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## Digital Tides in the Media Industry: Navigating the Impact of Digitization on the Kenyan Media Landscape Post Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Digital Tides in the Media Industry: Navigating the Impact of Digitization on the Kenyan Media Landscape Post Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Article history

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to establish different ways in which Kenyan media practitioners are coping with the rapid transition from legacy media platforms and practices to new digital technologies as audiences' transition to online spaces moreso after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was informed by the Media Ecology Theory. The study aimed to meet three objectives: to establish the of the rapid digital shifts on the Kenyan media landscape after the COVID-19 pandemic; to find out if there were any notable paradigm shifts in the Kenyan media professional practice post COVID-19 pandemic; and to determine challenges experienced by stakeholders in the media industry as a result of rapid digitization of the Kenyan media.

**Materials and Methods:** The research adopted a descriptive survey design. The research population comprised media professionals and media content consumers. Sampling was done purposively with the researcher selecting work-based and social WhatsApp group members as respondents. Qualitative and quantitative data collection tools, that is, interviews and questionnaires, were used. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and narration. Presentation of the data was done through a description of

qualitative data while quantitative data is presented in pie charts and graphs.

**Findings:** Findings of the study indicate that digitization of Kenyan media landscape became more visible and unavoidable after the Covid-19 pandemic. The use of digital media platforms was also found to have expanded after the pandemic causing a shift in audience behaviour, audience engagement, and media revenue management and sourcing as well as job losses among media professionals. The study also provides insight into steps taken by media practitioners who had to quickly adopt digital innovations and practice more collaboration through digital spaces even as they grapple with various ethical issues.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study provides recommendations that would help media professionals and regulators adapt better to the new trends while maintaining the principles and ethics of journalistic practice.

**Keywords:** *Digitization, Disruptive technology, paradigm shift, COVID-19 pandemic*

**JEL Codes of Classification:** *03: Technological Change; L86: Information and Internet Services; L82: Entertainment Media.*



## INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are an important conduit for global advancement in diverse areas of humanity including culture, economics, social infrastructure and politics. The new phenomenon, popularly referred to as disruptive technologies, has impacted operations in almost every sector around the world. Communication and media researchers posit that digitization has influenced the world's social system greatly by having serious impact on the media landscape (Praprotnik, 2016; Vivona & Caranti, 2020; Bakirmekik, 2022). Digital technology concepts such as big data, information age, Internet of Things, virtual reality, machine learning and artificial intelligence and digital transformation currently inform discussions on current and future trends in the fields of media and communication. These new technological developments are part on the digital transformation that people, nations and organizations are embracing in the current era. Alloghani, M., Thron, C., Subair, S. (2022) define digital transformation as the process of using digital technologies to create new or change existing business processes, culture, and customers' service experience.

In journalism and communication, digital transformation has democratized content creation and sharing that has enabled previously voiceless individuals to be heard and to co-create information through different internet-based platforms. As Shiming (2024) argues, traditional media have been transitioning into digital reform and transformation especially with regard to content creation. Of interest is the transformation of contents producers to content operators as audiences look for content with differentiated characteristics. Increased internet access has brought about a new type of journalism variously referred to as electronic journalism, virtual journalism, internet journalism, online journalism and digital journalism. This form of journalism thrives better online due to the inherent features of the digital world such anonymity, autonomy and freedom of expression in the naturally occurring free market of ideas. The rise of new media technologies including mobile journalism popularly known as Mojo have propagated the concept of media repertoires that bring to the fore potential threats and competition between old and new platforms as well as content providers (Taneja, 2013).

McLuhan predicted the future of the world in reference to digital technologies predicting that the world will become a global village. This has become a reality as global connectivity to electricity and the internet accelerates digitization, the Internet of Things thereby creating an emerging digital savvy society, complete with netizens and online communities. Competition for digital platforms and spaces has led to cheaper content from social media and other platforms such as Netflix, Showmax and through the main search engines like Google and Yahoo. Another development is the emergence of media hubs such as Afropods, which has a Pan African orientation and uploads African podcasts. Another example is Baraza Media Lab that is involved with co-creation, collaboration and research in the media ecosystem.

The digitization of media in Kenya and elsewhere has not come without challenges. These range from misinformation, fake news, big data management, breaching of privacy and a paradigm shift in media management and economics. Digital media technologies have their own inherent complexities. For instance, they are quite dynamic and diverse which poses a challenge to the media industry as the dynamism in digital technologies may not always be matched by journalistic growth in terms of infrastructure, training, and general environmental and technological adaptability of the media industry. This media acceleration has on many occasions meant that news breaks out first in the online platforms before legacy media get to collect, verify and disseminate the information. This paper explores both positive and negative changes observed in the Kenyan media industry after the emergence of fast growing digital technologies that seemed to surge during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper

focuses on the impact of accelerated digitization of the media on content production, distribution, audience behaviour, digital ethics and journalistic practice in Kenya. The study took an exploratory approach that aimed to find out how digitization has impacted different media professionals, specifically those in legacy media. The mini survey offers a glimpse into the digital transformation phenomenon across the media industry in Kenya.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Digital technologies have rapidly evolved especially with the emergence of highly dynamic social media platforms and Ai powered apps. These disruptive technologies especially communication and media technologies have caused a shift in journalistic practice and media management as media practitioners embrace digital media platforms. These shifts are diverse and touch on the actual practice of journalism, audience behaviour and engagement as well the media entrepreneurship. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation across all sectors globally, with the media industry experiencing particularly rapid changes. The Kenya government took radical measures to curb the novel virus including lockdowns and social distancing forcing both media producers and consumers to adopt digital platforms for work related activities and news sharing. Studies on digitization of media in Kenya have focused on specific media platforms such as how television content is sourced through technology and how digitization influences marketing practices (Wekesa, E., Mberia, H. & Nyakundi, A., 2024; Rianga & Murungi 2021; Bett, Ngala & Kiruhi, 2020). While there are many other studies on digitization of media and digital transformation in different sectors, there remains a gap in the area of how the shifting media use and management after the COVID-19 pandemic affected the media industry in Kenya. Questions such as: What the effects of the rapid digital shifts on the Kenyan media landscape after the COVID-19 pandemic were; whether there were any notable paradigm shifts in the Kenyan media professional practice post COVID-19 pandemic; and what the challenges experienced by stakeholders in the media industry as a result of rapid digitization of the media were, remain unanswered. This research paper aims to fill this gap of knowledge by seeking answers from the key stakeholders in the media industry, i.e. the media practitioners and the media content consumers. Their insights may help to shed light on the impact of the worldwide pandemic on media practice and consumption while at the same time illuminating the paradigm shifts in both theory and practice of media and journalism.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Effects of the Digital Shift in the Kenyan Media Landscape**

Digitalization has caused both negative and positive changes globally and Kenyan media is no exception. From a positive perspective, the emergence of digital technologies are not just disruptions but have enabled many people to acquire digital literacy and social media management skills. On the other hand, the rapid growth of digital technologies have many negative effects on media practice and audience management because information in the digital platforms can be manipulated and this may lead to misinformation, mal-information and dis-information.

#### **Positive Effects of the Digital Shifts**

Digital technology disruption has made traditional journalism to shift focus from conventional practices to the more dynamic blended approach by embracing online journalism, where content in the form of news texts, videos, sound recordings, graphics and animations are presented to the reader simultaneously. All these messages can be accessed through mobile devices that a good percentage of the Kenyan population possess. The national electricity grid

has greatly expanded in recent years especially with increased access to electricity through efforts such as the Last Mile Initiative by the Kenya government and the previous rural electrification programme. Internet connectivity in Kenya also stands at a great competitive level with other developing and developed countries. This connectivity coupled with high literacy levels and a bigger percentage of the population being youthful has raised Kenyans' interest in digital media technologies and content.

Word Processing Apps have enabled media professionals and other content creators to digitally edit texts in real time (Diang'a & Murunga, 2021). It is now possible to transfer content from the terrestrial media platforms to the digital platforms so that the target consumers for different media house are not left behind in terms of reach and information dissemination. Digital technologies have also opened digital territories beyond geographical or political boundaries and this has created opportunities for ordinary citizens to create, share and access content. Digitization has also enabled media professional to update information in real time and has increased stakeholder engagement in the media industry. The era of Artificial Intelligence is here and many journalists are now facing the reality that Ai may be either a partner or a replacement in the legacy media newsroom. The shifting communication dynamics are further complicated by the concept of the Internet of Things (IoT) which refers to connectivity that involves devices being joined through sensors and RFID (radio frequency identifications) tags where information can be dispensed and accessed through multiple devices and platforms (Hanlon, 2019). It is now possible for people to access information through multiple devices enabled by high digital technology connectivity.

With most audiences shifting online, media houses are rushing to capture the highly connected and interactive audiences. This competition has meant better content, better technological connectivity and better equipment leading to better content outputs. Journalists have also enhanced their digital skills to enable them to keep their audiences engaged with their content. Moreover, online technology enables professionals to not only collect information but they are also able to utilize apps and other software that can detect fake news and hence reduce misinformation and mal-information that is a common occurrence in the digital spaces. Online platforms such as Tik Tok and You Tube, allow content creators to create videos that users can use to acquire different skills. This has been especially critical in increasing digital literacy levels among the Kenyan populace. This new development comes with the advantage of creating a new professional area dubbed digital advertising that opens new career opportunities to journalists (including photojournalists), independent content creatives and artists, digital technicians and digital marketers.

### **Negative Effects of the Digital Shifts**

Digital technologies have immense positive effects on human life and media practice but have also caused problems in journalistic practice ranging from threatening the survival of journalists in legacy media; accountability issues in newsgathering and dispensation; news verification challenges and forcing journalists to multitask by learning multiple survival skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The advertising industry, for instance, has been undergoing rapid transformations that may not always bring positive effects. Bakirmekik (2022) posits that new types of advertisements in line with new media forms have emerged. Legacy media have traditionally relied on older forms of advertisements such as classified ads, pictorials, audio and visual ads on radio and television as well as ads that appear on film, theatre or cinema screens. The current internet based advertisements which include pop-up boxes, advertisement content adjacent to news screens, banners, podcast ads and videos require new digital skills that journalists and marketers must quickly learn. These skills keep changing as new software

and applications are innovated. Furthermore, there are millions of pop-up ads from all corners of the globe making information overload on target audiences a reality.

Digital marketing which relies on digital platforms is not without challenges ranging from misuse of information especially customer data; unfair targeting of customer segments; dishonesty due to loose cyber security laws and anonymity; and a general tendency to confuse customers due to information overload and misinformation (Hanlon, 2019). This consequently means that digital marketers and journalists have to go beyond the traditional methods of content creation for the ads, even beyond the need to create ads with a Wow Effect. Consequently, Hanlon (2019) explains that media professionals are losing jobs because they lack the fast changing digital technologies skills or the technologies naturally replace them. Digital journalism skills are now in demand as most media houses currently operate E-accounts for their newspaper copies, radio and Television stations. Besides, the effect on media professionals' skills and tools, the new technologies have also threatened the journalists' tenures. For instance there is a visible reduction in readers' interest in the hard copy newspaper affecting the print media sector (Bakirmekik 2022). Newspaper and magazine readers now prefer online publications popularly referred to as e-copies. Kenyan newspapers are also slowly transitioning into the digital space through the production of electronic copies. For instance, the Daily Nation sells the online copy at Ksh. 20 and one cannot share the e-copy and that is important for the paper's economic survival as hard copies circulation dwindle. The other leading newspapers, The Star and The Standard also have a growing online circulation. This transformation to online media options has caused massive layoffs in the print media industry as more and more journalists are viewed as redundant.

Another negative effect of digitization, especially social media platforms, is the surge of cybercrimes, controversial or fake theories and unverified or even worse for audience protection, unfiltered information. This was a very common occurrence during the COVID-19 pandemic as content creators all over the world purported to explain the nature of the novel virus (Kisa & Kisa, 2024). Misinformation, malinformation and disinformation are some of the challenges that digitization of media has posed to media content producers and consumers. Misinformation is broadly defined as circulating information that is false (Pierri, Piccardi & Ceri, 2020; Zubiaga et al., 2017). The term misinformation is more commonly used to refer specifically to situations when false information is shared accidentally, whereas disinformation is used to refer to false information shared deliberately (Hernon, 1995). It may also mean changing the way something has been previously understood or interpreted. Malinformation refers to the spread of false and sometimes dangerous information with a malicious intent. For instance information related to security or disease outbreaks can be manipulated ending up causing grievous harm to diverse populations.

### **Paradigm Shift in Media Practice**

Digital technologies have caused a shift in journalistic practice and media management. These shifts are diverse and touch on the actual practice of journalism, audience behaviour and engagement as well the media entrepreneurship. For starters, the media have traditionally set the agenda and maintained the practice of gatekeeping especially on sociopolitical news. However, with the increase in the use of digital media platforms, there is a paradigm shift in agenda setting whereby the audience now express what they want or prefer to consume through digital media platforms. Media editors are no longer setting the agenda for media audiences. Diang'a & Murunga (2021), posit that social media especially Facebook and blogging have disrupted the agenda setting function of mainstream television broadcasting. Furthermore,



news sometimes breaks online through citizen journalists before the mainstream media have verified, leave alone filtered or primed the content.

Praprotnik (2020) argues that digitalization and growth of social media have challenged the news industry so much so that the latter has to adjust its media production to the rising power of independent publishers on social media platforms as well as users, who have now become publishers themselves through citizen journalism. These are now referred to as *prosumers* (Praprotnik, 2020). Smart phones, mobile apps and social media platforms are now competing with legacy media. Mobile devices have taken a powerful position in the Kenyan communication landscape. With over two thirds of the population connected to mobile phones and a good number on smart phones, it means that a majority of the population are able to access information from the internet in real time. The dynamism of these devices allows them to change the contexts of media use whenever they want. The Media Council of Kenya's Supplementary February 2023 Report indicated that 83% of Kenyans use digital media. This is a significant digitization statistic.

De Souza e Silva (2013) emphasizes that as a new technology the mobile internet offers unique qualities such as most portability, always-on connectivity and context sensitivity making them a necessary element in today's world. Besides, mobile devices are context aware by considering the users location, usage patterns and personal interests through geolocation apps. Journalists can use this to develop more innovative ways to connect with their audiences. This is especially important because audiences still portray loyalty to media organizations that they find most gratifying in the news or information they seek. Mobile technology enables users to access a video on demand or watch news at their temporal or spatial convenience. Wolf & Selnaube (2014) accurately predicted that mobile technologies would cause structured changes in the journalism market since they are critical in ensuring that the digital transition in the media industry happens successfully.

Another paradigm shift is that the 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences have different features from the traditional media audience. It is more connected, exposed, dynamic, choosy and more aggressive in seeking information. The current media audience are not just content recipients or consumers but have now taken the role of co-creators and prosumers of content. According to Praprotnik (2020), the internet is more interactive, personal and collaborative which is a clear departure from the normative journalistic practice. Media researchers and scholars have to come up with grounded digital media theories that will help understand not just new media, cybernetics and digital connectivity in relation to human communication but revisit audience analysis approaches and paradigms. There is no doubt that old theories of audience analysis have been challenged by new media developments. Theories such as traditional behavioral theories of media effects may need review.. The new audiences are highly connected and they respond to media content based on the influence of a myriad other factors besides content quality, channel access, media systems and sociocultural aspects. This may challenge the views expressed in previous theories of audience analysis under the existing approaches such as structural, behavioral and cultural/reception analysis.

Digital technologies especially social media have also brought about the F-Factor concept in audience analysis and digital marketing fields. There are four F-Factors that influence audience choice of media that is Friends, Fans, Family and Followers. These factors are aligned to the different ways in which social media sites name their online communities connections. Clearly, new technologies have caused new, unstable and blurring divisions between the public and private spheres of communication as suggested by Praprotnik (2020). The traditional definitions and role of journalist is being challenged by new media technologies. For instance,

ordinary citizens and celebrity journalists are playing the role in social media spaces. Diang'a and Murunga (2021) argue that the new media have altered cultural consumption dynamics and made the audiences more active consequently making content creators come up with content that meets their needs. Journalists also need new skills such as audience editing in order to engage better with the new audience.

Visnovsky & Radosinska (2015) views affirm Diang'a & Murunga (2021) above that the effect of new information technology on journalistic work is immense. Media houses are converging their professionals through multi-skill engagements in the converged technologies newsroom. Journalists have to not only learn journalistic skills in college and as professionals in service, but have to learn new skills including editing software that would help them develop the new journalistic content for the new audience. This may translate to the need to transform the training of journalists to integrate these new skills in the curricula and at work. The media houses have to compete with popular media especially social media platforms which not only offer entertainment but also disseminate news round the clock. Repurposing of content is now critical for media practitioners. There are enough digital platforms to create content but not enough for credible content dissemination. Media professionals can use same content for different platforms.

Another paradigm shift is seen through the role of Ai in content generation and dissemination. Ota, Sangita & Alli (2024) while explaining the role of Artificial Intelligence in content creation argue that Ai is now widely employed in generating digital media content through novel technologies. Ai also helps in getting feedback online and therefore Ai literacy is important for everyone interested in communication. Ai can however have negative implications such as being used to generate fake content compounding the problem that was already a concern in digital media. Therefore, media houses are setting up units for fact checking though this is quite expensive for small media organizations. An organization called Africa Check focuses on verifying news and detecting fake news online. As a way to mitigate the rising risk of fake news online, the Media Council of Kenya, established a wing to check fake news during the election period of 2022. They also have an online App or site called Iverify Network for fact-checking so as to enhance news verification and as an effort to prevent misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. This is a project launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 in partnership with the UNDP. A lot of fake information was flagged down during Kenya's electioneering period through this platform. A Media Council survey done in Kenya before election indicated that traditional media still remain the most trusted source of information or news.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was anchored on the thoughts expressed in the Media Ecology Theory which can be traced to the works of Marshall McLuhan's work in the 1960's. The Media Ecology Theory draws upon the basic concepts of ecology, that is, the science that studies the environment, natural habitats, limiting factors in the environments, populations, ecosystems, and methods of human cognition to understand their environments. The term ecology draws its meaning from the systems theory and cybernetics in order to make sense of the evolution of humans and technology in the co-production of culture. As a theory of media and communication, media ecology focuses on media as environments and environments as media, focusing on their evolution, effects and forms (Laskowska & Malgorzata, 2019; Milberry, 2012). Media ecology is a multidisciplinary field that encompasses thoughts from technology and information sciences, linguistics, semiotics, communication and cultural studies. Media ecology theory explains the interconnection between human beings, technology, media and the environment



with the sole aim of highlighting mutual effects of these concepts. It is associated with research outputs from different scholars who gave varied perspectives on culture, understanding and technology. These include Harold Innis whose thoughts and views influenced McLuhan, his student, greatly; Lewis Mumford, Elizabeth Einstein, Jacques Ellul, Walter Ong, Eric Alfred, Neil Postman and Havelock Jack Goody. Innis's thoughts are especially important for this study.

According to Innis (1951), as cited by Laskowska & Malgorzata (2019), the stability of cultures depends on the balance and proportion of the media of these cultures and each historical era can be aptly described through the lens of its specific form or means of communication. The key to social change is the development of communication media since each medium represents a specific nature, directions, attitudes, bias and control of information. Innis's views align with the rapid growth of digital technology, now referred to as the fourth industrial revolution. This paper sought to understand digital revolution in relation to its impact on the Kenyan media industry. Information is the currency in this digital revolution and as Innis (*ibid*), puts it, the society is subject to and depends on technological change. These thoughts agree with Elizabeth Einstein's ideas in her work "Theory of the History of Typology" which examined the result of the increase in information and accumulation of knowledge and how technology enables the information to be made available on a mass scale. She was analyzing the role of the printing technology on human societies. Strate (2017) explains, "Einstein provided an in-depth examination of one of the most pivotal innovations in human history, the printing press with movable type attributed to Johann Gutenberg." Einstein explained the importance of printing in aspects like time-binding, novelty, discovery, preservation of knowledge and culture as well as how the printing evolution preserved the renaissance era before it and served a foundation for modern science. These ideas are important for this study because digitization is a major transformation in the media industry. Communication, information gathering and distribution is no longer monopolized and controlled by media professionals and their organizations. Digital devices have given power and voice to those who were previously recipients of information and made them recipients, creators and distributors of their content of choice.

Marshall McLuhan has long been associated with technological evolution theories especially through his 1962 theory of Technological Determinism where he makes the claim that technology is the primary driver of social and cultural change. This theory argues that with every new system of media technology, society will change and adapt to that technology (Hallstrom, 2020). According to Levinson (2017), McLuhan's work is said to be the beginning and the foundation of the media ecology theory but through Postman's works (1985, 1992, 2000) the ideas of McLuhan were formalized and developed into the current field of media ecology. To Postman, the concept of media ecology meant the communication and media environment of man.

According to Laskowska (2019), the media ecology theory generally seeks to answer the following questions: How do media influence the behaviour of their recipients? To what extent can media change audience behaviour? What causes a group of recipients of media content to change their attitudes towards certain people, ideas, values or the media themselves? Media ecology can therefore be understood as the science of the functioning of the media, the impact of the media on human beings as well as the mutual dependencies between man and the media. McLuhan's media ecology theory is interconnected with the systems theory that posits that when a new element is added to the environment, one does not get an old environment plus a new element but a new environment (Marcynski, 2016). Lum (2006) explains that media ecology is a science that focuses on how the form and inherent biases of communication media

create the environment in which people symbolically construct the world they come to know and understand as well as its social, economic, political and cultural consequences.

The changes in media consumption and rapid digitization of the Kenyan media landscape is an example of a new element being introduced into an old environment hence creating an entirely new media ecology. This theory was therefore relevant to this study because it not only addresses the role of technology in changing societies but also how the media and their audiences form a distinct ecosystem with elements that depend on one another. When one element changes as happened after COVID-19 the entire ecology shifts as demonstrated in the data presented in this paper. The paper also outlines the paradigm shifts and challenges that have resulted from digital transformations in the media industry.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In order to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the media industry in Kenya, the study sought answers for three key questions: What were the effects of the rapid digital shifts on the Kenyan media landscape after the COVID-19 pandemic; Were there any notable paradigm shifts in the Kenyan media professional practice post COVID-19 pandemic?; What are the challenges experienced by stakeholders in the media industry as a result of rapid digitization of the media? The study employed a descriptive survey research design focusing on the exploration of the digital transformation phenomenon. The study had two target populations; media professionals and media content consumers in four WhatsApp groups. Sampling was done purposively with the researcher selecting two work-based (professional) and two social WhatsApp groups as respondents to the study questions. Data was collected using Google Form Survey and in-depth interviews hence producing both qualitative and quantitative data. These tools enabled the research to obtain both statistical data to explain trends and personal experiences which served to provide data for a more human-centric perspective from media professionals. Members of the groups were asked to voluntarily respond to the survey.

Secondary data from online sources obtained through data mining provides the literature review for this paper. Primary data was obtained from media professionals in 12 main media houses although there were 6 other digital media companies that had representation bringing the total to 18 media stations. Some media professionals seemed to work for more than one station. Data from media consumers was obtained through a survey where questionnaires (Google Forms) were distributed to respondents. Primary data was obtained from 13 media professionals in different media stations from a target population of 36 journalists representing the randomly selected 18 media organizations. Primary data was also sourced from 94 media consumers who responded to the survey targeting 176 respondents in four WhatsApp groups (2 professional and 2 professional). The data from the two populations was supplemented through one on one in-depth interviews with 12 media professionals (practicing media/journalism lecturers and journalists) sampled from a population of 28 purposively identified by the researcher in different WhatsApp work groups. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics for the survey and narration of the responses from the interviews with media professionals. Data presentation is done through pie charts and graphs and discussions and interpretation made to elicit conclusions and recommendations.

## **FINDINGS**

The study sought to find out the effects of the rapid digital shifts on the Kenyan media landscape after the COVID-19 pandemic; establish if there were any notable paradigm shifts in the Kenyan media professional practice post COVID-19 pandemic; and, establish the

challenges experienced by stakeholders in the media industry as a result of rapid digitization of the media.

The researcher collected qualitative data from purposively selected journalists so as to get some insight on the effect of the acceleration of digitization in media organizations after the COVID-19 pandemic. The media professionals were asked questions in relation to how the emergence of COVID-19 influenced changes in their organizations as the lockdowns and mitigation measures forced workers to operate from home. From their responses, it is evident that COVID-19 contributed to the accelerated digitization of media systems. These changes range from journalists being forced to retool themselves through the acquisition of digital skills to some of the journalists losing jobs as media organizations restructured due to reduced income streams. Interviews were conducted on 12 practicing journalists who explained the shifts in the media industry post COVID-19. The shifts were both positive and negative. For instance, one respondent explained that digitization opened up new opportunities for journalists who were tech-savvy while also accelerating the move of legacy media houses into the more advanced digital journalism era:

*Respondent 1: In the media industry, we now have digital journalists working in newly created digital newsrooms that have online correspondents, social media content specialists, social media editors, online news editors and directors. The team is similar to the legacy media newsroom.*

*Respondent 12: Journalists need to learn how to use different technologies. Mobile journalism (mojo) is a practice that relies a lot on applications on mobile devices. It is now the norm among Kenyan media professionals. I am a reporter who not only gathers news using my smart phone but I also edit and relay the scripts to the newsroom from wherever I am. There is no need to rely on bulky devices. Most of us, as in reporters and script writers, are able to do tasks such as editing, graphic design and text creation and curation. Most of these skills are self-taught and we had to learn them fast.*

Journalists have embraced these changes positively with some getting into entrepreneurship as they seek to build careers through the digital technologies as the respondent below explains:

*Respondent 5: Since the emergence of COVID-19 when many media houses lost revenue streams due to reduced advertising and general uncertainty for businesses, a good number of journalists operate in what is popularly called the 'gig economy'. This is where a journalist may work for different media houses and in some cases have their own pages. In Kenya, some journalists have opted to start You Tube Television channels. These channels may be for edutainment and will usually focus on trending issues in the society besides being an audience-journalist engagement platform where information is freely shared.*

*Respondent 6: There are no scoops now due to the digital media landscape allowing a fast growing citizen and participatory journalism where breaking news fast appear online before the legacy media verifies or even organizes it into disseminatable news. News production is cheaper now. Gatekeepers have fallen as news seeps through the internet with almost nil journalistic checks. Traditional/legacy media is struggling due to the new requirements in the industry. Establishing the digital infrastructure is an expensive undertaking. Instead of scoops, there are new phenomena like 'following day journalism' e.g. the woman who sells carrots at...*

*Respondent 2: Following the GenZ uprising in Kenya in mid-2024 many content creators and journalists created You Tube and Tik Tok accounts where they engage in analysis political issues and events in Kenya. Many of these videos are discursive and antagonistic in nature*



*with an aim of criticizing issues of governance and law enforcement. Others are sensationalist and propagandist depending on the political orientation of the content creator. In most cases journalists are overtaken by these content creators who are increasingly gaining popularity.*

This response indicates that digital media platforms are also fast becoming political discourse platforms for Kenyan masses especially those who feel aggrieved politically and socioeconomically. There are 10s of You Tube, Facebook and TikTok accounts owned by Kenyans focusing on sociopolitical content. Journalists also expressed the fear that digital media apps especially social media platforms are slowly edging out legacy media platforms. There is notable shift in audience behaviour as Kenyans embrace digital media more as not only sources of information but also avenues for information sharing as shown in the response below:

*Respondent 4: WhatsApp is one powerful mobile App that serves as a news source for millions of mobile smart phone owners. Most of this news is unverified. Legacy media is slowly dying. The media is now playing catch up with the new media platforms. When Facebook started most media houses blocked it but now they have embraced almost all social media sites since they need to be present online. This is where the audience is. However legacy media tends to drag a little bit more in adopting new technologies. This is despite the fact that the media institutions continue to lose their autonomy and control of not just the media industry but the audiences as they were previously viewed.*

Another paradigm shift in the Kenyan media landscape was marked by the rise of youthful political and civic activists who engage in discussions on issues affecting the country in different digital platforms. These activists form part of the ever increasing body of citizen and civic journalists who create, share and consume news, entertainment and other forms of information online. They are independent, connected, fluid, diverse, tech-savvy and very aggressive in their search, creation or sharing of information. Many would be classified as digital natives cognizant of the fact that they have interacted with digital devices and the internet since birth.

11 out of 12, that is 91.7% of the respondents agreed that Kenyans have witnessed an unprecedented utilization of digital technologies and social media platforms in a totally different manner in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many young people turned to social media for edutainment not forgetting that educators also resorted to using Learning Management Systems exposing the youths to the digital platforms even more. The respondents argued that many young people got more exposure during the COVID-19 lockdowns as schools and universities turned to virtual learning exposing the youths to digital apps and content. This exposure may have awakened a certain level of political awareness among the Kenyan youths as explained by the respondent below:

*Respondent 7: Since the coming to power of the Kenya Kwanza government, Kenyan politics has witnessed an indefatigable quest to debate and prosecute policy matters in the digital space. Journalists have not only been forced to engage with their audiences online but also must confront the existence and power of the new voice of the voiceless; the Kenyan GenZ. This group gained sociopolitical visibility in 2024 when the government of Kenya introduced the infamous Finance Bill 2024, even though their online activities heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic when they used the digital platforms for content creation to pass time away from school.*

These views are affirmed by data obtained from online data mining of various social media platforms, it is evident that another paradigm shift in media usage and content consumption in

Kenya can be seen through a shift in audience behaviour. For instance, young Kenyans have managed to completely shift Kenyan politics as well as political reporting through platforms like Tik Tok, Facebook, You Tube, Reels, Instagram and X. On X Space, the youths have engaged in all manner of revolutionary discussions and engagements to the extent of having the Kenyan president attend one such session in June 2024. This was after a major revolt against the Finance Bill 2024 was organized culminating in the attack of parliament buildings in Nairobi on June 25<sup>th</sup> 2024, forcing law makers to flee for their lives. The street revolts transitioned to digital revolt whereby youths retreated to the digital spaces where they have created their own You Tube platforms which they variously label as ‘media’, ‘TV’, ‘Outlet’, and ‘Forum’ and so on. Examples of such You Tube media platforms are: ROMY ROLLZ, Mururi TV, Afro David TV, THIRD DAY SHOW, AJAABU TV, PLUG TV, The BOLD, Brave Kenya TV, Mwenda Saba TV, Mutembei TV, etc. These platforms are used for posting trending political news, government criticism, and civic discussions such as good governance practices, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This is supported by a respondent (media content consumer), who says:

*“I think the media space and diversity of information has greatly increased. The use is also greater with content creators exploring wider and more personalised offerings that utilize entertainment as a way of communicating even serious topics”.*

This response confirms that digital media platforms are not just used for entertainment but they have become tools for discursive discourse against government operatives. This data was endorsed by Respondent 6 who explained:

*This new development has brought change in the face of the new news makers, journalists have been forced to engage with their audiences in the same spaces. For instance, Citizen TV hosted several X Space discussions during Prime Time news. Audiences have moved to the digital spaces. They are creating their own news and talk shows. We have no choice but to interact with them in their spaces of preference.*

In response to the question on challenges that the changes brought about by the acceleration of digitization in the Kenyan media industry, the media professionals interviewed raised the issue of lack of proper policy and regulation of cyber space content creation and dissemination:

*Respondent 6: Anyone can create content but who has copyright? Most people in the creative industry previously worked as co-hosts in the media houses but now they have made inroads online making it difficult to get them on set. There are no written laws for the digital space. These laws have not been streamlined. Laws and regulations are important but it is important to remember that things get stifled when they are streamlined.*

Another challenge raised by the journalists was the proliferation of fake news and misinformation in the digital spaces

*Respondent 1: The other area that requires focus is organizational or institutional image and reputation. Online reputation monitoring is no longer an option in an era where cyber bullying and cybercrimes are the order of the day. News modification even after a media house has verified can still happen where people are able to use Apps that allow content manipulation. Online reputation can be managed using existing tools such as the search engines to mine audience data including public opinion.*

Digital technologies provide tools to measure the popularity of a show or programme or even any content posted online using specific social media metrics and analytical tools. This allows the media organization to exercise some level of control on their own activities online.

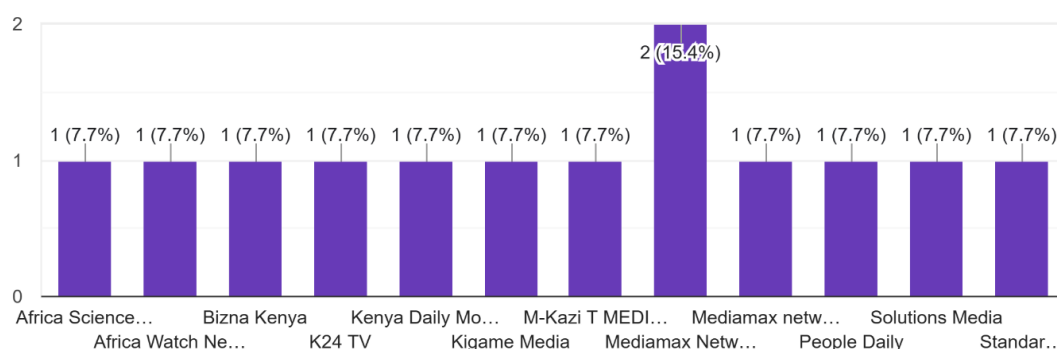
However digital technologies seem to have created another complication with relation to this as a respondent explains:

*Respondent 5: Monitoring has to be consistent and maintained at high levels since the online communities are endlessly creating new ways of interacting with any content posted. Artificial intelligence is not helping matters here and it may be a skill that media professionals need to embrace besides seeking social media expertise.*

The media professionals participants of the study responded to a survey run through Google forms. The questionnaire had demographic questions, questions related to media systems and structures, and the adoption of digital technologies after the COVID-19 pandemic as well the changes and challenges experienced after covid-19. From these questions, Responses from 13 respondents to Google Form Survey were analyzed.

The media practitioners who responded from the survey were from 18 media companies (some worked across platforms or media houses), namely: Africa Science News, Bizna Kenya, K24 TV, Kenya Daily Monitor, M-Kazi T Media & Entertainment, Media Max Network Ltd, People Daily, Nation Media Group, Standard Group, Royal Media Services, Kigame Media, Africa Watch News, Taarifa News, Mount Kenya News, The County Diary Media, Kenyan Prime News, Newslight Kenya and Africa Times News Network. 46.2 % of these companies were digital media channels, 30.8% were print media channels, 15.4% were broadcast and 7.7% were multimedia. From this distribution, it is clear that digital media journalists have increased in number as compared with results in Media Council Reports of 2019 and 2020 where there was no data on digital or online news sources.

Name of Media House  
13 responses



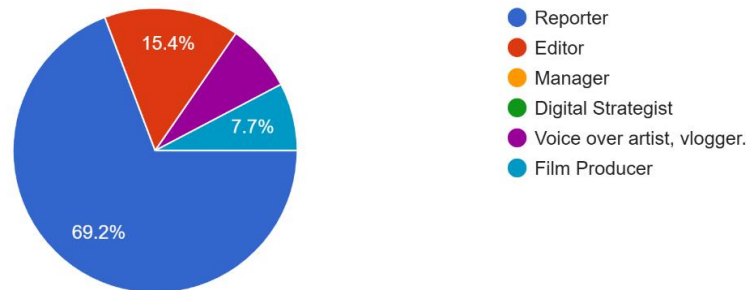
In 2023 Media Council Report indicated that online news sources had increased from 2% in 2020 to 4% in 2022. The report also indicated that 19% of Kenyans in the 47 counties accessed TV from digital or online platforms and another 4% from digital apps. The media practitioners' data revealed that 30.8% were female and 69.2% were male. 53.8% were aged between 18-25 years, 30.8% were aged between 26-35 years and 15.4% were aged between 36- 45years. Younger Kenyans as per this data seems to be more involved with digital media platforms.

69.2% of the respondents were reporters, 15.4% were editors, 7.7% were voice over artists/vloggers and 7.7% were film producers.



#### Role in Organization

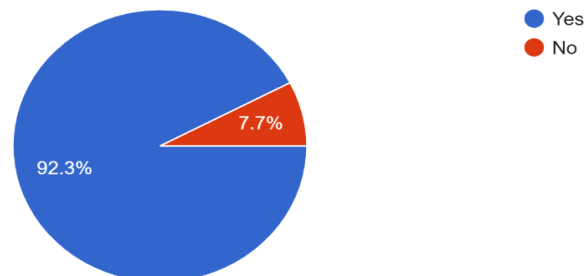
13 responses



In response to the question: Did your organization adopt any new digital tools after COVID-19 pandemic? 92.3% of the respondents responded in the affirmative while 7.7% responses were negative. This is a significant number that demonstrates that indeed the COVID-19 pandemic pushed media organizations into digitization. The data is collaborated by Wekesa, Mberia & Nyakundi (2024) whose study revealed that the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic forced television stations to seek alternative ways of sourcing for content.

#### Did your organization adopt any new digital tools after COVID-19?

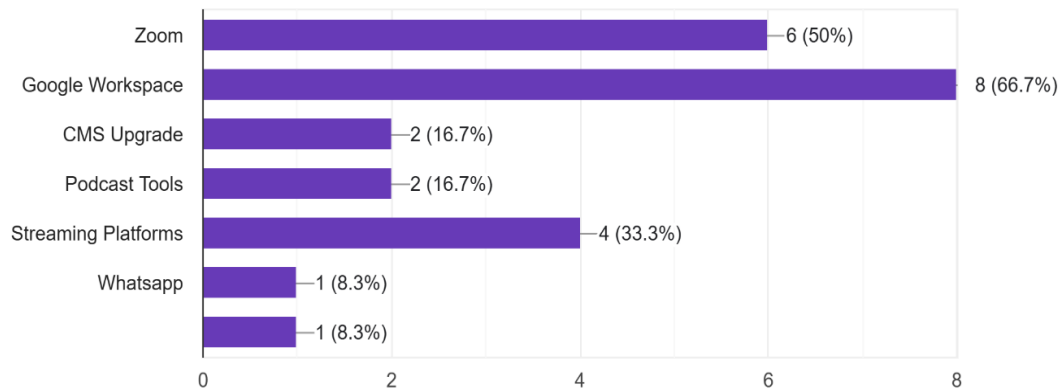
13 responses



For the organizations that adopted digital tools, 50% adopted Zoom, 66.7% adopted Google Workspace, 33.3% adopted Streaming platforms, 16.7% adopted CMS Upgrade, 16.7 % started using Podcast Tools and 8.3% adopted WhatsApp as a major communications platform. These results agree with the response from all the respondents i.e. 100%, that their organizations invested more in digital infrastructure since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If yes, which ones?

12 responses

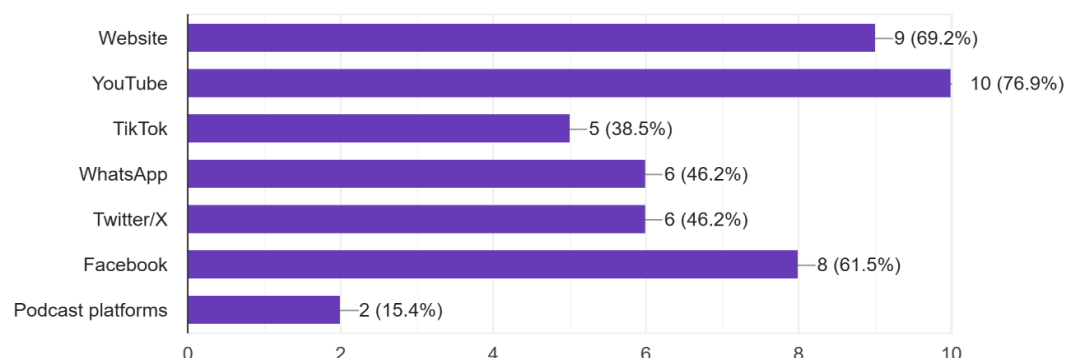


The respondents were also asked which platforms are now prioritized for content delivery by their organization, 69.2% indicated that they prioritize their websites; 61.5% prioritize Facebook 46.2% prioritize WhatsApp; 46.2% prioritize X; 38.5% prioritize Tik Tok; and 15.4% prioritize Podcast platforms. This is a sharp increase from the reported trends in the Media Council Report of 2023 which also reported an increase from the levels reported in the 2019 and 2021 reports. This means that since the emergency of COVID-19 in Kenya in the year 2020 the access and consumption of digital media content has risen.

On being asked to describe the impact of digitization on their workflow, media professionals' practitioners thus: 46.2% strongly agreed that this had greatly impacted on their workflow, 38.5% agreed, 7.7% disagreed and another 7.7% were neutral. The total percentage of those who at least agreed with changing work flows for media due to digitization was 84.7%. This again confirms that digitization had an effect on media organizations decisions about the workflow of media professionals.

Which platforms are now prioritized for content delivery?

13 responses

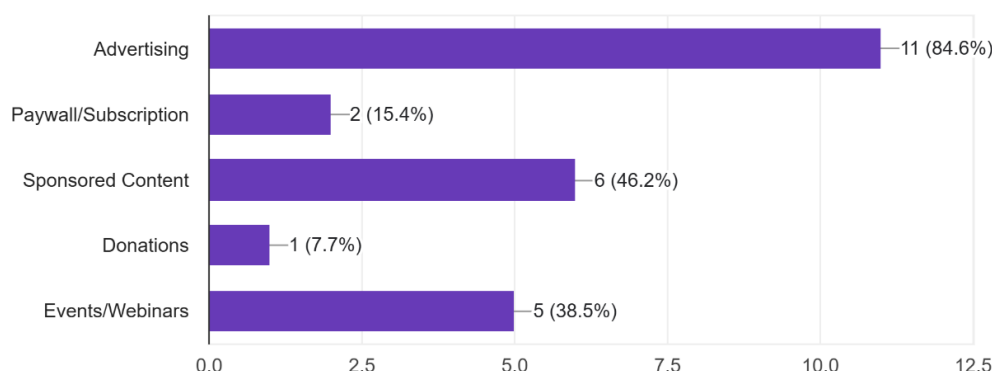


Media companies and organizations have traditionally relied on paid advertisements for revenue generation. Cognizant of the fact that digitization had impacted the media organizations from the responses above, media practitioners were asked to state the revenue

models being used by their media houses. 84.6% still rely on advertising; 15.4% rely on Paywall/subscriptions; 46.2% had sponsored content, 7.7% relied on donations and another 38.5% generated revenue through events or webinars. The results show that advertisements remain the key source of revenue for media organizations, but there is an emerging source, that is, online revenue sources at 15.4% for subscriptions and 46.2% for sponsored content.

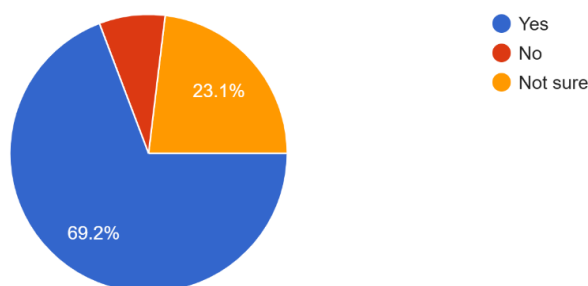
#### What revenue models are being used now?

13 responses



#### Has digitization improved your media house's ability to generate revenue?

13 responses



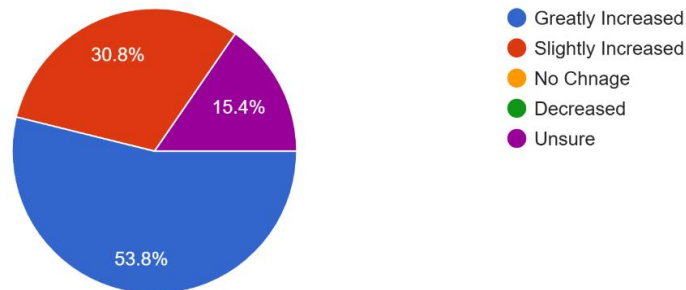
From the chart above, 69.2% agreed that digitization had improved their media houses ability to generate revenue while 23.1% were not sure and 7.7% disagreed.

Media professionals were also asked if there was any change in audience engagement since the emergence of COVID-19 when many media content consumers turned to digital platforms for information and entertainment. In response, 53.8% indicated that audience engagement had greatly increased; 30.8% said that engagement increased slightly while 15.4% were unsure about the status of audience engagement.



How has audience engagement changed since COVID-19?

13 responses



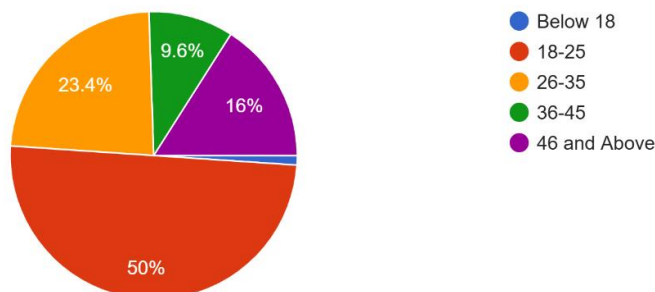
On the effect of COVID-19 on media professionals careers, 91% of the respondents indicated that they witnessed colleagues being laid off due to lack of funding or reduced revenue ; 10 respondents said some media professionals were laid off due to redundancy as their companies embraced digital platforms and 5 respondents indicated that no staff in their organizations were affected. One respondent explained that colleagues in their media house were laid off as a result of the changing consumer habits which have affected revenue streams.

Through a paragraph question, media practitioners were also asked to highlight the challenges that the media industry is facing due to digitization. They raised issues such as: plagiarism of content; stiff competition in attracting traffic to their websites; slow internet/low bandwidths; difficulty in measuring the return on investments for digital initiatives; lack of knowledge in the digital skills needed; increasing reliance on Ai to generate content; audience reach due to competition; loss of old media which also have good elements and features; lack of enough social events or contact with colleagues resulting in mental health issues due to no socialization; working from home after digitization has resulted in less allowances from events and retreats, hence reduced incomes for media professionals. Another challenge that was highlighted was that media organizations seemed to integrate new technologies with existing legacy systems thereby creating challenges such as data security issues, managing change among employees used to traditional systems and maintaining consistent digital skills capacity building to enable the uptake of digital journalism.

A survey on five WhatsApp groups (2 professional (98 members) and 2 social (78 members)) was done targeting media consumers. Out of these groups that had a total of 176 members, 94 responded translating to 53.4% response rate which is adequate. Like the norm in most qualitative studies on social issues, saturation was noted after the 55<sup>th</sup> response but the researcher captured the feedback from all the 94 respondents.

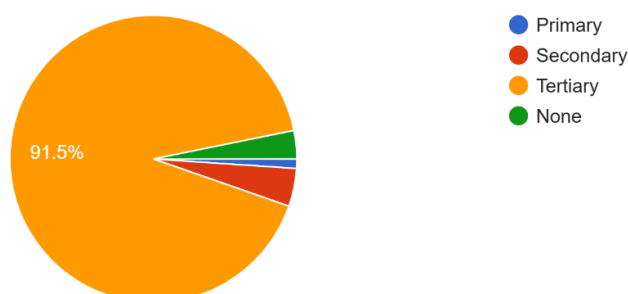
The respondents were 89.4% urban and 10.6% indicating a clear digital divide due to challenges related to access and digital literacy skills. From the responses, 50.9% were male and 49.1% were female. 5.3% were aged between 36-45 years; 21.1% were 26-35 years, 17.5 were 46 years and above; 54.4% were between the age of 18 and 25 and only 1.8% were below 18. The sample was therefore representative of the target populations.

Age Group  
94 responses



With reference the respondents' level of education, 87.7% had acquired tertiary level education, 7% had high school level education, 2% did not respond to the question and 1.8% had primary school level of education. Digital media platforms require some level of literacy so as to access and be able to maneuver the different digital spaces. Majority of the respondents as the data indicates had tertiary level education.

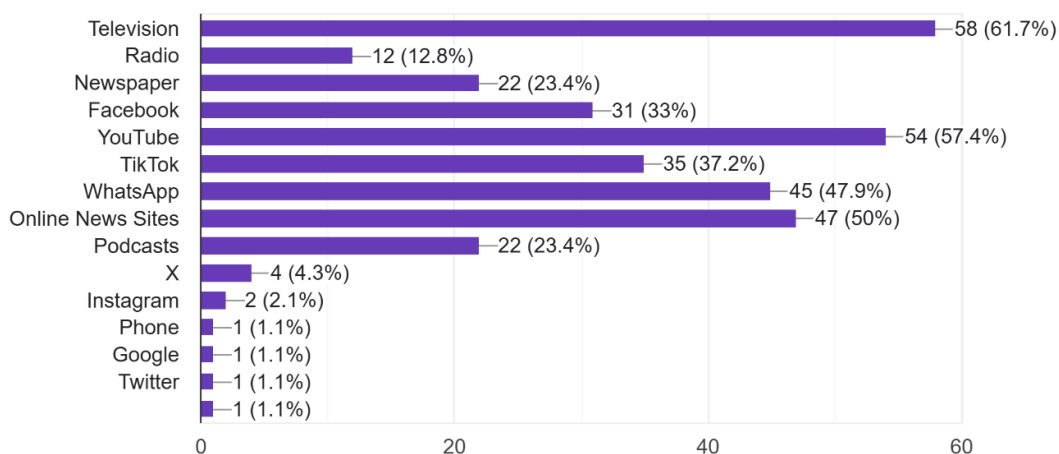
Education Level  
94 responses



The respondents' occupations included accountants, Food & Beverage specialists entrepreneurs/business persons, university lecturers, scientists/researchers, creatives, social work, web developers, software engineers, pastor, university students, teachers (primary and high school), and 5 out 94 were unemployed. When asked which platforms they regularly use to access news and entertainment, a majority (63.2%), seemed to prefer television, followed closely by You Tube at 55.2%, Online news sources at 46.6% and WhatsApp at 44.8%. Tik Tok followed with 37.9 %. 22.4% and 24.1% of the respondents preferred Facebook and Podcasts respectively. Those who preferred newspapers were 19% of the respondents while only 5.2 % preferred radio and 3.4% preferred X/Twitter. Those who preferred Instagram and Google were a paltry 1%.

#### Which platforms do you regularly use to access news and entertainment?

94 responses



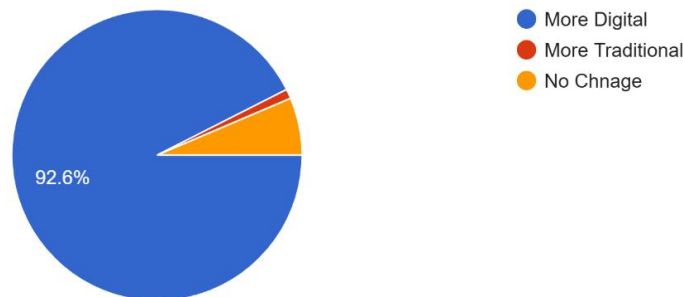
These results are in tandem with the Media Council Report of February 2023, indicated that in the year 2022, 51% of respondents visited websites up from 12% in 2021. According to the report the rise was caused by the need to access news during the electioneering period, ease of access to the internet, availability of non-pay sites and low cost of e-papers as compared to hard copy newspapers. The report also indicated that 83% of the respondents in the survey used digital media which was an improvement from 77% in 2021. Those who relied on online news sources were 22% in 2021 which has increased fairly fast to 46.6% in the current study. Though the Media Council Report covers the 47 counties with 3331 while this is a media survey with less participants i.e. 292, the data serves to prove that Kenyans continue to embrace digital media platforms as sources of information and entertainment.

Majority of the respondents, that is, 92.6% agreed that their media consumption and choice had changed since the COVID-19 pandemic while 6.4% felt that there was no change and 1.1% said that they became more traditional. From this data and the interview responses, it is evident that as preventive and control measures such as lockdowns and social distancing took effect professionals in different fields were forced to work from home and embrace digital tools in their work activities. People also sought information in the digital platforms especially social media causing a major shift in consumer behaviour. Media houses that had previously dragged their feet in the adoption of technology had to hastily shift to digital spaces for survival with many of their audiences shifting to digital media platforms.



How has your media consumption changed since COVID-19?

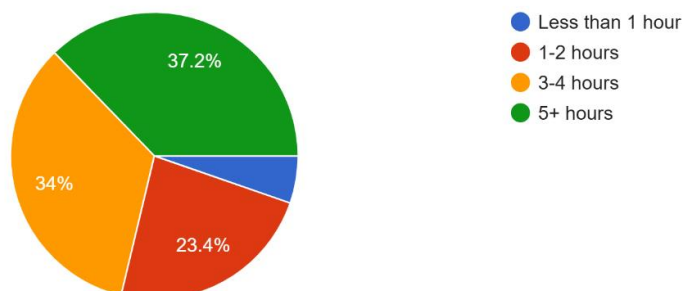
94 responses



To further establish the changes in audience behaviour the respondents were asked how much time they spent on digital media per day. The responses indicate that a majority of Kenyan media consumers, i.e. 42.4% spent over 5 hours. 27.1% spent 3-4 hours, another 27.1 % spent 1-2 hours while only 3.4% spent less than 1 hour online.

How much time do you spend on digital media per day?

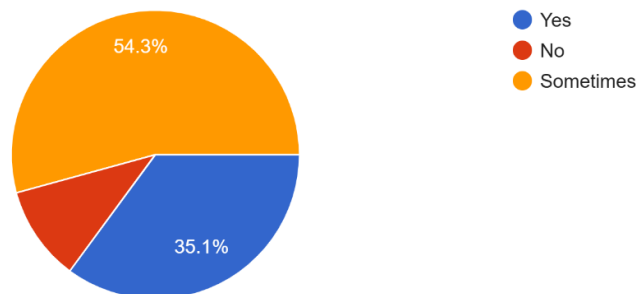
94 responses



The fact that 42.4% of participants spend over 5 hours on digital media in a day shows that digital media form an important part of Kenyans' lives. The data from interviews collaborates this view since there is a lot of emphasis on the fact that many Kenyans are now content creators dispensing their content through social media platforms. When asked whether they trust information from digital media platforms more than traditional media, 50.8% indicated that they only trust digital media some of the time, 8.5% indicated that they do not trust digital media and 40.7% said they trust digital media more than traditional media.

Do you trust information from digital platforms more than traditional media?

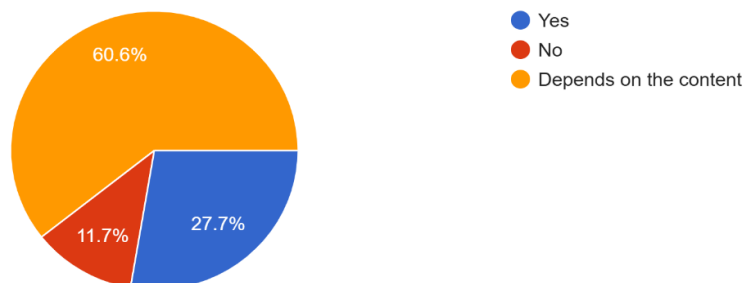
94 responses



These results demonstrate that legacy media retain relevance in this era of connectivity since most users still confirm the authenticity of news through these traditional channels. However, digital media platforms are positioning themselves as important sources of information. Besides, most people use social media for entertainment making many people not to take the sites seriously where news is concerned. In response to the question on whether they were willing to pay for digital media content, 61% indicated that they would pay depending on the content, 6.8% said they would not pay, while 32.2% were willing to pay for digital content.

Are you willing to pay for digital media content?

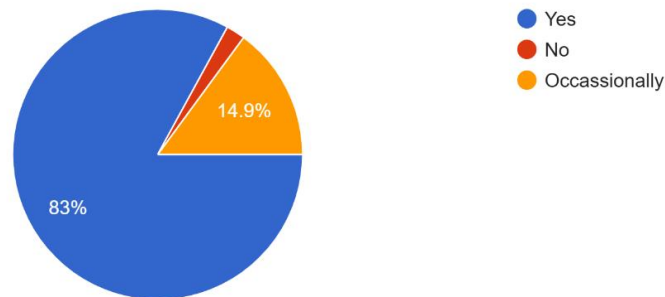
94 responses



In terms of reliable internet availability and access, 84.7% indicated that they have reliable internet while 11.9% had internet occasionally and 3.4% had no access to reliable internet.

Do you have reliable internet access?

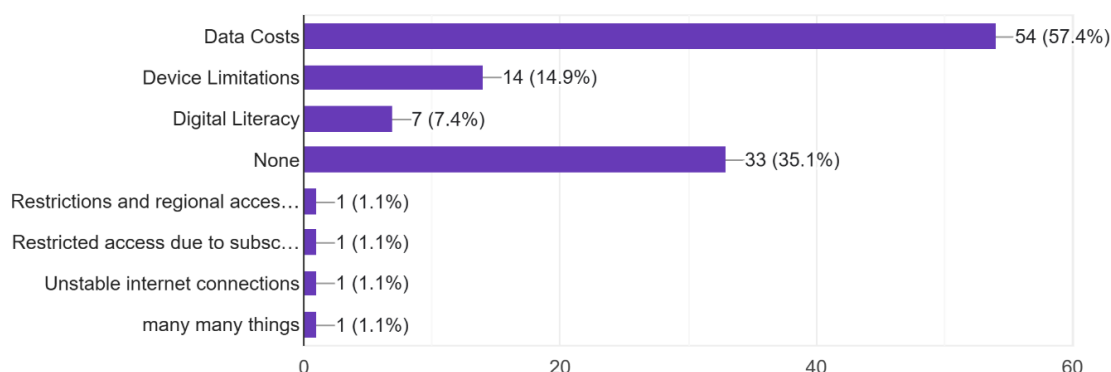
94 responses



The respondents also indicated the kind of challenges they faced in accessing digital media. A majority, i.e. 57.6% complained of unaffordable data costs; 20.3% had device limitations; 8.5% blamed low digital literacy levels; 1.7% faced restricted access due to subscriber costs and limited listing of news items; and 1.7% indicated that they had many unspecified challenges while accessing digital media.

Have you faced challenges accessing digital media?

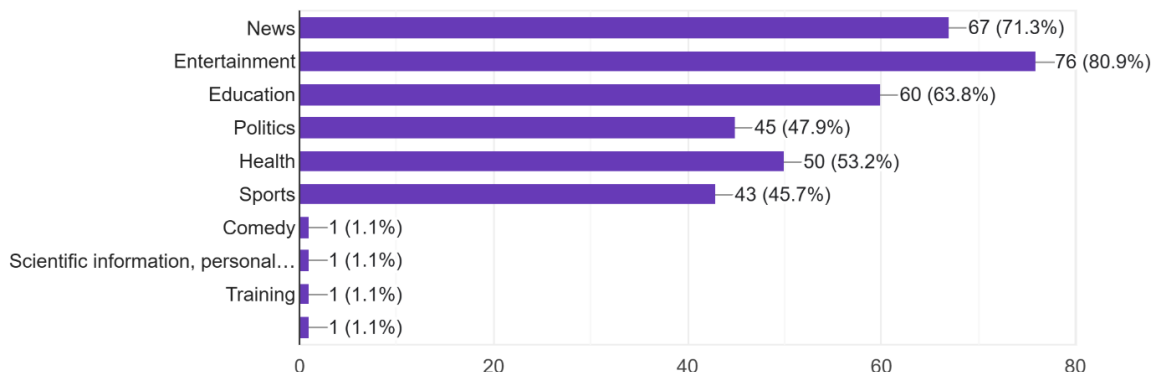
94 responses



In response to the question on the type of content they prefer on digital platforms, 86.9% indicated that they seek entertainment; 72.1% seek news from digital media 62.3% look for educative content; 57.4% seek health information; 45.9% go for information on sports; another 47.5% prefer political news; 1.7% of the respondents prefer digital media for comedy and scientific information. This data shows that audience behaviour has changed. Audiences do not just seek entertainment from digital platforms as before. They are also seeking important information such as news, educative content and health information.

What type of content do you prefer on digital platforms?

94 responses



Respondents were also asked to describe the general use of digital media in Kenya since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Majority of the respondents expressed the view that digital media use had greatly increased and media audiences had now shifted to the online platforms. Respondents also seemed to agree on the advantages of using digital technology platforms citing several advantages such as the fact that the internet allows automation, higher access to information or data, higher information processing speed, wider social networking and generally better communication abilities for netizens and other users.

One respondent said: *digital technology should not be seen as a threat but a catalyst of progress. The Standard Media Group has launched the 'The Digital Space' along Mombasa Road.*

The respondents felt that digital media had transformed many sectors. One respondent wrote: *Since COVID, digital media in Kenya has really taken off. People now use their phones a lot more to watch news, listen to music, or just scroll through social media. Apps like WhatsApp, Tik Tok and You Tube became super common. Even older folks started using smart phones.*

Another respondent claimed: *Most people have shifted to the digital space and only a few are left behind. Digital media has become better and well established since during the pandemic it was the main form of all communication...*

Another respondent argued thus: *I think the media space and diversity of information has greatly increased. The use is also greater with content creators exploring wider and more personalized offerings that utilize entertainment as a way of communicating even serious topics. There has been increased consumption which is attributed to easier access to digital platforms and data offers from major internet suppliers. It is accessible to a larger population than before. However, some contents are not helpful to our young users as they use their time watching unhealthy content.*

Another respondent explained: *Since COVID-19 pandemic, Kenya's digital media use has surged – with internet penetration reaching 48% (27.4 million users), social media accounts exceeding 13 million, and mobile money adoption topping 94% - fueling rapid growth in online services such as telehealth and e-learning despite persistent rural connectivity gaps.*

This view is shared by another respondent: *It has become more popular and reliable because you can cross check information obtained from one content creator with that of others.*



This view that Kenyans' digital media use has increased was shared by 83 out of the 94 participants in the survey. Another respondent indicated that digital media use in Kenya has been systematically proportional to the increased need for digital transformation, as businesses, schools and even government services rapidly shifted online due to lockdowns and social distancing. The respondent explains:

From a software engineering perspective, this catalyzed the demand for scalable web and mobile solution, cloud infrastructure and cybersecurity. The pandemic forced many Kenyan institutions to embrace digital, not as a luxury, but as a necessity leading to noticeable boom in fintech apps, e-learning platforms, digital marketplaces, and tele-health services.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Digitization has clearly reshaped the Kenyan media landscape and altered audience behaviour as demonstrated in this paper. From the data, it is clear that technological innovations have forced a media industry evolution as practitioners strategically navigate a way forward. After the COVID-19 pandemic digitization of media systems in Kenya was quickly adopted. Many Kenyans embraced diverse digital media platforms and this made the Kenyan legacy media to embrace media convergence by adopting a blended mode where they use both digital platforms and the traditional media channels. Digital technologies have brought many benefits that should be harnessed but media practitioners must mitigate the risks and potential pit holes that the industry faces through these innovations. The study demonstrates that COVID-19 pandemic had positive and negative impacts on the media industry. On the positive side media professionals have become more creative. Some journalists lost jobs as revenues dwindled and this led them to start social media businesses such as You Tube video accounts, websites, and online TV channels.

Media organizations sources of revenue have expanded beyond advertising to include digital media sources such as subscriptions and sponsorship of content. Therefore digital technologies are changing media management and the political economy of the mass media. Media ownership has traditionally been a huge factor in information flow and control. This study illustrates that Kenyans from different backgrounds now own media platforms albeit for only edutainment and activism. The data demonstrates a paradigm shift not just in media production but also audience behaviour. The current Kenyan audience is tech savvy, highly connected and aggressive in seeking information from both online and offline sources.

As audiences become content creators, the challenge of timely news verification has led to the proliferation of fake news and misinformation. Lack of policy or implementation of existing cyber policy in Kenya compounds this challenge. Anyone with access to a digital device can create and dispense content and due to the virality of digital content, cyberspace content control and regulation remains a challenge in ethical journalistic practice.

In conclusion, the study agrees with the perspectives of the media ecology theory. This study agrees with the idea propagated by Innis that the society is subject to and dependent on technological change. The Kenyan media landscape underwent technological change as a result of the rapid digitization as online journalism was adopted especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that media organizations prioritize digital literacy and adaptability for their staff. By investing in training programs and fostering a culture of innovation, these entities

can equip themselves with the tools necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving ecosystem. Media practitioners in Kenya in this digital age need to embrace a holistic approach that embraces digital literacy, audience-centricity, collaboration, ethics, and regulatory foresight. By adopting these principles, media organizations can navigate the complexities of digitization and emerge stronger, more resilient, and better positioned to meet the evolving needs of audiences in this Ai era.

Secondly, the study advocates for a renewed focus on audience engagement and user experience. In an era characterized by information abundance, capturing and retaining audience attention requires personalized, immersive content experiences that transcend traditional formats used by mainstream media. Audience tech savviness needs to be taken into consideration when creating content as this will lead to better interactivity and engagement between the media practitioners and their audiences. Audiences are no longer passive consumers of information; they are now co-creators and disseminators of information.

The study also underscores the need for collaboration and partnerships within the media ecosystem. By forging alliances with technology companies, content creators, and other stakeholders, media organizations can leverage synergies and co-create innovative solutions to complex challenges in the communication and media industry. Media organizations can involve the industry in training, as well as equip colleges and universities. Universities can adopt newsrooms in different regions or outside the country as a form of partnership to train journalists in new skills including artificial intelligence, science and solution journalism as well as health communication and reporting. This was lacking especially during the pandemic.

Ethical considerations for media practitioners and journalists is a principle that must continue in practice. As concerns about misinformation and privacy mount, media entities must uphold rigorous ethical standards and transparency practices to maintain credibility and trust. Cyberspace news creation poses a major challenge to news credibility but enabling professional journalists to detect fake news, malinformation and misinformation through personal development and capacity building initiatives is critical. Moreover, the digital media landscape needs to adhere to existing regulation and policy frameworks. Balancing the imperatives of innovation and consumer protection, policymakers must enact forward-thinking regulations that foster competition, safeguard user rights, and promote media pluralism. In essence, policymakers and regulators need to foster an environment that supports digital innovations and transformation while combating fake news and other unethical practices.

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