MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY INDEX

Country Report
Côte d'Ivoire

DW Akademie

Made for minds.

Supported by the

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

Imprint

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY INDEX

Country Report
Côte d'Ivoire

Content

Executive summary

Young Ivorians are adept at using digital media. They are creative when it comes to using digital media and many have developed strategies to cope with media malpractices such as cyberbullying or hate speech. These are two significant, indicative findings from the present MIL INDEX country study. Both seem very impressive considering the challenges of high illiteracy rates and the strongly politicized national media landscape in Côte d'Ivoire. The results of the study are drawn from eight focus groups conducted in the beginning of 2019 in Abidjan and Bouaké and interviews with eight local experts. They confirm that young people are very good at using and creating content on social media but urgently need better critical, analytical, and reflective skills.

This MIL INDEX study is aimed at obtaining a concise picture of media- and information-related skills amongst youths under the age of 35 in Côte d'Ivoire. It addresses five dimensions of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) according to DW Akademie's MIL model: access, analysis, reflection, creation, and action.

In terms of **access** the focus groups conducted for this study reveal that young urban and semi-urban Ivorians use a variety of different media for purposes such as consuming information, communication, entertainment, education, or business information. Digital media, particularly social media platforms and instant messengers, are the most used and most popular among this age group and are generally preferred over traditional media. Nonetheless, radio and television are still valued for their auditory and visual input which are significant characteristics considering the high illiteracy rates of about 40,4 % present in Côte d'Ivoire (UIS, 2018). A divide between more urban and more rural regions is visible in the case of radio programs, which are more popular in more rural settings. The focus groups suggest this is due to the fact that local radio stations are often the only media which provide news relevant to more remote areas. Most other media show a tendency to focus only on news from the capital. Printed media are widely regarded as too costly and outdated by Ivorian youths.

The results of the **analysis** dimension indicate that most focus group participants possess a good digital and media knowledge while at the same time many lack awareness of their rights to freedom of expression and access to information. Striking was that youths generally consider content provided by traditional media to be more trustworthy, but mainly consume social media content. This and often very loose definitions of what media quality means showed that there is still room for improvement when it comes to the young people's analytical skills. Overall, urbanites seem to question the trustworthiness of media content slightly more than youths from more rural regions.

Results from the **reflection** dimension confirm that Ivorian youths are constantly exposed to malevolent forms of communication and media malpractices such as cyberbullying, hate speech, sexual harassment, and disinformation. Most young people show strong abilities when it comes to recognizing media problems and using prevention or coping strategies to handle them. Exceptions are politically motivated disinformation and biased reporting which are taken as normal in the Ivorian context. Due to this tendency towards normalization only very few young people reflect critically upon this media malpractice. Reflection on a deeper level such as on the impact of media messages or motivations of news outlets is often missing among young people.

Focus group participants showed very strong basic **creation** skills. Taking pictures, posting them on social media platforms, setting up instant messenger groups, and sharing information with peers, are activities participants of all groups pursue frequently. The experts interviewed for this study see these strong creation skills rather critically because they think that many young people do not possess sufficiently developed analysis and reflection skills to accompany them. Advanced creation skills such as setting up a website or editing videos are rarely encountered among the participants.

Results from the **action** dimension show that most young Ivorians are highly motivated and aware of options on how to put their MIL skills into practice for their own and their communities' benefit. Numerous examples on how young Ivorians use their skills for their own, individual advantage were reported in the focus groups. However, it is a different reality when it comes to actively using their skills for their communities. Although most of them show great enthusiasm for social causes and topics such as health, education, climate change, and migration are very important to them, only very few put their ideas of taking action in these areas into practice.
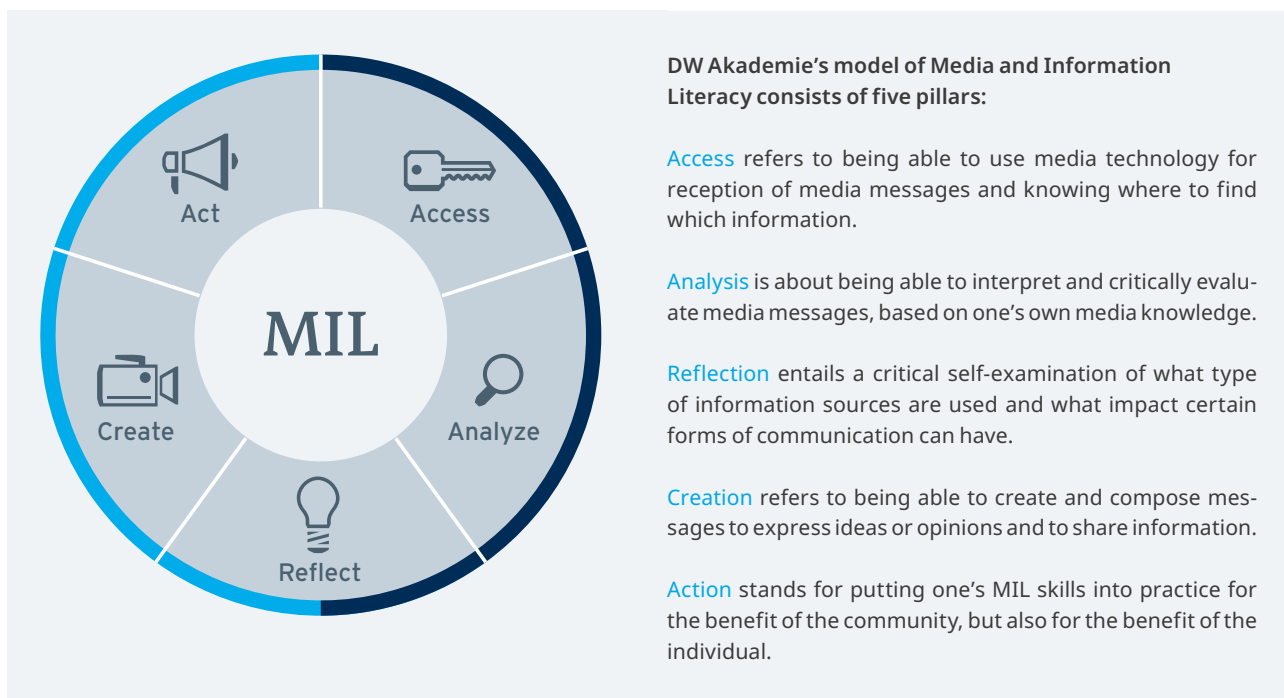
1. The MIL Index Approach

DW Akademie's model of Media and Information
Literacy consists of five pillars:

Access refers to being able to use media technology for
reception of media messages and knowing where to find
which information.

Analysis is about being able to interpret and critically evalu-
ate media messages, based on one's own media knowledge.

Reflection entails a critical self-examination of what type
of information sources are used and what impact certain
forms of communication can have.

Creation refers to being able to create and compose mes-
sages to express ideas or opinions and to share information.

Action stands for putting one's MIL skills into practice for
the benefit of the community, but also for the benefit of the
individual.

Image 1   *DW Akademie's Media and Information Literacy Model*

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) enables people to under-
stand and use media to put their freedoms of expression and
access to information into practice. In its MIL Model, which is
based on the concept of MIL developed by UNESCO (2013), DW
Akademie clusters MIL competencies in five key dimensions:
access, analysis, reflection, creation, and action.

The purpose of the MIL INDEX study, based on data collected
between November 2018 and April 2019 in Burkina Faso, Côte
d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, and Uganda was to ascertain
the levels of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) amongst 15-
19 and 20-35-year-old citizens in all six African countries.

In contrast to countries in which representative studies could
be conducted (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya) the methodology
for this Country Report Côte d'Ivoire was purely qualitative, re-
lying on key informant interviews and focus groups. Eight focus
groups with 64 adolescents and young adults in Abidjan and
Bouaké were conducted which were differentiated by age (age
groups 15 to 19 and 20 to 35, and urban vs semi-urban settings).
The participants answered questions that were drawn from the
five key MIL skill sets of the model: access, analysis, reflection,
creation, and action. After each focus group discussion, a brief
survey on all MIL dimensions was completed by the young peo-
ple. Since the focus groups were conducted in Abidjan, which
has about 4.4 million inhabitants, and Bouaké, the country's
second biggest city with approximately 536,000 inhabitants,

the results of this study do not reflect rural-urban differences
of MIL skills among the young age group. However, the youths
in Bouaké were recruited from the semi-urban perimeters of
the city. Thus, differences between the metropolitan setting in
Abidjan and the predominantly semi-urban background of the
participants in Bouaké can be identified. The participants were
more highly educated when compared with the total popula-
tion, with roughly a third having benefitted or are still benefit-
ting from tertiary education.

The findings from the focus groups are complemented with
eight in-depth interviews with local experts, who include two
key informants each for the following areas of expertise: media,
youth, education, and MIL.

2. Access

> Access refers to being able to use media technology for reception of media messages and knowing where to find and use information.

Access to information is the pre-condition for understanding local and national contexts, political participation and taking conscious, well-informed decisions in everyday life. Online and offline media play a key role in accessing relevant knowledge resources and are hence important for every citizen. On a practical level, access in the context of MIL comprises the skills of finding, tapping into, and using information, including technical know-how on managing hardware and software or knowledge on where to find different types of media content.

The media expert and journalist Anderson Diedri interviewed for this report draws attention to the fact that access to information and media facilitates connecting individuals to the community that surrounds them: "Access to information is very important [for people in Côte d'Ivoire], because the media allows us to connect. In order not to live isolated, you have to be informed so that you can connect with society."

Overall, freedom of expression and access to information are still a mixed bag in Côte d'Ivoire. The situation has improved since the country's civil war at the beginning of the 2000s and the political crisis between 2010 and 2011: The country has upped its rank on the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index from 82 to 71 in 2019. However, several media freedom violations still occur. Journalists have been attacked by the police at several instances and insulting the president is still a criminal offense (Reporters without Borders 2019, Freedom House 2017). Access to objective news coverage is difficult to come by because most Ivorian media are highly politicized and show clear political affiliations in their framing of informational content according to the interviewed experts. Only very few media outlets are politically unbiased, but most of them focus primarily on entertainment formats or music. Expert Anderson Diedri explains: "After the multi-party system in 1990, we only had state media. Then the first print media were created by the political opposition. […] The first media here were media directly backed by political camps. This has an influence up to today." Expert Nesmon De Laure, journalist and editor at the online forum Observatoire libre de Côte D'Ivoire, (OLCI) further problematizes that many media at the national level are financed by politicians. "It is them who have the money, it is them who finance media outlets," she says.

More than 60% of the total population of Côte d'Ivoire are under 25 years old (UIS 2018). These young people are highly digitized in comparison to other countries in the sub-region. According to education expert Antoine Mian from the Online University of Côte d'Ivoire, statistics provided by the national Ministry for ICT (Ministère de l'Economie numérique et de la Poste), indicate that about 68% of Ivorians have Internet access, 12% of citizens are active on Facebook and about 2% use Twitter. Focus groups confirm that social media and messenger apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter enjoy a high popularity among young Ivorians and are used frequently in urban and peri-urban settings.

While social media are popular in rural areas as well, access to online media is hampered by several barriers such as poor digital infrastructure in form of lower bandwidth and lacking Internet coverage, relatively high cost of mobile data subscriptions, and electricity, according to several of the interviewed experts. Education expert Antoine Mian further draws attention to illiteracy as an obstacle to media access. Data from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics confirms this assumption: Out of the ca. 5,2 million young Ivorians aged between 15-24 years, about 2.1 million are considered illiterate (UIS, 2018).

Radio and television

Radio is traditionally a very important medium in Côte d'Ivoire. The country counts a variety of more than 300 national, regional, and particularly local and community radio stations (CAIDP 2017). According to a study conducted in 2018, more than 90% of the population listen to radio programs regularly (Mieu 2019).

For the young people from Abidjan and Bouaké who took part in the focus groups discussions of this study radio is of somewhat less importance. They see the advantage of no or low access costs, availability in remote and digitally not well-equipped areas and value that content is provided orally—a crucial fact in a country with high illiteracy rates. Still, most of them prefer visual media such as television or online content over radio content. "Radio doesn't broadcast an image, so it's not attractive to me," (female, 15-19-year- old, Abidjan) says

> **Male, 20-35, Abidjan**

> 66 Radio is a media from another era. Because with our generation, we are used to images .

> **Female, 15-19, Bouaké**

> 66 I use our television at home mainly to watch films. All other videos and information I get through my smartphone.

a young woman from Abidjan. Several participants perceive radio as an outdated technology and available radio programs appear too conservative and too old-fashioned to them—especially in comparison with online content. "We believe that radio is traditional. Young people use new things like the smartphone and TV," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) argues a young man from Bouaké region. Another aspect is that many young people perceive information transmitted via radio as too slow. They miss availability on demand as with online content. "With radio, we have to wait for information until they talk about it on air. With the smartphone, you just type what you need, and it's displayed immediately," (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan) explains another participant.

When it comes to the popularity of radio, there is no significant difference between the perception of young people from Abidjan and Bouaké. The only exception is local news. Here, some youths from Bouaké show a preference for radio stations. "Radio makes it possible to stay up to date on political news within the region," explains a male participant from the semi-urban region (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké). A common characteristic of both groups is that if they consume radio content, they access it via their phones and only very rarely via classic radio sets.

Regarding to linear TV, reception sets are quite common amongst the focus group participants (85.9% own a TV set). The youths from Bouaké area appreciate that it is not affected by problems such as poor batteries or missing Internet coverage which they seem to experience frequently. "With the

smartphone sometimes, you can have connection problems, battery problems and so on. As long as there is electricity the television set can be connected," explains a young woman (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké). Another aspect why TV is popular among young people is its visual appeal. This focus on visuality does not only facilitate consumption of media content by people with low literacy or illiteracy but also contributes to the perceived trustworthiness of the media content. Particularly live and on-site reporting is a sign of trustworthiness for many participants (see chapter on analysis) which is why several participants from Bouaké region prefer accessing news content via the TV.

Youths from Abidjan clearly prefer digital media over the traditional linear TV. For them, the mobility smartphones offer is crucial. "Everything you can watch on TV can also be accessed on smartphones," a young woman from Abidjan points out (female, 15-19 years-old, Abidjan). Young urbanites often consider TV content as not up to date. If they watch it, they mostly do so online with help of their own or shared smartphones, tablets, or computers in cyber cafés.

In both urban and peri-urban settings TV is used mainly for information and entertainment purposes. The younger group aged 15-19 years is focused more on entertainment formats. A teenager from Abidjan observes, "watching television, you can have fun, for instance by watching cartoons" (male, 15-19-old, Abidjan) whereas the older age group frequently accesses news formats. "I watch France 24 […] because they provide well researched information," (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a participant from Bouaké reports.

" The majority of the information listed in the newspaper is already on Facebook.
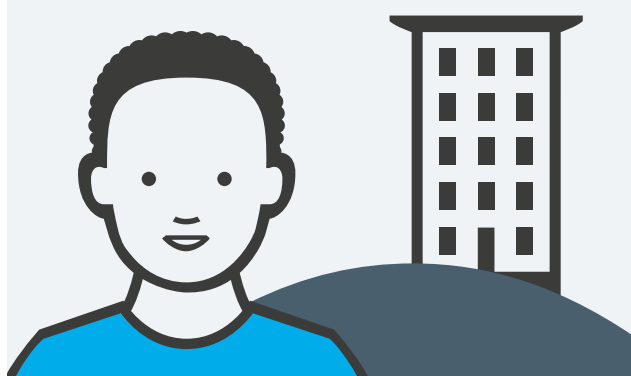
Printed media

Newspapers, books, and magazines are not popular among the youths from Abidjan and Bouaké for several reasons. One aspect is that newspapers are perceived as not up to date and something rather for older generations than for young people. A 20-35-year-old from Bouaké points out: "It's because we are young that we find that the computer and the smartphone are more important than media such as the newspaper. Older people like to use the newspaper. I think it's a generational issue" (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké).

Another argument mentioned several times by young people from Abidjan and Bouaké is that they have the impression that newspapers and magazines cannot offer them more than what they already find online on websites of news outlets and via social media channels. Several participants from both locations perceive printed newspapers as redundant and too costly. "Everything that's in a magazine is on the Internet. So, we don't see the point of magazines," argues a participant from Abidjan (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan). Generally, youths from Abidjan and Bouaké prefer accessing news content online.

Another challenge when it comes to accessing print productions are the high illiteracy rates among Côte d'Ivoire's youth. A participant who cannot read well describes her difficulties of accessing newspaper content and its marginalizing implications: "Me, I am at the bottom of the ladder. Because I can't read, when I pick up a newspaper, I don't even see what they've written. I prefer to receive information through

my ears or eyes. Then at least I know what they are talking about."(female, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan) Several focus group participants show social awareness and criticize the lacking accessibility of print contents for functional illiterates.

Books in turn seem to be in higher regard than newspapers and magazines as they serve educational purposes and are linked with schools and universities. Still, most young people prefer to access them online due to high acquisition costs of analogue versions.

Smartphones and social media

Falling prices and slowly improving digital infrastructure have increased the access to and use of online media among young Ivorians. Possessing a feature phone has become so common in Côte d'Ivoire that the interviewed experts hardly recall cases where young people did not have access to a phone. And also, smartphone ownership is currently on the rise due to lower access prices, according to the experts. "Today it is common to see a young person who is [...] 10 years old with a smartphone," says youth expert and journalist Yannick Djanhoun.

According to the Afrobarometer survey, about 90% of Cote d'Ivoire's inhabitants owned a mobile phone in 2017 with about 36% having Internet access via their phone (Afrobarometer 2017). In the focus groups, a clear majority of young people possess a smartphone or at least had access to a smartphone owned by family members or friends.

Focus group participants from Abidjan and Bouaké consider the smartphone to be the most important medium with regards to their everyday life. When asked for the reason, most mention mobility and versatility. "We can take smartphones with us wherever we go," a participant from Bouaké justifies his preference for the smartphone (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké). For another participant from Abidjan the versatility constitutes the most important feature of the smartphone. "The smartphone [...] includes several media at once such as radio and television." (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan) Besides this, also the relative affordability in comparison to a computer or tablet is seen as a strong advantage of the smartphone. And for young male participants from urban and peri-urban contexts, smartphones often assume the role of status symbols as they are "fashionable [and let them] keep up with technology of their generation." (male,15-19-year-old, Bouaké)

"Staying connected at all times" with peers and "fun" was a description given by a young woman from Bouaké when asked what function the smartphone has for her (female, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké). Her answer is emblematic for most focus group participants who use their smartphones mainly

Male, 20-35, Bouaké

66 A smartphone includes everything: books, TV sets, social media. With the smartphone you can access all these media at the same time.

Female, 20-35, Bouaké

66 On WhatsApp, people who are illiterate can also make voice notes if they can't write. It's important.

for entertainment and communication purposes such as playing online games, listening to music, posting or following people on social media, chatting with peers, and messaging or calling friends and family.

The most popular smartphone apps mentioned by focus group participants are messenger apps, primarily WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Imo, social media platforms, mainly Facebook and YouTube, the search engine Google, and a variety of gaming apps. "I think that for us young people the three applications [WhatsApp, Facebook, Google] represent our daily life. Nobody can do without these applications for at least one day," a young man from Bouaké summarizes (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké). Instant messengers such as WhatsApp, Viber, Snapchat, Imo, and Telegram are very present in the lives of youths living in Abidjan and Bouaké. They are used for communicating, sharing pictures, transmitting status updates, and taking part in social or study groups. "WhatsApp offers the possibility […] to take part in groups in which you learn a lot. We have English clubs and computer clubs on WhatsApp," (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a young woman from Bouaké explains. The general trend among the participants is instant messenger apps replacing more traditional communication functions such as calling or sending text messages.

The focus groups reveal that after WhatsApp, Facebook is the most popular social network among the participants, closely followed by YouTube, Instagram and SnapChat. Twitter and LinkedIn are mentioned only occasionally. The

main functions of Facebook as described by the young people are to maintain the connection to family and friends, to reach out to the international community, to provide entertainment, and information on current events.

Search engines and online encyclopedias such as Google and Wikipedia as well as specific study platforms are frequently accessed by the Ivorian youths to search for information on topics of interest, research for school and university, and job opportunities. YouTube is seen as both a problem solver because it is popular for looking up tutorials on study topics as well as an entertainment app which is also widely used to stream movies and series. "Google allows me to find a lot of information, I work a lot on projects with it," explains a participant from Abidjan (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan).

Other applications that are used by young people in urban and peri-urban contexts focus on specific areas of interest and entertainment. They range from applications for listening to music and watching movies (e.g., YouTube), to online games (Google play store) and applications that provide religious information. Gaming apps are particularly popular among 15-19-year-old males in urban and rural settings. "I download [games] from Google, and then I play them on my phone," one of them explains (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké).

Tablets and notebooks are considered less important than the smartphone by the young people. Reasons why participants use them, however, are the same: mainly versatility

Male 15-19, Bouaké

❝ I often watch YouTube to inform myself. When I have problems, I search for advice on how to solve them on YouTube.

Female 15-19, Abidjan

❝ Everything you read in magazines can also be found online. Magazines are useless.

in terms of usage and mobility. In comparison to the smartphone, tablets are judged as more comfortable for gaming, conducting research, and using social media platforms. In terms of mobility however, they are seen as less "practical" due to their size. Notebooks are favored by young people who pursue careers in schools or universities and use them for running complex programs or writing papers. High acquisition costs of tablets and notebooks, however, still constitute a significant financial barrier for most participants. Desktop computers seem to be occasionally available in public spaces such as libraries or schools. Still, they are significantly less popular because they lack the important feature of mobility.

When it comes to news content social media, Facebook, WhatsApp or YouTube are appreciated for the fast flow of information and communication. "There is a community of young people who are connected online via their smartphones. This way we can get information easily," (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan) says a young man from Abidjan. Moreover, in contrast to traditional media, digital media frequently cover news topics young Ivorians are concerned with and interested in. "We young people really like smartphones and we use applications like Facebook and WhatsApp [to get information about topics of young people]," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a young man from Bouaké argues. Google is mentioned by the younger age group of 15-18-year-olds as an important source for news. Particularly with time sensitive news such as information on protests or news that impact personal security,

social media are the preferred choice of most focus group participants.

Regardless of whether they are consuming radio, television, online, or social media news content, young people's preferred device for accessing news is the smartphone.

In conclusion, the young urban and peri-urban participants have taken to the smartphone as their media device of choice. They use it mainly for social interaction, but especially the older groups also use it as a source of news and information. Instant messengers like WhatsApp are the most frequently used apps in the discussion groups. Radio, traditionally with a high penetration, is losing in popularity, not just in comparison to digital media but also compared to television. The latter is more popular in peri-urban areas than in metropolitan Abidjan. One reason for the preference of (audio-)visual over written media is the high level of illiteracy.

3. Analysis

Analysis is about being able to interpret and critically evaluate media messages, based on one's own media knowledge.

Analysis skills are a precondition to be able to critically question and contextualize media content. They include not only possessing knowledge about the sender of a message but also the awareness of possible motivations and agendas. Analysis refers to knowing the present media landscape, having a critical mindset and practical analytical skills.

Francis Akindès, sociologist and director of UNESCO programs at the University of Alassane Outtara in Bouaké, stresses that it is necessary to explain to young Ivorians "that a message is always produced to achieve an objective." He thinks that young people are often not aware of hidden agendas of politically motivated media and is convinced "they need to learn that there are no neutral messages." Souleymane Oulaï, director of Studio Mozaik, an Ivorian organization dedicated to the education of journalists, agrees with Akindès and points out that analytical skills are vital for young Ivorians in order to form their own opinion and "distinguish quality information from false information." All interviewed experts agree that analysis is one of the MIL dimensions where young Ivorians' skills are least developed although they are highly needed due to the common presence of politically biased content and other media malpractices present in Côte d'Ivoire.

Media knowledge and media norms

Media knowledge encompasses understanding of how media function and how they are supposed to function when they assume their role of supporting freedom of expression and access to information within a society.

For the purposes of the MIL INDEX, media knowledge was tested using several multiple-choice questions focusing on social media, journalism, and freedom of expression. Judging by the results of the focus group participants, they did not have big difficulties when it comes to basic digital and media knowledge. The majority could define Facebook accurately as a social network on the Internet (67.2%) and journalists as people who research, produce, and publish new information (71.9%). Slightly fewer participants were aware of their universal right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by the national constitution (60.9%), which is considerably lower than the rate of awareness in several other African countries.

For young people from Abidjan and Bouaké the smartphone is the most popular media device and focus groups reveal that many of them possess advanced practical knowledge of mobile applications. They know which application is available for which purpose, know how to access app stores and search for applications they need. "There is an app called BOUNE PLAY. An application you can use to listen to music," (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) explains a participant from Bouaké and another from Abidjan reports, "I use YouTube for beauty tips." (female, 15-19-year old, Abidjan) Nevertheless, the young people's media knowledge seems to remain on the surface as focus groups indicate that many of the participants do not analyze motivations and processes that led to the creation of the apps they use or to the distribution of the online content they consume.

More participants show a critical mindset when it comes to traditional media. The older age group of 20-35-year-olds notices biased reporting of newspapers or TV stations that are affiliated with political groups. "I have the impression that people in power use television, depending on the regime or party they belong to," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) says a participant from Bouaké. And another one argues, "[the public broadcasters] are focused on defending the interests of the government. They provide government information [which is] often biased and watered down." (female, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan)

The interviewed experts confirm that political polarization of news in national—mostly traditional—media occurs very frequently and is common knowledge to many Ivorians. Still, several of them argue that the awareness of politically biased reporting of national media outlets does not decrease the young people's need for stronger independent critical thinking skills when it comes to media content. "They know which media belongs to which political party [...] but they lack the basic [analysis skills]," youth expert Yannick Djanhoun sums up.

Overall, the focus groups reveal that the majority of young people do not feel represented well in media. Young people miss opportunities to engage with media and think their topics of interest are only very rarely taken up by media outlets. A young woman from Abidjan confirms, "Things that interest us are not reflected in the [traditional] media." (female, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan)
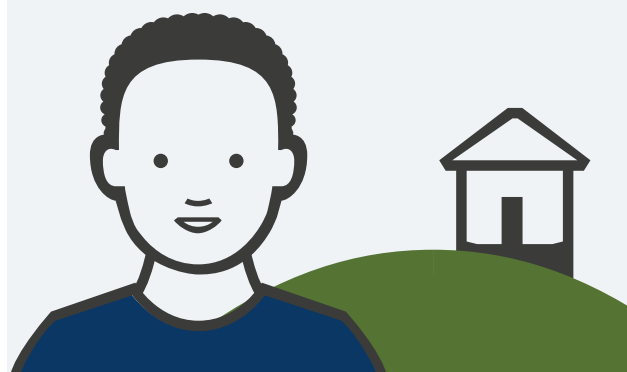
Male, 20-35, Abidjan

❝ I can say that about 20% of the media take the interests of young people into account, but 80% don't.
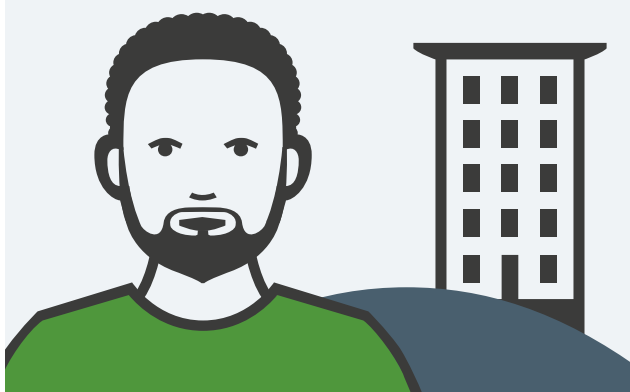
Male 15-19, Bouaké

❝ If you give information to a local radio, you have to provide evidence, which they can check.

Trustworthiness of media

Although the vast majority of focus group participants from Abidjan and Bouaké region declared the smartphone and digital media as the media most important to them, it is traditional media such as television or radio which they trust most when it comes to news. Reasons for this trust vary. The most prominent criteria of trustworthiness include strong local links, for instance with community radios, as well as visual input which is perceived as "proof of truth" (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) in the case of TV programs or the belief in media professionals working in traditional media outlets as opposed to "random social media users." (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan)

Despite the clear vote for traditional media when it comes to trustworthiness, most focus group participants prefer to use digital media over traditional media. From their viewpoint, digital media offer unique advantages such as providing very prompt information, numerous ways of active engagement and a smaller chance of being subjected to censorship. Those advantages outweigh the risk of receiving untrustworthy information from them.

For youths living in Bouaké region, local media, particularly radio stations, are often more trustworthy than regional, national, or international media because they offer locally relevant content, whereas national and regional media concentrate on news focusing on the capital. Another important aspect when it comes to the trustworthiness of local radio stations, is the notion of being close to reporters and the belief of being able

to check the truthfulness of news they report. "Radio Bouaké is trustworthy. They reported about the teachers' strike last time [...] Since it was in my neighborhood, I went to check it out," (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) says a participant from Bouaké. Besides this, local radio stations possess a good reputation among the participants because they are often managed by professional journalists who use established research and fact-checking processes. "When you go on the radio to pass on information, they ask you for proof of what you say, before passing on the information to the population of Bouaké," (female, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) explains another participant.

Although also perceived as rather trustworthy, radio is much less popular with young people from Abidjan who prefer news content provided by TV stations or online media, which also might be rooted in the fact that those media cover more news about the capital than on peri-urban or rural areas.

From the viewpoint of youths living in Abidjan and Bouaké, TV is generally a trustworthy source for news because it provides visual inputs and offers live reporting. "Most journalists go into the field to record videos and broadcast them. This guarantees reliable information," (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) a participant from Bouaké is convinced, while another from Abidjan argues, "TV is the most reliable source of information [...]. They are reporting on the spot and record live." (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) Yet, when it comes to determining the trustworthiness of national Ivorian TV channels and international (mostly

Female, 20-35, Bouaké

" Those of us living in Bouaké, we can check ourselves whether the information from the local radio station is true or false.

Male 15-19, Abidjan

" National TV channels did not report on the student and teacher protests. International channels did.

western) TV stations, youths from rural and peri-urban settings are divided. Some firmly trust in news content provided by TV stations such as the national public broadcaster RTI: "If it concerns Côte d'Ivoire, the national channel can't lie about what's happening in the country," (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a young woman from Bouaké is convinced; whereas others show a clear distrust in national public channels because they feel the stations are too influenced by political players. "They [the national public TV outlets] are not telling us the truth; they're trying to cover it up. During the teachers' strike, for example, they said that there were classes taking place and it was not true. Teachers were not working," (female, 15-19-years-old, Bouaké) a young woman reports from her personal experience. This mistrust in TV stations, particularly in national public broadcasters, is even stronger among urbanites who on several occasions narrated instances of biased reporting or omission of information. "There was a student march, the RTI reporters were there, but they did not show it on national television," (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) says a participant from the larger city.

Due to this mistrust in national and regional TV channels some youths from semi-urban and several from urban settings prefer news content from international broadcasters such as BBC or France 24. "There is information that France 24 or BBC report, and that RTI doesn't show. For example, the student protests," (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) a participant recounts in explaining his preference for international media outlets. But some participants from less urban settings insisted that international stations would not focus enough on local news that was relevant to them.

Several participants are aware of the strong influence of political parties on certain newspaper content. "If it is a political topic, and the editor is not from the same political party as the people in power, he will have to reframe information that he wants to publish," (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) notes a participant from Abidjan. Overall, the focus groups reveal a high awareness when it comes to political bias in printed media and national and regional TV outlets.

Some focus group participants seem aware that news provided on social media can carry the risk of media malpractices such as disinformation: "On Facebook, it's not necessarily journalists who are going to publish, there are also people who have fun giving false information." (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) Others do not seem to possess this critical lens: "On social media they show you videos of how events really happened. It's always true." (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké)

News via social media are considered as vital by several participants, despite their frequent lack of accuracy, because they are often not or only sparsely found elsewhere in a timely manner. "There was a time when there were protests, fights, and shootings in Bouaké. [...] Some people managed to film it and posted it. We received the information immediately," (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a young woman recounts her experience.

When it comes to researching information for school, university, or personal purposes via search engines and online encyclopedia such as Google and Wikipedia, it becomes apparent that

Female, 20-35, Abidjan

❝ There's a little bit of everything, truth and lies, on Facebook, so one has to be careful.

Male, 20-35, Bouaké

❝ On social media they often spread false information. The radio is more serious. It will provide you with real, local information.

several participants do not question the trustworthiness of the content they find. For some also the distinction between Google as a search engine and websites they find while using it seems not to be clear. "I go to the page, to Google, I type and what I'm looking for […] comes out," describes a 20-35-year-old woman from Bouaké.

Overall, urbanites seem to trust digital media more often for news than their rural or peri-urban counterparts. And at the same time, they also seem to be more critical, particularly when it comes to social media. "On Facebook they sometimes post lies," (female, 15-19-years-old, Bouaké) a participant from Bouaké points out. A few young people from Abidjan have even developed fact-checking strategies: "When I receive information on Facebook, I will first check on Google to see if it's verified, before I can inform others." (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan)

Summarizing, one can say that when it comes to trustworthiness of news young Ivorians act somewhat contradictorily. Although they trust more in the content provided by traditional media such as television and radio, they use digital and particularly social media more frequently for news. This contradiction might be partly explained by their perception of receiving more prompt information and less censorship in digital media. Overall, focus group participants base their judgement of trustworthiness on the presence of professional journalists, visual input, and local connectedness of media. Practical analytical skills such as questioning sources due to their political agenda or pursuing fact checks by analyzing content of

different media are only seen occasionally and mostly among urbanites. The respondents fared quite well on media knowledge, though there is less awareness of their right to freedom of expression than might be expected.

4. Reflection

Reflection entails a critical self-examination of what type of information sources are used and what impact certain forms of communication can have.

In terms of DW Akademie's MIL model, reflection means evaluating the impact of media messages and technologies on one's own and others' daily lives, as well as considering their overall impact on communities and societies. Media malpractices such as disinformation, hate speech, political bias, and cyberbullying constitute challenges for many young people when it comes to reflection. On a practical level, reflection can, for instance, mean thinking about the trustworthiness of information before spreading it, recognizing the harmful effects of cyberbullying or preventing cybercrime. As with all other areas of MIL, reflection is a prerequisite for responsible consumption and production of media content.

Disinformation, political bias, hate speech, and cyberbullying are the most common media malpractices young Ivorians are confronted with according to the interviewed experts. "Young people tend to pick up false information quickly without checking it," says journalist and media expert Nesmon De Laure. Cécile Coulibaly, a local expert for MIL, sees a high risk of young people falling victim to cyberbullying. According to her, for many youths the "most important thing is to post frequently [on social media]," but only few reflect upon the consequences of their publications. Overall, all interviewed experts agree that young people in Côte d'Ivoire need to enhance their reflection skills.

Sensitizing about and teaching reflection skills is seen as a challenge by educational expert Frances Akindès, from the University of Alassane Ouattara, because "reflection is not young people's priority when it comes to media." According to him, young people's priority is media use. "When you come and tell them [...] that there are people who manipulate media content they are saying 'you are annoying me, you are not teaching me anything'," he summarizes his experiences. And youth expert Étienne Bosson, who presides over the Ivorian association "International Women's Youth Network," (RESI-Fille) points out that when teaching reflection skills it should be taken into account that "young people are actors as well as victims when it comes to media problems."

Cyberbullying, hate speech and harassment

Hate speech, cyberbullying, and harassment are media-related malpractices that focus group participants from Abidjan and Bouaké region seem to experience very frequently. In every discussion, group participants contributed examples of the mentioned media problems which either they themselves, friends, or family members have experienced. Some participants even report that they are confronted with such malpractices on a daily basis.

Experiencing cyberbullying in the school context seems very common for the participating youths aged 15-19 years. Bullying often occurs on social media platforms or instant messengers such as Facebook or WhatsApp. Contentwise it focuses mostly on the outward appearance or other personal characteristics of the affected. "They posted his picture on Facebook and the majority of the students in the class [...] started saying he was cursed because of how he looked," is a typical example mentioned by a participant from Bouaké (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké). There is frequent posting/sharing of false announcements. Alleging a young person had died is a very common way of bullying peers. The following list includes further examples for cyberbullying in school contexts that were mentioned in the focus groups:

– A young woman received insulting comments on her Facebook page from classmates because of her English pronunciation (female, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké);

– A classmate was bullied via comments on Facebook due to his choice of clothes (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan);

– A participant reported bullying his peers by posting that they are dead on Facebook (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan).

Sexual harassment and cyberbullying based on gender norms and roles is also reported very frequently by participants from both regions. Mostly it is girls and young women who are affected by sexualized comments, sextortion, or similar types of harassment. In the case of young men, the recurring theme is homophobia. "Homosexuals get laughed at a lot. Sometimes, instead of helping them, they'd rather make fun of them and people even hit them. Then they film," (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan) a participant from Abidjan explains. Other typical examples of sexual harassment that were mentioned in the focus groups:

– A young woman from Bouaké posted a picture of her new tattoos on Facebook and receives many insulting comments because "a good girl" does not get tattooed. Several comments are of a sexual nature. (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké);

– A group of female participants talked about being discriminated for their choice of clothing either being called "too

provocative, revealing, or slutty" or too "modest", and "no fun" (females, 20-35-year-olds, Bouaké);

– Classmates shared a video of two students having sexual intercourse (15-19-year-olds, Bouaké);

– A participant reported that his male friend is being discriminated as "cursed and sterile" due to openly declaring his homosexuality (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan);

– Several participants mentioned examples of prominent women being harassed with sexualized comments (20-35-year-olds, Abidjan).

Xenophobia, religious beliefs, and political convictions are further topical strands that are recognizable when it comes to cyberbullying and hate speech examples mentioned by focus group participants. Noticeable about xenophobic comments and messages is that they include racist remarks by Ivorians and international actors. "There is a group on Facebook [...] where everyone is free to publish. In this group there are a lot of white people. Every time Africans publish, they will always say things like 'Ah, only an African can do this and that kind of thing.' It is frustrating," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) says a participant from Bouaké. Hateful comments motivated by religious beliefs mostly center around infringements of conservative values and taboo topics such as abortion (e.g., 20-35-year-olds, Bouaké). Insults of politicians or their followers seem to happen very frequently online. Typical platforms mentioned by the focus group participants are Facebook and Twitter. Some politicians seem to propagate hateful discourse themselves, as a participant from Bouaké recounts: "On Facebook, I saw a posting by [a] minister [...]. [S]he threatened the teachers, those who are behind the strike. She threatened them rudely," (female, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké). Further typical examples mentioned by focus group participants can be found below:

– A participant from Bouaké has been discriminated by users from Western countries in forums on Facebook due to being "black and African" (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké);

– A participant from Abidjan witnessed xenophobic comments about the Ivorian president on Facebook (female, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan);

– A young woman witnessed a friend asking for advice on abortion in a women's group on Facebook. The friend received many insulting, religiously motivated comments (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké);

– A participant reported about a group on Facebook where users insult politicians (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké);

– Several participants witnessed insults politicians publish about each other on Facebook (15-19-year-olds, Abidjan and Bouaké);

> " Everybody says what they want on Facebook without thinking whether they are offending people.

– A participant described a dynamic of hateful comments on Twitter and Facebook towards a man who was standing trial because of rape allegations (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan).

The majority of focus group participants from both locations show sensitivity towards cyberbullying, hate speech, and harassment. They condemn hurtful comments or xenophobic postings. "He should know not to mess with people's feelings," (female, 15-19-years-old, Abidjan) a participant from Abidjan expresses her opinion concerning a Facebook user insulting another user. And another participant voices her disapproval of defaming comments about a man who is standing trial in a theft case on Facebook: "I believe in the presumption of someone's innocence for as long as the facts are not proven, we must not smear someone. [...] I'm very wary of Facebook accusations," (female, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan).

The sensitivity documented in the discussions is in line with the quantitative results. In the accompanying questionnaire, focus group participants were asked to judge examples of cyberbullying and hate speech. Based on the results, it seems the young participants are quite aware of the negative implications of cyberbullying and hate speech. Almost two thirds reject the cyberbullying example as "not okay" (64.1%), over a third is unsure (34.4%) and only one participant is willing to tolerate the behavior. The proportion of respondents rejecting the hate speech example as "not funny" approaches three quarters (73.4%), 17.2% are unsure, and the remaining 9.4% are willing to accept it as "funny".

When it comes to responding to incidents of cyberbullying, hate speech, or harassment, reactions seem independent of location and age and vary considerably. Nonetheless, four different approaches can be identified:

1. Most common among participants is ignoring hateful comments or messages and retreating from conversations–sometimes even by shutting down accounts on social media or deleting instant messenger groups. Participants who chose this option seem to be motivated by feelings of powerlessness. This is expressed by a participant from Bouaké: "I think you should ignore [hateful comments], because even if you try to give haters advice, they're going to do worse than that afterwards." (male, 20-35-years-old, Bouaké) Or such reactions are rooted in the conviction that the mentioned problems form part of exercising one's freedom of expression. "When we post a photo or a video, it's to get criticism from others. So if you tell someone not to give a pejorative comment, it's as if you were telling them not to give their point of view, but only to say what you want to hear," argues a young woman from Abidjan (female, 15-19-years-old, Abidjan).

2. The second mode of reaction is retaliation. Several participants report they insult or mock people who have attacked them online. "We have to put them in their place, so they will not do it again," (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) justifies a young woman from Abidjan who tends to return insulting comments on Facebook.

3. A third way of responding seems to be reporting to social media sites, blocking accounts, or notifying national authorities, whereby the latter is only mentioned a few times and most participants seem not to be sure which authority they would have to contact. "I think that to help, the media should be able to work hand in hand with the authorities," (male, 20-35-years-old, Bouaké) a young man from Bouaké suggests.

4. The last approach in dealing with the problems mentioned above comprises awareness raising efforts and educating peers. "We need to organize awareness campaigns on social media because respectful behavior starts with education," (male, 20-35-years-old, Bouaké) explains a participant from Bouaké.

Disinformation

Several experts interviewed are concerned about disinformation in Côte d'Ivoire. "Disinformation is growing within the country and cases are becoming more frequent," says education expert Francis Akindès. At the same time experts are sure that young Ivorians do not possess the necessary skills to recognize false information. "Several young people get fooled by photo montages, or video montages," MIL expert Souleymane Oulaï describes the dilemma.

However, judging by the results of the accompanying survey, the younger generation does have a certain sensitivity toward attempts aimed at misinforming them. When presented with

Male 15-19, Bouaké

❝ I'll flag the person who insults me on Facebook and block their account.

an untruthful message about a cure for HIV/AIDS and cancer, over two thirds of the focus group participants rejected it as not to be trusted (67.2%), 18.8% were unsure and only 12.5% were willing to trust the Facebook post.

False information, biased media content or omission of information for political purposes is a prominent topic among the experts when it comes to disinformation. Due to Côte d'Ivoire's highly politicized media landscape, young Ivorians seem to be confronted with these types of disinformation and bias on a constant level via all types of media. When it comes to the question of whether young people are aware of this problem, experts differ in opinion. Some see a strong influence of politically motivated disinformation such as youth expert Yannick Djanhoun who claims: "Young people are being manipulated by the [Ivorian] media, because politicians use the media to manipulate people." Others are convinced that most youths are aware of the fact that "Ivorian media are colored politically" (media expert Nesmon de Laure, 2019). The results of the focus group discussions, however, indicate that several young people are aware of and do recognize politically motivated disinformation. Especially young people living in Abidjan seem to possess strong skills in this area.

A selection of typical examples presented by focus group participants can be found below:

– A young woman has witnessed politicians spreading false information on their opponents on Twitter and Facebook (female, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan);

– Several participants reported examples where the public broadcaster RTI withheld information or reported politically biased information, particularly in cases of protests of students and teachers against government policies (20-35-year-olds, Abidjan and Bouaké);

– Several participants noticed false news on politicians, e.g., that they are dead or running for office again, published by newspapers affiliated to political parties (15-19-year-olds, Bouaké).

Other frequently mentioned examples of disinformation cover a variety of topics such as conspiracy theories, religious manifestations, and digital fraud and, as mentioned before, false death announcements. "Often we get messages on WhatsApp, 'press here, then get 50 GB', and when you press it you don't get anything. They just want your data and your mobile money," (male, 20-35, Bouaké) a participant from Bouaké reflects his experience with fraud attempts via WhatsApp. A young woman from Abidjan mentions a case of a false death announcement on social media: "He had posted a picture on Facebook to say that DJ Arafat was dead. It was not true." (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) Further typical cases reported in the focus groups include:

– A YouTube video on "fake resurrections" conducted by African pastors (15-19-year-olds, Abidjan);

– A false death announcement of a teacher who had supposedly died during teacher protests via WhatsApp (female, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké);

– False offers for jobs on Facebook (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan);

– Personal photographs that were taken out of context and published on Facebook as an illustration for another user's post (female, 20-35-years-old, Abijdan).

Most young people clearly disapprove of disinformation for ethical reasons and several seem to reflect on potential negative impacts. "The problem with social media is that the information spreads like lightning. You have to filter information and you have to be careful with everything you post," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a participant from Bouaké expresses his concern about false information on Facebook. When asked for further suggestions about what could be done against false information, several young people suggest "verifying and analyzing" information. What these actions mean to them, however, seems to differ very much. Whereas some are in favor of verification and fact-checking strategies such as comparing information issued by different media outlets, contacting the source of information directly or gathering data, others suggest relying solely on the opinion of friends, visual inputs such as video recordings, or posts on social media platforms. Reporting incidents of false information to

Female, 20-35, Bouaké

❝ Here in Bouaké when the students at campus were fighting it was reported in the news that there were several dead. It was not true there were only very few wounded.

the authorities is another way of reacting to disinformation mentioned by several participants. "The body that regulates media outlets must be able to punish them when they publish false information," (female, 20-35, Abidjan) a participant is convinced.

Thus, young Ivorians are confronted with different types of disinformation frequently. Most young people seem very aware of the malpractices and a few try to employ some form of basic verification or fact-checking strategy before sharing information. Due to their own experiences, focus group participants know about harmful impacts of disinformation. Yet, the majority of them do not reflect upon possible motivations behind disinformation. An exception seems to be politically motivated disinformation which seems to be very common in the Ivorian context. Overall, there is room for improvement when it comes to the ability to link the impact of disinformation to possible motivations, as well as to develop functional verification strategies.

In summary, it can be said that young Ivorians are very sensitive when it comes to media-related malpractices. Most of them recognize these problems easily and several have developed coping and sometimes also prevention strategies. Nevertheless, many youths still feel helpless and frustrated because they either do not know how to respond or they react in a way that intensifies the problems. Moreover, a deeper level of reflection on the impact and motivation behind malevolent forms of communication and media practices still seems to be missing.

5. Creation

Creation refers to being able to create and compose messages to express ideas or opinions and to share information.

Possessing skills in terms of creation is a precondition for expressing oneself and communicating with the help of media. Creation include basic skills such as taking a picture, composing, and sending a message as well as more advanced activities such as setting up a blog or designing a computer program. Digital media and particularly social media have transformed media users into producers of media content and thereby widened the dimension of creation. "With social media, you are your own editor, you are your own journalist, you are your own reporter," expert Antoine Mian, teacher and researcher at the Virtual University of Côte d'Ivoire, describes the potential of creation in the digital realm.

There is a broad consensus among the interviewed experts that creation skills are vital for young Ivorians. Étienne Bosson, youth expert and director of the "International Women's Youth Network" (RESI-Fille) elaborates: "Creation is really important [...] because it makes young people visible and connects them to the world." Particularly the visibility aspect seems significant in the Ivorian context because according to several experts, youths often do not feel that the domestic media represent them or their interests appropriately. Expert Cécile Coulibaly, who works for the Virtual University of Côte d'Ivoire, emphasizes the economic potential of creation skills and argues: "ICT skills facilitate innovation and rapid development. They can foster creativity and help to create virtual businesses and employment opportunities for young people."

When it comes to the current state of production skills of Ivorian youths, experts agree that the majority of young people have highly developed skills, especially in the context of social media. Education expert Francis Akindès reports that "young people are always taking selfies [...] and they post and tell their stories on Facebook." Also more advanced creation skills such as editing videos, setting up a blog, recording YouTube videos or designing web-shops were witnessed by the experts--although they are mostly the privilege of "an elite group among young people in Côte d'Ivoire," as Francis Akindès points out. According to him it should not be forgotten that many young Ivorians are still excluded from opportunities to develop their creation skills due to lack of funds or education. Media expert

Female, 15-19, Bouaké

❝ We take selfies and publish them on Facebook and Instagram.
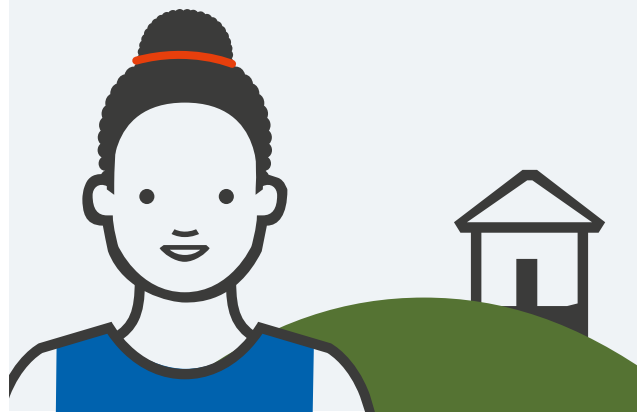
Nesmon De Laure, on the other hand, sees the wish to escape poverty and generate an income as an important driver for young people to advance their creation skills. "I see them taking part in MOOC, online training. And then afterwards, they create their own business," she is convinced.

Beyond the positive appraisal of the digital creation skills of many Ivorian youths, critical aspects are also voiced by the interviewed experts. Several see a too strong focus on entertainment and a gap when it comes to analyzing, reflecting, and responsibly using media content. "Their expression is sometimes violent. Yes, they somehow use their freedom of expression, but their posts shouldn't be trivial content or insults," elaborates Studio Mozaik's director Souleymane Oulaï. To close this gap and also reach young people who do not have the opportunities to further their creation skills, experts suggest a mixture of the already prominent peer-learning among youths themselves, formal learning at school, and directly approaching young people via social media and youth organizations.

Results from the focus groups are in line with the statements made by the experts and indicate that the vast majority of the young participants from Abidjan and Bouaké region possess well-developed basic creation skills. Taking pictures and sharing them via instant messengers or social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are mentioned in every group. Researching information for school or university via search engines or online encyclopedias is also something

all participants seem very familiar with: "I research on Google and download PDF files from Wikipedia for school," (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) explains a teenager from Bouaké. Most focus group participants use instant messengers such as WhatsApp, Imo, Viber, Telegram, or Snap Chat frequently to communicate with their families and peers and many are used to setting up groups for social, entertainment or work purposes. "I created a women's group on WhatsApp," (female, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) reports, for instance, a young woman from Bouaké. Widely popular for impression management are social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The young people know how to set up accounts and are adept at a variety of skills that serve to present and promote themselves. "I use applications to embellish my photos on Instagram," (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) explains one participant. Overall, only very few participants, most of them urbanites, possess more advanced creation skills such as uploading YouTube videos, editing photographs with Photoshop, or setting up a blog.

Comparing the individual skills based on the quantitative results, taking photos, usually with the mobile phone, is by far the most frequent technical skill. 84.5% of focus group participants do this at least sometimes. Over half also report recording audio (53.1%) and publishing reports (51.6%) that often, though some participants might have understood publishing reports to include school assignments as well. Video recording is done a little less frequently (43.8%), perhaps because of bandwidth problems or the cost of airtime.

Summarizing, it can be said that Ivorian youths have strong skills when it comes to basic media-related creation. Taking and sharing pictures is frequent, but mainly as a part of impression management. A lack of skills in the areas of analysis and reflection, however, can pose a risk if creative skills are employed irresponsibly. Only few young people were encountered that possess more advanced creation skills.

6. Action

Action stands for putting one's MIL skills into practice for the benefit of the community, but also for the benefit of the individual.

The action dimension is about possessing the knowledge and abilities to utilize media for the purpose of making a difference in society, for example through political activism, or to use media to one's own individual advantage. An example for the latter could be for instance looking for job offers online.

There is consensus among the interviewed experts that young Ivorians are very active in expressing themselves and their concerns using online and particularly social media. According to Antoine Mian, who works as teacher and researcher at the Virtual University of Côte d'Ivoire, social media platforms are a "place of expression" offering numerous ways for young people to engage and share their concerns. "They film themselves on YouTube, post on blogs, tweet, or write on WhatsApp," he elaborates.

Media professional Nesmon de Laure sees blogs and other online platforms as a possibility for young people to raise awareness for political and social issues. She mentions the example of a blogger who advocates for women's rights: "She has very rich content without being a journalist. She didn't go to journalism school, but she can publish a story." Journalist Anderson Diedri further points out that through "creating visibility and attracting followers" on social media young people have the chance to generate an income, achieve an influence on their communities or even on politicians. According to him, examples such as the chicken farmer "Dougoutigui," whose YouTube video went viral overnight and opened up a new sphere of influence for him, strongly motivate young people to express themselves on social media. At the same time, this potential for influence also triggers critical thoughts with some experts who doubt that young people have the necessary skills and notion of responsibility to handle the abrupt dynamics of social media. Education expert Antoine Mian argues: "It can be dangerous. Because if they have 10,000 Facebook accounts following them, they can expect 10,000 different opinions every day."

In contrast to social media, traditional media rarely offer spaces for youths to express themselves, the experts state. Even though some experts mention occasional radio or TV shows with call-in options and a few media projects for youths initiated by NGOs, ministries, or international organizations, they

seem to agree with media expert Anderson Diedri who concludes: "There is not enough room for young people in traditional media." Media expert Nesmon de Laure further points out that "youths are not taken seriously" by traditional media. And Studio Mozaik's director Souleymane Oulaï adds that online media are often considered a safer option by youths who fear censorship or repercussions from the authorities, as those media offer anonymity. Several experts demand more options for young people to participate in traditional media as well as more content tailored to their interests and needs.

Activism using media

Focus group results confirm that young people's preferred way to voice their worries and hopes is through social media and instant messenger services, mostly via accessing their smartphones. Also, the experts' notion that youths do not feel represented in traditional media is confirmed by focus group results. "We don't actually have a say on TV. We use Facebook to express our emotions," (female, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) explains a young woman from Abidjan.

When it comes to putting MIL skills into practice for the benefit of their community many participants are highly motivated. One participant even names "helping out, making an impact on those around you. Giving joy to all" (male, 15-19-year-old, Bouaké) as his main life goal. Results further indicate that many participants' eagerness for activism is rooted in worries about societal problems they notice in their surroundings. "I personally dream of no longer seeing misery in the country, of not seeing brothers and sisters asking for food, not seeing hunger and illness," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a participant from Bouaké region declares; worries which are very understandable in a country where nearly a third of the population is living below the poverty line (Worldbank 2018).

Another worry that is mentioned in every focus group is the fear of violence and social decline. Having experienced conflicts and upheavals in the past and constantly being confronted with news of violent youth gangs called "microbes," many participants worry about their future. They seem to feel close to those less fortunate youths because of their own fears. "I'm concerned that poverty and unemployment are driving our youth into prostitution, into a life like criminals, like the microbes," (female, 19-35, Abidjan) says one participant form Abidjan. Other frequently mentioned concerns include corruption, climate change, and migration.

Politics was dismissed as a topic of interest by the majority of young people due to two main reasons: 1. feeling powerless, not represented as well as being frustrated about bad governance of national politicians and, 2. considering politics as something for "older" and not for young people. Participants further express that the 2002 civil war and the violent post-elections conflicts in 2011 have turned their view on politics even

more negative. "For us young people, it's a bit of a taboo subject. Because in the past years, when young people have stood up for politics, we have seen that they have been reprimanded. We're a little afraid to get involved in politics," (male, 20-35-year-old, Bouaké) a participant explains.

When asked how media can help to cope with their worries and concerns the youths name numerous ideas, e.g., campaigns on television or social media on the dangers of migration, educational programs on climate change aired by radio stations, posting motivational pictures on Facebook for people to donate, or reaching out to people with YouTube clips to promote employment opportunities. The key to preventing their biggest fears for themselves and other youths, poverty and social decline, seem to be measures linked to furthering education and creating employment opportunities for most young people.

Although many youths know about possible ways of how to put their MIL skills into practice for the benefit of their communities and have plans to do so in the future, only very few could report practical examples of implemented activities. "We launched a fundraiser on social media with an organization. [...] We were able to collect funds and target orphanages to make donations," (female, 20-35, Abidjan) one participant describes. And another states: "On WhatsApp we have a group to end violence against women and girls. We exchange our experiences and knowledge. It's interesting." (female, 20-35, Bouaké)

Using MIL for one's own benefit

From an individual perspective many participants were concerned with the topic of health. They perceive good health as a vital precondition for everything else they want to do in everyday life. A statement which no doubt has to be seen in the context of Côte d'Ivoire's high burden of infectious and non-communicable diseases (IHME 2018). Several youths report experiences with malaria and the groups of 15-19-year-olds stress the importance of being well informed about sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

To receive information and practical advice on health issues, many young people prefer consuming media content which is quickly and easily accessible. Hence, health applications, websites, YouTube or Facebook, tips or testimonials from real-life experiences are very popular to seek advice. TV was named only occasionally as a source for health information. "On Discovery Channel, there is a show about diseases that are deadly. They teach you how to avoid them." (male, 15-19-years-old, Abidjan)

Other individual interests and concerns of youths refer to education and employment opportunities, which are linked to the young people's goal of avoiding social exclusion, pursuing successful careers and their wish to financially support family members or charitable causes. Several youths perceive educa-

Female, 15-19, Bouaké

" When I want to learn more about health, I go to YouTube to watch videos on diseases.

tion and employment as an effective prevention measure to not become part of Abidjan's "microbes"-youth gangs.

Using online and analogue media for research in school and university settings is very common for the majority of participants. Autonomous learning with the help of YouTube tutorials or researching for scholarship opportunities online were mentioned several times. "We're doing research with Google and Wikipedia," (male, 20-35-year-old, Abidjan) one participant explained.

Youths named several options to either search for jobs or advertise their own services via social media. "There are web sites like 'young job,' where you can post your qualifications, as soon as there is an offer, they notify you," (female, 15-20-year-old, Bouaké) a young woman from Bouaké explains. Also, inspirational stories of peers who have been successful in their careers or educational efforts are taken up frequently in focus group discussions. "On Instagram and Facebook, successful people share their stories. We can learn from it," (male, 15-19-year-old, Abidjan) argues a young man from Abidjan.

In summary, experts and focus groups confirm that youths are aware of and highly motivated to exploit the variety of opportunities digital media offer for the benefit of their communities or to their own advantage. The majority of them seem used to employ their MIL skills for their individual interests. However, when it comes to implementing projects of a more activist nature most did not have practical experiences yet. Focus group results and expert interviews indicate that traditional media do not offer enough spaces of participation and representation of youths.

7. Conclusions

This MIL INDEX study for Côte d'Ivoire focuses on Media and Information Literacy skills of 15-35-year-old youths. In contrast to countries in which representative studies could be conducted (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya) the methodology for this report was purely qualitative, relying on key informant interviews and focus groups. The findings presented are indicative of the state of MIL of young people in urban and peri-urban Côte d'Ivoire but cannot claim to be representative of the entire population. Additionally, there is no score or rating system that allows direct comparisons with the other countries in the overarching MIL INDEX project. Nevertheless, the results do give an indication of where the strengths and weaknesses of the 64 youths involved in the study lie.

Access

Young Ivorians access a variety of different media for a multiplicity of purposes such as information and news, communicating with peers and family members, entertainment, education, and business and much more. Digital media, especially social media, are the most popular among youths of all age groups. Greater accessibility of smartphones in terms of costs have made them available to the vast majority of participants. Young people value the prompt access to information, swift communication via instant messengers, oral and visual inputs, and opportunities of exchange, social media offer. Most of the youths are "professionals" when it comes to downloading and using apps for communication, news, entertainment, or education.

Traditional media such as radio and television are often perceived as old-fashioned and often rejected, especially by urbanites, as not quick enough in comparison to social media. Nevertheless, radio and television are still valued for their auditory and visual input which are significant characteristics considering the high illiteracy rates within Côte d'Ivoire. Radio is slightly more popular among youths from peri-urban settings than youths from Abidjan when it comes to news. The focus groups suggest that this preference is since radios provide locally relevant news whereas most other media have the tendency to focus only on news from the capital. Print media are widely regarded as too costly and outdated by young people from Abidjan and Bouaké region. Overall, digital and social media dominate all other media among the focus group participants.

Analysis

On the one hand, most focus group participants showed a decent knowledge of online and offline media. However, on the other hand the results indicate that many do not have an extensive knowledge about their rights to freedom of expression and access to information. Another significant finding is that although most young people consider content provided by traditional media as more trustworthy than information found on digital and social media, they clearly prefer to use the latter. Several participants are aware of the fact that news content shared on social media often lacks quality and trustworthiness but still prefer to rely on social media due to more opportunities to actively engage in discussions, a flow of information perceived as faster and a notion of being less

subject to censorship than in traditional media. Focus groups from both locations revealed that there is still room for improvement when it comes to analytical skills in the context of social media. Overall, it was found that urbanites seem to question the trustworthiness of media content slightly more than their peri-urban counterparts.

Reflection

Focus group participants are very frequently exposed to malevolent forms of communication and media malpractices such as cyberbullying, hate speech, sexual harassment, and disinformation. The vast majority recognizes malpractices and many have developed some type of prevention or coping mechanism such as ignoring cyberbulling, retaliating in the case of hateful comments, asking the opinions of friends on doubtful information, or reporting misconduct to social media providers. Nevertheless, a deeper level of reflection on the impact of media messages created by themselves or others and the underlying agenda is often missing. Interestingly, politically-motivated disinformation in traditional and digital media seems very normalized. Most young people do recognize this type of media malpractice but do not reflect on ways of how to handle it.

Creation

The young people who took part in the focus group discussions have strong skills when it comes to basic creation. Taking pictures, posting them on social media platforms, and setting up instant messenger groups as well as sharing information with peers, were activities mentioned in all groups. Only a few youths from the Abidjan possess more advanced and complex creation skills such as editing photographs or setting up websites. The experts interviewed for this study confirmed well-developed creation skills among Ivorian youths but at the same time drew attention to the dangerous dynamics that can develop if young people create media content while at the same time lacking critical skills to analyze their impact.

Action

Experts and focus groups indicate that young Ivorians are highly motivated and aware of options on how to put their MIL skills into practice for their own and their communities' benefits. At the individual level, youths report numerous examples of how

they use their skills to access information they are interested in and online resources to find jobs or education opportunities. However, it is a different reality when it comes to actively using their skills for the benefit of their communities. Although most of them show great enthusiasm for social causes and have thought about options on how to help less-fortunate people or

to conduct awareness raising on issues such as health and climate change, only very few seem to put the activities they are considering into practice. This gap might be attributed to the social insecurity most of them are confronted with, which leads to prioritizing their own personal worries and concerns in areas such as health, education, and employment.

Positive results	Critical results

Access

+ Strong expertise in using digital media + Smartphones are partially used to access journalistic media + Solidarity with young people who do not have full access to media such as illiterate young people or users with less access skills	– Only few young people consume news content via social media – Rare access to printed media and lack of awareness of the surplus newspapers offer vs. their websites – High illiteracy rates exclude many young people from media content without visual or audio elements – Less access to news provided by traditional media for youths from more rural regions because most media focus on urban areas

Analysis

+ Good knowledge of online and offline media + General awareness of ambivalent quality of news and information on social media	– Awareness of rights to freedom of expression and access to information not sufficiently developed – Discrepancy between media used and media trusted – Some criteria of trustworthiness based on poor justifications, e.g., TV being considered as trustworthy due to its visual appeal

Reflection

+ High awareness of malevolent forms of communication and media problems + Numerous strategies to cope with or prevent media malpractices	– Normalization of politically motivated disinformation and biased reporting – Reflection on underlying motivations and impact of self-produced media content on others remains rather superficial

Creation

+ Good basic creation skills	– Less developed advanced creation skills

Action

+ Good knowledge of options on how to put MIL skills into practice + Experience in using digital media for individual purposes	– Less experience in employing media for social causes – Too few spaces of participation for young people in media, particularly in the context of traditional media

8. Recommendations

Access

Improve access and media usage skills of rural youths: Focus group participants and experts pointed out that young people living in rural settings often experience a scarcity of local news content, are prone to having less access to technical devices and hence also less developed media user skills. These gaps should be addressed by media, schools, and other organizations working on MIL.

Develop strategies for functionally illiterate and low literate young people: About 40% of Côte d'Ivoire's population lacks reading and writing skills. Strategies on how to improve the media access and usage skills of barely literate and illiterate youths should be developed.

Promote use of journalistic media to access news content: Several youths consume news content solely via social media platforms and instant messengers. The quality of the content they consume is very ambivalent. Young people should be made aware that they can access high quality journalistic media content via social media channels.

Analysis

Strengthen awareness of rights to freedom of expression and access to information: More youths should be made aware that they are rights bearers when it comes to freedom of expression and access to information. More awareness on the role media can and should assume in society is needed.

Improve analytical skills and encourage youths to consume trustworthy media content: As pointed out in the chapter on the analysis dimension a discrepancy exists between media young Ivorians use and media they consider trustworthy. The young people should be encouraged to also rely on news content provided by quality traditional media—offline and online.

Reflection

Reflect on the motivation and agenda behind media malpractices: Although most youths show a high awareness of malevolent forms of communication and media malpractices, many do not reflect upon underlying agendas and motivations. More reflection on the mechanisms behind media malpractices is needed.

Promote critical reflection of political disinformation: Ivorian youths are confronted constantly with biased or false information on political issues. The strong politization of media is normalized and accepted as given by many. It should become subject to more critical reflection.

Creation

Advance level of creation skills: Most youths possess basic creation skills. They are used to taking pictures, uploading content on social media platforms, and initiating messenger chat groups. Only very few are familiar with more advanced creation activities such as setting up a website or editing pictures. A more advanced level of creation skills facilitates more participation in media and creates more employment opportunities for Ivorian youths.

Action

Encourage and assist youths to use their MIL skills for the benefit of their communities: Several youths have ideas on how to use their MIL skills to create a positive impact in their community but do not put them into practice. Encouraging the young people and assisting with the implementation of their ideas contributes to more confidence and experience, and in the long run to more social action for the good of society as a whole.

Create more spaces in media for participation and content relevant to young people: Young people often do not feel represented in Ivorian media. Particularly traditional media are often rejected by youths because they do not feel relevant to them. More media should create spaces that facilitate active participation of youths. Also, contents and formats more relevant to young people should be integrated.

Literature

Afrobarometer (2017), Online Data Analysis Tool: Côte d'Ivoire
https://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online

Baudelaire Mieu (2019); in Jeune Afrique, "Côte d'Ivoire: Radio Nostalgie conserve sa place de première radio commerciale"
https://jeuneafrique.com/755059/economie/cotedivoire-radio-nostalgie-conserve-sa-place-de-premiere-radio-commerciale/

Commission d'accès à l'Information d'Intérêt public et aux Documents Publics (CAIDP) and UNESCO Bureau Abidjan (2017), "Étude diagnostique de la situation des médias", *http://caidp.ci/uploads/3af05f87c7a98e4ba0b790c018e5f39b.pdf*

Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), (2018): Health Data Côte d'Ivoire, *http://healthdata.org/cote-divoire*

Freedom House (2017), Country Profile Cote d'Ivoire
https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/c-te-divoire

Reporters without Borders (2019) – Côte d'Ivoire
https://rsf.org/en/cote-divoire

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UIS Database: Country Profile Côte d'Ivoire (2018), *http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ci*

Worldbank (2018), Country Profile Côte d'Ivoire
https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&d-d=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=CIV

DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.
DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 50 developing countries and emerging economies.

DW Akademie   *Made for minds.*