Role of Social Media Platforms in the Spread of Fake News in Nyeri County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Fake news is widespread in elections, especially during presidential elections. It has the potential to divide public opinion and create a hostile environment in which people feel their voices aren't being heard. The current study aimed to explore the role of social media platforms in the spread of fake news in Nyeri County. The study is anchored in agenda-setting theory. A mixed-methods approach is used. The population comprised adults in Nyeri County, registered journalists, bloggers, and social media experts, as well as politicians in the county. A sample of 195 respondents was calculated using the modified formulas by Fisher. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Quantitative analysis consisted of frequencies and percentages using Microsoft Excel. The qualitative data collected was analyzed using content analysis with the help of NVIVO software. The results of quantitative analysis were presented in the form of tables and figures, while those of qualitative data analysis were presented using narration. The study found that social media was the main source of fake news. Facebook and Twitter had the highest prevalence of fake news, with 87% and 72% of the respondents indicating that they witnessed fake news on the apps, respectively. The study therefore concluded that social media was the biggest source of fake news in Nyeri County. The study recommended that social media companies, especially Facebook and Twitter, should take more responsibility by implementing laws to protect against the spread of fake news. This can include flagging fake news and implementing tough penalties for users spreading propaganda on the internet.

Key words: Elections, Facebook, Fake News, Social Media, Twitter

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I. INTRODUCTION

Fake news is defined as news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and designed to manipulate people's perceptions of real facts, events, and statements (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Rich (2018) defines newspaper articles, television news shows, or other information disseminated through broadcast or social media that are intentionally based on falsehoods or that intentionally use misleading framing to offer a distorted narrative. Unlike misinformation, which is inaccurate because a reporter has confused facts, fake news is created with the intent to manipulate someone or something. New communication technologies have allowed for new ways to produce, distribute, and consume fake news, which makes it harder to differentiate what information to trust (Kalsnes, 2018). The risk of encountering disinformation across digital and legacy media is becoming more common. Fake news stories use technology and social media to look like proper news sites. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter make it easy to share trending news without taking the time to critically evaluate it (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). The spread of misinformation is in part attributed to social media failing to verify the authenticity of a news item. This makes it easy to share seemingly real images and videos that have been skillfully manipulated (Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020).

Research indicates that fake news is a global epidemic and that its impact is widespread. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2020) reports that 86% of online global citizens believe they have encountered fake news. Moreover, a significant majority of people worldwide, namely 67%, see false news as a significant problem in their own countries. A poll done by the Pew Research Center (2019) revealed that around 63% of respondents in the United States believe that fake news reports lead to significant uncertainty regarding the fundamental truths of current situations. Jalli et al. (2019) discovered that false news was disseminated not only by regular individuals but also as a deliberate form of communication by cyber armies working for political parties during the Malaysian 14th General Election in 2018 and the Indonesian Presidential Election in 2019. A poll performed by the United Nations Department of Global Communications (2018) in the Middle East revealed that 86% of internet users depend on social media to obtain news. As to the African Media Barometer (2020), the prevalence of false news is a significant challenge in the African media environment. According to the research, a significant majority of residents, 74%, expressed the belief that fake news was a significant

issue in their respective countries. Notably, South Africa and Kenya had the greatest levels of concern, with 83% and 82% of citizens expressing worry, respectively.

Fake news is widespread in elections, especially during presidential elections. An analysis conducted by Muhammed and Matthew (2022) found that false stories were more widely shared on social media than true stories in both the 2018 French parliamentary election and the 2016 US presidential race. During the Mexican 2018 presidential campaign, it is estimated that 131 million people were exposed to at least one piece of fake news spread by accounts connected with a Russian propaganda outfit (Cantu & Marquez, 2021). Cantarella et al. (2023) found that fake news was prevalent in the Italian elections of 2018. In the Korean 2017 presidential election, fake news was confirmed to have the effect of mobilizing supporters for each political party (Go & Lee, 2020). In Taiwan, fake news and disinformation provoked heated arguments during the 2018 local election. Most significantly, concerns grew that Beijing was attempting to sway the island's politics armed with a new "Russian-style influence campaign" weapon (Butler Horton, 2018). In Kenya, studies by Maweu (2019) and Mutahi and Kimari (2020) found that fake news was rife in the 2017 Kenyan elections.

The dissemination of inaccurate information, sometimes referred to as "fake news," during electoral periods may pose significant risks for a multitude of reasons. False information is intentionally crafted to seem believable to those who are not closely examining it, which may deceive voters and influence them to make uninformed choices when choosing a candidate (Lee, 2019). False information also has the capacity to fragment public sentiment and create an antagonistic atmosphere in which individuals see their perspectives as being disregarded. Moreover, through the intentional propagation of inaccurate information, the general public may be deprived of the essential details required to make an enlightened decision on their preferred candidate for voting (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). Ultimately, false information may exacerbate mistrust among political factions and hinder advancement by emphasizing significant disagreements rather than prioritizing areas of consensus where negotiation is feasible (Tambini, 2017).

In recent years, there has been a significant surge in the dissemination of false information, especially due to the expansion of social media platforms. Garett et al. (2019) express concern about the role of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in promoting misinformation during political campaigns. Due to the widespread use of these technologies, any incorrect information that circulates via them is very conspicuous. The proliferation of false information on social media presents significant risks to public safety and social cohesion as it stimulates people to make impulsive choices, fuels intense emotions, and fosters division (Luo et al., 2021). Ong'ong'a (2021) asserts that social media plays a pivotal role in the information age due to users' remarkable capacity to generate, replicate, and disseminate their material to a broad audience.

1.1 Problem Statement

The problem motivating this study is the prevalence of fake news during the 2022 Kenyan general elections. Fake news was prevalent during the 2022 Kenyan general elections. Prior to the 2022 general elections, Nyeri County had a surge in deceptive articles, distorted visuals, and fabricated films, as well as candidates spreading misleading claims and making baseless accusations against rival parties. Social media platforms were inundated with intentionally partial or deceptive material designed to resemble authentic news articles. As a result, media outlets were compelled to issue many statements disavowing postings that were designed to mimic authenticity (National Cohesion and Integration Commission [NCIC], 2022; Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission [EBC], 2022). This issue has adverse effects on the way the public perceives political matters and democratic procedures, which may weaken the credibility of election outcomes and result in a lack of trust in the political system. The academic issue addressed in this paper pertains to the dearth of research about the influence of false information on the public's impression of democratic procedures in Nyeri County, Kenya. Although there is an increasing amount of literature on the occurrence of false news and its influence on politics, there is a scarcity of studies that specifically examine its consequences in certain locations or situations. The majority of previous research, conducted by Del Vicario et al. (2016), Jang and Kim (2018), Peterson and Allamong (2022), and t'Serstevens et al. (2022), has mostly focused on the western world, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. This research seeks to address this deficiency by examining the origins of false information in Nyeri County and the influence of social media in disseminating such deceptive content. This statement focuses on the political situation in Kenya, namely the history of violence during elections, ethnic divisions, and restrictions on media (Maweu, 2019; Mutahi & Kimari, 2020). In light of this situation, the proliferation of false information during the 2022 elections is especially worrisome, since it has the potential to worsen pre-existing tensions and provoke acts of violence. In addition, the widespread availability of social media platforms has facilitated the dissemination of misinformation by political entities, hence complicating the task of

distinguishing veracity from lies for the general public. The study therefore explored the role of social media platforms in the spread of fake news in Nyeri County.

1.2 Research Objective
To explore the role of social media platforms in the spread of fake news in Nyeri County

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review
This study is anchored in the agenda-setting theory. The authors of Agenda Setting Theory are Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. They developed the theory in a study on the 1968 presidential election, and it has since become one of the most important theories in mass communication (Kim et al., 2017). This theory suggests that the media has a powerful influence on the public's perception of the world. By highlighting certain topics and issues in their coverage, they suggest that the media can heavily shape public discourse on a variety of topics (McCombs et al., 2014). Through offering stories and information on particular topics or people, they can funnel attention and understanding towards them even if those topics or persons would not have been discussed otherwise (Kim et al., 2017; Protess & McCombs, 2016). The agenda-setting theory has been used in previous studies on fake news.

In the context of this study, the agenda-setting theory can help explain the role that social media plays in shaping public perceptions of political issues and candidates during election periods. This theory suggests that the news media can influence the importance placed on certain topics during election cycles (Kim et al., 2017). This can lead to a distorted view of reality, where certain topics are given more attention and focus than others. Fake news can be used to further distort the public's perception of reality by providing false information about topics that are given more attention and focus (Wang, 2020). This theory provides a useful framework for understanding how fake news influences public perceptions of democratic processes in Nyeri County, Kenya. By examining the sources and impact of fake news, as well as the role of social media in its spread, your study can shed light on how fake news affects democratic processes in the region.

2.2 Empirical Review
A study by Yerlikaya and Aslan (2020) focused on the impact of social media and fake news on democracy and elections in different countries. It found that social media platforms can be used to manipulate and influence voters' preferences through the dissemination of false or misleading content. Social media platforms can also pose a threat to democracy by enabling populist and far-right actors to spread their messages and agendas without accountability or regulation. In addition, social media platforms can have both positive and negative effects on democratization and social movements, depending on the context and the actors involved.

Social media was investigated as a source of false information and disinformation in research by Hilary and Dumebi (2021). Although fake news has been around for a while, it was discovered that technological developments have made it easier for it to spread swiftly. Misinformation and disinformation are easily created and disseminated on websites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Del Vicario et al. (2016) showed via a large-scale quantitative study of Facebook that news pertaining to different narratives generates homogenous and polarized groups with comparable information consumption habits. They discover that, whereas consumers of conspiracy theories and scientific tales exhibit comparable content consumption tendencies, cascade dynamics are different. The main factor in content dispersion is selective exposure to it, which causes homogenous groups to develop. Indeed, each chamber has its own unique cascade dynamics, and homogeneity seems to be the main force behind the dissemination of contents. A study by Shao et al. (2018) was about the role of social bots in spreading fake news online, especially during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. It used two tools, Hoaxy and Botometer, to track and analyze millions of tweets that shared links to claims and fact-checks. It found that social bots are significantly more active and influential than humans in spreading fake news. According to the study, bots use various strategies to manipulate the online information ecosystem, such as targeting influential users, posting early, and disguising their locations. It was found that humans are vulnerable to bot manipulation and tend to retweet bots who post false news. In addition, the authors found that successful sources of fake news are heavily supported by bots on both ends of the political spectrum. Hattori (2021) studied the spread of fake news during the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil. It examines how different social media platforms and websites were used as sources and distribution channels of disinformation. The study identified 58 websites that consistently produced and disseminated fake news, mostly with a right-wing bias. These websites had a high concentration of web traffic and were

more popular than some mainstream news outlets. The study also analyzed 58 fake news stories that circulated on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. It found that these stories were mostly related to four narratives: anti-left/anti-workers, anti-corruption, pro-military intervention, and religious conservatism. The study also found that Facebook was the most relevant platform for the distribution of fake news, followed by Twitter. WhatsApp, however, had a major impact on closed groups, where fake news was more likely to be believed and shared due to cognitive and social factors.

Sharma and Goyal (2018) examined the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) use of Twitter and its effects on media coverage and public perception in India. The BJP is the country's biggest political party. The official BJP Twitter account mostly posts micro- or positive-agenda tweets rather than propaganda. There is a marked lack of bias or negativity in the press coverage of these tweets. The media does not prepare the tweets from the BJP account, as these interpretations demonstrate. Most of the tweets from the official BJP account are either neutral or favorable, and they were prepared for the news. Political hegemony has no impact on the news-priming of tweets. The research by Shin et al. (2018) discovered that, whereas false rumours (misinformation) often resurface after their initial dissemination, correct rumours (facts) do not. Textual alterations often precede the revival of rumours until the stress around the subject is relieved. They saw that rumours would re-emerge on partisan news websites that would repackage them as news and would acquire popularity among powerful Twitter users who would spread them around the Twittersphere.

Chen and Wen (2019) examined the factors that influence Facebook users' attitudes towards the platform as a source of political news and regulations regarding fake news. These factors include news literacy, users' experiences with fake news, their trust in the News Feed, their disappointment with the results of local elections, and their perceptions of Facebook's algorithms. After the 2018 Taiwanese municipal elections, researchers surveyed 1,453 people to form the basis of the study. Disappointment with the election outcomes and fear of missing out were significantly predicted by regular tablet use, FOMO, and other forms of excessive internet use. How users felt about the News Feed's reliability and the dangers of algorithmic biases (decontextualization and untruthfulness) varied depending on whether they had sent or received bogus news. Support for anti-fake news legislation and the chosen approaches to this problem were both strongly predicted by participants' levels of trust in and perceived danger from algorithmic biases.

The findings of the Talwar et al. (2020) research revealed that immediate news sharing to raise awareness has a favorable impact on the spread of fake news because of time constraints and religion. However, owing to time constraints and religion, verifying news before sharing had little impact on the dissemination of fake news. A similar study by Celliers and Hattingh (2020) discovered proof that social bots are crucial in the transmission of fake news. Significantly more accounts that deliberately disseminate false information are likely to be automated. Automated accounts often target important people and are especially active during the first stages of the dissemination of viral claims. Humans are easily tricked by this manipulation by retweeting bots that spread misleading information. Social bots are one of the most effective sources of untrue and biased statements.

In order to better understand the scope, effect, and origins of false news in Kenya, a poll by Portland and GeoPoll (2019) looked at the country's general election of 2017 as a case study. With 90% of respondents having seen faulty or misleading information and 87% seeing this material as intentionally untrue, the research concludes that fake news is a widespread issue in Kenya. A third of Kenyans felt they could not get all the information they needed about the election due to fake news, which is preventing people from making well-informed voting selections. Among the many ways in which false information may be disseminated, the authors discovered that 49% of respondents got their news about the general election via social media. As a counterpoint to more conventional news outlets like television, radio, and newspapers, social media is often considered to be an unreliable source of information. Kenyans, according to the authors, are wary of what they see and hear in the news and would rather have in-depth, accurate reports than brief, opinionated ones. In addition to seeking consistency across media, they also search for trustworthy platforms and writers.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design
This study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

3.2 Population
The population comprised adults in Nyeri County, registered journalists, bloggers, and social media experts, as well as politicians in the county. Adults were targeted since they were the ones who were involved in democratic processes such as voting. In addition, fake news is usually targeted at this group. The total population was 280, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Target Population

Population	Total number	Sources
Adult residents	470,681	2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census (KNBS, 2019).
Journalists, Bloggers and social media experts	60	Media Council (2023), Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE, 2023)
Politicians (MCAs)	32	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC, 2022).
Total	**470,773**	

3.3 Sample

To obtain a representative sample of adult residents, the modified formulae by Fisher was used.

n= $z^2 p(1-p)/d^2$

z = is the Z value for the corresponding confidence level (i.e., 1.96 for 95% confidence), d = is the margin of error (i.e., 0.05 = ± 5%) and p = is the estimated proportion exposed to fake news = 86% = 0.86 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020) while q=1-p

Therefore:

n=$1.96^2 p(1-p)/d^2$= 1.96 x 1.96 x 0.86 (1- 0.86)/ 0.05^2 = 185

The study, therefore, used a sample of 185 adult residents. The study also included 5 journalists and 5 politicians. The researcher purposefully selected 5 journalists, bloggers, and social media experts who were very active on social media and who had been practicing for at least 5 years. Similarly, the researcher purposefully recruited 5 elected MCAs who were also active on social media, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Distribution of Sample

Population	Total number	Sample
Adult residents	470,681	185
Journalists, Bloggers and social media experts	60	5
Politicians (MCAs)	32	5
Total	**470,773**	**195**

Purposive random sampling was used to recruit the residents of Nyeri County. These were leaders of various groups, such as church leaders, youth and women group leaders, as well as other special interest groups in the county. A simple random sampling technique was used to recruit journalists, social media experts, and politicians. To sample respondents in the study, a sampling frame including all registered journalists, bloggers, social media experts, and politicians in Nyeri County was created in Microsoft Excel. Each member of the sampling frame was assigned a unique identification number. A random number generator (RNG) was then used to select the sample. These random numbers corresponded to the identification numbers of the individuals who were included in the sample, as shown in Table 3.2. The names corresponding to the generated numbers were the respondents in the study.

3.4 Data Collection

Data from residents was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was split into various sections in order to collect data on the various variables in the study. Data from journalists, social media experts, and politicians was collected using an interview schedule. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was carried out. The pilot study was carried out among 17 randomly selected respondents in Murang'a County. Content validity was ensured in this study. This was achieved through expert judgment. The researcher developed the instrument and then had it reviewed by his supervisor, who assessed the extent to which the instrument is relevant to and representative of the targeted constructs it was designed to measure.

3.5 Data Analysis

Upon completion of the data, the data analysis process began. This comprised both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis consisted of frequencies and percentages using Microsoft Excel. The qualitative data collected was analyzed using content analysis with the help of NVIVO software. This involved coding the text data into

categories and then analyzing the data within each category to identify patterns and themes. The results of quantitative analysis were presented in the form of tables and figures, while those of qualitative data analysis were presented using narration.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rates
4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 185 adult residents took part in the study by filling out a questionnaire. In addition, 5 journalists and 5 politicians took part in the study through interviews. This represents a maximum (100%) response rate. The majority (64.9%) of the respondents in the study were male, as shown in Table 3. Slightly below half (47.6%) of the respondents were aged between 30-39 years, whereas those aged 20-29 years accounted for 43.2% of the sample. Results show that 47.6% of the respondents had acquired a bachelor's degree, whereas 43.2% had a diploma.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

		N	%
Indicate your gender	Female	65	35.1%
	Male	120	64.9%
Indicate the group where your age falls	20-29 years	80	43.2%
	30-39 years	88	47.6%
	50-59 years	17	9.2%
What is your highest level of training?	Bachelor's degree	88	47.6%

4.1.2 Respondents' Experience with Fake News

Respondents in the study were asked whether they witnessed fake news during the 2022 general elections. All (100%) of the respondents replied in the affirmative. The researcher then asked them to indicate from which platforms they witnessed fake news. As shown in Figure 1, social media was the most popular response, as indicated by 70.8% of the respondents.
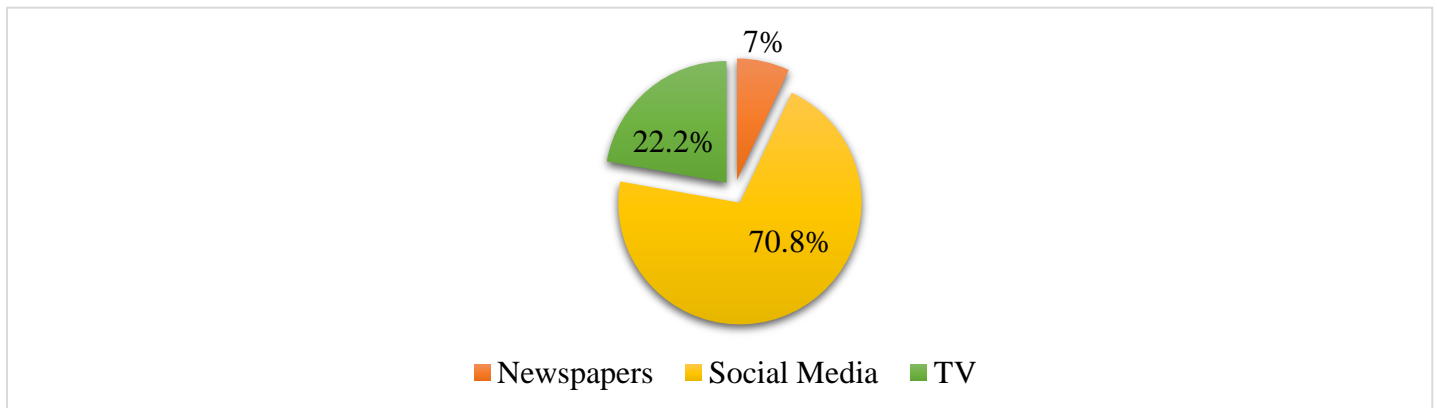

Figure 1
Sources of Fake News

Respondents were asked to describe some fake news that they witnessed in the previous general election. Some respondents mentioned fake news about candidates supposedly dropping out of political races. Respondents mentioned the spread of images on social media depicting preparations for celebrations by one political side before the official declaration of election results. Fake news about politicians conceding defeats before the official announcement of results was highlighted as a rampant issue. The overarching theme, therefore, is the intentional spread of misinformation and deceptive narratives to influence public perception, create confusion, and potentially manipulate democratic processes during the election.

There was a claim by some bloggers from a political divide that one presidential aspirant had died, and according to the Kenyan constitution, if one of the presidential candidate dies, that election is called off. The person said to be dead was my neighbour and I used to see him every day. (INT003)

One instance was during last year's presidential tally when even before the chairperson of the IEBC then, Wafula Chebukati declared the winner, images surfaced on social media of preparations for celebrations by one side of the political divide, meant to insinuate that that side had won the election. Only for the results to be announced as the opposite of the rumoured presidential outcome. (INT001)

The most rampant incidents were reports of Politicians conceding defeat before official results had been announced. (INT002)

Violent videos photoshopped or lifted from other countries and passed off as parts of the country were burning (INT005)

4.1.3 Frequency of Fake News

The respondents were also asked to indicate how often they witnessed the fake news during the election period. As shown in figure 2, majority (62.7%) of the respondents witnessed fake news on a daily basis.
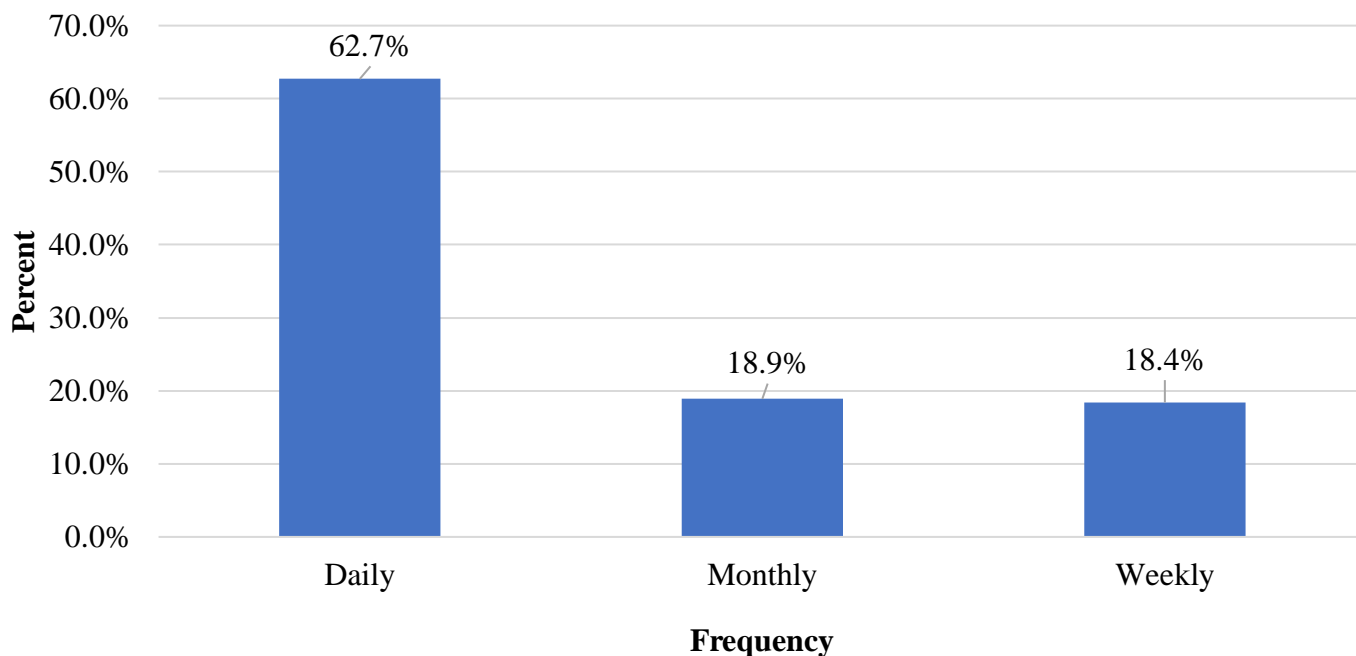

Figure 2
Frequency of Fake News

4.1.4 Respondents Perception of Role of Social Media in Fake News

Respondents in the study were asked to indicate whether, in their opinion, social media has contributed to the spread of fake news. A recurring theme across the responses is the acknowledgment that social media serves as a prominent platform for the swift and widespread distribution of information, irrespective of its authenticity. One prominent viewpoint emphasizes the concept of citizen journalism, where individuals lacking journalistic ethics contribute to the circulation of unverified information. The ease of access to social media and the intense competition to be the first to release information are identified as factors contributing to the lack of verification. Furthermore, the responses highlight the prevalence of false stories, manipulated images, and misleading headlines that go viral on social media, often driven by a desire to sell a particular agenda.

Yes it has contributed since blogs, Facebook pages owned by propagandists and WhatsApp groups peddle the news that suit their script and with choreographed contributors in those walls, it's hard to distinguish between the real and fake. Many have been misinformed, misled and extorted from job scams (INT007)

Yes. Reason being with the advent of social media, citizen Journalism has taken over the social media space, where people with little knowledge of journalistic ethos post anything that they come across, either with the need of being seen as the first ones to get the news or to drive a certain agenda. (INT003)

Yes. Because everyone now believes they are journalists and experts in different fields. Posting content on social media is like blinking, the Internet is cheap and affordable to most people and having a huge following or targeting high number of engagements, people are coining fake stories to drive a certain narrative while preying on ignorance of most people (INT001)

4.1.5 Social Media Platforms with Fake News

Respondents in the study were asked to indicate which social media platforms they witnessed fake news on. As shown in Table 4, Facebook and Twitter had the highest prevalence of fake news, with 87% and 72% of the respondents indicating that they witnessed fake news on the apps, respectively.

Table 4
Prevalence of Fake News on Social Media Apps

App	N	%
Facebook	161	87.0
Twitter	134	72.4
Tiktok	26	14.1
Instagram	84	45.4

4.1.6 Respondents Perceptions on Social Media as Channel of Fake News

Respondents in the study were asked to indicate why, in their opinion, social media is used to spread fake news. Many respondents indicated that social media is easily accessible to a large number of people, particularly those with smartphones. They highlighted the immediacy of social media, allowing information, including fake news, to spread rapidly within a short period of time. According to some respondents, social media platforms enable the packaging of fake news in various formats, such as photographs, deep fake audio files, videos, and CC posters. This versatility enhances the impact and reach of misinformation. Respondents also noted the lack of professionalism among those who control or contribute to social media. Some of the responses are captured below:

Due to its huge mass of followers and it is easily accessible (INT004)
It is easily accessible to any Kenyan with a smartphone and has the above applications installed in their phone. (INT003)
Ability to package the fake news in multiple formats from photographs, to deep fake audio files and videos and posters. (INT007)
There is a thin line between opinions and news, this is especially on twitter. Therefore, it is hard for one to distinguish objective news from mere opinions (INT006)
Lack of professionalism among those controlling social media (INT002)
Because there is minimal supervision and regulations (INT005)

4.1.7 Perceived Social Media Control

The researcher sought to find out from the respondents whether social media companies do enough to protect users from fake news. According to the vast majority (94.1%) of the respondents, social media companies do not do enough to protect users from fake news. Similarly, 84.9% indicated that policies against fake news are ineffective.

Table 5
Social Media Control

Statement	No	Yes
	%	%
Do you think the social media companies do enough to protect users from fake news?	94.1	5.9
Do you think the policies against fake news are effective?	84.9	15.1

4.1.8 Respondents Recommendations for Reducing Fake News on Social Media

Respondents in the study were also asked to indicate what else can be done to reduce fake news on social media. Many respondents emphasized the importance of better legislation, proposing stronger policies, and calling for proper regulations from government authorities. Respondents suggest that social media companies should take more responsibility by implementing laws to protect against the spread of fake news. Several responses focus on the importance of verifying accounts posting information and implementing stringent measures against group administrators who spread fake news. Some responses touch on the importance of public awareness and responsibility. Some of the responses are captured below:

Better legislation (INT001)

I would propose stronger policies that pile more pressure on the owners of the social media platforms to take more responsibility when their platforms are used to propagate or spread fake news (INT003)

By ensuring all accounts posting information (News) are verified and taking stringent measures to group administrators who spread fake news. (INT005)

Social media companies should also tighten the grip on accounts flagged as notorious in spreading fake news (INT002)

4.2 Discussions

The study found that social media platforms were key to the spread of fake news in Nyeri County. Facebook and Twitter had the highest prevalence of fake news, with 87% and 72% of the respondents indicating that they witnessed fake news on the apps, respectively. Many respondents indicated that social media is easily accessible to a large number of people, particularly those with smartphones. They highlighted the immediacy of social media, allowing information, including fake news, to spread rapidly within a short period of time. According to the vast majority of the respondents, social media companies do not do enough to protect users from fake news. This agrees with Luo et al. (2021), who found that false information is rampant on social media and poses serious threats to public safety and social order because it leads individuals to make rash decisions, inflames passions, and sows discord. According to Ong'ong'a (2021), social media is a crucial instrument in the information age because of users' outstanding ability to create, copy, and share their content with a wide audience. Celliers and Hattingh (2020) conducted research that also found evidence supporting the importance of social bots in the dissemination of false news. The proliferation of false information on social media during electoral periods may be ascribed to a confluence of user conduct, platform architecture, and intentional endeavours to influence public sentiment. Regular users who routinely disseminate information on social media platforms may unintentionally contribute to the dissemination of false or misleading information (Ali & Zain-ul-Abdin, 2021). As per Luo et al. (2021), social media platforms are designed for rapid information sharing, allowing fake news to spread far and fast before anyone has a chance to verify its accuracy. Social media algorithms often create personalized news feeds that reinforce existing beliefs. This means users are more likely to encounter fake news that aligns with their biases, making them more likely to believe and share it without questioning it. In addition, unlike newspapers and television with established editorial teams, social media platforms allow anyone to publish content, regardless of their credibility or expertise (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). This means anyone can create and share fake news, and it can be difficult to distinguish it from legitimate sources. Social media platforms' algorithms can inadvertently amplify the spread of fake news. Furthermore, the dissemination of false information may occur via circular reporting, a process in which one source disseminates misleading content that is then adopted by another news organization, which then cites the original source as proof of the material's validity (Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020).

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

According to the research, social media emerged as the primary disseminator of false information in Nyeri County. According to the respondents, Facebook and Twitter had the greatest occurrence of false news, with 87% and 72%, respectively, reporting that they had seen fake news on these platforms. A significant majority of participants said that social media is readily available to a wide demographic, especially those who own smartphones. Their emphasis was on the quick dissemination of information, both genuine and false, via social media platforms, due to their instantaneous nature. According to the overwhelming majority of respondents, social media businesses inadequately safeguard consumers from misinformation.

5.2 Recommendations

The research suggests that social media corporations, particularly Facebook and Twitter, should assume more accountability by enacting regulations to safeguard against the dissemination of false information. This might include identifying and marking false information and enforcing strict punishments for those who disseminate propaganda online. Furthermore, it is essential for the IEBC to provide the public with education on identifying misinformation and promoting ethical conduct as a shared obligation.

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