

Curriculum relevance in the digital era: Insights from Kenyan communication graduates on preparedness for the evolving media landscape

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how media and communication curricula in Kenyan universities respond to the ever-changing digital media terrain. As the traditional communication practices are continuously being replaced by digital technologies, the question is, are universities preparing their students to be ready and relevant and ready to respond to these changes? The paper seeks to establish the relevance of the current communication curricula in various universities to see if they are equipping students with skills to navigate and survive in the ever-changing and dynamic media industry. With the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the research examines how communication students actively engage in digital media platforms while at school and whether their curriculum keeps pace with their professional expectations and the needs of the media sector. An exploratory qualitative multiple case study design was utilized. From the target population of communications graduates in 2023–2024, 20 interviews were conducted to establish if they felt well-prepared in the aspects of digital journalism, social media engagement, and multimedia content creation in the job market. Data were analyzed thematically as per Braun and Clarke’s framework. The research also identifies the gaps in training in regard to focus on new media tools, ethical concerns in digital journalism, and how digital storytelling competencies can be integrated for maximum returns. The findings indicate that even though there has been some effort to integrate digital media elements within the curriculum, substantial room for improvement exists in areas such as practical training, production of multimedia content, new media technologies, and digital ethics. Despite sufficient coverage of the theoretical background of these concepts, curricula appear to lag behind industry trends and innovations, leaving graduates ill-equipped for the realities of today’s media landscape. It is concluded that it is necessary for curricula for communication in Kenyan universities to be periodically reviewed and restructured to keep up with the evolving digital media landscape. The research recommends more partnerships between universities and industries, more incorporation of practical digital media training, periodic curriculum review processes, and greater emphasis on multimedia journalism, social media, and digital ethics being included.

Keywords: Communication Curriculum, Digital Media, Graduate Preparedness, Multimedia Skills, New Media Tools

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been significant change to the communication and media landscape over the past few years. With the new media technologies of the internet and social media platforms, along with tools for digital journalism, there has been a clear shift in both the production, consumption, and transmission of information (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Deuze, 2007). Traditional forms of communication—print newspapers, radio broadcasting, and linear television—are no longer the dominant channels through which audiences access news and entertainment. Instead, digital platforms have created an environment where information is instantaneous, interactive, and increasingly visual. While these developments may render traditional forms of communication less useful (Pavlik, 2013), the digital age further begs the question of how prepared graduates in communication studies are for this new world. Likewise, similar to many other places in the world, universities in Kenya have transformed their communication curriculum to reflect changes in industry practice, highlighting the concern of whether communication students are being prepared to meet the requirements of a digital-first environment, as digital media continues to infiltrate into public life (Ndavula & Agufana, 2023; Nyabuga & Booker, 2013). Never has media education that includes digital capabilities been more important.

The digital journalism skill set is the primary key variable of this study. While journalism has always been about much more than just writing stories, the advent of digital technology means that journalists are required to perform a host of functions besides just reporting news. Digital journalism involves telling stories through video, infographics, search engine optimization, content management systems, and real-time publication. Unlike the practice of print journalism, where the news cycle revolved around daily deadlines, digital journalism entails continuous news coverage, audience analysis, and repurposing news content for use across multiple platforms such as the web, mobile applications, and social media platforms (Salaverria, 2019). A journalist with sufficient digital literacy skills must be able to master

the use of content management systems like WordPress and Drupal, knowledge of HTML basics, headline optimization techniques for search engines, and Google Analytics audience metrics. Again, digital journalism calls for skills in mobile journalism, which entails using smartphones to conduct journalism at the news scene. However, while there are high expectations in the industry, research indicates that many journalism graduates in Kenya join the job market without undergoing any training in the use of these digital tools (Nyale et al., 2026).

Social media engagement is the second variable of interest. Social media, which includes Facebook, X (previously known as Twitter), Instagram, Tiktok, LinkedIn, and YouTube, have changed the dynamic between media producers and consumers. The audience does not consume the information but actively engages in commenting, sharing, curating, and creating media content, thus becoming actors in the process of news consumption (Hermida, 2010). Social media engagement competencies for graduates include, among other things, the ability to manage online communities, engage in strategic content planning, conduct analytics, advertise their products on social media, and engage in crisis communication. The understanding of how to engage an audience, raise their awareness by posting relevant updates, measure their reactions, and react appropriately to negative feedback from audiences becomes part of media employer expectations. Besides, social media engagement requires knowledge about ethical issues in social media, such as content verification prior to publication, distinguishing between misinformation and correct facts, and maintaining professional boundaries within online environments (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Initial findings suggest that current social media education practices among communication majors focus more on theory than practice with scheduling software, such as Buffer and built-in platform analytics (Mudavadi, 2025).

Another important variable is the development of multimedia content. Nowadays, the media professional should no longer specialize in one medium but instead become a multimedia creator who can develop textual, audiovisual, audio, and graphical content. Multimedia skills include video shooting and editing, audio recording and podcasting, graphic design, photojournalism, caption writing, and managing metadata. Converged newsrooms expect one journalist to write a news story, shoot a video clip, edit audio clips, design graphics for social networks, and publish the content in one news cycle (Singer, 2011). This requires versatility and technical knowledge that conventional programs of communication studies, traditionally divided into track programs of print, radio, and television, might not necessarily teach. For example, the typical Kenyan university program includes specialized modules on print, broadcast journalism, and public relations without any cross-media training (Nyabuga & Booker, 2013). Thus, a graduate might have the necessary skills to script radio news stories but have insufficient experience creating videos. Another one might be able to write a press release but find designing social media posts difficult.

Apart from these three critical variables, the introduction should also state the research context, research gap, significance of the study, and research justification. For instance, the country of Kenya is particularly suitable in providing a backdrop for this study due to the fast-growing digital economy, increased mobile phone penetration, and thriving media sector. According to Communications Authority of Kenya (2023), internet penetration rate in Kenya is at about 42% with more than 22 million active social media users. Traditional Kenyan media firms have moved towards digitization through increased investment in digital technology, video making, and social media marketing. New companies have also emerged as players in the media landscape; digital media houses include TUKO.co.ke, The Elephant, among others. As such, there are several job openings in these companies that would favor graduates with appropriate digital skills. However, little empirical information exists regarding the level of preparedness of graduates emerging from Kenyan universities' communication programs. There is an evident gap here. While a lot of assumptions exist concerning the inadequacies of graduates, there is a scarcity of systematic research work using a qualitative approach that captures the voices of the graduates themselves.

The significance of this study goes beyond its contributions to academia. The results have implications for how university administrators and curriculum developers make changes to their programs, invest in technological infrastructure, and assess their students' learning. They are also significant for media organizations who will be able to identify the gaps in skills possessed by graduates and better develop training programs for new hires. From the student point of view, the research will help in choosing between programs and developing additional skills to supplement studies in the major. Finally, it is significant for policy makers and professional associations like the Media Council of Kenya. In light of these objectives, this study addresses the following question: Are Kenyan universities preparing students with proper skills and knowledge relevant to the media sector? Through examining the readiness of Kenyan media graduates to join the field of digital media communications, the research contributes significantly to the current debate on relevance of curricula in the digital era.

1.1 Research Problem

Traditional forms of communication like print journalism, broadcasting, and public relations are being replaced by digital technology (Albadri, 2023). This presents challenges for communication programs where the curriculum, and especially the appropriate technologies, become obsolete very quickly. Many universities made attempts to utilize the digital media in their communication programs (Ayman et al., 2020), there is minimal empirical evidence studying the

capacity of communication/humanities programs to provide students with the skill sets to meet employers ready in an ever-changing media industry. The aims of this study are to report on whether the media and communication programs of Kenyan universities are preparing students with the necessary skill-sets needed by employers in the more changing media landscape.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which Kenyan universities' communication curricula respond to the changing digital media landscape.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a way to analyse how media students in Kenya engage with digital media to realise specific outcomes, where the underlying premise of UGT is that audiences are active participants and select media to facilitate outcome use to achieve purpose, whether this is information seeking, personal identity, entertainment, or social interaction (Katz et al., 1973). In applied media education, UGT is insightful in determining how students leverage digital platforms in ways that enhance or inhibit their intended academic, and/or, career outcomes. For example, students may be using YouTube tutorials to learn video editing, Twitter to follow journalists or thought leaders, LinkedIn to network or pursue internships and/or other workforce opportunities, or Instagram or TikTok to create personal brands and highlight their creative portfolio.

Kenyan university students have been established to leverage digital platforms for academic and non-academic engagement (Nyaanga & Mbirithi, 2024). For example, WhatsApp was highly used for group conversations and sharing study materials, while platforms like Facebook and Twitter were more of a place for consuming information and learning professionally. The same study found that over-using social media for leisure purposes might distract students from their educational objectives, revealing the need for media literacy education.

UGT also illuminates the disconnection between what institutions are offering and the media preferences of students. If students are using digital platforms to experiment with journalism projects, including blogging, podcasting and vlogging, but those activities are not taught or incorporated into the curriculum, then students are losing out on a significant experiential learning opportunity. Striving to align the media students are using with explicit instruction, can help decrease disconnection and make media education more meaningful and impactful.

2.2 Empirical Review

In the past twenty years, we have witnessed unprecedented change in media and communications. Traditional mass media such as print newspapers, radio, and television is evolving and is being fundamentally changed by emerging technologies and growth of digital media and mobile communication technologies. Changes in media and communications, especially mobile communication technologies, have not only changed how content was created, distributed, and consumed; but have also challenged non-traditional and traditional media education institutions to change their education programs and media training to meet the current practice of media occupations. It is no longer a matter of reviewing media programs, it is rather, on the basis of profound changes albeit a response to new digital media, a matter of reviewing communications curricula. The result is a more complex digital media environment that institutions have to clarify before they can begin educating and training graduates with relevant skills that can allow them to operate meaningfully and effectively in this new media environment through communication education graduates. This is particularly necessary gain for traditional developing countries like Kenya.

Three main empirical fields serve as the basis for the research. Firstly, there is digital journalism skills. This category is of increasing interest for scholars. For example, Salaverría (2019) showed that news organizations have shifted from cyclical deadlines in print publications to continuous publication on multiple platforms, thus requiring journalists to be able to use Content Management Systems such as WordPress, SEO, and analytics tools. However, it appears that studies done in Kenya indicate a lack of proper training in the field. According to Nyale et al. (2026), most journalism students join the labor market without any formal education in those tools, indicating a gap between their education and the skills needed. It is also supported by Ndavula and Agufana (2023), who state that although curricula in Kenyan universities are up-to-date, the training is not deep enough.

In terms of social media engagement, the existing literature highlights a move away from passive consumption by the audience towards active participation (Hermida, 2010). Evidence for this in terms of current training in Kenyan communication programs comes from Mudavadi (2025), who showed that social media training is more focused on theories such as the uses and gratification theory rather than actual application of scheduling tools such as Buffer or analytics through the analytics dashboard. Ethical considerations, especially content verification, mis-information and

professionalism in social media usage are considered optional subjects even though they form an integral part of digital practice (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Thirdly, multimedia content production has been looked at from the perspective of newsroom convergence. As pointed out by Singer (2011), modern journalists are required to come up with news texts, videos, images, and other multimedia content all in one news cycle. In practice, however, according to studies conducted in Kenya such as the work by Nyabuga and Booker (2013), universities have continued to offer courses on journalism in isolation with specialization either in broadcast, print, or public relations fields. As a result, graduates may know how to produce scripts for radio broadcasts yet not know anything about video editing, or be able to come up with press releases but not create visual content for social media. None of these studies, however, has focused on capturing the experiences of graduate students from the perspective of qualitative approaches. The current review indicates a glaring gap that exists in relation to digital journalism skills, social media engagements (ethics), and multimedia content production among others in regard to Kenyan communication graduates' preparedness.

2.2.1 Transformation of the Media Landscape

The advancement of digital media in place of analog media has disrupted traditional journalism, and in doing so, impacted the production, broadcast, dissemination, and the very construction of newsrooms. What is often referred to as media convergence, explains this transformation through the compression of various media—text, audio, video, and graphics—into a unified digital platform (Pavlik, 2008). Fast forward to today, and news stories are different than they were even a decade ago. Stories are no longer simply confined to a paper or in magazines for readers to consume. News stories are now, able to be produced and presented simultaneously on a media house's website, shared directly through Facebook, re-represented as a video segment for YouTube, and debated in real time via Twitter or X (Deuze, 2007). Thus, the journalist's role has changed from reporter to a journalist who is expected to deliver multimedia journalism, digital content and data visualization, as well as storytelling and audience engagement through social media and data analytics (Singer, 2011). This speaks to the need to be flexible in modern journalistic practice, and for continuous learning.

The evolution of user-generated content (UGC) along with social media, has shifted the role of the audience, whose position has changed from a passive consumer to an active participant in the creation, curation, and distribution of content. Platforms including Twitter, now X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Youtube, allowed ordinary people not only to be content and curators, but also influencers and citizen journalists (Hermida, 2010; Bruns, 2008). At the same time, a participatory culture has emerged in which users not only share information, but also participate in shaping public discourse, and affecting the news agenda. However, this has worked against journalism as a professional practice with established norms that includes ethics, credibility, and gatekeeping (Singer, 2014). There was a long-standing distinction between professional journalism and amateur activity veracity, responsibility and standards (Carlson, 2015). Furthermore, democratized content opens up old ailments infamously called misinformation as the audience assumes the editorial function for journalism. Media organisations have been reinventing their roles in verifying content to maintain trust in an increasingly precariously decentralised and fragmented public space.

Importantly, this shift has ushered in both exciting possibilities and major challenges for media. For example, digital platforms provide capabilities previously unavailable (real-time, global communication and new ways to use different forms of media such as video, podcasts, infographics, and interactive mapping) to tell stories in new ways that can engage audiences on multiple levels and provide opportunities for content creation by many more voices that contribute to public discourse. On the other hand, the digital era presents new challenges such as information overload, algorithmic bias around what users see and do not see, doubt in public information from misinformation and disinformation that affects public trust and ultimately impacts knowledge necessary to make informed choices (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018). For those working in media, this means the ability to adapt to change, to have digital literacies, and a willingness to learn continuously. Digital tools and audience behaviors are changing at an ever-increasing pace, so journalists and content creators alike need to continue to grow their skills to be effective and enact the ethical principles and practices of media as a profession.

2.2.2 Media Education in the Digital Era

Due to the quickly changing media landscape, media education has undertaken a major reorientation in order to remain relevant and responsive to industry needs. Academic institutions are beginning to include digital media training into communication and journalism programs for students to become qualified and competitive when entering the job market. These programs emphasize the need for competencies in the areas of digital journalism, social media and social media strategy, mobile reporting, data journalism, multimedia story-telling and media entrepreneurship (Deuze, 2006; Pavlik, 2013). This shift represents the importance connected and converged media platforms and audience interaction now represents in contemporary journalism. Along with this transformation, students must also participate in practical training using emerging technologies and analytics tools in order to create adaptable media professionals with proper

digital literacy (Domingo & Paterson, 2011). As digital platforms continue to change how content is created and distributed across those platforms, academic institutions are also cultivating critical thinking skills as well as ethical reasoning skills for students to explore the complexities, implications and contexts of the digital public sphere (Mihailidis, 2014). Overall, these shifts are indicative of a broader transition in media education pedagogy.

However, the availability of digital integration appears to differ across regions. In the Global North, universities have made large investments into their digital infrastructure, as well as digital capability and curricular change to adapt to technological change. Digital media programs in the US are located in institutions such as Columbia University, and the University of Southern California, all of which offer courses on digital media that provide students with the development of skills in digital storytelling, multimedia production and interaction design (Degner et al, 2022). Recognition of the significance of digital literacy is representative of a greater social phenomenon, which shows effort to bring digital literacy into higher education toward the goal of developing graduates who are prepared for the shifting workplace (Kayyali, 2024).

On the contrary, there are several universities in the Global South especially in the case of sub-Saharan Africa that face constraints by way of structures, budgets, and pedagogy that usually limit the pace of modernizing their curriculum (Nyale et al, 2026; Etoru et al, 2025). For example, in Kenya, some of the so-called leading universities, such as - the University of Nairobi and Daystar University have invested and continue to invest in renewing their communication programs although there still exists a gulf between the academic training and the industry in the terms of transformed dimensions of the media (Mudavadi, 2025). In instance, Nyale et al (2026) established that most Kenyan journalism graduates were deficient in all the key digital skills, such as video editing, mobile journalism, and audience analytics that are of essence in today's media environment.

There are a few reasons why we are experiencing this lag. First, the low digital literacy of faculty and poor digital connections inhibit effective hands-on practical training, especially in more digital learning spaces. Secondly, the lack of continued professional development results in faculty using outdated texts and teaching using traditional practices, which inhibits innovative ways of thinking about pedagogy. Thirdly, academic institutions often deal with institutional inertia and bureaucracy that slows down the timelines to make needed revisions to their curriculum. This is despite the need for updates being well established (Ndhlovu, 2025; Kayyali, 2024).

2.2.3 The Need for Digital Literacy and Ethical Grounding

In a world where digital platforms occupy the central place in current media practice, so too has digital literacy evolved into a core competency for communication students. Digital literacy is more than the ability to use digital devices. It includes critical thinking, ethical reasoning, evaluating content, and being able to responsibly act in digital cultures and online communities (Livingstone, 2004; Hobbs, 2010). In an environment of misinformation, disinformation, echo chambers and rapid communication, media students need to be able to identify credible sources, fact-check material and remain true to journalistic practice (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). These competencies are necessary for the creation of factual, balanced and ethical media content in an increasingly indistinct digital landscape that has eroded traditional gatekeeping (Buckingham, 2015).

Furthermore, with evolving media platforms becoming increasingly interactive and commercialized – the questions of privacy, data ethics, representation, and inclusion are no longer obscure issues and require our attention. Therefore, communication education will need to include dialogues about digital rights, media ethics, and social responsibilities, especially for digital storytellers. Institutions must nurture a reflexivity culture that encourages critical engagement and has students acknowledging the implications of how they use digital tools in society, not just technical capability.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research followed a qualitative research design that sought to explore recent graduates of communication courses in Kenya and their readiness to join the media industry. It is notable that this methodology is considered suitable due to the fact that it allows the researcher to conduct in-depth investigation into the graduates' experience of being ready for joining the fast-changing world of digital media (Creswell, 2007). In turn, this made it possible to understand the extent to which graduates have been involved in using digital media while at university and later when graduating. The semi-structured interview technique was employed to obtain qualitative data.

3.2 Study Area

This research was carried out in Kenya targeting four universities that offer communication and media studies courses. This involved both public universities (2) and private universities (2), namely, Technical University of Kenya, Pan Africa Christian University, University of Nairobi, and St. Paul's University-Nairobi Campus, located in Nairobi.

3.3 Target Population

The target group included new graduates from programs in communication and media studies at Kenyan universities. The study aimed at targeting the new graduates from the 2023 and 2024 cohorts that had started working in the media industry or any other forms of communication-related areas like digital journalism, social media management, and multimedia production. This group was chosen due to its fresh academic and practical experience in the field.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of information-laden cases pertaining to the research aims. The participants were graduates not older than two years from four of Kenyan universities who majored in courses of communication and media related disciplines. The criteria set for the selection of interviewees entailed that they must have joined the labour market as employees or practiced in areas such as digital journalism, social media communication, or multimedia production. 20 interviewees were identified for participation. Such a number was sufficient for reaching data saturation (Baker & Edwards, 2012).

3.5 Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, providing a degree of flexibility but maintaining consistency. Twenty recent graduates, who graduated between 2023 and 2024, were interviewed. The interviews centred around five aspects, including: (i) digital journalism and multimedia skills gained as part of the higher education process; (ii) involvement with digital media platforms in the past and present; (iii) views on how the curriculum prepares graduates for the job market; (iv) any difficulties encountered while transitioning from university to working within the digital media field; and (v) suggestions for enhancing communication/media curricula. The interviews took place in person, where possible.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze qualitative data according to the framework established by Braun and Clarke. The steps of this method included becoming familiar with the data, creating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique made it possible to discover repeated themes associated with graduate preparedness, strengths of the curriculum, and gaps that need addressing in terms of digital media education.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were kept in mind during this study. Ethical consent was taken from each participant before collecting the data. Participation in the study was voluntary for the participants, and they were made aware of the aim of the study, the role of participants in it, and their right to refuse or drop out at any point in time without any repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were assured by using pseudonyms, and no personal details were shared in the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Preparedness for Digital Media Skills

A common thread in the interviews was mentioned barriers existed between academic preparation and industry expectations in the digital fields. Graduates recognized that their institutions did provide a baseline understanding of fundamental journalism skills (for example, writing, editing, reporting), but many were worried that they were not sufficiently prepared for the digital demands of modern journalism.

"Yes, we learned how to write news stories and edit scripts, but when I started working for a digital news platform, I noticed that I had no idea how to schedule posts or interpret engagement analytics. No one taught us that." (Participant 4, Female, 25-December, 19, 2023).

"There was a module on digital journalism, but it was very theoretical, we did not really get our hands on the tools that newsrooms use today." (Participant 9, Male, 24-March 13, 2024).

Participants suggested that there was a disconnect between what was being taught to them, and what they were expected to do in the field. Because the field of digital journalism is happening very quickly, and is dependent on technology, it was important that they could be adaptable and have fluency with the tools (a topic that was mostly absent from their university training).

"My first job was to create Instagram reels, TikTok content, and YouTube shorts. I had no idea how to even start. I had to learn on the job." (Participant 7, Female, 23 -March, 13, 2024).

These experiences suggest that, while institutions are doing well in laying journalistic foundations, there is a pressing need to integrate digital media skillsets more intentionally into the curriculum. Gaps in Training

4.1.2 Digital Tools and Platforms

Possibly the most notable gap reported is in the practical experience of using digital tools and platforms. Graduates indicated they did not feel prepared to use content management systems, social media analytics platforms, or video editing software, all of which are standard expectations for many media jobs today.

"No one really introduced us to platforms like Hootsuite, Buffer, or Canva. I didn't see those until I started working at a media startup and had to learn the tools in the trenches," (Participant 5, Male, 26-December 19, 2023)

"We had only had access to Google Trends and data tools, but they were never used, just spoken about," (Participant 2, Female, 24-December 11, 2023)

This lack of real-world training undermines graduates' aptitude to compete in an employment world where digital literacy is becoming an increasingly important requirement. It seems like institutions have assumed students will gain digital skills on their own or as part of an internship, with many participants emphasizing that opportunity as one of two impressions that served as disservice to their employability and experience, either as limited, too late to make changes, or poorly elaborate on fixing behavior.

"My placement was to a traditional newsroom with basically no online presence. So, I came out of that with more experience editing newspaper articles than I did creating adaptable online content," (Participant 8, Male, 25-March 13, 2024)

These testimonies support the view that a practical, skills-oriented approach is needed, with deliberate exposure to contemporary platforms and workflows.

Ethical Considerations in the Digital Age. A major issue pointing to a blind spot was that participants described little training on ethical issues unique to digital journalism space. Respondents understood ethics in journalism, in many cases they felt unprepared for the ethical dilemmas they faced around misinformation, privacy, and user-generated content.

"We had classes on media law and we had a couple taught ethics classes, but no one talked about how to handle fake news or what it means to verify a viral piece of content on social media," (Participant 3, Female, 22-December, 18, 2023)

"I was once told to use a video from the internet that was trending without verifying whether it was real, I knew it was wrong to not verify but did not know how to push back. We did not talk about situations like that in school," (Participant 6, Male, 23-March, 10, 2024)

This presents an urgent need to broaden the definition of ethics in the training in the digital journalism space since ethical failures in digital journalism - whether deliberate, or a lack of knowledge - may have serious consequences for public trust and personal accountability. Participants also raised concerns about the pressures of "click-driven" content, which can compromise journalistic integrity.

"We're expected to produce content that goes viral. So sometimes there's pressure to exaggerate or oversimplify. Ethics feel optional in the race for views," (Participant 10, Female, 24-March 15, 2024).

Clearly, media training must evolve to equip students with not only the tools but also the ethical frameworks needed to navigate digital journalism responsibly.

4.1.3 Multimedia Competencies

An instructor's oversight during training sessions on producing multimedia content stood out as a common issue that needed addressing. Although most training programs still focus on print and broadcast journalism, a modern digital newsroom demands competencies in photography, graphic design, podcast and video production.

"Learning how to shoot, edit, or make social media videos was out of the question, but writing radio and TV scripts was in my skill set" (Participant 1, Male, 25-December 11, 2023).

"While we did have access to cameras, there was no formal training provided to us, and so we had to improvise when it came to lighting and framing" (Participant 4, Female, 25-December 19, 2023).

Clicking and talking have added to the traditional storytelling through reading and writing and so have broadened the scope of storytelling in the digital world. There seems an urgent need to address the gaps in the multimedia curriculum, which the present reality demands, as expressed by the participants. Some participants who had access to campus media outlets or multimedia clubs attributed the gaps to these extracurricular activities:

"Being a part of the university media club was really beneficial to me." I learned how to record and edit audio there. I would be completely lost if I hadn't done that (Participant 11, Male, 23-December, 19, 2024)

This suggests that informal channels can help close the gap even though formal education may lag behind. However, depending solely on students to seek extracurricular activities transfers accountability away from educational

institutions and results in disparities between students who are proactive and those who are less well-resourced. Bridging the Gap: Suggestions from Graduates. In addition to criticizing the current gaps, participants provided helpful recommendations for enhancing readiness for digital media: More Realistic Coursework: Including tasks that ask students to create multimedia packages, model digital newsroom settings, and use real-world tools. According to Participant 5 (male, 26-December, 19, 2023), "I believe we should have courses where we manage actual social media pages and track performance using real tools."

Collaborations with Online Newsrooms promoting internships or partnerships with companies engaged in the production of digital content.

"It would have made a huge difference if we had industry professionals come teach or mentor us," says (Participant 9, Male, 24. March 13, 2024)

Updated Curriculum – Frequent revision of course content to reflect the fast-changing digital landscape.

"We're learning with materials from five years ago. That's ancient in the digital world," (Participant 3, Female, 22-December, 18, 2023).

Ethics Labs and Case Studies – Teaching ethics through real-life case studies, simulations, and workshops on misinformation, privacy, and algorithmic bias.

"We need to be trained for the tough calls—what to post, when, and how to ensure its accurate and ethical," (Participant 10, Female, 24-December, 18, 2024)

4.2 Discussion

The study shows a huge gap between the expectations in the digital media industry and the training of journalists who graduate from university in Kenya. While respondents admitted being very good in conventional journalism such as reporting and writing, they also confessed being underprepared for the digital era through their lack of proficiency in use of digital tools and multimedia. The difference between university education and industry requirements is not a problem limited to Kenya. According to Deuze (2006), journalism education internationally always lags behind technological development, while Pavlik (2013) pointed out the need to equip students with digital toolkits.

Lack of practical exposure to technology in digital platforms was another significant problem cited by the respondents. Many graduates complained of curriculums that relied heavily on theories yet offered no practical knowledge of important tools like analytics software, social media schedulers, or content management systems. One of the respondents noted that "Although there was a module on digital journalism, it was quite theoretical. No one taught us how to use the digital tools in use in newsrooms nowadays" (Participant 9, Male, 24). This is consistent with the findings from Mudavadi (2025) research where it was revealed that most of the Kenyan journalism graduates lacked proficiency in critical digital skills such as video editing, mobile journalism, and audience analytics. In the same vein, Nyaanga and Mbirithi (2019) reported that an enduring gap continues to exist between what students learn in schools and the new realities of the media sector in Kenya. The underlying causes of this phenomenon, according to Ndhlovu (2025) and Kayyali (2024), included lack of digital literacy among teaching staff, poor infrastructure, and institutional inertia.

The training on ethics had also failed to keep up with changes in the sector. While students were aware of journalism ethics in general, they lacked the capacity to tackle digital ethical dilemmas, including algorithms, misinformation, and privacy rights. Participant 3, a female aged 22, said, "We got lectures on media laws and some even did ethics courses, but none of us was trained to deal with fake news or how to verify a viral video on social media" (Participant 3, Female, 22). Current learning goals fail to adequately equip graduates for handling the new ethical multiplicity of digital media (Tandoc & Maitra, 2018). Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) asserted that information disorders—misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation—necessitate the acquisition of novel verification skills by journalists. This study indicates that Kenya's communication departments have not yet incorporated such skills into their teaching modules.

Skills in multimedia were found to be equally significant and essential as well. Most institutions still focus on traditional media without giving students any training in creating content through the convergence of online, audio, and video content. As one of the participants indicated, "Learning how to shoot, edit or make social media videos was out of the question" (Participant 1, Male, 25). According to Singer (2010), cross-platform skills are vital to journalists since they define the nature of news stories in converged media environment. However, lack of structured learning in multimedia implies that individuals have to learn these skills on the job. Jenkins (2006) uses the concept of "convergence culture" to argue that journalists should learn how to communicate across various platforms. Unfortunately, this ability is absent in the curricula as described by the participants. Generally, one can conclude that there is a gap between university-based journalism training and industry needs. Even though industries require flexible and technologically proficient journalists, universities still base their teachings on out-of-date models of communication. Fortunately, the recommendations made by graduates are aligned with the Mensing (2010) philosophy of "learning-by-doing".

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The changing media environment presents challenges and opportunities for media education. Although some forms of communication remain relevant, the overwhelming influence of digital channels puts a new spin on media education institutions such as universities. Rethinking curricula, investing in physical infrastructure, and promoting digital literacy within student and non-student users are essential for Kenyan universities. In particular, students have a specific way of interacting with the digital media; and by examining these interactions from a uses and gratifications perspective, one must ponder essentially on the curriculum and the learning objectives. In theory, the research extends uses and gratifications theory in media education, since students use the available digital media tools to acquire some skills for themselves. In the future, academic institutions must ensure that graduates acquire digital tool skills and are also equipped with the ethical and critical thinking skills necessary for the challenging media environment of today.

5.2 Recommendations

Further changes are required for Kenyan universities to effectively equip students and graduates for a dynamic and rapidly changing media sector. First, institutions need to engage in regular curriculum reviews to ensure training is aligned with technological trends and industry needs. Moreover, practical training in multimodal production, social media analytics and digital marketing should be positioned alongside theoretical training in communication, ethics and media studies. Second, there will need to be significant investment in digital technology - launching computer labs, editing suites, mobile journalism kits, and exposed students to good hands-on learning opportunities. Building partnerships with media houses, tech companies and NGOs can provide effective on-the-job training opportunities through relevant internships, mentorship and experiential learning in a real media setting.

Third, building faculty capacity is critical; lecturers need to be skilled and knowledgeable in modern media technologies enabling them to teach about the technologies, which will provide students with practical content creation skills and habits. There are numerous online courses, workshops for staff syllabus development; and exchange programs across the continent to build capacity and enhance faculty innovation. Media education cannot be divorced from the social reality within which they operate and must be inclusive to ensure the workforce is appropriately preparing students and following ethics that reflect the Kenyan context. Examples include addressing access to media between rural and urban communities, the digital society which perpetuates the digital gender divide, issues regarding language representation in media content and research funding, and considerations of ethics in an increasingly digital society.

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