

## *Media literacy policy in Morocco: A strategic milestone missing*

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### ABSTRACT

In the digital age, diverse walks of human life have reconfigured profoundly. In the Moroccan society, digitalisation plans and the skyrocketing numbers of internet users necessitate coping literacy policies. While several community initiatives have been taken to improve the quality of media literacy, they, as bottom-up efforts, cannot suffice to meet the needs of the whole Moroccan population. Rather, the absence of a central, nationwide, cross-sectoral media literacy policy significantly challenges the effective coordination of official strategies and community initiatives in media education. This article investigates current practices in media literacy in Morocco. Using document analysis, it delves into data gathered from various official sources, media announcements, and activities on media literacy. The analysis of Moroccan policies in the disciplines of education and media regulation reveals the critical need for a national, cross-sectoral media literacy policy to coordinate the regulatory promises and practical efforts that look discrepant, shambolic and limited in impact.

**Keywords:** *media literacy, Morocco, education, media policies, digital divide.*



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## INTRODUCTION

### General backdrop

The Moroccan society has witnessed a salient transformation in its relationship with the media in recent decades. In addition to a culture and heritage of access to traditional media (Chalfaouat, 2015), Moroccans rely heavily on digital platforms and apps. They frequently communicate via WhatsApp, seek political, economic, or sports news on Facebook, buy goods on Jumia or AliExpress, and advertise others on Avito. They share daily routine videos on YouTube and tripping tips on Instagram. They watch tutorials to fix appliances at home. Graduates look for job opportunities on LinkedIn. The ill, notwithstanding their educational level, seek health tips on Google. This immersive access has encouraged many Moroccans, of all ages, to consider becoming digital influencers to gain fortunes while simultaneously transcending the conservative nature of traditional media. Their informative impact has been experienced in covering such influential events as the September 2023 El Haouz Earthquake. Meanwhile, the government is considering imposing taxes on famous Youtubers' income. In short, digitalization has ushered in new practices of media creation, consumption, and circulation, pushing Moroccans to struggle with the nuances and veracity of media content in the absence of media literacy.

Officially, various connectivity initiatives have been launched. For instance, in 2012, the National Agency for Regulating Telecommunications (ANRT) adopted the National Broadband Development Plan to provide high-speed internet to the entire country by 2022. Among the highest figures in Africa, 93% of Moroccan households now have access to the internet, while in 2021, over 70% of Moroccans reported using the internet. Social media accounts shot up from 14 million in 2017 to 24 million in 2022, with 90% of them on Facebook (Saleh, 2023). Digital ubiquity and the amalgam of digital experiences have encouraged both digital vigilantism and active doxing (Chalfaouat, 2020), as well as social ills that spark 'kill Facebook' or 'kill YouTube' discourses, as Moroccans simultaneously consume true and fake information online without formal education on fact-checking.

Currently, media policy strategies tailored to the Moroccan geo-cultural context are missing. To Navigate the nascent cultural context of the digital transformation requires a "smart state" that welcomes citizens' active contributions to efficient governance, facilitates state-

citizen interaction, and values freedom of speech and creativity online (Noveck, 2015). In their digital reality, Moroccans include digital natives (Prensky, 2001) and Generation AI (UNICEF Office of Innovation, n.d.), while the educational system shows inadequate digital readiness.

However, as of 2013, for UNESCO, "only a handful of states have put in place national MIL-related policies and elaborated the strategies that are needed to sustain their efforts" (p. 8). In Morocco, the mismatch between deep mediatization (Hepp, 2020) and media literacy policies creates a serious lack of skills to shun filter bubbles, check deep fake, detect harmful content, avoid binge-watching suicidal content, or think deep before sharing private or sensitive data online. The neglect of literacy mechanisms that reduce these online harms questions policymakers' attention to the changing meaning of sovereignty and responsibility.

### Research problem

In Morocco, civil society often launches media literacy (ML) initiatives. For instance, in October 2022, during the Global Media and Information Literacy Week, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s office in Rabat partnered with the High Institute for Media and Communication (Institut Supérieure de l'Information et Communication, ISIC) on a panoply of fact-checking and media literacy activities (El Bouchtaoui, 2022). ISIC also hosted Article 19 in a roundtable to stress the role of ML in media freedom. Meanwhile, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) launched "a wide array of programs, projects, and training sessions" to enhance youth digital skills and improve their integration into the ever-morphing labour market (ICESCO, 2022). Those initiatives targeted journalists, media professors, and students with media and information literacy (MIL) skills that address changes in learning, working, and living in Morocco today.

However, bottom-up projects and workshops can only supplement, not substitute, state policies and strategies. They remain limited in scope, geography, reach, and impact. They neither ensure even access nor have enough financial or logistical abilities to properly generalize ML. Instead, missing a central, nationwide, cross-sectoral media literacy policy leaves a gap that fragments government approaches to media education and weakens citizens' evaluation of online content and participation in democracy.

## Scope and design

This article investigates current practices in media literacy in Morocco. Given the absence of a national media literacy policy, it systematically and holistically analyses official documents and projects in the fields of ‘education’ and ‘media regulation’ to reveal ML’s location in Moroccan policy frameworks. By investigating the current ML landscape, this article aims to examine the repercussions of addressing the rapidly evolving media landscape with fragmented policies. Via a systematic document analysis, it purports to spotlight the opportunities missed and the challenges posed by the digital environment, as well as to name areas for improvement towards a coherent and effective national policy. Subsequently, its central research question is: To what extent does the absence of a media literacy policy aggravate the asymmetry in education and media praxis?

## MEDIA LITERACY

### Definition and importance

As an umbrella term, “media literacy” encapsulates a constellation of skills, tools, and practices. Among others, Bulger and Davison (2018) define it as a set of skills that encourage critical engagement with media-produced messages. They stress that media literacy involves active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create, echoing Hobbs & Jensen (2009)’s definition. Bulger and Davison (2018) also point out that ML is a perennial struggle to cope with the evolving complexities in media creation and communication. Otherwise, ML may fail to keep up with emerging platforms and media outlets. While Bulger and Davison (2018) offer a foundational framework for comprehending ML, a key concern lingers to effectively address emerging challenges like AI-driven content and information disorder. This questions ML’s ability to equip individuals with the necessary skills to navigate this morphing landscape.

Instead, as the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) Core Principles indicate, media literacy is broader and more profound. The principles extend ML beyond its traditional competencies (ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media) to incorporate digital literacy, adaptability to shifts in media production, and communication trends. Noteworthy too is that media literacy is not a static skillset but an “ongoing development of habits of inquiry and skills of expression necessary for people to

be critical thinkers, thoughtful and effective communicators, and informed and responsible members of society” (para. 2).

Scholars and organizations’ varied approaches to media literacy reflect the concept’s diverse interpretations. As an inherently multifaceted field, Hobbs (2010) argues, media literacy requires a multidisciplinary approach. The Finnish national media policy too describes ML as “multisectoral and multidisciplinary activities, resulting in a diverse and colourful landscape of media education” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019, p. 30). For Hobbs (2010), media literacy education can cultivate critical thinking abilities while enhancing reading comprehension and writing acumen among teenagers. Consequently, in our media-saturated world, media literacy assumes preventive and proactive roles to bridge lapses and limit disparities in information and access to knowledge (UNESCO, 2013). This constructivist empowerment boosts society’s concurrent hold of information, education, training, and awareness.

While ML’s complementary definitions and frameworks address new opportunities and challenges, they also necessitate constant re-evaluations and adaptations. Renewable sets of skills and practices are unremittingly required to cope with the proliferation of mixed reality technologies, smart cities, streaming platforms, free online courses, and generative AI, as well as the spread of deepfake, malinformation, data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2020), digital imperialism (Jin, 2015), information disorder, and digital harm.

In Morocco, policymaking has a pivotal role in bridging this divide. Beyond merely recognizing and acknowledging how crucial ML is, translating intentions into impactful policies is often ambiguous. This strategic asymmetry restrains civil society and individuals, who already grapple with rampant basic illiteracy, gaps in responding to community needs, regulatory chasms, and inadequate support frameworks for media literacy NGOs.

### Media literacy in Morocco: Review of the literature

A national, cross-sectoral media literacy policy can bring significant benefits and help avoid repercussions. As a strategic vision, it entails good practices that prepare netizens for media creation and critical consumption. Such skills can empower citizens, foster their self-reflection and open-mindedness, boost their employability, and catalyze a culture of digital rights, in

a context that affects the ways in which Moroccans study, work, socialize, and consume news.

In his critical analysis, Nait Belaid (2021) demonstrates that policies to curb illiteracy and school dropouts in rural Morocco fail gravely. This results from education policies' neglect of the link between dropping out of school, illiteracy, and rurality that conflate in remote areas. While the meaning of rurality is changing in Morocco due to increasing urbanity, a factor Nait Belaid (2021) misses is the wide reach of traditional media (Chalfaouat, 2015) and the wide reliance on digital devices across the kingdom (Saleh, 2023). For instance, in 2018, 99.8% of Moroccan families, urban and rural, used mobile phones. In every one of the seven million families, 3.9 members own phones, making a total of around 25 million devices, 73% of which are smartphones (ANRT, 2021). Phones are used mainly to access the internet. 94.7% of internet users have social media accounts. 98% of those aged 15-24 participate actively in online platforms, spending a minimum of one hour daily. Consequently, vast amounts of data, opinions, and attitudes circulate nationwide, along with a significant increase in computer and tablet ownership, which questions as well as the imbalanced efforts to spread general literacy and media literacy but also the repercussions of neglecting ML's prominent impact on education.

Despite high internet penetration and social media usage, concerns linger about the quality of access. Access fosters Moroccans' sense of belonging to an inclusive community through online news consumption and may revitalize national languages (Fish, 2016). However, Morocco ranks 85<sup>th</sup> globally in e-government readiness. This requires further improvement in digital infrastructure and service delivery to reduce "digital bureaucracy" (Zaanoun, 2023), and a serious assessment of the tangible gains and pitfalls of implementing the national and international partnerships that Morocco has signed to strengthen its information infrastructure. More worrisome is the scarcity of media literacy, which has pushed UNESCO to recommend integrating MIL into public policies in Morocco (Salah, 2017).

Furthermore, when Bahnas et al. (2023) assessed the employability of the alumni of the English Department at Ben M'sik Faculty in Casablanca, Applied Linguistics track, their survey revealed the limited effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing students for the job market. Among the study's conclusions and recommendations is the need for integrating technologies in the delivery of courses. Graduates also expressed dissatisfaction with their writing and communication skills, despite

receiving modules in them. Possibly, a key remedy for the detected lacunas in the given track's ability to facilitate employability is the integration of media literacy education, as it can enhance the graduates' employability via both access to available resources and autonomous, self-directed, and life-long learning.

At school, teachers and students' perceptions of media literacy demonstrate the serious need for a national policy. After surveying a random sample, Ait Hattani (2019) found out that 35% of teachers in high schools had no idea what media literacy stood for, and 77% of them could not define the concept. Also, the majority (81.92%) thought that the Ministry of National Education's effort to promote media literacy was absent or frivolous. 62.98% admitted the absence of media literacy content or skills in their own subject curriculum. Despite ministerial circulars and programs, media literacy education initiatives remain mainly local, inconsistent, and access-focused. Put otherwise, initiatives like establishing school 'digital clubs' or 'digital libraries' tend to focus mainly on teaching students how to use specific software or platforms, often neglecting the intricate nuances and broader possibilities of media literacy. However, when questioning the causes of the current ordeal, respondents focused on problems with logistics, infrastructure, and training. Though Ait Hattani (2019, p. 21) concludes that media literacy "does not appear in the national syllabi neither as an independent subject nor as a cross-curricular one", the role of a national, cross-sectoral policy is neglected when discussing the present and future of media literacy in the kingdom.

As for students, Mlilles and Larouz (2018) reveal the numerous rebounds of university students' excessive reliance on smartphones. The 554 respondents to their questionnaire clearly show addiction and dependency predictors. Students admit relying on smartphones to share huge amounts of content online and connect to different social networks, very frequently, day and night. Despite its potential contribution to learning and well-being, the smartphone, for half of the respondents, helps neither to acquire ICT skills nor to do homework, while for 77.3%, it does not help improve listening and writing skills. Apart from encouraging their online interaction, smartphones worsen university students' social relationships, academic achievements, and mental health. However, in the recommendations, the study addresses mainly researchers, the students themselves, educators, and parents to further understand and reduce the harm of reliance on smartphones. In line with that, in Belhadj's (2023) experimental study, students' social

media literacy (SML) improved significantly after a two-month course. The pre-test and post-test show that incorporating SML in schools can empower Moroccan students. Nevertheless, neither of these studies addresses the question of how efforts can be synchronized and orchestrated under the conspicuous oversight of a national policy.

A key observation from the studies above is the excessive focus on schooling. Researchers who have engaged with or investigated media literacy are either teachers or professors, or they see schools and formal education as the only venue for ML, while the school system witnesses different downsides. ML may even help solve some of these problems if well-planned across social learning venues. The government has initiated digitalization and e-governance projects. As Zaanoun (2023, pp. 1-2) puts it,

In 2005, the government implemented the e-Maroc 2010 Strategy, which included the creation of a national system for digital administration ([idarati.ma](http://idarati.ma)), a public services portal ([service-public.ma](http://service-public.ma)), and a spatial information portal ([maps.service-public.ma](http://maps.service-public.ma)). These measures aimed to facilitate administrative procedures, address complaints from beneficiaries ([chikaya.ma](http://chikaya.ma)), and improve the quality of administrative services. Additionally, several websites were dedicated to digitizing transactions, such as filing declarations and payments of tax ([tax.gov.ma](http://tax.gov.ma)) and managing public procurement electronically ([marchespublics.ma](http://marchespublics.ma)).

Similar projects have been launched, including the Digital Morocco 2020-2025 development strategy that the Ministry of Administration and Public Service Reform spearheads. However, digitizing administrations is crippled by basic illiteracy and, more importantly, by a lack of synergy with the efforts of other sectors, which only a media literacy policy, this article contends, can put together, and ensure long-term impact for.

## METHODOLOGY

This study conducts a document analysis to examine media literacy policies in education and the media. The collection process sources data from key official documents and media announcements. To accurately align the collected data with the research question, the criterion of relevance was adhered to strictly.

Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves interpreting documents to give voice and meaning to a specific issue or topic. Analyzing documents involves coding content into themes, like analysing transcripts of focus groups or interview. A

rubric can also be used to grade or score documents. Bowen (2009) emphasizes the importance of document analysis and its role in giving voice and meaning to the data. Bowen (2009) categorizes document analysis into three types: Public records, personal documents, and multimedia documents. This article relies on a mix of the first and third categories.

Document analysis involves exploring data in various forms of text. It is a “research tool for collecting, reviewing, interrogating, and analyzing various forms of written ‘text’ as a primary source of research data” (O’Leary, 2017, p. 474). It can be used in various fields, including education, media, and social sciences to analyse different types of documents, such as laws, ministerial announcements, and policy documents. Such documents as journals, policies, letters, and reports can hold answers to research questions, as can other forms of communication, such as videos, TV shows, radio broadcasts, and websites.

While O’Leary (2017) acknowledges the value of document analysis in qualitative research, she cautions against biases. These arise from two sources: Credibility of the documents under scrutiny and the researcher’s own perceptions and predispositions. As interpretation and extraction of information from the documents will undoubtedly be influenced by personal realities and perspectives, O’Leary (2017) advises researchers to remain aware of their personal biases and skills, to be clear on what exactly they aim to derive from the documents and ensure credibility for data they did not personally gather.

Using this research methodology, this article studies two disciplines, namely education and media. In education, the study analyses fundamental state-policy documents that govern and guide education in Morocco. These consist of education official charters, strategies and laws, ministerial announcements, training programs for teachers, and regional academies’ initiatives. Together, they yield important perspectives for a comprehensive view of the mechanisms implemented to promote media literacy.

In media regulation, the analysis probes into multiple facets of the media landscape. This includes a comprehensive examination of the law that restructures the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HACA), the regulatory body overseeing audiovisual communication. Additionally, the study analyses radio and TV channels’ Books of Specifications, which outline their content and guidelines. The analysis also encompasses the channels’ proactive initiatives in media literacy, showcasing their efforts to promote a better

understanding of media content among their audiences. Furthermore, the study considers the role of media officials, closely examining their announcements and initiatives that contribute to the broader landscape of media literacy.

## CASE STUDIES

### Education

Over the past two decades, the National Charter for Education and Training (NCET) has been a strategic roadmap. It stressed improving education's quality, fair access, training human resources, engaging different stakeholders, enhancing education's relevance to the country's economic, social, and technological development, and international openness (MEN, 1999).

The Supreme Education Council (CSEFRS) found defects in the implementation of NCET's guidelines and principles. To remedy and reinforce NCET, the 2009–2012 Moroccan Emergency Plan for Education (MEPE) saw light in 2009 (CSEFRS, 2008), adding projects that encourage better use of ICTs in schools. Media literacy was not explicitly addressed, however. In line with NCET and MEPE, the 2015-2030 Strategic Vision for Reform (SVR) saw light in 2016. It stresses fighting basic illiteracy and dropping out. It equally guarantees educational availability, inclusiveness, efficiency, equity, and quality, especially for children, girls, vulnerable children, and children with special needs (CSEFRS, 2015). Many levers and articles in SVR hint at media literacy. As one of its five principles, SVR depends on a strong will “to engage in the society of knowledge, science, innovation, creativity, and new technologies” (p. 10). When specifying its strategic goals, SVR mentions “coping with global transformations in science, technology, and knowledge” (p. 12). Achieving such optimistic principles and aims practically requires media literacy, which SVR does not pinpoint.

In terms of infrastructure, Lever 6 commits to equipping all classrooms with audio-visual and media communication tools. Concurrently, Lever 7 promotes diversifying extracurricular training, including school TV, facilitating the mastery of technology, and integrating distance learning methods. Regarding learning resources and media, Lever 12, devoted to fostering an innovative pedagogical model, advocates for a national strategy to adapt to digital advancements. This strategy would incorporate educational software, interactive media, and digital tools into teaching,

research, and innovation processes. Furthermore, to improve educational governance, Lever 14 focuses on equipping the national research and innovation system with marketing and copyright tools, along with a robust media and communication structure that encourages technology-driven collaboration. Lever 15, Section D, suggests establishing an integrated national system for data-driven decision-making, access to information, and data-based leadership. Later, Lever 20 underscores effective engagement in the knowledge society and economy, particularly through projects in ICTs, language, research, and innovation. Youth's readiness for future jobs is highlighted in Lever 16, which calls for forward-thinking training and improvements in integrating media to tackle global developments and inclusivity in the job market.

In SVR, youth socio-cultural inclusion is a priority. It emphasizes integrating media and communication technologies for cultural enrichment and interaction. Meanwhile, citizenship, democracy, and equality require partnerships with media institutions and ensuring responsible behaviour in spaces that students frequent, such as social media and websites. Concerning life-long learning, diverse media literacy requirements support software and app-based learning, cross-disciplinary media integration, and the use of ICTs in education. To enhance Morocco's standing as an emerging nation, education and training reforms should encompass the adoption of technology, while professional media outlets should support educational goals and emphasize media literacy's role in combating misinformation within the educational system. In short, the Strategic Vision addresses media literacy, though indirectly, without calling for a broader strategy that orchestrates educational efforts with the media literacy plans and strategies of other sectors.

To make SVR legally binding for all stakeholders, the Moroccan government transformed it into Framework Law No. 51-17 in 2019. Surprisingly, this Law pays near-zero attention to media literacy, focusing instead on combating basic illiteracy and reducing dropout rates. The Law acknowledges the joint responsibility of the state, families, NGOs, and other stakeholders in culture, media, and communication. It emphasizes the role of ICTs in fighting illiteracy and improving learning capacities both onsite and online. However, it departs from SVR's good intentions, neglecting the urgent need for media literacy or its significance for all levels of schooling.

Despite this textual unsteadiness and inconsistency, the Ministry of National Education (MEN) still

recognizes the importance of media literacy. For example, the Ministry has extended its agreement with Samsung Electronics Maghreb to promote digital education and mainstream ICTs in the education sector (Mediamarketing, 2022). This agreement's projects aim to provide educational institutions with information equipment, media, teacher training, and the Samsung Innovation Campus program in coding. Nevertheless, this program, meant to stimulate youngsters' creativity and innovation, does not fit within any national policy or strategy. Rather, as a dangling initiative, it is difficult to trace, evaluate, or measure.

Also, in its 2021 Annual Report, the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council acknowledged the importance of the digital transformation for development and its role in improving citizen-administration interactions. The Council proposed measures such as developing an integrated regulatory framework, improving cybersecurity, establishing digital trust, enhancing personal data protection, and developing public-private partnerships. However, the report overlooks the importance of integrating media literacy in education, which is crucial for critical and responsible online navigation.

At universities, media literacy education is inconsistently integrated into curricula. Some English departments at faculties of Arts and Humanities have incorporated modules or MA programs on media studies and cyberspace. For instance, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Moulay Ismail University of Meknes provides a course titled "Media and Visual Studies". Nevertheless, including ICT courses or modules in higher education relies on local initiatives, reflecting a serious lack of systematicity in integrating media literacy in the Moroccan education system.

Despite these initiatives and efforts, media literacy as a specific educational focus is conspicuously neglected. This lack of institutionalizing media literacy initiatives significantly implies lacunae in students' and citizens' overall literacy and their ability to participate in a democratic society. As Moroccans are inundated with information from various sources, media literacy can enable them to evaluate its credibility, assess its accuracy, and discern its propaganda or bias. Otherwise, citizens can be susceptible to distorted perceptions of reality, uncritical consumption of harmful content, and inadequate media creation, which further stresses the urgency of designing a national, cross-sectoral media literacy policy and implementing it in Moroccan schools.

## Media

Despite the plain lack of a consistent and explicit media literacy policy in Morocco's education system, media policies have recognized the significance of media literacy, particularly in post-Arab Spring reforms. Various regulatory texts and official guidelines stress the importance of media literacy, albeit shyly and limitedly.

Firstly, Law 66-16, which regulates audio-visual communication in Morocco, specifies that public service media (PSM) "contribute to literacy about the media, the environment, and sustainable development" (Article 46). Consequently, media literacy has been pivotal in PSM's responsibilities since 2016, alongside sustainable development. Mentioning 'media literacy' indicates its limited visibility, as it is listed among new legal PSM measures. However, Law 66-16 does not specify media literacy's definition or precise content (Official Gazette, 2016, p. 6722).

Secondly, the media regulator's Law 11-15 too advocates promoting media literacy. After its restructuring in 2015, the HACA handles protecting young audiences from media physical, mental, and psychological harm, presents media literacy as a solution for media threats, and preserves media ethics and integrity. The Law indirectly links media literacy to sustainability by emphasizing young people's overall well-being. However, it neither specifies ML's scope in Morocco nor gives examples of potential strategies, programs, or practices for the HACA or audio-visual outlets to apply. Rather, Law 11-15 seems concerned primarily with political equality of opportunity, political parties' visibility on PSM, and the HACA's relationship with key media official stakeholders. The Law positions audiences as passive receivers needing protection rather than active agents worthy of empowerment. Practically, in 2020, HACA staff only attended four international conferences that discussed media literacy (HACA, 2021). In 2021, the HACA participated vividly in seven ML-related surveys, conferences, meetings, and the UNESCO MOOC on MIL (HACA, 2022). Most participations took place abroad. None addressed Moroccans or the Moroccan mediascape with clear ML strategies, direct policies, or hands-on programs.

Thirdly, the Books of Specifications (BoS) bindingly regulate the relationship between the HACA, audio-visual channels, and audiences. In SOREAD 2M's BoS, media literacy is mentioned twice. Like news programs, debate programs, or TV dramas, Article 20 mentions media and communication literacy programs within 2M

TV's annual programming (Official Gazette, 2012, p. 5540). Article 24 is entirely dedicated to media literacy, explicitly stating that "2M TV broadcasts weekly and regularly a program of 26 minutes minimum on media literacy that addresses mainly youngsters" (Official Gazette, 2012, p. 5541). The BoS also hints at media literacy twice. Article 2 specifies PSM objectives, including facilitating young audiences' participation in public life, integration, and access to "culture, science, and technology." Later in Article 26, 2M TV is expected to broadcast a set of programs on culture and science, including a "weekly and regular" 26-minute slot on "science and technologies" (Official Gazette, 2012, p. 5542). These measures illustrate the increasing recognition of deep mediatization and the need for media literacy in media regulations and programming.

Furthermore, Moroccan officials often stress the significance of media literacy. For instance, in the "Youth Encounters" Conference, ex-president of the HACA, Amina Lamrini, extolled media education for enabling the "connected generation" to use social media more consciously and rationally. For Lamrini, social media is a "double-edged sword" that can foster research and education, as well as misinformation and fake news. With media literacy, Lamrini added, youngsters can develop the necessary skills to detect unreliable sources of information, make informed decisions, avoid misinformation, and reduce the downsides of social media (Maroc Diplomatie, 2017). Besides, during UNESCO's "Youth, Media, and Active Citizenship Forum", aimed to raise awareness of media literacy's strategic role in educational practices, former Minister of Communication, Mostapha Khalfi, highlighted the importance of media literacy and underscored strong media education programs' role in combating fake news (Maroc Diplomatie, 2017).

In practice, media literacy receives less attention, even from legacy media. SNRT, for instance, operates several general and thematic TV and radio channels, including one that specializes in culture and education. All the articles that specify SNRT channels' programs on culture and science mention promoting 'technologies' broadly, as content, not as skills. Even from a protectionist standpoint, programs that tackle juvenile delinquency, schooling, and family challenges can include sexual literacy but not media literacy. Moreover, SNRT program objectives and genres do not mention anything related to media literacy, while Alaoula TV's specific programming entirely overlooks media literacy (Official Gazette, 2012).

On Channel 4, which specializes in culture and education, media literacy is approximately absent. Its annual list includes programs that "facilitate scientific knowledge, or discoveries, research, and new technologies, or botany, zoology, geoscience, or archaeology" (Official Gazette, 2012, p. 5497). Channel 4 is also required to broadcast "weekly and regularly a 26-minute documentary on scientific discoveries, technologies, the environment, or sustainable development." This may include programs on communication technologies or IT discoveries, but as descriptive content rather than skills to enhance literacy.

In short, SNRT programs seem more concerned with coverage of political events, citizen integration, and promoting/protecting Moroccanness. The politically loaded programming focuses, directly or otherwise, on state needs and challenges, which eclipse audience needs, including media literacy. Unspecified media literacy in BoS unveils a gap in national broadcasters' efforts to promote media literacy among audiences. As SNRT targets mainly viewers in rural areas, its channels neglect media literacy, while the avalanche of mediated content in the digital environment requires recognizing media literacy's potential to reduce basic illiteracy.

Finally, the discrepancy between media literacy stakeholders' intentions and strategies is noteworthy. Media outlets generally recognize ML importance, but do not prioritize or promote it actively, making the recognition pointless. Consequently, problematic praxis of media illiteracy inculcates in audiences in the absence of precise strategies, efficient regulations, and adequate programs.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two key features underscore media literacy in Morocco. The first is ubiquitous access to the internet, especially social media platforms. The second is that media literacy policies remain mere token gestures and good intentions. The steps taken to incorporate media literacy in education and media systems are uncoordinated, which puts pressure on the government and citizens alike.

In both fields, faint inklings can be discerned. In education, reform roadmaps mention media practices and suggest projects, levers, and procedures to consider in reform plans. Even a national strategy for coping with digital updates is proposed in the SVR. However, media literacy per se is not clearly suggested. Concretizing all SVR's and FL's programs necessitates media literacy as the 'lever of levers', particularly given the abundant



information, serious resources, training options, capacity-building courses, and job opportunities online. In brief, current efforts in Moroccan schools and universities cannot ensure access to high-quality media literacy curricula and programs.

In the media, regulations, institutions, and official debates extoll media literacy and the impact of deep mediatization on digital citizenship. For citizens, however, the offered media programs and training, especially by public outlets and institutions, or civil society, remain uncoordinated, limited geographically and inconducive to better learning, working, and living amidst media content's ubiquitous benefits and digital harm.

This unequivocally pinpoints the urgent need for a comprehensive, cross-sectoral media literacy policy. It represents a pivotal milestone in empowering society in an era of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and the rampant integration of applications in all walks of human life. Considering this imperative, Morocco stands to examine media literacy policies and good practices of similar contexts in other countries, and mould strategies for its own context.

To transcend the status quo of regulatory void and inconsistency, the following recommendations are identified for a clear media literacy policy in Morocco.

*Develop a comprehensive media literacy policy.* Morocco urgently needs a coherent, comprehensive, cross-sectoral media literacy policy. This comprises a well-articulated vision, a clear philosophy, principles, objectives, and practices to advance media literacy nationwide. The policy framework guides a seamless integration of media literacy across all sectors and evolves with the changing media landscape. In constructing this framework, Morocco ensures providing administrations, educators, media outlets, socio-economic stakeholders, and families with clear guidelines and banks of resources. This roadmap frames the development of training programs, stresses critical thinking skills, and forges digital citizenship today.

*Introduce formal media education in schools.* To ensure its comprehensive education, Morocco introduces formal media literacy courses at the secondary education level or earlier. Teachers, as key policy implementers, receive robust training to effectively impart media literacy skills and knowledge. The creation of multimedia clubs can provide a platform for students to engage in discussions about media-related issues and create media content as project work. Special attention should be given to rural and remote regions where access to digital resources is limited. In

those areas, analogous programs and collaboration with civil society campaigns can provide the necessary training and resources. Contextualising teaching resources and training programs can derive relevant inspirations from the Association for Media Literacy in Ontario's Media Literacy Resource Guide, to create a Moroccan Media Literacy Guide.

*Spread media literacy in the public sphere.* Raising awareness of media literacy across informal social venues is the third element. Public media outlets can allocate specific programs to promote media literacy and educate the public on critical analysis of media content, identification of information disorder, and safe navigation of the digital landscape. Public media can enrich their content by inviting contributions from ML experts, educators, and researchers, or hosting them in news and debate programs to share insights. This can debunk misconceptions related to media literacy. In tandem with civil society and the creative industries, the Ministry of Culture can launch media literacy campaigns in streets, administrations, youth houses, universities, museums, and festivals. An edition of the annual International Book Fair can be devoted utterly to media literacy. Different ministries can equally share media literacy content on their websites and make their websites conducive to user-friendly experiences that enhance media literacy. Moreover, an entire campaign can be dedicated to raising awareness among parents about the critical importance of media literacy for their own well-being as well as for the appropriate upbringing of their children. This holistic approach is meant to significantly mitigate the repercussions of the critical situation of ML in the kingdom.

*Learn from global best practices.* Morocco can benefit from examining the media literacy policies and practices of other countries. For instance, the UK's Online Harms White Paper proactively underscores the importance of formulating policies to safeguard citizens, especially children, from harmful content and activities online (Online Harms White Paper, 2019). Taking inspiration from India, Morocco can encourage setting up media clubs where youngsters can engage in discussions pertaining to media-related issues (Kumar, 2019). Similarly, in Brazil, the ML approach emphasizes digital citizenship and social inclusion. It can offer a valuable model to promote social inclusion and empower citizens' full and responsible participation in the digital age (Pereira et al., 2018). Embedding these best practices into Morocco's media literacy policy can help ensure Moroccan citizens, particularly young

generations, capacities to navigate the complexities of digital citizenship while staying safe and informed.

*Engage local stakeholders.* While seeking inspiration from global best practices, it is paramount to recognize the setbacks of a one-size-fits-all approach. Tailoring policy models to Morocco's unique cultural, social, and economic context is essential. This customization ensures that media literacy strategies are effective, inclusive, and reachable for all social groups, especially the disadvantaged. For that, Morocco should involve local stakeholders and organizations in a participatory approach. Due to their grassroots knowledge and familiarity with local communities' specific challenges and needs, partnering with civil society organizations can be highly beneficial. Moreover, leveraging regional organizations can help ensure that media literacy efforts do not concentrate solely on urban areas. Extending programs to remote and underserved regions can bridge the geographical digital divide and guarantee even access to media literacy resources. Engaging youth organizations and women's associations is particularly important. These groups can vitally reach out to their peers and communities, fostering a culture of responsible media creation, circulation, and consumption. Recognizing that media literacy involves critical thinking and discernment, partnerships with illiteracy-fighting associations can help meet the unique needs of individuals with varying literacy levels. These associations can adapt media literacy materials and training programs to cater to different literacy levels. Lastly, the ANRT and the Agency for Digital Development (ADD) can join efforts to support media literacy via well-funded, properly regulated initiatives that align with national goals.

Taken together, these recommendations form a threshold for a media literacy framework in Morocco. They bridge the existing media literacy efforts and offer guidance for policymakers and educators to ascertain the feasibility and efficacy of various training interventions. This preliminary roadmap, in essence, can serve to prepare a structured response to the actual needs of the Moroccan context and citizens.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of education and media policies in Morocco reveals the critical need for a national media and information literacy policy. In fact, the existing efforts to spread media literacy remain shambolic in the absence of a harmonizing strategy. Individuals'

increasing connectivity, young people's visibility on digital platforms, and the shortcomings of certain public policies, create a context of uncertainty. The resultant layers of in-betweenness emit an ongoing interplay between stability and change, depending on how educational and communication objectives align with social practices. The lack of clear and straightforward policies and guidelines on media literacy widens the digital divide in Morocco and swamps the public sphere with unsafe and poor critical thought.

However, while international experiences can inspire the Moroccan policymaking, localisation and contextualisation are necessary. 'Universal' ML models originate actually and were designed to fit in the Global North. They reflect the capacities and needs of their immediate contexts. Adhering to them without careful contextualization extends colonial epistemologies. Media literacy intersects with the economic interests of big tech companies and the cultural imperialism of creative industry platforms. Instead of a copycat model, the policy should be appropriated for Moroccan citizens culturally, economically, socially, and politically. Its threshold is a rigorous needs analysis to symmetrically match objectives to the short- and long-term skills required for 21<sup>st</sup> century technological opportunities and challenges in the kingdom.

Finally, ML is increasingly important as a research priority. To expand on the findings of this study, there are various avenues for future research. First, beyond mere official document analysis in education and media, research can explore the perspectives of a broader range of stakeholders, such as educators, media professionals, policymakers, and students to uncover their views and beliefs on how different sectors should implement ML. Second, a comparative approach can examine media literacy policies in countries with similar political and cultural contexts to Morocco. This will provide useful insights for how media literacy is structured, delivered, and evaluated in other national contexts and may inform the development of effective media literacy policies and practices in Morocco. Lastly, future research can investigate the impact of media literacy programs on critical thinking, literacy skills, digital citizenship, and attitudes towards media and information literacy in Morocco to figure out these programs' effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

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