



DIGITAL TRENDS

10 Digital Media Strategies and Tactics for the International Development Community



Over the years, we have seen that digital media technology has profoundly reshaped all aspects of our society, often in unexpected ways¹. Digital transformation, an effort to enable existing business models by integrating advanced technologies², is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³. This unavoidable digital transformation has enhanced the role of digital media, offering a plethora of opportunities particularly when it comes to reaching and engaging young people in online spaces.

Digital media technologies are constantly evolving; the creation of a metaverse to the viral AI model ChatGPT are just two examples of this. Young people's digital media consumption behaviours and habits are also changing rapidly. Whilst these changes are constant, digital media literacy and maturity levels of the international development community varies. Accelerated by the effects of the pandemic, the international development community is eagerly seeking to find sustainable and effective digital media solutions that can affect societies, and lead to social change: "The post-COVID-19 era will bring forward a new normal – one that will accelerate digital transformation in many areas," said Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General and Head of UN DESA.

Responding to this need, in 2022 RNW Media successfully supported 22 partners from 15 countries in improving their digital media strategies to achieve social change⁴. Jointly with our partners, we embarked on a journey with the objective to co-create digital media strategies. This journey included a series of approaches: in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of the contexts where these organisations operate, analysis of the organisations' digital maturity, followed by several interactive workshops and (online) co-creation sessions. **These activities resulted in the co-creation of digital media solutions, in addition to short and long term learning trajectories.**



The above-mentioned journey has allowed us to collect and analyse valuable data, resulting in a set of key insights intended for the international development community focused on reaching young people and further their impact through digital media.

¹ <https://www.undp.org/blog/digital-changing-development-undp-changing-too>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/digital-transformation-improving-the-odds-of-success>

³ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/how-inclusive-digital-infrastructure-help-achieve-sdgs/#:~:text=goods%20for%20development-,Digital%20transformation%20is%20central%20to%20achieving%20the%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals,million%20more%20from%20extreme%20poverty>

⁴ Bolivia, DRC, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine (OPT), Jordan and Tunisia.

1 Due to the digital transformation, **ICT for Development** has become more prominent, underlying the need for digital transformation in the international development community. The pandemic exposed the obstacles faced by the international development community are the lack of long-term **digital leadership, investment, capacities, and expertise**.

2 In some countries internet penetration remains low, while mobile penetration is high. In some cases, connectivity is more prominent in urban areas, while it's scarce in rural areas. Therefore, ensuring that **digital inclusion** becomes a precondition for young people's active participation in society. This can be done by for example developing "mobile first" digital media, engaging with the media and creating strategies that look at young people's ecosystem (offline/online).

3 Young people have the right to be able to universally and equally access the internet, meaningfully connect in digital spaces and be able to express themselves freely, openly communicate their opinions and access pluralistic information. Therefore, **building digital media and data literacy is essential** so young people can surf the internet safely and access pluralistic, fact based information on issues that matter to them. Digital literacy can serve as a form to inoculate mis-information.

4 Cyberviolence (taking the form of for example online hate-speech or online bullying) are on the rise, particularly against historically excluded groups. **Technology Facilitated Gender-based Violence (TFGBV)** against women, female journalists, and the LGBTQIA+ community needs tailored mechanisms to ensure that these groups can meaningfully participate in digital civic spaces. Private and semi-private digital environments, moderation strategies, holding big tech accountable on the content shared on their platforms, and monitoring and documentation of digital rights violations are key to create safer online spaces.

5 One of the main challenges to freedom of speech and access to reliable information are **dis-, mis- and mal-information**. Creating stronger alternative narratives, fact-checking and fact-based journalism, building pre-bunking digital media literacy and critical thinking among young people are ways to inoculate against dis-, mis- and mal-information.



- 6 | Social media (SM) plays a key role in young people's lives** as these are spaces where young people can express themselves, engage in meaningful conversations and find reliable information on topics that matter to them. Our research showed that the SM are widely used, and that there is a need to prioritise the creation of SM channel strategies to ensure that for example there is a connection between the social media channel used, the target audience and the content developed.
- 7 | Creating engaging, reliable digital content that is culturally sensitive and speaks to young people in their language is a must in order to engage with them in a meaningful way.** Lack of fact-based, locally-owned and reliable visual digital content poses a challenge. Balancing and strategically prioritising user-, professionally-, and/or occupationally generated content helps creating authentic content and establishing brand loyalty and growing the community. Through our research we learnt that visual digital content, especially short videos, are in high demand and short-video platforms such as TikTok are becoming more popular.
- 8 |** The importance of partnership between media (involving journalists and media makers) and the international development sector is a fast-growing trend globally⁵. Media, especially independent and investigative journalism, can contribute more to relevant SDGs delivery by expanding their editorial themes/topics. **Recentring media development and build mutually beneficial cross-sector partnership are the keys for ensuring public access to information and mobilise public support around the SDGs, such as in sexuality education.**
- 9 |** E-services are highly sought for and can be connected efficiently. A sustainable and thriving digital community can significantly increase the service demand and mobilise young people to access to offline services (legal support, health services). A digital footprint – user journey mapping, moderating service referral and referral tracking are essential for highlighting the need and importance of online information in closing the circle of care to accessing offline services.
- 10 | Using (digital) data is crucial to further informing interventions and steering work to influence initiatives.** There is a strong need for the international development community to have better processes for data collection and improve the interpretation of data. A data ecosystem, including effective social listening techniques on the grounds of human rights-based data ethics, enables organizations to better understand the context and needs of young people and craft superior digital media interventions.

⁵ <https://www.niemanlab.org/2021/12/newsrooms-and-civil-society-organizations-team-up/>





The digital media and learning solutions co-created enabled our partners to better understand the realities of young people and make informed decisions, by for example tailoring content to young people's preferences across websites and social media channels, driving engagement by using persuasive storytelling, ensuring correct targeting of audiences, and development of moderation strategies. The combination of these approaches (based on young people's needs and their online behaviour, in addition to our partners' needs), encourage positive online community behaviours that result in safe, inclusive online communities where opinions are respected and young people can express themselves freely.

RNW Media is in a unique position as it can act as a catalyst for social change, through incremental changes in young peoples' attitudes and behaviours, as well as by influencing the social norms and policies that affect them.