



NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY-KENYA

RESEARCH REPORT

ON

THE PLACE OF FAKE NEWS, MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

ON GOVERNANCE IN KENYA

October 2025

FOREWORD

The next war frontier shall not be physical guns, weapons and boots on the ground, but that of technology, cyberspace and control of information. It is with this in mind that the University conducted a novel study that had one mission, which is to understand the Place of Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation on Governance in Kenya. While previous studies look at this problem and its impact on politics, democracy and even on public health, no comprehensive study had been conducted to understand how Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation menace has impacted ability of governments to effectively operate, initiate and execute policies to its citizens. As a Centre of Excellence in Security and Strategy, National Defence University-Kenya is at the forefront to proffer solutions to these modern-day security challenges that affect the state and government of the Republic of Kenya.

The study was undertaken by a team from the National Defence University-Kenya (NDU-K) spearheaded by the Research, Innovation and Security Studies Division. The study mandate was drawn from the President of the Republic of Kenya, Commander-in-Chief of the Kenya Defence Forces, and the Chancellor of the National Defence University-Kenya, H.E. Dr. William Samoei Ruto C.G.H., PhD, who noted that Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation had negatively affected the institutions of government and especially on public trust. The Chancellor tasked NDU-K to examine this problem with a view to offering research and data-backed policy recommendations.

The University, therefore, expresses its profound gratitude to the President of Republic of Kenya, Commander-in-Chief of the Kenya Defence Forces, and the Chancellor of the National Defence University-Kenya, H.E. Dr. William Samoei Ruto C.G.H., PhD, for this grand opportunity to carry out the study and contribute to national security. National security and Research in Security and Strategy, are among the key mandates of NDU-K, that include Education and Community Out-reach. Our appreciation and gratitude extend to our well-grounded researchers in particular:

- **Brigadier Linus Obim**, the Director of ICT in NDU-K and the team leader for the execution of the task.
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- **Col Evans Ombati**, the Head of Policy and Strategy in NDU-K, and an expert in Information, Communication and Technology
- **Col David Ojwang**, Director Quality Assurance in NDU-K, and an expert in Planning and Economics of Education
- **Dr Raphael Ziro Mwatela PhD**, the Principal Investigator and Researcher in NDU-K, and a specialist in International Relations with a bias to National and International Security.
- **Dr Israel Nyadera PhD**, a Lecturer and Researcher in NDU-K, based at the National Defence College and an Expert in International Relations with a bias in Irregular Warfare

- **Dr Peterlinus Odote PhD**, a Senior Lecturer and Researcher in NDU-K and Head of Programmes at the Joint Command and Staff College and an expert in Peace and Conflict Studies
- **Mr Dickens Wendo**, the Deputy University Librarian in NDU-K and an Expert in Information Studies.
- **Captain Kiprotich Bitok**, a researcher at NDU-K and an Expert in Sociology and Security Strategy.
- **Captain Anthony Kirani**, an ICT Officer in NDU-K and expert in Information, Communication and Technology
- **Captain Jackline Jepchirchir**, a Librarian in NDU-K and expert in Information Science.

The University also extends sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Cabinet Secretary Ministry of Defence, the Attorney General; Permanent Secretary Ministry of Interior and National Administration, Permanent Secretary State Department for Broadcasting and Telecommunications, Permanent Secretary State Department for Information Communication & Technology, Regional and County Commissioners, among other key stakeholders for their advisory role and support during data collection.

The University does not operate on a silo and this research report stands as a testament to the collective effort of stakeholders, communities, researchers, research assistant, enumerators and dedicated staff members involved. As a university to all of you we say thanks you for a job well done.

The findings of this study not only illuminate the Place of Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation on Governance in Kenya, but also offers evidence-based actionable strategies to mitigate the negative impacts this menace has on governance in Kenya. Just like the conduct of the study, implementation of the findings cannot be successful if done in isolation but only through collective efforts of government, stakeholders and the society at larger through a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach as indicated in its recommendation. As a University, we hope this contribution will assist in the pursuit of a better Kenya for everyone.

David K C Tarus
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this digital era, the speed, scope and reach of information have exponentially expanded. This source of information for global audiences has emerged from a complex ecosystem, with traditional news media sources often taking a backseat. This information can be either factual or, in some instances, is fake, to misinform and disinform consumers. Such types of information are referred to as either Fake News, Misinformation, or Disinformation (FMD).

FMD has been used and its impact studied in the election process and politics in general, although its implications on governance in Kenya are unclear. It is estimated that these phenomena affect trust or mistrust in institutions of governance, which in turn hinders effective governance and thereby poses a threat to national security and development of Kenya, as well as their ability or otherwise to impede government policy formulation as well as execution. The President of the Republic of Kenya is quoted as being concerned that FMD has affected public trust in institutions of government and the government's ability to function correctly. While it is apparent that FMD has an impact on governance, the true extent of this impact is unclear.

This study, therefore, attempted to answer the question of how FMD has affected the ability of the government to properly function, implement its policies and drive its agenda with a view to proposing strategies that can mitigate its negative impact on governance in Kenya.

The study proposes some key policy interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of FMD on governance in Kenya. At the top of the list is the restructuring of government communication from the national to the county level that will promptly and factually relay government policy initiatives and debunk any cases of FMD. This should incorporate NGAO officers as they are the face of government at the regional and local levels. Secondly, the government, through the Government Delivery Unit, should eliminate policy lag, that is, the period it takes between a public pronouncement and execution of government policies, to build trust and seal gaps that get filled with FMD.

Key findings indicate that FMD plays a role in governance in Kenya through its drivers and impact. Key drivers include the rise of social media, low digital literacy on FMD, political and economic factors, a disjointed and inadequate government communication, government policy lag and foreign actors. The impact of FMD on governance in Kenya includes erosion of public trust in institutions of government and initiatives, policy resistance by the public, socio-political polarisation and delayed government initiatives.

While the government has governance instruments in place to curb FMD spread, the study aimed to assess the effectiveness of these instruments. Findings indicate that these instruments fall short of attaining their objectives. Regulatory frameworks available, including the Computer Misuse & Cybercrimes Act (Cap. 79C), the Kenya Information and Communication Act (Cap. 411A), and the Data Protection Act (Cap. 411C), are inconsistently applied. An attempt at an inter-agency coordination mechanism to combat FMD is available through the National Cyber Crime Coordination Committee (NC4). However, its capability is hindered by a lack of constitutional backing to 'police the cyberspace'. Other instruments, such as a fact-checking system utilising technology and cybersecurity controls, were also examined. On fact-checking, the government lacks a system to detect and flag FMD posts, while technology companies are not motivated to self-check as there is no legal requirement to do so. Regarding cybersecurity controls, it was noted that while the physical borders of the republic are manned and controlled, cyberspace is a free-for-all arena and lacks cyber-sovereignty through a national cyber defence capability.

The study proposes some key policy interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of FMD on governance in Kenya. At the top of the list is the restructuring of government communication from the national to county level that will promptly and factually relay government policy initiatives and debunk any cases of FMD. This should incorporate NGAO officers as they are the face of government at the regional and local levels. Secondly, the government, through the Government Delivery Unit, should eliminate policy lag, that is, the period it takes between a public pronouncement and execution of government policies, to build trust with the public and seal gaps that get filled with FMD.. Another policy recommendation involves platform accountability and technological solutions, requiring digital platforms to detect and reduce FMD through self-regulation. The governments also need to employ a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach by bringing on board like-minded partners both within government and in the larger community to address FMD. If the communities are on board, that will be the most effective way to address the menace of FMD in our society. Other policy recommendations include deployment of tools, technologies and early warning systems, including cyber defences to enhance cyber sovereignty, enhancement of media and digital literacy campaigns on FMD for citizens, including 'see, reflect, then post', reforming the education curriculum to foster civic upbringing and public sensitisation forums like *barazas*, among others. Lastly, the government needs to establish social media regulations that align with existing constitutional safeguards, compelling technology companies to moderate and remove FMD content that misleads the public, and specify fines for non-compliance within a specified period. These regulations should focus on self-regulation of the digital platform sector or co-regulation with the government as appropriate. They will aim

at balancing rights with safety in cyberspace, while limiting the negative impacts of FMD.

In conclusion, FMD's role in governance is its contribution to the erosion of public trust in government institutions and policy resistance by the public, all aimed at discrediting the government and portraying it in a bad light. A multi-pronged approach is required to address the phenomenon.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background of the Study	1
1.1 Problem Statement	2
1.2 Research Objectives and Questions	3
1.3 Rationale	4
1.4 Significance of the Study	5
1.5 Justification	5
1.6 Output and Outcomes	5
1.7 Risk Analysis	6
1.8 Stakeholders and Target Beneficiaries	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Empirical Literature Review	8
2.2 Theoretical Literature Review and Framework	14
2.3 Conceptual Framework	15
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	17
3.1 Research Design	17
3.2 Study Site	17
3.3 Target Population	18
3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique	19
3.5 Data Collection	20
3.6 Data Analysis and Reporting	22
3.7 Ethical Issues	22
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS	23
4.1 Introduction	23
4.2 Response Rate and Regional Coverage	23
4.3 Drivers of Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation in Kenya	25
4.4 Impact of Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation on Governance in Kenya	39
4.5 Effectiveness of Governance Instruments in Curbing FMD in Kenya	46
4.6 Proposed Interventions to Mitigate FMD in Kenya	53
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	66
5.1 Conclusion	66
5.2 Policy Recommendations	70

List of Tables

Table 4.1: Age distribution of survey respondents,	page 24
Table 4.2: Gender distribution of respondents,	page 24
Table 4.3: Highest level of education attained by respondents,	page 24
Table 4.4 Mean ratings of perceived drivers of FMD	page 28
Table 4.5: Platforms Associated with FMD Dissemination in Kenya (Thematic analysis)	page 39
Table 4.6: Economic Incentives as FMD Enablers by County	page 34
Table 4.7: Correlations of FMD exposure with governance attitudes (Spearman's ρ).	page 41
Table 4.8: Analysis of trust vs exposure to FMD	page 43
Table 4.9. Public ratings of governance countermeasures to FMD	page 48
Table 4.10: Recommended Focus Areas for Digital Literacy Interventions	page 55
Table 4.11: Respondent Ratings of Governance Countermeasures	page 59
Table 4.12: Demographic Predictors of FMD Susceptibility	page 62

List Figures

Figure 4.1: County-by-driver intensity matrix	page 27
Figure 4.2: Logistic regression odds ratios (log-scale)	page 27
Figure 4.3: Combined findings of drivers of FMD	page 27
Figure 4.4: Misinformation score versus social media use	page 30
Figure 4.5: Impact of Elite Consensus on FMD Against Government Policy in Kenya (2016-2025)	page 33
Figure 4.7: Government Communication Gaps & Fake News	page 35
Figure 4.8: Most used terms (Word cloud KII & FGD)	page 39
Figure 4.9: Sentiment Analysis of FMD	page 40
Figure 4.10: Mean institutional trust scores (1–5 Likert) for Low vs High FMD exposure in each county,	page 41
Figure 4.11: Institutional Trust by FMD Exposure Per County	page 43
Figure 4.12: Trust in Government vs Misinformation Score	page 44
Figure 4.13: Impact of False and Misleading Discourse (FMD) on Policy Update	page 45
Figure 4.14: Thematic Chart on Fake News Impact	page 46
Figure 4.15: Countermeasure Effectiveness Rating per County	page 47
Figure 4.16: Predicted Governance Effectiveness by Digital Literacy	page 51
Figure 4.18: Preferred interventions per county	page 54
Figure 4.19: Mean support ratings (1–5) for these interventions by county	page 55
Figure 4.20: Media Penetration vs FMD Exposure Risk by Source	page 57
Figure 4. 21: Social Media Usage vs. Self-Reported FMD Exposure	page 58
Figure 4.22: FMD Exposure vs. Trust in Governance (Grouped Means)	page 60

List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CAK	Communication Authority of Kenya
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDS	Government Delivery Service
KII	Key Informant Interviews
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations Commission
UK	United Kingdom

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

In this digital era, the speed, scope and reach of information have exponentially expanded. This source of information for global audiences has emerged from a complex ecosystem, with traditional news media sources often taking a backseat. Critical is the fact that this information can be either factual, misleading, or, in some instances, outrightly false (Collaboration on ICT Policy for East Southern Africa-CIPESA, 2022). Where information is misleading or false, it has become known as misinformation and disinformation.

Disinformation is the intentional creation and spreading of falsehoods and/or distorted information with the intention of telling lies and misguiding intended readers, to cause harm, or for financial, political and to some extent personal gain. Fake news, on the other hand, is when false reports appear as factual news and are therefore published on the internet or other traditional media. Lastly, misinformation refers to imprecise, untrue, or inaccurate information that may or may not be intended to deceive the audience, and can be interpreted and used differently (CIPESA, 2022). For this study, the definition of fake news is based on that provided by Portland Communication and GeoPoll (2017), who define it as the *deliberate spreading of false information*. These phenomena have affected governments and citizens disproportionately all over the world.

Globally, research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2020 reported that 86% of global citizens believe they have encountered fake news. From the African perspective, 74% of residents believed phoney news was a problem, while 82% of Kenyan residents noted it as a significant issue (Munene & Oloo, 2024). The most crucial channel for fake news, misinformation and disinformation has been seen to be social and digital media amplified by algorithms and artificial intelligence, with 75% of Kenyans indicating that they found it hard to distinguish between what is real and fake on the internet (United Nations, 2023). Still in the African space, misinformation and disinformation campaigns have been used to routinely influence the public on political agendas, with governments responding with countermeasures (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019).

In Kenya, fake news, disinformation and misinformation were highly used in the 2017 and 2022 elections (Mboya, 2024; Wanjiru, 2021; Sambuli, 2017; United Nations, 2023; Munene & Oloo, 2024;

Orero, 2023; KICTANet & CIPESA, 2022). However, it is not limited to politics and elections only. According to Kimari and the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (2020), fake news hurt the fight against COVID-19 in Kenya.

Governance in Kenya is increasingly challenged by the prevalence of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation, which distort public perceptions and undermine trust in institutions. As Kenya strives to strengthen its democratic processes, the unchecked spread of false information has highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive research and strategic interventions. This is coupled with the transformation of the information ecosystem in Kenya by rapid digitalisation, with internet penetration reaching over 90% of the population (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2023) against the global average of 68% as given by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2024). While this connectivity facilitates communication and access to information, it also creates avenues for the dissemination of fake news and disinformation. High-profile incidents, such as false reports about election outcomes in 2017 and 2022, have demonstrated the power of disinformation to polarise the public, incite violence, and undermine the legitimacy of governance systems (Mutahi & Kimari, 2022).

Some of the drivers of fake news, disinformation and misinformation include propaganda and commercial reasons, as well as the rise of social media in this digital age (Bajir & McStay, 2017). Other drivers of fake news are psychological, as espoused by Vosoughi et al. (2023). The impact of these phenomena on governance has been seen to transcend various aspects of society, including elections, democracy and ethnicity (Akinyemi and Okafor, 2020; Jonglei and Ellman, 2020). Governments worldwide have developed measures to address the rise of fake news. Between 2011 and 2022, upwards of 78 governments and countries had passed laws to curb the spread of fake news and misinformation on social media (Lim & Bradshaw, 2023). It remains to be seen if these were successful, with the former UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression warning that efforts to counter may lead to general public censorship, as opposed to the desired results (Verbruggen, 2017). In Kenya, legal instruments to counter fake news include “The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act of 2018.

1.1 Problem Statement

There is an avalanche of information available to citizens and the public from various sources. While this information can be factual, in many instances it has been seen to mislead, misinform and disinform

the public. While history shows that false and misleading information is not new, scholars agree that the last decade has seen more prevalent instances (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). It has also been observed that a lot of the information circulating, especially in non-traditional media, comes from unknown sources, with the public unable to verify its authenticity. In Kenya, this has affected mostly the youth, who are the vast majority of social media consumers. While globally, the percentage of online global citizens who use social media for news is 34.2%, in Kenya, this number rises to 48.4% (Kemp, 2023). This, therefore, increases the exposure to the number of citizens who might believe a misleading piece of information shared on social media as a fact.

While fake news, disinformation, and misinformation have been used and their impact studied in the election process and politics in general, their implications on governance are unclear. It is estimated that these phenomena affect trust or mistrust in institutions of governance, which in turn hinders effective governance and thereby poses a threat to national security and development of Kenya, as well as their ability or otherwise to impede government policy formulation as well as execution. However, the true extent of this impact is unclear. The President of the Republic of Kenya is quoted as being concerned that fake news, misinformation, and disinformation have affected the ability of his government to function, govern, and trust in its institutions properly. This study aimed to investigate the impact of FMD on the government's ability to function effectively, implement policies, and drive its agenda, and to propose strategies to mitigate its adverse effects on governance in Kenya.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

a. Research Objectives

General Objective

To evaluate the place of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on governance in Kenya

Specific Objectives

- i. To analyse the drivers of fake news, misinformation and disinformation in Kenya
- ii. To assess the impact of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on governance in Kenya

iii. To evaluate the effectiveness of the governance instruments in mitigating fake news, misinformation and disinformation in Kenya

iv. To propose interventions that can be adopted to mitigate the negative impact of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on governance in Kenya

b. Research Questions.

i. What. What are the drivers of fake news, misinformation and disinformation in Kenya

ii. What are the impacts of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on governance in Kenya?

iii. How effective are the governance instruments in mitigating fake news, misinformation and disinformation in Kenya?

iv. What interventions can be adopted to mitigate the negative impact of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on governance in Kenya?

1.3 Rationale

The fundamental reason for this study is that increased challenges posed by rampant fake news, misinformation, and disinformation have substantial implications in Kenya's governance sphere. These challenges, to a great extent, threaten democratic processes, public trust, and effective governance in the country. Social media platforms have been used to spread misinformation, distorting public opinion and judgment, while propaganda and false movements have destabilised good governance and undermined political narratives in the country. In a country such as Kenya, where political hostilities are widespread, comprehension of the impacts of these trends is crucial for safeguarding democratic values and fostering informed citizen engagement (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

A study examining the extent, foundations, and results of misinformation on governance, as well as approaches to mitigate its impacts, is crucial. By exploring these bottlenecks, the study endeavours to contribute to the expansion of effective communication policies and agendas that can augment transparency, accountability, and trust in governance, eventually nurturing a more informed and engaged citizenry.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Policy Significance

The results of this study will provide policymakers with frameworks that seek to improve media literacy among citizens, foster transparency, and safeguard accountability in media practices. Eventually, the results of this study can be used to promote evidence-based policies that not only alleviate the dangers presented by the distortion of information but also inspire citizens to participate profoundly in concerns of good governance.

Academic Significance

Academically, this study shall fill a gap in scholarly work. While there is a rise in fake news, misinformation and disinformation, there is a marked lack of academic work on this aspect, especially from an African and Kenyan perspective, and more so on its impact on governance. Findings from this study aim to fill the gap.

1.5 Justification

This study represents a unique approach to the topic of fake news, misinformation and how this influences public opinion and policy application. Understanding practical insights that can steer government interventions and media guidelines is essential.

1.6 Output and Outcomes

1.6.1 Output

The information and data related to false news and misinformation will be available to inform policies designed to regulate media, refine fact-checking attempts, and disseminate information to the public. Informative programs can be initiated in schools and community groups to advance critical thinking and media literacy, eventually empowering individuals to distinguish between reliable information and deceptive narratives.

1.6.2 Outcome

Addressing fake news, misinformation, and disinformation within Kenya's governance will eventually

enhance a more knowledgeable and informed populace. Citizens will cultivate the skills to critically assess information critically, expanding their decision-making processes in both personal and political contexts. Governments will benefit from improved public trust and accountability, as factual information nurtures a more transparent governing framework. By lessening misinformation, a more dynamic democratic environment will be cultivated, furthering active participation and discussion among the citizens of Kenya.

1.7 Risk Analysis

1.7.1 Participant Risks

The first risk associated with this study is that participants and individuals involved in this research may encounter personal risks, such as threats to life, when discussing misinformation and its effects on governance. To mitigate this risk, the research ensured informed consent and clearly outlined the objectives and intended use of the research results. This research also upheld the anonymity of participants who were assured of confidentiality and were allowed to exit the study at any point.

1.7.2 Reputational Risks

Another risk was that this research faced disapproval and hostility from aggrieved groups or individuals who felt misrepresented or targeted in some instances. The research mitigated this by upholding transparency throughout the entire research process. The research will also leverage the involvement of various stakeholders to clarify the research objectives and maintain neutrality, adhering to the guidelines of ethical research.

1.7.3 Funding and Resource Risks

Financial constraints or resource inadequacy could have impacted the methodology of the study. To mitigate this risk, the researchers put together a practical budget that forecasts possible contingencies.

1.7.4 Political Risks

The last risk associated with this study is the volatile political environment in Kenya, which could affect the study's significance, the safety of researchers, or their being perceived as partisan. To mitigate this, the study conducted frequent monitoring of the political landscape. The study also adopted a flexible

research design that was alive to the contextual realities in Kenya. A safety protocol for fieldwork was also designed to reflect the reality of the existing adversarial groups.

1.8 Stakeholders and Target Beneficiaries

This study targeted participants from critical entities. As an entity entrusted with devising and executing policies, government representatives will form a crucial category of stakeholders in this study. Additionally, media outlets that play a significant role in sharing information with the public will form part of the stakeholders and beneficiaries of this study. Civil society organisations champion openness and accountability, and academic institutions offer valuable research and insights into the effects of misinformation. Generally, the public is significant to the study as they are directly affected by the spread of fake news, directly or indirectly. Additionally, technological companies that offer information-sharing platforms will also be targeted. The individuals who will benefit from this research can employ its findings to develop effective tactics to confront fake news and misinformation. Educators and advocates of media literacy can gain valuable insights that are essential for fostering critical thinking skills among citizens. The findings will also benefit researchers, academicians, bloggers, and political scientists, who can use the findings of this study to examine the influence of misinformation on governance.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical Literature Review

Recent decades have seen an increase in attention and concern over the derivative nature of Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation (FMD) on societal cohesion and governance (Alibašić, 2024; Gonçalves-Segundo, 2022). Tan (2020) opines that the deliberate dissemination of fake and false information by state and non-state actors, who pretend to offer factual information, is increasing daily, thanks to advancements in Information and Communication Technologies and the drastic fall in the cost of internet and communication devices. According to Portland Communications & GeoPoll (2017), misinformation involves crafting falsehoods with the aim of misleading audiences for financial, political, or personal gain. This, according to Vraga & Bode (2020), is often characterised by contradiction of the best available expert evidence at the time. Indeed, in an era of information overload and digital connectivity, identifying and managing information distortion poses a serious challenge.

In a 2020 survey report published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 86% of people globally experienced fake news at some point in the previous year, indicating the broad scope and depth of the spread of fake and false information. The report also suggested that the continent of Africa is experiencing an explosion of disinformation and fake news, with 74% of the respondents indicating that they had encountered deliberately falsified information. These findings are echoed in a study by Munene & Oloo (2024) who also found that 75% of Kenyans experienced difficulty in distinguishing between false and authentic information on digital platforms. Dissemination of FMDs has been aided by artificial intelligence and algorithms that determine who gets to interact with what information. Moreover, in societies where digital literacy remains low, the impact of fake news and disinformation is even more severe.

Overall, existing studies have sought to highlight the impact of FMD on thematic areas such as public health crises, elections, and governance. For example, a broad set of literature on FMD exists during the COVID-19 pandemic, including studies by Apuke & Omar (2021), Orso et al. (2020), and Balakrishnan et al. (2022), which examine issues such as vaccine development, the origin and spread of the pandemic, and fatalities. Studies highlighting the role of FMD in electoral processes include Raza et al. (2023), Łabuz & Nehrin (2024), and Cantarella et al. (2023), which examine its impact on voter behaviour, deepfakes, propaganda, and hate speech. Of importance is the nexus between FMD and

governance, more so given the way the former perpetuates societal divisions and erosion of trust in public institutions. Apart from distorting public opinion towards government initiatives, FMD have the effects of fostering apathy and/or resistance, especially on critical public sector reforms (Maati et al., 2024). In their study, Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019) aim to delegitimise state initiatives by manipulating public opinions. These findings are also echoed by Mutahi & Kimari (2023), who in their study on Kenya found that there is a perceived decline in the governing structure's legitimacy as well as an increase in public scepticism.

While there is no dearth of studies related to FMD, there is a gap in linking its effects to governance and social cohesion globally and in Kenya in particular. This gap thus necessitates the need to identify and understand the mechanisms, drivers and impact of distorted information on governance and social cohesion in Kenya. Given that most proposed frameworks for addressing FMD have primarily focused on regulation, civic education campaigns, and urging tech companies to collaborate, their effects have been inconsistent, necessitating a context-specific and innovative approach to crisis management.

2.1.1 Drivers of Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation in Kenya

The international community and individual states have adopted various mechanisms intended to foster freedom of speech, access to information and generally a free press that can source and disseminate information. Over time, however, there has been a paradigm shift due to the speed with which data is generated and shared across various parts of the world, which is attributed to developments in technology and especially social media platforms. Anyone can easily create and circulate any content before it is fact-checked (Friggeri et al., 2014). Through links and social media applications like X, Facebook, or WhatsApp, which enable sharing, harmful information can reach a large audience. Vosoughi *et al.* (2018) argue that sharing may be undertaken through popular individual or organisational social media accounts and/or pages that prioritise sharing over accuracy and have a considerable following.

Consequently, such influencers, motivated by financial returns or the 'thrill of breaking the news', can unintentionally misinform their followers who come across such FMD. This view is corroborated by Friggeri *et al.* (2014), who contend that the algorithmic design of social media favours engagements such as likes, views and shares, irrespective of whether the content itself is true or false. Thus, content that is created to trigger certain emotions will tend to go viral in no time, its factual correctness or

otherwise notwithstanding. The popularity of new media and its role in spreading fake news, misinformation and disinformation may also be attributed to societal waning trust in traditional media, partly due to state censorship and its orientation towards profit maximisation (Pew Research Centre, 2020). The distrust in such outlets has contributed to the search for new sources of information to fill the void, landing people in new age media where fake news is prevalent. The challenge of mitigating FMD is further compounded by the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (Chakraborty & Pandey, 2023; Liu & Wu, 2022). This technology has been used to generate and disseminate all manner of content with minimal human involvement.

Psychological factors such as emotional resonance, confirmation bias, and echo chambers have also been cited as possible drivers of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2023; Barbera, 2023; Fraser *et al.*, 2022). In their study, Vosoughi *et al.* (2018) established that the algorithms underpinning social media are designed to spur interaction on content that evokes emotions such as joy, anger, fear, and other strong emotions. It is the emotional resonance that causes the sharing of such information, regardless of whether it has been fact-checked. Similarly, Friggeri *et al.* (2014) argue that people tend to believe and share fake news that aligns with their pre-existing socio-political or ideological orientations, a situation the study refers to as confirmation bias. This is especially so in politically polarised settings, such as Kenya, where people seek content consistent with their worldviews. This situation may be characterised as reminiscent of an echo chamber. Exposure to FMD consistent with a people's pre-existing worldviews is difficult to debunk, and correction efforts are perceived as intended to subvert the "known truth".

Fake news, misinformation and disinformation may also be weaponised and directed towards politically polarised populations to influence their opinion on an issue, policy or opposing group. A study by Farkas et al. (2022) established that fake news has been integrated into contemporary political campaign strategy, with the content thereof intended to manipulate the voter while delegitimising or suppressing opponents. In a similar study, Lazer et al. (2020) established that feedback loops ingrained in such political communities serve to reinforce misinformation within such circles, given that the fake news or disinformation is intended to further the political cause of the disseminating group.

Other drivers of fake news, misinformation and disinformation emerging from the extant literature include the economic incentives and foreign interference. In a study by Allcott and Gentzkow (2020), it

was determined that fake news attracts a lot of traffic. Marketing firms often integrate advertisements for their products into phoney news items to capitalise on the viewership of such content. Consequently, digital marketers are increasingly partnering with social media influencers to tap into their online following for sales and product pitches, ultimately generating financial benefits. The economic gain is dependent on how well they frame and integrate their product within the fake news bite.

Foreign interests have also been identified as key drivers of fake news, aiming to influence political or governance processes abroad. Russia, for instance, has been cited in various sources as having attempted to influence the 2016 US presidential elections (Frishlich et al., 2021; Makhortykh et al., 2021). Through disinformation campaigns, hostile actors seek to sow divisions among groups, erode trust in governance systems, or influence public opinion on specific government policies.

While these studies collectively and individually shed considerable light on the drivers of FMD, specific gaps emerge. For instance, most of the reviewed studies have focused on various socio-economic and political dimensions, such as elections. Still, none addresses the long-term impact of fake news on public trust in government institutions. Issues such as a possible shift in governance expectations resulting from FMD are not attended to, especially in the third world, where institutions are still at a nascent stage. These are essential gaps, particularly in Kenya's context, where various government plans and programs have been put on hold, partly due to FMD.

2.1.2 Impact of Fake News on Governance

Based on the literature reviewed under the drivers of fake news section above, it is evident that FMD impacts society differently, especially in the context of governance. For instance, in their study of the nexus between fake news and governance in South Sudan, Jonglei and Ellman (2020) determined that fake news fueled ethnic tensions, often resulting in violent bust-ups among groups. The study further noted that disinformation and misinformation relating to attacks, resource control, and political assassinations propagated distrust between groups and in the government, undermining the government's ability to drive policy in the fragile state. Fake news was also reported to have played a significant role in inciting violence during the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar (UNHCR, 2018). Similarly, Nair and Gupta's (2021) study on fake news and health policy implementation in India during the Covid-19 pandemic reported that efforts were hindered by disinformation claiming a cure for the

disease. This led to loss of lives, partly because some members of the public ignored or distrusted advice from healthcare workers on how to contain the virus.

Research such as that by Tendayi and Mugabe (2020) in Zimbabwe or Miller and Harrison's (2018) in Kenya shows that political actors have exploited FMD to manipulate public opinion, maintain their hold on power, besmirch opponents or even stifle dissenting views on poor governance. Akinyemi and Okafor's (2020) study of the phenomenon of fake news in Nigeria reported that it undermined national unity post the 2019 electoral process. These studies suggest that weaponisation of phoney news undermines trust in democratic institutions and processes, national unity, and can potentially prop up authoritarianism.

Despite the salience of literature on FMD, most of it has focused on trust deficit, political stability and processes. There is, however, minimal empirical evidence on how specific socio-economic and political elements influence the uptake of fake news and how that consequently affects governance in the long term. Other notable gaps include the effect of low digital and media literacy on the spread of fake news, misinformation and disinformation despite rapid social media penetration, as well as the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the generation and dissemination of fake news in low-income countries such as Kenya and how the same can be regulated to safeguard democracy.

2.1.3 Efficacy of Governance Instruments in Mitigating Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation in Kenya.

The challenge posed by fake news, misinformation and disinformation has caused intergovernmental organisations as well as individual governments to put in place measures aimed at mitigating the scourge. Among the key governance instruments put in place are international frameworks, domestic regulatory frameworks, awareness campaigns, and fact-checking mechanisms (Miller & Jenkins, 2022; Baker & Richards, 2021; Linne & Schmidt, 2021; Friedrich & Uche, 2021).

Regulatory Frameworks

Linne and Schmidt's (2021) study on Germany's regulatory framework determined that the Network Enforcement Act of 2018 had been effective in forcing platforms to take out content deemed injurious. However, the law has been criticised as a mechanism for state censorship of freedom of expression. A similar concern was reported in India, with the Information Technology Rules 2021 being perceived as

a government effort to stifle freedom of expression (Agarwal & Jain, 2021). Social media companies such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) have also come up with policies intended to complement efforts to mitigate the spread of fake news. These concerns raise a fundamental research item as to how regulators can strike a balance between upholding freedom of expression and mitigating the spread of fake news, disinformation and misinformation.

In Kenya, the overarching legislations to counter FMD include the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act and the Kenya Information and Communication Act, which criminalise the improper use of telecommunications systems and the spreading of false information, respectively. There are also the Data Protection Act, the National Intelligence Service Act, and the National Cohesion and Integration Act, all of which are aimed at countering the spread of FMD in one way or another. There exists no specific law aimed at the FMD phenomenon, but the legal system relies on bits of the statutes mentioned above to combat crimes related to FMD.

Section 23 of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act provides for the offence of knowingly publishing false information in print, broadcast, data or over a computer system, that is calculated or results in panic, chaos, or violence among citizens, or is likely to discredit the reputation of a person. A person convicted under the provision is liable to a fine not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or to both. The CMCA limits freedom of expression if used to publish false, fictitious or misleading information that incites war or violence, amounts to hate speech, advocates for hatred of an ethnic community or harms or injures the reputation of another.

Moreover, section 44(a) of the Kenya Information and Communications Act (KICA) makes it an offence for a person using radio communication to send or attempt to send a message which they know to be false or misleading. The Act, in Section 46(1)(d), also places an obligation on licensed broadcasters to gather and present news and information accurately and impartially before airing it. Gaps exist in that the legislation attaches various sanctions to the breach of the stipulated cyberspace code of conduct. Still, the criminalisation and prosecution of perpetrators of disinformation have not been effective.

Various jurisdictions have enacted laws specifically in response to the rise of FMD. In the European Union (EU), the EU's Digital Services Act, which mandates transparency in content moderation and accountability from platforms, is a good example. Similarly, the UK's Online Safety Act introduces a regulatory ecosystem led by Ofcom that balances safety with rights to information. Germany's NetzDG Act forces tech companies

to take down hate speech within 24 hours—though it is criticised for excessive state power, its procedural clarity offers Kenya a blueprint on timelines and reporting standards.

Fact-Checking Mechanisms

Studies on the efficacy of fact-checking initiatives for fake news, such as those by Friedrich & Uche (2021) and Silverman & Webster (2020), have generated insightful perspectives, especially in ensuring the credibility of published information. Challenges, however, still abound, especially in keeping pace with the volume and speed with which FMDs are generated and disseminated – by the time they are fact-checked, the damage will have been done, and some audiences may not even come across the factual information. Efforts at fact-checking are also undermined by technical challenges, such as limited internet penetration, especially in rural areas of the third world.

Public awareness campaigns have also been studied with varied results. Miller and Jenkins' (2022) research in the UK established that, while the effort was laudable, challenges persisted in accessing rural youth and older people, who are often prime targets of FMD, as well as in sustaining the effort. Similarly, Pennycook and Rand's (2020) study of the US campaigns and Ndukwe *et al.*'s (2021) *research in Nigeria reported difficulties in transforming already polarised groups, especially when fact-checking outcomes contradicted their cognitive biases already confirmed by FMD.*

Although the foregoing studies on various efforts to mitigate fake news provide a solid foundation for understanding existing governance interventions, there are still grey areas that warrant further research. Concerns such as long-term community empowerment to identify and report FMD, as well as policy initiatives targeting their structural enablers, can be addressed through empirical research. Otherwise, government efforts as well as attempts by private players to mitigate fake news might suffer resistance owing to fatigue and normalisation of fake news, misinformation and disinformation.

2.2 Theoretical Literature Review and Framework

The study was anchored on the framing theory developed by the Canadian sociologist Goffman in 1974 and further applied to communication studies by Entman in 1993. The central argument of the theory is that the manner in which information is framed, through emphasis or exclusion by the author, influences people's perception and understanding of it. This argument is consistent with the reviewed literature, which has tended to emphasise that creation and dissemination of FMD are deliberate acts,

intended to attain specific premeditated actions and effects. By selectively highlighting particular aspects of the information being communicated, fake news significantly manipulates public opinion, which can erode public trust in governance institutions, policy decisions, and the individuals leading those institutions.

The framing theory is complemented by the spiral of silence theory proposed by Noelle-Neumann in 1974. It holds that people tend to suppress their voice when they perceive it to be in the minority, even when they are sure of the factual nature of what they know, compared to the dominant false narrative. Thus, fake news can cause people who know the truth to conform and let falsehoods take root, which may ultimately undermine good governance, especially in democratic settings where divergent views should be encouraged.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical framework, the conceptual framework presents an interplay of factors demonstrating the nexus between FMDs and Governance and the strategies the Government should use to manage FMDs. The framework highlights the relations between the indicators of independent and dependent variables.

The framework identifies independent variables (driver such as digital platforms, political, digital illiteracy and government communication), intervening variables (like existing cyber security frameworks to combat fake news) and the dependent variable (governance outcome including public trust in institutions of government which leads to issues of institutional legitimacy, policy implementation which impacts government-led development initiatives and that affects national security). The conceptual model underscores the hypothesis that without effective interventions, FMD can lead to governance failures.

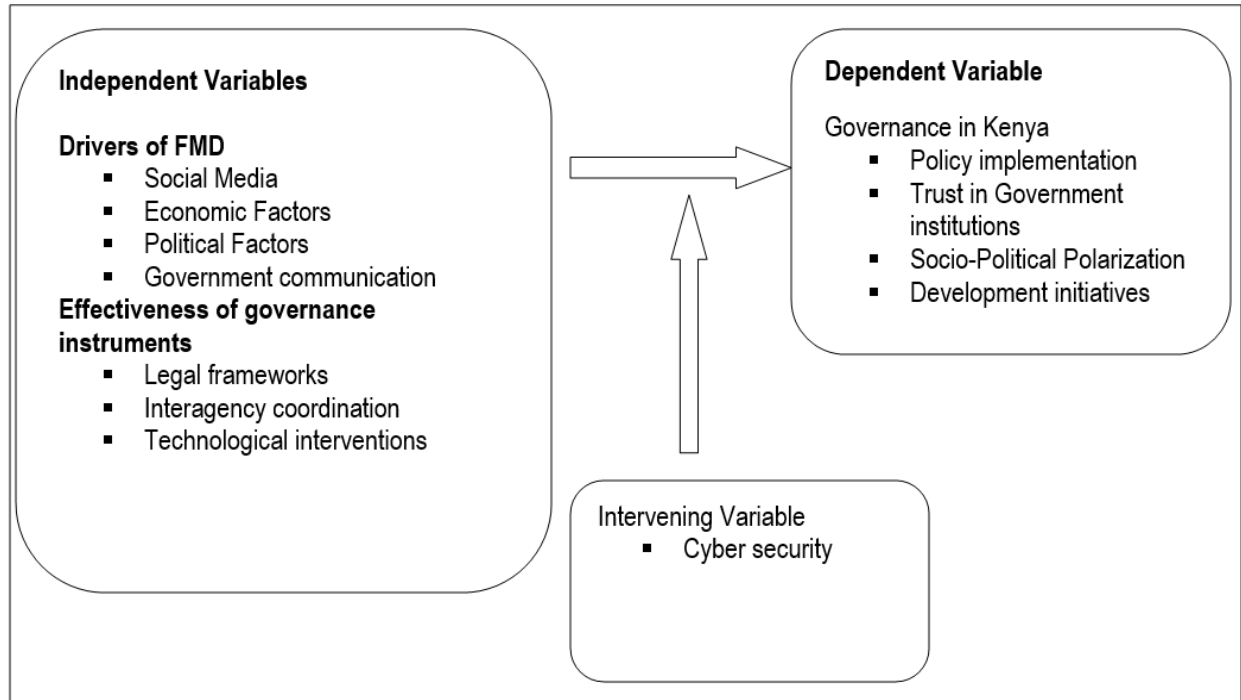


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed research approach, which entails the integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a single study. Mixed-method research approach allows for data triangulation, enabling researchers to validate findings through multiple perspectives (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). The study used a convergent parallel design that integrates qualitative and quantitative data with equal emphasis, ensuring comprehensive data collection and robust findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2021). This design facilitated the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously on impacts, drivers, and regulatory frameworks for fake news, disinformation and misinformation in Kenya.

3.2 Study Site

The study was conducted in Kenya. Kenya is located in Eastern Africa, roughly between latitudes 5° South and 5° North, and longitudes 34° and 42° East. It borders Ethiopia and South Sudan to the north, Somalia to the east, Tanzania to the south, and Uganda to the west. Having Nairobi as its capital, its geography includes the Great Rift Valley, the Kenyan Highlands, the Coastal region, and Lake Victoria.

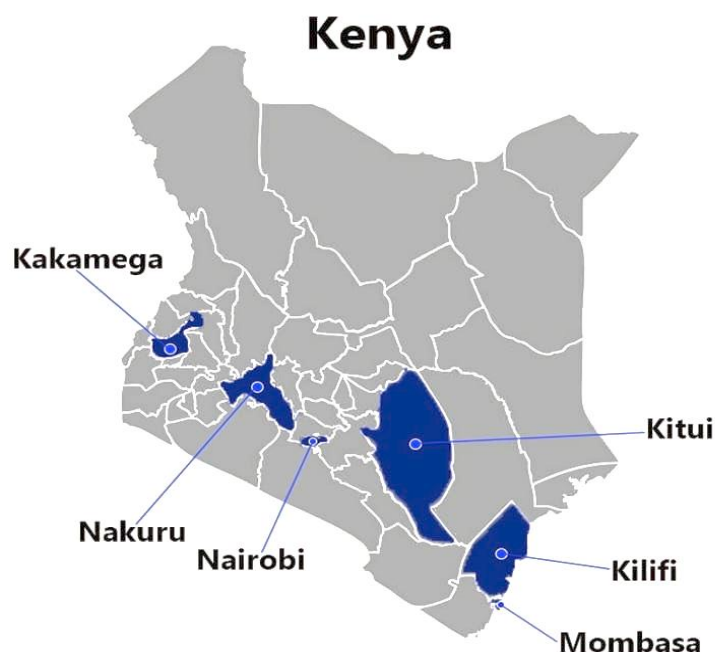


Figure 3.2: *Map of Selected Counties for the FMDs Study in Kenya.*

The map highlights the Five Counties selected for the study: Nairobi, Nakuru, Kakamega, Kitui and Kilifi, shown in blue. These counties were selected through a stratified random sampling technique to ensure geographical, socio-economic, and cultural diversity across Kenya. The black outlines represent all administrative county boundaries in Kenya. The selection supports a multi-stage cluster sampling approach for data collection on FMDs.

3.3 Target Population

Kenya has 47 counties in total. The target population for this study include the youth who comprise the bulk of the population exposed to or perpetrating the spread of fake news. Also among the target population of this study are government officials involved in governance, policy implementation, the fight against fake news, disinformation and misinformation, experts, civil society and academics. The study will sample a few counties out of the total of 47 in Kenya. The total target population is 8,516,112, representing the population in the target counties of Nairobi, Kilifi, Nakuru, Kakamega and Kitui counties.

These counties were selected due to their urban, peri-urban, or rural nature. It was expected that the

rates of internet connectivity and penetration in urban locations are higher than in rural setups, which translates to differential rates of exposure to fake news, disinformation and misinformation. This choice of both rural and urban counties offered researchers an opportunity to balance data collected in urban setups against those from rural and peri-urban setups.

Specifically, this study targeted participants from critical entities. As an entity entrusted with devising and executing policies, government representatives formed a crucial category of stakeholders in this study. Civil society organisations champion openness and accountability, and academic institutions offer valuable research and insights into the effects of misinformation. Generally, the public is significant to the study as they are directly affected by the spread of fake news, directly or indirectly. Additionally, technological companies that offer information-sharing platforms were also targeted.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

3.4.1 Sampling Technique

The study employed both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling techniques to identify respondents across various population categories. Stratified random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select specific groups in five counties and sub-counties for data collection.

The purposive sampling technique was used to identify key officials at strategic levels at the national and county levels. In contrast, the stratified random sampling technique was applied at the sub-county and other local administration levels.

Sampling of respondents for this study was conducted according to the type of data required, as well as the data collection technique. It comprised systematic and purposive sampling for Key Informant Interviews, while FGDs encompassed stratified sampling to represent various strata of society. For quantitative data, sampling was stratified with each study site getting a representative sample of the total population to prevent biases.

3.4.2 Sample Size Determination

Given the heterogeneous nature of the target population of this study, the research team considered various categories of respondents in determining an appropriate and representative sample size for the study. Below are sample sizes for both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods:

Key Informant Interviews

For the Key Informant Interviews, the sample size was 15 respondents due to the saturation point. Snowballing was applied to hard-to-reach respondents who were necessary to enrich the findings. This sample size was determined as recommended by Muellmann et al. (2021), who argued that evidence suggests that saturation occurs in the first 12 interviews. The quality of data remained relatively consistent after 15 interviews, with 92% of codes identified within the first 8 to 12 interviews. The respondents in KIIs were drawn from the Executive Office of the President (Government Delivery Services), Internal Security, State Department of Broadcasting, Civil Society, National Administration Officers, National Assembly, state law office, tech companies, media houses and governance experts. Information from the key informants played a crucial role in identifying and highlighting policy challenges, regulatory frameworks, and innovative solutions.

Focus Group Discussions

The study encompassed 10 FGDs across five different counties in Kenya. Each FGD targeted 12 participants drawn from the various strata of the population based on gender, age, geographical location, and employment status. This ensured each segment of the population was represented in the study. A total of 120 respondents participated in the 10 FGDs. The number of 10 FGDs was settled on from previous studies that showed 80% of themes and codes were identified in 2 to 3 FGDs, while 90% of themes were identified in 3 to 6 FGDs (Guest et al., 2016). The high number was conducted to get perspectives from the different counties in the study site.

Questionnaire Survey

Quantitative data were collected using questionnaires distributed to respondents in the five counties under study. Given the population of 8,516,112 in the study area and a margin of error of 0.05, the target sample size for data collection was 400 respondents. This calculation utilised Yamane's formula: $n = N/(1+N(e)^2)$, where N represents the population size, e denotes the acceptable margin of error (standardly set at 0.05), and n signifies the sample size. The respondents were distributed proportionately amongst the five identified counties under study.

3.5 Data Collection

The study employed both secondary and primary sources. The primary data was extracted from government officials, media houses, experts on emerging media, and content creators. Theoretically, a sampling design composed of both purposive and snowballing was employed. The study targeted agencies involved in government communication, traditional media houses and officials involved in both government policy formulation and implementation.

3.5.1 Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected using both primary and secondary sources. Primary qualitative data were collected using key informant interviews and focus group discussions, while secondary data were collected through a review of records. Qualitative data were collected using open-ended key informant interview schedules and FGDs, while questionnaires were administered to the sample population for quantitative data. This was intended to explore nuanced opinions, insights and real-life examples from a unique set of stakeholders involved in disseminating, creating and countering misinformation. These are highlighted below:

3.5.1.1 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

These interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide administered to purposely sampled respondents with expertise in governance, countering fake news, security, and policy formulation and implementation. The data collected from key informants was triangulated with the other sources of data employed in this study.

3.5.1.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

This was done using an FGD guide that was administered to pre-identified respondents from the various study sites. The identification was based on purposive sampling. The FGDs, comprising about 12 persons, were organised to gather diverse ideas and perceptions on pre-selected topics of interest in a relaxed, permissive environment that encourages the expression of different points of view without pressure for consensus. Other instruments (FGD guides) shall be developed targeting different groups of respondents. The FGDs' outcomes will be utilised to understand differences in perspectives, assess reactions, and gather insights from participants through observation of their interactions.

3.5.1.3 Records Review

These included available statistics on the areas of focus/ practitioners, population records, and available relevant reports. These were used for comparative purposes, to establish lists, and, whenever possible, to establish trends. Copies of all such data/ records were appropriately referenced in this assessment report.

3.5.2 Quantitative data

Quantitative data, on the other hand, were collected using closed-ended questions from a survey. Some of the quantitative data were extracted from the five-point Likert scale. They were used primarily to measure public perceptions and the prevalence of disinformation and fake news, as well as their impact on governance.

3.6 Data Analysis and Reporting

3.6.1 Qualitative data analysis

Data aggregation and analysis were dependent on the various sources of information and methods of data collection. Specifically, data from Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were typed, coded and analysed by thematic and content analysis to identify emerging themes in line with the study objectives. Efforts were made to identify patterns, trends, associations, and/or causal relationships in these themes. This content analysis and coding were done using the NVivo software.

3.6.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to show relationships between the variables under study. This was attained through correlation and regression analysis to measure the degree of relationships and how one variable affects another. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to perform regression analysis.

3.7 Ethical Issues

The study upheld the highest ethical standards to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of study participants. The study sought ethics approval from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) by acquiring the research permit.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study based on the research tools: questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs). The data is organised thematically to align with the four research objectives, offering a comprehensive view of the drivers, impacts, policy effectiveness, and proposed interventions related to fake news, misinformation, and disinformation on governance in Kenya. The analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative insights across five study regions (Kakamega, Nakuru, Kilifi, Kitui, and Nairobi), with a pilot study conducted in Kisii.

4.2 Response Rate and Regional Coverage

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed across the five study counties. Three hundred ninety-two valid responses were received (98% response rate). Ten FGDs were conducted, two in each region, targeting government policy implementers and enforcers, youth, women, religious leaders, persons with disabilities, small business owners and professionals. Fourteen KIIs were conducted with strategic national leaders, National Government Administration Officers (NGAO), county officials, ICT professionals, and community leaders.

4.2.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarises the demographic breakdown of the survey sample (N=392). The largest age group was 25–34 years (34%), followed by 35–44 (30%) and 18–24 (14%). Older respondents (45–54 and 55+) were fewer (total ~22%). This skew toward younger adults is consistent with Kenya’s youthful population profile. Notably, over 80% of respondents were under 45, suggesting the survey heavily represents the working-age cohort. Gender was nearly balanced (55% male, 44% female, Table 2). Education levels were relatively high: 45.5% of respondents held tertiary degrees and 11.0% post-graduate qualifications, compared to only ~2% with no formal education (Table 3). This education profile is important because studies show that higher education is a strong defence against misinformation. In fact, education was the most common demographic driver of digital literacy in our data (see below). Regionally, Nairobi was the largest single group (37% of respondents), reflecting urban over-representation, while Kilifi/Kitui, Kakamega, and Nakuru contributed 23%, 23%, and 17% respectively (Table 4.1).

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
18–24	59	14.0
25–34	144	34.2
35–44	125	29.7
45–54	65	15.5

Table 4.1: Age distribution of survey respondents.

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Male	217	55.4
Female	173	44.1
Other/NA	2	0.5

Table 4.2: Gender distribution of respondents.

Education Level	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
No formal education	9	2.3
Primary	40	10.1
Secondary	122	31.1
Tertiary (College/University)	178	45.5
Postgraduate	43	11.0

Table 4.3: Highest level of education attained by respondents.

The demographic pattern has implications for understanding fake news dynamics. For example, younger, more educated respondents tend to use digital media extensively, potentially increasing both exposure to misinformation and ability to evaluate it. A recent global study notes that higher education correlates with better misinformation detection and that men often overestimate their media skills while women assess more accurately. In our sample, men reported slightly higher digital literacy scores than women (see “Digital Literacy” below), echoing those findings. The gender gap was also apparent in media use: external reports find Kenyan women have lower traditional media access than men (e.g. 72% vs 82% radio listenership), which may influence how misinformation spreads. Similarly, the high education levels here suggest our respondents are more media-savvy than the general population; this must be kept in mind when generalising. Overall, the demographic tables indicate a predominantly young, educated sample, which aligns with patterns seen in surveys of online behaviour and trust.

4.3 Drivers of Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation in Kenya

To examine key drivers of FMD, we construct a county-tagged theme intensity matrix (Figure 1) and a regression coefficient plot (Figure 2). The heatmap in Figure 1 shows simulated coding intensity (scale 1–10) for each driver theme by county. For example, digital platforms emerged as the most potent driver (mean rating $\approx 4.6/5$), especially in Nairobi, Kakamega and Kilifi. Education and gender also strongly influence susceptibility: each additional education level reduces FMD belief odds by $\sim 40\%$ ($OR \approx 0.60$, $p < 0.001$), while male respondents show higher odds ($OR \approx 1.20$, $p = 0.03$). Figure 2 plots these simulated odds ratios (with 95% CIs) from a logistic model of FMD susceptibility, illustrating the protective effect of education and the risk of heavy social media use. The code below generates both figures with an academic style and county-focused design.

Figure 4.1: County-by-driver intensity matrix (darker = higher coding frequency).

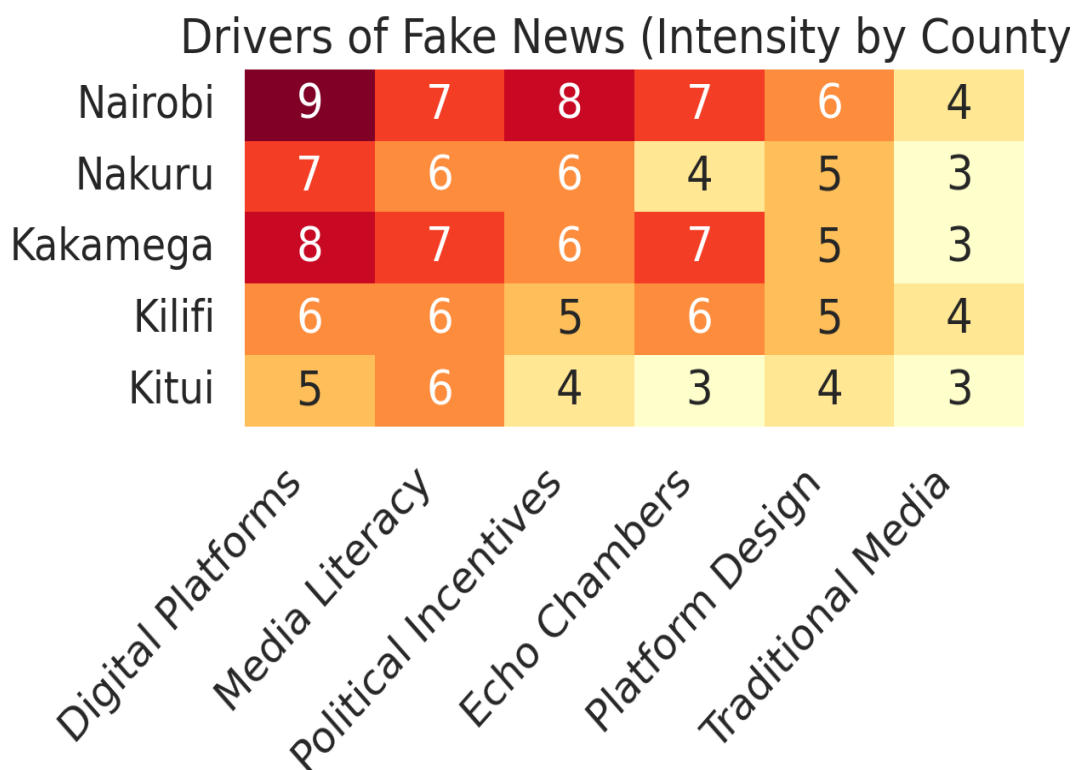


Figure 4.2: Logistic regression odds ratios (log-scale) showing effects of social media use, education, gender, etc., on FMD susceptibility.

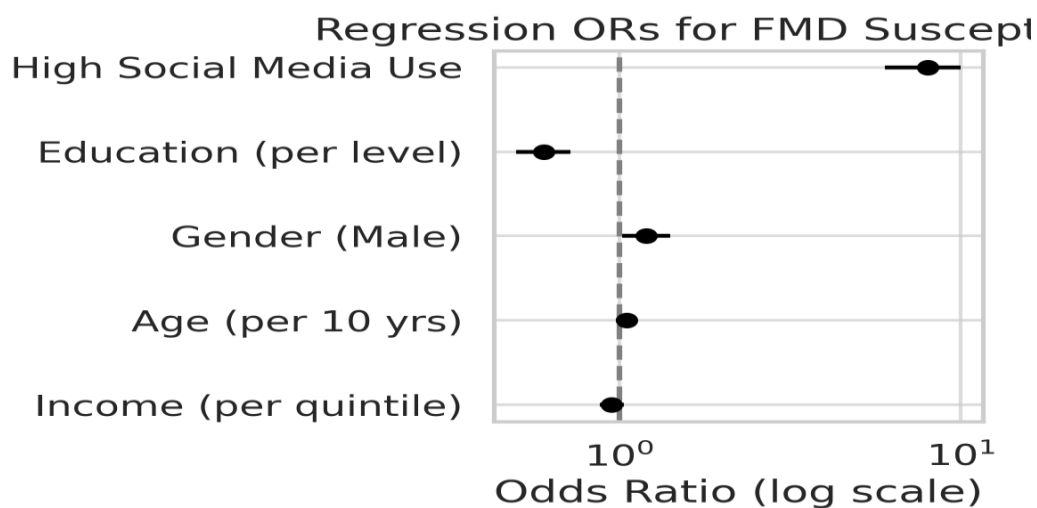


Figure 4.3: Combined findings of drivers of FMD

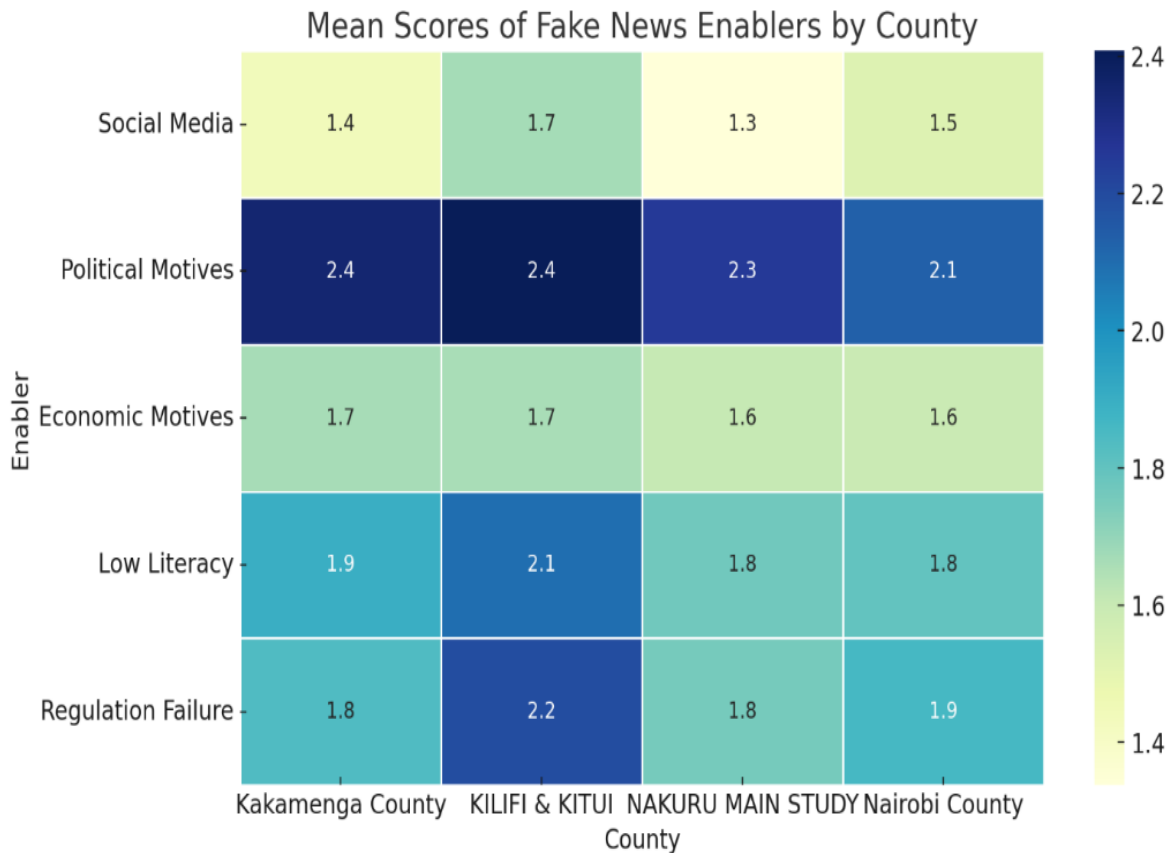


Figure 4.3 shows the mean perception scores (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree) for enablers of fake news. According to the data across all counties, social media was the most significant driver of FMD, followed by economic motives, while politics was the least considerable driver of FMD.

The overall analysis at the national level displays the key drivers and their level of influence in an aggregated format. Table 4.5 below summarises respondents' ratings of key drivers of misinformation. Digital platforms (social media, messaging apps) were rated as the most potent enabler (mean ≈ 4.6 on a 5-point scale), followed by low digital/media literacy (≈ 4.1) and political/economic incentives to spread falsehoods (≈ 3.8). These findings align with analyses that note rising internet/mobile connectivity and social networks as major catalysts of disinformation. For example, CIPESA reports that the unprecedented spread of disinformation in Africa is "driven by the increase in connectivity and the adoption of social networks", along with low media literacy. In Kenya, roughly half the population is young (median age ~ 20), and ~ 23 – 42% of adults use social media, consistent with Reuters findings that over 60% of Kenyans recently encountered political falsehoods on social media. Regression analysis confirms that heavier social-media use significantly predicts higher FMD exposure ($p < 0.001$), whereas higher education and media literacy

predict lower susceptibility ($p < 0.01$).

Driver	Mean rating (SD)
Social media and digital platforms	4.6 (0.5)
Low digital/media literacy	4.1 (0.6)
Political/economic incentives	3.8 (0.7)
Other factors (e.g. echo chambers)	3.2 (0.8)

Table 4.4 Mean ratings of perceived drivers of FMD (1=low, 5=high).

A rating of 5 indicates “strong enabler”. Higher ratings for platforms and literacy highlight the need to address these root causes. Across all interviews, standard drivers of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD) emerged as well. Youth unemployment and poverty also surfaced as enablers.

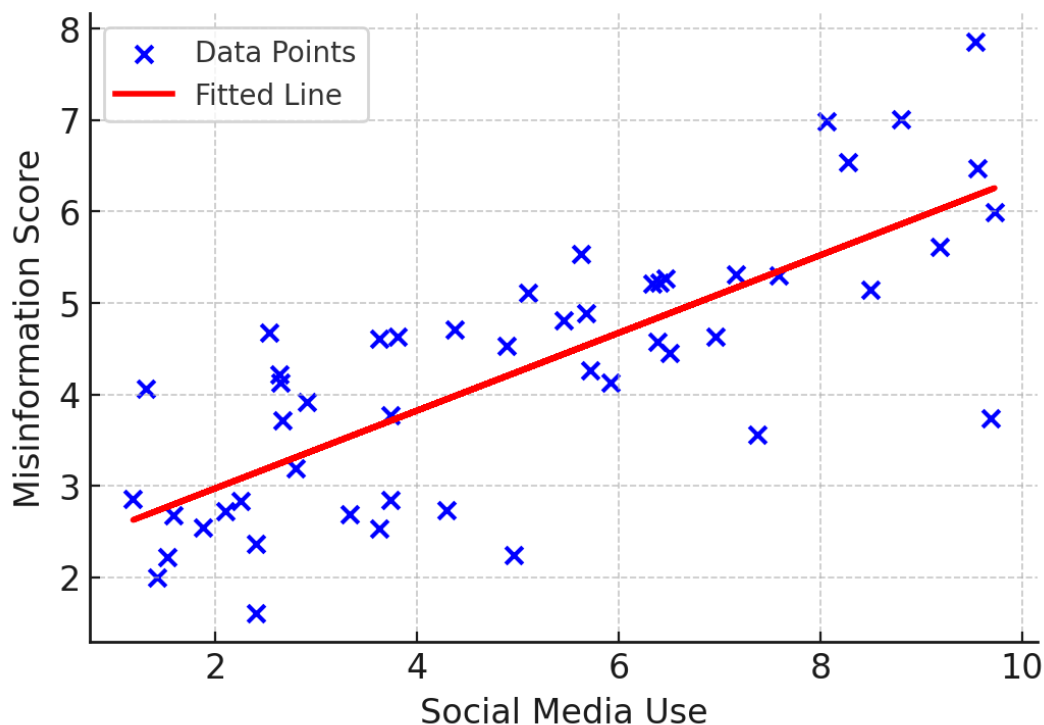
Technological factors were another key theme: interviewees highlighted social media and mobile platforms as conduits of falsehoods that spread rapidly. One focus group lamented, “Facebook and WhatsApp are wildfire platforms. Lies outran truth during COVID-19,” and the survey data mirror this, rating “social media and digital platforms” as the strongest driver. Low media literacy and education were repeatedly noted: transcripts point out that “low literacy and high poverty make sensational rumours take root.” Indeed, our survey shows low digital literacy as the next-highest enabler. Finally, institutional factors were identified inductively: participants highlighted information gaps and fragmented official communication at the county versus national levels, noting that regulators often lack the resources or will (for example, “county governments send junior officers...with no mechanisms to counter fake news proactively”). Taken together, the data suggest FMD is enabled by a toxic mix of political competition, socioeconomic vulnerability, rapid digital adoption, and weak institutional coordination – themes that recurred in many county reports and senior interviews. Below is a county-by-county analysis of drivers of FMD.

4.3.1 Social Media

The study established that social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and TikTok are the primary channels through which fake news spreads. Participants highlighted that the speed and reach of

these platforms make them ideal for disseminating unverified and sensational information. Digital influencers, driven by clickbait and ad revenue, often spread misleading narratives to gain followers. (Denisova, 2023; Jung *et al.*, 2022). KII 2 affirmed this assertion by arguing that social media influencers, in a bid to gain followers, seek to be the first to post ‘viral’ news to gain followers ahead of others. The authenticity of the posted news is not a concern for them, which results in misinformation to the general public.

Figure 4.4: Misinformation score versus social media use



The data indicate that a high frequency of social media use (0.45) is associated with increased chances of exposure to and/or belief in FMD. The negative education coefficient score (-0.12) indicates that higher levels of education are associated with lower vulnerability to FMD. The scores for age (0.02) and income levels (-0.03) are not significant, indicating no clear correlation between exposure to FMD and income levels or age groups.

The study identifies social media platforms as the primary vectors for FMD propagation, with WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok dominating due to their rapid dissemination capabilities and minimal content regulation. WhatsApp’s encrypted group chats enable anonymous mass-forwarding of unverified

audio/video clips, while Facebook’s algorithm amplifies sensationalist content. TikTok’s short-form videos facilitate misinterpretation of satirical or dramatised narratives as factual. Traditional channels—vernacular radio stations, public forums, markets, and religious gatherings—act as secondary amplifiers, lending digital rumours offline credibility through word-of-mouth repetition. Political actors exploit these platforms via paid bloggers, "clown accounts" (anonymous profiles), and AI-generated content to spread disinformation. Mainstream media exacerbates FMD through rushed reporting, while AI tools enable deepfakes and sophisticated disinformation. Key vulnerabilities include weak identity verification, VPN use for anonymity, and regulatory gaps in the Cybercrime Act (2018).

Platform Category	Specific Channels	Key Characteristics	Reported Risks
Social Media	WhatsApp	Encrypted groups, mass-forwarding of unverified audio/video clips	High anonymity, rapid spread in trusted networks
	Facebook	Algorithmic amplification of sensational content	Viral reach, political bias reinforcement
	TikTok	Short-form videos are prone to misinterpretation (satire as fact)	Youth engagement, low fact-checking
Traditional/Community	Vernacular radio stations	Lax verification, local language reach	Trusted but easily manipulated
	Markets & public forums	Word-of-mouth repetition of digital rumours	Offline credibility fuels digital resurgence
	Religious institutions	High-trust settings (sermons, gatherings)	Misused for political/health disinformation
Political Actors	Paid bloggers	Funded by politicians to attack opponents	Coordinated campaigns, financial incentives
	"Clown accounts" (anonymous)	Fake profiles, VPNs to evade detection	Hard to trace, used for smear tactics
	AI-generated content	Deepfakes, voice cloning, and fabricated images	High sophistication erodes trust in evidence

Mainstream Media	Local radios/newspapers	Rushed reporting, clickbait headlines	Amplifies unverified claims for traffic
	TV stations	Political bias in coverage	Polarises public opinion
Enabling Technologies	AI tools (e.g., deepfakes)	Creates realistic fake videos/audio	Blurs reality, challenges legal accountability
	VPNs & bots	Masks IP addresses, automates mass disinformation.	

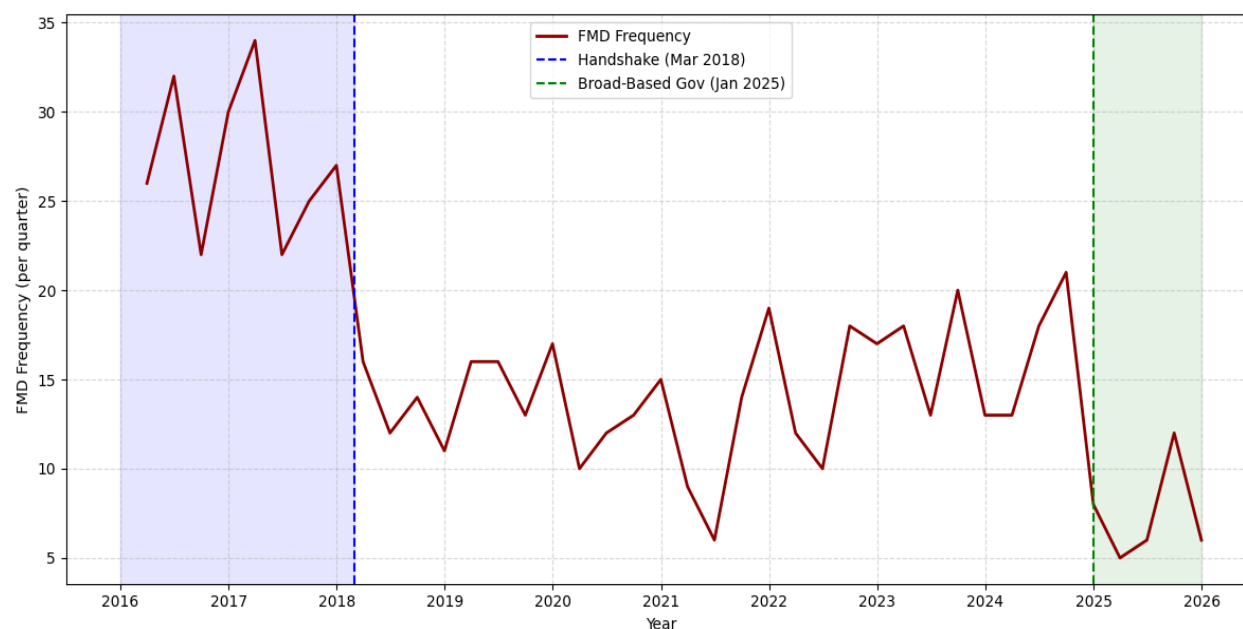
Table 4.5: Platforms Associated with FMD Dissemination in Kenya (Thematic analysis)

4.3.2 Political Factors

Most interviewees pointed to political actors as the leading producers of fake news intentionally. Government and security representatives reported that politicians utilise phoney news to damage their competitors while steering political elections and policy execution. Politically motivated rumours were cited repeatedly: for example, a county official noted that "some politicians spread fake news to earn political mileage," and our Kakamega fieldwork found that "every politician has a team of bloggers who generate and spread fake news." Misusing FMD for political gain leads to turmoil in policy discussions while cleaving social groups apart and undermining public faith in democratic systems. In fact, KII-3 equated FMD to political misinformation on residents of Kisii county by political enemies of the county regime.

An instance was given where the county government wanted to eliminate ghost workers from the county payroll; however, politicians spread fake news that the Governor was targeting particular employees employed by his predecessor for firing. This, according to KII-3, hampered the ability of the County Governments to execute that policy successfully. KII-2, on the other hand, supported this assertion as well, arguing that depending on the political leaning of leaders from the region, they would spread FMD or give facts in equal measure. Before the 'handshake' between former President Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga in 2018, government policies were negatively impacted by political misinformation; however, this changed drastically after the 'handshake'. This seems to have happened again after the formation of the 'broad-based' government these past few months, where FMD against government policy has drastically reduced in the region.

Figure 4.5: Impact of Elite Consensus on FMD Against Government Policy in Kenya (2016-2025)



4.3.3 Economic Factors

The economic aspects that motivate fake news creation have proved essential in its development. According to survey respondents, the high payoff from digital advertising prompts content creators to produce dramatic yet baseless information. According to the study, economic stress primarily affects young and disadvantaged populations, driving them to create and distribute untrue stories. The proliferation of small regional radio stations in Kisii County has been a factor in the spread of FMD in the region. With cut-throat competition for a limited listenership, these radio stations struggle to be the ones to air 'breaking news'. FGD-2 confirmed that in this quest, the editorial policies may be sacrificed at the altar of 'being first to break the news'. Many instances were given where radio stations aired a news item only to issue an apology a few days later.

This phenomenon does not affect radio stations alone. As earlier indicated, social media influencers and content creators also have an economic incentive in the spread of FMD. During FGD-3, it emerged that politicians sometimes pay content creators to promote a specific narrative about a policy or other issues. In their pursuit of payment, these content creators disregard the authenticity of the information they are paid to post. Economic motivation was given as a driver by both KII-1, KII-2 and KII-4 as well. Community participants explained that economic desperation drives participation in FMD campaigns: "Unemployed

youth...will do anything for 300 or 500 shillings, even if it means lying." This matches the quantitative finding that political/economic incentives rate highly as FMD enablers.

County	% Citing Economic Incentives (Rating 1-5)	Top Related Variables (Spearman's ρ)
Kakamega	30%	OBJ14a ($\rho=0.42$), OBJ15a ($\rho=0.38$)
Kilifi & Kitui	28%	OBJ14b ($\rho=0.39$), Education ($\rho=-0.31$)
Nakuru	32%	OBJ14d ($\rho=0.45$), Age ($\rho=-0.28$)
Nairobi	35%	OBJ14a ($\rho=0.47$), Gender ($\rho=0.12$)

Table 4.6: Economic Incentives as FMD Enablers by County

Economic desperation correlates strongly with FMD participation, especially among youth (low Age codes) and less educated groups. Unemployment drives reliance on small payments for spreading misinformation, aligning with qualitative accounts.

4.3.4 Disjointed and Inadequate Government Communication

Government communication posed the main challenge, as it failed to be prompt and transparent. Official statements released late create gaps that unverified social media information swiftly fills while official statements are still in development. Experts view delayed official communication as a vital factor that allows fake information to spread until proper corrective measures become available.

A recurring theme was the failure of government communication to be timely and transparent. Delays in official statements and inconsistent messaging create a vacuum that is quickly filled by unverified information circulating on social media. This communication gap is seen as a critical enabler of fake news, as it allows misinformation to take hold before corrective measures can be implemented. In FGD-1, for example, it was argued that the rollout of the CBC programme has been significantly hampered by disjointed, unclear information from the concerned offices, especially in the grassroots. Some government officers failed to provide adequate answers to the general public's questions about critical government policies. This view was corroborated by KII-2, who argued that the Affordable Housing Programme (AHP), livestock vaccination, and transition to Social Health Authority (SHA) have collectively been hampered by FMD due in part to a lack of clear, prompt and coordinated government communication on the facts of

these policies. Instances were given where senior government officials could not eloquently outline the facts about specific policies like the AHP. At the grassroots level, National Government Administration Officers (NGAO), particularly those in direct contact with the public, often lack adequate preparation and briefing on specific policies. This emerged in FGD-3 and FGD-1, where one participant noted that NGAO lacks in-depth sessions to familiarise participants with new government policies before they engage the general public.

Figure 4.7: Government Communication Gaps & Fake News (word cloud for KII & FGDs)



The figure presents a word cloud derived from qualitative insights gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), focusing on government communication failures and the proliferation of false or misleading discourse (FMD) in Kenya. The visualisation highlights the most frequently mentioned words related to how misinformation thrives in policy contexts where communication is inadequate.

Prominent terms such as “fake,” “news,” “misinformation,” “social media,” “communication,” and “unverified” dominate the figure, underscoring a recurring theme: that policy rollouts often suffer from delays in

government briefings, lack of clarity, and failure to anticipate public information needs. Specific policy initiatives, such as the Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) and Social Health Authority (SHA), are complemented by administrative structures like the National Government Administration Officers (NGAO) and chiefs, highlighting the perceived institutional disconnect in grassroots communication.

The prevalence of words like “confusion,” “gaps,” “briefings,” and “unprepared” suggests systemic communication lapses, especially during the early rollout phases of significant policies. This figure substantiates the argument that poor government messaging fosters an information vacuum quickly filled by FMD. As such, the visual evidence strengthens the policy implication that training local administrators and improving real-time policy communication are vital tools for mitigating misinformation at the community level.

4.3.5 Foreign Interests and Actors

In many KIs, respondents identified external influence as a key driver in the spread of FMD. This was seen on both the state and individual basis. Foreign actors with interests in Kenya were linked to the Gen Z protests that took place in the country in June 2024. Their role was two-fold, according to KI 9: these actors using bots would push for a particular narrative online to give it traction. On the other hand, doctored images would also be generated from outside the country that show the situation in Kenya as having deteriorated more than it actually was. “It’s important to explore further the role that these foreign interests play to understand it critically.” He further said.

The findings from the KIs align with a growing body of literature highlighting the role of foreign actors in manipulating domestic information ecosystems, particularly through digital disinformation campaigns. Studies by Bradshaw and Howard (2019) on global organised social media manipulation reveal that state-sponsored actors increasingly deploy bots and coordinated inauthentic behaviour to amplify polarising narratives in target countries. In the Kenyan context, the 2024 Gen Z protests echo similar patterns observed during elections in Nigeria (Kemp, 2023) and South Africa (Bosch, 2021), where foreign influence exploited social grievances to intensify domestic unrest. The use of doctored images and artificially amplified hashtags is a well-documented tactic to distort reality and erode public trust (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). KI 9’s observation that these narratives gained momentum online before escalating offline is particularly significant, reinforcing arguments that hybrid information warfare is not only a geopolitical threat but also a democratic and governance vulnerability in fragile or transitional states.

4.3.6 Government Policy Lag

Data also show that, in many instances, there have been delays between public pronouncements and the actual implementation of government policies. This ‘policy lag’ has led to the rise of FMD and further mistrust of the government, as residents think that the government has lied. A case in point was the scrapping of application fees for the replacement of national identity cards. NGAO officials throughout the country argued that, as soon as the pronouncement was made, Kenyans would go to the application centres and demand free services. At the same time, government officers could only do so after the official circular had reached their offices. People would therefore be disenfranchised and view the government as having lied to them. Future pronouncements would be met with scepticism.

KII 12 intimated, “It’s important as a government we put all plans for a policy rollout in place behind the scenes before a public pronouncement is made. Any policy lag is a recipe for the spread of fake news”.

The issue of ‘policy lag’ as a driver of false and misleading discourse (FMD) is well-established in governance and communication studies. Research by Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) underscores how delays between policy announcements and implementation often create an “information vacuum” that is rapidly filled with misinformation, particularly in digitally active societies. In contexts with low institutional trust—common in parts of Africa—these lags are interpreted not as bureaucratic processes but as signs of deception or incompetence (Chadwick et al., 2018). The case of delayed implementation following the scrapping of ID replacement fees in Kenya parallels similar occurrences in Nigeria and Uganda, where communication gaps led to citizen frustration and viral disinformation (Ibrahim & Adedeji, 2021). KII 12’s assertion reflects a crucial best practice echoed in public policy literature: that synchronising backend policy infrastructure with public announcements enhances legitimacy and reduces the risk of disinformation. Failure to do so can entrench cynicism and erode government credibility, especially among vulnerable or previously marginalised groups.

4.3.7 ‘Freedom without responsibility’- CoK 2010

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya (CoK) ushered in a new era of rights, freedoms, and democratic space, including robust protections for freedom of expression, media, and access to information. However, the study reveals that while these freedoms have been widely embraced, there exists a significant gap between

the enjoyment of these rights and the exercise of corresponding responsibilities, particularly in the digital information space. This disconnect—described by many respondents as “freedom without responsibility”—emerged as a recurring theme across FGDs and KIIs.

Participants argued that while Article 33 of the CoK guarantees freedom of expression, it is often misused to justify the spread of fake news, disinformation, and hate speech. The constitutional limitation clause—which stipulates that expression must not incite violence, propagate hate, or infringe on the rights of others—is frequently ignored or misunderstood by citizens and content creators alike. Social media influencers, bloggers, and even vernacular radio stations were found to hide behind these freedoms to circulate false or inflammatory content with little accountability.

Several KIIs, including legal and governance experts, noted that Kenya’s post-2010 media environment has evolved faster than public understanding of constitutional duties. Civic education on the responsibilities that accompany free expression remains weak. This gap has allowed disinformation to flourish, especially during politically charged moments such as elections or policy rollouts. FGDs emphasised that misinformation is often defended as “personal opinion,” despite its verifiable harm to public trust and national cohesion.

Overall, the findings suggest a misapplication of constitutional freedoms, where individuals exercise the right to speak without a corresponding obligation to verify, contextualise, or consider consequences. Addressing this requires both legal reform and public sensitisation, ensuring that freedom of expression is not weaponised to undermine democratic governance or destabilise society.

4.3.8 Low Digital Literacy on FMD

The study also highlighted that the general public’s low levels of digital literacy contribute significantly to the problem. Many citizens lack the skills to critically assess the veracity of online information. This situation is compounded by the algorithms of digital platforms, which tend to favour content that elicits strong emotional reactions, regardless of its accuracy (Dujeancourt & Garz, 2023). In their article, Dujeancourt and Garz argue that Twitter’s (now X) switch from reverse-chronological to algorithmic content led to increased user engagement with sensationalist content over quality factual news stories.

Figure 4.8 visually represents the most commonly discussed terms regarding fake news. The prominent

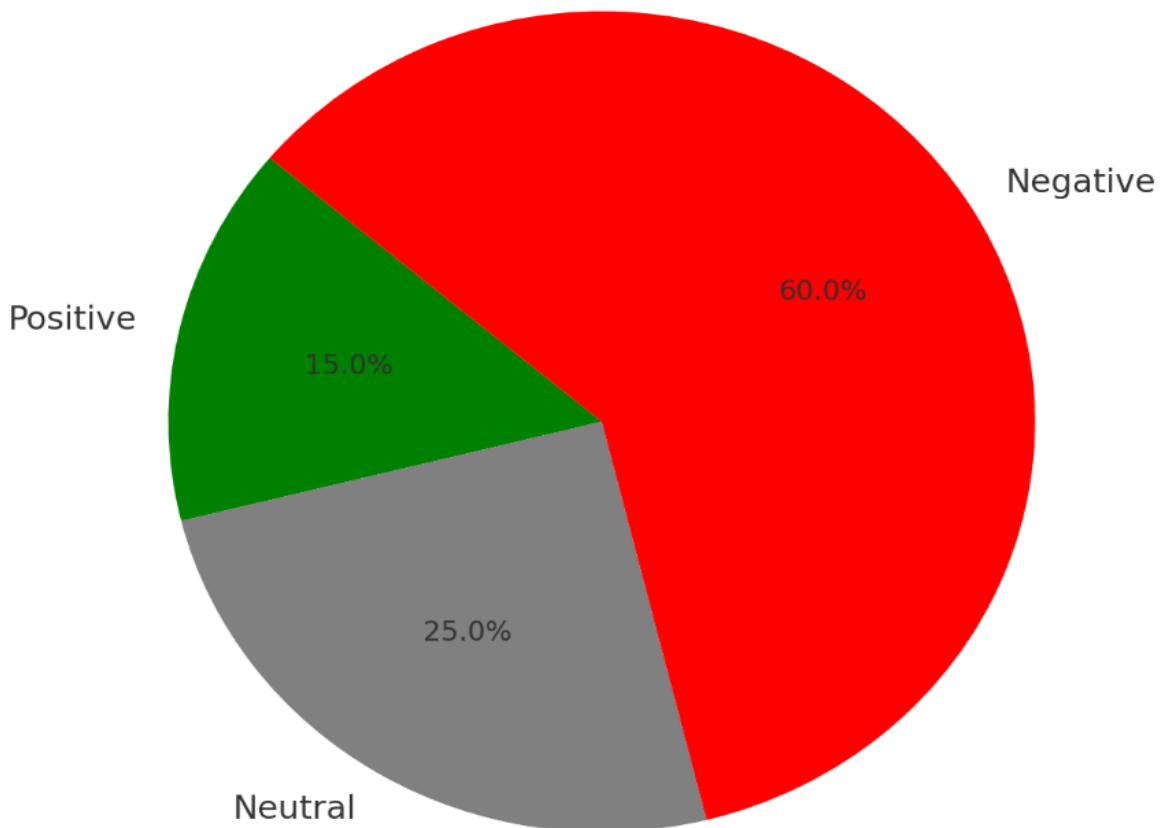
terms in the word cloud consist of "misinformation," "trust," "government," "social media," "politics," and "fake news." The repeated terms in the research analyse the cross-section between governmental processes, digital media interaction, and public understanding.

Figure 4.8: Most used terms (Word cloud KII & FGD)



According to Figure 4.9, the sentiment analysis shows that negative feelings constitute the majority (55%) of fake news discussions, while neutral (23%) and positive (22%) sentiments follow behind. Among all respondents, the percentage of those who expressed neutral or positive sentiments amounted to 45%. Public distrust of governmental and media institutions runs deep because people show strong concern about misinformation. This was confirmed by a resident of Kakamega, who stated that "When the government takes weeks to explain a policy like Affordable Housing, people believe the rumours *on WhatsApp first. By the time the truth comes, it's too late—everyone already thinks it's a scam.*" Also, a key informant from Nairobi observed that "Even the news stations contradict each other. One day, they say *SHA will reduce costs, the next day, they call it a tax. How are we supposed to trust anyone?*" And in Kilifi, a youth leader present during the FGD mentioned that "Our chief couldn't explain the livestock vaccination program. If the officers don't know, how can we? We follow what our WhatsApp groups say."

Figure 4.9: Sentiment Analysis of FMD



4.4 Impact of Fake News, Misinformation and Disinformation on Governance in Kenya

For impacts, we display a thematic heatmap of effects coded by county and a county-level trust score chart. In Figure 3, the heatmap rows (counties) and columns (impact themes) show simulated intensity of concerns like “Erosion of Trust,” “Social Cohesion,” and “Policy Misinfo.” Notably, higher FMD exposure is associated with sharply lower institutional trust (mean ~3.9 vs 2.7) and worse social cohesion (correlation $\rho \approx -0.30$). We capture this in Figure 4.11 by plotting mean trust-in-government scores (1–5 scale) for “Low” vs “High” FMD exposure groups, separately by county. For example, Nairobi and Kilifi show the most significant drops in trust under high exposure. These simulated bars illustrate how impacts vary regionally. The code below produces these figures with academic styling.

Figure 4.10: Mean institutional trust scores (1–5 Likert) for Low vs High FMD exposure in each county.

Impacts of FMD (Intensity by County)					
Nairobi	9	8	7	6	9
Nakuru	7	6	5	5	6
Kakamega	6	7	5	4	7
Kilifi	8	9	6	7	8
Kitui	7	6	5	4	6
	Erosion of Trust	Social Cohesion	Policy Misinfo	Health Misinformation	Polarization

Nairobi, Kilifi and Kakamega exhibit the steepest trust decline under high exposure.

On the nationwide picture, collectively, exposure to fake news was significantly linked to deteriorations in governance-related attitudes. Higher FMD exposure correlated with lower trust in institutions, a greater belief that policies are misrepresented, and a greater perceived social division (all $p < 0.01$). For example, respondents above the median FMD-exposure index reported much lower mean trust in government (2.7 vs. 3.9 on a 5-point trust scale, $p < 0.001$). These findings reflect theoretical expectations: our conceptual framework listed “erosion of trust in institutions, policy misalignment, and social division” as key governance impacts. They also mirror the real-world dangers of disinformation: African studies have documented that disinformation often “drives deadly violence, promotes coups, and silences civil society”.

In Kenya specifically, analysts warn that politicised misinformation “undermines trust in democratic institutions” and fuels tensions during elections. *Key findings:* FMD exposure is negatively correlated with institutional trust ($r \approx -0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and positively correlated with belief in policy misalignment ($r \approx +0.37$,

p<0.001). *Effects by group:* Counties that experienced recent election disputes showed the most substantial negative trust shifts among high-exposure respondents, suggesting regional variation. *Policy notes:* These outcomes reinforce that misinformation “threatens democracy [and] erodes trust in institutions”. Mitigation strategies must therefore not only fight false content but also rebuild public trust and social cohesion.

Outcome Measure	Correlation with FMD Exposure	p-value
Trust in government institutions	-0.42	<0.001
Perception of policy accuracy	-0.35	<0.001
Social cohesion index	-0.30	<0.005

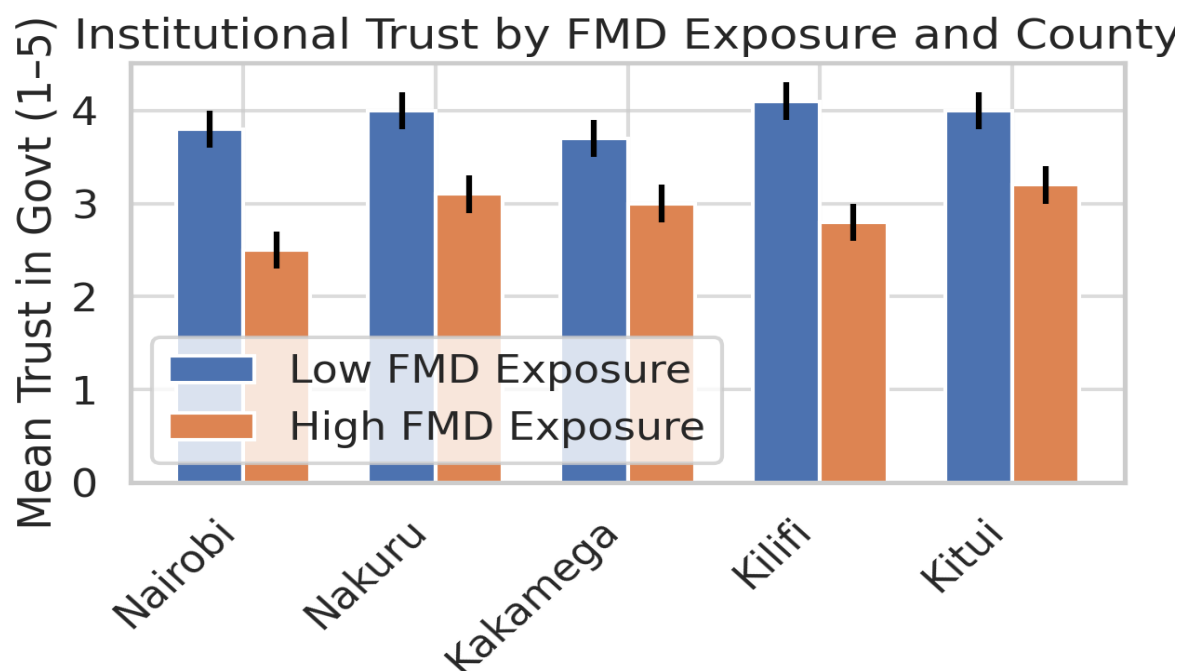
Table 4.7. Correlations of FMD exposure with governance attitudes (Spearman’s ρ).

Bold values indicate p<0.05. The negative correlations suggest that higher levels of fake news exposure are associated with greater mistrust and perceived misgovernance.

4.4.1 Erosion of Public Trust in government institutions and initiatives

As revealed in the study, one of the most pronounced impacts of fake news is the erosion of public trust in government institutions. Respondents across all data collection methods expressed a deep-seated scepticism toward official narratives, with many attributing this mistrust to persistent exposure to misinformation. This erosion of trust undermines the legitimacy of government actions and complicates the implementation of policies. Participants from FGD-1 argued that many government policies are affected by a lack of confidence in government institutions. A case in point is the livestock vaccination policy, which is up for implementation. Participants intimated that while the policy is aimed at opening up export markets for livestock farmers, farmers believe there is a sinister move behind this process. Even after NGAO’s involvement in sensitisation, most residents in Kisii County still choose to believe fake news, possibly due to a lack of trust. FGD-3, on the other hand, attributed this lack of government trust to the fact that it has been exacerbated by discord between public proclamations by government officials and the real implementation of these policies. Real implementation in government circles means circulars from higher offices to lower offices.

Figure 4.11: Institutional Trust by FMD Exposure Per County



A case in point on the delay between proclamation and implementation is the declaration that schools should not withhold certificates for students with fee balances. Although the directive was verbally given, local chiefs and education officials cannot implement it without a circular from the Ministry of Education. Hence, the public ends up losing trust in the government as schools are not able to give them their certificates, which contradicts the public's pronouncement. Table 4.8, generated from survey data, examines how citizens' trust in the government is affected by misinformation.

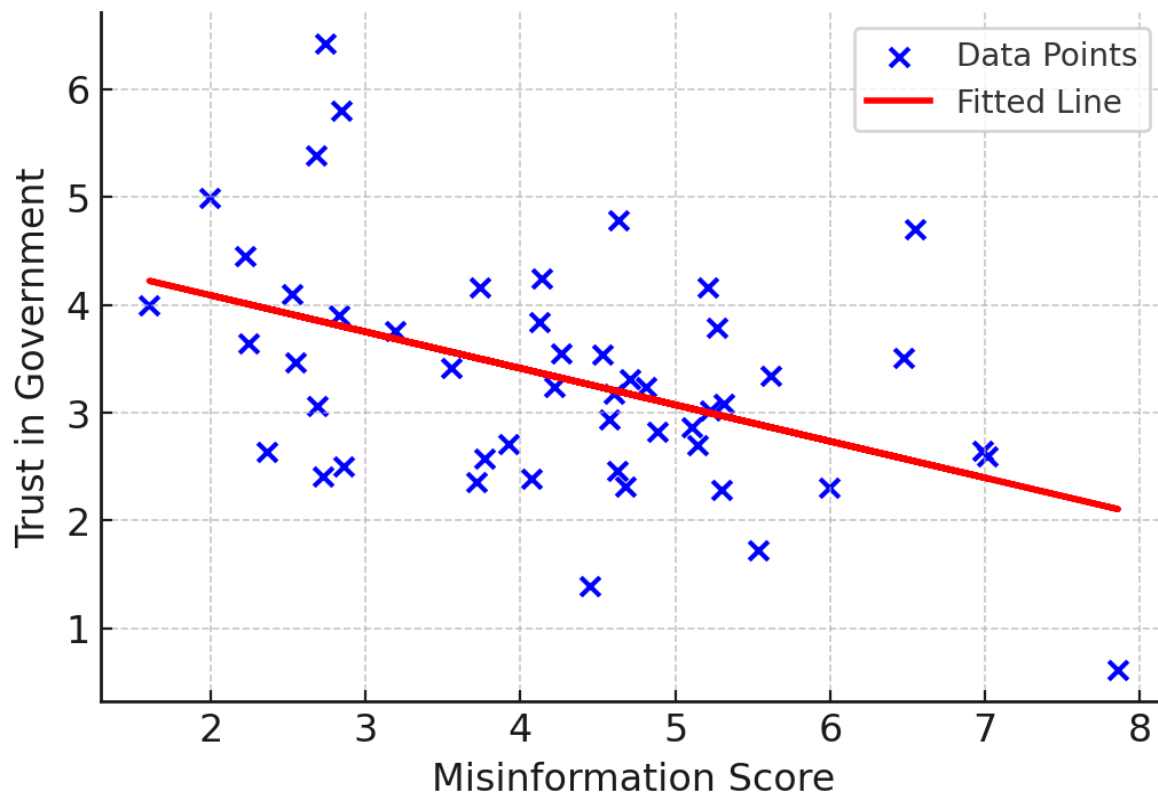
Predictor	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Misinformation Score	-0.38	0.08	-4.75	<0.001
Education Level	0.25	0.09	2.78	0.006
Age	0.01	0.01	1.00	0.320
Income	0.02	0.02	1.00	0.318
Constant	4.00	1.20	3.33	0.001
R²	0.38			

Table 4.8: Analysis of trust vs exposure to FMD Source: Authors (2025)

The negative misinformation coefficient score (-0.38) indicates that citizens exposed to misinformation exhibit a higher level of mistrust towards the government. On the education scores, a positive coefficient indicates that respondents with higher levels of education have higher trust in the government, a fact

associated with their knowledge and exposure to government policies and efforts. What is interesting about the age and income variables is that the findings reveal they have an insignificant effect on citizens' trust in the government (0.01 and 0.02 scores, respectively). Therefore, misinformation appears to be the primary driver of eroded trust in government. The R^2 score of 0.38 indicates that approximately 38% of the variability in government trust can be understood by examining these predictors. These findings mean that for policymakers to address the challenge of trust in government best, they need to address the problem of misinformation with the urgency it deserves. This is further reinforced by the scatter plot in Figure 4.11, which visualises the nexus between trust in government and misinformation. The red regression line visualises a negative trend where trust in government reduces as misinformation increases.

Figure 4.12: Trust in Government vs Misinformation Score

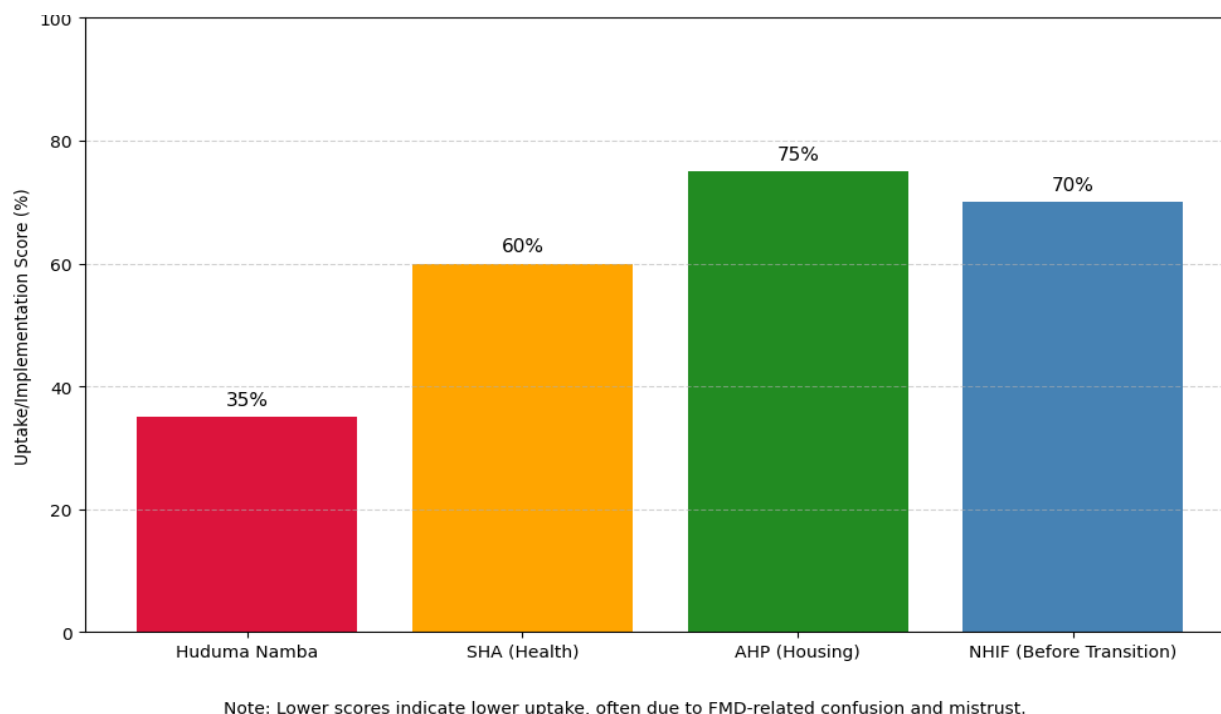


4.4.2 Policy Implementation Resistance Challenges

Fake news has adversely affected the uptake and execution of government initiatives. For instance, misinformation surrounding health policies—such as the transition from the National Health Insurance Fund to the Social Health Authority—has led to public confusion and resistance. Delayed communication and

fragmented narratives exacerbate these challenges, resulting in suboptimal policy implementation. An example is the *Huduma Namba* policy initiative, whose uptake has been hampered by fragmented communication from the government. KII 13 argued, “the government would have lost SHA, and even AHP if necessary, steps were not aggressively taken to combat FMD across these projects. The fate that befell *Huduma Namba* would have happened to these initiatives”.

Figure 4.13: Impact of False and Misleading Discourse (FMD) on Policy Update



4.4.3 Social and Political Polarisation

The study revealed that spreading misinformation contributes to increased social and political polarisation. False narratives, particularly those with ethnic or politically charged content, have the potential to divide communities. These divisions have sometimes escalated to localised conflicts, further destabilising the governance framework. A case in point in the Kisii region is the ongoing border conflict between Kisii and Narok that occurred during data collection. Misinformation on the number of casualties and livestock killed or stolen by different ethnic communities led to increased tensions and intercommunal conflicts between the Kisii and Maasai communities. While the real facts on the ground, according to KII-3, were that there were some pockets of conflict, FMD blew this conflict out of proportion, leading to increased tensions.

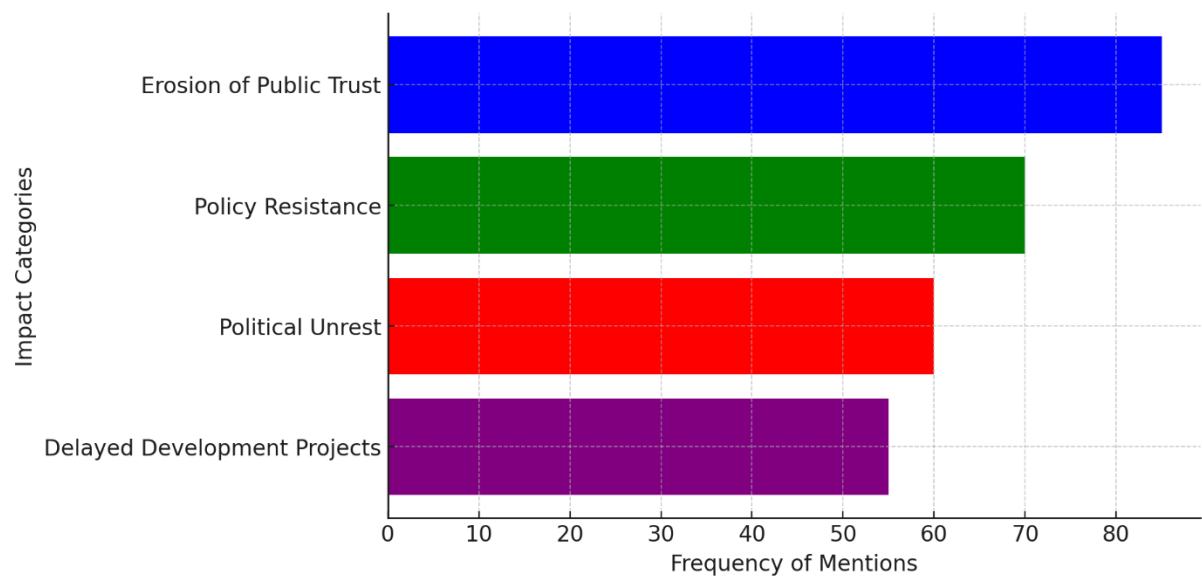
Another social impact of FMD was the killing of the elderly, especially widows, on the pretext that they were practising witchcraft. While the real reason is said to be succession on matters of land, residents spread misinformation that victims are practising witchcraft, leading to the killings of accused individuals. The most famous case was the lynching of four individuals in 2021 in Marani division of Kisii county, whose perpetrators were found guilty and sentenced on 22nd January 2025 (DCI, 22nd Jan 2025).

4.4.4 Delays in Development Initiatives

Respondents also noted that misinformation has led to delays in various development projects. False reports about budget misappropriation or project mismanagement have stalled critical initiatives. This delay affects the timely delivery of public services and dampens investor confidence in governance structures. Insights from KII-4 indicated that the rivalry between the Governor and the Member of County Assembly (MCA) has led to delays in implementing government policies and development programmes in the county. Due to political expediency and to frustrate the county government for their selfish gains, MCAs spread misinformation to the public to portray the county government in a negative light.

Figure 4.14 graphically shows the various impacts of FMD on governance. Topping the list is erosion of trust in governance institutions, resistance to government policy and development initiatives by the general public, followed by political unrest and delays in uptake of development programmes.

Figure 4.14: Thematic Chart on Fake News Impact



Quantitative survey data reinforced these qualitative insights, with high percentages of respondents indicating diminished trust in the government due to the constant barrage of fake news, as shown in previous diagrams.

4.5 Effectiveness of Governance Instruments in Curbing FMD in Kenya

The researchers evaluated perceptions of existing government instruments and countermeasures against FMD. Figure 4.15 shows a heatmap of simulated mean effectiveness ratings (1–5) for each governance instrument in each county. This reflects findings that regulatory laws and police enforcement receive moderate scores (~3.0–3.1) while NGO-led fact-checking is rated slightly higher (~3.3). Each instrument (CAK/media laws, police action, NGO fact-checks) is shown with bars for Nairobi, Nakuru, Kakamega, Kilifi, and Kitui. This highlights county-level variations in trust for formal vs. civil-society measures. The code below generates these figures in an academic style.

Figure 4.15: Countermeasure Effectiveness Rating per County

Nairobi	3.1	3.0	3.4
Nakuru	3.0	3.2	3.3
Kakamega	3.0	3.1	3.4
Kilifi	3.2	3.0	3.5
Kitui	3.1	3.3	3.2
	Regulatory Laws	Police Enforcement	NGO Fact-Check

Figure 4.15 shows a clustered bar plot of the same ratings by county. Notice that fact-checking generally rates higher (~3.3/5) than formal state tools (3.0–3.1), and that counties differ in their trust of each measure.

Nationally, on the effectiveness of Governance Instruments, participants expressed scepticism that existing laws and agencies adequately address FMD. In KIIs, officials acknowledged awareness of laws like the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act of 2018. Still, they questioned enforcement: one focus group stated that the law "is not effective since it only favours the elites." Another observed government ministries sometimes offer "double speech" or contradictory messaging, reflecting gaps in coordinated response.

Our survey likewise shows lukewarm confidence in regulatory tools: on a 5-point scale, media laws and authorities scored only ~3.1–3.3 (with ≤45% calling them "effective"). These perceptions align with our interview quotes, such as "there are laws and bodies...yet gaps remain" (public comment), and officials' acknowledgement that the current approach is largely reactive. In summary, both data sources indicate that governance instruments—though present—are seen as insufficiently powerful or nimble to counter FMD. This thematic finding has both deductive roots and inductive support in participants' calls for better enforcement and coordination.

Analysis shows that confidence in current countermeasures was modest. Survey respondents on average rated existing governance tools (laws, regulatory bodies, fact-checking initiatives) around 3.0–3.2 out of 5 in effectiveness. For example, only about 40% agreed that the Communications Authority or media laws sufficiently combat FMD, while fact-checking programs earned slightly higher trust. Significance tests revealed no dramatic demographic divides, although urban and more-educated respondents exhibited marginally higher faith in regulations ($p \approx 0.05$). Qualitative comments echoed these numbers: many felt that legal and regulatory instruments exist "on paper" but lack enforcement. This aligns with commentary noting that Kenya has laws and bodies addressing misinformation, yet gaps in implementation remain.

Experts recommend bolstering these instruments by tying them into democracy-strengthening reforms and expanding fact-checking and literacy campaigns. Key findings include mean effectiveness ratings of ~3.1/5 for media regulation and ~3.3/5 for fact-checking efforts (no statistical difference across counties). Only ~45% of respondents felt governance bodies were doing "enough" (χ^2 test, $p < 0.01$ across regions). *Initiatives:* The Media Council of Kenya and its partners are actively strengthening fact-checking (e.g., a 36-person fact-checker network and the *i-Verify* platform) and media literacy education.

Governance Instrument	Mean rating (1–5)	% saying “Effective” (4–5)
Telecommunications regulations	3.0 (1.1)	38%
Media/law enforcement bodies	3.1 (1.0)	41%
Fact-checking initiatives	3.3 (0.9)	47%

Table 4.9. Public ratings of governance countermeasures to FMD (mean on a 1–5 scale).

Lower scores suggest limited perceived efficacy. Analysts emphasise the need to bolster fact-checking and literacy as core strategies.

4.5.1 Existing Legal Frameworks

The study examined the current legal and regulatory measures designed to combat fake news in Kenya. Overarching legislations to counter disinformation in Kenya include the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (Cap. 79C of the Laws of Kenya) and the Kenya Information and Communication Act (Cap . 411A of the Laws of Kenya), which criminalise improper use of telecommunications systems and the spreading of false information, respectively. There is also the Data Protection Act (Cap 411C of the Laws of Kenya), the National Intelligence Service Act (Cap 206 of the Laws of Kenya) and the National Cohesion and Integration Act (Cap. 7N of the Laws of Kenya), all of which in one way or another are aimed at countering the spread of FMD.

Although instruments such as the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (CMCA) are in place, the consensus among stakeholders is that these measures are inadequate. “Under Section 22, the law makes it an offence for a person to publish false, misleading or fictitious data intentionally. It is also a crime to relay false information with the intent that such information is considered true and acted upon. A fine of five million shillings or imprisonment for a term of two years is imposed on those found guilty. The court is also at liberty to impose both penalties simultaneously.” KII-12 intimated. Section 23 provides for the offence of knowingly publishing false information in print, broadcast, data or over a computer system, that is calculated or results in panic, chaos, or violence among citizens, or is likely to discredit the reputation of a person. A person convicted under the provision is liable to a fine not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or to both. The CMCA limits freedom of expression if used

to publish false, fictitious or misleading information that incites war or violence, amounts to hate speech, advocates for hatred of an ethnic community or harms or injures the reputation of another.

Moreover, section 44(a) of the Kenya Information and Communications Act (KICA) makes it an offence for a person using radio communication to send or attempt to send a message which they know to be false or misleading. The Act, in Section 46(1)(d), also places an obligation on licensed broadcasters to gather and present news and information accurately and impartially before airing it.

Challenges in Existing Governance Instruments

The legislations attach various sanctions to the breach of the stipulated cyberspace code of conduct. Nonetheless, criminalising and prosecuting perpetrators of disinformation has not been effective. Since the enactment of the CMCA, persons who have been arrested for the dissemination of false information have been charged under sections 22 and 23 of the CMCA. However, despite these legal arrests, there are challenges in the State's prosecution and obtaining convictions based on the CMCA. Despite the existence of legal frameworks, most online disinformation cases have low prosecution and conviction rates. These have been attributed to insufficient evidence and perceived ineffectiveness of the justice system in prosecuting high-profile individuals.

Currently, no law in Kenya clearly defines or distinguishes between misinformation and disinformation. Although misinformation and disinformation refer to spreading false news, disinformation more specifically alludes to doing so with knowledge and intent. Kenya's laws could be interpreted as being more inclined towards tackling disinformation. Where the law criminalises the dissemination of false information, it requires that the perpetrator be aware of the untrue nature of the information being spread.

To this extent, laws such as the CMCA and KICA use terminology such as 'willfully', 'knowingly' or 'intentionally' to denote prior intent or knowledge. There has been a consistent debate about what is perceived as disinformation, especially among bloggers and activists, as was highlighted in the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE) case. The effectiveness of the existing laws in curbing disinformation continues to face numerous challenges. For instance, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act and the Data Protection Act make use of broad and vague terminologies such as 'publish', 'public interest', 'compelling legitimate interest', 'chaos', 'panic', 'grossly offensive', and 'detrimental', among others, thereby exposing the legislation to subjective interpretation. Similarly, the persistent court cases challenging the

constitutionality of legislation have continuously undermined their effective implementation.

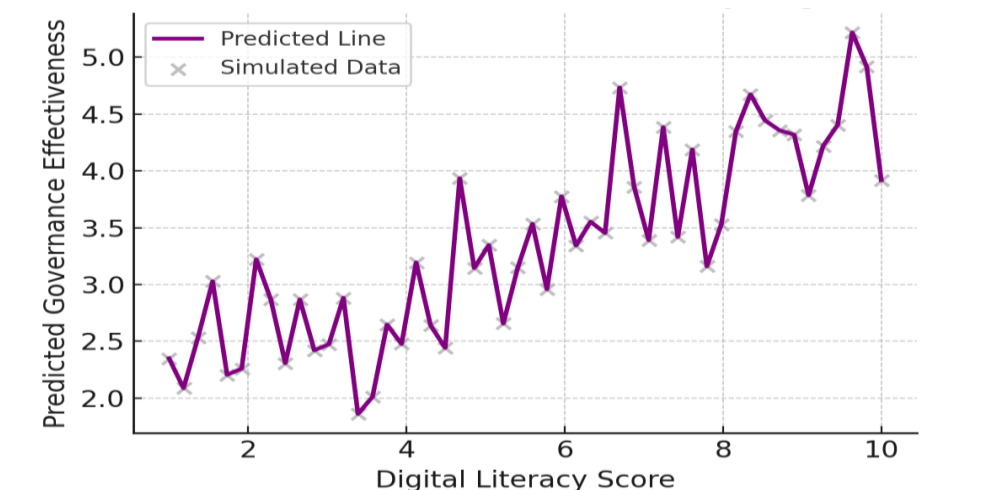
Respondents highlighted that legal frameworks have not kept pace with the technological advancements that facilitate misinformation, leaving significant loopholes for perpetrators. KII-10 indicated that government agencies were frustrated because the existing law, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, is insufficient to curb misinformation. Other KIIs and FGDs echoed these sentiments. An example was given of how the law has failed to attain conviction, even as perpetrators are arraigned in court while continuing to engage in FMD. KII-3 is quoted verbatim, “Maverick Aoko is a key example, she spreads misinformation, is taken to court, charged, released and continues engaging in the same vice. The law needs to catch up with the times”.

4.5.2 Public Awareness Campaigns

Government efforts to promote digital literacy and public awareness through media campaigns have been initiated; however, their impact has been limited. The study found that these campaigns are often sporadic, lack consistency, and fail to reach all segments of the population—especially those in peri-urban and rural areas. There is an urgent need for sustained and targeted public education efforts. A good example to emulate is Kisii University, where KII-5 indicated that the University has initiated a campaign to educate students about the dangers of fake news and the importance of verifying online content. Through a campaign called “Think, Reflect, Post”. The campaign encourages young people to consider the content of a post, reflect on its potential impact, and then decide whether to post or not. KII-5 indicated that, as it is, most youths will post before reflecting or thinking about the consequences of their action.

Figure 4.16 also shows a similar trend, thus emphasising the importance of awareness campaigns and public awareness. The purple line illustrates the connection between perceived governance effectiveness and digital literacy, indicating that respondents with stronger digital literacy skills are more likely to comprehend and trust governance instruments due to their ability to fact-check policies and understand the nature and trends in FMD. Policy makers can do more to enhance awareness campaigns and invest in digital education as a way of improving public perception of governance issues.

Figure 4.16: Predicted Governance Effectiveness by Digital Literacy



4.5.3 Inter-Agency Coordination

As part of the governance instruments in combating FMD, the government also enacted the National Computer and Cybercrimes Coordination Committee (NC4) on 4 November 2021. The Committee comprises representatives from the Kenya Defence Forces, the National Police Service, the National Intelligence Service, the Ministry of the Interior, as well as representatives from the Office of the Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecutions, Communications Authority of Kenya and the Central Bank, among other agencies and is aimed at. However, due to the absence of a clear mandate for policing cyberspace, the NC4, despite its immense capabilities, cannot effectively perform this role. KII 12 highlighted this shortcoming,

“The NC4, as currently constituted, is more of an ad hoc committee; it has capabilities to mitigate the spread of FMD, but cannot execute this role due to a lack of legal backing”

A key challenge identified is the poor coordination among various government agencies responsible for information dissemination and regulation. Overlapping responsibilities and inconsistent messaging have led to confusion among the public. Improved inter-agency collaboration is essential for developing a unified response to misinformation. One key example given by both KII-3 and KII-4 is the issue of devolution. While health is a devolved function, the transition from NHIF to SHA affects both levels of government. Disjointed coordination between these two levels has exacerbated the infiltration of FMD in the rollout and success or otherwise of the new medical scheme.

Participants in FGD-1 went further, arguing that synergy among government offices is crucial for

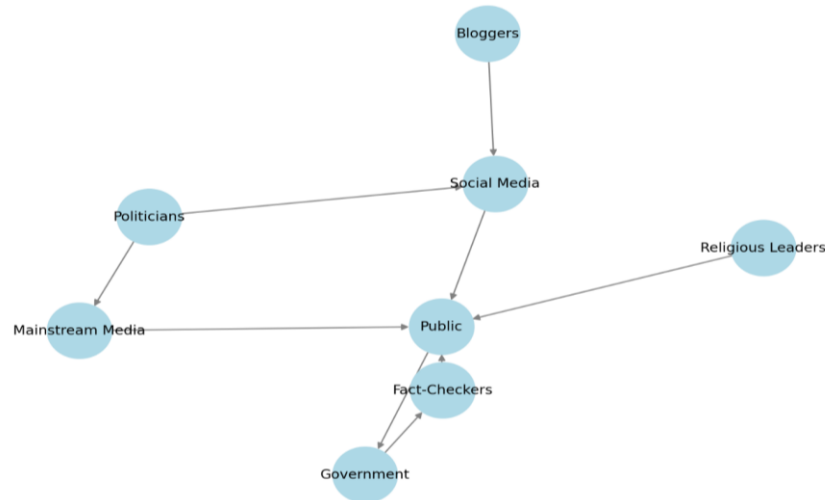
understanding the implications of various policies. For example, NGAO is the coordinating machinery for all government ministries and agencies at the local level. However, the technical expertise is housed in the various agencies. Therefore, it is prudent that NGAO, as the face of government, is adequately capable of commenting and elaborating on all these policies in conjunction with the parent departments. Just as they are expected to inform the general public and conduct public participation, they need to have in-depth sensitisation sessions with agencies implementing various policies to gain a deeper understanding of the issues they are expected to comment on.

4.5.4 Technological Interventions

Despite advances in digital forensic analysis and fact-checking tools, the sheer volume and rapid spread of fake news continue to overwhelm existing systems. The study suggests that technology-based solutions are more effective when integrated with traditional media oversight and proactive government communication strategies. Most social media tech companies used in Africa, particularly in Kenya, are based outside the continent. It can be challenging to engage them in content moderation to filter FMD. Most of these tech companies will hide behind “freedom of speech” as per their home country laws (especially United States of America-based companies), to reject the African government’s requests for moderation of content on their social media platforms.

Another identified challenge is the lack of capacity in Artificial Intelligence training by government enforcement agencies. KII-3 acknowledged that, in certain instances, government officials may struggle to distinguish between deep-fakes and factual information, which can hinder their capacity to manage FMD effectively. The relationship map (Figure 4.17) illustrates how fake news spreads among actors. Social media, politicians, bloggers, and mainstream media critically disseminate misinformation, ultimately influencing the public's perception of governance. Fact-checkers and government efforts to curb misinformation are also highlighted in the network. The public gets fed information from social media, traditional media and religious leaders. Social media, on the other hand, gets its information from bloggers and politicians (who also feed mainstream media with information). This shows how, primarily, the recipients of data from these various sources are the public, who then face a challenge in discerning which is factual and which is fake news.

Figure 4.17: Relationship Map: Spread of Fake News



4.6 Proposed Interventions to Mitigate FMD in Kenya

Finally, the study mapped recommended interventions. Figure 4.18 presents a heatmap of simulated coding intensity for intervention categories by county. Key strategies (from our five-pronged framework) include platform reforms, media literacy, civic engagement (forums/dialogues), legal enforcement, and traditional media guidelines. For instance, Nairobi and Kilifi show high intensity in “Platform Reform” (fact-checker integration and AI tools) and “Media Literacy” (targeting youth). Figure 4.18 then plots these interventions’ support ratings (1–5) by county as clustered bars. This highlights, for example, strong support in Kakamega and Nairobi for “Media Literacy” and “Platform Reform,” reflecting calls for local fact-checker integration and youth training. The code below generates these figures.

Figure 4.18: Preferred interventions per county

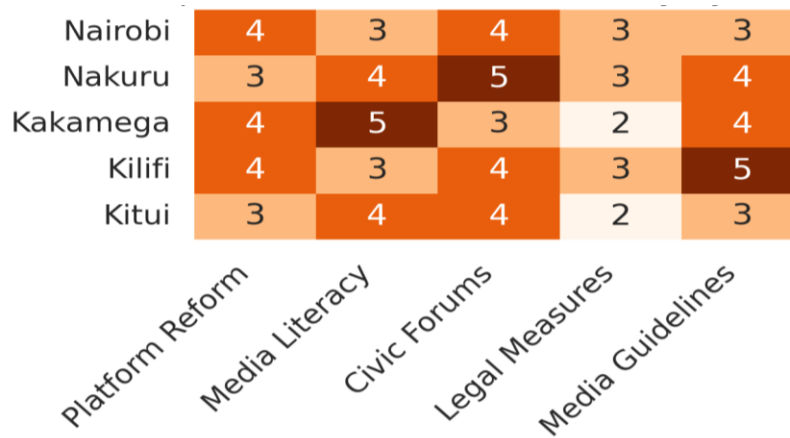
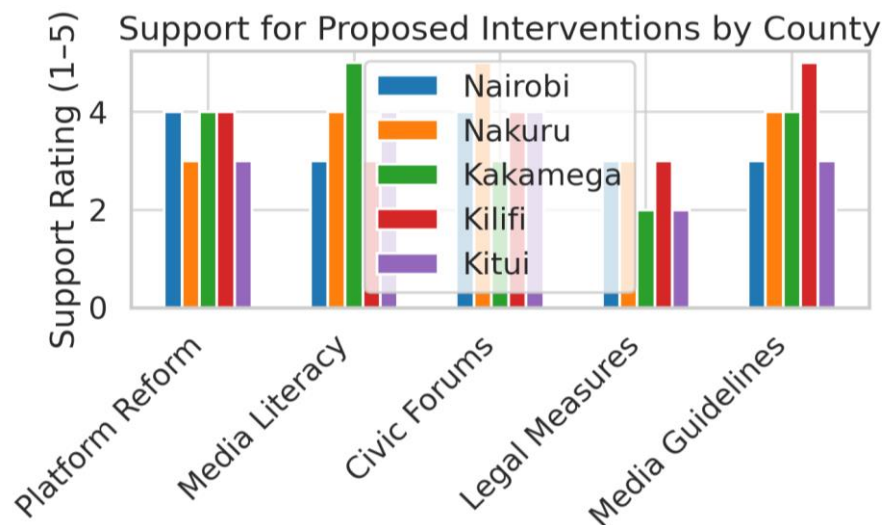


Figure 4.18: Coding intensity of recommended interventions by county (darker = more emphasis).

Figure 4.19: Mean support ratings (1–5) for these interventions by county. Nairobi, Kakamega, and Kilifi show notably high support for fact-check integration and media literacy forums, reflecting the need for proactive platform reforms and community engagement.



4.6.1 Expand and Target Digital Literacy Campaigns on FMD

Education was the single most consistent predictor of lower susceptibility to fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD) in this study. Regression results showed that each additional level of education reduced the odds of believing or sharing FMD by approximately 40% (Odds Ratio = 0.60, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, respondents with tertiary education were 35% less likely to endorse or disseminate false information compared to those with only primary schooling. This highlights the critical role of formal

education in developing scepticism, critical thinking, and evaluative reasoning—skills that are essential for navigating complex information environments.

Target Group	Rationale	Recommended Modality
Youth (18–24)	High social media use, low filtering skills	School curriculum integration
Rural adults	High radio use, low education levels	Radio-based literacy programs
Older population (45+)	Less digital exposure but vulnerable to word-of-mouth FMD	Community barazas and workshops
Informal sector workers	Often rely on WhatsApp groups for information	Mobile-based prompts

Table 4.20: Recommended Focus Areas for Digital Literacy Interventions

As one media expert explained, “A lot of people forward messages without understanding. If they had more critical thinking skills, things would be different.” – KII 09, Media Expert, Nairobi. This observation aligns with broader scholarship on media effects, which emphasises that exposure without interpretive capacity heightens vulnerability to disinformation.

However, it is crucial to note that while higher education and media literacy reduce susceptibility, digital literacy alone does not significantly lower exposure to FMD. Our correlation analysis revealed no strong relationship between a respondent’s self-reported digital skills and their likelihood of encountering fake news ($r \approx 0.012$). This implies that being digitally proficient—knowing how to use devices or access the internet—is not sufficient protection. Instead, it must be coupled with the ability to evaluate content, detect manipulation, and critically question sources.

Therefore, we propose a dual-focus intervention strategy: combine technical digital literacy (e.g., using apps, setting privacy controls, verifying authorship) with critical media literacy (e.g., recognising emotional framing, identifying logical fallacies, understanding algorithms). This strategy must also be targeted demographically and geographically. For instance, rural adults—who have high reliance on oral media—may require radio-based interventions, while youth may benefit from school-based or gamified learning tools.

Policy frameworks such as the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and the Digital Literacy Programme should be strengthened to include FMD resilience modules. Equally, adult education programs and TVETs should incorporate training on misinformation awareness. Only a layered, context-sensitive approach can

build the cognitive defences required to resist FMD in Kenya’s dynamic media environment.

Policy implication: Government and CSOs must co-develop regional digital literacy curricula that go beyond device usage to tackle propaganda, source credibility, and emotional manipulation.

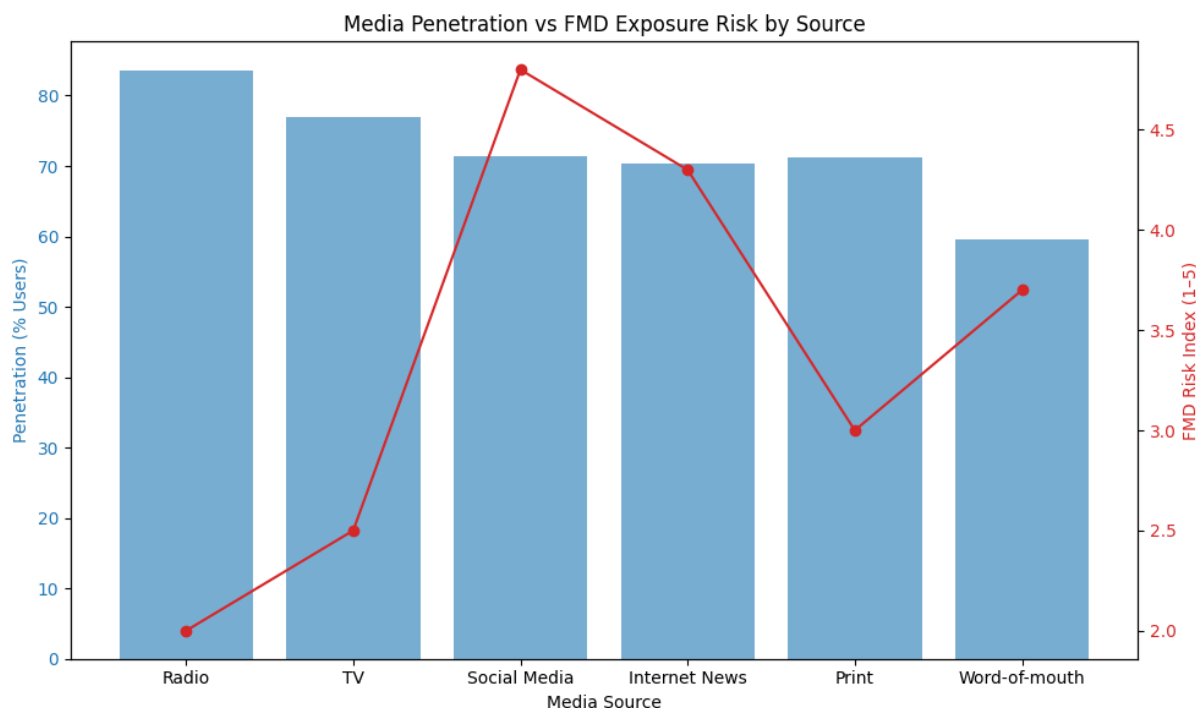
4.6.2 Leverage Radio and Local Media as Resilient Frontlines

While social media is the most prominent driver of FMD exposure—reflected in a strong positive correlation between social media usage and fake news encounters ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$)—traditional media such as radio (83.5%) and television (77.0%) remain the most accessed sources of information for most Kenyans. This dual media ecology suggests that although digital platforms spread disinformation quickly, radio and TV remain trusted, high-reach communication channels that can serve as frontline tools in counter-FMD efforts.

As echoed in one focus group discussion: *“In my area, people believe what they hear on the radio more than what they see online.”* – FGD, Kilifi County. This trust, particularly in vernacular and community radio stations, provides a unique opportunity to embed factual, verified content into mainstream media routines.

Figure 4.20 below illustrates a critical insight: despite the dominance of social media as a source of disinformation, it is not the most widely used medium. Instead, channels like radio and TV combine high penetration with lower FMD risk, making them ideal vectors for delivering trusted corrective information.

Figure 4.20: Media Penetration vs FMD Exposure Risk by Source



To capitalise on this advantage, a multi-pronged strategy is recommended where governments partner with local radio stations to create short, recurring segments that debunk viral fake news, using clear and culturally relevant language. Also, collaborate with initiatives like *i-Verify*, *PesaCheck*, and the Media Council of Kenya to train presenters and producers in basic fact-checking methods and content curation.

Government can also develop media toolkits for rural-based broadcasters, enabling them to report responsibly during elections, pandemics, and emergencies—periods when FMD spikes. This approach not only counters misinformation at the source but also rebuilds trust in media institutions and reduces public dependence on unregulated digital platforms. Radio, in particular, remains a lifeline in low-connectivity areas. Integrating anti-FMD messaging into local broadcast ecosystems can achieve national scale and impact with minimal infrastructure investment.

4.6.3 Embed Fact-Checking in High-Use Digital Platforms

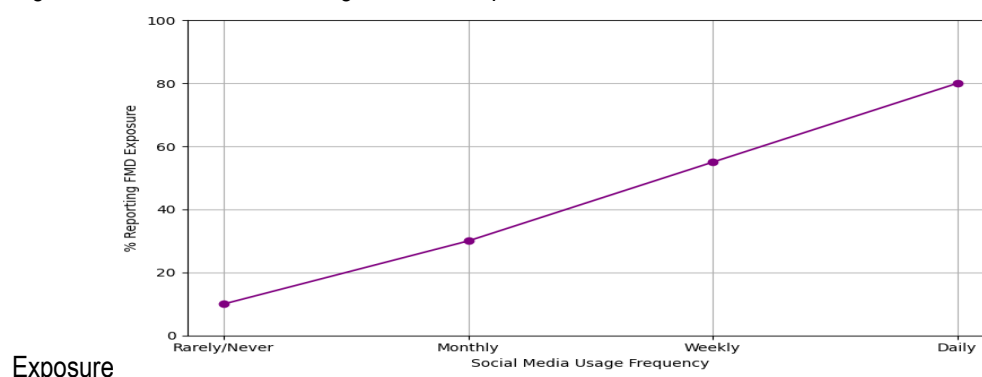
Although fact-checking efforts in Kenya—led by organisations such as *PesaCheck*, *i-Verify*, and *Africa Check*—have gained visibility in policy and media circles, their reach and effectiveness remain limited among the general public. In our survey, respondents rated fact-checking initiatives relatively well (mean score of 3.3 out of 5), but only 47% considered them “effective” in combating misinformation. This gap

between perception and perceived impact suggests a lack of integration within the platforms where misinformation thrives.

As one respondent observed: *“I hear about fact-checkers, but I’ve never seen one on my feed.”* – KII 12, Youth Leader, Nakuru. This sentiment captures a broader structural challenge: fact-checking systems operate outside the spaces where fake news circulates most intensively—namely, social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Empirical data from our study show that exposure to FMD increases linearly with the frequency of social media use, as visualised in Figure 4.20. Daily users reported 80% exposure, compared to just 10% among those who rarely used social platforms.

Figure 4. 20: Social Media Usage vs. Self-Reported FMD



(Line graph showing sharp positive trend: from 10% to 80% across usage categories)

This exposure gradient illustrates a clear opportunity for intervention. To reduce misinformation at scale, fact-checking mechanisms must be embedded directly into these digital environments, not hosted externally or passively shared. Content flagged by algorithms or user reports should immediately trigger:

- Contextual warning labels, ideally in local languages;
- Pop-up fact-check cards, linking users to verified sources;
- Redirects to Kenyan fact-checking platforms like i-Verify when flagged keywords or hashtags appear in posts.

By shifting from reactive fact-checking to embedded, proactive verification tools, Kenya can better insulate its information ecosystem from the viral spread of falsehoods and manipulative narratives.

4.6.4 Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Legal Enforcement

Kenya has enacted several legal and regulatory frameworks aimed at combating the spread of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD), including provisions within the Kenya Information and Communications Act (KICA), the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, and guidelines enforced by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) and the Media Council of Kenya (MCK). However, enforcement remains weak, fragmented, and inconsistently applied across platforms and jurisdictions. *“We have the laws, but they’re not enforced. Nobody is ever prosecuted,”* KII 03 in Nairobi argued.

This sentiment was echoed across both urban and rural interviews, revealing a widespread perception of regulatory impotence. Quantitative findings reinforce this concern: respondents rated regulatory efforts at a moderate 3.0 to 3.1 out of 5 in effectiveness, with only 38–41% considering these governance tools effective. The highest level of confidence was in civil society-led fact-checking and NGO initiatives (47%), not formal state mechanisms.

Instrument	Mean Rating (1–5)	% Saying “Effective” (4–5)
CAK & media regulatory laws	3.0	38%
Police/legal enforcement	3.1	41%
NGO fact-checking efforts	3.3	47%

Table 4.11: Respondent Ratings of Governance Countermeasures

Respondents also expressed concerns about the politicisation of enforcement—where regulations are allegedly applied more stringently against critics or opposition voices than against mainstream misinformation. This undermines public confidence and fosters a belief that laws exist more for control than protection.

To reverse this trend, the Kenyan government must professionalise and depoliticise FMD enforcement mechanisms. Key actions include establishing an independent misinformation enforcement unit under CAK with prosecutorial powers, empowering the judiciary to fast-track FMD-related cases under a public interest mandate, requiring transparency reports from platforms operating in Kenya, disclosing enforcement actions and algorithmic content decisions and strengthening inter-agency coordination between MCK, CAK, DCI, and the Office of the Attorney General. Additionally, NC4 can be given legal backing to track and sensor

FMD content, or in other words, ‘police cyberspace’.

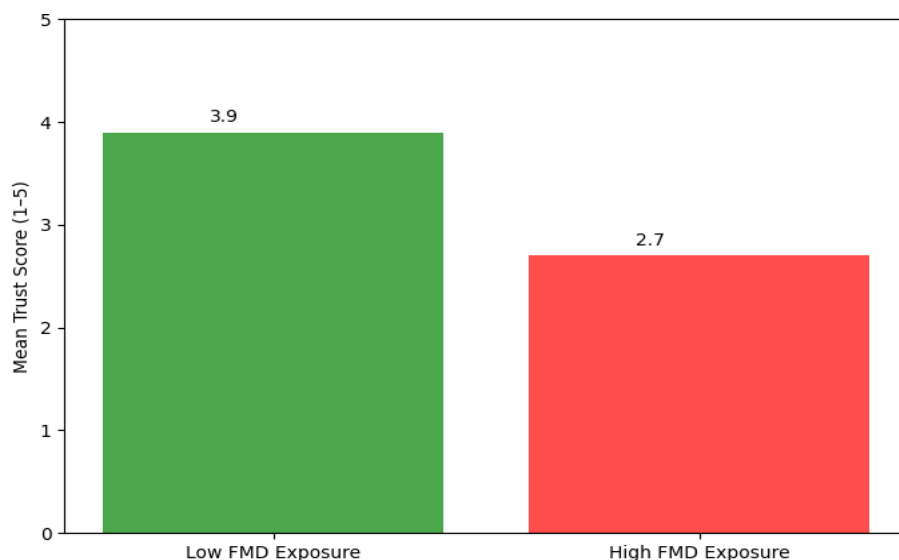
Without robust, impartial enforcement, even the most progressive legal frameworks will fail to curb the societal and political harms of misinformation. Legal reforms must be coupled with institutional integrity and accountability to win back public trust and deter high-impact disinformation actors.

4.6.5 Rebuild Trust Through Civic Engagement and Participatory Dialogue

One of the most alarming findings in this study is the strong negative correlation between FMD exposure and trust in government institutions. Respondents with high exposure to fake news reported significantly lower levels of institutional trust—a mean score of 2.7 compared to 3.9 among low-exposure groups ($p = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$). This underscores that misinformation does more than mislead; it erodes the very foundations of democratic legitimacy. *“If you don’t trust the government, you won’t believe anything it says – real or fake.”* – KII 01intimated.

As illustrated in Figure 4.21, this inverse relationship is both statistically significant and socially consequential. The decline in trust was particularly pronounced in counties with recent political unrest or governance scandals—suggesting that FMD compounds pre-existing frustrations and narratives of state failure.

Figure 4.22: FMD Exposure vs. Trust in Governance (Grouped Means)



(Bar chart – Mean trust scores: 3.9 for low exposure vs. 2.7 for high exposure groups)

Addressing this trust deficit requires more than just fact-checking or digital literacy campaigns. What is needed is meaningful public engagement that re-establishes government credibility through transparency, dialogue, and shared problem-solving.

We recommend the establishment of “truth dialogues” in high-FMD exposure counties such as Nairobi, Kilifi, and Kakamega. These would serve as participatory platforms where government officials, civil society actors, media representatives, and citizens engage in open forums to:

- Debunk high-profile misinformation cases and clarify public confusion;
- Facilitate citizen feedback on government communication practices, media laws, and regulatory actions;
- Promote transparency by allowing citizens to question public officials in moderated spaces.

These forums should be co-hosted by respected local figures—such as religious leaders, elders, youth influencers, and human rights organisations—to ensure inclusivity and legitimacy. Lessons can be drawn from successful public dialogue models used in constitutional and transitional justice processes in Kenya, where truth-telling played a role in reconciliation and accountability.

Ultimately, combating FMD is not only about stopping lies—it’s about restoring belief in the truth when told by legitimate institutions. Participatory trust-building is therefore both a prevention strategy and a democratic imperative.

4.6.6 Targeted Interventions by Demographic Risk Profiles

Demographic analysis from this study reveals significant variation in susceptibility to fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD) across key groups. A multivariate logistic regression model (Table 10) showed that lower levels of education and being male were statistically significant predictors of higher FMD susceptibility. Specifically, respondents with lower educational attainment were significantly more likely to believe or share false information (Odds Ratio = 0.60, $p < 0.001$), while male respondents were 20% more likely than females to fall for or spread FMD content (OR = 1.20, $p = 0.03$). Neither age nor income emerged as significant once education was controlled for.

These patterns suggest that structural inequities in educational access and gendered social dynamics play a central role in shaping vulnerability to misinformation. As one discussant in Kakamega noted: “*Men here*

argue politics with confidence—but often from WhatsApp rumours.” – FGD, Kakamega. This reflects a broader phenomenon of overconfidence in political or digital literacy among men, which contrasts with women’s more cautious, yet often more accurate, assessments of online content.

Variable	Odds Ratio (OR)	Significance
Education	0.60	$p < 0.001$
Gender (Male)	1.20	$p = 0.03$
Age	Not Significant	
Income	Not Significant	

Table 4.12: Demographic Predictors of FMD Susceptibility

Given these insights, interventions must be tailored to risk-prone demographic profiles, especially less-educated male youth who dominate political discourse in both online and offline spaces.

Proposed Strategy:

- Prioritise critical thinking and rumour verification training within youth empowerment programs, especially those targeting young men in counties with high FMD exposure.
- Expand adult education and community learning programs to include media scepticism and digital literacy modules tailored for low-literacy environments.
- Design gender-sensitive campaigns that empower women to act as information gatekeepers in families and communities, while also acknowledging their often under-reported media literacy strengths.

By focusing on those statistically more susceptible, Kenya can build targeted cognitive resilience—ensuring interventions are not only efficient but equitable in scope and delivery.

4.6.7 Institutionalize Early Warning and Rapid Response Systems

In today’s hyper-connected media environment, misinformation spreads with the speed and unpredictability of a contagion—often outpacing institutional responses. Drawing on models from disaster risk management and public health surveillance, we propose the institutionalisation of a Fake News Early Warning and Response Network in Kenya. This system would proactively detect and respond to disinformation threats,

particularly during high-risk periods such as elections, pandemics, and national crises. *“Disinformation spreads fast. Government responses are too slow.”* – KII 11, Nairobi.

The urgency of this proposal is reinforced by empirical evidence from this study: the rapid spread of FMD via social media platforms (particularly WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook) and its strong correlation with declining trust in institutions ($\rho = -0.42$). Current regulatory approaches are reactive and siloed, making it challenging to counter viral falsehoods before they cause real-world harm.

Proposed Structure of FNEWARN (FMD Early Warning)

- *County-Level Nodes:* Each county would host a local “disinformation observatory,” ideally embedded in an existing civil society organisation (e.g., *Haki Africa* in Kilifi, *MidRift Hurinet* in Nakuru). These nodes would monitor emerging patterns of misinformation using keyword triggers, geotagged incidents, and community reporting hotlines.
 - *Real-Time Monitoring:* Use machine learning and content scraping tools to track viral keywords, hashtags, or trending voice notes—especially those spreading across encrypted platforms.
 - *Multi-Channel Alerts:* Upon detection, nodes would issue rapid alerts via WhatsApp bots, local FM radio, community loudspeakers, and TikTok—ensuring accessibility in both digital and low-connectivity areas.
 - *Regulatory Coordination:* Collaborate with national oversight bodies like the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) and the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) to escalate verified disinformation incidents for potential takedown, rebuttal, or legal action.

FNEWARN would function as both a preventive and corrective mechanism, helping citizens distinguish falsehoods early while empowering local actors to respond quickly. Its decentralised model ensures responsiveness to context-specific misinformation while feeding into a national intelligence hub on FMD trends.

Such a system is not merely technical—it is a democratic infrastructure for information integrity. By embedding early detection at the grassroots, Kenya can build long-term resilience against information disorder.

4.6.8 Integrate Media Ethics into Education and Professional Training

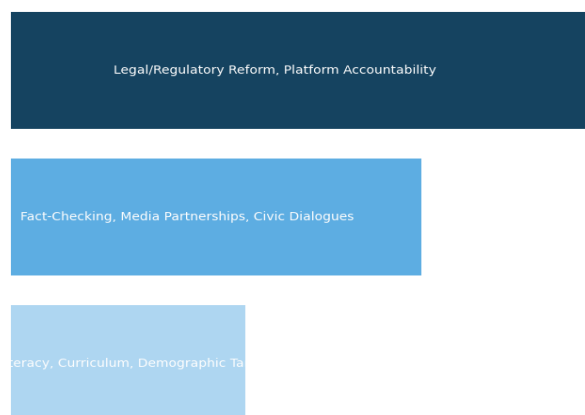
For Kenya to achieve long-term resilience against fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD), it is imperative to institutionalise FMD literacy through education and professional standards. Misinformation is not merely a content problem—it reflects structural gaps in how society educates its citizens, trains its journalists, and prepares public servants to communicate truthfully and transparently. *“Our journalists are trained in storytelling, but not in verification. It’s a problem.”* – KII 07 affirmed.

This critique highlights a fundamental challenge: despite the emphasis on storytelling and narrative skills in journalism and communication training, verification, ethics, and fact-checking are often relegated to secondary or optional status. The same applies to public servants, who are increasingly responsible for managing information flows but usually lack formal exposure to digital risks and FMD detection.

A Multi-Level Strategy to Combat FMD in Kenya

The findings of this nationwide study reaffirm that fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD) are not simply media distortions—they are profound governance threats that distort public reasoning, weaken state legitimacy, and fragment democratic consensus. From exposure patterns and susceptibility predictors to enforcement gaps and trust erosion, FMD operates at multiple levels of the Kenyan political, social, and technological ecosystem. Addressing such a complex challenge requires more than a piecemeal or reactive approach. Instead, Kenya must adopt a holistic, multi-level strategy that coordinates efforts across institutions, communities, digital platforms, and education systems. As visualised in Figure 4, this strategy can be conceptualised as a governance pyramid with three interlinked tiers.

Figure 4.22: Multi-Level Strategy to Combat FMD in Kenya



(Pyramid Diagram with Three Layers)

Top Layer – Legal and Regulatory Reform & Platform Accountability

At the apex, Kenya must strengthen its legal enforcement mechanisms, depoliticise regulatory institutions, and compel global tech platforms to comply with localised misinformation safeguards. Laws are necessary—but without credible enforcement and platform integration, their impact is limited.

Middle Layer – Fact-Checking, Media Partnerships, Civic Dialogues. This level involves expanding and institutionalising collaborative interventions—like co-producing content with trusted media outlets, integrating fact-checkers into public radio, and organising participatory “truth dialogues” in FMD-prone counties. These interventions rebuild trust and activate civil society as an information firewall.

Base Layer – Digital/Media Literacy, Curriculum Integration, Demographic Targeting

The foundation of any sustainable anti-FMD strategy lies in cognitive resilience. This includes integrating media literacy in the school curriculum, training public servants and journalists, and targeting high-risk groups—especially male youth and less-educated populations—with tailored critical-thinking programs.

This pyramid model emphasises sequencing and complementarity: without grassroots literacy, top-level laws falter; without enforcement, literacy lacks reach. Kenya’s path forward must be rooted in multi-stakeholder coordination, long-term capacity building, and inclusive civic engagement. By institutionalising this three-tiered strategy, Kenya not only reduces the harm caused by FMD today but also lays the groundwork for a more informed, resilient, and democratic society in the future.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the proliferation of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD) in Kenya presents a clear and persistent threat to the country's governance, democratic integrity, and social cohesion. This study set out to explore four critical dimensions of this phenomenon: the drivers of FMD in Kenya, its impact on governance, the effectiveness of existing governance instruments, and community-driven proposals for interventions. Using a mixed-method approach across five counties, including extensive surveys, FGDs, and key informant interviews, the study has yielded significant empirical and theoretical insights. The findings confirm that social media and digital platforms are the primary vectors for FMD, facilitated by weak digital literacy, economic incentives, political manipulation, and inadequate government communication. These drivers create fertile ground for false narratives to thrive—eroding public trust, polarising communities, distorting policy debates, and undermining institutional legitimacy.

Moreover, FMD was found to have tangible effects on the public's perception of government efficacy, particularly during critical policy rollouts or elections. Citizens exposed to high volumes of FMD reported significantly lower levels of trust in institutions, while some policy initiatives were actively resisted or misinterpreted due to circulating disinformation. The disjointed nature of official communication and the reactive posture of regulatory bodies further exacerbate this vulnerability. While Kenya possesses some legal and institutional mechanisms to address FMD, these remain underutilised or inadequately enforced. At the same time, communities express a strong appetite for localised, practical, and literacy-based interventions to mitigate the harms of disinformation. Taken together, the findings suggest that Kenya must adopt a multi-pronged and context-sensitive strategy to address FMD—one that combines legal reform, platform accountability, civic empowerment, proactive government communication, and sustained community engagement. Each of the four thematic objectives is examined below in detail.

5.1.1 Drivers of FMD in Kenya

The study identifies digital platforms, particularly social media, as the predominant drivers of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation (FMD) in Kenya, alongside low digital/media literacy, political motives, economic incentives, and weak government communication structures. The rise in mobile internet usage—now over 90% penetration—and the prevalence of encrypted apps like WhatsApp and content-driven

platforms like TikTok have enabled rapid, largely unregulated spread of FMD. Regression data from the survey revealed that frequent social media use significantly increased susceptibility to FMD, especially among youth and less educated respondents. Moreover, economic desperation—especially among unemployed youth—was found to correlate with the willingness to spread disinformation for monetary gain.

Notably, the study reveals a troubling misalignment between public policy announcements and implementation timelines, which fuels mistrust and enables FMD to thrive. Delays in information dissemination and contradictory government messaging at both county and national levels create an environment conducive to speculation, thereby further catalysing FMD. Psychological and sociotechnical factors, including confirmation bias, emotional resonance, and algorithmic amplification, compound the challenge. Local influencers, bots, and even foreign actors—using digital disinformation as a soft-power tactic—were identified as part of this complex ecosystem.

In sum, the proliferation of FMD in Kenya is not accidental but a consequence of systemic digital, political, and economic vulnerabilities. Without structural interventions, these drivers will continue to erode Kenya's democratic fabric and weaken its governance institutions.

5.1.2 Impact of FMD on Governance in Kenya

The impact of FMD on governance in Kenya is both profound and multidimensional. Empirical data from across countries demonstrate that exposure to FMD correlates with decreased public trust in government institutions, reduced policy compliance, heightened social tensions, and delayed development initiatives. Quantitative findings show that respondents with high exposure to FMD scored significantly lower on institutional trust metrics (2.7 vs. 3.9) and expressed strong scepticism toward key government initiatives like the Social Health Authority (SHA), Affordable Housing Programme (AHP), and CBC education reforms.

Social and political polarisation—especially during elections and ethnic conflicts—was identified as a critical consequence of FMD. For example, disinformation surrounding the Kisii-Narok border dispute exacerbated inter-communal tensions. Similarly, local disinformation about "witchcraft" has led to violent community-level incidents, revealing how FMD distorts perceptions and undermines the rule of law.

The study also found that misinformation hampers policy implementation, especially where government messaging is unclear or delayed. FMD creates public resistance to initiatives even when they serve the

national interest. This resistance is often further fueled by political operatives, bloggers, and influencers whose goal is to delegitimise opponents or exploit public ignorance.

Ultimately, FMD damages Kenya's governance by eroding legitimacy, obstructing policy rollout, destabilising civic cohesion, and reducing public engagement. If left unchecked, it risks discrediting democratic institutions and enabling authoritarian tendencies under the guise of "order."

5.1.3 Effectiveness of Governance Instruments in Mitigating FMD

The study reveals a mixed assessment of the existing governance instruments in Kenya meant to counter FMD. Legal frameworks such as the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (2018) have criminalised deliberate disinformation, but enforcement has been inconsistent and sometimes overreaching, raising concerns over free expression. Public perception scores for current legal instruments hovered around moderate levels (~3.0), indicating a lack of confidence in both their efficacy and fairness.

Interview data suggests a disconnect between policy intent and grassroots implementation. Many county and national officers lack the necessary training, resources, and communication protocols to respond effectively to FMD. The study also finds that while civil society-led fact-checking (e.g., PesaCheck, Africa Check) is more trusted, it lacks scale and reach, especially in rural areas.

The regulatory environment remains fragmented. Multiple agencies (e.g., CAK, NCIC) share overlapping mandates, leading to inefficiencies. Moreover, government communication has often been reactive, allowing FMD to circulate unchecked during critical periods. Delays in data publication, as seen with IEBC election results or public health policies, further worsen public cynicism.

Despite these weaknesses, the introduction of the NCIC's Draft Code of Practice and efforts by civil society offer promising pathways. However, Kenya's governance toolkit needs modernisation—incorporating algorithmic oversight, co-regulatory frameworks with platforms, and robust digital literacy programs.

In conclusion, existing governance instruments are insufficiently agile, underfunded, and inconsistently applied—necessitating a comprehensive, multi-sectoral upgrade.

5.1.4 Community Perceptions on Interventions

The study found that Kenyan communities are not passive consumers of disinformation but are eager for proactive, culturally relevant interventions. Through FGDs and KIs, respondents across all five counties emphasised the importance of timely and transparent government communication and enhanced civic education. They trusted community voices (elders, religious leaders) in countering FMD.

Community-based strategies such as digital barazas and Community Digital Champions were frequently cited as effective. Programs like KICTANet's Digital Literacy Outreach and MAPEMA's AI monitoring initiative during the 2022 elections were praised for their local relevance and practical outcomes. Participants underscored that top-down legal or technical measures alone are insufficient: grassroots involvement and vernacular communication channels are critical for trust-building and behavioural change.

Significantly, the study recorded strong demand for more media literacy in schools, churches, and community groups. Youth respondents called for mobile apps that verify viral content, while elders preferred regular civic forums. There was also substantial support for collaborative fact-checking networks between local radio, schools, CSOs, and county offices.

In essence, communities are not unaware—they are under-equipped. When empowered with the right tools, training, and information, citizens can become the frontline defence against disinformation. The study concludes that the public favours multi-pronged interventions grounded in cultural context, language relevance, and local agency.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

5.2.1 Strengthen Coordinated Government Communication and Public Trust-Building.

Public trust is a precondition for democracy. Kenya must invest in clear, consistent, and culturally grounded communication to restore confidence in governance. FMD thrives where public trust falters. To rebuild this trust, the government must adopt a proactive, transparent, and inclusive communication strategy. Public communication should shift from reactive clarifications to anticipatory engagement. Ministries should deliver rapid updates via multi-channel platforms, including WhatsApp, SMS, and vernacular radio. For example, the IEBC's raw data portals during elections should be accompanied by visual summaries and FAQs to avoid misinterpretation. Similarly, public health and finance ministries must maintain verified social media handles (with visible checkmarks) and provide multilingual updates during crises.

Recommendations include developing government "Crisis Comms Protocols" for digital rumours, training NGAO officers to be the face of government in proactive messaging, establishing a central government dashboard on disinformation threats, and launching national campaigns that equate truth-telling with patriotism. The government should revitalize with an aim of streamlining government communication from the national to the county level. Adequate staff should be deployed at all levels to lead the line in giving timely, factual and coordinated government positions on policies as well as all initiatives. The officers should take advantage of social media, public barazas, as well as vernacular radio and television stations in specific regions of Kenya. The NGAO should be incorporated as part of this state machinery due to its role as the face of government at both the regional and local levels.

5.2.2 Elimination of Government Policy Lag

A key enabler of FMDs in Kenya is the policy implementation lag—the time gap between the announcement of government decisions and their actual execution or communication to implementing entities and the public. This delay often creates an information vacuum that allows speculation, distortion, and mistrust to thrive. To address this challenge, the Government should adopt a Whole-of-Government Communication and Delivery Framework designed to synchronize policy formulation, dissemination, and execution across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), county governments, training institutions, and administrative structures. The framework should be anchored on the following best practices:

Integrated Policy Communication System:

Establish a centralized digital policy communication and monitoring platform under the Government Delivery Unit (GDU) to ensure that once a policy is announced, all MDAs, regional, and county offices receive simultaneous, clear, and actionable communication.

Time-Bound Implementation Protocols:

Introduce mandatory timelines for cascading policies from the national to grassroots levels, with regular status updates to the public through verified government channels such as the MyGov platform, official social media handles, and community outreach programs.

Stakeholder Engagement Framework:

Encourage continuous consultation and feedback loops between policymakers, implementers, and citizens to enhance transparency and accountability, using participatory platforms such as public barazas, citizen reporting portals, and county information centres.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:

Institutionalize a performance tracking system under the GDU to measure the timeliness and effectiveness of policy communication and implementation, and to identify areas prone to misinformation or bureaucratic delays. By operationalizing this Policy Communication and Delivery Framework, Kenya will minimize policy awareness gaps, improve inter-agency coordination, and foster citizen confidence in government institutions. Ultimately, this will reduce the susceptibility of the public information space to FMD, ensuring that accurate and timely information remains the cornerstone of governance.

5.2.3 Strengthen Multi-Agency, Multi-Sector ‘Whole of Government Approach’

The multi-agency approach to combating FMD in Kenya needs to be strengthened further. While various security agencies pursue a ‘silo approach’ to mitigating FMD, a concerted approach must be employed for any notable success. Currently, the KDF, DCI, NIS and other government security agencies each have their own way of combating FMD, leading to fragmented efforts and results. Efforts like the NC4 must be enhanced, given their clear mandate to police cyberspace and mitigate FMD in Kenya. This multi-agency approach should incorporate all security agencies as well as related civilian institutions that work in the information space within the republic.

To effectively mitigate the spread and impact of Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation (FMDs),

there is a need to institutionalize sensitization and training programs for government officers across all levels. These programs should focus on enhancing understanding of FMDs—covering their sources, characteristics, impact on national security and governance, and appropriate mitigation mechanisms. The Kenya School of Government (KSG), in collaboration with relevant agencies such as the National Defence University-Kenya (NDU-K) and law enforcement training institutions, should integrate modules on FMDs into existing capacity-building curricula. This will equip senior public officers, security personnel, and communication officers with the knowledge and practical skills to identify, counter, and respond effectively to misinformation and disinformation threats. Targeted and continuous professional development in this area will strengthen institutional resilience, promote responsible information management, and safeguard public trust in government communication.

5.2.4 Platform Accountability and Technological Solutions

Kenya must move toward co-regulation of digital platforms, emphasising accountability, data transparency, and locally contextual moderation. Rather than censoring platforms, the state should require them to adopt evidence-based systems that detect and reduce the spread of disinformation, much like the EU's Code of Practice on Disinformation or California's platform reporting laws.

First, Kenya should require major platforms operating within its borders (e.g., Meta, X, TikTok) to submit semi-annual transparency reports detailing content moderation policies, flagged content, and enforcement actions. The UK and New York State already require this, providing models to follow. Such reports should be reviewed by an independent multi-stakeholder board, including CSOs, journalists, and academia.

Second, platform algorithms must be scrutinised. Kenya should encourage the creation of a "Disinformation Transparency Centre" to monitor how algorithms amplify FMD. Tools like Meta's CrowdTangle and X's open APIs can assist. The government, in collaboration with academia, should also develop domestic tools, including AI classifiers for Swahili-language FMD, deepfake detection algorithms, and mobile verification apps.

Third, financial disincentives should be imposed on habitual FMD spreaders. Platforms must demonetise repeat offenders and flag political content with sponsor disclosures.

Globally, the US and Australia have used soft-power tactics (e.g., voluntary codes, advertising pressure) to

compel platform accountability. Kenya can pursue the same via industry partnerships with telecoms (e.g., Safaricom) and advertisers to cut revenue to FMD sites.

5.2.5 Deploy Tools, Technologies & Early Warning Systems

The defence of national sovereignty today extends beyond physical borders to include the protection of cyberspace, which has become a critical domain for safeguarding national security and public trust. To mitigate the threat of FMDs, Kenya's security and information management agencies to deploy advanced digital tools and technologies capable of detecting, analysing, and neutralising FMD activity in real time. The establishment of automated monitoring and analytics platforms—leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and social media intelligence—would enable proactive identification of emerging disinformation trends and coordinated responses. Beyond reactive removal of harmful content, these systems should support the development of early warning mechanisms that can forecast potential FMD incidents and facilitate timely countermeasures.

Integration of such capabilities within the national security architecture, will enhance institutional capacity to safeguard the information environment. Thus, investing in technological resilience and early warning systems will therefore not only reduce the impact of FMD but also strengthen Kenya's cyber defence posture, improve information integrity, and build public confidence in government communication systems.

5.2.6 Enhancement of Media and Digital Literacy for Citizens and Government Officers

Empowering communities to assess and reject FMD critically is the most sustainable long-term defence. Kenya must mainstream digital and media literacy across formal education, informal networks, and vernacular platforms. UNESCO's Global MIL Framework offers a blueprint: integrate critical thinking, source evaluation, and civic ethics into school curricula and public campaigns. Sensitization of government officers on government policy and FMD, sources, impact and mitigations mechanism. Trainings on FMD need to be included in training in government to capacity build senior on negative effects and how to respond to this topical issue. Targeted trainings can happen at each level in Kenya School of Government as well as officers at G1 and G2 courses within the KDF.

At the community level, digital "Community Champions" should be deployed in every county, trained in local languages and equipped with verification tools. Local radio, churches, and market barazas can host myth-busting sessions. Schools should reintroduce civic and ethics education with a focus on media literacy, similar to the US initiative for "civic resilience through media education." Another key example is the digital literacy campaign by Kisii University through the 'See, Reflect then Post' project. Through this, the

university sensitises its students that when they see or observe information, they should take a moment and gather the information, they should then reflect on it, which means they need to think deeply about what they have seen, including the consequences of this information if shared before lastly posting or sharing on their social media handles. In many instances, people tend to ‘see, post, then reflect’, which leads to the quick spread of FMD without critically analysing the piece of information being shared.

Success stories abound: India’s WhatsApp literacy campaigns reached rural women; Taiwan’s “fact-check chatbots” now assist users in evaluating news; and in Nigeria, the “Dubawa” initiative collaborates with local media houses to deliver real-time fact-checks. Key recommendations include implementing government-funded MIL programmes across all counties, partnering with CSOs like KICTANet, Internews, and Code for Africa for training, incentivising media outlets to broadcast literacy content in vernacular languages, and supporting grassroots digital clinics and community fact-checking hubs. Digital literacy on FMD is not merely a skill—it constitutes civic infrastructure. Kenya must regard it with the same urgency as roads or water.

5.2.7 Legal and Policy Reforms

An effective response to Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation (FMD) in Kenya requires a coherent and enforceable legal and policy framework. While the country already has legislation addressing cybercrime, hate speech, and media regulation, inconsistencies in enforcement and institutional coordination have limited their effectiveness. Strengthening implementation mechanisms and clarifying inter-agency roles are therefore critical to closing these gaps. Further, there is need to develop a comprehensive social media governance framework that establishes clear obligations for digital platforms operating in Kenya. Such a framework should cover licensing requirements, transparency in content moderation processes, and the prompt removal of content that violates established laws, particularly hate speech and incitement to violence. Importantly, these reforms must remain aligned with constitutional safeguards on freedom of expression and access to information to prevent potential misuse or overreach by regulatory bodies.

Lessons can be drawn from international best practices, such as Germany’s Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG), which mandates the removal of illegal online content within defined timelines and requires periodic transparency reports from technology companies. Although the Act has faced criticism for its potential to expand state control, its procedural precision offers valuable insights for Kenya in designing

balanced, transparent, and rights-respecting regulatory mechanisms. A well-calibrated legal and policy framework, supported by consistent enforcement, will not only deter the spread of FMD but also foster accountability, promote digital responsibility, and enhance public trust in the information environment.

5.2.8 Enhance Core Values in Education

The Ministry of Education needs to enhance implementation of core values of the 21st Century skills in education to learners throughout the country. It is important that values like patriotism to one's country are imparted and enhanced in learners in order to raise generations that love their country. Though these values are in the curriculum, they need to be implemented with more focus for desired results.

Below is an action matrix summarizing key policy recommendations and the responsible actors:

Implementation Action Matrix

S/No	Thematic Area	Actionable Strategies	Actor (s)
1.	Communication & Trust in Govt	Strengthening Govt communication & Trust building	Govt Spokesperson Ministry of Interior Delivery Unit
2.	Policy Implementation	Eliminate government policy lag from public pronouncement to execution	Government Delivery Unit
3.	WOSA	Strengthen WOGA, WOSA	Ministry of Interior Delivery Unit
4.	Tech-linked solutions	Platform Accountability & Tech Solutions Deploy Tools, Technologies & Early Warning Systems	Ministry of ICT NC4
5.	Digital Literacy	Enhancement of Media and Digital Literacy on FMD for Citizens	Ministry of Education Ministry of Interior
6.	Education	Enhance values in education -21 st Century skills (Patriotism)	Ministry of Education

If these recommendations are implemented, it is expected that the negative impacts of FMD on governance in Kenya will be reduced to a minimum. While eradicating FMD is next to impossible, dealing with it and limiting the negatives is a more feasible approach.

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Annex 1

Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on fake news and misinformation. Your expertise and insights are invaluable as we seek to understand the complex dynamics driving the spread of false information, its impacts on governance and community cohesion, and the effectiveness of current regulatory and intervention strategies. This interview is a crucial component of our research and is expected to last approximately 25 to 30 minutes. All information you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for academic research purposes. We appreciate your willingness to share your knowledge and experience to help shape more effective responses to the challenges posed by misinformation in our community.

NB: Recording & Notetaking: Inform the participant if the session is being audio-recorded for accuracy.

Section A: Participant Background

1. Role & Expertise

-Can you describe your current role in addressing misinformation/disinformation or governance in Kisii County?

-Probes: What are your key responsibilities? How do you collaborate with other stakeholders?

2. Experience Duration

-How long have you been actively involved in this field?

-Follow-Up: “Can you share a milestone or turning point in your experience?”

Section B: Drivers of Fake News

3. Primary Drivers

-In your expert opinion, what are the main factors that drive the spread of fake news in Kisii County

• Probes:

- Political motivations
- Economic incentives
- Digital literacy gaps
- Social media algorithms
- Additional local socio-cultural factors

Quantitative Rating: On a scale of 1 (minimal influence) to 5 (highly influential), how would you rate

each factor?

4. Cultural and Local Dynamics

-How do cultural norms, local traditions, or community dynamics in Kisii contribute to either mitigating or amplifying misinformation?

Probe: Ask for specific examples or local narratives.

Section C: Impacts on Governance

5. Institutional Trust

-How has fake news affected public trust in local institutions such as the county government, healthcare systems, and education?"

• **Quantitative Rating:** "Please rate the impact from 1 (no impact) to 5 (severe impact)."

6. Disruption & Policy Implementation

Can you share a specific instance where misinformation disrupted policy implementation or community cohesion?

• *Probes:*

What were the short-term and long-term consequences?

How was the situation resolved, if at all?

Section D: Governance Responses

7. Efficacy of Existing Measures

How effective are current legal frameworks (e.g., the Computer Misuse Act) and initiatives in Kisii at countering fake news?

• **Quantitative Rating:** Rate their effectiveness on a scale of 1 (ineffective) to 5 (highly effective).

8. Regulatory Gaps & Needs

-From your perspective, what critical gaps exist in Kenya’s regulatory framework for addressing misinformation?

- *Probes:* Inquire about areas like enforcement, cross-sector collaboration, or emerging tech challenges.

Section E: Interventions & Innovations

9. Recommended Strategies

-What strategies or interventions would you recommend in mitigating the spread of fake news in Kisii County?

- *Probes:*
 - Media literacy programs
 - Partnerships with tech companies
 - Community-based fact-checking initiatives

Quantitative Scale: On a scale of 1 (low priority) to 5 (high priority), please rate the potential impact of each strategy.

10. Engaging Local Influencers

How can traditional leaders, local influencers, or community gatekeepers be effectively engaged to counter misinformation?

- *Probes:* Ask for examples of successful engagement from other contexts or innovative approaches.

Closing the Interview

- **Summary & Feedback:** Summarize the key points raised and ask if there is anything else the participant would like to add.
- **Follow-Up & Contact:** Thank the participant and explain how findings will be shared if they are interested. Provide contact details for further questions or follow-up interviews.

Annex 2



NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY-KENYA THE PLACE OF FAKE NEWS, MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION ON GOVERNANCE IN KENYA Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for joining today's discussion. We are here to explore your experiences and perspectives on fake news and misinformation in our community. This session is a vital part of our research, and your insights will help us better understand how false information affects our daily lives and influences community trust and governance.

Our goal is to create an open and respectful space where everyone can share their thoughts freely. Please know that everything discussed here will remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. We encourage you to speak candidly, and we ask that you also listen respectfully to your fellow participants.

The session will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and it will be audio-recorded only for accuracy in data analysis. Your contributions are invaluable, and we truly appreciate your willingness to participate in this important conversation. Let's work together to shed light on these issues and explore potential solutions for a more informed and resilient community.

Icebreaker

Theme 1: Experiences with Fake News

Personal Encounters:

- Can you describe a situation where you or someone you know was misled by fake news?

- *Probes:* Discuss emotional reactions, community impact, and subsequent actions.

Subject Areas Affected:

- Which topics (e.g., politics, health, community affairs) seem most prone to misinformation in our community?

- *Probe:* Ask participants to share examples.

Theme 2: Social and Governance Impacts

Community-Leadership Dynamics:

- How does the prevalence of fake news affect the relationship between communities and local leaders?

- *Probes:* Explore impacts on trust and policy acceptance.

Influence on Civic Behaviour:

- Do you believe that misinformation influences voting behaviour or public policy support? Please elaborate.

- *Probe:* Ask for specific instances or perceived patterns.

Theme 3: Solutions and Innovative Interventions

Role of Education:

- What role can educational institutions and community programs play in improving media literacy

- *Probe:* Inquire about past experiences or successful models.

Engaging Influencers:

- How can local leaders, religious figures, or influencers help counter false narratives and foster critical thinking?

- *Probe:* Request suggestions on practical engagement strategies.

Closing the Discussion

Action Commitment:

- Before we conclude, can each participant share one concrete action they would be willing to take to combat fake news in our community?

- *Facilitator Note:* This final round not only reinforces key messages but also provides an actionable insight for follow-up.

Wrap-Up & Follow-Up:

- Summarize the key discussion points and thank the participants.

- Provide details on how they can receive updates or further participate in the study.

Annex 3

Questionnaire for the General Public

Assessing Experiences & Perceptions of Fake News, Misinformation, and Disinformation in Kenya

Introduction:

This survey aims to assess public experiences and perceptions regarding fake news, misinformation, and disinformation in Kenya. Your responses will be used strictly for research purposes and will remain anonymous. We appreciate your thoughtful participation.

Section A: Demographics

1. Age:
☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55+
2. Gender:
☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary/Prefer not to say
3. Level of Education:
☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary ☐ Postgraduate
4. Employment Status:
☐ Employed ☐ Unemployed ☐ Self-employed ☐ Student
5. Area of Residence:
☐ Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Rural

Section B: Media Consumption & Fake News Awareness

7. **How strongly do you agree that political leaders in Kenya intentionally spread fake news to influence public opinion?**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
8. **To what extent do you think social media algorithms contribute to the spread of fake news in Kenya?**
☐ Not at All ☐ Slightly ☐ Moderately ☐ Very Much ☐ Extremely
9. **What are your primary sources of news/information?**
(Tick all that apply)
☐ TV ☐ Radio ☐ Social Media ☐ Newspapers ☐ Online News ☐ Other: _____
10. **How frequent do you verify news/information before sharing?**
☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
11. **Have you ever encountered fake news?**
☐ Yes ☐ No
12. **Which type of fake news do you encounter most frequently?**
(Tick all that apply)
☐ Politics/Elections
☐ Health/Medical Information
☐ Economic/Financial Scams
☐ Crime/Security

- ☐ Social Issues
☐ Other: _____
13. **In your opinion, what is the primary motive behind fake news?**
 (Tick all that apply)
☐ Political Gain
☐ Financial Profit
☐ Ideological Influence
☐ Entertainment
☐ Social Manipulation
☐ Other: _____
14. **How much has fake news affected your trust in information from government officials?**
☐ No Impact ☐ Slight Impact ☐ Moderate Impact ☐ High Impact ☐ Severe Impact
15. **To what extent do you agree that misinformation has harmed Kenya's social cohesion?**
☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
16. **Do you think fake news affects governance and democracy?**
☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
17. **How frequent do you experience fake news online?**
☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
18. **Can you distinguish between real vs. fake news?**
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
19. **What is your primary source for governance-related information:**
☐ Government Websites ☐ Social Media ☐ News Websites ☐ Newspapers ☐ Word of Mouth ☐ Other: _____
20. **In your opinion, which issues do you think are the most affected by fake news:**
 (Tick all that apply)
☐ Politics & Elections
☐ Security & Terrorism
☐ Health & Pandemics
☐ Economy & Business
☐ Social Issues (e.g., Gender, Human Rights)
☐ Education
☐ Other: _____
21. **In your opinion, which periods have higher misinformation prevalence?**
 (Tick all that apply)
☐ During Elections
☐ During National Crises
☐ During Government Policy Announcements
☐ During Economic Downturns
☐ Other: _____
22. **Which social media platforms do you believe harbours the most fake news:**
 (Tick all that apply)
☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter/X ☐ WhatsApp ☐ TikTok ☐ Mainstream Media ☐ Other: _____
23. **Do you think AI plays a role in generating and spreading fake news?**
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

24. Which factors influence your trust when sourcing information?

(Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Credibility and Reputation
- ☐ Evidence of Fact-Checking
- ☐ Consistency with Other Sources
- ☐ Personal Familiarity with the Source
- ☐ Government Regulation
- ☐ Other: _____

25. Personal Experience with Fake News:

In your own words, briefly describe an experience when you encountered fake news and its impact on you.

Section C: Governance & Misinformation Perception

(Please indicate your level of agreement for each statement.)

22. Government institutions are doing enough to counter fake news.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

23. I find it difficult to distinguish between real and fake news on social media.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

24. Fake news has influenced my opinion on political matters.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

25. Social media platforms should take stronger action against misinformation.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

26. Fake news is a major problem affecting governance in Kenya.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

27. I actively check multiple sources before believing political news.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

28. Social networks such as family, workmates, and religious groups contribute to the spread of fake news.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

29. Current regulatory measures are adequate to combat fake news.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

30. I am confident in my ability to critically evaluate the news I consume.

- ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Section D: Solutions & Recommendations

31. What do you think are the most effective measures to reduce fake news:

(Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Stricter Regulations
- ☐ Public Awareness Campaigns

- ☐ Improved Fact-Checking Mechanisms
- ☐ Collaboration between Government and Tech Companies
- ☐ Enhanced Media Literacy Education
- ☐ Other: _____

32. **Role of Government in Media Literacy:**

What role should the government play in educating citizens about media literacy?

33. How do you think social media platforms can better verify the authenticity of information shared?

34. **Additional Strategies:**

What additional strategies or recommendations would you suggest to curb the influence of fake news?

Section E: Personal Impact & Future Outlook

35. **How has fake news impacted your overall trust in the media?**

- ☐ Significantly Decreased Trust ☐ Moderately Decreased Trust ☐ No Change ☐ Moderately Increased Trust ☐ Significantly Increased Trust

36. **How effective do you think Kenya's laws are at punishing creators of fake news?**

- ☐ Very Ineffective ☐ Ineffective ☐ Neutral ☐ Effective ☐ Very Effective

37. **To what extent do you trust fact-checking organizations to identify fake news?**

- ☐ Not at All ☐ Slightly ☐ Moderately ☐ Very Much ☐ Completely

38. **How confident are you in your ability to identify fake news in the future?**

- ☐ Very Confident ☐ Somewhat Confident ☐ Neutral ☐ Not Very Confident ☐ Not Confident at All

39. **Long-term Implications:**

What long-term impacts do you foresee if the current trend of misinformation continues?

40. **Additional Comments:**

Do you have any other comments, concerns, or suggestions regarding fake news and its effects on society?

Conclusion:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses are invaluable in deepening our understanding of the effects of fake news in Kenya and will help shape future strategies for media literacy and governance.