

## Digital newspaper contents readership in rural Kenya: Myth or reality?

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**Abstract:** The surging purchase of smartphones coupled with the expanding internet connectivity in rural Kenya has opened on to the increased use of social media platforms. This has made media houses venture into the production of both print and digital versions of newspaper production. However, little was still known about the consumption of digital newspaper content by the rural audience. It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted. The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the extent to which Kenya's rural population access and read contents of digital versions of mainstream newspapers-the *Standard* and the *Nation*. The study site was Nyatike Sub-County of Migori County, which is one of the rural sub-counties in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were: to assess the extent to which residents of Nyatike Sub County accessed online newspapers and to investigate the level at which residents of Nyatike Sub County read the contents of the online newspaper versions. The study adopted a descriptive research design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect and analyze data. It was found that internet connectivity was widening in rural Kenya. However, the majority of those who access the internet still do not use it to access contents of the digital versions of the mainstream newspapers-*Standard* and *Nation*. The study therefore recommended the need for cheaper internet services in rural Kenya, subsidized prices of digital newspapers, and sensitizing people in rural Kenya on the existence of online newspapers and how they can be accessed. This study, therefore, contributes to the realisation of the Kenya Vision 2030's social, economic, and political pillars; the African Union Agenda 2063 of communication and infrastructure connectivity, and the realisation of some of the Sustainable Development Goals such as Goal Seventeen on Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.

**Keywords:** Media, Online newspaper, Print newspaper, Rural Kenya, Smartphones

### 1. Introduction

The Internet world has indeed changed the behaviour of media audiences across the globe, according to Joshi (2011). From the print-when people would buy newspapers to the world where the audience can effectively read online content wherever they are (Salaverria, 2005). This means that journalism, which is an applied career, must embrace technology massively in order to effectively serve its audience in every corner of the world. Joshi (2011) argued that global statistics give a population of over 5.18 billion Internet users, which is more than 64.6 percent of the world population of roughly 8 billion. This increase in internet users, the author remarked, coincides with the decline in print media content consumption. Therefore, as Joshi

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further argued, online newspapers are taking over from the traditional print version; a situation that paints the future of print negatively.

Coincidentally, these changes have led to the restructuring of newsrooms; majorly the realignment of the relationships between and among news organisations, journalists, and their public- including audiences, sources, competitors, advertisers, and governments (Salaverria, 2005). Even though Internet connectivity is highest in urban parts of the world including Kenya, the audience population of the news content has spread to the rural areas; some areas cannot be accessed by the media houses when distributing print newspapers (Anyuor et al., 2021).

Again, Kenya's Internet connectivity is said to be widening to the rural population. Therefore, in the structural realignment of news production, the media houses have come up with online versions of the mainstream newspapers to capture the rural audience who can access the Internet. Doing this could mean that the newsrooms are also increasing the reading of online newspapers even in rural areas. However, the study found out that this is a myth. The majority of rural Kenyans still do not read digital newspapers regardless of the surging internet connectivity. This hugely affects the effectiveness of internet mobile devices such as mobile phones, and computers, among others, that have been designed to improve information sharing across the world (Olebera, 2022).

The outcome of this study is critical since its recommendations will guide newsrooms, government, and media stakeholders on how to handle the issues of the Internet and the consumption of online news content by the rural audience. It also contributes to the realization of the Kenya Vision 2030's social, economic, and political pillars; the African Union Agenda 2063 of communication and infrastructure connectivity, and the realisation of Sustainable Development goals.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The concept of digital news reporting**

Joshi (2011) observed that the concept of online journalism began decades ago with its first newspaper witnessed between the 1980s and 1990s when *Chicago Online* was launched. The launch opened the eyes of the world into a new shift of journalistic content generation hybrid kind of media practice both traditional and digital activities were witnessed in the newsrooms with the single purpose of feeding the audience with quality content to the farthest end of the world.

This shift in the representation of media content has developed more into the utilisation of technology, expanding media communication from the usual one-way feeding of the audience to an advanced concept of sharing and interaction. That is, technology has made it easier for the audience to interrelate in sharing the information- getting feedback from one level to the other; therefore, a journalist is expected to utilise various available online platforms to publish their stories. This is an imperative characteristic that has created room for interaction (Pavlink, 2001).

Even though other important facets differentiate this type of journalism from the rest of the aspects of finance, and skills, among others major feature rests in the use of technology. Joshi (2011) observed that an online journalist would make decisions on which media format to use to tell a story and offer room for public responses and interactions. On his side, Domingo (2006) argued that even though traditional newspaper (print) production has for a long time been profitable, a steady decline has been reported across the world that has actually caused an economic crisis that has indeed made media houses sensitive to innovation in communication technology. This sentiment is further echoed by Santinoli (1988: 12) that, 'the increased prices of the raw materials for newspapers and the fact that people developed a growing visual culture 'imposed by television are some of the factors that have promoted a strategy of technological innovation to improve the product and lower production costs at the same time'.

In the United States, for example, Boczkowski (2004) established that the choice of digitalization has mainly been due to the perception within media companies that the World Wide Web was actually becoming the preferred environment for users to browse for digital information. This kind of computerising newspaper production accelerated the digital delivery of content around the globe. According to Salaverria (2005), to develop effective online news reporting, a scholarly consensus has been reached on three singularities to be used in journalistic language in cyberspace. These include the hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimodality. The three may enable online journalists to make clear decisions on what is the best format to tell a story (Multimediality), which is the best way to allow public interaction

(Interactivity), and which is the best way to connect news pieces to other news archives, online sources, and other elements through links (Hypertextuality).

Therefore, through these languages, different categories and levels of audience can read stories online, and at the same time share widely with other people. Moreover, journalists-reporters and editors have the leeway to distribute to the audience the content that they have created (Joshi, 2011). It is during such operations that digital journalism creates space for interactions where the newsroom is seen as having one-on-one discussions with the news consumers. This kind of discussion is healthy as news content creators will have the feeling of the people about the stories published and at the same time get more information from the people to add to their story as fresh flesh or delete from the story as an outdated or nonfactual bit. Such working relations will finally lead to the establishment of a family of gate watchers, who are more elaborate and more enhanced in news production than the gatekeepers (Anyuor et al., 2021).

## **2.2. Digital news audience and access to the Internet**

According to Clement (2020), globally more than 4.57 billion people are active Internet users as of July 2020- which is 59 percent of the global population. Joshi (2011) stated that around mid-2009, more than 4.2 billion people globally owned mobile phones at least two of every three adults already owned a mobile phone. This has enabled many mobile phone users to easily access news content anytime and wherever they are, and again there is potential for people to be where news breaks, and easily snap images of that given news items.

Now with the emergence of smartphones, as Joshi (2011) put it, many people can take photos and post them online, a bigger population than even the number of journalists around the world. Therefore, there are some news organizations that have started embracing citizens' newsgathering initiatives to boost their newsgathering potential. For example, in April 2009, YouTube launched a training site for aspiring reporters; a centre where they learn more about how to report news (Joshi, 2011). Figures by *The Guardian* (August 8, 2013) indicated that by around 2013, 55 percent of United Kingdom (UK) adults were using their mobile phones to access the Internet to read or download newspaper content, broadcasters, and websites. By this time, *The Guardian's* report further espoused that digital readership in the United Kingdom had been the most popular among the younger tech-savvy population where 72 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds were likely to read or even download news content online, leading to decreased physical newspaper readership across the UK and other parts of the world.

In the Asian region, China has become the major player in terms of internet connections and access to online news, according to a report by the China Internet Network Information Centre (2009). The Report revealed that by the end of 2008, China had a population of 298 million who were using the Internet with a penetration rate of 22.6 percent of the population. This Report predicted that by July 2009, about 2.2 billion people worldwide would be online by 2013 which would be a global increase of 45 percent, and almost half of these new users would be in Asia, with China contributing 17 percent of the world's new internet users.

Africa, on the other hand, is said to be having more people who access the internet compared to Latin America, North America, and the Middle East-with 525 million internet users in Africa, 447 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, 328 million in North America and 174 million users in the Middle East (Campbell, 2019). However, the author argued that even though internet users account for about 40 percent, usage varies from country to country. For example, Kenya, according to Business Daily (2020), has recorded 83 percent usage, while South Africa 56 percent. Nigeria is 60 percent even though Nigeria is bigger in population compared to any other African country, with citizens comprising about 20 percent of all African internet users.

Many scholars such as Joshi and Campbell, have actually predicted how internet penetration in Africa is likely to grow at a faster rate than any other part of the world and is expected to bring greater positive change politically, socially, and economically (Campbell, 2019). Kenya has improved steadily in internet use and access to online news. So far, Kenya's over 17 percent population uses social media growth of 1 percent since January 2019 (Business Daily, 2020); on the side of online news consumption, to access news content, Kenya is second globally with 90 percent after Greece 92 percent. Apart from online news accessibility, Kenyans trust news media more than any other information outlet in regard to social, cultural, political, and economic issues affecting them, making it first in Africa and sixth globally with a global average of 38 percent (Business Daily, 2020).

### **2.3. Impact of digital news consumption on the audience**

Opgenhatten and D'Haenens (2011) argued that online news reporting has provided a wider space for multimedia features such as videos, and pictures. It has improved interactivity where users react to the contents, and established hyperlinks as stories can now be shared on many digital platforms. The authors averred that the digitization of news has become crucial in the field of communication, even though some scholars have argued that audiences tend to misunderstand or forget a considerable amount of information presented by news media. Online news reporting, Kammer (2013) remarked, has enhanced the relationship between news and audiences by promoting audience participation in the production of online news. The flow of messages has gone beyond senders to receivers, to a situation where the audiences themselves participate in the production of media content.

In the view of Lauf and Wurff (2005), the development of internet technology has been of significance in the media industry, especially in the print media sector, which is now hugely utilizing online platforms to improve their way of production, thereby providing value to the audience. Kammer (2013: 2) further observed that "it is in this concept that certain scholars developed the idea of 'gate watchers' instead of 'gatekeepers', where the former is not only about 'news dissemination' of known media organizations, but also includes sharing of 'news and information that takes place on blogs and through social media". The technological development has indeed enhanced the internet use for news. But this has uniquely happened where members of the public express their views openly and at the same time read the opinions of other people; shaping each other's view as information seekers and providers.

### **2.4. Internet access in rural Kenya**

The latest report by the Kenya Population and Housing Census (KPHS,2019) put rural Kenya as lagging behind in regards to broadband and network coverage. Only 13.7 percent of rural people in Kenya access the Internet though 41 percent of the rural population own mobile phones. Generally, Kenya's population of about 10 million or slightly higher currently are internet users (KNBS, 2019), translating to about 20-25 percent; which is lower compared to countries such as the United States internet usage of 95 percent by 2020.

DW Akademie (2019) remarked that Kenyans have for a long time been facing challenges such as poor electricity supply and gender power dynamics in regard to smartphone ownership in rural Kenya. But so far, the switch is changing with the coming of cheap smartphones from China that are currently flooding Kenya's market. Even though challenges to digital participation in rural Kenya remain, many rural Kenyans still believe the Internet is the way to go.

However, HuaweiBlog (2021) argued that even though 44 percent of the urban population has access to the Internet, only 17 percent of the rural population has access to the Internet. Further, digital literacy is seen as a barrier to internet penetration since people are unable to effectively use many digital technologies. Smartphone penetration, as HuaweiBlog (2021) added, is higher in urban areas than in rural areas, as one of the hindrances in rural areas is literacy levels. Many older people struggle to use smartphones while those with little education are wary of such technologies. It is due to these kinds of challenges that many people in rural Kenya may not be accessing news online. This is the scenario that called for this research to find out if the internet availability in rural Kenya is used to access online newspapers by those living in rural areas.

### **2.5. Digital newspapers landscape in Kenya**

Major print newspapers in Kenya include *The Star*, *The People Daily*, *Nation*, *Standard* and *Taifa Leo*; though there are over 100 newspapers in Kenya print and digital, written in the national languages-Kiswahili and English- as well as in local languages. Newspaper readership, especially of print is dwindling in Kenya. A survey conducted by the Media Council of Kenya (2022), established that seven in every ten people surveyed (70 percent) do not read newspapers; meaning only 30 percent read newspapers. Even though for a long time, newspapers in Kenya have remained in print form, the mainstream newspapers such as *Standard* and *Nation*, which are under this study, have both print and digital versions.

Ngoge (2013) stated that stories that are in print newspapers do not necessarily appear in the online version-or they appear but some contents are found to be missing. Nevertheless, the contents can still be the same in both versions. Nyabuga and Booker (2013) established that Kenyan newspapers have been recognized for their originality and credibility in both their print and online version contents; prompting the emergence of convergence in the newsrooms.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design, where a Mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative was utilized in data collection and analysis. The mixed research approach is better than either qualitative alone or quantitative alone as it provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of these two (FoodRisc Resource Centre, 2016). Here, the quantitative part of the study informs the qualitative part of the research; therefore, qualitative was used later to confirm the findings of the quantitative part of the survey study (Anyuor, 2022). On the other hand, qualitative research is seen as deficient because of the potential for biased interpretations made by the researcher and the difficulty in generalizing findings to a large group. So as Anyuor (2022) further put it, this design of mixing both qualitative and quantitative enables the researcher to gain in breadth and depth the understanding and corroboration of the study and at the same time offsets the weakness that is inherent to using each approach on its own.

In this study, for quantitative, questionnaires were randomly administered to a sample size of 400 adult and literate residents of Nyatike calculated from a population of 176, 162, using Yamane’s formula. The respondents were residents of Nyatike sub-county drawn from five divisions-Karungu, Muhuru, Nyatike, Kaler and Got Kachola. For qualitative data, 20 key informants who were journalists and other media stakeholders, Information Technology experts, and local opinion leaders were interviewed.

The study site was Nyatike sub-county of Migori County, Kenya-which is one of the rural sub-counties in Kenya (KNBS, 2019). The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software package was used to perform descriptive statistics for data analysis and interpretation. wo newspapers-*Standard* and *Nation*- were selected for this study since they are the most-read newspapers in Kenya, according to the Media Council of Kenya (MCK,2022). The Media Performance Report indicated that the readership of the newspapers is - *Nation* at 53 percent, followed by *Standard* at 22 percent, *Taifa Leo* at 15 percent, then *Star* at 3 percent.

### 4. Results and Discussions

#### 4.1. Internet accessibility in rural Kenya (Nyatike).

Out of 400 questionnaires administered to residents of Nyatike Sub County in Migori County, Kenya, 384, which is 96% were returned. This is adequate for a research study. The table below shows the results for Internet Accessibility in Nyatike, rural Kenya.

**Table 1:** Internet Accessibility in Nyatike (Rural Kenya)

Division	Total Respondents per Division	Questionnaires Returned	Those accessed the Internet	Those didn’t access the Internet
Karungu	94	90 (96%)	80 (89%)	10 (11%)
Muhuru	62	62 (100%)	62 (100%)	0 (0%)
Nyatike	128	120 (94%)	115 (96%)	5 (4%)
Kaler	47	43 (91%)	40 (93%)	3 (7%)
Got Kachola	69	69 (100%)	69 (100%)	0 (0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>400 (100%)</b>	<b>384 (96%)</b>	<b>366 (95%)</b>	<b>18 (5%)</b>

Source: Field Data, 2024

**Table 2:** Key Informants’ Responses on Internet Accessibility in Nyatike

TOTAL KEY INFORMANTS	Accessed the Internet	Didn’t Access the Internet
20 (100%)	19 (95%)	1 (5%)

Source: Field Data, 2024

### Discussions

From the above results in **Table 1**, most people in rural areas access Internet 366 (95%). This agrees with the results from key informants in **Table 2** of 19 respondents that gives 95%. This is a great improvement compared to what has been studied about internet penetration in rural areas in Kenya. The result of this study has indicated that even though there could be a number of challenges, internet access in rural Kenya is widening. During the study, areas that had been perceived to have very poor internet connectivity were now having stronger internet. A key informant, *Participant T*, a resident of Muhuru Beach, a few metres from Lake Victoria, a water body partly located in the rural Kenya of Nyatike, says that initially even making a phone call in some areas around the beach was impossible.

But this has changed. He observed that today locals can access social media content easily because of improved internet connection. *“We are not worried so much about Internet right now. This was a disease of the past. Today we may be worried about having data bundles to get into social media platforms. But Internet connectivity is not an issue, it is all-over here,”* T avered.

*Participant U*, who is a fisherman in Lake Victoria’s Sori-Karungu, agreed with *Participant T’s* remarks. In his view, the Internet has spread into the Lake and fishermen who own smartphones access social media platforms when they go to fish. *After spreading the fishing nets over the Lake water, we pick our phones and access social media platforms as we wait for fish. But when we go deep at the borders of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, the Internet becomes weak because these other countries have theirs. You will receive message about Vodacom of Tanzania, among others.”*

This argument corroborated what a *key informant A*, who is an Information and Technology expert in Migori County, observed that today the Internet has been made easily available in rural Kenya by service providers such as Safaricom, *“Just a year ago, we didn’t have strong internet. Today it is stronger after Safaricom erected their internet masts around here. Internet is now great.”* Meaning, to some extent, the spread of the Internet in rural Kenya has been necessitated by infrastructural improvements.

Again, this observation relates to the findings of Wangui (2019) that the rise in number of Internet users in Kenya is due to liberalization of telecommunication sectors and investment in the sector; that currently, Kenya has several Internet service providers such as Wananchi Group, Safaricom, Telkom Kenya, Bharti Airtel, Surf and Jamii telecommunication.

#### 4.2. Internet Accessibility Versus Digital Newspaper Consumption in Rural Kenya, Nyatike.

Since there is widening Internet coverage in rural areas as we have witnessed above, there is also the perception that people could be accessing news and information through the Internet. Therefore, this study went ahead to find out if the availability of the Internet resonated with the reading of digital newspaper content in rural Kenya.

**Table 3:** Internet accessibility vs consumption of digital newspaper contents in rural Kenya (Nyatike)

Division	Respondents who accessed the Internet	Accessed the Internet and NOT consumed Digital newspaper contents	Accessed the Internet and Consumed Digital Newspaper contents
Karungu	80 (89%)	75 (85%)	5 (16%)
Muhuru	62 (100%)	59 (95%)	3 (5%)
Nyatike	115 (93%)	109 (95%)	6 (5%)
Kaler	40 (93%)	35 (88%)	5 (12%)
Got Kachola	69 (100%)	69 (100%)	0 (0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>366 (95%)</b>	<b>347 (95%)</b>	<b>19 (5%)</b>

Source: Field Data, 2024

**Table 4:** Key informants’ response on Internet access vs digital newspaper consumption in rural Kenya, Nyatike

Key Informants Accessed the Internet	Did not access the Internet	Accessed and did not read digital newspapers	Accessed and Read Digital Newspapers
19 (95%)	1 (5%)	12 (63%)	7 (37%)

Source: Field Data, 2024

From Tables 3 and 4 above, the study revealed that even though Internet access is penetrating rural Kenya, the majority still do not use the Internet to read newspapers (95%), and therefore are not likely to access contents. This confirmed that maybe people use their smartphones to access other social media platforms such as Facebook, and WhatsApp, among others, which at times are provided for free of charge by the service providers but are not registered to read newspaper content.

According to one of the editors of the papers under this study, many people shy away from reading the newspapers online because they cannot afford to register; the registration process is not a one-touch thing, *“It is an issue. Some people for sure do not even know how to register. Others argue that it is complicated. This is really affecting the reading of our online contents,”* the editor observed. This argument is supported by results from the key informants at 12 (63%) of those who do not read newspapers online against 7 (37%) who read online versions of the two mainstream newspapers in Kenya. The arguments on why they don’t read newspapers online are varied as shown in the table below:

**Table 5:** Factors affecting consumption of digital newspaper contents in rural Kenya (Nyatike)

Factors Affecting the Consumption	Key Informants' Responses	Residents of Nyatike Responses
High cost data bundles	10 (40%)	152 (40%)
Illiteracy/Unaware of existence of Digital Versions of Print Newspapers	09 (36%)	96 (25%)
Unstable Internet Strength	02 (8%)	37 (10%)
Fear of Fake News	01 (4%)	32 (8%)
One's News Interest	01 (4%)	31 (8%)
Lack of Smartphone	01 (4%)	19 (5%)
Poor power/electricity supply	01 (4%)	17 (4%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25 (100%)</b>	<b>384 (100%)</b>

Source: Field Data, 2024

This table indicated that more people don't read the two newspapers online because of the high cost of data bundles at 152 (40%). This is also supported by qualitative data results of key informants at 40%. One key informant, *Participant B*, who is a media expert, argued that generally, there has been a high cost of living in Kenya, and buying data bundles is not a priority. *It is difficult to read newspapers online. Data bundles are very expensive. Again even if you buy, it takes few minutes and gets depleted especially when reading heavy content such as newspapers. I better go to Facebook, WhatsApp and other cheaper social media platforms that sometimes we even access freely.*

The issue of income levels is one of the major problems in regard to Internet consumption. According to HuaweiBlog (2021), rural areas are facing this challenge not only when data bundles become expensive to afford, but also when building and servicing networks. The Blog argued that 'low incomes, in turn, deter companies from building expensive power and mobile connectivity infrastructure for communities that may not be able to pay for it, thereby closing a negative feedback loop'.

The study's *Participant K*, who works as a civil servant, supports the argument of the high cost of bundles as one of the factors that affect access to online newspapers. He argued that poverty is higher in rural Kenya compared to urban would make one spend money on basic needs such as food instead of data bundles, *honestly, how can one spend Kshs100 in buying airtime and data bundles while that much can either buy mogo (flour), vegetables or omena (sardines) for two meals for a family? Personally, I work, and I have a smartphone, but I rarely buy huge data bundles that can make me access newspaper contents. Sometimes I don't buy totally and resort to free social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.*

Some people are illiterate. This illiteracy is a factor that affects newspaper reading online. According this study, 96 (25%) of respondents argued that they do not even know that the two print newspapers under this study-*Standard* and *Nation*-have online versions. This is similar to the observations by the key informants who were interviewed. For example, *Participant J*, an opinion leader, observed that some people in rural areas cannot imagine that print newspapers also exist online; that to them, anything online is only the social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *TikTok*, and *WhatsApp*.

Others, he argued, do not know how to access these online newspapers as they cannot register while others would not access them because they are written in English and they do not understand the language. *They are not aware that online newspapers exist; others have expensive smartphones with data bundles but still go to nearby trading centres to buy print newspapers because they do not know about the existence of the online versions of those print newspapers they are buying at the trading centres.*

A media student in one of the local universities within Migori County, where Nyatike is located argued that registration to access these online newspapers is complicated and some people do not complete it. *Personally, I read these newspapers online but I almost stopped registering because of the process. I know a number of people who call me to help them register. Others give up and leave.*

This view is in line with the opinions of some key informants. However, they now bring in the issue of the English language. The two newspapers under this study are written in English, which is a national language. Now being a foreign language, a good number of people still do not understand English well. *Participant M*, another local opinion leader, argued that *reading online newspapers is left for the elite in the village-those who can read and understand English. Some of us can speak shallow English and understand very little of it. Again, others like myself do not know how to access the online newspapers. I cannot register.*

There is the issue of digital illiteracy. This is also addressed by other scholars and research institutions as a factor that has interfered with online newspaper reading. According to HuaweiBlog (2021), digital illiteracy is what affected the thriving of the Kenyan Government's Digital Learning Programme. The Blog argued that even teachers were not able to use the Internet devices that were provided by the Government.

Another factor that affected the reading of online versions of the *Standard* and *Nation* was found to be one's interest. This is where one decides to read the two newspapers online only when there is a story that interests them. Some key informants agree with this finding when interviewed. *Participant N*, an opinion leader, believes that he cannot read online newspapers unless the contents discuss matters that interest him, especially issues of politics. *I only read those online newspapers when there is something serious touching on Raila Odinga, and at the same time I can't access print newspapers to read at Nyakweri trading centre.*

Raila Odinga is the Kenya's Opposition leader. *Participant L*, another key informant, who is a newspaper reporter with one of the mainstream newspapers under this study, observed that most people read what they relate to. *It is true most audience will read what they relate to; something that interests them. If not, they do not read any news platform. This is why others would only ensure they read newspapers when it is about something or someone, they love like Raila; or a story about some local.* Lack of smartphone and unreliable power supply were also factors that the study revealed to have affected the reading of the two newspapers online. However, they have not been the main factors.

## **5. Recommendation of the study**

From the study results, it is clear that reading digital newspapers in rural Kenya is still a myth even though the internet access is widening. The study therefore recommended the need for cheaper internet in rural Kenya, subsidized prices of online newspapers, and sensitizing people in rural Kenya on the existence of online newspapers and how they can be accessed. This awareness campaign should be done by both the government and the media stakeholders.

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) courses should be introduced and made compulsory in all primary schools across the country to form the basis of technological utilization. This can be enhanced by allowing pupils and teachers to also form MIL clubs where they meet regularly to discuss matters of information technology and media literacy. Internet service providers should strengthen their connectivity and switch from 2G to 3G, and 4G to help solve poor network challenges. The rural electrification policy should be implemented fully so that every Kenyan has access to electricity and a steady power supply. Finally, media houses need to establish digital newspapers written in local languages as a way of feeding people of different cadres with news.

## **6. Conclusion of the study**

Even though there is increased access to the Internet in rural Kenya, access and reading of online newspapers is low. This means that people depend majorly on social media platforms such as Facebook, and WhatsApp, among others for information. However, the contents on these platforms are prone to giving shallow and fake news.

Therefore, enhancing the Internet in rural Kenya, providing cheaper data bundles, proper supply of electricity, and creating awareness of online newspapers are some of the invaluable factors that should be encouraged in efforts to make people read online newspapers. Reading newspapers is an important activity as it informs and educates citizens about policies, governance, and activities of the government in general. Therefore, ensuring every citizen has information of what the government plans, and actions to be taken, is key and should be promoted by the Government, civil society groups, and the media stakeholders.

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