



Mitigating Election Violence through Social Media Micro-Influencers

Baseline Report

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Forward

There has been a growing concern about the role of social media in peaceful elections in Kenya yet very minimal evidence that demonstrates the causal relation between social media and peaceful political transitions therefore presenting a gap that is worth exploring. Contrarily, evidence is abound on how social media contributes to chaotic elections in Kenya with 2007, 2013 and 2017 serving as excellent examples. The good news, though, is that much of this evidence is local and focuses on the double-edged sword-nature of social media as both a tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. So the question that begs then, is the extent to which these evidence has been utilised to inspire or inform program intervention at the praxis level locally. The answer to this critical question would explain why there is evidence gap on the direct role of social media in peaceful elections in Kenya which implies that there could be very few local interventions that are inspired by locally produced knowledge that would compel peace researchers to initiate ground -breaking studies that would further contribute to literature in the area. This study could not clearly get hold of any good examples as reference points. However, what has remained clear is the double-edged sword-nature of social media in electoral conflict and peacebuilding. The fact that social media can be used both for escalating conflict and peacebuilding is a reminder of its technical composition. However, the fact that it has thrived more in escalating electoral conflict than peacebuilding in Kenya and beyond, over the years, as shown by scholarly evidence, is a cause for concern. It seems as if social media operates within the confines of algorithms that amplifies negativity and makes it easier for misinformation and disinformation, hate speech and propaganda to spread and thrive. Nevertheless, in Kenya, the reality is that politically motivated ethnic hate is a product that is generated or manufactured consensually offline and sustained online bringing to the fore critical discussions of the online offline dynamics in addressing social media hate speech, misinformation and disinformation as ingredients for social media weaponization and therein violence. The study that this report is based on revealed that the latter is perpetrated by politicians who work in tandem with a significant number of unemployed youth for political mileage before, during and after elections. So in mitigating social media's potential in conflict prevention and appraising its role as a tool for peace building, this policy related research report by the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security-Rongo University aims at supporting stakeholder in understanding the salience of local approaches and whole of society approach in interventions that would tap on social media affordances for peacebuilding. This would include appreciation of local produced evidence, local expertise (Southern Voices) and attendant recommendations coupled with the conceptualisation of well thought out coordination mechanisms that would be able to address the online–offline triple dynamics of social media hate speech, misinformation and disinformation used as fuel for politically instigated violence going forward.

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Executive Summary

This study was based on Mercy Corps' *Umoja Kwa Amani* (United for Peace in Swahili) a 12-month election violence prevention and mitigation program whose goal is to *promote peaceful elections in Kenya by strengthening stakeholders' capacity to prevent and mitigate election violence and contribute to a peaceful political transition* around the August 2022 elections. The use of technology is a key pillar in the *Umoja Kwa Amani* (UKA) program in mobilizing community capacities for peacebuilding, conflict mitigation and civic education and improving coordination and collaboration between and among community, county and national-level stakeholders in early warning and early response. To complement UKA, Mercy Corps is implementing a program christened *Mitigating Election Violence through Social Media Micro-Influencers*, whose goals are to mitigate the potential of social media to incite conflict, promote the digital space as a forum for non-violence discussions and build evidence around the effectiveness of social media influencers as tools for promoting peace and mitigating conflict. This baseline study report therefore details the key findings and recommendations of the study.

Desk review and institutional analysis reveal a growing concern about the role of social media in peaceful elections in Kenya yet very minimal evidence that demonstrates the causal relation between social media and peaceful political transitions therefore presenting a gap that is worth exploring. Contrarily, evidence is abounded on how social media contributes to chaotic elections in Kenya with 2007, 2013 and 2017 serving as excellent examples. The good news, though, is that much of this evidence is local and centers on the double-edged sword-nature of social media as both a tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. So the question that begs then, is the extent to which this evidence has been utilized to inspire or inform program intervention at the praxis level locally. The answer to this critical question would explain why there is evidence gap on the direct role of social media in peaceful elections in Kenya which implies that there could be very few local interventions that are inspired by locally produced knowledge that would compel peace researchers to initiate ground-breaking studies that would further contribute to literature in the area. This study could not clearly get hold of any good examples as reference points.

The fact that social media can be used both for escalating conflict and peacebuilding is a reminder of its technical composition. However, the fact that it has thrived more in escalating electoral conflict than peacebuilding in Kenya and beyond, over the years, as shown by scholarly evidence, is a cause for concern. It seems as if social media operates within the confines of algorithms that amplifies negativity and makes it easier for misinformation and disinformation, hate speech and propaganda to spread and thrive. Nevertheless, in Kenya, the reality is that politically motivated ethnic hate is a product that is generated or manufactured consensually offline and sustained online bringing to the fore critical discussion of the online offline dynamics in addressing social media hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation as ingredients for social media weaponization and therein violence². Therefore, the study that this report is based on revealed that the latter is perpetrated by politicians who work in tandem with a significant number of unemployed youths for political mileage before, during and after elections

So, in mitigating social media's potential in conflict prevention and appraising its role as a tool for peace building, this baseline research report aims at supporting stakeholder in understanding the salience of *local approaches and whole of society approach* in interventions that would tap on social media affordances for peacebuilding. This would include appreciation of locally produced evidence and attendant recommendations coupled with the conceptualization of well thought out coordination mechanisms that would be able to address the online-offline triple dynamic of social media hate speech, misinformation and disinformation used as fuel for politically instigated violence going forward.

² See Ogenga, 2021. Social Media, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in Kenya. In *The Tectonic Shift- Social Media Impacts on Conflicts and Democracy*. London, New York. Routledge.pp 131-140

The study that this report is based on used a triangulated approach (quantitative and qualitative methods) that employed decolonial epistemic analytical framework to social media and peacebuilding - the double-edged sword - guided by *Umoja Kwa Amani* Learning Agenda to inform practical intervention (UKA social media campaign). Respondents were randomly sampled through UKA influencers' networks and snowballed further to networks of these networks. The survey targeted a sample size of about 300 respondents (100 per county) and a 50 percent response rate. A total of 260 respondents gave their feedback representing a more than 50 percent reach.

Critical new theories of technology and theories of change were used. These theories point out how proper planning, participation, coordination, and evaluation of social media use by critical stakeholders (the civil society, academics, government, citizens, technology companies and the international community i.e whole of society) can help establish long term goals. In this case, social media can be used to foster greater understanding and democracy than to promote hate and division. If this is achieved, then social media can effectively support peacebuilding in Kenya. However, there is not enough evidence on how the positive affordances of social media technologies have been exploited for peacebuilding offline so that a conclusion can be made on the direct causal contribution of social media in peacebuilding to account for the online-offline dynamics. In addition, much of the works on the contribution of social media to peacebuilding have centered on the negative contributions of social media to peacebuilding at the expense of the positive.

Qualitatively, desk research evidence mapping was conducted using a decolonial analytical framework to unveil evidence for the last 15 years (between 2007 and 2022) that coincide with key controversial elections in Kenya in terms of time scope (2007; 2013; 2017). This was established through considering the year of publication of every document that was analyzed. Key among documents analyzed included: Theses, case studies, books, book chapters, working papers and Journal articles. This literature included documents from key state agencies and institutions involved in the electoral process. The key documents analyzed are as follows:

Theses:

- ❖ Akatsa, K. 2021. Social Media and Elections Violence: A Case of Nairobi City Council (2007-2017). Thesis. Kenyatta University
- ❖ Chomba B.W. 2017. The Influence on Use of SOCIAL Media on Conflict Management. The Case of Kibera Slums Nairobi County. Thesis, University of Nairobi
- ❖ Odero, P. 2013. The Role of Social Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Kenya. – The Case of Nairobi County. Thesis. University of Nairobi

Case Studies

- ❖ Wambura, A. 2008. Effect of 2007 Post-election Violence in Kenya: A Case of Kisumu City. Thesis. University of Nairobi

Books

- ❖ Gagliardoe, I. 2019. Social Media and Elections in Africa. Oxford University Press; Published Online. Retrieved 18th May 2022 from oxfodre.com <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1380>
- ❖ Sirch, L.2021. Social Media, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in Kenya. In The Tectonic Shift- Social Media Impacts on Conflicts and Democracy. London, New York

Book Chapters

- ❖ Ogenga, F..2021. Social Media, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in Kenya. In The Tectonic Shift- Social Media Impacts on Conflicts and Democracy. London, New York

Working Papers

- ❖ Mutahi, P. and Kimari, B. 2017. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Tech on Electoral Violence in Kenya. IDS Working Paper Vol. 2017 No 493

Journal Articles

- ❖ Makinen, M. and Kuira, M. 2008. Social Media and Post Elections Crisis in Kenya. *Information and Communications Technology Africa* 13
- ❖ Njeri, M. 2021 Influence Of Social Media on Political and Tribal Conflict in Kenya. *Journal of Public Relations* Vol. 1 Issue 1. 14028
- ❖ Njuguna C. and Gikandi J., Ogola, L., and Murrithi, J. 2020. Social Media as the Battleground against Violence among Netizens In Africa: The Case of Kenyan Youth. *East Africa Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* Vol 12 Issue 1

The methodology thus entailed a multi-pronged *Evidence Mapping Framework* through desk, institutional research and document analysis of state agencies' websites involved in the election process in Kenya ,such as The National Police Service, (NPS) Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, (IEBC) National Cohesion and Integration Commission, (NCIC) National Crime Research Center (NCRC) Media Council of Kenya and Civil (MCK) Kenya National Commission for Human Rights Commission (KNCHR) in order to assess if there are any publications related to social media, electoral conflict, and peacebuilding.

A Focus Group Discussion (see annex 2 for FGD questions) was also conducted with UKA influencers in a purposively sampled county that forms the epicenter of post-election violence in Kenya (Kondele, Kisumu County) to gauge emotions and to build evidence around the effectiveness of social media influencers as a tool for promoting peace and mitigating conflict. In the FGD in Kondele Kisumu, it was generally found out that politicians are influencers and can be used to divide people for conflict or unite them for peace based on what they say or post on social media. Although this finding is limited in Kondele, it can as well explain why Kondele is the epicenter of electoral violence in Kisumu every electoral cycle which can further explain the violence witnessed in Kisumu generally during elections.

Key Findings

1. Local Evidence and Local Interventions: There is a significant amount of local evidenced which can be useful at the praxis level for further learning and adaptation of programs yet there is not so much evidence indicating that this opportunity is being exploited presenting a major gap and betraying the very promising Local Turn approach to contemporary peacebuilding in Africa.
2. The Double-Edged Sword -Social Media Hate speech, Electoral Conflict and Peacebuilding: There is a direct relationship between hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and election violence.
3. Online Offline Dynamics and Role of Influencers (Youth and Politicians): There is direct correlation between offline hate speech and online hate and polarization and consequently violence. This means that online interventions must be supported by offline activities such as training workshops, sensitization, and community capacity building including cultural activities such as music and arts.
4. Political Candidates as Sources of Hate Speech and Polarization online and offline leading to conflict. The study revealed that politicians use misinformation to fight their opponents. Further, political voting strategies like six pieces have been the source of polarization, incitement, hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation in places like Kisumu

6. Influencers don't know that they are influencers and those who know commercialize influencer roles. Therefore, influencers should be made aware and sensitized.

7. Social media is a cheap and affordable way of sending misinformation and disinformation

Key Recommendations

Local Evidence and Local Intervention

There should be a high priority given to the generation and utilization of local evidence at the practice level to benefit the local context. This calls for building trust with local experts to lead evidence generation without arm-twisting them to comply. It further calls for a proper coordination and or cooperation framework that can help in the synchronization of interventions from state agencies, civil society organizations, youth movements online and academia and perhaps even donor community.

Hate Speech, Misinformation, Disinformation and Electoral Violence (Social Media Hate as Fuel for Violence)³

Sensitization of politicians, media, bloggers, analysts and commentators on conflict sensitive communication/reporting, training of trainers on election watch (cohesion monitor), monitor public speech and social media for hate related messages in order to support investigations by relevant state agencies who will then recommend for prosecution and infuse positive messages on social media (positive peace campaign)

Online-Offline Dynamics and Role of Influencers (Youth and Politicians)⁴

Political aspirants from Kisumu, Uasin Gishu and Nairobi should be in the forefront of preaching peace, however they should be sensitized to take the lead in ensuring there is peace. There should be trust built between community members of different political opponents in these counties. Citizens or youths who support these candidates should play an optimal role as active agents of peace through resisting manipulation and shunning perpetrators of violence in the name of politics. This calls for putting in place robust strategies, in collaboration with relevant state agencies, to eliminate hate speech and targeted forms of prevention to reduce risk of violence given the former as the biggest contributor to violence as revealed in the study that this report is based on.

Political Candidates as Sources of Hate Speech and Polarization Online and Offline Leading to Conflict

Leaders should be at the forefront of preaching peace by having political discussion and agree to disagree but not to the extent of fighting. In addition, the youth who follow a particular politician should do positive messaging online whenever their aspirant face abuse and stop being used by politicians

Influencers don't know that they are influencers

Influencers should be made aware and sensitized on their roles and politicians should stop commercializing and paying them

Social media is a cheap and affordable way of sending misinformation and disinformation

³See NCIC, 2022 Report: *A Violence Free 2022- Roadmap to Peaceful 2022 Elections* [NCIC, 2022: 10]

⁴ *ibid*

State should collaborate with tech companies such as Facebook to flag off online hate speech misinformation and disinformation through the classification of some words as hate speech

Stakeholder Sensitization and capacity building Workshop: There should be a Stakeholder Sensitization and capacity building workshop done towards the last quarter of the UKA online campaign for capacity building, further learning, adjustment, and adaptation of the program.

List of Abbreviations

UKA – Umoja Kwa Amani

MP- Member of Parliament

ODM-Orange Democratic Movement

DRC- Democratic Republic of Congo

SMS- Short Messaging Services

MEL- Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

KNHRC-Kenya National Human Rights Commission

IEBC-Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission

NPS- The National Police Service;

NCIC- National Cohesion and Integration Commission,

NCRC- National Crime Research Center

MCK- Media Council of Kenya and Civil

IWB-Internet without B orders

PCFK- The Peacemaker Corps Foundation Kenya

CMDPS-RU- Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security-RU

SCOK- Supreme Court of Kenya

Introduction

Kenya has experienced a cycle of political violence following a series of controversial elections that are usually centred on ethnic competition leading to human rights abuses, deaths, destruction of property and economic down-spiral. At the core of election violence, witnessed in 2007/8 and in 2017 is how social media has been positively and negatively used by both citizens and politicians. Political competition driven through ethnic belonging, ethno-political extremism and hate speech on social media platforms has always taken centre stage. This report argues that social media is a double-edged sword, exploited in a way that contributes to violence but at the same time, contributing to peacebuilding. The report calls for evidence driven multi-stakeholder collaborative approach (whole of society) to education and sensitization programs on the positive use of social media technologies for democratic consolidation in Kenya.

Currently, there is not enough evidence on how the positive affordances of social media technologies have been exploited for peacebuilding offline so that a conclusion can be made on the direct causal contribution of social media in peacebuilding in Kenya. In addition, much of the works of the contribution of social media to peacebuilding have centred on the negative contributions of social media to peacebuilding emphasising the centrality of Mercy Corps' *Umoja Kwa Amani* (UKA) Campaign for peaceful elections online component that this report is based on.

Therefore, this report systematically details the research's theoretical framework, methodology and procedure and results that can inform adaptive learning and the successful implementation of the campaign program so that stakeholders can learn lessons from the program, to replicate what works elsewhere and take up approaches and activities that have proven to work to scale up the program. The objectives of this baseline study as well as baseline questions (see appendices section) were guided by two broad objectives of the online component of the UKA campaign. The latter's goal is *to promote peaceful elections in Kenya by strengthening stakeholder capacity to prevent and mitigate election violence and contribute to a peaceful transition*. The goals of the two broad objectives of the online complimentary program christened *Mitigating Election Violence through Social Media Micro-influencers* are:

1. To mitigate the potential of social media to incite conflict and promote the digital space as a forum for non-violence discussions
2. To build evidence around the effectiveness of social media influencers as tools for promoting peace and mitigating conflict

Social Media and Politics in Kenya

Social media has been at the core of recent studies on media and political campaigns with criticism of how social media platforms such as Facebook (META) have been used to capitalize on private data where big technology companies like Cambridge Analytica are caught up in the middle of electoral controversies in many parts of the world including Kenya. The new phenomenon of citizen journalism and cybercitizenship in the context of social media platforms, where the internet has given birth to cyberdemocracy, is both an exciting and a worrying trend. Social media has also been used negatively leading to ethnic divisions and violence as witnessed in Kenya in the aftermath of the 2007/8 elections, 2012 elections and in the 2017 elections. It is widely feared that social media can influence political violence again ahead of the August 9th critical elections.

Social media can play both a positive and negative role in social movements. It can be used to incite hatred, fuel ethnic polarization in multicultural societies like Kenya, and build support for authoritarian leaders. At the same time, social media can be used as vehicle to combat hate speech, spread useful and empowering information, to support democracy and social change, yet few civil society organizations, governments and citizens really understand how social media works.

Social media is confined within the virtual space of “the attention economy” which requires that a creative capacity building approach to citizen participation be taken for them to positively use its potential in bringing about democratic change. For example, there is need to counter meanings dictated by virtue of social media technical specifications like algorithms and echo chambers through parasocial interaction outside the scope of technology (offline). The reality that people encounter only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own (selective reading) and do not consider alternative ideas is not helpful for politically volatile multicultural societies like Kenya.

In Kenya, a few civil society organizationsⁱ such as Internet Without Borders (IWB) and Article 19 have openly questioned the role of social media networks such as Facebook in political transitions and are of the opinion that Facebook should be more open and collaborative in their ventures such as those that seek to recruit local content editors. They have also criticized Facebook (META) exploitative engagements with government sugar coated as philanthropy in provision of free Wi-Fi to poor communities without their involvement expressing fears of content manipulation in favour of the State.

The 2017 elections and the attendant chaos demonstrate clearly how elites in Kenya exploit identity politics through media propaganda to incite violence leading to human rights abuses for their own benefit. The 2017 media shutdown should be a wake-up call for Kenya’s mainstream media regarding its watchdog role and a reality check for the State regarding the critical role of social media in cyber-democracy.

Social media presented an opportunity to report and document electoral related violence. Online monitoring through crowdsourcing enabled the identification of appropriate technologies and tools to track and analyse structural tensions, social divides and friction points. Using SMS, Kenyans have been able to report, map and document violent incidences on mass scale, providing information which journalists could not ordinarily access through traditional means. Facebook allowed users to share experiences and witness accounts of electionsⁱⁱ.

Social media is therefore a double-edged sword that can be used for conflict and for peacebuilding during elections depending on how they have been exploited. Some sites for example, allowed for the sharing of videos and information during elections which enabled the mapping of violence and generate public attention for preventive efforts from government and other stakeholders. It is, however, important to point out that social media is not a silver bullet, this report would want to equally underscore the important role played

by the other institutions such as the ones selected for the study that this report is based on in ensuring there is peaceful elections.

Theoretical Framework

Critical new theories of technology and theories of change point out how proper planning, participation and evaluation of social media use by critical stakeholders (the civil society, government, citizens, technology companies, youth movements and the international community) can help establish long term goals. In this case, social media can be used to foster greater understanding and democracy than to promote hate and division. If this is achieved, then social media can effectively support peacebuilding in Kenya. However, there is not enough evidence on how the positive affordances of social media technologies have been exploited for peacebuilding offline so that a conclusion can be made on the direct causal contribution of social media in peacebuilding. In addition, much of the works of the contribution of social media to peacebuilding have centred on the negative contributions of social media to peacebuilding at the expense of the positive.

In a more recent study by Mercy Corps and others titled “*Social Media, Conflict, and Peacebuilding: Issues and Challenges*” that discusses the weaponization of social media and peacebuilding responses to it, the role of digital technologies in creating new threats and exacerbating existing threats is examined. The study concluded that this role is still under-appreciated amongst peacebuilders in general. This means, therefore, that the role of digital media technologies in peacebuilding is still largely taken for granted evidenced in research that largely focus on the negative implications of social media technologies in the society.

Social media, with spill-over effects into other types of media and information engagement, should also be approached with the kind of peacebuilding opportunities presented as opposed to the new threats created. For example, Civil society has pioneered referral or warning and response mechanisms for mitigation in Kenya through Ushahidi’s early crowd-sourced reporting platform inspired subsequent generations of mobile reporting including initiatives to involve enforcement responses by governmental authorities. There is also concern about epistemic positions adopted in knowledge generation and a loud call for appreciation of “The Local Turn” in order to prioritize local voices and local approaches in a manner that would help decolonize peacebuilding in Africa and Kenya. More often, peacebuilding interventions are externally funded and, in this context, attached to donor interests which might not necessarily speak truth to the local nuances and context making them fail to achieve their objectives despite their promising potential.

In the Mercy Corps paper, the general contention is that technology has many uses in peacebuilding and peacebuilders have been early adopters of digital tools; while these have afforded breakthroughs, they have often been considered by peacebuilders to outweigh potential harms, and a re-assessment is needed. However, such reassessments need evidence for positive appraisal in order to assess what works locally and what does not work for program implementation. This is what this evidence mapping baseline investigated in order to inform AIfluence intervention on the role of social media influencers in peacebuilding in the August 2022 Kenyan elections and beyond. Critical new theories of technology in the context of theories of change supported by a decolonial epistemic position and analytical framework to argue for locally led evidence production and intervention in the *Mitigating Election Violence through Social Media Micro-Influencers, to promote peaceful elections in Kenya by strengthening stakeholder capacity to prevent and mitigate election violence and contribute to a peaceful transition.*

Methodology

This study used a triangulated approach (quantitative and qualitative methods) that utilizes a decolonial epistemic analytical framework to social media and peacebuilding - the double-edged sword - guided by *Umoja Kwa Amani* Learning Agenda to inform practical intervention (UKA social media campaign). A decolonial approach simply means being sensitive to pan-African epistemic positions that embrace local voices, contexts and nuances when mapping evidence related to social media and electoral violence.

Sampling

Respondents were randomly sampled through *Maskani Digital Peacebuilders* and UKA influencers' networks and snowballed further to networks of these networks. The survey potentially targeted a sample size of about 300 respondents (100 per county) and a 50 percent response rate. This number was arrived at based on the fact that a limited number of social media users are actually influencers and judging by the potential impact of only one influencer in social media spaces, then a total of 100 influencers are sufficient to address questions related to role of influencers on social media regarding electoral conflict and peacebuilding. A total of 260 respondents participated in the survey representing a more than 50 percent reach.

Desk and Institutional Analysis

Qualitatively, desk research evidence mapping was conducted using a decolonial analytical framework to unveil evidence for the last 15 years (between 2007 and 2022) that coincide with key controversial elections in Kenya in terms of time scope (2007; 2013; 2017). This was established through the year of publication of each document that was analyzed. As mentioned earlier, Key among documents analyzed included theses, case studies, books, book chapters, working papers, and Journal articles. This literature also included documents from key state agencies/and institutions involved in the electoral process and **Mercy Corps' UKA program documents, including the MEL plan M&E and learning plan/agenda.** The methodology thus entailed a multi-pronged *Evidence Mapping Framework* through desk, institutional research and document analysis of state agencies involved in Kenyan elections. Specifically,

- ❖ The National Police Service, (NPS)
- ❖ Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, (IEBC)
- ❖ National Cohesion and Integration Commission, (NCIC)
- ❖ National Crime Research Center (NCRC)
- ❖ Media Council of Kenya and Civil (MCK)
- ❖ Kenya National Commission for Human Rights Commission (KNCHR)

Focus Group Discussions

One Focus Group Discussion consisting of six discussants, three male and three female (see annex 2 for FGD questions) was conducted with UKA influencers in a purposively sampled county that forms the epicenter of post-election violence in Kenya (Kondele, Kisumu) to gauge emotions and to build evidence around the effectiveness of social media influencers as a tool for promoting peace and mitigating conflict in Kondele, Kisumu which is actually a potential epicenter of electoral violence in Kenya in the context of the forthcoming elections on the 9th of August 2022⁵.

⁵ See Wambura, A. 2008. Effect of 2007 Post-election Violence in Kenya: A Case of Kisumu City. Thesis. University of Nairobi

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Quantitatively, online Google form surveys were deployed by social media influencers in UKA campaign counties (Nairobi, Uasin Gishu, and Kisumu) and snowballed to other influencers in their networks as previously explained. Quantitative data from the Google form survey was analyzed and used to generate a report that summarizes statistical information regarding the survey on seven questions drawn from the UKA learning agenda adopted. The results are represented for interpretation in charts, graphs and tables with. The latter included details of the response rates.

Qualitative Data

Desk research literature was analyzed using thematic content analysis and document analysis that examined thematic evidence inspired by the UKA learning agenda which included relations between online activity and offline violence, interventions to prevent conflict and countering hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and social media weaponization, online-offline relations when it comes to electoral violence ,and online activities, role of influencers and barriers and enablers of using technology in mitigating violence due to social media misinformation. It was also critical to underscore the role of emotions in electoral violence both online and offline related to political incitement and hate speech perpetrated by politicians and the unemployed youth often weaponized during electoral cycles.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework examined locally produced evidence listed earlier that included theses, case studies, books, book chapters and journal articles by local authors and institutions and externally driven evidence with the view of assessing their epistemological positions vis-à-vis power relations regarding peacebuilding discourses produced and/or published in the context of *The Local Turn*⁶. Interestingly, there was not much foreign evidence documented. The evidence unveiled in this study informs on the required level of synergy, collaboration and cooperation regarding different stakeholders in social media and peacebuilding especially around elections in Kenya by revealing the existing implementation gap. The knowledge of the latter can guide implementation of Afluencer's strategic campaign program to avoid duplication of interventions going forward. The online baseline surveys questions were structured around the two main objectives of the *Mitigating Election Violence through Social Media Micro-influencers* campaign that are used as the basis for implementing the MEL framework (See Annex 1 for online survey questions). That is:

1. To mitigate the potential of social media to incite conflict and promote the digital space as a forum for non-violence discussions
2. To build evidence around the effectiveness of social media influencers as tools for promoting peace and mitigating conflict

Ethical Issues

Since this was largely desk research, there were no sensitive issues involving children. The study relied on adult population between the ages of 18-55. No sensitive document was accessed without authorization or relevant state, or non-state agencies or institutions and all authors quoted are acknowledged. Equally,

⁶ See Leonardsson, H and Rudd G. 2015. The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Literature Review of Effective and Emancipatory Local Peacebuilding. Vol 36 Issue 5. pp 825-839.

participant consent (See Annex 3) was obtained from all those involved in the research project. Evidence produced is for the sole purpose of this research project by Mercy Corps. Mercy Corps will use the information to enrich their UKA campaign and strengthen the goals of the program especially the online component that seeks to use social media for electoral peacebuilding

Limitations

There were time constraints and lack of proper coordination and cooperation between relevant stakeholders involved in the study in terms of liaison with the consultant regarding key deliverables.

Results

Impacts of social media misinformation and disinformation on triggering violence of different demographic groups

Literature of the role of social media in inciting conflict is abundant and much of this literature, evidently local, indicates the contribution of local authors and institutions in the subject which is good news. However, the fascinating aspect of this literature is the emphasis on the double-edged-sword nature of social media platforms. It's almost as if social media cannot just serve one purpose, if it does, then it seems it would cease to be what it is (social media) as we know it today. Therefore, as we explore social media's potential in inciting conflict and its potential as a digital space or forum for nonviolence discussions in this section, this reality should not be taken for granted. Njeri, (2021)⁷ for instance discusses, *in the CARI Journal of Public Relations*, the *Influence of social media in Political and Tribal Conflict in Kenya* arguing for the salience of ICT infrastructure in enhancing literacy, and better communication among learners thus making them able to make better choices and decisions and therein avert conflict.

Social media, with User Generated Content, have become platforms where people can easily influence public affairs in a context that enables civil society to exist independently of political institutions- therefore challenging the de-facto role of the State in monopolizing violence⁸. However, Njeri's study fails to deal directly with relations between social media and conflict in her rather promising title where she discusses the media in general and fails on the promise of demonstrating causal relations regarding social media and peacebuilding. This implies that social media's potential in escalating or preventing conflict remains unexplored. Njeri's paper thus fails to deal with the critical concern on 'causal relations' of social media and electoral conflict exposing one of the most critical gaps between research and praxis.

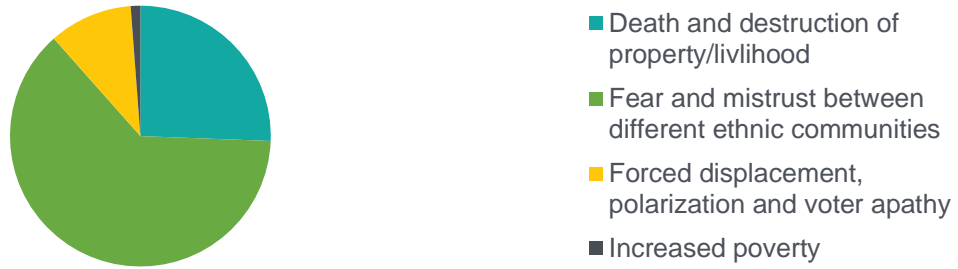
In a 2020 study on *Social Media as the Battleground for Electoral Violence* published by *The East African Journal of Social Sciences*, Njuguna and Gikandi⁹ et al. argue that there is a rise in political disturbances during elections in Africa perpetrated by the youth and Kenya is not an exception. They point out how this is attributed to social media use. Their study focused on Mathare in Nairobi and WhatsApp social media platform which emerged as the most popular platform among the youth in Kenya. The study further established that the platform equally contributed positively towards electoral violence in Kenya among the youth. Social media was found to have a strong explanatory strength among Kenyan youth on electoral violence in Mathare contributing about 65 percent on electoral violence. Njuguna and Gikandi et al

⁷ Njeri, M. 2021 Influence of Social Media on Political and Tribal Conflict in Kenya. *Journal of Public Relations* Vol. 1 Issue 1. 14028

⁸ See Ogenga, 2021. Social Media, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in Kenya. In *The Tectonic Shift- Social Media Impacts on Conflicts and Democracy*. London, New York. Routledge. pp 131-140

⁹ Njuguna C. and Gikandi J., Ogola, L., and Murrithi, J. 2020. Social Media as the Battleground against Violence among Netizens In Africa: The Case of Kenyan Youth. *East Africa Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* Vol 12 Issue 1

Impacts of violence due to social media



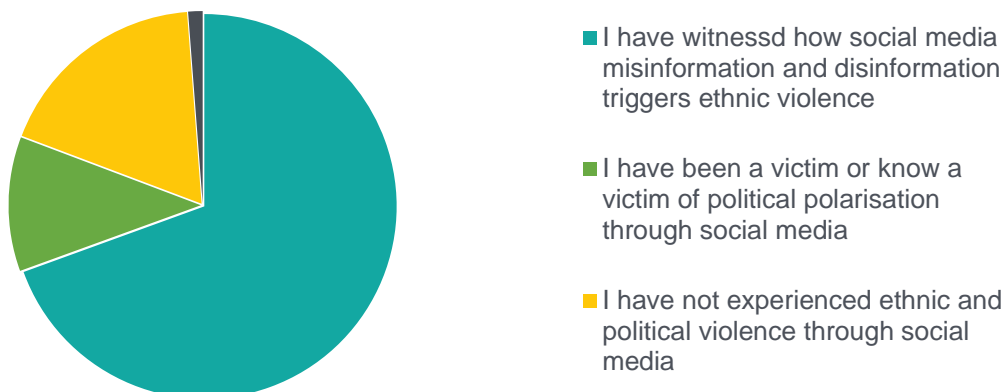
concluded that *there is a relationship between social media and violence among Kenyan youth* in Mathare recommending the government to *embrace and enforce self-regulation mechanisms by internet service providers to deter incitement*. In addition, they call for increased effort to educate and inform internet users on the importance of assessing credibility of information. There should also be the promotion of productive engagement as an effective instrument for dealing with online hatred (sensitization).

Mutahi and Kimari¹⁰, 2017 discuss *The Impact of social media and Digital Technology on Electoral Violence in Kenya* in their *Institute of Development Studies* working paper. Their main contention is how violence has become synonymous with Kenya’s elections with the deadliest violence witnessed in 2007 coinciding with the fact that it is during this time that social media and digital technology was first used for political reasons, including for campaigning and polling, lending credence on the relations between social media and electoral conflict and peacebuilding. During this time, social media was used as *a double-edged sword, to propagate hate speech* and mobilize for violence, but also to map out violence hot spots. Social media has since been used for political mobilization and campaigns but the fact that it is widespread, has posed peace and security challenges by the way it is exploited for hatred and violence. Mutahi and Kimari, therefore, identify threats and opportunities and further present opportunities for partnership between state and non-state actors to effectively prevent political and electoral violence:

Data collected from primary source indicated that, 68.9 % have witnessed how social media misinformation and disinformation triggers violence, 11.2 % have been victims or know a victim of political polarization through social media, 17. 9% have experienced ethnic and political violence through social media.

25.7% of respondents mentioned death and destruction of property/livelihood, 63.1 mentioned fear and mistrust between different ethnic communities, and 10.4 % mentioned forced displacement, polarization and voter apathy. Fear and mistrust between ethnic communities has resulted in ethnic balkanization during elections and ethnic violence related to electoral disputes. There is always the element of blaming the other because they belong to a particular community or they carry the burden of their ethnic leaders, they become easy targets of ethnic chaos.

Social Media and Violence



orking
edia

Extend to which social media “influencers” contribute (or not) to reduced potential of electoral violence

Social media and digital technology have led to the creation of a people centric response mechanism from bottom-up peace and conflict resolution as opposed to the top-down state driven approaches allowing citizens and communities to respond in a timely manner by developing early warning systems to prevent violence. A good example is the use of crowdsourcing during the 2007 elections and the run up to the elections where citizens were encouraged to document and report violent incidents during the 2007 post-election violence on online platforms for response operation including humanitarian aid. Other examples include:

- ❖ Ushahidi established in 2008 to documents post-election violence, modified and used in 2013 for collecting data that could be used to prevent violence;
- ❖ Uchaguzi electoral monitoring tool powered by Ushahidi Crowd-sourced local information to monitor incidences of incitement and violence. It uses a toll-free number in ecologies with problematic internet connectivity.
- ❖ Uwiano platform for peace for documenting evidence of electoral violence since 2010. It includes online tools for tracking, reporting and retrieving evidence of dangerous speech, incitement and other forms of violence using a toll-free code 6397.
- ❖ Facebook pages such as election Eyewitness and Kenya Elections 2013 established before 2013 to share experiences on the conduct of the elections to map violence generate public attention and facilitate preventive measures.
- ❖ Umati for monitoring *hate speech* and dangerous speech online established in 2013. Umati worked through IHUB researchers who combed through Kenyan blogs and relying on other applications such as Google map to identify the geographic location of trends.
- ❖ I Have no Tribe established by the founder of Mashada when it had become controversial as discussed earlier to counter messages of hate on Mashada by promoting messages of unity and peace.
- ❖ Unahakika, a mobile phone based information service that monitored the spread of rumors and act to check and contain them, formed by the Sentinel Project and IHub researchers.
- ❖ The Office of the Director of Public Prosecution established a framework for inter-agency collaboration between its office, the Directorate of Criminal Investigation, IEBC, and NCIC for effective detection, investigation and timely prosecution of election offenses.
- ❖ The Peacemaker Corps Foundation Kenya’s (PCFK) project called *Maskani* in collaboration with the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security-Rongo University (CMDPS-RU) and Buildup that uses university students (digital peacebuilders) to address online political and ethnic polarization ahead of 2022 elections

Mutahi and Kimari, 2017 conclude that while research and practice has shown that:

Technology and new media have the potential for informing conflict prevention and mitigation efforts , its success depends much on how it is employed in the right context and channeled to the responsible agencies. If wrong technology is used, then different data and results would be generated which would not be useful for conflict prevention and mitigation. Thus, the actors undertaking prevention initiatives should let the context inform what kind of technology is needed and what kind of approach will work best

An elaborate UNDP research report titled; *Social Media in Africa – A Double Edged Sword for Security and Development* by Cox, Bellasio and William et al, unspecified year of publication, discusses ICT and security challenges in Africa in the context of terrorism, presenting a case of how social media narratives are used for online radicalization presenting a broader picture of the challenges posed by social media platforms in Africa beyond just elections.

Makinen and Kuira¹¹ (2008), discuss *social media and Post-Election Crisis in Kenya in the Information and Communication Technology Africa*. They discuss the role of social media in the aftermath of the 2007/8 elections functioning as an alternative medium for citizen communication or participatory journalism following a ban on mainstream media with important implications on the process of democratization in Kenya. In a section called *Social Media for Peace and for Trouble*, the double-edged sword nature of social media explored in this section as a theme is yet again revisited. For instance, although some blogs were used in 2007 to promote peace and justice, others were used as channels for biased information, tribal prejudices, and hate speech. Similarly, SMS had been a powerful tool for good during and after the elections, it was also used to spread rumors and messages laden with ethnic hatred. It was reported that SMS predicted attacks and called recipients to act based on their ethnicity.

However, Makinen and Kuira observe that when social media discussions and debates became too tense, the moderators decided to shut down the forums presenting a response that potentially prevented the escalation of violence at that time. They appraise social media's role in electoral peacebuilding noting that social media enabled people to interact after the media shut down, opening new possibilities for citizens to share their view in public and discuss with other people globally. Social media empowers citizens on the grassroots despite common problems related to internet connectivity presenting a level of diffusion of power that makes it difficult for the State to control therefore presenting an opportunity for citizen participation in matters of democratic governance and accountability. In cases of violence, SMS platforms provide quick ways of identifying and connecting relatives and friends in distress for the necessary support as well as reporting to authorities for action.

Akatsa¹², 2021 conducted a study on *Social Media and Election Violence- A Case of Nairobi City County* in the School of Diplomacy and Peace Studies at Kenyatta University. The study revealed 55 percent of respondents agreeing that social media was used to recruit others into violence during elections. In the same study, 61 percent reported that their ethnic group had been described or profiled derogatively on social media during elections. The study further revealed that political parties are aware of the power of social media and therefore harness its potency for political communication and mobilization and seeking support for a political ideology or candidature.

An interesting study in Kibera, done by Chomba titled: *The Influence of social media on Conflict Management- a Case of Kibera Slums, Nairobi* done in October and November in 2017 established that most youth use social media and have actually been involved in conflict. The study purposely sampled 390 youth of ages between 19-35 years who were snowballed after the initial number purposively identified for the study. The study then employed a survey data collection method in a similar approach to this study.

¹¹ Makinen, M. and Kuira, M. 2008. Social Media and Post Elections Crisis in Kenya. *Information and Communications Technology Africa* 13

¹² Akatsa, K. 2021. Social Media and Elections Violence: A Case of Nairobi City Council (2007-2017). Thesis. Kenyatta University

Chomba¹³ (2017) cites cases where social media has been hijacked for conflicts in many spaces globally because it is a widely used platform from Latin America, where it has been used for the selling of drugs, money laundering and extortion where many social media users of ages between 15- years old male have been victimized and killed (Gusaveo et rober in Chomba 2017). Chomba (2017) demonstrates the many incidences where social media has stirred conflict rather than preventing them. In Burma for example, a monk who has styled himself as the Burmese Bin Laden has fueled racism and hatred online. Pictures that circulated regarding the war in Syria did not help solve the conflict but led to polarization and more violence.

Today, there are valid concerns about the images circulating online regarding the war in Ukraine which is not helping to solve the conflict either, amounting to nothing but another modern combat strategy, a hybrid war technique celebrated today as information warfare - which is nothing but war. Chomba (2017) also cites cases where social media or digital technology can be positively harnessed for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, For example, recent studies in Syria revealed that the location of ceasefire violation or regime deployments could be identified within minutes of occurrence (Nurmi in Chomba 2017¹⁴). The media, social media, internationalizes internal conflict with recent examples of the conflict in Rwanda and Burundi and famine in South Sudan. Modern electronic media has allowed for the effects and causes of conflict to be known instantaneously in different parts of the world prompting demand for action including intervention like is the case of Ukraine (see chomba 2017).

Odero's¹⁵ 2013 compelling thesis on the *Role of Social Media as a Tool For Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention In Kenya-The Case of Nairobi County* argues that the popularity and penetration of social media platforms among youth and young adults have shown that social media has potential to be a great tool that can foster democratic dialogue and freedom of expression but due to its free and unrestricted nature it can lead to the circulation of misleading information that can be used to destabilize peace and ignite violence (Odero, 2013). Odero observes that while few studies have shown the role of social media in escalating political unrest, some have shown its role in crisis management. In Kenya, there is inadequate information about the potential role of social media for conflict prevention and peacebuilding pointing to one of the biggest gaps in social media and peacebuilding research and echoes the centrality or the importance of the Umoja kwa Amani online campaign baseline study that this report is based on.

The UKA baseline study also found out the popularity of social media platforms among youth and young adults which could also be beneficial for conflict management and peacebuilding. Odero's study sought to find out three key issues; first, to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of social media as a tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Second, to analyze the contribution of regulatory mechanisms of social media in promoting peacebuilding and lastly, to examine the potential role of social media in generating social and political tension that might result in violence and to identify early warning social and political signals through social media and ICT in conflict prevention. The study adopted a descriptive survey design to find a description about the role of social media as a tool for peacebuilding and conflict prevention to find out how things are (Mugenda and Mugenda in Odero, 2013) using a case of three estates in Nairobi Eastland area: Dandora, Mathare and Kariobangi North that represented the entire population of Nairobi in order to get a particular perception of the situation.

In his findings, Odero (2013) points out one major weakness of social media as a tool for conflict prevention, that is, the lack of ethical standards and professionalism for the users.

¹³ Chomba B.W. 2017. The Influence on Use of social media on Conflict Management. The Case of Kibera Slums Nairobi County. Thesis, University of Nairobi

¹⁴ Chomba B.W. 2017. The Influence on Use of social media on Conflict Management. The Case of Kibera Slums Nairobi County. Thesis, University of Nairobi

¹⁵ Odero, P. 2013. The Role of Social Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Kenya. – The Case of Nairobi County. Thesis. University of Nairobi

It is too liberal and can be used to spread unverified information and distorted facts [misinformation and disinformation] that might be detrimental to peace building and conflict prevention. This has led to some users questioning the credibility of social media information (Odero 2013: 59).

At the same time, some online activism and *hate speech* against certain ethnic communities on social media by respondents to express political opinion and opinions that might ignite social tension have proved dangerous. The study that this report is based on also revealed that ethnic polarizing posts and hate speech targeting a particular community would be emotive to the extent of triggering violence with 63 percent of respondents agreeing. 67.9 % indicated that social media elicit strong emotions to a great extent, 8.1% to a lesser extent while others mentioned to no extent. The high percentage reveals how social media hate online easily leads to violence offline due to strong emotions. 67.9 % indicated that social media, to a great extent, elicit strong emotions, 8.1% to a lesser extent while others mentioned to no extent. The high percentage reveals how social media hate online easily leads to violence offline due to strong emotions.

Odero's (2013) study also established the salience of government regulation mechanisms through policy. His respondents agreed that if the government was to regulate social media, then very few people would use it for political reasons. They would instead use it for exchanging social pleasantries that is, socializing and not for activities like incitement, ethnic discrimination and hatred which might undermine social cohesion and co-existence. Similarly, many respondents in the UKA study that this report is based on agreed that government policy regulation could avert social media instigated conflict. 24 percent of respondents agreed that state driven internet policy interventions are effective in mitigating conflict and preventing violence by countering hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and social media weaponization. In addition, social media was not being fully exploited as an early warning early response tool even though there was a general indication that a great deal of respondents would respond appropriately or positively if they were to receive an SMS alert on violence. There was a general indication that reporting of violence was still synonymous with police with many indicating that they only knew police hotline for reporting despite the existence of platforms like Ushahidi for reporting and gathering information from citizens. A paltry 1 percent knew it and about 10 percent knew of the Uwiano Peace Platform for reporting violence.

Role of social media in eliciting strong emotions in politics and how dis/misinformation is spread

Social Media as a Conveyor of Threats and Mobilizer of Electoral Violence

Evidently, there is a direct relation between hate speech spread online and post-election violence such as the one witnessed in 2007. Politicians use social media for ethnic mobilization of voters and sometimes use *hate speech* and incitement (CIPEV in Mutahi and Kimari¹⁶ 2017) for political mileage lending credence to the view that disinformation is not organic but deliberately engineered. 51 percent of respondents in the study that this report is based on pointed out that disinformation and misinformation is deliberately engineered compared to 21 percent who thought it was organic. The ability to share content through platforms like WhatsApp widely and rapidly has allowed for real time coordination which could be dangerous in cases where hate speech is used for incitement into violence especially considering that digital media provides new ways of spreading inflammatory political messaging that are difficult to point out and lawfully prosecute (Kiberia and Musau, in Mutahi and Kimari, 2017). This demonstrates the contribution of social media misinformation and disinformation on triggering violence among different demographic groups especially the youth with devastating consequences.

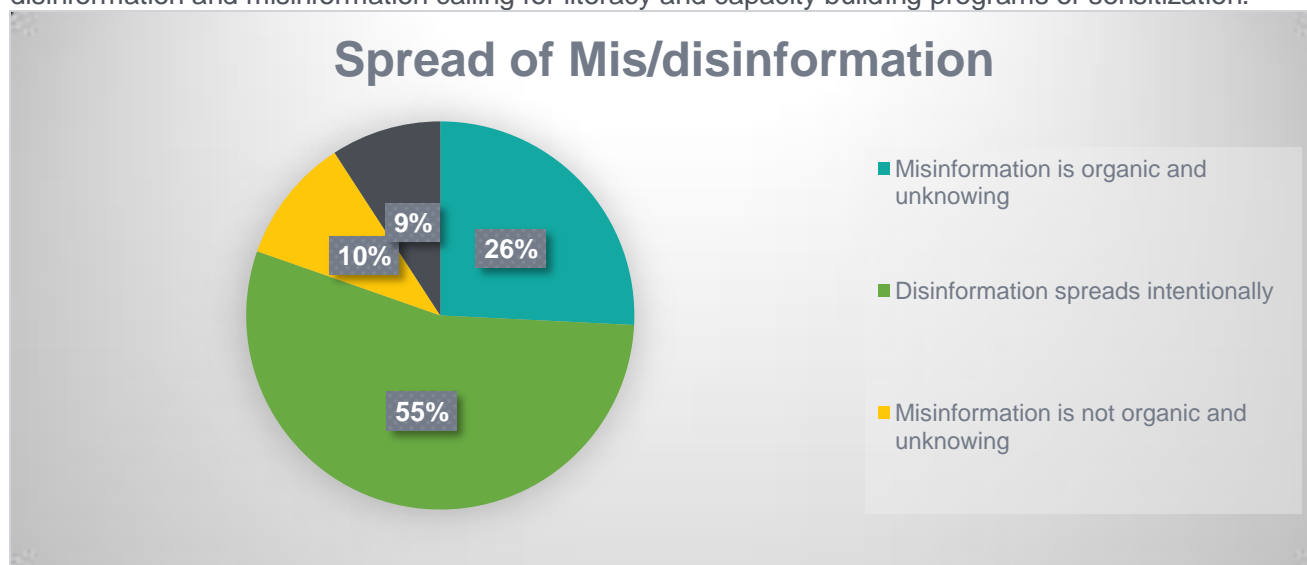
Mobiliser against Electoral Violence and Hate Speech

In the aftermath of the 2007/8 election violence, for example, social media played an incredible role in *countering hate speech* and promoting peace through tweets and hashtags. Peace campaign ahead of

¹⁶ Ibid

elections help avert violence on social media emphasizing the role of social media in electoral violence or *hate speech* despite the fact that this role has widely been criticized for failing to address the root causes of violence in Kenya and to some degree, a level of retrogressive self-censorship culture created (CIPEV in Mutahi and Kimari¹⁷, 2017)

From primary data analyzed in the study, 50.6 % noted that misinformation spreads intentionally, 23.9 % stated that misinformation is organic and unknowing, 9.7 % stated that misinformation is not organic and unknowing, meaning it's intentional, while 8.5 % indicated that disinformation does not spread intentionally. These mixed responses indicate the kind of confusion that lies in the public sphere on what constituted disinformation and misinformation calling for literacy and capacity building programs or sensitization.



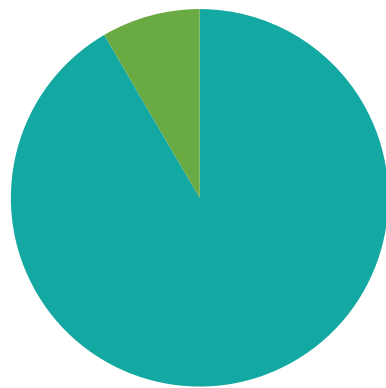
Social media posts and the extent they elicit strong emotions towards either side of the political divide

67.9 % indicated that social media elicit strong emotions to a great extent, 8.1% to a lesser extent while others mentioned to no extent. The high percentage reveals how social media hate online easily leads to violence offline due to strong emotions.

¹⁷ Mutahi, P. and Kimari, B. 2017. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Tech on Electoral Violence in Kenya. IDS Working Paper Vol. 2017 No 493

Mutahi, P. and Kimari, B. 2017. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Tech on Electoral Violence in Kenya. IDS Working Paper Vol. 2017 No 493

Social media and political emotions



- To a great extent
- To a lesser extent
- To no extent
- To some extent
- To some extent, depending on personal feelings

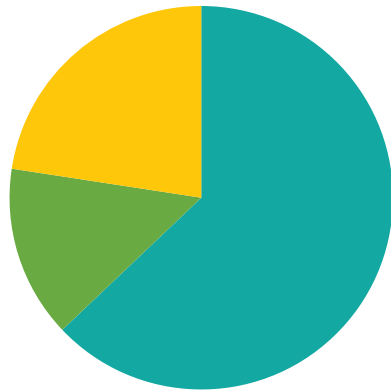
Online Polarization and how it affects in-person relationships

62 % of respondents indicated that social media affects in person relationships while 32 .7 % observed that it affects relationships sometimes. This implies that personal relationships can be easily broken because of social media polarization making it difficult to build trust and cooperation around contentious issues like elections.

Online polarization and violence

62.4 % agreed that in fact ethnic polarizing posts, hate speech targeting a particular community would trigger violence, 14.4% mentioned personal attacks targeting a prominent politician while 22.4% mentioned misinformation and disinformation regarding contentious political issues

What can trigger violence?



- Ethnic polarising posts, hate speech targeting a particular community
- Personal online attacks targeting a prominent politician
- Misinformation and disinformation regarding a contentious political issues
- All of the above
- All mentions can trigger violence

Most urgent actions for the UKA and partners in the next three months

This means that the existence of platforms alone is not enough for peacebuilding and conflict management, people need to be sensitized and educated about these platforms for them to adopt and work with their affordances as required. Perhaps a level of community sensitization, outreach, capacity building and training workshops around the use of social media platforms (Social Media Literacy) is required in the next three months. Training on social media literacy around political and ethnic polarization conducted by the CMDPS, PCFK and Buildup with students from six public universities in western Kenya, for example, resulted in one of the most ambitious and promising youth peacebuilding infrastructure called *Maskani* or home in Swahili with more than 75 online digital peacebuilders. *Maskani Digital Peacebuilders* were deployed together with Alfluence influencers in the 12-month UKA campaign for peaceful elections in Kenya that this baseline research report is based on. *Maskani Digital Peacebuilders* were also used as the core purposively sampled bloc on the role of social media and electoral conflict and peacebuilding and they then helped the study to snowball to other peacebuilders from Alfluence and beyond who would then get as many respondents of the baseline survey in their networks as possible in three purposively selected counties (Nairobi, Kisumu and Uasin Gishu)

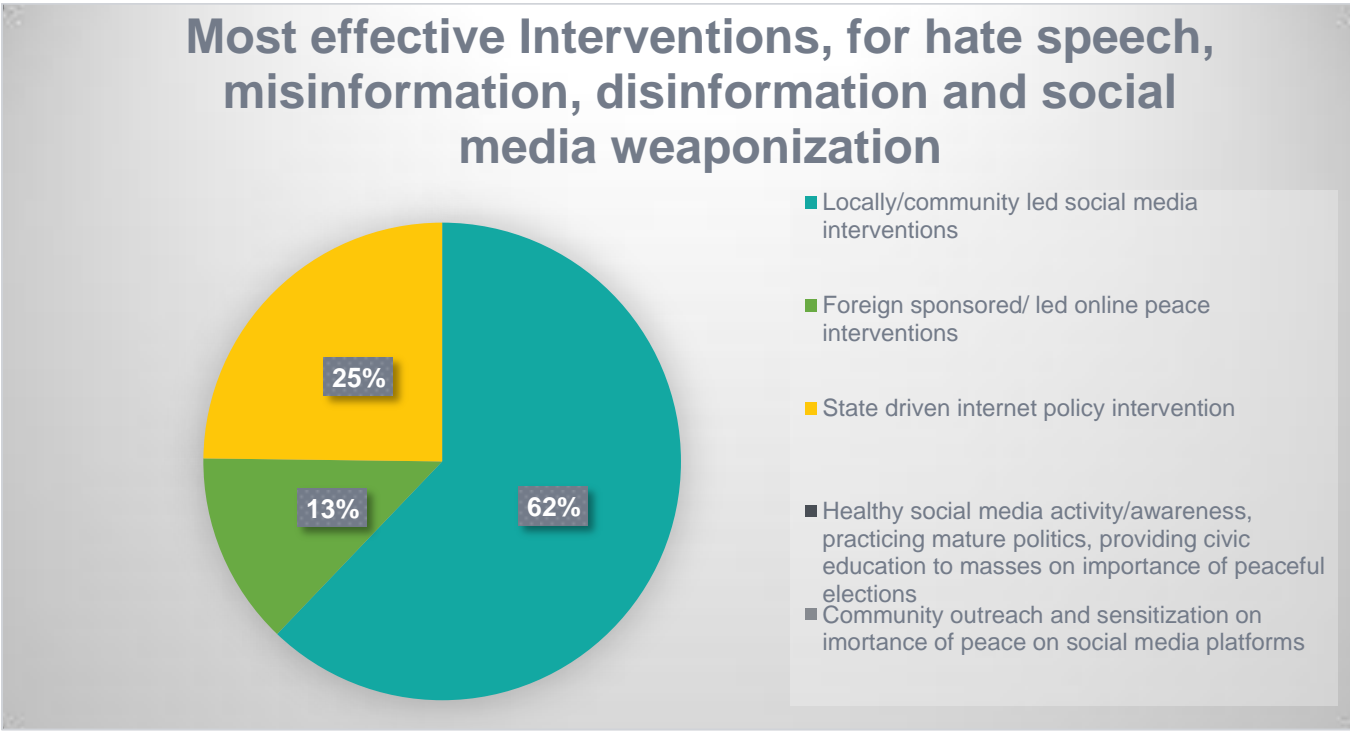
Beyond Kenya or elsewhere in Africa, social media seems to be also displaying its double edged sword nature as argued in this review of evidence/ literature section. In the study of *Social Media and Elections in Africa*, Gagliardone 2019 posits:

A more recent wave of empirically grounded studies have embraced a greater conceptual and methodological pluralism, offering more space to analyse the contradictions in how social media are being used and abused [double edged sword]: how humor can be turned into a powerful tool to contest a type of power that appears overwhelming; or how armies of professional users have exploited people's credulity of news media as 'freer' from power to actually support partisan agenda. Interestingly, this latter approach has brought to light phenomena that have only recently caught global attention, such as the role of 'fake news' and misinformation in electoral contests, but have played a determinant role in African politics for at least a decade (Gagliardone 2019: Unknown).

This means that UKA partners should continue investing in local research on the implications of the double edged sword nature of social media in a politically volatile and multi-ethnic environment like Kenya. Since the review indicated that most of the evidence is locally produced and have a general tone that calls for the local turn both conceptually and methodologically grounded on ecological approaches that embrace conceptual pluralism or epistemic freedom and pan-African approaches where ideas from others are also

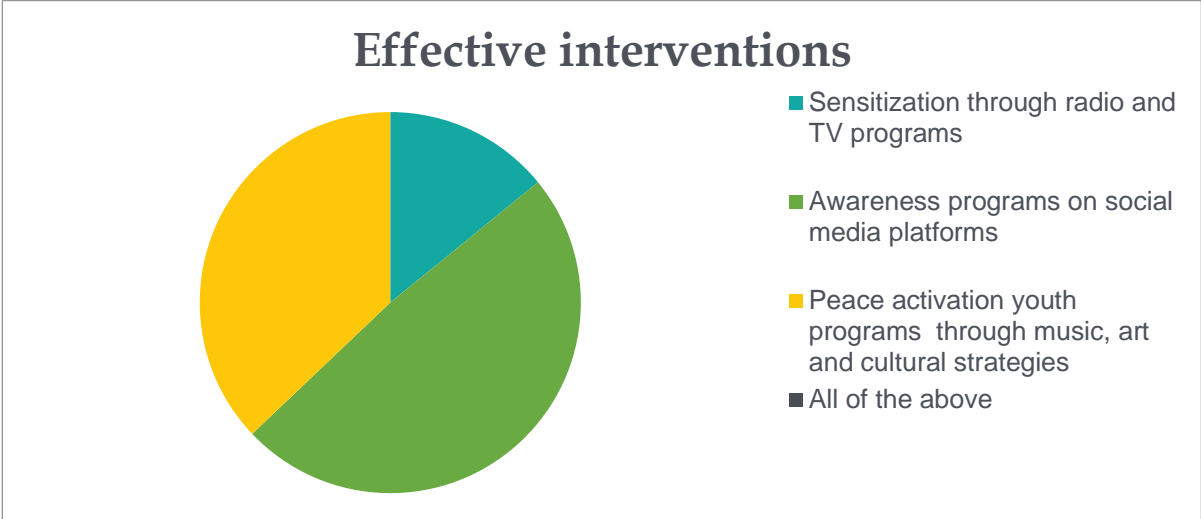
allowed to thrive as postulated by Gagliardone (2019), it implies that it's no longer business as usual and the time to "walk the talk" on the idea of the Local Turn is nigh. The latter is quite interesting since Gagliardone is a foreign or western author yet his views are supportive of the decolonizing peacebuilding. This view is equally supported by the UKA baseline survey on the kind of interventions that are most effective in mitigating conflict and preventing violence by countering *hate speech misinformation, disinformation* and social media weaponization where 62 percent of the respondents agreed that local interventions are the most effective. This reveals therefore that the problem is not lack of locally generated knowledge or evidence but that there is in-deed a gap at the implementation level. There seems to be lack of coordination and/or cooperation or, perhaps, lack of clear policy that can help in the synchronization of interventions from state agencies, civil society organization, academia, youth movements and donor community whether the latter are local or foreign is by the by. The UKA campaign that this report is based on is a great strategy that begins to identify and address these gaps because it has involved partners and movement beyond the traditional cycles of state and non-state agencies to include youth movements from universities such as *Maskani*, academics as well as critical stakeholders (the youth in the community) in post-elections hotspot counties of Uasin Gishu, Kisumu and Nairobi in Kenya – A very promising approach to peacebuilding which can, however, fail to achieve its full potential without cultivating an environment of trust between UKA partners.

From primary data, effective interventions that would counter hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and social media weaponization, 61.4% indicated that local/community led social media interventions as the most effective, 12.9 % mentioned foreign led/sponsored peace interventions and 24.5 percent state driven policy interventions. This numbers echo the emphasis on the local turn in peacebuilding interventions and the salience of the state through policy frameworks that would support the exploitation of social media affordances for peacebuilding.



Mitigating drivers of youth participation in, and support for, election violence

48.4% of respondents mentioned awareness programs through social media platforms 36.8 % indicated that offline youth peace activation programs through music art and cultural strategies were more effective while 14% mentioned sensitization through radio and TV programs, social media sensitization therefore remains the most effective programs to target the youth and mitigating driver of their participation in, and support for, election violence. It is important to note from the survey that the youth were the most active constituents on social media platforms at 54.2 %, mostly unemployed 50.8% and therefore vulnerable and most exploited or weaponized for electoral violence.



Analysis of Key Institutions and Documents

Hate Speech and Ethnic Bigotry

The desk and institutional analysis revealed that hate speech and ethnic bigotry offline and online are the major causes of electoral violence. Document and institutional analysis consisted of reports from key state institutions involved in electoral processes and democracy demonstrates the online-offline dynamics of social media’s centrality in electoral conflict and peacebuilding evidenced in the main theme of *hate speech* and attached to it, the sub-themes of *misinformation* and *disinformation* often circulated on social media. This makes the former (hate speech) a key driver of electoral conflict. The document analysis involved the examination of key documents related to election conflict and peacebuilding in official institutional websites of the purposively selected institutions. The analysis revealed one strong thematic area related to electoral violence and peacebuilding- *Hate speech* and attached to that the sub themes of *misinformation* and *disinformation* often circulated on social media. Interestingly, not much of the literature examined appraises the role of social media as a tool for peacebuilding, yet there is a general agreement that social media plays a double-edged sword and can be used for conflict and peacebuilding. This reality could possibly be because few studies or programs/ interventions have focused on such a role explaining the gap in literature and further justifying the salience of both the UKA social media campaign/intervention and the attendant baseline survey that this report is based on.

The National Police Service, (NPS)

The NPS (2017) booklet on community policing titled; *Community Policing Information Booklet-Building Safer Communities Together* and NPS (2022) Manual for police commanders titled; *Elections Security Management Manual for Police Commanders*, identified political incitement and *hate speech* as defined by section 13 of the National Cohesion and Integration Act 2008 and ethnic content as the biggest impediments to peace and they recommend monitoring, reporting and investigating *hate messages*. Police commanders

are therefore tasked to ensure close cooperation with representatives from NCIC in monitoring public spaces and social media for *hate related messaging* reporting and investigation (NPS, 2022:56)

NCIC (2022) Report: *A Violence Free 2022- Roadmap to Peaceful 2022 Elections* equally identifies and discusses *hate speech* as problematic and suggests ways of eliminating it together with political incitement and ethnic balkanization by tightening the checks on *hate related speech*, fake news, misinformation and incitement to ethnic hate. However, the roadmap also identifies politicians as the biggest impediments to electoral peace and proposes the sensitization of politicians on patriotic and servant leadership, a contention that came out clearly in Focus Group Discussion in the UKA baseline study as indicated in the following excerpt from one of the discussants:

Leaders/politicians should be in the fore-front of preaching peace... aspirants should take the lead in ensuring there is peace like now Ouda's [incumbent MP] followers in Kisumu are bitter because he did not get the party ticket but they should come out and preach peace and calm down people's emotions...they can do that through their posts on social media like in Kondele Youth Forum (Priscah FGD, 23rd May 2022, Kondele, Kisumu)

NCIC (2022) recommends engaging political parties and their preparations to hold elections by holding meetings with principals (NCIC, 2022). Regarding the role of social media in peacebuilding during elections, Mercy Corps and partners can leverage on NCIC proposals (NCIC, 2022: 10) in the following manner:

- a) Sensitization of politicians, media, bloggers, analysts, and commentators on conflict sensitive communication/reporting
- b) Training of trainers regarding social media hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation for them to be more effective on election watch [cohesion monitors] in collaboration with NCIC
- c) Support the popularization /dissemination implementation of NCIC criteria for vetting candidates through social media posts
- d) Support NCIC in the monitoring of public speech and social media for hate related messages for further investigation and recommendation for prosecution.
- e) Publicize NCIC's wall of honor and wall of shame for cohesion champions and violators respectively
- f) Infuse positive messages on social media (positive peace campaign)

Interestingly, the sixth intervention on positive messaging on social media was echoed by the UKA social media baseline survey that this report is based on. 47 percent of respondents agreed that awareness programs on social media would be the best intervention to address drivers of youth participation in, and support for, election violence. In the NCIC (2021) report on *The Road to a Peaceful Elections, Cohesion Bulletin* January-April 2021 the online–offline dynamics of social media, conflict and democracy is evidenced through offline strategies put forward for countering the elephant in the room (*hate speech*). For example, NCIC joined hands with other partners and brings to life five transformative actions to curb identified roadblocks to peaceful elections in Kenya (NCIC, 2021:33):

- a) Building trust between community members
- b) Empowering citizens to play their optimal role as active agents of peace through resisting manipulation and shunning perpetrators of violence
- c) Encouraging leaders to lead responsibly
- d) Putting in place robust strategies to eliminate *hate speech* and targeted forms of prevention to reduce risk of violence

Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, (IEBC)

Document and institutional analysis of IEBC website revealed no report related to social media, electoral conflict and peacebuilding. The documents which are mainly reports and strategic plans focus on the Elections Act and conduct of the elections in relation to political parties and aspirants. None, for example, tackles the key thematic finding of the document and institutional analysis which concerns *hate speech* and

its sub thematic areas of misinformation and disinformation before, during and after elections or more generally, the role of social media in electoral conflict and peacebuilding. Although the role of ICT features prominently, it is discussed within the context of election result transmission and declaration of results.

National Crime Research Center (NCRC)

NCRC, (2016) Research Report on *Election Crimes and Offences in Kenya, NCRC Research Report No 4*, documents several election offenses but does not touch on misinformation, disinformation and hate speech therefore the role of social media in electoral conflict and peacebuilding is not featured. This could be due to how the research objectives and questions were framed therein preventing the probing of social media's centrality in elections. The study was therefore motivated by an offline mentality rather than mentality than an online one.

Media Council of Kenya and Civil (MCK)

Media Council of Kenya, 2017: Guidelines for Election Coverage covers *hate speech*, conflict sensitive reporting, social media, and fake news. Hate speech here consists of use of negative stereotypes, particularly cultural, emotive media content that incite, hate filled speeches especially in political rallies and incendiary political adverts (MCK, 2017). The report discusses the role of social media during elections albeit within the confines of journalism. In this context, fake news is considered to have a social media or internet origin raising unresolved questions about internet regulation.

Kenya National Human Commission for Human Rights (KNCHR)

KNCHR Election Monitoring Strategy 2022 titled: *2022 General Elections from Pre-poll to Post-poll: Buffering the Inherent Universal Suffrage Rights*, ethnic bigotry is singled out as the biggest problem during elections manifested through politically instigated violence in 2007 attributed to ethnic animosity fueled by *hate speech*, ethnic mobilization, and illegal arming of vigilante groups

Synthesis, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The results, recommendations and lessons learnt are as follows:

Results

1. Local Evidence and Local Interventions: There is a significant amount of local evidenced which can be useful at the praxis level for further learning and adaptation of programs yet there is not so much evidence indicating that this opportunity is being exploited presenting a major gap and betraying the very promising Local Turn approach to contemporary peacebuilding in Africa.
2. The Double-Edged Sword -Social Media Hate speech, Electoral Conflict and Peacebuilding: There is a direct relationship between hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and election violence.
3. Online Offline Dynamics and Role of Influencers (Youth and Politicians): There is direct correlation between offline hate speech and online hate and polarization and consequently violence. This means that online interventions must be supported by offline activities such as training workshops, sensitization, and community capacity building including cultural activities such as music and arts.

4. Political Candidates as Sources of Hate Speech and Polarization online and offline leading to conflict. The study revealed that politicians use misinformation to fight their opponents. Further, political voting strategies like six pieces have been the source of polarization, incitement, hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation in places like Kisumu

6. Influencers don't Know that they are Influencers and those who know commercialize influencer roles Therefore, Influencers should be made aware and sensitized.

7. Social media is a cheap and affordable way of sending misinformation and disinformation

Recommendations

Local Evidence and Local Intervention

There should be a high priority given to the generation and utilization of local evidence at the practice level to benefit the local context. This calls for building trust with local experts to lead evidence generation without arm-twisting them to comply. It further calls for a proper coordination and or cooperation framework that can help in the synchronization of interventions from state agencies, civil society organizations, youth movements online and academia and perhaps even donor community.

Hate Speech, Misinformation, Disinformation and Electoral Violence (Social Media Hate as Fuel for Violence)¹⁸

Sensitization of politicians, media, bloggers, analysts and commentators on conflict sensitive communication/reporting, training of trainers on election watch (cohesion monitor), monitor public speech and social media for hate related messages in order to support investigations by relevant state agencies who will then recommend for prosecution and infuse positive messages on social media (positive peace campaign)

Online-Offline Dynamics and Role of Influencers (Youth and Politicians)¹⁹

Political aspirants from Kisumu, Uasin Gishu and Nairobi should be in the forefront of preaching peace, however they should be sensitized to take the lead in ensuring there is peace. There should be trust built between community members of different political opponents in these counties. Citizens or youths who support these candidates should play an optimal role as active agents of peace through resisting manipulation and shunning perpetrators of violence in the name of politics. This calls for putting in place robust strategies, in collaboration with relevant state agencies, to eliminate hate speech and targeted forms of prevention to reduce risk of violence given the former as the biggest contributor to violence as revealed in the study that this report is based on.

Political Candidates as Sources of Hate Speech and Polarization Online and Offline Leading to Conflict

Leaders should be at the forefront of preaching peace by having political discussion and agree to disagree but not to the extent of fighting. In addition, the youth who follow a particular politician should do positive messaging online whenever their aspirant face abuse and stop being used by politicians

¹⁸See NCIC, 2022 Report: *A Violence Free 2022- Roadmap to Peaceful 2022 Elections* [NCIC, 2022: 10]

¹⁹ *ibid*

Influencers don't know that they are Influencers

Influencers should be made aware and sensitized on their roles and politicians should stop commercializing and paying them

Social media is a cheap and affordable way of sending misinformation and disinformation

State should collaborate with tech companies such as Facebook to flag off online hate speech misinformation and disinformation through the classification of some words as hate speech

Stakeholder Sensitization and capacity building Workshop: There should be a Stakeholder Sensitization and capacity building workshop done towards the last quarter of the UKA online campaign for capacity building, further learning, adjustment, and adaptation of the program.

Conflict of Interest

The time sensitive nature of the study presented an operational hurdle among partners that might have impacted on the research. There has also been vested interest by the funder in terms of epistemic framing of the research project and lack of confidence in locally led expertise. There seems to be lack of seriousness in the continuous call by Southern Voices for respecting local voices/approaches and locally led interventions in the political-economy of peacebuilding regarding Africa.

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- c) Forced displacement, polarization and voter apathy
 - d) Other
3. How does mis/disinformation spread? (Is this organic or engineered?)
- a) It is organic
 - b) It is spontaneous
 - c) It is engineered
 - d) Other
4. To what extent social media posts elicit strong emotions towards either side of the political divide/politicians.
- a) To a great extent
 - b) To lesser extent
 - c) To no extent
 - d) Other
- 4.1. Does this affect in-person relationships?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Other
- 4.2. What would trigger violence?
- a) Ethnic polarizing post, hate speech targeting a particular community
 - b) Personal online attack targeting a prominent politician
 - c) Misinformation and disinformation regarding a contentious political issue
 - d) Other
5. What kinds of interventions are effective at mitigating conflict and preventing violence by countering hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and social media weaponization?
- a) Locally led social media interventions
 - b) Foreign led online peace interventions
 - c) State driven internet policy interventions
 - d) Digital peacebuilding awareness programs
6. What interventions effectively mitigate drivers of youth participation in, and support for, election violence?
- a) Youth empowerment programs
 - b) Music, arts and cultural interventions targeting youth talent
 - c) Social protection [programs]
 - d) Other

7. What are the shifting perceptions of youth with regards to the prevailing political rhetoric (Hustler Vs Dynasty, Economy/Pesa Mfukoni etc.)?
 - a) Youth perceptions are shifting positively towards the Hustler Vs Dynasty rhetoric
 - b) Youth perceptions are shifting negatively towards the Hustler Vs Dynasty rhetoric
 - c) Youth want Pesa Mfukoni
 - d) Other

Annex 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of using influencers in managing (political – misinformation)?
2. To what extent are social media “influencers” contributing (or not) to reduced potential for electoral violence?
3. What are the barriers of using technology in mitigating potential violence because of social media misinformation?
4. What are the enablers of using technology in mitigating potential violence because of social media misinformation?
5. How, and under what conditions, does online activity lead to offline violence?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of using influencers in managing (political – misinformation)?

Annex 3: Participant Information Leaflet and Consent Form

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTORAL PEACE-BUILDING IN KENYA BASELINE STUDY, 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Prof. Fredrick Ogenga, I am the President and CEO, The peacemaker Corps Foundation Kenya and Director, Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security-Rongo University. I am undertaking a study with Mercy Corps christened *Mitigating Election Violence through social media Micro-Influencers*, whose goals are to mitigate the potential of social media to incite conflict, promote the digital space as a forum for non-violence discussions and build evidence around the effectiveness of social media influencers as tools for promoting peace and mitigating conflict. The baseline study is a component of Mercy Corps Umoja Kwa Amani (United for Peace in Kiswahili), a 12-month election violence prevention and mitigation program whose goal is to *promote peaceful elections in Kenya by strengthening stakeholders' capacity to prevent and mitigate election violence and contribute to a peaceful political transition* around the August 2022 elections. As a critical stakeholder, you have been identified as a respondent and would therefore want to seek your consent by requesting you to read the following terms of the study and if you agree to participate, please append your signature.

SENSITIVITY OF THE STUDY

This is largely desk research, there will be no sensitive issues involving children. The study relies on adult population between the ages of 18-35. No sensitive document will be accessed without authorization or relevant state or non-state agencies or institutions and all authors quoted shall be acknowledged.

IMPLICATIONS OF PARTICIPATING

This study will involve only those participants that have given direct consent to participate in the study

If you would wish your names and details will not be included in the study, they will remain confidential

IMPLICATIONS OF WITHDRAWING

There are no risks involved in participating in this study and should you wish not to participate or continue participating in the study, you are free to withdraw with no consequences for your withdrawal

The information obtained in the study will be for the sole use of the program and will help mercy Corps make decisions on scaling their online UKA campaign and in any other way that supports the objectives of their program. Data that will be considered less useful for the study will be discarded

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study

YES

NO

Signature

Date

Annex 4: Focus Group Discussion Photos in Kondele, Kisumu



ⁱNitasha T. 2019. After Trouble in Myanmar, Facebook Charges Ahead in Africa. Retrived 05th May 2019 on www.wired.com/story/after-troubles-myanmar-facebook-charges-ahead-africa

ⁱⁱⁱⁱMutahi, P. and Kimari, B. 2017. The Impact of Social Media and Digital Technology on Electoral Violence in Kenya. IDS working paper Volume 2017 No 493

