

Media usage patterns, beliefs, and practices among kenyan youth in Uasin Gishu County

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ABSTRACT

This article examines media usage patterns, beliefs, and practices among youth aged 18-24 in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, addressing the research question: What are the media usage patterns, beliefs, and practices among Kenyan youth in Uasin Gishu County? Based on the outcomes of a qualitative descriptive design where 28 purposefully selected respondents (14 from an urban setting and 14 from rural areas), as well as 25 policy documents were analyzed, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews involving media elicitation methods. The results show that WhatsApp is the most widely used medium for gathering information, the relevance of radio to the life of people in rural areas and hierarchy of trust in certain media shaping information consumption. Media practices among youth are described by passive reception, heuristic criteria used to assess credibility and considerable differences between urban and rural youth. With Potter's Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy, the findings show the presence of underdeveloped knowledge structures necessary for critical media usage. The term "family bubble" implies that relationships come first and the youth do not dare to criticize their parents and close friends concerning disinformation distribution. However, there are clear gaps between policy and practice, as policy documents tend to focus more on urban digital spaces while ignoring rural radio spaces and the social aspects of media use. Some of the recommendations for this problem are to include radio in Media and Information Literacy (MIL) policies, solve infrastructure issues by providing zero-rated websites for fact-checking, adopt platform-specific strategies, utilize peer networks in MIL initiatives, and combine civic education and MIL. This paper provides empirical evidence about youth media behaviors in Uasin Gishu County and highlights the significance of socially situated MIL approaches.

Keywords: Kenya, Media and Information Literacy (MIL), Media Consumption, Misinformation, Uasin Gishu County, Youth Media Practices

I. INTRODUCTION

The current media landscape presents a unique forum for information access, production and dissemination among youth globally. Kenya is no exception, considering that the youth aged between 18-24 years have increasingly found themselves navigating a complicated media landscape, where traditional media converges with digital media. Their media use includes social media sites, mobile devices, online news, radio and television. As much as this has widened the avenues for information access and involvement, it has made them more vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation. It is for this reason that comprehension of how youth engage with media is fundamental for Media and Information Literacy (MIL) interventions.

A critical aspect of youth media participation is the pattern of media usage, which entails the media platforms used by the youths, the frequency of using the media, the reasons for accessing the media and the kinds of information accessed. The move from traditional to digital media has made the youth use different media. Social, mobile and on-demand media have been increasingly important (Boyd, 2014; Livingstone & Third, 2017). Digital media have, however, not replaced traditional media entirely. Across Africa, the two media continue to be significant due to the accessibility of these media even in places where internet access is poor (Conroy-Krutz et al., 2026). In Kenya, there has been an increasing trend of using WhatsApp in accessing information. Young Kenyans have increasingly been accessing news via WhatsApp before the news is aired in traditional media. Newman et al. (2023) also found out that WhatsApp has been a source of news in some African countries.

Another critical variable is media beliefs. Specifically, people may have specific media beliefs concerning the credibility and trustworthiness of sources. It should be noted that young individuals do not perceive every media platform to be equally credible and trustworthy. On the contrary, people have varying levels of trust depending on the source, the type of medium, their prior experience and social ties. Pennycook and Rand (2019) suggest that people may use very simplistic ways of evaluating the credibility of online information. At the same time, Vraga and Tully (2021) argue that source perceptions are critical for social media credibility assessments. In Kenya, audience gullibility was

found to be one of the challenges with media consumption by Oriare et al. (2010). Additionally political information may be interpreted through social and identity-based frameworks by Kenyan youth.

Thirdly, there is media practice, which refers to what young people engage in when encountering media content. Media practice includes the consumption of information, looking for more sources, checking credibility, spreading information and combating misinformation. Media practice is of particular relevance to MIL since awareness of the necessity to check the information does not necessarily entail such practice. In one study, Adjin-Tettey and Amenaghawon (2024) found that there is a mismatch between awareness of fact-checking and the practice of fact-checking among university students. Also, Dutton et al. (2019) noted that young people may come across information accidentally through digital media platforms instead of looking for information through trustworthy sources.

The interaction between media usage habits, beliefs and practices can be explored using the Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy as put forward by Potter. Potter (2004) views media literacy in the context of knowledge structure and information processing skills. Knowledge structures pertain to media content, media industry, media effects, the real world and self while cognitive skills include analysis, evaluation, classification, induction, deduction, synthesis and abstraction. People who have well-developed knowledge structure and skills have better chances of making critical interpretations of media messages compared to people whose knowledge structure is not well-developed and thus make use of heuristics.

Geography is also a vital element in the consideration of media consumption by the youth. As noted in the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics data in 2019 Uasin Gishu County has a population of about 1.2 million individuals, of which the youth make up a significant proportion. The city of Eldoret, which is a major urban centre within the county, has more access to internet connectivity and other media platforms including the digital, broadcast and print media. Other places like Moiben and Kesses have constraints with regards to internet connectivity. Radio and mobile phones are therefore important sources of news in these places (Warf, 2018). Local stations such as Chamegi FM and Kass FM are still relevant especially among the rural communities.

The urban-rural divide becomes an important point when one considers that different levels of infrastructure could have a role in determining the media literacy possibilities and practices. Youth living in cities may have more options when it comes to the digital platforms they use, whereas those living in rural areas might use radio and interpersonal communication. However, just because young people living in cities may use more media platforms, it does not mean they engage in media critically. On the other hand, just because those in rural areas use the radio, it does not mean that their media literacy is low.

This becomes an important point in the case of Uasin Gishu County because of its history from a social and political perspective. It had been affected by violence following the election period of 2007-2008 in places such as Burnt Forest and Turbo. Thus, it is important to see how young people get, interpret and circulate information.

In spite of numerous studies about the use of media by young people in Kenya, there has not been enough focus on media environment variations at the county level, especially in areas outside large urban cities. Media studies conducted in the past have focused more on the tangible media skills and less on the attitudes and actual practice of using media by youth. This study will, therefore, focus on media usage practices, attitudes and belief of youth aged 18-24 years in Uasin Gishu County.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While youth in Kenya reveal a relatively high degree of media engagement in platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok, little knowledge exists about media consumption patterns, beliefs, and practices of youth at the county level. Previous studies performed by Oriare et al. (2010) reveal a trend of gullibility among Kenyan audiences concerning media consumption. Despite youth in Kenya being highly exposed to the media, they are still not able to criticize the media. Nonetheless, much research performed on media consumption patterns and beliefs focuses on national levels or Nairobi, leaving aside differences that exist across the country in terms of media environments, politics, and MIL programs.

Again, qualitative research remains underexplored since most of existing research uses only the quantitative approach where media literacy is viewed in terms of skills rather than qualitative aspects that are important. Little research can be found about youth beliefs and experiences in terms of media engagement and their subjective perceptions of media consumption. It is especially true for the case of Uasin Gishu where political violence associated with manipulation of information existed in the past.

1.2 Research Question

What are the media usage patterns, beliefs, and practices among Kenyan youth in Uasin Gishu County?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Potter's Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy

The current study is based on Potter's (2004) Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy. The notion of media literacy is based on interrelated structures of knowledge that allow people to understand media in a critical way. Such structures include knowledge about media content, which means information offered, the structure of such information and the message communicated through such content. Knowledge about media industries and ways media content is created, distributed, and used in commercial purposes is also important in media literacy. One more aspect of media literacy concerns the impact of consuming media content on the person's cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes. At the same time, media literacy involves an ability to separate representations in media content from reality. Finally, the aspect of self-awareness should be mentioned here, especially the ability of a person to understand his or her vulnerabilities, goals and limitations as an information processor.

The above-mentioned knowledge structures are manifested in seven skills – analysis, evaluation, categorization, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstraction. Potter claims that those people who possess a developed set of knowledge structures and have polished their information-processing skills can interact with media content in a critical manner; whereas people with a less developed set of knowledge structures use heuristics – simple rules of thumb which are easily manipulable. The importance of Potter's theory in relation to this research lies in its potential to provide an explanation of how media use by the youth, along with their beliefs and practices related to that, are indicative of either the construction or failure to construct knowledge structures and cognitive abilities. Youth might also resort to heuristics rather than evaluation due to a reason explained by Potter's theory.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Media usage patterns, beliefs, and practices among Kenyan youth

The change from traditional media to digital forms in the process of youth media consumption is one of the most radical changes in the contemporary media environment. Studies show that the consumption of on-demand, social, and mobile media is increasingly replacing the consumption of traditional media (Boyd, 2014; Livingstone & Third, 2017). Youth aged 18-24 are leading the trend, having been born into the digital era.

In the African case, there has been a relatively fast, yet unequal transition to digital media. According to GSMA (2024), the number of subscriptions for mobile broadband in Africa grew by 20% from 2019 until 2023, with youth being mostly responsible for this growth. The use of digital media does not mean the disappearance of traditional media. Conroy-Krutz et al. (2026), while radio and television are the most popular tools of mass communication in Africa due to their accessibility, access to digital media is revolutionizing the information environment. WhatsApp has become increasingly important as a medium of information consumption among youth, especially those in the Global South. WhatsApp was cited by Newman et al. (2023) as one of the top information platforms in many African countries; indeed, WhatsApp frequently is the main source of news for people in these regions. Kenya is no exception; youth in Kenya consume news through WhatsApp and sometimes even hear about news stories first on WhatsApp before other media cover them.

According to Communications Authority of Kenya (2022, 2023), over 90% of internet users using mobile devices in Kenya interact with WhatsApp frequently, which makes WhatsApp the most widely used messaging application in the country. Thus, there has emerged an intricate web of information flow through a wide variety of social networks where messages get exchanged very quickly. There is a significant amount of literature that underlines the increasing trend towards passive media consumption among young people in contemporary society. Dutton et al. (2019) have discovered that despite the fact that youth use digital media heavily, most of these interactions happen unintentionally, meaning that young people just scroll down their social media feed. This issue is relevant to MIL since information consumption incidentally reduces the possibility of critical thinking.

Various studies conducted in the area of online misinformation and media literacy revealed that youth use heuristics, that is., simple mental strategies for evaluating the credibility of the information provided online, rather than applying systematic verification strategies. In their work, Pennycook and Rand (2019) established that the assessment of the credibility is related to the popularity of posts, which is measured by the number of comments, likes, and shares that it gets. Vraga and Tully (2021) discovered that youth evaluated the trustworthiness of news based on the reputation of the person who shares it, not the original source.

The same results were obtained during research conducted in West Africa. Adjin-Tettey and Amenaghawon (2024) conducted a study regarding the practice of fact-checking among university students in Ghana and Nigeria. The authors found that there is a gap between the awareness of information verification and the actions of the youth as they use unprofessional strategies for fact-checking, including peer advice.

Several studies have shown that the youths have hierarchical trust relations with different media outlets. Oriare et al. (2010) discovered the phenomenon of gullibility amongst the Kenyan audience as regards media consumption.

However, recent studies have shown that the case is more complex, as there is differentiated trust towards certain media outlets. For instance, Kenyan youth perceive political news from the perspective of their identity as well as party membership.

Speaking about traditional media, radio continues being trusted in Africa. Warf (2018) revealed that the rural youth in Kenya use more often the radio and oral communication compared to their urban peers. The reason lies in the institutional editing process which makes the media outlet reliable for the youth. In turn traditional broadcast media (radio and TV) are perceived as more credible than social media. The social aspect of credibility assessments is another important discovery in modern studies on the topic. Studies have shown that youth do not evaluate credibility in isolation but rather in the social networks they belong to. Clark (2011) found that family-based dialogue plays an important part in developing media literacy skills among youth. The study in Kenya showed the presence of the "generational digital divide," where youth are more skilled in using technology than their parents ((Rudnova et al., 2023).

An extensive amount of literature exists that talks about the digital divide that exists between urban and rural areas in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa. Warf (2018) reports that whereas the youths from urban areas are able to use a wide array of media channels that include digital media, those from rural Kenya depend heavily on radio and oral media channels. This divide stems from disparities in the availability of infrastructure where rural areas lack internet connectivity, digital devices, and digital literacy. Research shows that there is also access disparity in MIL education between urban and rural areas. Although there are MIL related objectives in the competency-based curriculum of Kenya, there is a significant disparity in their implementation in urban and rural schools because there are more chances for the teachers in the urban schools to have been trained and be well-resourced in the urban schools than the rural schools.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design that is philosophically based on an interpretive paradigm. This kind of methodology was chosen due to the richness of description offered by it without losing the participant's language and meaning (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). This study took place in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, where data was collected from October 2025 to March 2026.

3.2 Study Area

The study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County situated in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Uasin Gishu is relevant as a location for carrying out the study because of its cosmopolitan nature, presence of both urban and rural settlement patterns, and politically dynamic environment. The county is made up of six sub-counties namely, Ainabkoi and Kapseret (urban), Soy and Turbo (peri-urban), Moiben and Kesses (rural). This arrangement gave the research a wide geographical coverage with regards to accessibility to information and communication technology as well as civic engagement among others.

Uasin Gishu is known to have a predominantly rural population as well as fast-growing urban centers like Eldoret city, which is one of the commercial towns and transport nodes in the region. The geographical position of the county on the Northern Corridor, diverse ethnicity, and politically charged environment makes Uasin Gishu a unique place for studying the dynamics of information dissemination and civic engagements. Furthermore, high youth population in the county combined with high youth unemployment rates make the youth potential participants in civic matters as well as users of technology. The research covered participants from all the six sub-counties of Uasin Gishu.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

Twenty-eight participants aged 18-24 years were recruited using purposive sampling.

The sample included:

Table 1

Participants Distribution

Demographic Variable	Category	Number
Age	18-20 years	12
	21-24 years	16
Gender	Male	16
	Female	12
Location	Urban (Eldoret)	14
	Rural (Moiben/Kesses)	14
Status	In-school	11
	Out-of-school	17



Inclusion criteria necessitated that participants should be media users who would have a mobile phone as well as use at least one media platform on a weekly basis. Participants were selected by key informants (youth leaders, church leaders, village elders, and youth polytechnic leaders) who would refer individuals. Snowball sampling was done to access out-of-school and rural youths who were not in organized bodies.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews that incorporated media elicitation techniques whereby participants were shown samples of media content and instructed to give an assessment of them. Interview time was between 45 to 60 minutes and interviews were done in English, Swahili or Sheng languages. In this interview, topics discussed included the media platforms used, frequency of their use, trust in different sources, source distinction, ways of assessing credibility, and experiences with misinformation. Additionally, 25 documents were reviewed. These included government policies (n=8), NGO reports (n=9), and scholarly works (n=8) on MIL in Kenya. These documents were chosen based on criteria of relevance, credibility and representativeness (Bowen, 2009).

3.4 Data Analysis

The thematic analysis procedure was adopted as per the six-step model by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The coding process adopted a mixture of both deductive and inductive techniques. The deductive codes were based on the conceptual framework of Potter (2004), while the inductive codes were based on the data. Data saturation was reached at the 25th interview.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Ethics

The trustworthiness of data was established through the use of techniques like member checking, an audit trail, bracketing of researcher biases, and a thick description of the research setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The ethical clearance for the research was provided by Moi University, while a research license was acquired from NACOSTI.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Media Usage Patterns: WhatsApp as the Primary Information Infrastructure

All 28 participants stated that WhatsApp was their primary source of information, viewing it as the means by which “everything” gets passed on. Participants were members of many WhatsApp groups such as those from families, friends, classes, church, neighbourhoods and communities. Thus, besides being a medium of interpersonal communication, WhatsApp was also used by the participants as an essential information network for accessing news, information, and opinions. Newman et al. (2023). One participant explained:

“WhatsApp is where everything comes. My mother sends me messages, my friends send me things, even the church group has announcements. If something is not on WhatsApp, I probably won't see it.” (Y07, male, urban, 21 years-Nov., 05, 2025)

Another participant described the volume of information received through WhatsApp:

“I have about fifteen WhatsApp groups. Family group, my class group, church youth group, neighbourhood watch group. Every day there are hundreds of messages. You cannot read everything, but you see the ones people forward many times.” (Y15, male, rural, 20 years-Nov., 18, 2025)

Another prevalent behavior was passive consumption. People received their news through forwarded messages instead of actively looking for information from reputable sources. This is explained by the following statement made by one participant:

“I do not look for news. News finds me through WhatsApp. People forward messages, and I read them. That's it.” (Y19, male, rural, 23 years – Jan, 16, 2026)

Similarly, another participant explained:

“Sometimes I simply wake up in the morning to find that there are fifty forwards. I quickly scan through them. I do not have the time to verify all of them. If I think that it is important, I read it; otherwise, I delete it.” (Y04, female, urban, 20 years-Nov., 3, 2025)

This phenomenon is aligned with the work by Dutton et al. (2018), who identify the importance of incidental news consumption in digital media usage. This pattern also agrees with Newman et al. (2023), who discuss the increasing significance of messaging apps in news distribution. Based on the findings, one can conclude that intensive media usage does not imply that people intentionally seek information.

Potter (2004) would conclude from the findings that there is a lack of correlation between media exposure and formation of sufficiently complex knowledge structures needed to critically engage with media messages. The participants were able to demonstrate some understanding of the media content, but not so much when it came to the



ways of information production and distribution, impact of media on cognitive processes and behaviour, and participants' positions as information consumers.

4.1.2 Media Usage and Beliefs: Radio's Persistent Relevance in Rural Settings

Although WhatsApp was central to how the participants used social media, radio was of particular relevance to the rural youth. For example, the participants related the use of radio to politics, agriculture, emergencies, and local news. The above result indicates that social media has not replaced traditional media in equal measure. A rural participant stated:

"On the farm, there is no internet all the time. The network comes and goes. But radio is always there. I listen to Chamgei FM every morning while I walk to the shamba [farm]. That is how I know what is happening in the county." (Y22, female, rural, 24 years-Feb., 17, 2026).

Radio information could also reach young people indirectly through family members:

"My grandmother does not have a phone. But she has a radio. I get news from her sometimes. She hears something on Kass FM and tells me. So even if I am on my phone, the radio news still reaches me." (Y10, female, urban, 20 years-Nov., 11, 2025).

This ongoing relevance of the radio medium can be justified by the findings of Conroy-Krutz et al., (2026), which describes the radio medium as a crucial source of information for people in Africa, and those of Warf (2018), who link the use of rural media to infrastructural constraints and continued dependence on traditional media. In addition, the participants viewed the radio as more credible than WhatsApp. As one participant commented:

"Radio people cannot lie like WhatsApp. If it is on radio, I believe it. WhatsApp you don't know who sent it." (Y17, female, rural, 19 years-Dec., 19, 2025)

Another explained:

"When there is a big story, I check radio first. If radio and WhatsApp say the same thing, then I know it is true. If they say different things, I trust radio." (Y28, female, rural, 24 years-March., 16, 2026)

The accounts suggest that the issue of credibility is linked to institutional processes, including professional journalism and editorial accountability. Youth of Kenya may find the established broadcast media more credible than the informal digital media. However, the significance of the radio highlights a possible mismatch between the policy of media literacy and the realities of the media environment. The National ICT Policy (2019) as well as competency-based education framework prioritizes digital skills, but as the findings reveal, the radio continues to play a role, especially where internet access is problematic.

4.1.3 Media Beliefs: Platform Differentiation by Purpose

Users had diverse purposes for using each platform. WhatsApp was regarded by participants as a "serious" platform where they would use it for communicating with their families, community and news, whereas TikTok and Instagram were used for entertainment, music and socializing.

One participant explained:

"I use TikTok to have fun. I watch dancing; I watch comedians. I do not care if it is real because TikTok is for fun! However, when I get something from someone on WhatsApp, I could care less if it is real." (Y04, female, urban, 20 years-Nov., 01, 2025).

Another participant differentiated Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok according to perceived users and functions:

"I think Facebook is for older people; my parents have Facebook. I use WhatsApp and TikTok - WhatsApp for talking and getting the news, TikTok for the laughs." (Y01, male, urban, 24 years-Oct. 27, 2025)

Such distinctions reveal that the participants had platform-specific expectations, which played a role in their approach to the information provided on the websites. Such distinctions may be beneficial for navigating various media settings; however, such expectations may also be a weakness because entertainment sites can be viewed as information sources which do not require critical evaluation. According to Potter (2004), it is important to comprehend media content, production, media effects, and one's own role as an information processor. However, the distinctions made by the participants may reflect their awareness about the purpose of media; at the same time, it can be said that their critical evaluation depends on the purpose of the site.

4.1.4 Media Beliefs and Practices: Trust Hierarchies and the "Family Bubble"

Trust hierarchy was clearly evident for all forms of media channels. Radio and TV were perceived as highly credible channels since they were perceived as professionally edited and checked. The official social media accounts of known organizations were rated as moderately credible while anonymous forwards on WhatsApp were rated as lowly credible. One participant explained:

"If Citizen TV says it, then I know it is true since they have people to check. If my uncle sends the same message via WhatsApp, then I have to do the checking since he might not have checked before sending it." (Y12, male, urban, 22 years-Nov., 14, 2025)



Another stated:

"I trust the Nation newspaper WhatsApp channel because it is from real journalists. But if someone forwards a screenshot with no name, I don't trust it." (Y21, male, rural, 20 years-Jan., 16, 2026)

This result is aligned with Vraga and Tully (2021) who emphasize the significance of source reputation and social cues in credibility judgments. Furthermore, this study is linked to Pennycook and Rand (2019) who prove the impact of social and contextual cues on the evaluation of information. Nevertheless, participants' attitudes toward the credibility of information did not always correlate with the verification process. This was especially noticeable for cases when the source was someone from their family or close friends. The participants were more inclined to ask questions about the anonymous source rather than someone they know well. One of the participants stated:

"My mum sends me forwards through WhatsApp, there's no way I can doubt anything she sends me. Even if I think it could be false I wouldn't say anything to her, just delete it, because it would create issues." (Y26, female, rural, 20 years-Feb, 24, 2026)

Similarly, another participant stated:

"I get forwarded WhatsApp messages from my best friend, and I know that at least some of the time she is being duped, but I don't want to call her out on it (it would be embarrassing), so again I just delete the message and don't say anything." (Y11, male, urban, 24 years- Nov., 11, 2025)

"Family bubble" shows that media literacy is not just an individual cognitive skill. The practice of verification is also affected by family hierarchy, social relations and friendship. In this regard, it should be noted that Clark (2011) draws attention to the impact of family relations in media consumption, whereas Rudnova et al. (2023) illustrate the impact of intergenerational relations on digital media usage. Thus, it can be stated that there is a difference between being aware of potential unreliability of information and doing something about it. People were able to recognize possible questionable information, but sometimes refrained from criticizing it due to social implications of questioning one's parents and friends (United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021). This means that media literacy initiatives aimed at improving individual verification skills may ignore the social environment.

From the aforementioned, it can be conclude that there is a close connection between media use, beliefs and practices of youth in Uasin Gishu County. WhatsApp is used more often in daily information seeking, while radio is still relevant, especially in rural and low connectivity situations. People classify media by purpose and gain trust through institutional reputation and identity of the sources. Meanwhile, their information practices depend on passive reception, infrastructure, expectations and social relations. In other words, the results of the study contribute to the work of Potter (2004) and illustrate how media literacy takes place within certain technological and social contexts.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Urban-Rural Disparities

The findings indicate large differences between urban and rural populations in every respect regarding media practices, attitudes and beliefs. Young people from cities receive better opportunities for formal MIL training, possess greater verification skills, participate in more corrective activities, and show higher consciousness levels. Young people from rural settings have more exposure to radio broadcasting, poor opportunities for receiving formal MIL training, tend to use heuristic verification, and remain at the protective engagement stage.

These differences cannot be explained by mere variations in cognitive skills. They stem from structural factors including differential access to technology, education, media environment and social ties fostering critical engagement with the media. In his research, Warf (2018) found out that rural locations in Kenya are characterized by much lower internet penetration rates, have fewer digital devices and relatively higher prices for data services than urban localities, creating the digital divide that impedes the development of media literacy competencies (Coesemans, 2013). Thus, in order to improve media literacy skills, MIL projects should take into account not only individuals' needs but also the infrastructure problems.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

From the results of the study, there seems to be a very rich media ecology with WhatsApp being the key means of communicating and sourcing information for the youths, and therefore information flows across the rich web of social connections such as family, peers, education, religion, and community-based channels. There are instances where information consumption is done passively since the interviewees refer to how news "finds me" rather than actively looking for the information. On the other hand, radio continues to be one of the information sources for the youths living in rural areas due to its accessibility, the use of local languages, and its institutional credibility, despite not being recognized in the policy documents analyzed, showing the policy difference between urban and rural regions in MIL. The youths distinguish the media channels based on what purpose they serve, with WhatsApp being considered as

"serious" and TikTok being "entertainment." Even though this shows some media literacy within the context, it makes users vulnerable to misinformation from entertainment channels.

Trust hierarchies also develop in different media channels, with broadcast media being viewed as more trustworthy than anonymous WhatsApp forwards; yet at times, this critical stance can be undermined by the phenomenon of the "family bubble," in which case information received from one's parents or other close people is not subject to questioning due to personal connections. At the same time, a distinction is revealed between urban and rural young people, with rural youth being reported to depend on radio, lack MIL education, and apply heuristics in their information evaluation. On a broader note, the gap arises between policy and actual practice, as policy focuses primarily on digital media, media literacy competencies, and MIL education, whereas participants' accounts indicate that media involvement is affected by infrastructure, geographical setting, social networks, traditional media, and specific practices of particular platforms. Therefore, MIL interventions have to take into account real-world conditions of young people rather than urban settings alone.

There are four major contributions made by this study. On an empirical note, this study offers some evidence on media practices among the youths in a Kenyan county that has hitherto been underexplored in the MIL literature. From the theoretical perspective, it illustrates how the Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy proposed by Potter (2004) is useful in explaining youth media practices, and that MIL is not only an individual cognitive activity but socially situated. From the methodological perspective, it illustrates the usefulness of qualitative descriptive research with media elicitation and document triangulation.

5.2 Recommendations

It is suggested that the Ministry of Education introduce structured skills of verification for MIL in the Competency Based Curriculum in the next curriculum review period through proper teacher training and measurable outcomes of learning. The relevant bodies should work towards reducing rural-urban differences in the use of radio MIL programs, offering offline educational resources, and ensuring affordable access to fact-checking platforms through subsidized data or zero-rated service within the next three years. Civic education should emphasize the role of verification literacy in democratic participation. Platform-specific interventions aimed at WhatsApp and radio use, peer-to-peer education in youth forums, churches and communities, should be used in order to improve verification processes and address misinformation in families. Further research should conduct longitudinal and comparative studies, as well as interventions, to measure the success of such initiatives in various settings in Kenya and study intergenerational influence on misinformation correction. Such measures would improve critical media engagement and lower misinformation vulnerability of Kenyan youth.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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