

Fake news on societal behavior: A case study of the youths in Nairobi County, Kenya

Maisiido V. Naserian^{1*}
Daniel Oloo Ong'ong'a²

^{1*}nasivero893@gmail.com
²doloo@mku.ac.ke

^{1,2}Mt Kenya University, Kenya

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.6.4.3>

ABSTRACT

Fake news is becoming a rising global concern through social media. This can influence public opinion as well as society through behavioral change and distortion of information. The study examined the link between fake news and social behavior of youths in Nairobi County, Kenya, specifically Nairobi City County. The research focused on how fake news was framed on social media, how it was managed, and how young people interpreted the news. The influence of fake news on the decision-making of youth was also the subject of this study, along with evaluating the effects of misinformation and the impact of news errors. The social responsibility theory and the media dependency theory guided the study on the interaction between fake news and youth. We used a descriptive research design to collect the views of the youth on the subject. The study targeted a population of 600 employees working with the Communications Authority of Kenya. Then, the study selected a sample of 240 respondents through simple random sampling using the Yamane formula. The data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire based on the objectives of the study. The analyzed responses were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics, and the outcomes were presented by way of tables and charts. During the research process, principles such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and participants' informed consent were adhered to. Fake news has a great impact on behavior of the society youth in Nairobi County. According to a recent study, social media is the most common medium through fake news is being spread throughout the world. Misinformation can damage trust in media, personal relationships and participation in civic affairs. Discrepancies like errors and bias in the news were seen as a big reason for people disbelieving news. Although they don't trust the news as much anymore, they trust less accurate sources just as much as before. The phony news stories were also directly related to the decision-making of youth which influenced their political choice. Some youths were resilient enough to check the veracity of the information before taking any action. However, the majority became vulnerable due to confirmation bias and reliance on something shared by their peers. Considering these findings, the study advised incorporating digital and media literacy programs into the educational system so the youth could be trained to evaluate things critically. The report advised independent fact-check validation processes should be strengthened. All media should continue to remain subject to ethical standards through professional codes. Social media companies should be made accountable for false news. Similarly, it calls for partnerships among various sectors. The goal is to work with youth to increase their resistance to fake news and support positive media behavior.

Keywords: Fake News, Nairobi County, Societal Behavior, Social Media, Youth

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of fake news has become one of the most serious issues in today's time which is capable of distorting information, swaying opinion, changing behavior on a global scale. Prior to the onset of the internet age, newspapers, television, magazines and radios were our main sources of news. Yet, the internet and the growth of Information Technology changed how people receive news. Moreover, dissemination shifted to online platforms, web-based transmission, news websites, and social media (Olan et al., 2024). The speed and reach of social media platforms have allowed news to be consumed almost instantly. This has, as such, replaced the delay with which news would appear in cycles.

According to Aimeur et al. (2023), worldwide, news that are fakes are defined as false information that are deliberately contrived to misinform the audiences or manipulate them. Although the term is usually for false news online, it has been politicized instead. It is sometimes used to discredit negative-yet-true coverage (Yao & Ngai, 2022). There are various reasons behind producing fake news. For instance, politically, financially and socially motivated news are common (Wang et al., 2022). Research finds that youths aged 18 to 34 years are the group most reliant on social media for news and information. Furthermore, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and X are the most popular channels, according to research (Vogels et al., 2025). The global implications of fake news are documented well. It is known to erode trust in conventional media, drive polarization and manipulate consumer behaviors. (Jais et al., 2021). Research has found that false reviews or deceptive promotional messages can trick consumers into buying non-existent and lousy

quality goods (Cao, 2023). In addition, the dissemination of fake news often employs emotional manipulation that can trigger fear, anger, or sympathy. Consequently, this results in emotional outbursts and harmful social consequences (Mathew, 2022). Scholars stress that it is also essential to figure out what motivates people to spread lies to make countermeasures effective (Wang et al., 2022).

Fake news is not just a Western or developed phenomenon but is experienced very much in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South. Due to the rapid growth of ICT infrastructure in the region, youth are increasingly reliant on mobile phones and the internet for their communication, education and economic activities (Shen et al. 2023). With more and more people getting enrolled into the online world, disinformation and misinformation has been on the rise as well. There have been fears in Africa that many of the information that circulates on social media is unverified.

According to reports, most pictures and text shared online are usually not credible or hold advantageous narratives which can incite conflict and violate people's privacy rights (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025). Moreover, misinformation in the region often touches on sensitive political, ethnic and religious matters, which is likely to have a particularly severe impact on social cohesion.

The social sphere can come under misrepresentation due to which human relationships can become more complex. Moreover, stereotypes are reinforced and the functioning of our society gets disrupted. The studies of behavioral scientist show that the behavior of society is molded by the same communities that live in. Furthermore, exposure to wrong narratives can undermine years of work of communities that face injustice (Martin & Bolliger, 2023). For example, movements that promote division, fear or hatred may undermine healthy societal behaviors, such as tolerance, cooperation or conformity (Elsayed, 2024). Many societies on the African continent remain susceptible to fake news due to extremely limited capacities to detect and counter it (Shirish et al., 2021).

Fake news is rife in Kenya and Nairobi County in particular. The widespread use of smartphones, inexpensive data packages, and a quality ICT infrastructure have made it easy for fake content to circulate among the Kenyan audience (Mbithi, 2022). According to Yin (2023), the youth has ditched the traditional media outlets and started to depend on social media sites for news due to the immediacy, accessibility and interactive nature. Nevertheless, it is also home to misleading information as not everyone, including the celebrities, practices fact-checking.

The Media Council of Kenya (MCK) has consistently warned that over half of the content being posted on social media is unverified, not credible and usually violates privacy and dignity while operating at conflict (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025). Fake news in Kenya has been reported in several instances ranging from political misinformation with the elections to misleading claims over public health, consumer products and social events. The public is less trusting of both digital and traditional media due to such forms of misinformation that cause confusion.

Kenya's youth are particularly affected, given their high level of social media usage and their active participation in conversations and discussions. While some youths are becoming more careful and cross-checking information from multiple sources before sharing, many still go ahead and share unverified or what the peers are buzzing about. The impact of misinformation, therefore, can influence one's misunderstanding and attitudes, and moreover, it can affect people's political participation, buying decisions, and social relationships (Mbithi, 2022).

Fake news, which refers to false information propagated for malicious intent, is impacting how residents of Nairobi County behave. Communication experts have pointed out that misinformation can harm specific audiences and the general public. These negative impacts can influence decision-making, media trust, and civic engagement. In light of the above, it is important to assess how fake news has distorted the behavioral patterns of the youth in Nairobi and recommend ways through which it can be mitigated.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

According to Newman (2022), over half the world's population now relies on news circulated through online channels. This shift is also seen in Kenya. These days many Kenyans prefer to get their news through fast online channels. They do not stick to print and broadcast as before. Kenyan news media operations are regulated by the Communications Authority and other statutory organizations. However, the fast pace of evolution of information technologies brings challenges that can limit the full effect of these regulatory measures. There is an increasing challenge due to the spread of content by bloggers and untrained commentators who often give personal opinions rather than factual news, making it hard to ascertain credibility and reliability (Otieno & Owiti, 2022).

To get more views and readership, media companies are accused of publishing sensational and inaccurate content. This, however, has caused the public to start mistrusting the media to a certain extent. The erosion of credibility shows the importance of the role fake news plays. The causes of fake news include misinformation, social media, and news errors. The study hence pays special attention to these variables in order to understand how fake news informs societal behavior among youth in Kenya. According to Munene and Oloo (2024), the growth in the number of social media users and the increasing diversity of platforms has made it too complicated for government agencies, corporations, and businesses to control false messages from spreading. Although regulatory interventions are important, they alone do not constitute a sufficient response to the complexity and scale of the problem. Alternative approaches have also

been suggested like having verification mechanisms, specialized fact-checking websites and digital tools. Mbithi (2022) adds that educational interventions can help users learn to assess online content critically and distinguish between true and false information. Evidently, despite all the regulatory and corrective efforts being employed to quell the fake news problem in Kenya, it is still a major issue. Particularly among youth who are the most active users of social media. So, there is need to study how far misinformation, social media, and news errors drive fake news impact society.

1.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To evaluate social media influence on the societal behavior of youths in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- ii. To analyze the effects of misinformation on the societal behavior of youths in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- iii. To examine exposure of fake news on societal behavior among young people in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- iv. To investigate the impact of news errors on the societal behavior of youths in Nairobi County, Kenya.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. How does social media influence the dissemination of fake news among youth in Nairobi County?
- ii. In what ways does misinformation affect societal behavior among youth in Nairobi County?
- iii. What role do news errors play in shaping public opinion among youth in Nairobi County?
- iv. How does fake news influence decision-making among youth in Nairobi County?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study merges Social Responsibility Theory and Media Dependency Theory to analyze the fake news and societal behavior of youths in Nairobi County. The two theories are complementary in that they help us be clear on the responsibilities of media actors and what level of reliance on media audiences should have.

2.1.1 Social Responsibility Theory

Media practitioners and institutions have an ethical obligation that was put forward by McQuail (2005) on Social Responsibility Theory to provide effective and fair media content to the public. Misinformation and disinformation are the crucial underpinning variables in this study which spread non-verified and sensationalised news erodes social stability and public trust. The accountability and ethical journalism normative focus of its theory makes it stronger and relevant, as this can serve as answer for fake news problems. Nonetheless, the subjectivity of this test, which depends on moral and ethical standards, poses a serious limitation. Since such standards differ from society to society, it can place undue burden on individuals or organizations (Zikargae & Gessese, 2025).

2.1.2 Media Dependency Theory

Media Dependency Theory explains how audience dependence on the media shapes perceptions, behaviors, and decision-making. This theory was formulated by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in 1976. The study applies the theory to the variable of social media and error news, which illustrates that the higher the dependence on the media, the greater the probability of fake news. One of the strengths of the theory, which should be noted, is its ability to explain cognitive, affective and behavioral effects of media. It is a very useful theory in the digital age. A flaw of this model is that it takes little account of the social, cultural, or economic factors that shape how people use media (Tandoc et al. 2017).

The combination of these two frameworks provides a more comprehensive theoretical perspective for the study. The ethical obligations of the content creators and the media institutions are emphasized in the Social Responsibility Theory whereas the audience's dependency on the media and the impact of unbalanced media environments is captured in the Media Dependency Theory. When put together, all the above will paint a vivid picture of how fake news propagates, why audiences fall prey to it and how it ultimately affects youth behavior in Nairobi County.

2.2 Empirical Review

The growth of social media worldwide has changed the way people get news and interact with society, with Facebook, Instagram, and X now the dominant platforms for news (Adegboyega, 2020). Although these platforms foster connectivity, they allow for misinformation and fake news generation. Lee's (2019) research revealed that unregulated social media facilitated the sharing of false information against the 2016 U.S. election. Misinformation can be especially harmful in public health and politics. Audiences prefer to stick to false beliefs than give them up even after they are corrected (Susmann & Wegener, 2022). Caceres et al. (2022) also pointed out that the miscommunication caused social discomfort and distrust in many areas of the world. Fake news refers to news, stories or hoaxes that are fabricated deliberately to mislead for ideological or financial gain. As noted by Talwar (2020), it causes people to have an adverse and negative perception or behavior. Furthermore, news errors have the potential to undermine journalistic credibility

and trust in the media. For instance, Henke et al. (2022) shows how these errors can create doubt towards the media. Social media, misinformation, fake news, and errors in news threaten to undermine trust, distort decision-making systems, and impact behavior in diverse contexts, studies show.

Across the region, African societies experience similar problems but with unique social and political dynamics. According to Adeoye et al. (2021), social media is a vital tool for communication and collaboration during emergencies. As per Abiodun (2024), misinformation in Nigeria hampers political communication, civic engagement and divides communities while reducing trust in institutions. Audiences in less regulated environments are vulnerable to misinformation. Adams et al. (2023) finds that audiences in less regulated environments are particularly vulnerable to misinformation. Less regulated advertising environments can lie with little recourse for fact-checking. According to Mohamed et al. (2024) in Kenya, the spread of misinformation via Facebook and X exacerbated political crises and divisions in society, affecting the lifestyle of people and leading to long-term unrest. This finding indicates that misinformation, fake news, and news errors interact in a regional context and are often compounded by socio-economic vulnerabilities and weak enforcement.

At the local level, the literature emanating from Kenya sheds some light on the dynamics of fake news and societal behavior. According to Kamau (2017), the youth of Kenya see social media as the primary source of their information despite being perceived as unreliable. According to Maweu (2019), over-utilization of social media negatively influences student performance in Kitui, showing that people's behavior changes as they engage online. According to Maweu (2019), the impact of fake news on the 2017 general elections resulted in protests due to distrust of electoral agencies. Fake news during the elections created a high expectation that public trust in democracy and security would be undermined (Lee, 2019). The Kamau and Shiundu (2024) explained that unlike newspapers, the unverified online news has made it easier to spread false information rapidly. For instance, the Nation Media Group suffered legal penalties over false news about a public figure whose credibility the public trusted (Kamau & Shiundu, 2024). The local findings reveal that social media misinformation, fake news, and errors by news organizations interrelate in their impact on behavior in Nairobi. The youth in Nairobi are the most active consumers of digital content.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area: Nairobi County, Kenya

Nairobi County, Kenya's capital city, is the political, economic and communication centre of the country. The population of Nairobi exceeds 4.3 million people, most of whom are youth under 35 years of age (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). The information and communication technology (ICT) sector is growing rapidly in the county and the cellphone penetration is high. Further, people have access to the internet. Nairobi is an essential center for the study of how youth use social media and other online platforms as their primary source of news and information.

As a multicultural urban center, Nairobi combines a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic groups, thus making for a good setting to study the impact of fake news on society. Young people use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube for political discussions, entertainment, education, and social networking. Although these platforms increase participation and connectivity, they also act as major conduits of misinformation, disinformation and news error that shape understandings, influence decisions, and impact civic engagement.

Nairobi is where the national government offices, business corporations, universities and media houses are located. The Communications Authority of Kenya's (CA) presence in the county reinforces Nairobi's role as the centre for regulation of information and communication policy. Yet, despite this, there is no stopping the fake news caravan. The active political culture in the county and the usage of internet by youth allows for easy creation and circulation of disinformation especially during elections and other social important events. These dynamics make Nairobi County an appropriate study setting to investigate the relationship between Fake News and Youth Behavior in society. The high level of digital penetration, the socio-cultural diversity of the population, and a highly active youth demographic make it a mini-India which is an excellent reproduction of what happens in the nation. Fake news has begun to interfere in matters of social interactions, trust of citizens in institutions, and civic engagement among the general citizenry.

3.2 Research Design

A descriptive research design was used in the present study employing a mixed method. The reason for selecting a descriptive design is because it is appropriate for studying contemporary phenomenon as they occur in their natural settings without manipulation. With this design, the researcher can receive feedback from the respondents on the perception, attitude and behavior of the society due to fake news. By examining existing conditions, the descriptive approach enabled the study to provide a comprehensive account of the patterns and relationships involved in the spread and impact of misinformation, news errors and fake news on youth. The power of this design is that it produces factual and contextual data so that we get insights into things happening in the real world and not mere assumptions or

projections. Furthermore, this method made possible systematic observation and quantifiable data collection, while also enabling qualitative perspectives that help interpret the findings. By doing this, the study not only captured what was happening but helped understand why some behaviorally responses occur. Thus, it helps achieve the objective of the study with efficiency.

3.3 Target Population and Sample Size

As per Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), population refer to persons which you expect to note and which have similar traits. The researcher must concentrate this characteristic of the work. The Communications Authority of Kenya in Nairobi County supplied the 600 employed youths that were the focus of this research. The organization employs 800 people, of which most are young people in the age group of 35. The researcher targeted youths aged not less than 25 years of age. This organization was chosen as it plays an important role in communication trends especially through social media as well as the dissemination of news. It helped the researcher maintain her energy and other resources for the targeted organization and help obtain effective results of the study. The targeted population was spread across the following departments: Corporate Communications, Consumer and Public Affairs, Cyber Security, Licensing, Compliance and Standards.

Multiple research study has adopted a simple random sampling to collect data. This is a probability sampling model. Thus, in this case, each person in target population has an equal chance of selection. Further, each person has an independent chance of selection. The researcher randomly picks a sample of the population, which are the selected participants, to complete the issued questionnaires. The employed youth numbering to 240 were surveyed in order to obtain factual data on social media and behavior of the youth. Bryman (2019) described sample as part of the larger group that a researcher extracts for analysis in his book.

The sample size was calculated using the Yamane formula in the table below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

Where:

n=Sample Size

N= Population size (600)

e -Marginal error (0.05)

$n=600/1 +600 \times 0.0025$

$n=600/1+1.5$

$n=600/2.5$

n=240

Therefore, 240 employed youths were included in the study using a sample chosen from Nairobi's target population.

3.4 Data Analysis

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), after survey data is collected, the researcher studies the data and interprets the meaning. The questionnaires' responses were first entered into Microsoft Excel and later transferred into SPSS Version 30 for analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize and describe the research data, while inferential analysis tested the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Data was presented using chart and tables. Similar findings were identified with previous studies and reviewed literature. The simple linear regression formula is a model established by the model. $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$

Y - Youth Behavior

b_0 - the intercept

X_1 – Effect of Social media on youths behaviour

X_2 – Effect of Misinformation on youths behaviour

X_3 – Effect of News error on youths behaviour

$\beta_1 - \beta_3$ - factor coefficients

ε is the error term

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

The study targeted a sample size of 240 respondents. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 218 was filled and returned, showing 90.8% response rate which is an excellent figure; being very useful for analysis and interpretation. The response rate was high because research assistants checked on their responses or were physically present at the institution. A response rate exceeding 80 percent is generally considered adequate in social research.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents according to bio-data section of the questionnaire has been presented in this section. The information includes their gender, age, work experience in the organization, level of education, and time using social media. The above characteristics give meaning to how fake news shapes the youth behaviors within Nairobi County's community.

4.2.1 Gender

Table 1

Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	120	55.0
Female	98	45.0
Total	218	100

The results show a fairly balanced gender distribution, with a slight male majority among the respondents.

4.2.2 Age of Respondents

Respondents were asked to indicate their age bracket. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Age of Respondents

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage (%)
25-27 years	30	13.8
28-30 years	110	50.5
31-35 years	52	23.9
36-40 years	26	11.9
Total	218	100

A majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 35 years, aligning with the target demographic of youth and early-career professionals.

4.2.3 Duration of Employment

Respondents were asked how long they had worked at the Communications Authority. Table 3 presents their responses.

Table 3

Length of Employment

Years of Service	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	98	45.0
5-10 years	76	34.9
10-15 years	30	13.8
More than 15 years	14	6.4
Total	218	100

The findings indicate that nearly half of the respondents had been employed at the institution for between 1 and 5 years, indicating a relatively young and dynamic workforce.

4.2.4 Educational Level

The respondents' highest level of education was also recorded and is shown in Table 4.

Table 4*Education Level of Respondents*

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma	46	21.1
Bachelor's Degree	124	56.9
Master's Degree	48	22.0
Total	218	100

Most respondents held a bachelor's degree, suggesting that the study engaged a well-educated sample with adequate media literacy and professional exposure.

4.2.5 Duration of Social Media Use

Respondents were asked how long they had been using social media platforms. Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5*Duration of Social Media Use*

Duration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1–5 years	34	15.6
6–10 years	104	47.7
11–15 years	62	28.4
More than 15 years	18	8.3
Total	218	100

The majority of respondents had used social media for between 6 and 10 years, indicating long-term engagement with digital platforms which is relevant to the study's focus on fake news.

4.3 Presentation of Findings**4.3.1 Social Media on the Dissemination of Fake News among the Youth in Nairobi County**

Social networking platforms have become the most preferred application through which people, in particular youth, get news. However, their speed and interactive nature have also become facilitators of misinformation and disinformation on the platform. The laid-back format of user-generated content makes it easy for news to “go viral”, after which there is despondence at people's inability to tell fake news apart. This study therefore probed the respondents' perception of the role of social media in the spread of fake news.

Table 6*Influence of Social Media on Dissemination of Fake News*

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
Social media platforms are my primary source of news	88	96	18	10	6	4.15	Agree
I often encounter unverified or misleading information on social media	102	84	20	8	4	4.26	Agree
Social media allows rapid sharing of information, including fake news	110	80	14	10	4	4.32	Agree
I rarely verify the authenticity of news before sharing it	54	80	36	32	16	3.47	Neutral
Fake news spreads faster on social media than on traditional media	120	70	12	10	6	4.33	Agree

According to the results, it shows that most of the respondents agreed that fake news can spread through social media ($M=4.15$). According to most respondents, social media is their main source of news, and most have seen unverified or erroneous content. The respondents also considered social media a platform for the quick dissemination of any information, including misinformation ($M=4.32$). The mean score on whether to check information before sharing it was relatively neutral, indicating inconsistent behaviors among users. This suggests that there is a gap in digital literacy or awareness of the adverse effects. The research confirms that social media is the main channel through which most fake news gets into the youth in Nairobi County ($M=4.33$). Because social platforms are so close to people, it results in a quick spread of information. But at the same time, the unverified news can take a toll too. The results showed that social media is used for news by most youths in Nairobi County. The respondents revealed that they mostly come across unverified or fake information on social media. This is in tune with Adegboyega (2020), who observes that social media has become one of the most powerful sources of information in the world, notwithstanding, capable of spreading falsehood.

Table 7*Influence of Social Media on the Dissemination of Fake News*

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
I have adopted or supported social views that were later proven to be false	52	74	40	36	16	43.6
Misinformation has led to arguments or tension in my workplace or community	64	86	36	22	10	4.39
Exposure to fake news makes me more cautious and anxious about social issues	80	96	20	14	8	4.62
I have changed my behavior (e.g., avoided places or people) based on fake news	58	76	42	30	12	3.81
Misinformation has influenced my perception of certain social groups	76	88	28	18	8	4.48

The graphical distribution reveals that most respondents agreed and strongly agreed with statements suggesting this social media was the main forum where fake news propagates. The statement "Exposure to fake news makes me more cautious and anxious about social issues" received the most score for strong approval (M=4.39). In the same boat, the message "Misinformation has influenced my perception of certain social groups" secured high agreement levels too, indicating a widespread sentiment of social media being a misinformation magnifier (M=4.39). The statement "I have changed my behavior (e.g., avoided places or people) based on fake news" showed a fairly even distribution of responses across the Likert categories, with few respondents strongly agreeing (M=3.81). This indicates that there is some sort of engagement between the content and the user, suggesting that not all users share such content without critical thought. Survey data finds youth believe social media is the most significant means through which fake news is disseminated in the country. The analysis of the frequency of the agreement with the statements points towards the conclusion that exposure to fake news on social media is an important influencer of the information environment among the youth in Nairobi. In the same vein, Lee (2019) explained the spread of false information through social media during the U.S. elections and how social media can distort democracy. According to Kamau (2017) a local study has showed that young Kenyans are heavy consumers of social media for information but are doubtful of its credibility. The study found that most respondents rarely check the content before sending it out. This corresponds with the findings from a study by Maweu (2019), which showed that the youth in Kitui suffered negative behavioral problems from their use of social media. Also, youth lack the ability to verify the authenticity of information before sharing.

4.3.2 Misinformation on the societal behavior of youth in Nairobi County

Misinformation is one of the most communicational environment challenges affecting how individuals, especially youth, view and act upon social issues. The fast spread of false or misleading information online harms trust in the news media and affects decision-making, civic engagement and relationships with others. In Nairobi County, where the youth heavily rely on social media for information, misinformation can distort social behavior by fueling polarization, instigating reactionary behavior and undermining confidence in institutions. The next table provides data on the impact of misinformation on the social behavior of youth in the study area.

Table 8*Effects of Misinformation on Youth Societal Behavior*

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
Misinformation has influenced my perception of certain social groups	76	88	28	18	8	3.90	Agree
I have changed my behavior (e.g., avoided places or people) based on fake news	58	76	42	30	12	3.60	Agree
Exposure to fake news makes me more cautious and anxious about social issues	80	96	20	14	8	4.00	Agree
Misinformation has led to arguments or tension in my workplace or community	64	86	36	22	10	3.78	Agree
I have adopted or supported social views that were later proven to be false	52	74	40	36	16	3.50	Neutral

The research shows that misinformation has a visible impact on social behavior of youth. Most of the respondents believed that they have been affected by fake news about social groups which sometimes led them to act in a different manner to an extent (M= 3.60). Many others also reported increased anxiety and caution because of misleading news and misinformation, especially involving sensitive social or political issues (M=4.00). Interestingly, many of them agreed that they have participated in an action caused by misinformation. However, the responses given to the last item showed quite a neutral agreement (M=3.50). It may mean that they are reluctant to admit they were misled or are simply ignorant that their previously held beliefs were wrong. According to the data, false information can change relationships, behaviors, and the mood of a community in society. This shows that the framework that if left unchecked, fake news can lead to attitude and behavior change especially in our youths who are more connected. The



findings revealed that misinformation skews youth’s ideas about social group, creates anxiety and in some cases, influences change in the behavior in order to not go to that place or not meet that person. In their publication, Susmann and Wegener (2022) state that misinformation sticks even when it’s corrected. This affects people’s opinions and actions.

Table 9
The Influence of Social Media in the Dissemination of Fake News

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
Social media are my primary news source	88	102	110	54	120	94.8
I often encounter unverified information	95	85	80	80	70	82
Social media allows rapid sharing of fake news	10	10	10	32	8	14
I rarely verify news before sharing	6	4	5	16	4	7
Fake news spreads faster on social media	6	4	5	16	4	7

The visual spread shows many participants mostly strongly agree or agree that social media is a dominant source of news and is a significant facilitator of spreading misinformation. The social media spreads information (fake news has been used here) like wildfire and faster than traditional media, scored maximum number of Strongly Agree responses. This agrees with the popular belief that social media does indeed spread fake news faster than other platforms. Likewise, the statement has a high level of agreement that “Social media enables the fast sharing of information, including fake news.” This further implies that the structure of social media allows the sharing of information without restrictions. Current research attributes the primary reasons for misinformation amplification to algorithmic curation and user engagement features. Youth strongly agreed with the statement “I often come across unverifiable or misleading information on social media”, showing that young people are conscious of misinformation surrounding them. In contrast to the former example, the statement “I rarely verify the authenticity of news before sharing it” produced a more spread-out response pattern. This means that while many agree with the statement that fake news is widespread, not all are equally passive or negligent consumers. The table shows that social media is a major source of news, though people are aware to its potential misinformation. According to Social Responsibility Theory, media users and media platforms have an obligation to ensure the dissemination of accurate and reliable content. These findings strengthen the applicability of this theory. Caceres et al. (2022) reported that misinformation during COVID-19 increased distress in society. Similarly, in Nairobi, respondents noted an increase in caution due to fake news. According to a study conducted within Nigeria by Abiodun (2024), misinformation eroded civic engagement and political trust. Locally, Mohamed et al. (2024) identified misinformation as a driver of political crises in Kenya, echoing the disruptive impacts noted in this study.

4.3.3 Fake News on the Decision-Making of Youth in Nairobi County

Fake news is not just ordinary misinformation. Unlike misinformation, fake news is made up on purpose to mislead us. Young people living in Nairobi County consume information from live digital platforms much more than any other medium. Exposure to fake news helps shape perceptions, attitudes, and collective actions among them. This influence extends to sensitive areas such as politics, health and social relations, where false narratives can easily influence opinion and trigger emotion. The study offers an understanding of the impact of fake news on youth alteration behavior after analyzing the data.

Table 10
Influence of Fake News on Youth Decision-Making

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
I have made decisions based on news that was later found to be fake	62	88	32	24	12	3.76	Agree
Fake news influences my views during elections or civic engagement	84	92	18	14	10	4.00	Agree
I sometimes support causes based on emotional reactions to fake news	70	80	30	26	12	3.78	Agree
Fake news content often influences my opinion on national policy issues	64	86	28	24	16	3.72	Agree
I now take more time to verify content before making important decisions	76	90	22	20	10	3.93	Agree

A high number of respondents stated that they made some decisions based on false or misleading information and some said they were emotionally affected by false information (150 of 218 respondents). The respondents were also worried that fake news will affect their political choices and support for a public cause. The last sentence, one that the exposure of fake news has initiated a more careful analysis of the information being processed. Many respondents now more carefully verify the information they see before forming an opinion or making a decision. The study reveals that

youths don't verify the information and require training for the same (166 of 218 respondents). Fake news affects the decision-making process of youth, especially with respect to elections and civic engagement. Respondents reported making decisions based on fake news and pledging their support to emotional appeals. This matches with Talwar's (2020) worldwide examination, which identified imitation news to have severe behavioral consequences on social media clients. Yin (2023) also associated false news with its ideological and financial motivations and exploitation of emotions.

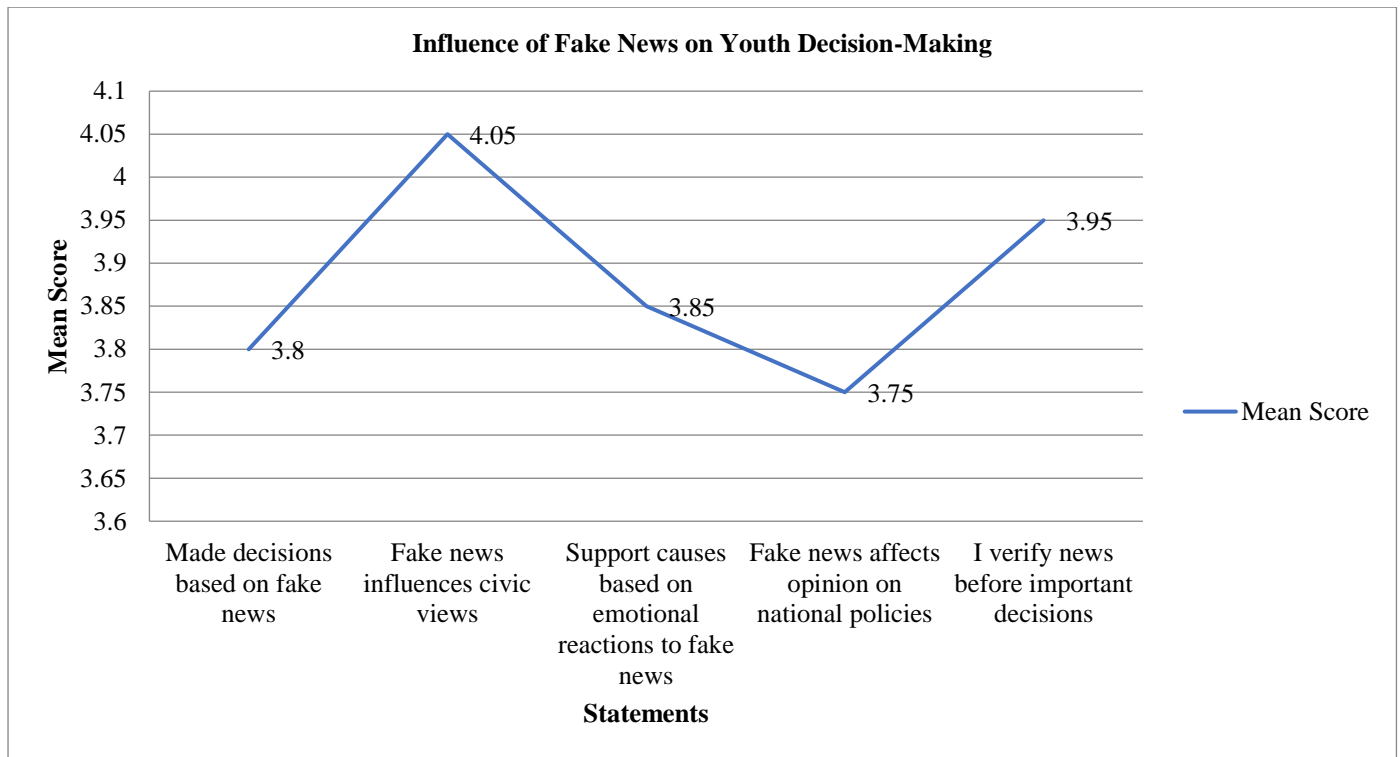


Figure 1
Influence of Fake News on Youth Decision-Making

As can be seen from the graph, the mean score of all statements is more than 3.5 indicating general agreement. The statement with the highest mean score was “Fake news influences my civic views.” This indicates that many respondents perceive that fake news influences their socio-political views. Fake news can intrude and pervert public perceptions of civic issues, the finding shows. These findings suggest that exposure to disinformation may have resulted in an unusual positive behavioral adaptation of youth, as seen from their high agreement with the statement, “I check news before taking important decisions.” This demonstrates that they are increasingly aware of the potential harm that fake news can cause. Statements like "Support causes based on emotional responses to fake news" and "Fake news influences opinion on national policies" also recorded moderate mean scores, indicating that emotional and policy-related decisions are susceptible to manipulation by fake news. Even though this figure has the second lowest mean, it still shows that a good number of people have made decisions based on false news. The graph indicates that fake news impacts the choices made by the youth in Nairobi. According to the findings of the present study, some youths of today take more time to verify content. Similarly, Maweu (2019) finds that fake news in the 2017 Kenyan elections misled some audiences while pushing others toward skepticism and verification practices. These findings support the Media Dependency Theory, which suggests that when uncertainty exists, audiences will turn to the media for decision-making.

4.3.4 News Errors in Shaping Public Opinion among Youth in Nairobi County

Whether intentional or unintentional, news errors – negligence, lack of fact-checking and hasty reporting – are a further distortion of information in the media ecosystem. Unlike deliberate disinformation, mistakes result from inherent weaknesses in our editorial standards or the pressures of immediacy. Inaccuracies such as these have the potential to undermine the confidence of the youth in Nairobi County in media institutions and, consequently, affect the acquisition of knowledge and social interactions based on incorrect information. The findings in this section show how news errors lead to negative social behavior of young people.

Table 11*Role of News Errors in Shaping Public Opinion*

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
I have encountered factual errors in news reports that influenced my opinions	70	94	24	18	12	3.88	Agree
Corrections or apologies by media houses reduce the impact of news errors	56	82	34	28	18	3.55	Agree
News errors make me skeptical about future reports from the same source	92	86	18	14	8	4.04	Agree
I rely on more than one source of information to confirm the accuracy of news	88	96	20	8	6	4.15	Agree
News errors often lead me to reevaluate my views on ongoing issues	66	78	34	28	12	3.72	Agree

According to the findings, the errors in news contribute significantly to the making and re-making of youth opinion. Many respondents pointed out the presence of factual errors in media content that affected their interpretation of events or issues. Most also stated that these mistakes create doubts and they will not quickly believe the news, but will confirm from different sources first. In the event of any defects in the news, would it help to correct and apologize? A sizeable number of respondents agreed to this. The same shows youngsters being more conscious of the media. They seem to engage with the news more critically and aware about the journalistic errors. Another clear implication that can be derived from this sentence is that news error perceived as a cause of skepticism indicates an erosion of trust in single media. The results shown that news errors create a major impact on the public. It reduces their faith in a media source. And youngsters are fact-checking the information through other media sources as well. Henke et al. (2022) has shown that typesetting errors and factual mistakes in news articles thwart audiences from retaining information and assessing credibility. Newman et.al. (2022) also noted that mistakes reduce trust in media throughout the world.

Table 12*Role of News Errors in Shaping Public Opinion*

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
News errors influenced my opinions	35	40	10	10	5
Corrections reduce the impact of news errors	25	35	20	12	8
News errors reduce my trust in sources	35	40	15	7	3
I cross-check news with other sources	40	40	15	4	1
News errors make me reevaluate my views	30	35	15	15	5

The table shows that most of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the errors in news made them change their opinion. Majority of the responses were either Strongly Agree or Agree. There was also a high level of agreement with the statement “News errors reduce my trust in source,” reflecting a belief that media accuracy issues degrade trust in other sources. The response category that was the most decisive, was the solutions to the statement “I cross-check the news with other sources”. In this statement, most of the respondents said that they take a personal initiative to verify news content. It shows that the youth today are becoming more media savvy due to more repeated reporting of inaccuracy by the media. Most agree that corrections or apologies lessen the impact of news errors – but a substantial chunk of readers are neutral or doubtful. This shows that while media accountability is appreciated, it will not always bring full accountability when public trust is lost. Regarding the final statement, “News errors make me think twice about my views”, we find moderate agreement. If errors lead us to rethink our views, it will depend on the opinion holder and the issue at hand. The graphic demonstrates that the mistakes made by the media have a measurable consequence on the people, with the trust in media and fact-checking driven by past experiences. According to Kamau and Shiundu (2024), the Nation Media Group was fined in Kenya due to inaccurate stories. This shows how the wrong news can affect society. The tendency of the respondents to search for more than one source for verification purposes proves that errors, without correction, will result in doubt and negative views of the media by the audience (Munene & Oloo, 2024). According to Social Responsibility Theory, the media ought to publish accurate news information and it is not in their hands but in the audience’s hands anymore when they on the degree of reliance measured. Similarly, according to Media Dependency Theory, the more trust in the media (in this case Twitter), the more reliance on media to form opinions on the issue.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

One conclusion is that the widespread unverified material on social media has made fake news flash viral among the youth of Nairobi. Although these sites are immediate and accessible, their structures tend to prioritize popular

content. This makes them biased towards outrageous and emotionally appealing material, irrespective of its veracity. Many people are not used to checking the facts. Moreover, their friends keep sending them fake news that is trending. This does become visible to them.

First, disinformation has tangible and sometimes disruptive effects on behavior. It makes to feel fear, anger and empathy as well as how they become involved in the community, look at their relationships and understand social issues. This can also reinforce stereotypes, create or deepen social divides, and even discourage participation in civic engagement altogether. They show how harmful misinformation can be for society as the public sphere becomes more digital.

Second, mistakes made by the news, likely unintended or due to editorial slips, influence public opinion. Once people form their opinion based on incorrect information, they usually do not change them even after correction. This lasts a long time. Thus, it undermines trust in media institutions. People then turn to alternative sources of information. The problem is that these may be less trustworthy. This shows that media must exhibit a strong commitment to standards of accuracy and transparency.

In the end, fake news has a direct effect on youth's decision-making concerning political participation, consumption, and social activism and participation. Some people check the facts and sources of news. But others stick with the sources they know. They choose to take news that fits with their ideology. This leaves a large part of the youth population susceptible to manipulation, especially if the misinformation is consistent with their beliefs or supported by people in their networks.

5.2 Recommendations

The research suggests ways to address fake news influence on youths in Nairobi County through a multidisciplinary approach. Indeed, the very first step would be to include digital and media literacy in the educational curriculum so that young people can think critically and fact-check. The promotion of independent fact-checking initiatives and public awareness campaigns to counter misinformation in real time further complements this plan. It is also important that media practices are subject to high ethical standards. Hence, news organizations must incorporate high-level verification of facts, while professional bodies must ensure accountability. Alongside this, social media platforms must be regulated to detect, flag and remove false content on their site within a designated time frame, preferably using local fact-checkers. Peer-led interventions, such as workshops and influencer campaigns, are effective in promoting responsible sharing among youth, it notes. It is also advised to continuously research and monitor the fake news trends. Similarly, universities, think tanks, and community organizations must join hands to design evidence-based measures. In conclusion, the report highlights the need to embed misinformation awareness into civic education and calls for cross-sector partnerships between government, academia, media and civil society to develop coordinated, sustainable strategies. All of these options would make the youth more critical, responsible, and resilient.

REFERENCES

- Abiodun, A. (2024). The Impact of Fake News and Misinformation on Political Communication and Civic Engagement in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication and Public Relation*, 9(1), 26 – 37. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijcpr.2272>
- Adams, Z., Osman, M., Bechlivanidis, C., & Meder, B. (2023). (Why) is misinformation a problem?. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(6), 1436-1463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221141344>
- Adegboyega, L. O. (2020, April). Influence of Social Media on the Social Behavior of Students as Viewed by Primary School Teachers in Kwara State, Nigeria. In *Elementary School Forum (Mimbar Sekolah Dasar)* (Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 43-53). Indonesia University of Education. Jl. Mayor Abdurachman No. 211, Sumedang, Jawa Barat, 45322, Indonesia. Web site: <https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/mimbar/index>.
- Adeoye, A. A., Onuoha, C., Obiano, D. C., & Motunrayo, O. (2021). Social media as a collaborative tool for research among library and information science (LIS) professionals in Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/5137>.
- Aïmeur, E., Amri, S., & Brassard, G. (2023). Fake news, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 13(1), 30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-023-01028-5>
- Ball-Rokeach, S., & DeFleur, M. L. (1976). A dependency model of mass media effects. *Communication Research*, 3(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027600300101>
- Bryman, A. (2019). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Caceres, M. M. F., Sosa, J. P., Lawrence, J. A., Sestacovschi, C., Tidd-Johnson, A., Rasool, M. H. U., ... & Fernandez, J. P. (2022). The impact of misinformation on the COVID-19 pandemic. *AIMS public health*, 9(2), 262. <https://doi.org/10.3934/publichealth.2022018>

- Cao, C. (2023). The impact of fake reviews of online goods on consumers. *BCP Business & Management*, 39, 420-425. <https://doi.org/10.54691/bcpbm.v39i.4208>
- Denniss, E., & Lindberg, R. (2025). Social media and the spread of misinformation: infectious and a threat to public health. *Health promotion international*, 40(2), daaf023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf023>
- Elsayed, A. (2024). Societal behavior and cultural responses to misinformation. *Journal of Social Change in Africa*, 9(1), 66–82.
- Henke, J., Holtrup, S., & Moehring, W. (2022). Forgiving the news: The effects of error corrections on news users' reactions and the influence of individual characteristics and perceptions. *Journalism Studies*, 23(7), 840-857. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2044889>
- Jais, N. M., Mustafa, H., Mukhiar, S. N. S., & Jamaludin, S. S. S. (2021). Generational trends in emerging media consumption: A COVID-19 scenario. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, Special Issue: ICEMC 2021, 81-95.
- Kamau, D. (2017). Social media and youth behavior in Kenya. *Nairobi Journal of Social Studies*, 5(1), 44–59.
- Kamau, S., & Shiundu, A. (2024). Investing in fake news? The disinformation industry in Kenya's 2022 elections. *State-Sponsored Disinformation Around the Globe*, 194-215.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2019). *2019 Kenya population and housing census, volume I: Population by county and sub-county*. KNBS. <https://www.knbs.or.ke>
- Lee, T. (2019). The global rise of “fake news” and the threat to democratic elections in the USA. *Public Administration and Policy*, 22(1), 15-24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PAP-04-2019-0008>
- Martin, K., & Bolliger, D. (2018). Social media use and news consumption patterns. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 35(3), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1092>
- Mathew, P. (2022). Fake news and its harmful effects on society. *Journal of Global Media Studies*, 14(1), 14–28.
- Maweu, J. M. (2019). “Fake elections”? Cyber propaganda, disinformation and the 2017 general elections in Kenya. *African Journalism Studies*, 40(4), 62-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2020.1719858>
- Mbithi, A. (2022). The impact of social media misinformation in Kenya. *Kenya Communication Review*, 10(2), 55–72.
- McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mohamed, R. A., Radoli, L., & Aswani, R. (2024). Social Media Amplification of Political Rhetoric in Kenya: The case of the 2022 General Elections. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8(9), 146-164.
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (1999). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Acts Press.
- Munene, M. M., & Oloo, D. (2024). Role of Social Media Platforms in the Spread of Fake News in Nyeri County, Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 5(2), 229-239. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.5.2.21>
- Newman, N. (2022). Overview and key findings of the 2022 Digital News Report. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/dnr-executive-summary>
- Olan, F., Jayawickrama, U., Arakpogun, E. O., Suklan, J., & Liu, S. (2024). Fake news on social media: the impact on society. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 26(2), 443-458. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-022-10242-z>
- Otieno, K., & Owiti, N. (2022, December 9). *Spread false info online at your own peril, bloggers warned*. People Daily - Kenya latest news, business and politics. https://peopledaily.digital/news/spread-false-info-online-at-your-own-peril-bloggers-warned?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Shen, X., Liu, Q., & Zhang, H. (2023). ICT development and youth engagement in digital culture. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 25(3), 621–637.
- Shirish, A., Srivastava, S. C., & Chandra, S. (2021). Impact of mobile connectivity and freedom on fake news propensity during the COVID-19 pandemic: a cross-country empirical examination. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 30(3), 322-341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085X.2021.1886614>
- Susmann, T., & Wegener, F. (2022). Correcting misinformation and audience resistance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 98(2), 104–119.
- Talwar, S. (2020). The negative impact of fake news on social media users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 102, 138–147.
- Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2017). Defining “fake news.” *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
- Vogels, E. A., Gelles-Watnick, R., & Massarat, N. (2025, April 30). *Teens, social media and technology 2022*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>
- Wang, X., Zhang, M., Fan, W., & Zhao, K. (2022). Understanding the spread of COVID-19 misinformation on social media: The effects of topics and a political leader's nudge. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 73(5), 726-737. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24576>
- Yao, M., & Ngai, E. (2022). Fake news, misinformation, and disinformation in the digital era. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 133, 107289.



- Yin, L. (2023). The changing landscape of media communication: An analysis of the impact of new media marketing on news consumption and consumer behavior. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 11(3), 9-12. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ijeh.v11i3.14436>
- Zikargae, M. H., & Gessese, N. B. (2025). Navigating the influencing of Africa media ethical dilemmas in the Digital Age. *Ethiopian Journal of Language, Culture and Communication*, 10(1), 252-275. <https://doi.org/10.20372/ejlcc.v10i1.2606>