that were then examined and linked to form the bulk of our findings.



## **Survey**

For a better understanding of the key concepts and issues of this theme, it was necessary to seek primary information to understand new concepts and also gauge the current issues in the topic of concern. An online survey was sent out for young people in Kenya to fill and interact with the topic.

## **Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews**

After analyzing the literature review, we decided to carry out focus group discussions and key informant interviews to test, challenge and expound the notions and ideas collected through the literature review. Listening to the ideas of our beneficiaries and partners in their own words was necessary for the human-centered design aspect we need for our work. Separate reports for these two qualitative methodologies were produced. However, the recommendations and conclusions of this report are all inclusive of the literature review, surveys, key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions.

# FINDINGS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

## Current Socio-cultural context on civic engagement

What is the cultural context (including gender dynamics) around civic involvement and political participation for young people in Kenya and Africa?

The involvement of the youth in development is relatively new.<sup>1</sup> With rising extremism around the world, the youth have become marginalized in some of the policies created to impact our societies positively. In Sub-Saharan Africa, countries such as Kenya have many young people who are vulnerable and marginalized due to the social and cultural inequalities in their communities. Due to the poverty levels, young people in rural Kenya suffer inequalities that the youth in urban areas would not necessarily go through. This unequal access to opportunities hinders their participation in activities such as school councils. Women and girls in such contexts are more disadvantaged due to cultural norms that devalue young girls and negate their need for an education and active participation in society outside the home.

According to the constitution of Kenya, all adults in Kenya have a right to vote and participate in politics unless the laws invoke their right.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the right to vote for all adults in Kenya, the decision to vote and how to do it lies on the people. Youth voters are affected by different societal factors ranging from patriarchy, poverty, social/familial responsibility, and education level. The political environment affects many youth, yet the majority of voters in Kenya are the youth. The election year of a country is often a very intense political period, and it escalates further if people suspect an infringement of their democratic rights. For some countries, this means political strife and frustration that often disproportionately affects the youth. Political dissatisfaction manifests in many ways, including strikes, destruction of property, and physical fights.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Sanjoy Sigh, "The Need for Youth Participation in the Development of Social Integration," *Youth Peace and Development* 1 (2020): 283

2. Kenya Law, *The Constitution of Kenya 2010*, (Kenyalaw, 2010), <http://kenyalaw.org:8181/exist/kenyalex/actview.xql?actid=Const2010>.

3. Claire Elder, Susan Stigant, and Jonas Claes, *ELECTIONS AND VIOLENT CONFLICT IN KENYA*, (2014), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184626/PW101-Elections-and-Violent-Conflict-in-Kenya-Making-Prevention-Stick.pdf>.

Unfortunately, many youth are caught up in these activities due to manipulation by powerful political agents and out of an obligation to protect their families. Such a case was the Embakasi Jeshi la Embakasi which was an informal group with allegiance to a political candidate to the extent of causing violence. Thus, highly charged political environments combined with ignorance of electoral laws especially relating to electoral violence doesn't augur well for the youth who enter conflict cycles without awareness of the judicial processes and due diligence.

### Current National Digital Literacy Policy

What is the existing national digital/media literacy policy to enhance young people's democratic involvement in Kenya, and how is it affecting youth participation in elections?

The Ministry of ICT, which is in charge of all aspects of communication in the country, works closely with Kenya's Communications Authority in internet policy negotiations. The two bodies are the leading formulators of government policies associated with communications inclusive of the internet. The Ministry of ICT has also formulated and implemented ICT policies to enhance the growth of youth who are knowledge-based. These policies also aim at developing an enabling system that will stimulate ICTs' contribution to the realization of Kenya's Vision 2030. Moreover, these policies have established a cyber-security culture and help the country meet its technological challenges.

A significant number of national digital/ media policies have been put in place to enhance young people's democratic involvement. Such policies have a substantial impact on youth's participation in elections. For instance, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development is currently looking forward to including digital/ media literacy in the primary school Teacher Training Curriculum through the Digischool program. This Digital Literacy Programme (DLP) targets learners in primary schools intending to consolidate digital technologies in learning. This program's implementation is via a multi-stakeholder perspective piloted by the Ministry of Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT).<sup>4</sup>

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4. Digischool, "Implementation - DigiSchool - ICT Authority," ICT Authority, last modified 2020, <https://icta.go.ke/digischool/implementation/>.

In this case, the ministry of ICT, the ministry of energy, and the ministry of education have been working together to ensure that electricity is connected to all the public schools to enable children to learn using the devices. The government has already trained all the teachers. The Digischool has been decentralized, and the number of ICT officers has been increased at the county level. For instance, in Kakamega County, 8 ICT officers have been periodically retraining teachers. Currently, the Digischool program has been implemented in 21,638 schools, and 1,169,000 devices have been installed. Therefore, by the time these children are 18, they will have been equipped with digital/ media literacy skills to identify fake news on social media, affecting their voting decisions in the national elections.

## Current evidence of targeted misinformation

Current evidence of targeted misinformation and political incitement at young people (particularly in the electoral contexts and situations): How does this affect youth choices and their participation in the elections?

Social media has increasingly become an indispensable tool in Kenya's political spaces. Its broad reach has rendered it an asset to bloggers under the influence of political leaders and western corporations who use it to spread false information, propaganda campaigns, and mobilize supporters during election cycles. Deliberately blurred lines between truth and fiction amplify voter confusion and devalue fact-based political debate.<sup>6</sup> Rumors, hearsay, and online harassment are used to damage political reputations, exacerbate social divisions, mobilize supporters, marginalize women and minority groups, and undermine change-makers' impact. Inaccurate beliefs threaten democracy, and fake news represents a particularly egregious and direct avenue by which wrong ideas have been propagated via social media. Politicians have used social platforms to publicize their political ideologies.

On the other hand, tribal divides in the country have been expressed through social media. Supporters affiliated with different parties have attacked one another by creating suspicion through social media's inflammatory statements.<sup>7</sup> The offensive information incites hatred, creating tension in the country. Social media was broadly used to incite hatred and violence during the 2007 elections. Hateful and incendiary messages were circulated through popular social media platforms, leading to calls for regulation to stem the spread of hate speech.<sup>8</sup> The same trend is being recorded as the country prepares for the 2017 elections. Digital media platforms like blogs, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play a significant role in spreading videos, images, and articles that often lead to political incitement in the electioneering period.

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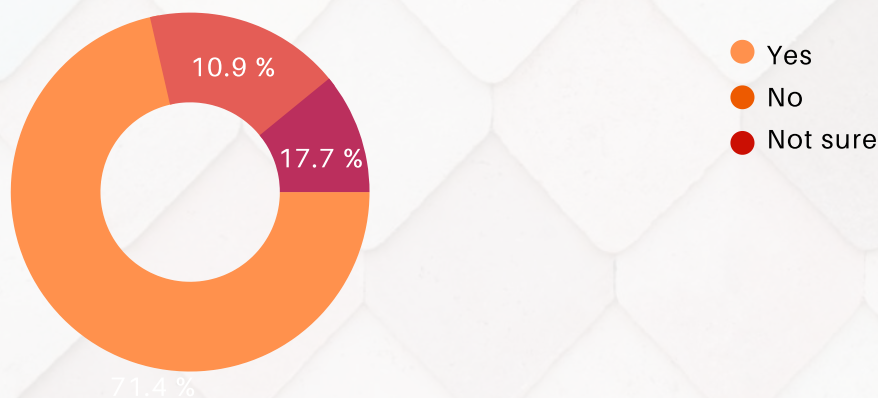
6. Amanda L. Wintersieck, "Debating the Truth: The Impact of Fact-Checking During Electoral Debates," *American Politics Research* 45, no. 2 (2017): xx, doi:10.1177/1532673x16686555.

7. Maaret Makinen and Mary Kuira, "Social Media And Post-Election Crisis In Kenya", *Information & Communication Technology - Africa*. 13 (2008): 5- 10, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/76381563.pdf>.

8. Patrick Mutahi and Brian Kimari, "The Impact of Social Media and Digital Technology on Electoral Violence in Kenya," *Institute of Development Studies*, no. 493 (2017): 8, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322630320\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Social\\_Media\\_and\\_Digital\\_Technology\\_on\\_Electoral\\_Violence\\_in\\_Kenya](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322630320_The_Impact_of_Social_Media_and_Digital_Technology_on_Electoral_Violence_in_Kenya).

During the 2007 elections in Kenya, digital/ media platforms were used for political reasons like polling and campaigning, where hate speech was propagated, and the youth mobilized for violence. <sup>9</sup> This period of political violence left more than 1,500 people killed and 600,000 internally displaced. Similarly, Kenya's 2013 and 2017 political campaigns were characterized by false information and propaganda, especially along ethnic lines being shared online to polarize the nation. Political incitement was done on social media platforms when posts of hatred and intimidation were widely circulated; people went to the extent of taking photos of real people and sharing them in WhatsApp groups. Emotional manipulation from the consumption of charged content encouraged young men to fight, particularly along ethnic lines. A significant percentage of the fake news that dominated the internet during the 2017 election season consisted of recorded and written statements that encouraged false information or perpetuated conspiracy theories.

Our recent survey on this topic showed that 71.4% of the participants have faced misinformation on the basis of politics through different digital sources.



The voting process requires a voter to make two decisions. One, they must choose between rival parties and candidates. Two and more importantly, they must decide whether to vote or not to vote at all. The second decision is crucial, for it will show the influence of that single partisan decision that significantly impacts party fortunes. When politicians appeal to youth voters' emotions, their rational decision-making is subverted, implying that democracy, in this case, is undermined. Young people are aware of cyberbullying and misinformation and how biased information could lead people to wrong beliefs. According to the MIL INDEX survey, the respondents were ready to condone news bias and censorship in given circumstances. There are also compelling arguments that social media could be destroying democracy by lowering the quality of debates, as well as enhancing the spread of toxic politics and fake news. Efforts of digital media literacy are required to leverage these opportunities completely.

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9.Patrick Mutahi and Brian Kimari, "The Impact of Social Media and Digital Technology on Electoral Violence in Kenya."

Hence, youth's decisions are influenced, and they do not choose their own. More importantly, the advertisements, images, and emotions during the campaigns also alter how they make voting choices. When the beliefs of youths are manipulated, their political behavior is likely to change. As such, foreign actors' interventions using digital/ media have a significant impact on youth voters in democratic regimes like Cambridge Analytics influence in the 2013 and 2017 Kenyan elections. This has not given any current evidence of targeted misinformation – please check recent by –elections or cases of electoral /political incitement and violence in Kenya e.g Kiamokama ward by election in Kisii, Matungu etc ( what was being said in social media chat rooms with regards to misinformation), the tension between the Kipsigis in Mau forest and Masai also gives politicians a powerful tool to mobilize locals to violence – check utterances by politicians which have served to mislead and incite the youth

### **Current access and use of digital technologies**

What is the evidence on young people's use of technology/access to technology in Kenya (e.g., rural vs urban)?

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development defines the digital divide as “the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socioeconomic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies and to their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities.”

13 Kenya has grown exponentially over the years in terms of its use of technology and exploitation in different developmental sectors. Now more than ever, technology has become the driver of success in many projects and government initiatives, which could not have been possible in the past eras. While this is a good thing for the country, we cannot ignore the fact that the most pressing challenge that many Kenyans face is poverty which exacerbates the digital divide.

Poverty is one of the significant challenges facing Kenya in recent years and has only being exacerbated by the COVID 19 epidemic which has seen many economies falter. Absolute poverty, which is essentially the lack of basic needs, is still evident in many slums in Kenya. Nairobi County is the fourth county with the highest population of people with absolute poverty.

which is essentially the lack of basic needs, is still evident in many slums in Kenya. Nairobi County is the fourth county with the highest population of people with absolute poverty. <sup>14</sup> Technology becomes a far-reaching goal for the youth in poor areas as their first concerns are usually food, shelter, and clothing. However, relative poverty is the primary cause of concern since the gap between the haves and the have-nots has significantly increased over the years. It is the classic case of the rich getting richer and the poor remaining poor.

The inequality levels are alarming considering that the wealthiest 10% of people in Kenya earned on average 23 times more than the most deficient 10%, according to data from Oxfam. <sup>15</sup> Despite all this, the middle class in Kenya is growing at a high rate leading to the affordability of mobile phones in most households in Kenya. These statistics indicate hope for a better technological future and shine a light on the necessity for digital education. Unlike in the past, where rural areas represented homogenous and straightforward living while urban life represented more progress, the digital divide is more startling seen between the urban poor and the urban rich. Taking Nairobi County as an example: people in the slums have limited access to technology and low digital literacy skills. A study on media literacy in Mathare and Umoja area in Nairobi showed that the households with digital skills in Umoja were 22, which was relatively high compared to 100 in Umoja considering a 100 household sample. <sup>16</sup> Umoja location is regarded as an urban area with a mixture of young people in business and employment. The digital divide, therefore, manifests in both technology access as well as knowledge to analyze and make decisions based on information collected online.

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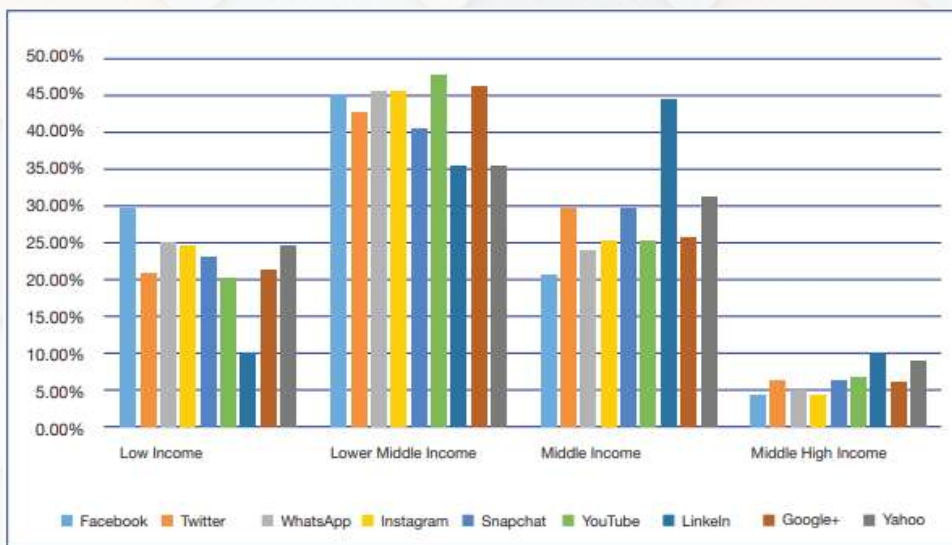
14. Vidya Diwakar and Andrew Shepherd, "UNDERSTANDING POVERTY IN KENYA", SPAN, 2021, <https://sidase-wp-files-prod.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/app/uploads/2020/12/01095836/kenya-mdpa.pdf>.

15. Oxfam International, "Kenya: extreme inequality in numbers," last modified 2020.

16. Patrick Wamuyu, "Closing The Digital Divide in Low-Income Urban Communities: A Domestication Approach," *Interdisciplinary Journal of e-Skills and Lifelong Learning* 13 (2017): xx, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1186154>.



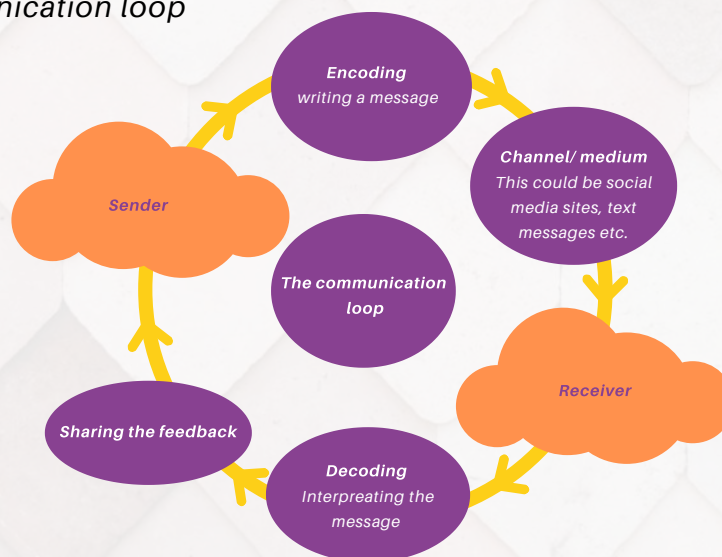
Figure 1: Use of Social media in Nairobi based on income.



Source: SIMElab 2018

Reducing the digital divide, therefore, requires exploitation of the available technology while still building capacities for young people to use information online for their benefit. Building capacities boils down to communication, where the response/ feedback shows the level of understanding on the receiver’s end. Whether the channel of information used is digital or manual, understanding the source of information and the credibility of the message is necessary.

Figure 2: Communication loop



Applying digital media skills in the communication loop is necessary considering the different internet usage of youth in Nairobi County, specifically in Mathare and Umoja.<sup>17</sup>

17. Patrick Wamuyu, "Closing The Digital Divide in Low-Income Urban Communities: A Domestication Approach," *Interdisciplinary Journal of e-Skills and Lifelong Learning* 13 (2017): xx, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1186154>.

Table 1: Household internet uses in Embakasi (Umoja) and Mathare

Internet Usage	Freq
Watching the news on the internet	18
Chatting and social connections	18
Citizen participation (Comments on newspaper websites, political forums, open debates)	15
Contacting government agencies	10
Online shopping	4
Information search	16
Games and entertainment	18
Emailing	18
Education	5

Source: Wamuyu (2017)

The above statistics were then confirmed by a survey that revealed that many youths use media to connect with others as well as receive news updates. People who constantly look for news on the internet and chat with friends online are exposed to information directly and indirectly. Considering that the election year is around the corner in Kenya, building the capacities of young people in evaluating the truthfulness and source of information. Digital media literacy is thus not a suggestion but an obligation for youth stakeholders.

For a long time, social media platforms have continued to penetrate most aspects of people's lives. About 70% of internet users spend a lot of time using mobile phones, with Facebook dominating all social media platforms globally, followed by WhatsApp. Research indicates that Kenya is a technology hub in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 17% of its population having access and social media access. 18 The global average social media usage as a news source is 55%, implying that Kenya's social media plays a significant role in political incitement. 19 According to the MIL survey data carried out by Deutsche Welle, the number of respondents reported to have had access to the internet in rural areas was less than half, especially among females. 20 This can be attributed to the fact that in rural areas, phones are on many occasions circulated among family members and friends; therefore, people have a smaller share of access to the internet than in the urban areas where the majority of the youth personally own smartphones.

18. M. Mwaura, "Digital Access: 17pc of Kenyans Now Use Social Media," *Business Daily*, last modified August 3, 2020, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/data-hub/digital-access-17pc-of-kenyans-now-use-social-media-2297538>.

19. Samuel C. Kamau, "Democratic engagement in the digital age: youth, social media and participatory politics in Kenya," *Communicatio* 43, no. 2 (2017): xx, <https://core.ac.uk/reader/212880080>.

20. Dennis Reineck, Georg Materna, and Luise Krumm, *Media and Information Literacy Index*, (Bonn: Deutsche Welle, 2020).

Despite the positive figures showing high trust in social media used to access the internet, the report also indicated that Kenyans, especially the youth, are anxious about misinformation on the internet, mainly because electoral violence has been synonymous with elections. In 2017, digital technology and social media were first used for political reasons like polling and campaigning. Most politicians use social media to cultivate hate speech and mobilize violence. As a result, such widespread social media reach has also created a significant challenge to security and peace. Media literacy skills have become a crucial factor in political science for leaders and citizens seeking to engage in political discussions. 21

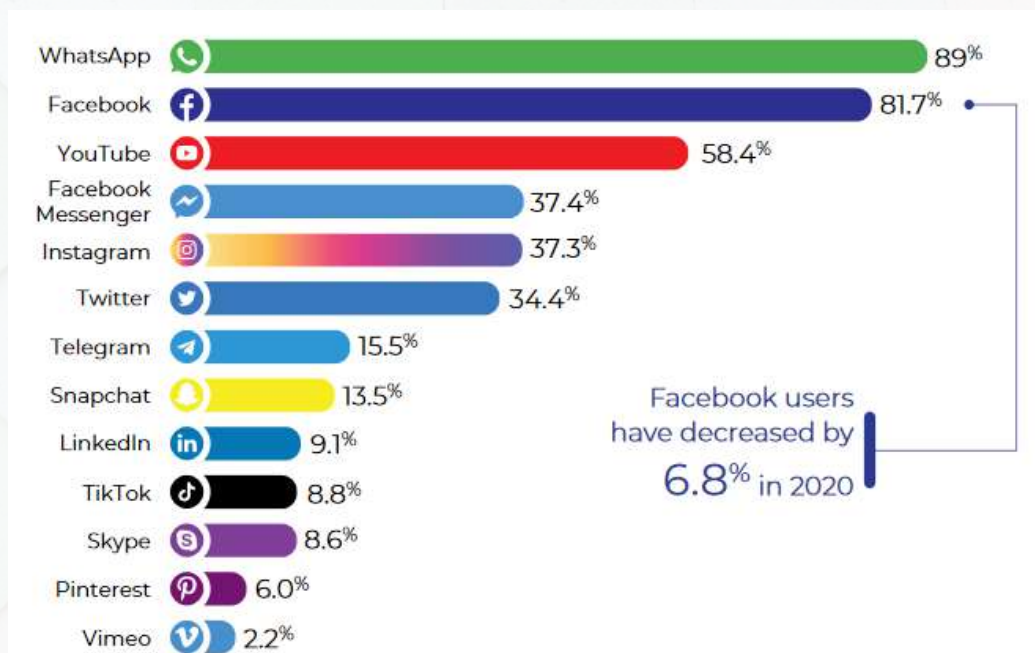


Figure 3: Frequency of Social Media Use  
Source: SIMELab (2020)



Figure 4: Dynamics of Social Media Group  
Source: SIMELab (2020)

## **Current interventions in teaching media literacy skills**

Do any universities in Kenya offer training and sessions for Media and Digital literacy? What are the current interventions in teaching media literacy skills?

Digital media technology is rapidly evolving, as are mass communication practices, including media production and distribution. As a communication medium, digital media now rivals print and broadcast media. Professionals in journalism and mass communication are therefore confronted by the need to acquire the knowledge and skills required by this new and still evolving media landscape. Universities providing journalism courses have been adopting emerging technologies due to the social, political, and economic demands.

There are various universities offering training and sessions for media and digital literacy in Kenya. These institutions provide media and journalism-related courses both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Some of these institutions include:

1. Graduate School of Media and Communication- Aga Khan University, Kenya,
2. University of Nairobi
3. Moi University
4. Daystar University
5. United States International University
6. Mount Kenya University
7. Institute of Advanced Technology Limited

*Media Houses Offering Digital media training*

1. Standard Media Group
2. Royal Media Services
3. Radio Africa Group

## **Current availability of fact-checking, social media verification, and quality assessment of information**

What are the existing digital/media literacy resources for young people in Kenya? e.g., existing online fact-checking tools/ websites/forums/apps/support lines available

There is an increasing presence of International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) investing in quality assessment and fact-checking journalism and news production. These organizations' work is centered on collecting, cleaning, scrutinizing, and sieving through data to present it using the mainstream news cycle. Two such non-profits whose work spans African countries, including Kenya are, Code for Africa and Africa Check.

The dissemination of the reports and findings of these organizations are free and accessible through their websites and their social media platforms.

Code for Africa is a civic organization established in 2015. They have cultivated partnerships with 15 civic organizations, including Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. 22 Their effort focuses on working with mainstream news platforms to train data journalists and investigative journalists on fact-checking strategies and data aggregation on digital platforms. 23

The most prominent of these organizations based in sub-Saharan Africa is Africa Check. Founded in 2012 and funded by international bodies such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), this fact-checking organization is independent and certified through the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). 24 Based at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, their conduct includes fact-checking and training projects for journalists in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal. Africa Check opened an office in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 2017. They investigate claims made by news organizations and public officials, using strategies geared towards countering the spread of fake news. The techniques used are informed and based on verified information from credible evidence sources.

Apart from publishing fact-checking reports on their website, Africa Check shares their materials with other news organizations for free republishing, thus encouraging independent media. Since internet penetration is still relatively poor in Kenya, the team also frequently discusses its findings on radio and television to reach offline audiences. 25

Two primary goals form the basis of the work these organizations do:

1. Equip the public with accurate data and factual evidence to help them make informed decisions
2. To raise the standard of journalism by training investigative journalists on better fact-checking methods

Information sites such as Facebook and Google have recently been accused of perpetrating fake and offensive news, which further leads to misinformation and hate crimes against minorities.

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22. Code for Africa, "ForMediaLiteracyClass," GitHub, last modified 2020, <https://github.com/ForMediaLiteracyClass>.

23. David Cheruiyot and Raul Ferrer-Conill, "Fact Checking Africa", *Digital Journalism* 7, no. 9 (September 2018)

24. Africa Check, "Sorting Fact from Fiction," last modified May 7, 2021, <https://africacheck.org/>.

25. Anim V. Wyk, *The Fact Checking Preferences of AfricaCheck.org's Audiences in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa*, (Oxford: Reuters Institute, 2019).

response, both platforms tried to find solutions; Facebook collaborated with third-party, fact-checking organizations in Kenya such as Africa Check to flag fake news to improve journalistic integrity and quality of news found on their platform. Google introduced a fact-checking feature in its search and news tabs by collaborating with non-partisan sites like PolitiFact, which help determine the validity of statements.

### Current issues on digital safety

What are the main issues around security in delivering and using online platforms to discuss politics and issues related to democracy?

Technological advancements have led to the formation of a 'Global Village.' It has opened up the world to the individual, but it has also opened up the individual to the world. According to KICTANET (Kenyan ICT Action Network), a multi-stakeholder platform for people and institutions in ICT and civic reform in Kenya, data protection is lacking in Kenya. People's digital information can and has been exploited by interested parties such as data mining companies for political purposes, especially during the 2017 general elections. 26 An issue arises as a result of the state's increased power over citizens through surveillance technologies. State surveillance hinders freedom of expression since people are reluctant to voice their opinions about leadership and government due to fear of reprimand from the people in power. This stifles views, as it is difficult to remain anonymous in Kenya since most people use registered mobile phones to access the internet, which can be tracked. 27

Today, privacy laws are seen to be more relevant than ever before. With the increased internet penetration, data crossing the border, and the increased use of social media platforms, the need for personal data protection and correct use of data has been created. Following a very long wait, the country passed the comprehensive data protection legislation- the Data Protection Act of 2019 on 8th November 2019. This Act plays an integral role in enhancing young people's democratic involvement in the country by bringing into play comprehensive laws that safeguard individuals' personal information, including the youth in this case.

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26. Kictanetadmin, "About KICTANET," KICTANet Think Tank | Catalysing ICT Reforms, accessed May 7, 2021, <https://www.kictanet.or.ke/about-kictanet/>.

27. Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), "'Kenyans Must Defend Their Digital Rights'," DW.COM, accessed May 7, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/kenyans-must-defend-their-digital-rights/a-47133164>.

individuals' personal information, including the youth in this case. The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner has therefore been formed through the Data Protection Act of 2019, which makes provision for regulating and processing personal data. 28 Therefore, Kenyans, including the youth, ought to take pride in the Data Protection Act, which is an excellent milestone for enhancing youth innovation. Besides, the Act enables the youth to feel safe while using social media platforms, which are very vibrant, especially during electioneering periods.

Social media has provided a platform for more direct engagement between political candidates and voters. As technology advances, so does the social media interaction, specifically in the context of elections. According to a study carried out by St Paul University in Kenya, there was a significant increase in social media campaigning in the 2013 elections compared to the 2007 election and an even higher statistic recorded for the 2017 general election. The study reported that over 80% of the candidates had an online presence. The third quarter sector statistics report for the financial year 2019/2020 published by the Communications Authority of Kenya depicts the following statistics: Internet penetration is 90%. There are 8 million social media users, with over 80% of Kenyans using Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. 29 These platforms can prove powerful tools in influencing voters' opinions, especially young people who have a remarkable social media presence. It can encourage political participation and be a nurturing environment for hate speech, political propaganda, and incitement of violence. 30 A recent survey carried out by Portland Africa found that 90% of Kenyans had come across fake news regarding the 2017 election. 31

Additionally, there have been reports of politicians being cyberbullied on Facebook and Twitter, such as President Kenyatta's badgering using the hashtag #KOT (Kenyans On Twitter) in 2019. Cyberbullying necessitates a reevaluation of current regulations to make online environments safer for political candidates and voters. Institutions that control news dissemination or track hate speech should not be used at the behest of the people in power but should seek to uphold the law for all. Although policies are in place that inform amendments of the constitution to incorporate digital rights, there is a need to create awareness for citizens, especially young people, about laws that hinder their rights to freedom of expression.

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28. 1. Republic of Kenya, Data Protection Act 2019, (KENYA GAZETTE SUPPLEMENT, 2019), [https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/2019/TheDataProtectionAct\\_\\_No24of2019.pdf](https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/2019/TheDataProtectionAct__No24of2019.pdf).

29. Communication Authority of Kenya, Third Quarter Sector Statistics Report for the Financial Year 2019/2020, (Nairobi: Communication Authority of Kenya, 2020).

30. John Ndavula, "How Social Media Are Levelling Kenya's Political Field -- and Lessons Learnt," The Conversation, last modified September 1, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/how-social-media-are-levelling-kenyas-political-field-and-lessons-learnt-144697>.

31. Portland Africa, The Reality of Fake News in Kenya, (Nairobi: Portland Communicaitons, 2020).

## Current Policies in Youth democratic engagement

### What are the Existing National Digital/Media Literacy Policies for Enhance Young People's Democratic Involvement?

The Ministry of ICT, which is in charge of all aspects of communication in the country, works closely with Kenya's Communications Authority in matters of internet policy negotiations. The two bodies are the leading formulators of government policies associated with communications inclusive of the internet. The Ministry of ICT has also formulated and implemented ICT policies to enhance a knowledge-based youth. The policies also aim at developing an enabling system that will stimulate ICTs' contribution to the realization of Kenya's Vision 2030. Moreover, the policies have established a cybersecurity culture and help enable the country to meet its technological challenges.

A significant number of national digital/ media policies have been put in place to enhance young people's democratic involvement. Such policies have a substantial impact on youth's participation in elections. For instance, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development is currently looking forward to including digital/ media literacy in the primary school Teacher Training Curriculum through the Digischool program. This Digital Literacy Programme (DLP) targets primary school learners to consolidate digital technologies in the Ministry of Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT). In this case, the Ministry of ICT, the Ministry of Energy, and the Ministry of Education are working together to ensure that electricity is connected to all the public schools to enable children to learn using the devices. The government has already trained all the teachers. The Digischool has been decentralized, and the number of ICT officers has been increased at the county level. For instance, in Kakamega County, eight ICT officers have been periodically retraining teachers. Currently, the Digischool program implementation is successful in 21,638 schools, and 1,169,000 devices are installed. Therefore, by the time these children are at the age of 18, they will have been equipped with digital/ media literacy skills that can help them be able to identify fake news in social media, as a result, affect their voting decisions in the national elections. 32

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32. ICT Authority, "DigiSchool - ICT Authority," ICT Authority, accessed May 7, 2021, <https://icta.go.ke/digischool>.



Today, privacy laws are more relevant as compared to before. With the increased internet penetration, data crossing the border, and the increased use of social media platforms, the need for personal data protection and correct use of data has been created. Following a very long wait, the country passed the comprehensive data protection legislation- the Data Protection Act of 2019 33 on 8th November 2019. This Act plays an integral role in enhancing young people's democratic involvement in the country by bringing into play comprehensive laws that safeguard individuals' personal information, including the youth in this case.

### **Findings from the Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews**

The two focus groups and two Key Informant Interviews conducted facilitated the findings of the literature review. All the participants agreed that digital media literacy is necessary for young people to make decisions and there is a significant relationship to civic reasoning. The consultation brought about valuable information also in terms of current needs for youths when using digital tools. Participants were receptive in answering the prompt questions ranging from social bullying, emotional intelligence, spread of online information, understanding of media literacy and the verification methods used. All the participants and experts acknowledged the importance of digital media literacy and the role that the media plays in influencing decision making. In support of the findings from the literature review, participants expressed that they related digital media literacy to sharing, collaboration and verification of information.

When talking of sharing of information, participants expressed that social bullying is a serious issue that curtails the online freedom of many young people. Cases of bullying act as a fear-factor for people who would like to meaningfully engage online. This issue thus translates to the lack of emotional intelligence that shows through hate comments, demeaning comments, infringement of rights, insensitivity and frauds online.

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33. Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), The Internet Legislative and Policy Environment in Kenya, (2014), <https://www.khrc.or.ke/mobile-publications/civil-political-rights/34-the-internet-legislative-and-policy-environment-in-kenya/file.html>.

On issues relating to collaboration, youths mentioned the lack of training on how to create and handle information online. The use of social media has enabled youths to create information quickly and access it easily as well. However, this liberty is a cause of concern when analyzing ethics and their application. Many youths are not fully aware of the laws and guidelines that apply when dealing with information. Segmented thoughts about what to share and how to protect private information poses a serious challenge.

Verification of information was another challenge when dealing with political information. Most of the participants rely on their direct sender for information sifting. Banking on trust for friends and family was identified as a common method although not very effective. Mainstream media also posed as a key confirmatory technique although a lot of information may not be presented in these primary channels of information. A clear point was that many youths do not have an established method of analyzing the data they receive.

## **Conclusions**

The sources of information considered in this literature review show evidence of misinformation in Kenya and offer valid reasons for supporting the implementation of teachings on digital media literacy, critical thinking, identification of authenticity of the information, and resources to equip young people in civic engagement. The Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions strengthened the tendencies noted from the secondary sources.

When talking of sharing of information, participants expressed that social bullying is a serious issue that curtails the online freedom of many young people. Cases of bullying act as a fear-factor for people who would like to meaningfully engage online. This issue thus translates to the lack of emotional intelligence that shows through hate comments, demeaning comments, infringement of rights, insensitivity and frauds online.

# Recommendations

Attaining universal digital-media literacy necessitates the collaborations of chief stakeholders and policy developers in the international media and the ICT industry, youth organizations, multilateral organizations, the government, ICT professionals, the media, and educational institutions, among others. Some of our recommendations include:

## Recommendations to the Government

1. The national government should make digital-media literacy a segment of ICT education at all levels and incorporate it into the new curriculum.
2. More importantly, the government should use a competitive pool of resources specifically for college and university associations to reinforce cross-disciplinary teacher education initiatives in digital and media literacy. Such would enhance in-school community education projects in digital and media literacy.
3. There is indeed a great need for support from the local government to map current community programs in digital media literacy, emphasizing youth media programs for impoverished populations. This can be done by financing the creation of an online video documentation instrument. Such a database would drastically enhance knowledge of best practices in digital media literacy.

## Recommendations to Youth Organizations

4. Youth organizations should work collaboratively and host an annual national competition, inviting audio, scripts, video submissions from youth-led organizations, after which winners should be recognized and rewarded at the State House.
5. Youth organizations should also share and disseminate current research on digital/media literacy. For instance, Youth Cafe's brief for this desk review mainly considered academic study, and we, therefore, incorporated publicly available research from previous studies.

## Recommendations to Multilateral organizations

6. All multilateral organizations worldwide should support initiatives like the YALI, Check campaign, whose objective was to fight the spread of misinformation in Africa. Such initiatives ought to be inspired and embraced by key stakeholders in digital media literacy.

7. Multilateral organizations should educate the public on verifying, detecting, assessing, and reporting malicious and fraudulent information by using illustrations and sharing tips through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook as part of their corporate social responsibility.

## Recommendations for Youths

8. Young people should be vigilant in determining the authenticity of information before deciding on sharing the information in different social spaces. This goes a long way in reducing the spread of fake news.

9. While technology could be a good tool for gathering information, engagement, and increasing collaboration, it could also be used harmfully to spread rumours, infringe data protection rights, and cause harm to people. It is upon individuals to do their due diligence before sharing information that may be false, inaccurate, or insensitive.

## Recommendations for the Media Literacy Handbook

10. Youth are eager to develop their media literacy skills and to engage actively in civic leadership. The handbook should thus be practical, comprehensive, and youth-centered. The survey data confirmed that youths use Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram heavily, as such; the handbook should be “youth-centered” by using common features of these apps as well as disseminating in the platforms.

11. While civic reasoning is the goal for the media literacy handbook, media literacy also affects other areas such as mental health and employment. It is necessary to design the handbook for ease of adoption for such themes as a sustainability strategy.

12. Young people share information with friends and family frequently. Information sharing is done informally, and thus, information verification methods should be clear, simple and easy to use for them to be effective. The handbook should thus capture that clearly.

13. Many youths in Kenya are fast to share information and they quickly digest visual data. As such, the handbook should equally be captivating for youths to engage and quickly learn.

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*This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of The Youth Café, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.*