

MEDIA AND  
INFORMATION  
LITERACY



MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY INDEX

# Country Report Namibia

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## Executive summary

Young Namibians are embracing the digital transformation, according to indicative findings from the present MIL INDEX country study. Interestingly, the youths that took part in eight focus groups conducted at the end of 2018 in Windhoek and Rundu are immersed in digital communication but are aware of the ambivalent nature of the news and information sources they find on social media and related Internet services. The importance of a critical mindset when navigating the World Wide Web was stressed by the eight experts interviewed as part of the study.

This MIL INDEX study addresses five dimensions of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) according to DW Akademie's MIL model: access, analysis, reflection, creation, and action.

The focus groups conducted for this study reveal that there is a rural/urban divide in terms of **access** and use of media. The more rural (and older) groups use radio and television on a regular basis, while the more urban (and younger) groups tend to regard traditional media as yesterday's media. This shift is in line with the rise of social media. Information uptake is coincidental and journalistic content is intermingled with all sorts of trivia when consumed in social networks. Smartphones are regarded by many as a substitute for newspapers, radio, and television. Amongst those who continue using traditional media, radio is turned to more often for information while TV is regarded more as an entertainment medium.

Considering **analytical** skills, there is a certain disenchantment of the Namibian youths with journalistic media, the reporting being considered not close enough to the interests and issues of the youth. But it was interesting to find that the focus group participants' appraisal of media in terms of trustworthiness is the exact opposite of their consumption patterns. While the discussions documented frequent use of social media these are evaluated as least trustworthy, whereas newspapers are rated highly on the trustworthiness scale but were hardly ever read. There is an awareness of the ambivalent quality of news and information on social media, but the youths cannot always name sources they consider produce high-quality information.

The results in the **reflection** dimension are ambivalent. The youths can recount numerous cases of cyberbullying and disinformation ("fake news"). But the accompanying survey shows that while they reject hate speech and disinformation, there is a certain willingness to accept cyberbullying as given. This is echoed in the focus groups where participants' advice is often to ignore hateful messages, rather than do something about them. However, the groups do discuss many other strategies in coming to terms with and combatting cyberbullying and disinformation. Rarely do they reflect the motivations that lie behind such behavior. It was also interesting to note

that disinformation is mainly discussed with regards to online rather than traditional media.

The Namibian youths in the focus groups have a good grasp on basic skills when it comes to **creating** media. Taking photos, recording audio or video is done quite frequently. But, as the experts interviewed for the MIL INDEX highlighted, the technical skills are seldom accompanied by an awareness of how to produce own media messages responsibly. Additionally, the skills are mostly used for trivial purposes rather than for more ambitious goals. Advanced skills such as programming or writing blogs are not encountered.

The **action** dimension is defined both as becoming active (using media) for the good of society and as using media for one's own benefit. The youths display confidence in their ability to voice their concerns and express themselves using media. There is a mismatch between the perspective of the experts interviewed and the youths concerning whether youths were taken seriously by the media. While the experts think this to be the case, the youths themselves do not feel adequately represented. This points to a blind spot in youth activism: Youths mainly mobilize via social media and thus, in the opinion of the experts neglect the opportunities journalistic media could offer them. The focus groups document that youths use media as sources of information on topics they are most interested in, such as politics, peace and stability, education, and health. They also use them for guidance and as an inspirational source when deciding what goals to pursue in life.

## 1. The MIL Index Approach

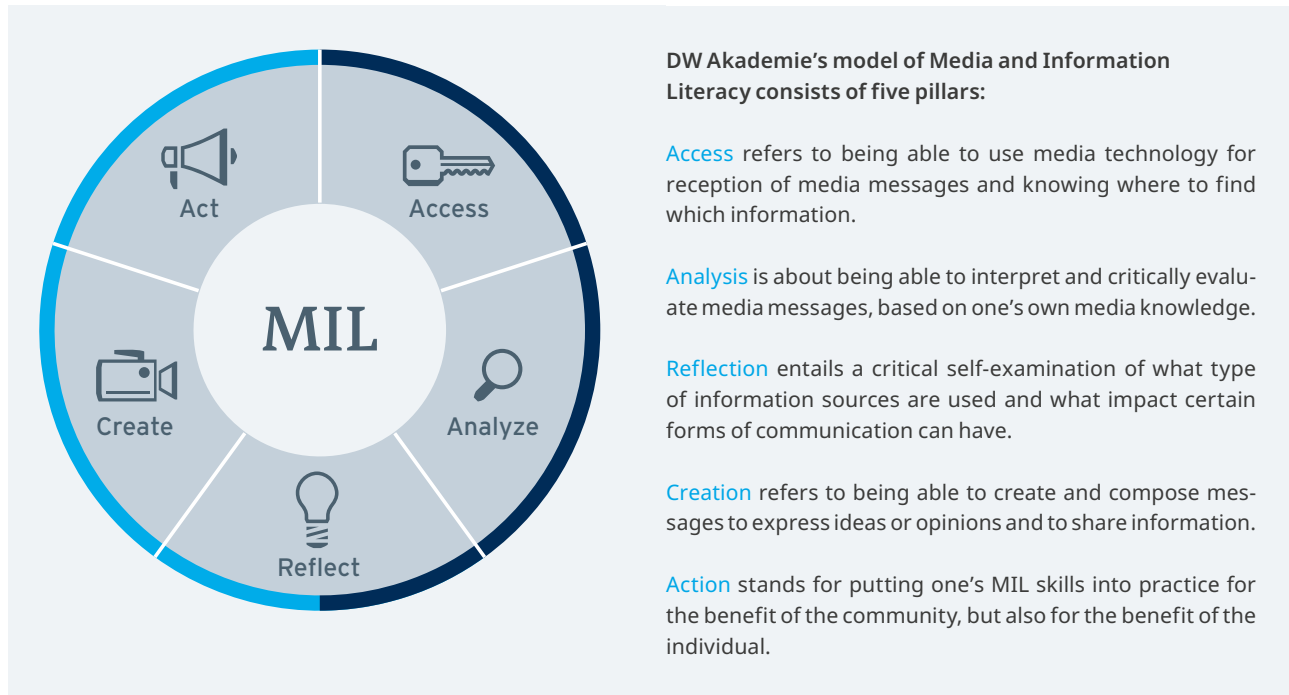


Image 1 DW Akademie's Media and Information Literacy Model

Today's media and information landscape is rapidly changing. All over the world, digital communication has revolutionized communication, but has also brought considerable disruption to existing media systems, as well as unparalleled levels of disinformation and hateful messages. To be able to navigate this challenging new environment, citizens need to be media- and information-literate. The purpose of the MIL INDEX STUDY presented here is to ascertain the levels of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) amongst citizens younger than 35 years of age in six African countries. It is based on data collected between November 2018 and April 2019 in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia and Uganda.

This Country Report Namibia is based primarily on qualitative data. Eight focus groups were conducted with 69 15-34-year olds, half in urban Windhoek and half in the smaller northern Namibian town of Rundu. They were split 50:50 amongst 15-20-year-olds and 21-34-year-olds. 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 an additional questionnaire was completed by the young people. The groups were somewhat more highly educated than the Namibian population in general and Rundu being the second biggest city in Namibia. They were not wholly reflective of the urban-rural split in Namibia, though there exists a marked difference between

metropolitan Windhoek (ca. 410.000 inhabitants) and Rundu (ca. 90.000 inhabitants). It is important to bear this in mind when interpreting the findings.

Beyond these methods with young participants, eight in-depth-interviews took place with two key informants each from 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.



Many important decisions in everyday life should be based on thorough knowledge, thus access to information is an important prerequisite for coming to terms with common challenges, be it as a citizen or as a consumer. Democratic politics in particular demand transparency of governance for citizens to be able to base their vote on a sound appraisal of democratic parties' performance. While an enabling environment and a diverse and professional media landscape are important, access to information also requires citizens to have the ability to access and use the information conveyed. Citizens need to know how to handle media devices such as radio sets or smartphones, they need to understand how to navigate them and where to find relevant information, as well as to be able to use the media accordingly.

Focusing on access to information in Namibia, the problem is seldom the supply side. The southern African nation ranks highly on freedom of expression indices (rank 23 on Reporters without Borders' Press Freedom Index 2019; rank 63 on Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Index 2017). It has a media landscape characterized by considerable independence from political, economic or religious influences. Jean-Pierre Ilboudo, Namibia's UNESCO representative, saw a problem on the demand side, particularly amongst under 30-year-olds. "[T]hey don't read the newspaper, they don't listen to the news or information, they just watch entertainment," said Ilboudo in an interview conducted for the MIL INDEX study.

Other experts interviewed, such as journalist and press freedom activist Gwen Lister, identified economic fault lines in Namibian society. She believed affordability is the biggest challenge in terms of access to information. „[I]f you dig a little bit deeper into communities you actually see that people have a tough life to get resources to connect to media [and] to information," concurred Joost van de Port, head of the department of Media, Arts and Technology Studies at the College of the Arts (COTA), when interviewed.<sup>1</sup> These factors go beyond the definition of access in terms of skills and it is important to bear them

in mind in the following discussion. Not having access to information is not necessarily caused by a lack of aptitude. It also has to do with the availability and cost of newspapers, television subscriptions, or data bundles for mobile and broadband.

Namibian youths have a wide variety of media to choose from. Compared to the entire population of two and a half million of whom roughly 57% are under the age of 25 (Munzinger 2020), the country has a vibrant media landscape: five national daily newspapers, two national television stations, and roughly 30 radio stations (FES/MISA 2015). Add to this a variety of international television stations via digital satellite television, magazines, as well as the limitless diversity of the World Wide Web.

The MIL INDEX findings from the focus groups conducted reveal that UNESCO's J.P. Ilboudo was partly right in stating that young Namibians are turning away from "traditional" journalistic media. This is in line with Afrobarometer data, showing that while about 56% of the total population had access to the Internet in 2017, the proportion of 18-to-25-year-olds is markedly higher at roughly 73%. On the other hand, 63 percent of Namibians listened to the radio for news daily, compared to 53% in the younger age bracket (Afrobarometer 2017). But this data also shows that the shift taking place is not as pronounced as Mr. Ilboudo's statement would imply.

### Radio and television

Radio is traditionally the strongest medium in sparsely populated Namibia. The focus groups were split into two factions when discussing it. On the one hand there were groups (more urban and younger) to whom radio represents the old order of media. It was termed "old fashioned;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) "an old form of technology;" (female, 15-20-year-old, Rundu) and a medium "for the old folks" (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) and criticized for not being on-demand, as well as being purely auditory as opposed to

<sup>1</sup> A note for transparency's sake: After more than twenty years in media and education in Namibia, including being the founder of the Media and Information Literacy Learning Initiative (MiLLi\*) at the College of the Arts, Mr. van de Poort is now working for DW Akademie.

Male, 21-34, Windhoek

“You can use the radio to listen to the news and it’s cheap to buy and you can access it anywhere in the world because it does not need a network to work.



Female, 21-34, Rundu

“With this new generation most of the people watch television and do not listen to the radio.



visual. On the other hand, youths (more rural and older) liked radio for its affordability, flexibility in use; and it was valued especially by the more rural groups for news content as well. It was seen by some as a constant companion. Several groups agreed that it was a benefit having vernacular language radio programs for every minority in the country. Many participants said the music was a prime motivation for listening to the radio, but some criticized that the radio stations had lost touch with their taste in music.

There was a clear divide between groups from the capital and from the smaller town when it comes to television. While the Windhoek focus groups tended to see TV as a medium being supplanted by digital media, the Rundu groups were more favorable towards the audiovisual medium. Several more urban youths reported having televisions at home but not using them. It was regarded by them as a medium of children and grown-ups, but not of their generation. They criticized that television did not offer on-demand services and was not portable, revealing that the benchmark was usually the smartphone.

The groups from the vicinity of Rundu tended to favor television and to compare it to radio rather than the smartphone. One argument was that television helped visualize events happening in Namibia and beyond, which radio could not offer. Participants could name a host of channels they watched regularly, the diversity of programs being one of the main motivators for watching TV. Most participants watched television

as an entertainment medium rather than as a source for news and information, with a focus on series, movies, music, and sports. But there were individual participants from several groups that said they watched the 8 o'clock news on NBC, the public broadcaster.

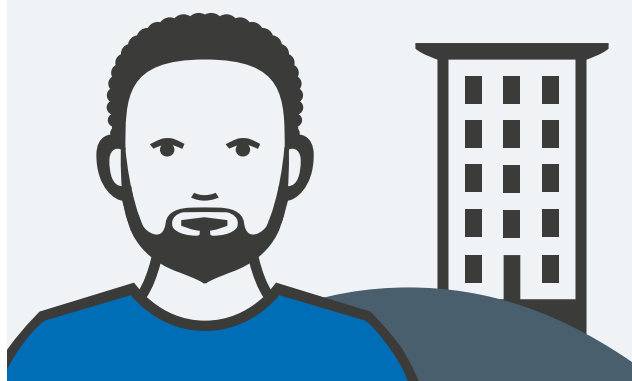
The youths also demonstrated the ability to think about issues of access facing other segments of the population beyond their own. The blind would profit from listening to the radio, one group mentioned, while another focused on how watching television could keep children off the streets and out of trouble. A third group said radio was important for the rural population without television access. This demonstrates a sense of solidarity with less privileged or challenged segments of the population.

### Printed media

The printed media, i.e., newspapers and magazines were seldom mentioned when it came to actual use of media. Magazines were regarded by most as too expensive. The participants were mainly familiar with the yellow press, arguing that there was an almost exclusive focus on gossip and celebrities in magazines. “Magazines are [...] out of fashion, there is now Instagram,” (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) one participant remarked. Newspapers on the other hand were seen as affordable, but with too much information. Not all partic-

Male, 21-34, Windhoek

“Newspapers are going to be obsolete soon.”



Participants would have agreed with two participants' statement that "we do not read," (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek; male, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) but there was a tendency to prefer brief rather than long, in-depth information.

Amongst most groups the perception was that the press has nothing to offer that you couldn't get on the Internet for free. Only one group from Windhoek was aware of the fact that newspapers offer more than their websites are willing to publish. One participant from this group also noted that the papers tended to have "a lot of journalists [...] going out of Windhoek to cover [...] a story on the less privileged people and put it in the newspaper." (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) But as mentioned, this was rather the exception than the norm.

The young generation has taken more strongly to digital media than the general population.<sup>2</sup> This was documented in the focus groups by every group choosing smartphones as one of the most important media devices. Coming from Windhoek and Rundu, one might argue that their choice is conditioned by their urban/peri-urban background. But not every participant owned a smartphone, so the preference reflected not merely actual use but also the desire to own and use such a device, which might also have applied to more rural youths. It was highlighted several times during the discussions that these types of mobile phones have become a status symbol for today's youth.

## Smartphones and social media

Smartphones were seen as a versatile gadget affording a variety of different applications. "Whatever you need, it's literally at the touch of your fingers," (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) as one participant put it. But "knowing how to press buttons" is not the same as knowing how to use the smartphone "constructively," as Shihomeka Panduleni, lecturer at the University of Namibia explained in his MIL INDEX interview. So, how do young Namibians use their smartphones?

Functions mentioned during the focus groups included listening to music, using messengers and social media, taking photos, watching videos, playing games, online shopping, checking the weather, doing research on the Internet, data storage, etc. Making phone calls was often mentioned as an afterthought, highlighting the fact that these devices are used by young people for a multiplicity of things beyond traditional telephone functions. Smartphones were also regarded by several groups as a substitute for television, newspapers, and radio, though the impression was gained that social media, messengers, and interpersonal communication were the main drivers of smartphone use and accessing mass media via the mobile phone was a side-effect. News apps were mentioned rarely compared to social media, though the latter were used by several participants to keep themselves up-to-date on the news of the day as well.

Asked why they use smartphones, the reasons included the aforementioned diversity of functions, portability, two-way-communication, and immediacy of access, though accessibility was also seen as a problem in less urban areas. "It is very hard for you to get a house where you can get Wi-fi here," (female, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) said a Rundu participant. All in all, the smartphone has advanced to a favorite pastime among urban Namibian youths. "It takes away your boredom," (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) one participant remarked. Several groups also struck more critical chords, admitting that they found smartphones "addictive," (male, 21-34-year-old, Rundu; male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) sometimes spending "the whole night" (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) on the phone and being "hooked on social media." (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) This may be summed up by the following declaration by a participant: "People now have the tendency of being engrossed with a phone and they are not aware of their social surroundings anymore." (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek)

In comparison, laptops, desktop and tablet computers were less attractive to the 15-34-year-olds because they were seen as bulky and less versatile. They were preferred, however, for gaming, watching movies and if the participants had to write

<sup>2</sup> It is important to bear in mind that roughly a quarter of Namibia's youth do not have access to the Internet, showing that the focus group findings are indicative of a large proportion of Namibia's youth but not of the poorest, most rural segment.

Female, 15-20, Windhoek

“I feel like we do everything with our smart phones: Internet, read newspapers, talk to people – and everybody has a smartphone, except me.



Male, 21-34, Rundu

“Facebook keeps you updated on information that you did not expect.



lengthy assignments. Feature phones were regarded as the emergency back-up if no smartphone was at hand.

In line with international trends, some Windhoek youths reported having moved on from Facebook. As one participant put it, “I feel like Facebook is redundant and not interesting at all and has been overtaken by other apps like WhatsApp, Instagram” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek). Snapchat was also mentioned in this context. This alerts to the fact that technical innovations are constantly changing the way information is disseminated, highlighting that access skills are a part of life-long learning, as Olga Maartens of the Namibia Institute of Educational Development emphasized in her interview for the MIL INDEX.

Nevertheless, the bulk of participants were still on Facebook and it was generally regarded as the most relevant platform alongside WhatsApp. There were four modes of using social media that emerged from the discussions: 1. The “see and be seen” mode, 2. the “get informed” mode, 3. the “get entertained” mode, and 4. the “let’s discuss” mode.

In the first mode, the participants keep others up to date on what is happening in their lives by updating their WhatsApp status and posting on Facebook. Selfies play a key part in this, the posting of which was termed “dropping some pics” (female, 15-25-year-old, Rundu) by a Rundu group. Popularity and presenting one’s lifestyle are the aims of this mode of identity management, which can make youths vulnerable for body shaming

and related forms of cyberbullying, as will be discussed further below.

One participant epitomized the “get informed” mode by saying: “For me, that thing of showing off is irrelevant. [...] I just go on Facebook and check things that I am interested in and log off” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek). Several participants took this stance, reporting that they “use Facebook to read the Sun newspaper” (male, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) or “use social media as a source of education.” (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) As mentioned above, youths feel that this is a worthy replacement for reading the actual newspaper. “I do not normally buy newspapers, but I get my information on Facebook,” (male, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) said one participant who followed both the *New Era* and *The Namibian* newspaper accounts on the social network.

In the “get entertained” mode the focus is also on passive consumption, but in this case, participants reported not posting their own content but rather being curious about what others posted as a way of passing the time. “[J]okes, funny videos and humorous pictures” (female, 15-20-year-old, Rundu) were preferred forms of content. This was seen as an antidote to the negativity that characterized certain other forms of communication on social media.

The “let’s discuss” mode was aptly described by one Windhoek participant. She reported discussing “anything that just pops inside my head” (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) with her

friends, such as crime, lifestyle, and good health. Judging by the focus groups, WhatsApp groups appeared to be common places for such discussions. All social media were seen as “a form of communication with peers” and debate within the peer group was seen as an empowering experience: “Everybody [...] has a louder voice.” (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek)

The focus group discussions amongst the 15-to-34-year-olds revealed that increased use of digital media does not necessarily imply abstinence from consumption of news and information. Certainly, it is true that journalistic content faces considerable competition from all kinds of other online content on social media. And that content is often below standard when compared to “the quality of information in traditional media because of the practice of journalism with checks and balances,” as Gwen Lister, Executive Director of the Namibian Media Trust emphasized in her MIL INDEX interview.

Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram were mentioned several times both as platforms that create opportunities to realize one’s aspirations, and as a potential source of problematic content. There was also an interesting mismatch between the frequency of use and the trustworthiness appraisal concerning social media. But this will be discussed in more detail in the analysis, reflection and action chapters that follow.

In summary, a clear rural/urban divide was documented in the focus groups. Rural (and older) groups tended to use radio and television on a regular basis while the more urban (and younger) groups were less likely to utilize traditional media channels. Social media turned out to be a prime news source for many and several regarded smartphones as a worthy substitute for newspapers, radio, and television. Amongst those who continued using traditional media, radio was turned to more often for information while TV was regarded more as an entertainment medium.

### 3. Analysis

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



Analytical skills enable media users to take a step back and contextualize the messages they receive. Knowing how media function, being able to analyze the source and the target audience of media messages enables citizens to critically interpret and evaluate media content.

The MIL INDEX experts interviewed identified the benefits of analytical skills at the individual and at the societal level. As Farah Isaacs, trainer in the MIL program "MiLLi\*"<sup>3</sup> remarked, "it is important to know how the media function for you to be able to know how to find the right information at the right place and the right source." In this sense, analytical skills feed back into competencies in terms of access and use of media. At the level of society as a whole, Mr. Shihomeka of the University of Namibia emphasized that citizens need to know how media function for them to value their access to information rights.

At the same time, the experts did not expect the young generation to know a great deal about media. "I don't think they have any knowledge about media functions," journalist Frederico Links<sup>4</sup> said. MiLLi\* trainer Farah Issacs believed this was especially true of rural youths. Tanswell Rooinasie, CEO of Rehoboth Youth Innovation Center cited anecdotal evidence to emphasize this was the case particularly when it comes to online media. When asked whether youths can analyze the media, he put forward the argument, "judging by what is on my Facebook account and Instagram account, I would tend to disagree."

#### Media knowledge and media norms

Being able to analyze media depends on a thorough knowledge of how media function but also on a clear vision of how media are supposed to function. Testing media knowledge in an accompanying questionnaire, the focus groups were asked to answer multiple choice questions. Over three quarters of the participants could define Facebook accurately, and almost 60

percent could define journalism correctly. This points to quite a thorough knowledge of media while also showing that digital knowledge is more widespread than knowledge on how mass media function.

Namibia regularly obtains good marks in international media freedom rankings (see above). Individual participants in the focus groups displayed gratitude to be living in a country with freedom of expression. "It's free to say anything," (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) one participant remarked. This corresponds to the awareness of the participants of their rights. In the accompanying questionnaire, 94.2% of the focus group participants knew their constitutional right to freedom of expression.

There was, however, a certain degree of disenchantment with the media linked to the topics and style of traditional media that was seen as incongruent with public interest. "We should give people information that is relevant to them," (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) said a participant. In a different group from Namibia's capital city, it was suggested that journalists increase efforts to "come into the community to talk to people" (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek). A Rundu group demanded media focus more on positive examples and role models rather than purely negative news: "Negative things will not help us with anything." (female, 21-24-year-old, Rundu) This is in line with the international trend towards constructive journalism (see McIntyre & Gyldensted 2017).

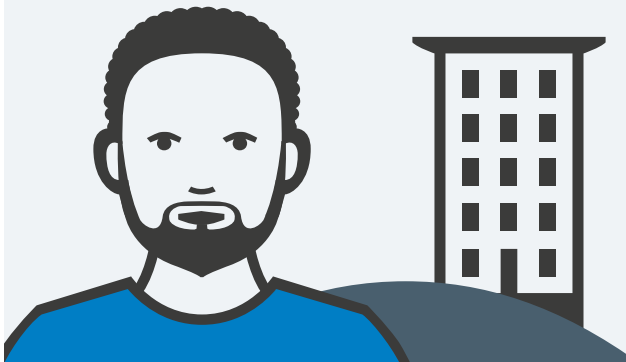
While most youths were of the opinion that social media compensated what was lacking from their perspective in traditional media, there were individual references to traditional media formats as catering for their needs. A Windhoek participant mentioned an SMS column in a newspaper where one could express one's opinion anonymously and a Rundu participant referred to a youth program on the radio. But television and radio formats were mostly seen in the rear-view mirror, i.e. they had been important to them while growing up – but especially the

<sup>3</sup> *The Media and Information Literacy Learning Initiative (MiLLi\*) is an MIL program launched in 2016 by the College of the Arts (COTA), Media Arts Technology Studies (MATS) in Windhoek.*

<sup>4</sup> *Mr. Links later went on to become head of Namibia Fact Check.*

Male, 21-34, Windhoek

“The media should not look at one angle of the story but maybe call those two parties out and we can hear from those people.”



Female, 15-20, Rundu

“Almost anyone can put something on social media which is not true.”



big city groups did not seem to seek age-specific formats out in traditional media anymore.

Some participants emphasized the value of diversity in media, rejecting media monopolies, and demanding media be “discussion platforms” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) dedicated to presenting both sides of a given story. Some also displayed a knowledge of the media landscape, differentiating between more tabloid and more quality type media, or as one participant put it, “you will find a few with the silly stories and a few that will have a better version.” (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek)

Only one group from Rundu was very critical of the media: one participant alleging journalists were susceptible to bribery and another proclaiming, “the media is a toothless bulldog which serves the interests of a certain party.” (female, 15-20-year-old, Rundu) But this hypercritical view of the media was an exception. Many statements rather displayed that traditional media have lost touch with the wants and needs of the young generation in terms of style and tone, rather than in terms of quality or trustworthiness.

### Trustworthiness of media

Interestingly, the assessment of the trustworthiness of media stood in contrast to the media the focus group participants

preferred. When asked to draw up a ranking of their most important media, all groups put smartphones on top. But when the discussion advanced to what media they considered to be trustworthy, the youths tended to mention traditional media and to contrast them with everyday communication on social media. This was in line with an observation made by Gwen Lister, Executive Director of the Namibian Media Trust, during the interviews, stating social media are the most widely used information source in the young generation, but “print media is the one they trust the most.” Judging by the focus groups, radio and television were however also considered trustworthy media.

The focus group participants trusted radio because it was seen as a medium with a long history and was considered to be closer to the community than the other, more nationally oriented media. “We once marched to town council when we were aggrieved by their services and the radio portrayed the story as it happened.” (male, 15-20-year-old, Rundu) The trustworthiness appraisal was also related to the fact that several local radio stations use vernacular language. Hourly radio news broadcasts and live shows were considered timelier than television or newspapers. One participant said she would hear news first on the radio and then turn to the television to find out more. In Rundu, all groups considered the radio to be the most trustworthy medium. One group participant emphasized that in cases of conflict, radio stations would “air about what both parties are saying.” (female, 15-20-year-old, Rundu) Besides balanced reporting, radio was also considered by some to be the top source for accurate information.



Female, 21-34, Rundu

“If you really want to find the real information like what is happening in Rundu you should be acquainted to the radio.



Television was not as prominently mentioned when it came to discussing trustworthy media. A frequent argument was that TV shows what happened in pictures. “People believe in things they see” (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek), as one Windhoek participant put it. Additionally, the length of news television formats in comparison to short radio news bulletins was mentioned as an advantage. On the other hand, as mentioned before, it was argued that television would take longer to provide news as it happened than radio. Public broadcaster *NBC* was mentioned several times as a good information source, but also as representing the government’s perspective on most issues.

Considering the low frequency of use in the young generation, the extent to which newspapers were cited as a reliable and trustworthy source of information was surprising. The older participants believed the papers to be a serious medium that backs its reporting up with facts, stands for objectivity, has access to news agency material, and is a medium with a nationwide reputation. One Windhoek participant also saw the static nature of the newspaper as an advantage compared to the fleeting nature of news on linear or digital media.

In general, journalistic media were seen as products of professional selection routines. The quality medium mentioned most often as an example of trustworthy news sources was *The Namibian* newspaper (“they say it as it is”, female, 21-34-year-old, Rundu; “they have the best investigative journalists”, male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the youths did differentiate between different types of ra-

dio stations, television channels, and newspapers. For radio, a Windhoek participant said, “there are certain radio stations that I do trust [...] and the rest are jargon.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) For television, *Fox News* was mentioned as a negative example considered to be “full of misinformation.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek)

News accessed via the smartphone, often on social media, was contrasted with these journalistic media, revealing that consumption of digital journalism was either not high on the agenda of the youths or that journalistic news had to vie for attention with other, often less accurate sources of information on digital devices. “There is a lot of fake information” (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) when reading and watching news on the smartphone, one participant noted and another from a different group felt online information often lacked reliable sources and spread rumors. “A picture of what happened somewhere can be taken and entitled that it happened in the Namibian streets.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) In a third group, online sources such as the *Windhoek Observer* and the *Villager* were criticized for dealing with irrelevant stories. And the groups from Rundu cited manipulation of pictures and lack of controls as reasons for not trusting social media. The online advantage of news via social media in terms of timeliness was linked by one participant to the necessity of having to verify the news by comparing with television news bulletins.

However, there were positive assessments of the use of smartphones and social media for news as well. A Windhoek youth emphasized that users commenting a news article on Facebook could in fact rectify or supplement the news reporting if it was coming from their village. Another from a different group said he used the options available to interact with reporters online. There was also an awareness in at least two groups that the quality of information obtained on the web was directly related to one’s own skills in terms of access and use. And yet the assessment of their peers was not very optimistic: “I think the majority of the youth don’t know that social media falls on the unreliable side as a source.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek)

Summarizing, there was a certain sense of dissatisfaction with journalistic media, the reporting being considered not close enough to the interests and issues of the youths. More importantly, the focus group participants’ appraisal of media in terms of trustworthiness was at odds with the media most of them used. Social media were used often but rated as least trustworthy, while traditional media were used less often but rated as superior in terms of trustworthiness.



## 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.



While the previous chapter deals with media knowledge and analytical capabilities, this chapter is about Namibian youths' ability to reflect their own behavior and the impact that certain forms of malevolent communication such as cyberbullying, hate speech and disinformation (frequently termed "fake news") can have on individuals and society as a whole.

The youth of Namibia are growing up in a complex information environment where traditional media have been supplemented, in some cases even supplanted by digital sources. With the benefits of always being online come multiple threats and challenges that young people are faced with today. "There are abuses, inappropriate posting, scamming, defamation and insults taking place," summarizes journalist Frederico Links who felt that anonymity on the web is a main driver of these deliberate transgressions. As Joost van de Port of COTA/MATS put it, youths "should always have a little question mark" in their heads, asking who the source is, what its motivation is and what the potential effects of any given message they receive via social media are.

The experts interviewed for the MIL INDEX generally did not believe that young people reflect their own online behavior. Shihomeka Panduleni of the University of Namibia was convinced that youths believe "they are using those media platforms perfectly," which to his mind was not the case. This was illustrated by youth NGO representative Tanswell Rooinasie saying, "how they reflect is by a like or a heart [...]." He emphasized that schools and parents were not doing enough to enhance young people's reflective skills and critical attitudes. But time to "stop for a minute" is also not ingrained in social media communication, as Gwen Lister reminded us. It is built on speed and reflection requires a conscious effort to stop and say, "hang on, this doesn't look right. Is it true? How can I verify?"

### Cyberbullying und hate speech

Some of the experts' reservations regarding the sensitivity of youths towards hateful and harmful communication were supported by the focus groups and the accompanying survey. However, generally there was a greater awareness than might have been expected vis à vis the expert opinions.

A first indication of lack of sensitivity was given by the accompanying questionnaire, in which 40% of participants rejected a case of cyberbullying as "not okay," compared to 47.7% saying it was "okay." (12.3% were unsure) On the other hand, a hate speech example was considered to be "not funny" by 72.7% of the participants and only 18.2% considered it to be "funny." (9.1% were unsure) The results illustrate the fluctuating nature of findings associated with young Namibians' ability to reflect on cyberbullying and hate speech.

Answering to the question "Have we experienced cyberbullying?" a Rundu participant remarked "cyberbullying is trending these days in Namibia." (female, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) Demeaning behavior does seem to be rather prevalent in communication via social media and messengers. Every focus group was able to recount several examples of cyberbullying, violence inciting content, and related issues:

- A video of two female fans of opposing musicians having a fist fight;
- An unfair meme (stereotypical photo or video with caption) created of a girl from their primary school;
- A girl being body shamed after a picture of herself naked was circulated via WhatsApp;
- A young man being attacked and mocked in a WhatsApp group whenever he posted or commented on something;
- Stereotypes of certain ethnic groups (esp. Kavango) being spread via social media;
- A person close to a girl creating a fake Instagram account and posting private pictures of her without her consent;
- A girl being stalked by someone on social media and via phone calls.

Young people's perspectives on such issues are influenced by how their role models behave. One Windhoek participant recounted two Namibian musicians "badmouthing" each

Female, 21-34, Rundu

“I think as youths we have to be very careful whenever we are taking pictures. First thing, you must think and reflect on it.



other using “vulgar words.” (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) He felt this “encourages people” to behave in the same way. Cyberbullying has reached an alarming level of normalcy as highlighted by the statement by another Windhoek participant. He reported witnessing cyberbullying “almost every day.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) “People have created this mentality where you can go on social media and talk anything bad about anyone and not get consequences,” (female, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) a Rundu participant added. Educator Olga Maartens, one of the experts interviewed for this study, confirmed that “cyberbullying is a topic that we are all really worried about”.

Several young focus group participants displayed a reluctance to accept cyberbullying as given. Almost all groups proposed reporting cases of cyberbullying to hold the responsible persons to account, but almost as many groups featured statements calling for victims of cyberbullying to ignore the messages, i.e., not to do anything about them. One Rundu participant even suggested the victim “go to another country or village,” (Rundu, 21-34-year-old, female) rather than do something about the online abuse. The third major strategy discussed was solidarity with the victims, comforting them or speaking out together on social media. A Windhoek participant reported putting a case of bullying that was happening on her WhatsApp status to notify others. Retaliating or blocking perpetrators’ accounts were strategies mentioned less often. However, more institutional approaches such as counselling or enhancing digital skills were also mentioned several times, indicating that there was an

awareness amongst the participants that victims should not be left alone.

Hate speech is less prevalent in Namibia, though society does have ethnic fault lines. Insults against the Okavango minority are an example from a focus group that shows that “tribalism” does occur. The participants of one group could readily recite the stereotypes that are spread about Kavango people. Additionally, racism rooted in the Apartheid past of Namibia may take place in closed messenger groups. There was no evidence of this in the focus groups, however. The groups sometimes mentioned racism but never with specific respect to media. Gwen Lister of the Namibian Media Trust said hate speech clustered around events like the national elections. From her point of view, disinformative communication was more prevalent in Namibia than hate speech.

## Disinformation

There was consensus amongst the experts that disinformation is a major problem in Namibia. As UNESCO’s Jean-Pierre Ilboudo put it, “it’s not frequent, but it’s permanent.” Endemic disinformation mainly “emanates from groups or profiles on Facebook or WhatsApp”, according to a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR 2020) on the 2019 elections.

The experts were divided on the question of whether the young generation is equipped for the challenges associated with disinformation. While Mr. Rooinasie argued that young people were “really good” at verifying information and Ms. Lister was convinced that young people were certainly more skilled than the older generation, Mr. Links stated that “most people do not verify the information” and Mr. Panduleni was sure that “they don’t look at sources [...] before sharing.”

Afrobarometer data showed that while 83% of the general adult population in Namibia feel social media “makes people more informed”, 73% also say that social media “makes people more likely to believe false news” (Keulder 2020). This would support the notion that the population is aware of the disinformative nature of certain social network messages but does not reveal anything about how Namibians come to terms with such malevolent communication. The IPPR report mentioned above assumes that “low levels of exposure to or engagement with traditional channels” increase the likelihood of forwarding disinformation (IPPR 2020). This would seem to be the case especially for urban youths.

Judging by the results of the accompanying survey, the focus group participants were quite adept at identifying untrustworthy online messages. 54.7% did not trust the example in

Male, 21-34, Rundu

“As for fake news I think maybe in our towns and communities we can have more teaching, discuss the cases and how they affect the other people.”



the questionnaire with a company alleging it had found a cure for HIV/AIDS, a further 18.8% were ambivalent and 26.6% of respondents were willing to trust the company. There was no significant difference between Windhoek and Rundu participants, indicating that more exposure to “traditional channels” – as was the case for the Rundu youths – did not seem to have a strong positive influence when it came to being critical of disinformative messages.

The participants in the focus groups could readily render cases of disinformation and related examples they had encountered:

- A Namibian “prophet” had supposedly seen signs that the world was coming to an end;
- After the first Ebola outbreak there were false rumors that it had spread to Namibia;
- An article alleged Namibia was providing free housing to immigrants;
- False messages were spread variously stating the president’s wife was pregnant or dead;
- An aunt of a participant had a liver disorder, and rumors were spread that she had contracted HIV/AIDS;
- There were reports Zimbabwe’s president Robert Mugabe had died long before this was the case;

– A participant was scammed into investing money into a company that did not exist;

– A musician was accused of hiring people to kill another man, but it proved not to be true.

There were recurrent examples of religious sightings, epidemic-related rumors, or gossip concerning celebrities, mirroring the topics the young people were particularly interested in.

When asked what could be done to stop the spread of disinformation, there was a sense of powerlessness when it came to social media. “I think you cannot really stop it” (Rundu, female, FG3), one Rundu participant said. The strategy in coming to terms with disinformation mentioned most often was reporting it to social networks or (in the case of scamming or severe insults) to the police. Beyond this, there was a wide variety of individual suggestions, ranging from fact checking websites and improving journalistic reporting on the production side, to verification strategies and reflecting before sharing on the reception side. Increased legislation and training of youths in digital skills were also mentioned.

Few focus groups reflected on the motivation behind disinformative content. “It is for business purposes” (male, 21-34-year-old, Rundu) one participant said, echoed by a Windhoek group that suggested confronting the bloggers who made a living off spreading rumors and gossip. A participant in the latter group put forward the following theory on the motivation behind it: “I think it’s either people who have political agendas or people who have personal grudges and use social media.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) But the level of reflection in the focus groups generally did leave room for improvement. It was also interesting to note that journalistic media were hardly ever mentioned in the context of disinformation, even though the previous chapter showed that the youths did have a sense that there are traditional media that do not adhere to established quality standards of journalism. This is especially interesting considering the fact, that the general adult population regards news media and journalists as the second most prominent source of “fake news”, not far behind social media, according to Afrobarometer data (Keulder 2020).

In summary, the youths were aware of malevolent forms of communication. Every group could recount several cases. However, the participants did not display a critical enough position when it came to cyberbullying. There was also not enough reflection on the motivations that caused such phenomena as disinformation and hate speech.

## 5. Creation

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



Digital technology has opened the gateway to worldwide two-way communication in the public domain. People formerly known as the audience, as blogger Jay Rosen once put it, today are able to produce their own media. Whether it be taking photos, recording videos or audio, writing their own texts, commenting on or sharing information with others, today's online users can take an active part in shaping the production and flow of information on the World Wide Web.

As COTA/MATS head Mr. van de Port pointed out in his interview for this study, the creative potential of online communication is closely linked to being able to use digital devices effectively, but also to being aware of the risks involved in exposing oneself online. Acting ethically and responsibly applies not only to creating content online, but also to the sharing of content, Ms. Maartens of the Namibian Institute of Educational Development remarked. She emphasized that creation is not merely a matter of technical know-how but also of awareness of the consequences of one's own actions.

When it comes to the technical skills involved in creation, most experts agreed that the young Namibian generation is very good at it. According to youth NGO representative Mr. Rooinasie, taking pictures is the most frequent form of creation, but he also mentioned "speak your mind poetry" and recordings of cultural events as things the young generation spreads via messengers and social media. "They share pictures and videos every day," reported MIL trainer Farah Isaacs, only to specify somewhat more critically that "it's actually not pictures or things that will have a positive impact on anybody else." Most pictures she had observed were selfies or of a trivial nature. One of the reasons might be because youth's activities in this realm are often self-taught or based on peer-to-peer interactions, as Ms. Maartens pointed out. She emphasized that parents do not have the skills and schools are not equipped to deal with it.

The accompanying survey revealed that indeed taking pictures (85.5%) was the most commonly practiced form of creation amongst the focus group participants, followed by audio recordings (76.8%) and video recordings (65.2%). Only roughly

Male, 21-34, Windhoek

“On Instagram people post pictures about where they are and what they are doing. And people talk more on WhatsApp because it is the main basis for communication.”



a third of the participants had written and published reports, documenting a bias towards (audio-)visual communication, at the expense of the written word.

This was confirmed by the focus group discussions. When asked to report what they do with their smartphones, "take selfies or pictures" was mentioned in every group. "The girls, they snap," (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) said one participant, illustrating the fact that the more urban groups have moved on from Facebook to more visual social networks like Snapchat or Instagram. The same applies to videos that are frequently uploaded. Audio recording is often related to sending voice notes via messengers.

Sharing one's status, exchanging one's profile pictures, sending text messages, listening to music, online shopping, and playing games were often mentioned, reiterating that a great deal of mobile phone activity is invested in social media and other pastimes, but seldom aiming at more than impression management. Judging by the focus groups, the technical skills of Namibia's youth are rarely harnessed for more ambitious causes. More advanced skills rarely mentioned included doing live video on social media, using picture editing software such as Photoshop or Lightroom, or recording one's own music.

Summarizing the findings for the creation dimension, youths had all the abilities when it comes to basic creative skills, but they did not often put them to more constructive use. More advanced skills were rarely encountered.

## 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 of MIL is about activism on the one hand, using one's media skills to make a difference in society, and about realizing one's full potential on the other. It entails both engagement for the public good and to one's individual advantage. "You'll make [...] better decisions if you understand how you can use media to your best benefit," as MIL trainer Ms. Isaacs put it. Action is also closely connected to young people voicing their concerns using the media at their disposal.

The experts interviewed for this study mentioned numerous possibilities for young people to voice their concerns in the media. Most were of the opinion that online communication, particularly social media, are the location where young Namibians mostly voice and discuss their hopes and worries. Youth center manager Mr. Rooinasie said some youths have a substantial follower base and could "actually shape how [their] [...] community behaves and acts." But several traditional media were also mentioned that try to cater for the needs of the young generation, including youth sections and SMS pages in newspapers, as well as interactive youth programs on *NBC* or community radio stations.

Joost van de Port emphasized that there was a role to play for traditional media brands in structuring the conversation around youth issues "in an entertaining, fruitful way." Journalist Gwen Lister also mentioned the fact that young people could approach newspapers like *The Namibian* to draw attention to issues that they felt should be investigated, though she regretted that youth would not often utilize this option. Lister also said call-in shows on *NBC* stations are mostly used by older people since young listeners lacked the patience and were unhappy with the restrictions that are associated with participating on air. UNESCO's Mr. Ilboudo too was skeptical, citing the youth's reluctance to read or use traditional media as a reason for low youth participation rates in mass media formats. He felt that this led to a fragmentation of the voice of the youth by virtue of their tendency to stick to social media.

The accompanying questionnaire was used to establish how the focus group participants judged their own abilities in media participation and publicly voicing their concerns. 55.1% agreed

somewhat or fully that the media they use help them to participate where they want. 65.2% were convinced that they could make their voice heard using the technical skills that they have. And 71% had a positive assessment of their own ability to express themselves using media. In summary, the young participants were least convinced of being able to participate in public dialogue and they were most convinced of their capability to use media for self-expression.

### Activism using media

Several experts interviewed were sure that the voice of the youth is taken seriously in Namibia. "I think the youth probably get a lot more coverage than the elders at this point," said Gwen Lister. Examples of youth campaigning mentioned by the experts that had been successful in Namibia included "affirmative repositioning" action aimed at improving the condition of urban youths, civil society actions surrounding the land issue and protest against cost-cutting at educational institutions. On the other hand, Farah Isaacs reported having served on the National Youth Council for the //Karas region of Namibia for seven years without ever seeing a youth issue be resolved satisfactorily.

The focus group discussions confirmed that social media and online messengers are the main vehicle for youth to voice their concerns, because "everybody can afford to be on it." (female, 15-20, Windhoek) WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Skype are thus the preferred spaces for discussing their issues. Most groups also argued that their issues were not taken seriously by the traditional media. One Windhoek participant felt that the media were doing what they could but also thought "the people who are supposed to make these changes are the people who are not taking these things seriously, like the politicians." (female, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek)

There was evidence that individual youths pursue goals in the public interest using the digital tools at their disposal. One Windhoek participant reported that he spread his music concerned with "our cultural history" and "the hopes and worries we have in this country" (male, 15-20, Windhoek) on different platforms. Another was involved in sports programs for less advantaged children and was trying to get media to sponsor the activities. A third shared his insights from an event on "decolonizing colonial images" online with his friends. A Rundu group reported how social media and messengers were used to mobilize protest when there were water problems in the town. "In a week we would go for two to three days without water" (male, 21-34-year-old, Rundu). After the strike, the issue was resolved.

Female, 15-20, Rundu

“The media brings information to the doorsteps of less privileged communities.



Female, 15-20, Rundu

“They do not give us an opportunity to express our ideas.



But participation is sometimes less conspicuous. One Windhoek participant said, “I like bringing up topics [...] with any random group.” (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) Topics that she had discussed on WhatsApp with peers included crime, lifestyle and health issues. Not all youths were inclined to discuss such matters in the open and some felt issues that were dear to their hearts would be “too personal.” (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek)

Societal issues considered relevant by the focus group participants were politics, peace and stability, education, and health. Several participants in different groups emphasized the importance of development for the prosperity of Namibia and the media were seen as one vehicle that might help in attracting foreign investment. There was a certain degree of disenchantment with politicians, as summarized by a Windhoek youth: “I hope that in the next 50 years we will have youngsters that are able to take care of our country. These guys of today are not.” (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) A hope expressed several times was that the media could hold government to account by exposing corruption and unnecessary expenditures. One Windhoek group discussed the land issue extensively, saying the media should inform the public objectively on the question of who owns what land in Namibia.

There was a sense that the country is well-off when compared to areas of conflict in Africa and elsewhere, but that issues such as racism and gender-based violence were undermining the freedom every citizen was entitled to. One Rundu partici-

pant reminded his group of the important role free media had played during South African occupation and hoped that the media would regain its role as a mouthpiece for justice. It was even suggested the media use the example of Namibia to educate people in conflict areas about how peace and stability could ensue after the end of conflict. The focus group participants also sought information on how to combat crime from media reports on how other countries were dealing with these issues.

Education was seen as an important key to success. Several groups focused not only on their own prospects but also on the less privileged. From their point of view, media should advocate improving the educational sector in Namibia, “from using books to using tablets and laptops in classes, [...] teachers being paid more, schools being renovated.” (male, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) Some believed the media should play a larger role, alerting its audience to the importance of education and offering more educational programming.

There was also consensus amongst most focus groups that good health care is an important public good. The focus groups cited various formats as examples of how the media can inform the public on health issues. One Windhoek group suggested the media research what conditions were not receiving enough attention and spotlight them, prompting government to act. In a similar vein, a Rundu group argued that the media could document the conditions of vulnerable groups in remote areas “bringing their issues to the attention of leaders.” (female, 15-20-year-old, Rundu)



## Using MIL skills for one's own benefit

Focusing on the individual perspective, one of the main concerns of youth in Namibia is unemployment. The focus group participants dreamed of having successful careers, some of them aspiring to become entrepreneurs and to start their own businesses. The most basic way in which media could help on that path was job offers, be it in the classified sections of newspapers or online. More than once, participants mentioned offering their services via Facebook or WhatsApp. The youths were also keen on receiving guidance from media on "how to start on your own business as a young person." (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) In later stages media could support businesses by providing space for advertising. A Windhoek participant recounted being featured on radio, in a newspaper, and on a blog while "promoting a comic book we had written." (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) Others reported media helped in their singing and design endeavors.

The young participants in the focus groups drew inspiration from media reports that featured successful people. One Windhoek participant recounted an NBC format that introduced Namibians telling the "story on how they had succeeded and what obstacles they faced." (male, 21-34-year-old, Windhoek) Another group mentioned the CNN format "African Stories" as an example. A recurrent topic was having inspirational success stories involving people of color.

But media were also seen as a potential work field in its own right. Rather than aspire to become a journalist, the goal tended to be along the lines of what one participant suggested: "There are Instagram models and the ones with the most likes get paid." (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) Along with successful careers sometimes came dreams of wealth and lifestyle, living the "fancy life with cars, designer clothes, vacations" (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek) or "a beautiful house with a big kitchen" (female, 15-20-year-old, Windhoek), though most youths recounted realistic aspirations. Additional issues at the individual level included relationships/family responsibilities. The youths were keen on getting advice on relationships from the media and several hoped to find the partner of their dreams online.

In summary, there is a distinct difference between the perspective of the experts interviewed and the youths concerning whether youths were taken seriously by the media. The experts believed this to be the case, while the youths were of the opposite persuasion. The focus groups documented that youths use media for guidance and as an inspirational source when deciding what goals to pursue in life.

## 7. Conclusions

The MIL INDEX study for Namibia focused on the Media and Information Literacy skills of 15-34-year-old Namibians. In contrast to countries in which representative studies could be conducted (Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso), the methodology was mainly 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 Namibia 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 69 youths involved in the study lie.

### Access

Media play an important role in the lives of Namibian youths today. The focus groups revealed that there is a rural/urban divide in access and use of media: the more rural (and older) groups using radio and television on a regular basis while the more urban (and younger) groups tended to regard journalistic media as passé. This is associated with the rise of social media, though it was interesting to find that Facebook and co. have become a prime news source for many whereas news apps are not prominent at all. Information uptake is coincidental and journalistic content is intermingled with all sorts of trivia when consumed in social networks. Smartphones are regarded by many as a substitute for newspapers, radio, and television. The youths thought newspaper websites were as informative as a printed newspaper. Amongst those who continued using traditional media, radio was turned to more often for information while TV was regarded more as an entertainment medium.

Several focus groups reflected critically on their own use of smartphones and social media, discussing aspects of addiction and of how online replaced more productive activities. There was also an element of solidarity with less privileged or impaired segments of the population for whom the youths believed traditional media were important.

### Analysis

The Namibian youths that took part in the focus groups value their right to freedom of expression. There was a certain disenchantment with journalistic media, the reporting being considered not close enough to the interests and issues of the youths. They were able to formulate clear expectations regarding journalism in Namibia. However, the most important finding in terms of analytical skills is that the focus group participants' appraisal of media in terms of trustworthiness was the exact opposite of the media most of them used. While the discussions documented frequent use of social media these were evaluated as least trustworthy, whereas newspapers were rated highly on the trustworthiness scale but were hardly ever read. While there is an awareness of the ambivalent quality of news and information on social media, the youths could not always name sources they considered produced high-quality information. Some groups were aware of the fact that the quality of news one gets from social media is proportional to one's own digital skills.

Remembering that the sample size was low and not representative, it is worth mentioning that the focus group participants had quite a good knowledge when it came to questions on social networks, journalism and their constitutional right to freedom of expression.

### Reflection

The results of the focus groups in the reflection dimension were ambivalent. The youths demonstrated a clear awareness of issues such as cyberbullying and disinformation, being able to recount cases they had come across. But the accompanying survey showed that while they reject hate speech and disinformation, there is a certain willingness to accept cyberbullying as given. This was echoed in the focus groups where participants' advice was often to ignore hateful messages, rather than do something about them. That being said, the groups did discuss numerous other strategies in coming to terms with and combatting cyberbullying and disinformation. Rarely did they reflect the motivations that lay behind such behavior. It was also interesting to note that disinformation was mainly discussed about online rather than traditional media. Additionally, tribalism and racism were mentioned several times as negative phenomena in society, but never with reference to social media or the media in general.

### Creation

The Namibian youths in the focus groups had a good grasp on basic skills when it comes to creating media. Taking photos, recording audio or video was done quite frequently. But, as the experts interviewed for the MIL INDEX highlighted, the technical skills often are not accompanied by an awareness of how to produce own media messages responsibly. Additionally, the skills were mostly used for trivial purposes ("impression management") rather than for more ambitious goals. Advanced skills such as programming or writing blogs were not encountered.

### Action

The action dimension was defined both as becoming active using media for the good of society and as using media for one's own benefit. The youths displayed confidence in their ability to voice their concerns and express themselves using media. There was a mismatch between the perspective of the



experts interviewed and the youths concerning whether youths were taken seriously by the media. While the experts thought this to be the case, the youths themselves did not feel adequately represented. This points to a blind spot in youth activism: Youths mainly mobilize via social media and thus, in the opinion of the experts neglect the opportuni-

ties journalistic media could offer. The focus groups documented youths using media as sources of information on topics they were most interested in, such as politics, peace and stability, education, and health. They also used them for guidance and as an inspirational source when deciding what goals to pursue in life.

## Positive results

## Critical results

### Access

- + Quite widespread expertise in using digital media
- Urban / rural divide in media access and use: the more urban, the more digital
- + Smartphones partially used for access to journalistic media
- Segments of the young generation rely heavily on social media for information uptake
- + Reflection of own social media use and of media access of less privileged/challenged segments of the population
- Rare access to printed media and rare awareness of the surplus newspapers offer vs. their websites

### Analysis

- + Participants value freedom of expression
- Discrepancy between media used and media trusted
- + Awareness of ambivalent quality of news and information on social media
- Reduced awareness of quality media
- + Quite good knowledge of digital and media landscape

### Reflection

- + Numerous strategies in combatting or coming to terms with cyberbullying and disinformation
- Considerable tolerance for cyberbullying, as opposed to disinformation and hate speech
- + High awareness of cyberbullying and disinformation, especially online
- Motivation behind such behavior is not reflected enough
- Not enough reflection of journalistic media

### Creation

- + Technical skills are frequently used
- Low awareness of how to harness technical skills for more ambitious purposes
- Advanced skills lacking

### Action

- + Confidence in voicing one's concerns and self-expression via media
- Not enough awareness and use of the potentials of journalistic media in public campaigning
- + Extensive use of media for specific information and for inspiration
- Underestimation of the influence their activism can have (using media)

## 8. Recommendations

Drawing on the above findings for Namibia, recommendations are as follows:

### Access

**Improve technical access and usage skills of rural youths:** The Rundu focus groups demonstrated that access to the Internet and digital devices is not evenly distributed. This should be addressed.

**Promote the use of journalistic media:** With social media gaining in prominence, young people should be alerted to the fact that they can follow journalistic media using the channels they are accustomed to, but they can also access them directly using news apps.

**Foster a culture of reading and comprehension of more in-depth texts:** The young generation is less and less inclined to read the printed media or long reads online. They should develop an awareness for the importance of being able to dig deeper into a subject matter to gain a more fundamental understanding than possible by skimming or reading short texts.

### Analysis

**Encourage critical trust in media:** Young Namibians trust journalistic media more than social media. As stated above, they should be encouraged to use quality sources more often while maintaining a critical distance to be able to judge the trustworthiness of individual news items.

**Explain how media function:** Because the media landscape has become blurred due to digital transformation, the young generation should be made aware of the professional system in place that produces trustworthy information and be shown how this is done.

### Reflection

**Promote critical reflection of cyberbullying:** While disinformation and hate speech are rejected, a portion of young Namibians seems to accept behavior like cyberbullying and online body shaming as given. This should be the subject of reflection more often.

**Reflect the motivation behind malevolent behavior:** Despite the considerable awareness for malevolent forms of communication, youths do not fully understand the mechanisms behind them. The roots of this type of behavior should be reflected more thoroughly.

### Creation

**Use technical skills for more ambitious purposes:** Young Namibians should be encouraged to go beyond selfies and sharing of prefabricated information snippets to put their creative abilities to use for more ambitious purposes, e.g., concerted campaigns or participating in existing media formats.

**Advance skills in terms of creation:** Basic skills like taking photos and doing video/audio recordings should be supplemented by more advanced media skills, giving young persons the opportunity to put forward engaging content. This will also help them in the workplace.

### Action

**Help youths believe that they can have an impact:** Youths need to understand that they can have an impact and are already more influential in society than they themselves might believe. This includes helping youths reflect when and how they need to communicate to get the attention of whom they are trying to reach.

**Create media formats that help youths participate:** The Namibian media are tentatively taking to the digital sphere. They should be bolder in integrating channels that the young generation uses, so as to give youngsters the opportunity to voice their concerns.

**Increase primary and secondary school MIL activities:** The more schools (and parents) join in the cause for better Media and Information Literacy, the greater the impact will be in practice. MIL should be taught from an early age to make sure every Namibian is equipped for the country's ever evolving media and information landscape.

## Literature

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