The reality of

FAKE NEWS
in **KENYA**

CONTENTS

This was designed by Portland's in-house Content & Brand team

01 FOREWORD

'A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes', so the saying goes. Never has this been more the case than in the current environment, where social media can spread an unverified story globally within seconds.

The topic came to prominence during the recent US presidential campaign. For the first time, deliberately false news stories, or fake news, appeared to influence the outcome of an election. Research showed that fake news stories were more widely shared on Facebook than mainstream news items.

The most popular fake news stories favoured Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton, leading commentators to ask whether they had contributed to his unexpected victory.

While many people expressed shock at what they saw as a new phenomenon, this effect will have been a lot less surprising in Africa, where deliberately false or inaccurate news is commonplace during elections.

So just how big a problem is fake news in Kenya and what impact is it having on the way people consume information? This is a question on the minds of communications professionals and political campaigners alike, as well as the media and citizens.

The issue of fake news shot into the limelight in Kenya in April 2017, when a fake front page of the Daily Nation was circulated in Busia County during the recent primaries. The fake cover claimed that the Orange Democratic Movement aspirant Dr Otumo had defected to Jubilee. It was created to discredit the candidate on the day of the nomination.

Other examples include claims on social media that Wiper leader Kalonzo Musyoka had defected to Jubilee and frequent distasteful fake stories of the deaths of showbiz celebrities.

How do these stories take hold? In Kenya, social media is fundamentally reshaping how citizens communicate and how brands and campaigners get their message across. With some four million Kenyans expected to be voting for the first time in this year's election, social media will be a key channel.

We know that mobile telephone technology has taken off across the continent with extraordinary speed, giving instant access to social media on the go.

In 2016, Portland's ground-breaking study on How Africa Tweets found that Africa outstrips the US and UK in using Twitter for political conversations.

Last year, Kenya is reported to have seen the largest growth on Facebook with the number of users at 5.3 million, up 18% from the 4.3 million recorded in a similar period the year before.

This is why Portland and GeoPoll decided to be at the forefront of our understanding of this topic - we want to fully comprehend the impact this phenomenon is having in this part of the world.

This research provides the first ever data on the prevalence and impact of fake news in Kenya.

We looked at a broad range of issues including consumers' preferred news sources, their experience of fake news, as well as trust levels across different sources of information and news.

The findings are both surprising and revealing and provide much food for thought for communicators, campaigners and brands looking to cut through and communicate to Kenyans in the digital age.

There are varying definitions of fake news but for the purposes of this research we defined fake news as **deliberate spreading of false information**.

A broader definition of fake news could be false or misleading information published as authentic news, generally understood to be deliberate, however possibly accidental.

Of course, this is an issue of fundamental importance to democracy, because it can skew and influence election results. As such, fake news is a bigger problem than previously thought, with potentially far-reaching consequences. This research aims for the first time to quantify and explain its impact on Kenya.
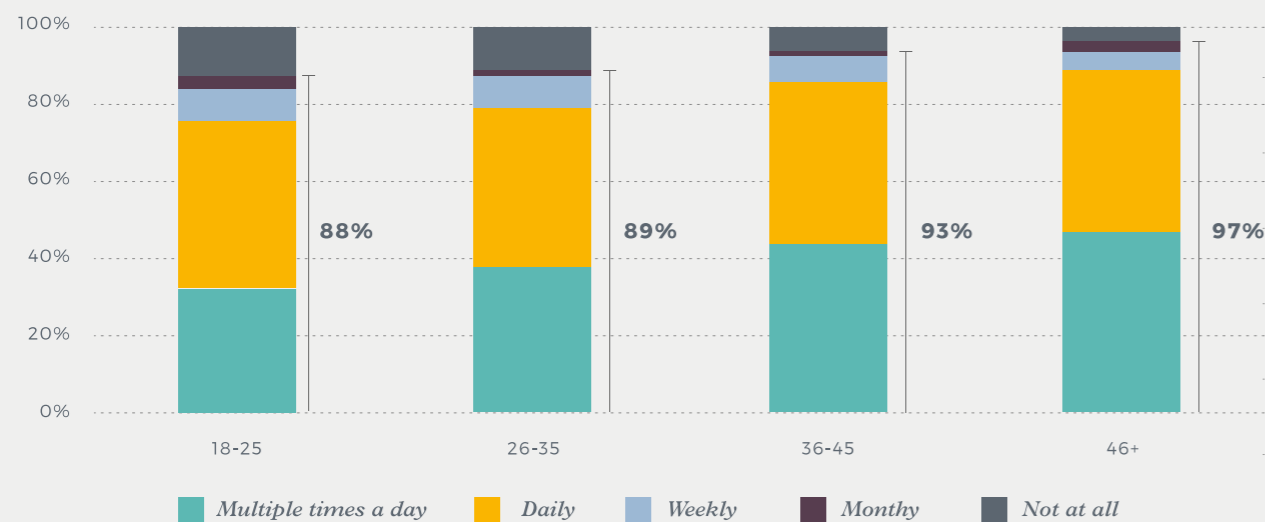
02 FINDINGS

The prominence of politics in Kenyan life

Politics is a hot topic in Kenya. Many countries, especially in the West, struggle with high levels of disinterest amongst the electorate. But in Kenya, politics is very much a core part of the national conversation. This is never truer than in the run up to a general election, and we've found that in May 2017 with three months still to go until the election, 91% of people had seen information about the general election in the last month. Some 89% of those had seen information daily or multiple times a day.

This held true across regions and genders, and we even saw a large proportion (88%) of young people (18-25), who are often perceived to be the most apathetic, viewing information about the general election in the past month.

There is of course no guarantee that this will convert into voter turnout, especially if people are failing to see options that they can relate to. But it shows that people are highly engaged and consuming information around the upcoming election.

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU SEEN/HEARD ABOUT THE 2017 KENYAN GENERAL ELECTION IN THE LAST MONTH?

	18-25	26-35	36-45	46+
	88%	89%	93%	97%

■ *Multiple times a day* ■ *Daily* ■ *Weekly* ■ *Monthy* ■ *Not at all*

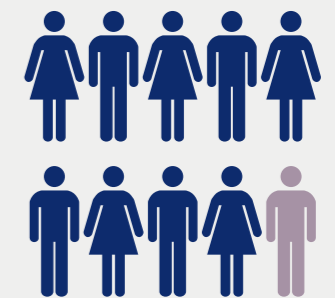## Fake news a core part of the news mix

But what information is available to the electorate, and is it fair, accurate and unbiased?

Following the fake news scandal that has spread around the world after President Trump's election in the USA in November 2016, we were particularly interested in exploring the prevalence of news that was deemed to be true / accurate versus the prevalence of news that was suspected of being false / inaccurate, either deliberately or accidently.
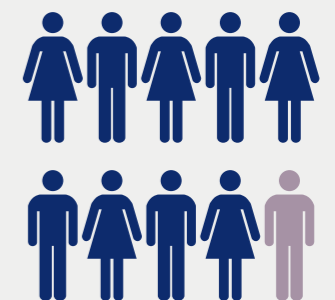
'Fake news' is not new in Kenya – for example the widespread conspiracy theories that HIV/AIDS was a secret weapon created by the West to wipe out Kenyans or the more recent stories that Barack Obama was not born in the United States but in Mombasa. Despite this history, we were still surprised to find that 90% of people suspected having seen or heard false / inaccurate information regarding the election. There is a chance that some of this was accidentally false, simply misrepresented through human error or misjudgement. However, 87% of people have seen information that they suspected was deliberately false - the more commonly used definition for 'fake news'. So it appears that whilst this might be emerging as a new concept in some countries, 'fake news' is not a new concept in Kenya and most Kenyans are able to identify it.

> **"[FAKE NEWS IS...] FALSE INFORMATION GIVEN THROUGH THE MEDIA AS PER WHAT IS TRUE - THAT'S WHAT WE SEE AND ENCOUNTER ABOUT POLITICS IN OUR DAILY LIVES"**

90% PEOPLE
have seen false news

87% PEOPLE
have seen deliberately false news

"CONSIDERING OUR GENERAL ELECTIONS HISTORY, I WOULD SUSPECT NEWS ABOUT THE ELECTION IS FALSE"

These do not appear to be isolated incidents that are getting widespread attention either. Rather, most people that we surveyed could list a myriad of potentially false stories about the general election that they have seen in the recent past. In fact, many people said that this was very much endemic in political news and presented itself in a range of different ways.

KEY REASONS TO SUSPECT FALSE NEWS AND QUOTES

1. Conflicting information from different sources

2. Controversial or confrontational messages

3. Biased information favouring one party / group

4. Inciting division / conflict between parties / groups

5. Excuses for failures e.g. poor management / vote tampering

"IN THE CASE OF OPINION POLLS FALSE FIGURES ARE GIVEN IN FAVOUR OF A CERTAIN CANDIDATE WHO SEEMS TO BE COORDINATING WITH PEOPLE WORKING THERE"

Social Media a key platform in the spread of fake news.

"[I SUSPECT IT IS FAKE…] IF IT COMES FROM UNRELIABLE SOURCES, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE'S PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS"

So where is all of this fake news coming from?

The obvious place to start looking is social media. With no quality controls or checks, it has frequently been accused of being a hotbed of misinformation. Our findings support this hypothesis.
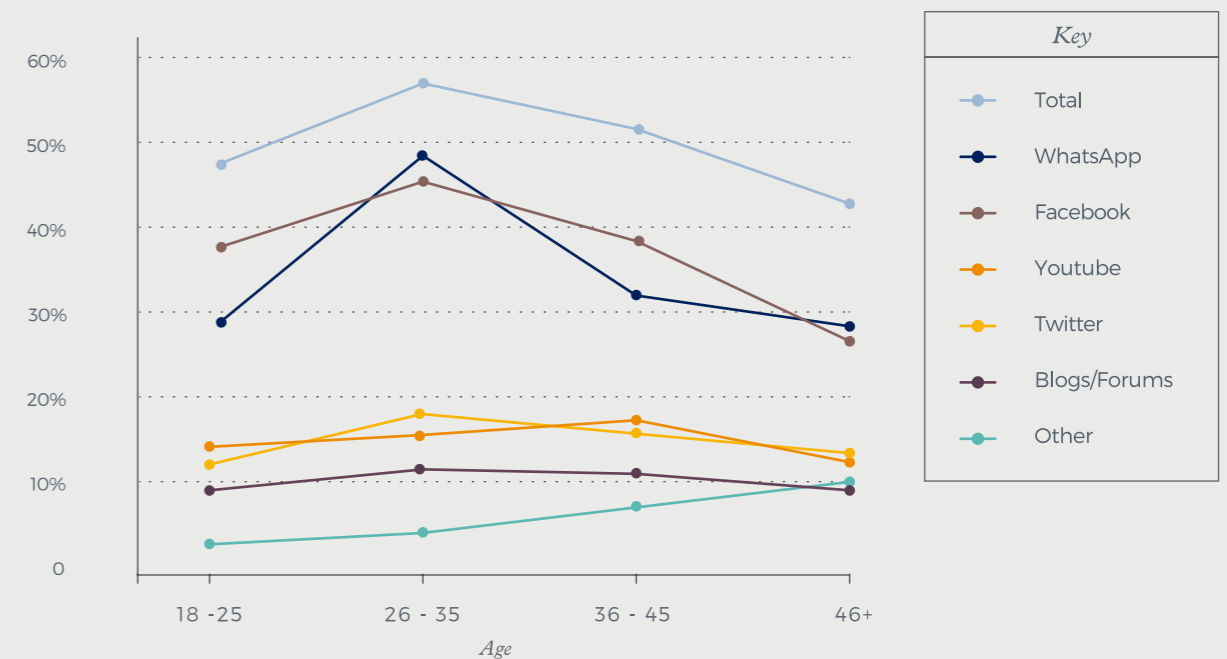
Firstly, we found that social media was being referenced relatively regularly with a total of 49% receiving news about the general election through this medium. Interestingly, it is not just young people referencing social media but a cross section of the population.

Although hard to quantify, private instant messaging apps are increasingly used for sharing and discussing news with WhatsApp in particular proving very popular with Kenyans across all age groups.

Despite these relatively high levels of use, we found that the levels of trust in the accuracy of the information was very low compared to more traditional news sources such as TV, radio and newspapers. Furthermore, no social media platforms were standing out as particularly trustworthy.
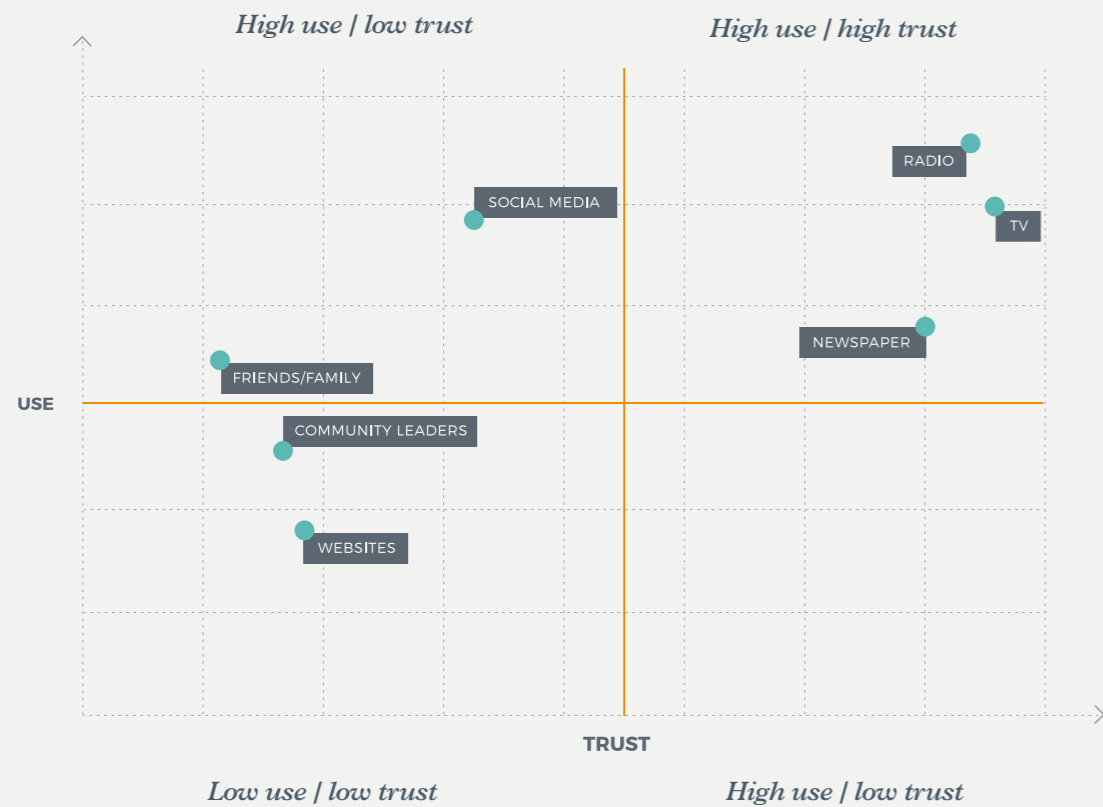
SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE FOR GENERAL ELECTION NEWS

Key
- Total
- WhatsApp
- Facebook
- Youtube
- Twitter
- Blogs/Forums
- Other

"[I SUSPECT IT IS FAKE…] IF IT COMES FROM UNRELIABLE SOURCES, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE'S PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS"

This may well link to the finding that family, friends and community leaders, although not referenced as frequently, were the sources least likely to be trusted to provide accurate information. This tells us that it is not just organised or official groups spreading misinformation but gossip, word of mouth and hearsay that also have a role to play.

in Nairobi. Radio stands out as the most evenly referenced source with a spread from 38% in the North Eastern province to 61% in Nyanza and the Western province.

"I HEARD RUMOURS THAT NDERITU MURIITHI HAD WON THE JUBILEE TICKET, THEN I GOT THE REAL INFORMATION FROM THE RADIO AFTER"

USE VERSUS TRUST OF KEY CHANNELS

High use | low trust

High use | high trust

RADIO

SOCIAL MEDIA

TV

NEWSPAPER

FRIENDS/FAMILY

USE

COMMUNITY LEADERS

WEBSITES

TRUST

Low use | low trust

High use | low trust

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES OF NEWS SOURCES FOR ELECTIONS

Community Leaders — NE, W

Friends/Family — NE, NB

Newspaper — NE, NB

TV — NE, NB

Radio — NE, NY

Social Media — NE, NB

Website — NE, C NB

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

% who have used

Key							
◆ Lowest Region	**C**	Central	**NB**	Nairobi	**RV**	Rift Valley
◆ Highest Region	**CS**	Coast	**NE**	North Eastern	**W**	Western
	E	Eastern	**NY**	Nyanza		

In contrast, the most reputable channels appear to be the mainstream media, including TV, radio and newspapers. These channels are not only commonly referenced sources of general election news but they are also the most commonly trusted sources. However, these are not always the most readily available sources of news with distribution being variable across the country. This is particularly marked for TV, where we see 31% of people in Northeastern Province receiving information from this source compared to 66% of those in Nairobi. It is a similarly broad spread for newspapers, with 19% in Northeastern Province recalling general election news from a newspaper compared to 47%

"KENYANS NOW ARE WISE ENOUGH TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISION"

"WHY WOULD YOU SUSPECT THAT NEWS ABOUT GENERAL ELECTION IS FALSE? - IF THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION CAN'T BE VERIFIED AND NO PROOF, OR IT'S FROM BLOGGERS"

The knock on effects of fake news in Kenya

It is relatively clear then that false and inaccurate news is a part of life in Kenya, particularly surrounding elections. And this is only likely to increase as social media continues to act as a key source of information, with limited checks and balances in place.

Given this new reality, it is important to consider the impact that this is likely to have. How are people consuming information, and how do we communicate effectively within this context?

The research findings give a strong sense that consumers have developed a critical approach when reviewing news and information. Much like we are seeing in other parts of the world (for example a recent poll by Gallup showed that only 32% of Americans say they trust the media) we see that Kenyans are suspicious of the information that they see and hear. They are actively assessing the reliability and trustworthiness of the information and looking at multiple sources to find news that they can trust. This means that as producers of information, we have to work harder at proving that the information that we are presenting is credible and it addresses what they are looking for.

1. Message cut-through

We need to acknowledge the challenge in getting a message across in this noisy environment. In the case of the Kenyan general election, we found that false / inaccurate news was so widespread that it was limiting people's ability to make an informed voting decision. So much so that just over a third (35%) of people felt that they were not fully able to access all of the true / accurate information about the election that they need. This highlights the challenge that we face in conveying important information to our target audience and how much consideration needs to be given to getting it right and having the cut-through that we need.

2. The need for credible platforms and authors

A key aspect of credibility lies in the author of the content. Depending on the degree of controversy within the content, it will be important to find credible voices who will be trusted authorities on the subject. Without this, there is a chance that the content will be dismissed. The proliferation of low quality websites set up to add credibility to false news stories and the widespread hiring of bloggers to propagate fake news stories is another area of concern.

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE, WHAT TYPE OF NEWS ABOUT THE GENERAL ELECTION WOULD YOU PREFER?

PREFER SUMMARISED AND CONCISE — **PREFER COMPREHENSIVE AND DETAILED**

33% | 67%

PREFER OPINION BASED — **PREFER FACTUAL AND ACCURATE**

22% | 78%

3. Detailed and comprehensive content

Interestingly there was a decisive preference for detailed and factual content about the general election. In fact, two thirds (67%) of Kenyans would rather read comprehensive and detailed information over summarised and concise information, and 78% would prefer factual and accurate information over opinion based news. This stands in contrast to countries such as the UK and US where there has been a long term drive to create succinct soundbites in the belief that consumers no longer have the attention span for anything more substantial.

4. Multichannel approach

Finally, we must carefully consider our use of the various news channels. The research findings show that Kenyans are referencing a range of different news sources, perhaps in direct response to the varying quality of the information available. Moreover, they become suspicious of information that is seemingly contradictory. This suggests a need to employ a multichannel approach where possible, particularly if aiming to reach a broad audience. It also highlights the importance of message discipline and making sure that a consistent message is appearing on multiple channels so as to reinforce credibility and avoid suspicion developing.

#FAKENEWSKENYA

In conclusion...

As we have seen, *The Reality of Fake News* presents the first quantitative data on the prevalence and impact of false news in Kenya.

Alarmingly, the research reveals that fake news is a pervasive problem surrounding the Kenyan elections with 90% of respondents having seen false or inaccurate information and 87% viewing this information as being deliberately false.

Why does this matter? An informed citizenry is vital to Kenya's democracy and the findings have serious implications for the media and society at large.

With a third of Kenyans unable to access accurate information about the election, fake news is limiting the public's ability to make informed decisions. This is of course extremely relevant to the business and political communities alike.

For the mainstream media, the survey findings will come as good news, with most Kenyans trusting traditional media sources such as TV, which has a trust level of 76%.

With 67% of Kenyans actively wanting comprehensive and detailed information and 78% wanting factual and accurate information, Kenya's media establishment should be encouraged to invest in better journalism.

Additionally, mainstream media has a duty to counter fake news, but also to maintain high professional standards on verifying sources and maintaining balance and accuracy. The value in traditional media is now in its reliability in this new, uncertain terrain.

For brands and corporates, the findings of the poll highlight the challenges communicators face in a fast changing digital landscape.

Social media and mobile phones are disrupting the ways that news and information is generated and shared.

The very question of what constitutes truth and news is being reassessed with a growing amount of user-generated "news".

With fake news a core part of the news mix and social media use growing, the phenomena could have an outsized impact with unknown implications.

The speed and pace at which hoaxes, gossip and lies can be spread is also an area of growing concern for brands that could see fake news seeping into the business world.

What does this mean for society? For consumers, it points to the need for more scrutiny of sources. Consumers need to be more discerning about what media they consume, believe and share.

For politicians, it should reaffirm the value of the mainstream media, and highlight some of the dangers of the digital explosion when it comes to democracy. They need to keep up with the changing nature of news.

Businesses need to be hyper-vigilant and prepared for the risks inherent in this new landscape, and how to deal with them.

And conversely, just as it is the conduit allowing false stories to spread, social media will be the new battleground for countering fake news and ensuring that the public remains well informed about important debates. For as the Chinese philosopher Confucius said: 'The object of the superior man is truth'.

03 METHODOLOGY

This report is based on quantitative research that was designed and fully analysed by Portland. The fieldwork was conducted in collaboration with GeoPoll, the leading mobile surveying platform in Africa.

The survey was completed by a nationally representative sample of 2,000 Kenyans representative for age, gender and location as defined by the 2009 census results.

The research took the form of a text message (SMS) survey which offers several advantages over other methods. Most importantly, it allows respondents to answer at their convenience, which results in a more considered response. It does not require a smartphone or data plan and it is completely free to the respondent, which when combined with the mobile phone coverage across Africa means that this method can reach a broad sample.

However, there are several limitations to a text message (SMS) survey. Most notably, each question is restricted to 160 characters and the answer format must be text message appropriate.

The 25 question survey covered a range of topics around news consumption, particularly in relation to the upcoming general election including:

• **Overall preferred news sources**

• **Frequency of general election news consumption**

• **Key sources for general election news**

• **Preferred information formats**

• **Experience of fake news**

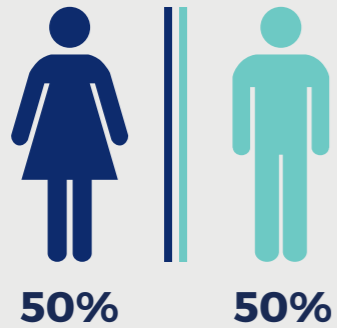• **Trusted / distrusted sources**

• **Examples of fake news**
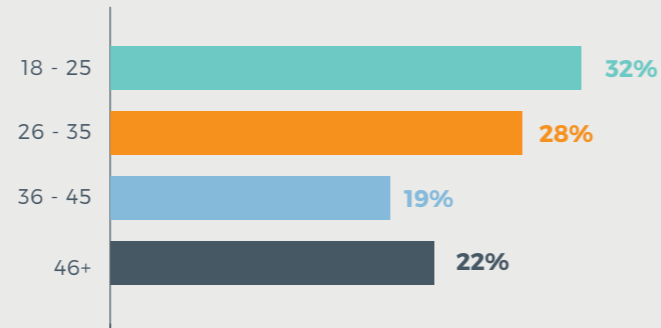
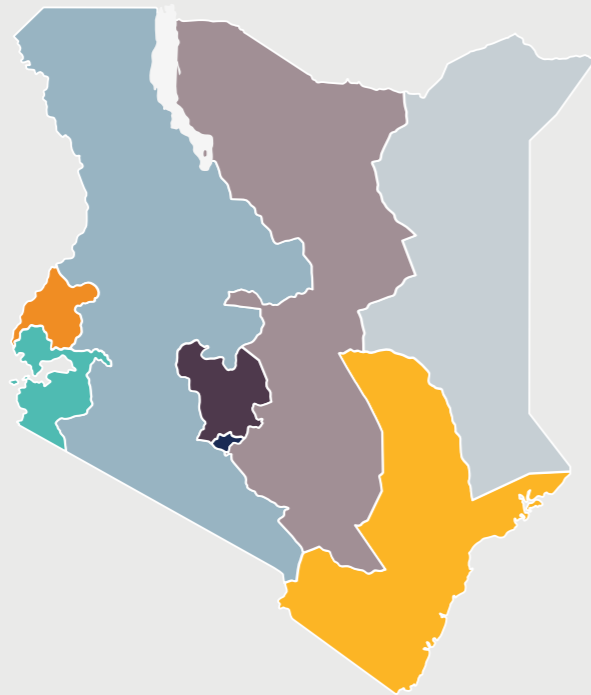Fieldwork was completed between 15th - 29th of May 2017.

SAMPLE (N = 2,000)

Gender

50%   50%

Age

18 - 25	32%
26 - 35	28%
36 - 45	19%
46+	22%

Regions

WESTERN
11%

RIFT VALLEY
26%

NYANZA
14%

CENTRAL
11%

EASTERN
15%

NORTH EASTERN
6%

NAIROBI
8%

COAST
9%

04 **ABOUT PORTLAND**

Portland is an international communications consultancy trusted by some of the highest profile organisations, governments and individuals in the world.

We are pioneers in integrated communications campaigns engaging politicians, global opinion leaders, decision-makers, key stakeholders, consumers and media.

We help clients manage their reputation, improve their visibility and media coverage – and deliver global communications campaigns across multiple platforms.

Through offices in London, Doha, Nairobi, New York, Washington DC and Singapore, Portland has supported clients in more than 85 countries.

Portland Africa

We are specialists in strategic communications in Africa. With a team of Africa experts in our London HQ and office in Nairobi, we offer an integrated service and a network of hand-picked strategic communications agencies across Africa, providing us with continental reach and deep market insights.

We help clients navigate the era of volatility in these important growth markets, providing a full suite of government relations, public affairs, strategic communications, and political and economic risk efforts across geographies and cultures. Over ten languages are spoken by our highly-diverse and experienced team. We are the pioneers of leading research on Africa's evolving communications landscape, including the ground-breaking study *How Africa Tweets*.

Research & Insights

We uncover the crucial insights that champion successful campaigns. We identify the right audience, the right channels and the right message to realise each client's version of success.

Every client is different, so we design bespoke methodologies that meet their needs, time and budget. We use a mixture of primary and secondary research techniques to address a range of objectives including perceptions evaluation, message testing, impact measurement and thought leadership. We work closely with our consultants across the globe to identify the insights that can inform compelling campaigns and communications strategies.

Portland believes developing an insightful strategy and campaign is central to any communications plan. Discovering that insight is achieved through Portland's comprehensive and creative research offering.

GeoPoll

GeoPoll is the world's largest real-time mobile survey platform, reaching a growing network of more than 320 million users in 30 countries worldwide on a deeply granular level and at unprecedented scale.

Through a multimodal platform powered by text, voice and web-based communications—GeoPoll enables organizations to gather quick, accurate and in-depth insights on anything from consumer preferences to social and development concerns.

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