



# **STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN VIENTIANE, LAO PDR**

## ***Final Report***

*Lao Youth Union  
Ministry of Culture and Tourists  
Ministry of Technology and Communications  
Lao CSOs Coordination Office  
Oxfam*

*Vientiane, Lao PDR*



## RESEARCH TEAM



NO.	Name	Position/Organisation
	Thongchanh Phoumiphanh	Vice Secretariat/LYU
	Phansone Viphavanh	Deputy Director/LYU
	Bounyong Phetvixay	Deputy Director/LYU
	Inpone Nakhonesy	Deputy Director/MOTC
	Phouthong Vilaykham	Youth Committee/MOES
	Viengxay Nuanthavong	Deputy Chief /Vientiane Capital
	Khamphy Khammavong	Project Manager/Oxfam
	Outavong Phathamvong	Consultant (team leader)/
	Ngern Xaychaluern	Youth member/Cyber Security/MOTC
	Phonesack Chanthavong	Deputy Chief/LYU
	Khampan Sivilay	Deputy Chief/LYU
	Nalee Singhalath	Chief/Cabinet/MOTC
	Thipmangkone Soulinthone	CSO Coordinator
	Khamsing Vilaykham	Technical Officer/LYU
	Xaysavath Souvanvixay	Technical Officer/LYU
	Somboun Mahavong	Technical Officer/LYU
	Souliya Kethkhamphin	Technical Officer/LYU
	Boulaphan Phonesavanh	Program Coordinator/Oxfam
	Pheng Inthamixay	Consultant (assistant)/LCCC
	Singkhram Inthamixay	Consultant (assistant)/LCCC

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**Viengakhone  
SOURIYO**

*Lao CSO's Vice-Chair*

## Foreword by LCCC Manager

Laos Civil Society Coordination Committee – LCCC

**By the head of the LCCC Secretariat**

It is my great pleasure to introduce this report, which presents the findings of a study on social media use among high school and university students in Vientiane, Lao PDR. This study is a timely and important contribution to our understanding of the impact of social media on the youth of our society.

The rise of social media has brought about significant changes in the way we communicate, interact, and consume information. While social media platforms have the potential to connect people from different parts of the world and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and ideas, they also come with their own set of challenges and risks.

This study sheds light on the ways in which high school and university students in Vientiane use social media, their attitudes towards social media, and the impact of social media on their academic and social lives. The findings of this study are based on extensive research and analysis, including surveys and interviews with students and educators.

I am confident that this report will be of great interest to educators, policymakers, and researchers who are working to understand the impact of social media on our society. It is my hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for those who wish to promote responsible social media use and ensure that our young people are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate the digital world safely and effectively.

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the research team for their hard work and dedication in carrying out this study. Their efforts have resulted in a report that is both informative and insightful, and I am proud to introduce it to you.

**Viengakhone SOURIYO**

Lao CSO's Vice-Chair

## DISCLAIMER

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This study will serve as the baseline information for any research in the future and for the Civic Space project formulation. The findings were drawn from information collected from desk reviews, in-depth interviews of key informants, and field questionnaire surveys. The research team declared no conflict of interest. For any further updates and modifications from the submitted report in the future, the research team will not be responsible for the content and legal consequences. All collected data was handed over to the LCCC and LYU for further analysis and use.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the government counterparts from the Ministry of Culture and Tourists and the Ministry of Technology and Communication for their collaboration and technical assistance during the study preparation, data collection, and finalisation of the report. We would also like to thank all key informants and students who participated in the interviews, schools, colleges, and the National University of Laos for their cooperation during the data collection.

Last, but not least, we would like to thank government counterparts from the Lao Youth Union, especially Mr Thongchanh Phoumiphanh, Vice Secretariat, for their leadership, collaboration, coordination, and technical assistance throughout the study process.

# Summary

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## Background:

Access to mobile phone broadband in Laos sharply increased from 2000 to 2015. However, in 2017, the percentage of Internet access was only 21.9%, which was the lowest in Southeast Asia, lower than Cambodia (25.6%) and Indonesia (25.4%). According to the Digital-Government Center, MTC, in 2021, the percentage of Internet access stood at 48.4%, and the percentage of active social media users was 49.1%, indicating a rapid increase during the intervening years.

Social media is becoming a vital platform for daily activities in Laos, including education, politics, social networking, and trading. Moreover, social media has become essential and changed work modality since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the many positive impacts of social media on youth development, many studies have illustrated some negative factors, such as reduced physical activity and depression. This study aims to summarise and map out the existing laws, policies, regulations, ministerial decrees, and instructions, both official and grey documents from relevant ministries, departments and centres; understand and describe gaps in how the laws, policies, regulations, ministerial decrees, and instructions, are enforced; describe social media use among high school, college, and university students; and provide recommendations to maximise the positive impacts of social media on development in key/study populations.

## Methodology:

This study applied triangulation research methodology, including desk/literature review, qualitative interviews (in-depth interviews), and face-to-face interviews with high school, college, and university students in Vientiane.

## Findings:

All reviewed laws and decrees highlighted issues related to human resource capacity building, free speech and expression, data privacy and security, and gender equality and disadvantaged populations. Key informants expressed that disseminating existing laws and regulations related to digital communication technology and cyber and computer crime was insufficient, and only law and digital policy implementers and telecommunication providers were aware of the existing laws and regulations. Some key informants were unaware of the laws; thus, they could not provide detailed comments.

In total, we interviewed 650 students. Almost all (99.3%) owned a smartphone and had access to the Internet. On average, students spent 20 to 30 minutes on their phone during class hours. Both high school and university/college students spent 120 minutes on smartphones and social media after school hours. Facebook was the most popular platform among high school and university/college students (29.0% and 29.9%, respectively). Using social media for entertainment (music and movies) was another reason for using social media among high school and university/college students (28.6% and 27.5%, respectively). Of the students interviewed, 11.7% and 25.2% of high school and university/college students, respectively, had shared fake news, in which 39.8% searched for further information beforehand and 34.5% used their personal opinion to verify whether it was fake news. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant ( $OR=0.4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). When asked about account security, 26.2% of students interviewed reported that their social media account was hacked, while 15.8% and 20.7% of high school and university/college students, respectively, reported that unknown persons had used their digital footprint.

Of the students interviewed, 30.6% of students experienced bullying through social media. In terms of financial scams, 21.5% of high school students and 30.0% of university/college students experienced being tricked into transferring money. When facing social media problems, 55.2% consulted with friends and 17.1% consulted with parents; less than 2% consulted with their teachers.

### **Conclusion and recommendations:**

Many laws and decrees have been endorsed in recent years; however, dissemination of these laws and decrees did not cover the entire Lao population; only those responsible for implementing the laws and regulations and telecommunication business persons were aware of these laws and regulations. The Internet access rate was very high among the students interviewed; moreover, students spent a significant amount of time on social media, which might have a long-term impact on their physical and mental well-being and development. Students reported negative experiences related to social media use, such as fake news, hacked accounts, bullying, identity theft, use of digital footprint without permission, among several other issues. Most students consult their friends first when facing social media problems, then their parents.

Based on our findings and taking into consideration the study's limitations, we recommend the following actions and activities to address social media use among young people and the general population in Laos.

### **General recommendations:**

- Disseminate digital and communication technology-related laws and laws on cyber and computer crime to the general population through different means, such as short course training, posters, and short audio and video clips.
- Train teachers on safe social media use, the use of social media for academic purposes, and the cyber and computer crime law. Because schools and educational institutions are the most appropriate place to raise awareness of cyber and computer crime and social media use for young people, teachers could play an important role in educating students on safe social media use and help protect them from becoming social media victims.
- Integrate compulsory safe social media use campaigns and related laws and regulations into the computer course curriculum as well as informal education courses.
- Continue smartphone restrictions for students who are in school during the summer vacation to minimise time spent on social media.

### **For the government:**

- Develop short guidelines or posters of the legal process when facing digital rights and social media-related problems and publish these widely on different social media platforms.
- Create a hotline to provide counselling to victims due to social media targeting.
- Strengthen law enforcement to ensure the rights of Lao citizens, especially young people, in accessing social media, regardless of gender and ethnicity, and participate in digital and communication technology development, implementation, and management.



**For CSOs and development partners:**

- Provide technical and financial support to raise awareness of digital and communication technology-related laws and cyber and computer crime laws, especially among CSO members and young people, preventing them from becoming victims.
- Engaging in promoting a safe environment for young people by building the capacity of teachers and organising campaigns for safe social media use in schools and supporting schools to implement smartphone use restrictions.
- Collaborate with the education sector to develop curriculums related to safe social media use, communication technology laws and law on cyber and computer crime, while integrating them into the general teaching-learning curriculum, such as IT.
- Based on findings from this study, CSOs and development partners should conduct further studies to deepen the understanding, with aims to identify factors associated with social media use, along with potential risks for becoming victims of social media, cyber, and computer crime among young people.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

In Laos, access to mobile phone broadband sharply increased from 2000 to 2015. However, in 2017, the percentage of Internet access stood at 21.9%, which was the lowest in Southeast Asia: lower than Cambodia (25.6%) and Indonesia (25.4%), according to the World Bank (WB, 2018). According to the Digital-Government Center, in 2021, the percentage of Internet access had increased to 48.4%, and the percentage of active social media users was 49.1%, indicating a rapid increase in Internet use between those years (Luanglath, 2021). In 2022, the UNDP conducted a digital assessment in Laos using the Digital Maturity Assessment Tools and classified Laos as in the Digitally Nascent stage (the first stage of the Digital Maturity Assessment), which implies undefined focus areas and sub-areas, low levels of digital literacy, low skillsets among the workforce, processes not being citizen-centric and not capturing feedback from the end users, policies and regulations are not defined for the digital services and standards, institutions are not yet digitally enabled, digital vision and implementation strategies are unclear, processes are manual and require intervention for decision-making, and there is a lack of technology infrastructure in place (Mukherji, et al., 2022).

Despite the immaturity of the digital, information, and communication technology infrastructure, social media is becoming a vital platform for daily activities in Laos, including education, politics, social networking, and trade. The digital world allows people to access better information, have significantly more connections to the outside world, and promote citizen participation and gender equality. The 11th National Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, held between 13 and 15 January 2021, highlighted the importance of ICT development to meet the regional standard as one of Lao's priorities of human resource development (GOL, 2021). In 2021, the government of Laos endorsed the National Vision on Digital Economic Development 2021-2040. The vision covers the ten-year Digital Economic Strategy 2021-2030 and the five-year Digital Economic Development 2021-2025 plan (MOTC, 2021). One of the remarks made by the Lao Prime Minister in the Lao Digital Economy Forum, held in Vientiane on May 26 2023, highlighted the importance of the deployment of digital resources on socio-economic development, natural resources preservation, national security, and connection with the region<sup>1</sup>.

Social media has become essential and changed working structures and logistics since the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, all in-person events, such as meetings, conferences, workshops, training, and class learning were moved online. Electronic applications and platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Webex, were widely used by different organisations, including government organisations. Electronic documents were accepted and replaced hard-copy documents; electronic signatures were more broadly used and accepted for official documents and legal processes. Online application and platform use continues even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1.2. Digital rights and social media use among young people

Despite a sharp increase in the percentage of Internet access in Laos, there have been no studies on digital rights and social media use among young people. The increase in the percentage of social media use and Internet access among young people was likely to be the same as among the general Lao population. During the Covid-19 pandemic, online advocacy interventions became more crucial than ever to promote civic engagement and basic rights by implementing, monitoring, and evaluating digital rights and Internet freedom policies. Most social

<sup>1</sup> News article-Prime Minister speech. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryS4tluiqnE>. Accessed date: June 5, 2023.

and education activities were shifted from physical attendance to online, virtual, or distance attendance during the pandemic and lockdown.

Social media has both positive and negative impacts on children and young people's development. A study in Turkey found that most students interviewed used social media to share documents, information, opinions, and entertainment (Endogan & Mustafa, 2017). A study in Singapore found similar findings, but it also found users had more focus on engaging in civic discourse, sharing, and commenting on online topics, engaging with friends and family, and organising and practising online and physical events, such as online learning and sports (Krishnan, et al., 2022). In addition, the digital world could protect children from violence by providing a safe space to express themselves and get help when needed (Foundation, 2023). The digital world could also promote family life, especially for children who live away from their parents, allowing them to look after their children until they become teenagers. For children with disabilities, the digital world enables them to access online and remote learning, information, and social engagements (Foundation, 2023). The digital world can also promote good health and well-being among children by providing health-related information and services provided by the government and private clinics with personal protection (HRBodies, 2023). A study in Thailand showed four positive components related to social media use among high school students, including happiness, tolerance, interpersonal communication, and self-esteem (Dhammathattariya, et al., 2021). Another study in Bangkok showed more constructive communication behaviours in social media among undergraduate students associated with personal and social factors (Jaruthavee & Rattanapisit, 2020).

Despite social media's many positive impacts on young people's development, many studies have illustrated some negative ones. A study among students in Saudi Arabia shows that only 1% of surveyed students used social media for academic purposes. Another study also found that 52% of students reported that social media use had affected their learning activities (Kolhar, et al., 2021). A study by Zeleke (2022) showed that 67% of school students use social media for non-education purposes and spend more time on social media than those who use it for education. Another study also found that students with higher education performance reported using social media for educational purposes and spending less time on social media use than others (Zeleke & Kibret, 2022). Tsitsika et al. found that using social media for two hours or longer correlated with anxiety and depression among European teenagers (Tsitsika, et al., 2014). Another study in Thailand in 2015 by Hanprathet et al. found a positive correlation between addiction to Facebook and depression among high school students that were interviewed (Hanprathet, et al., 2015).

Despite growing concerns about digital rights and social media use, there is little knowledge of digital rights and the use of social media among children and young people in Laos. Safe social media use is critical with the increasing use of digital technology and social media among young people. Therefore, the LCCC and Oxfam cooperated with the Lao Youth Union (LYU) to conduct a study on social media use among young people in Laos. It aimed to understand social media use and the behaviour of young people. Moreover, the study also aimed to map out digital rights, technology-related laws and regulations, while identifying challenges when implementing such laws and regulations.

### 1.3. Research/study questions

The Terms of Reference (ToR) provided by the LCCC highlighted some key questions guiding the study design and methodology. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. *What is relevant information by a desk review to gather information on digital rights, including local and national trends?*
2. *What are the relevant policies, laws, and regulations on digital rights transformation and digital technology strategy, as well as the relevant authorities' capacities?*



3. *What are the country's enablers and barriers to legal frameworks and digital rights enforcement?*
4. *What partnership and corroboration modalities should be between the government, CSOs, private sectors, and INGOs?*
5. *What are the potentials and priorities of development partners in advancing the digital space and work?*

During the study's preparation, most government counterparts were concerned about "digital rights" terminology, and they strongly recommended using the term "social media". Moreover, the research committee also suggested renaming the study. Therefore, we interpreted the research questions in different meanings, and the study focused on the following:

6. *What existing laws and regulations are there to promote the safe use of social media among young people and to protect them from becoming victims of social media?*
7. *How are the existing laws and regulations implemented and enforced?*
8. *How can the CSO, NGO/INGO, and development partners contribute to strengthening the law and enforcing regulation implementation?*

#### **1.4. Specific objectives**

This study aims to:

- Summarise and map the existing laws, policies, regulations, ministerial decrees, and instructions from relevant ministries, departments, and centres;
- Understand and describe gaps in how the laws, policies, regulations, ministerial decrees, and instructions are enforced;
- Describe the use of social media use among high school, college, and university students;
- Provide recommendations to maximise the positive impacts of social media on development in key/study populations.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Study design

This study applied a triangulation research methodology to respond to the study's questions and objectives, including a literature and desk review of existing policies, laws, regulations, decrees, qualitative interviews, and quantitative surveys.

#### *A. Literature and desk review*

The literature and desk review was designed to respond to research/study question numbers 1) and 2). The LYU made official requests to the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism and the Ministry of Technology and Communication to obtain digital and technology-related official documents. The research team collected key documents such as policies, regulations, ministerial instructions, and guidelines related to digital rights from the relevant ministries and government organisations. A consultant reviewed and consolidated these documents and mapped them out systematically. The summary of findings of this mapping is presented in a summary table in the results and Annex 3.

#### *B. Qualitative interview*

The in-depth interviews were designed to respond to research/study question number 3) in describing the enabling and predisposing factors and challenges for reinforcing the existing laws, policies, and regulations related to digital rights and social media use in Laos. Moreover, these in-depth interviews were to respond to research/study questions 4) and 5) in providing recommendations for improving coordination modalities and identifying the priorities in advancing digital rights and social media use. Face-to-face and virtual in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain opinions from key informants and experts working in Laos's digital-related or technology sectors and social media. The research team purposely selected key informants from concerned ministries, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and international partners, such as active INGOs, based on recommendations from key research committee members. The in-depth interview guide is annexed to this report.

The interview team consisted of three members: a supervisor, who acted as an interviewer and a notetaker, and two assistants, who were notetakers. The interview team received verbal consent and permission from the key informants to record the interview before questioning. All interview records were transcribed on the same day as the interview to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the interview notes.

#### *C. Quantitative survey*

The observational descriptive cross-section design was used for the quantitative survey. The study design and questionnaire were applied to respond to the study's objectives of understanding the population's current social media use and digital rights. Data collectors conducted face-to-face interviews with high school, university, and college students using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on previous studies in different countries, the digital citizenship framework, and the opinions of experts working in Laos's digital and technology sectors.

A consultant developed an online data collection form using the final quantitative survey questionnaire using Google Forms. The data collection team members were trained on the study protocol and the questionnaire. They also were trained to use their smartphone to access the Google questionnaire for the interviews. There were 20 data collectors and four field supervisors, later divided into five sub-teams. Field supervisors were also the interviewers to obtain sufficient responses within a limited timeline.

## 2.2. Study site

This study aimed to provide scientific evidence on digital rights and social media use in Laos. However, due to time limitations, the study was only conducted among high school and university students in the capital, Vientiane. According to the ToR, this study intended to survey high school students. In June, however, during the data collection, it was the second semester examination period of high schools in Laos. Therefore, the study's scope was expanded to survey university students as well to ensure the representation of high school and university students in the capital.

For qualitative interviews, key informants were purposively proposed. Due to time constraints and the limited availability of resources, we interviewed only key informants working in Vientiane.

## 2.3. Sampling methods and sample size

In the survey design stage, we planned to recruit students through random sampling to ensure an accurate representation of high school, university, and college students in Vientiane. Moreover, we planned to collect the data before the high school summer vacation. Due to a delay in survey preparation and clearance for the field survey, the data collection was postponed from mid-June to mid-July (a one-month delay), when the high schools were closed for the summer. Thus, we recruited high school students through a non-random sampling technique and reached the sufficient number of students as planned.

After LYU approved the field survey, an official notification letter was sent to the Vientiane Capital Education Office, the National University of Laos, and private colleges to inform them about the data collection schedule. We collected data from eight high schools in total – four public and four private high schools in Vientiane. Moreover, our team also interviewed high school students at the PAKA (Participation Development Knowledge Agency) centre where many high school students attended special courses. We collected data for university and college students at the National University of Laos, Ratana, and Lao-Top College. We also interviewed university and college students who were attending an English course at the Locos English School.

We used different approaches to reach high school, university, and college students. For high school students, on the day our data collection team visited, teachers gathered the students to be surveyed, according to a notification letter from the Vientiane Capital Education Office, in one place, such as a meeting room, a classroom, or an office. For university and college students, however, students were not gathered on our behalf; therefore, we used a convenience sampling technique to recruit these students.

To our knowledge, the LCCC study on social media use among young people was the first study in Laos which especially focused on high school and university students as well as the opinions of key informants. Before the study, there was little information and understanding of social media use and its impact on this specific age group. Therefore, this study proposed recruiting up to 600 students (plus 5-10% of errors depending on time availability), ideally from ten high schools and three universities in Vientiane. This was in order to obtain sufficient statistical power and ensure an authentic representation of high school and university students in the



capital. We proposed conducting the study in public and private schools and universities in the original design.

## 2.4. Study period

The original timeline of this study was from April to June 2023. However, the study was postponed due to a delay in consultant recruitment. The LCCC recruited a consultant at the beginning of June. During the first two weeks after the contract was authorised, the consultant developed a study methodology and questionnaires with technical inputs from the government counterparts, mainly from LYU, the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism and the Ministry of Technology and Communication, LCCC, and Oxfam in Laos. The consultant submitted an inception report and the first draft of a questionnaire with the in-depth interview guide on 6 June 2023. The LYU endorsed the research committee on 3 July 2023, and a technical meeting to finalise the questionnaire and interview guide was convened on 6 July 2023. A consultative workshop took place on 26 July 2023. A consultant revised and finalised a report based on feedback from the workshop and submitted it to the LCCC on 31 July 2023.

## 2.5. Inclusion criteria

- Key informants recruited for the qualitative interview were proposed by research committee members. These informants work in ministries, government bodies, and development partners.
- Students from selected high schools in Vientiane.
- Students from the National University of Laos and private colleges in Vientiane, in addition to other provinces.

## 2.6. Ethical considerations

The LCCC team was recommended to submit a study proposal and questionnaires for ethical approval from the relevant ethical committee for social science research. Due to time limitations, however, we were not able to do so. Nonetheless, key informants and students who participated in this study were informed that it was anonymous and that their participation was voluntary. They had the right not to answer any questions if they felt uncomfortable and could stop the interview at any time. The interviewer obtained verbal informed consent before starting the interview, and these were obtained from all participants prior to the interview. For the quantitative questionnaire in Google Forms, we provided an option of “skip answer” to all questions. This allowed the choice to skip any particular questions those interviewees did not want to answer.

For in-depth interviews, in addition to above mentioned, the research team asked permission to make a voice recording before the interview.

## 2.7. Data analysis

For the quantitative survey, the data collectors interviewed students using the Google Forms questionnaire; the responses were automatically uploaded to Google Drive after the data collectors submitted, thus, no data entry was required. All the data was downloaded to Microsoft Excel for data cleaning. The formatted data was then imported into the SPSS statistics program, where descriptive analysis was carried out. The chi-square and t-test were used to prove the statistical difference between two categorical variables, while also comparing the continuous variable means of two observatory groups. The p-value of 0.05 and smaller was considered a statistically significant difference.

The qualitative data was coded, and the content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Digital Policies and Regulations in Laos

We reviewed nine laws and two ministerial decrees related to digital information, communication, technology, computers, and media, which we obtained from the Ministry of Technology and Communication and the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism. A summary of the full findings of the review related to digital rights and social media use in young people is annexed to this report (Annex 3). Of the 11 documents, we found nine documents relevant to our study's objectives.

#### HR Capacity Building:

All reviewed laws and decrees addressed the need to promote the capacity building of the national workforce in the use and development of ICT software and technology by encouraging domestic and international investments and contributing to socio-economic development in Laos. For example:

- ICT Law (endorsed in 2016):
  - ◇ **Article 4: State Policy on ICT, paragraph 3:**  
“The state creates the conditions and facilitates students, Lao people of all ethnicities, clergy, disabled people, and disadvantaged people to learn and access ICT”.
  - ◇ **Article 18: Software development, paragraph 3:**  
“Software development work has been promoted by prioritizing students, researchers and developers in the country to develop such work to be modern and as a tool to promote economic and social development following laws and regulations.”
  - ◇ **Article 21: ICT system development:**  
“ICT system development work has been promoted by prioritizing students and developers in the country to develop diverse systems to reduce the use of foreign information following laws and regulations.”
- The Government Decree on ICT (number 047/PM, endorsed in 2009):
  - ◇ **Part 2 on Communication and information technology policy, Target 2, bullet 4:**  
“Promote conditions to facilitate rural, remote and disadvantaged people to access and use information and communication technology to improve their living conditions.”

The following law and decree also recommended developing ICT training curricula and integrating them into the general education system to increase the pool of the national ICT workforce and experts in order to supply them to the local labour market demand.

- ICT Law:
  - ◇ **Article 25: ICT curriculum development:**  
“The Ministry of Education and Sports develops and integrates the ICT curriculum into the national curriculums.”

— Decree on ICT:

◇ ***Heading 3.1 on HR development on ICT, bullet 4:***

“Create conditions and promote firmly and appropriately bringing ICT into the curriculum in the general education system.”

**Free Speech and Expression:**

The Media Law, endorsed in December 2016, aims to encourage Lao citizens to exercise their freedom and obligation of speech and express their opinions and views through social media. However, the expressions should be constructive, promote peace, unity, and national security, and not be against the country's laws and regulations. The law also indicates the rights of Lao people in accessing information through domestic and overseas media sources.

◇ ***Article 9: Freedom of Lao Citizens in the Media:***

“Lao citizens have the right and freedom in the media by expressing opinions, giving views and having access to information both domestically and internationally about the situation, information, entertainment and other issues that do not conflict with laws and regulations which are beneficial to the nation and the people of the ethnic groups.”

◇ ***Article 10: Lao Citizens' Freedom of Expression:***

“Lao citizens have the right and freedom to comment through the media on i) creation and implementation of party policies, constitutions, state laws and regulations, socio-economic development plans and state budget plans, ii) perspectives on domestic and foreign situations, and iii) constructive feedback to individuals, legal entities and organizations.

◇ ***Article 11: Lao Citizens' Freedom of Information***

“Access and receive information about the domestic and international situation, knowledge, entertainment, etc.”

The Media Law also clearly addresses that individuals and legal entities should take full legal responsibility for the information they express, share, or provide through all media.

◇ ***Article 46: Getting Information from Society, paragraph 2:***

“Individuals, legal entities and organizations must contribute to the provision and have legal responsibility regarding the content of the information provided to the media through online social media, press conferences, interviews and other forms.”

Although freedom of speech and expression are encouraged by the Media Law, dissemination of fake news, falsified information, and propaganda are strictly prohibited by the Law on Combating and Suppressing Cybercriminals and the Law on Electronic Information. The Cyber and Computer Crime Law also prohibits editing of photos, motions, information, audio, and video that could cause damage to individuals, legal entities, or organisations. The law relating to cyber and computer crime also provides clear statements on the legal fines and penalties for sharing and disseminating fake and falsified information and propaganda.

— Law on electronic information (endorsed 2017):

◇ ***Article 32: Prohibitions for Information Owners, heading 4:***



“Create fake electronic data or dangerous data and cause damage to individuals, legal entities or other organizations.”

— Law on Combating and Suppressing Cybercriminals (endorsed 2015)

◇ **Article 11: Unauthorized editing of content, images, motion pictures, audio and video:**

“Unauthorized editing of content, photos, motion pictures, sound and video is the creation, addition or modification of the original by electronic or other means to disseminate through the computer system, which causes damage to individuals, legal entities and related organizations.”

◇ **Article 13: Creating damage through online social media:**

“1. Bringing computer information that is slanderous, blasphemy, using obscene words to log in to the computer

2. Bringing information that is violent, fake information, or deceptive information into the computer

3. Bringing computer data that destroys national security, peace, social order, culture and good customs of the nation

4. Bringing persuasive computer information, inciting and encouraging people to oppose the government or divide unity

5. Advertising for the sale of drugs, military weapons, chemical weapons, human trafficking, prostitution and illegal items.”

◇ **Article 62: Criminal measures:**

“3. Unauthorized editing of content, photos, animations, sound and video will be punished with imprisonment from three months to two years and will be fined from three million to ten million kips.

5. Causing damage through online social media will be punished with imprisonment from three months to three years and will be fined from four million to twenty million kips.

6. Publishing obscene material through a computer system will be punished with imprisonment from one year to five years and will be fined from five million to thirty million kips.”

Data Privacy and Security: The Government of Laos takes data privacy and security seriously. All laws and decrees clearly prohibit sharing and disseminating information of the state, individuals, legal entities, and organisations without permission and authorisation. This also includes the data manager of the data house and data centre. Below are some examples from the reviewed law and decree:

— ICT Law:

◇ **Article 47: Prohibition for ICT Service Providers:**

“Access, collect, use, disclose or disseminate information of individuals, legal entities or organizations without authorization.”

◇ **Article 48: Prohibition for ICT service users:**

“Access, collect, provide, use, modify, destroy, disclose or disseminate information of individuals, legal entities or organizations without authorization.”

- Law on electronic information protection:
  - ◇ **Article 16: Use or Dissemination of Electronic Information, paragraph 2:**  
“Data managers can only provide personal data that they collect, maintain or manage to third parties if they have permission from the data owner or a government organization with the relevant authority defined by law.”
  - ◇ **Article 33: Prohibitions for Data Managers, heading 1:**  
“Access, collect, use, disclose or disseminate electronic information of the state, individual, legal entity or organization without authorization.”
- Decree on Government Digital Administration and Services (Number 290/GOV, endorsed 2022):
  - ◇ **Article 36: General Prohibitions, heading 1:**  
“Bringing, accessing, modifying, destroying or disseminating information related to government digital administration and services without permission.”

### Gender and Disadvantaged Populations:

The Law on Gender Equality clearly states the equality between women and men in accessing modern technology and information, offering opinions, and using social media. Gender and disadvantaged populations, including ethnic minorities and people living with disabilities, were also prioritised by other laws, such as:

- ICT Law:
  - ◇ **Article 4: State Policy on ICT Work, paragraph 3:**  
“The state creates the conditions and facilitates students, Lao people of all ethnicities, clergy, disabled people, and disadvantaged people to learn and access ICT.”
- Law on Persons with Disabilities (endorsed 2019):
  - ◇ **Article 42: Access to information, paragraph 1:**  
“People with disabilities can access information through print media, electronic media, modern technology and other media as appropriate.”
  - ◇ **Article 43: Access to communication, paragraph 1 & 2:**  
“People with disabilities can access telecommunications services such as postal services, Internet, and other necessary and appropriate communications.”  
“Telecommunications service providers must create conditions for disabled people to access such services.”
- Decree on ICT:
  - ◇ **Part 3: Communication and information technology policy, 2. Targets, bullet 4:**  
“Promote conditions to facilitate rural, remote and disadvantaged people to access and use information and communication technology to improve their living conditions.”

### 3.2. Implementation of the digital-related policies

We interviewed key informants working in Laos's digital and information, communication, and technology (ICT) sectors to understand more deeply the current situation of the law and policy implementations. We interviewed 19 key informants at 18 organisations using an open-ended interview guide. Three key informants were from ministries, 11 were from active civil society organisations in Laos, and the remaining five were from development partners. Of these, eight informants were female. However, we included only 11 in-depth interview notes in the analysis because seven interviews were not completed during our data analysis period. Nevertheless, the consultant team submitted all interview notes to the LCCC and LYU for further analysis and for any potential use in the future.

#### Use of social media

Social media has become a powerful tool, and it has been integrated into the working environment of the vast majority of organisations. Many key informants expressed that they used social media platforms to strengthen communication within and between organisations. They reported using platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger accelerates communication within teams, making them more effective. The respondents also said that social media platforms were helpful tools for spreading and sharing project information, lessons-learned, and advertisements.

The interviewees expressed that they used social media to raise awareness, especially among young people, on government laws and regulations. They also mentioned that online education platforms, such as the Lao Wisdom Education Platform of the EU project, was one of the examples of extending the education network, reaching children in rural areas.

In contrast, those interviewed emphasised that overusing social media is a risk, especially for the development of children and young people. Although there was no study on smartphones and social media (including game addiction in Laos) some informants raised concerns. In this study, we investigated the duration of time spent on smartphones and social media among high school, college, and university students. Findings from this study could serve as a reference for their research in the future. Concerns were also raised regarding the ability of children and young people to analyse whether information presented to them is true or false, the scope of speech and expression, and the use of social media to criticise and bully others.

#### Awareness of existing laws and regulations

The awareness of existing digital and social media-related laws and regulations among the informants interviewed was considerably low. Some expressed that laws and regulations existed; however, only one could explain and elaborate.

Respondent: "I do not know about the details of the law on media, but I think that in Laos, there is legislation on social media on the Internet."

In this study, we sought opinions on whether the existing laws and regulations in Laos were sufficient for the rapid development of digital and social media technology. Some respondents said that the existing laws and regulations were insufficient and insisted on developing laws to tackle the increase in digital and social media-related crimes, particularly among young people, while others suggested strengthening the dissemination of laws and regulations using different means, such as posters or short cartoons, that reach more vulnerable populations.



### Enforcement and implementation of laws and regulations

Many of the respondents interviewed were in agreement that enforcing social media-related laws and regulations was insufficient. Moreover, law enforcement was not yet strict enough, nor was it uniform throughout the country. It was also pointed out that dissemination of laws and regulations was weak and it was only present among those who currently work in relation to the laws and regulations implementation and telecommunication providers. They suggested that public and private sectors, including NGOs/INGOs and international partners, should work together in disseminating laws and regulations to ensure that people could take full responsibility for protecting themselves; people should be aware of the legal process required for suing, complaining, or filing a lawsuit regarding the use of online social media; the government should develop clear guidelines and distribute them widely.

### Access to social media among young people

There was no discrimination found between young people and other age groups in accessing social media. Affordable costs of Internet access and the decline in smartphone prices might be key factors in reducing the gap in accessing social media among young people. Only one respondent identified any gap in accessing social media, which was between young people in urban and rural areas, as well as those among ethnic groups. Some informants were concerned that young ethnic minority people might have language difficulties accessing social media. In addition, Internet coverage was a key factor limiting access to social media among young people in some rural areas.

### Gender equality and disadvantaged population

The respondents said that boys and girls have equal opportunities in accessing and using social media. However, there might be some difficulties among people living with disabilities. Most software and application developers do not fully consider issues related to people living with disabilities, particularly blind and deaf people. In this study, it is unclear whether there was a difference in accessing and using social media between boys and girls living in rural areas; none of the informants raised or mentioned this issue.

## 3.3. Demographic information

In total, 650 students participated in the quantitative interview, higher than our original sample size of 600 students; 51.2% were university or college students, and 60.0% were female. Table 1 shows the characteristics and demographic information of the participants. The age of students was a normal distribution in both groups; thus, the mean age of high school students was 16.0 years and 20.8 years for university and college students. The majority of the participants belonged to the Lao-Tai ethnic group (86.0%); more "other" ethnic groups were found among university or college students than high school students. Most parents of the high school students had high school or higher education, while the education of parents among university and college students varied. Of the high school students, 81.1% lived with their parents. Only 39.3% of university and college students lived with their parents, and 37.5% lived independently. The main jobs of the father and mother varied in both groups: around 30% of fathers of all students were civil servants, while 38.3% of mothers were merchants. Regarding transport, 33.8% of high school students came to school with their parents, while 59.0% drove a motorcycle or car to school alone. Of the university and college students, 73.9% drove alone by bicycle, motorcycle, or car to university or college. The students' characteristics and family background information were important to consider for further analysis by LCCC and LYU. This was to identify characteristics and family conditions linked to social media-using behaviour among the students interviewed.

Table 1: Characteristics of the studied population

Variable		Schools		University / Colleges		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Age (years)	Mean (SD)	16.0 (1.8)		20.8 (1.7)		18.4 (3.0)	
Sex	Female	181	57.1	209	62.8	390	60
	Male	136	42.9	124	37.2	260	40
Ethnicity	Lao-Tai	295	93.1	264	79.3	559	86
	Hmong-Lumien	15	4.7	37	11.1	52	8
	Mon-Khmer	1	0.3	21	6.3	22	3.4
	Chine-Tibet	6	1.9	11	3.3	17	2.6
Father's education	No school	4	1.3	9	2.7	13	2
	Primary	15	4.7	61	18.3	76	11.7
	Secondary	39	12.3	58	17.4	97	14.9
	High school	73	23	60	18	133	20.5
	Above high school	161	50.8	123	36.9	284	43.7
	Skipped answer	25	7.9	22	6.6	47	7.2
Mother's education	No school	9	2.8	35	10.5	44	6.8
	Primary	28	8.8	89	26.7	117	18
	Secondary	50	15.8	61	18.3	111	17.1
	High school	85	26.8	65	19.5	150	23.1
	Above high school	130	41	68	20.4	198	30.5
	Skipped answer	15	4.7	15	4.5	30	4.6
Living arrangements	Parents	257	81.1	131	39.3	388	59.7
	Father	5	1.6	4	1.2	9	1.4
	Mother	23	7.3	8	2.4	31	4.8
	Relatives	28	8.8	61	18.3	89	13.7
	Dorm/Others	4	1.3	125	37.5	129	19.8
	Skipped answer	0	0	4	1.2	4	0.6

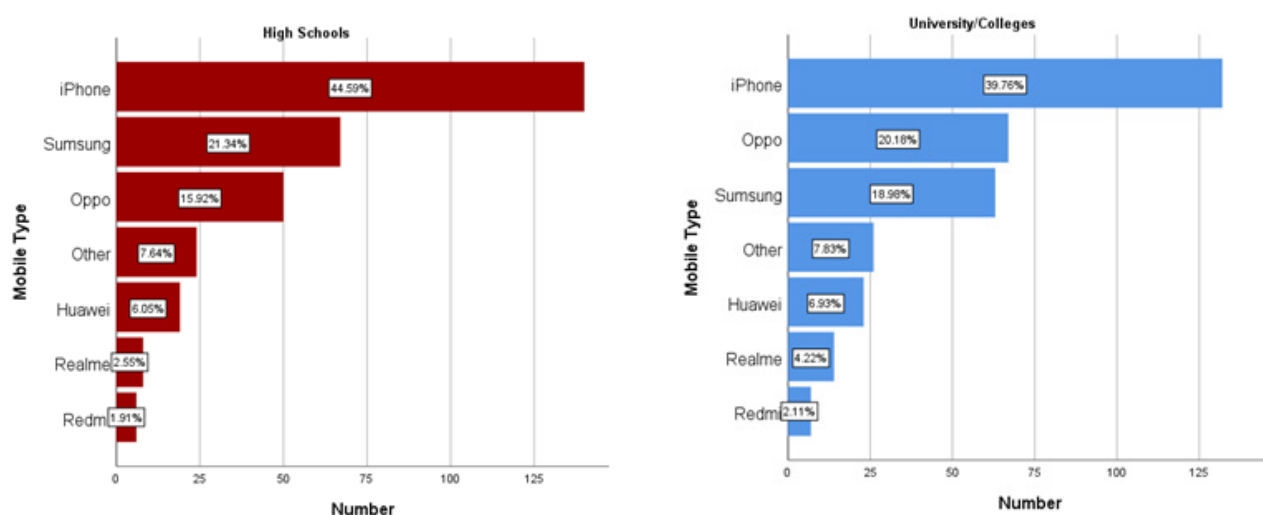
Variable		Schools		University / Colleges		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Father's main job	Civil servant	98	30.9	104	31.2	202	31.1
	Private employee	46	14.5	31	9.3	77	11.8
	Business owner	27	8.5	20	6	47	7.2
	Merchant	62	19.6	46	13.8	108	16.6
	Farmer	16	5	74	22.2	90	13.8
	Labourer	55	17.4	37	11.1	92	14.2
	Skipped answer	13	4.1	21	6.3	34	5.2
Mother's main job	Civil servant	56	17.7	55	16.5	111	17.1
	Private employee	45	14.2	15	4.5	60	9.2
	Business owner	20	6.3	12	3.6	32	4.9
	Merchant	137	43.2	112	33.6	249	38.3
	Farmer	24	7.6	101	30.3	125	19.2
	Labourer	23	7.3	24	7.2	47	7.2
	Skipped answer	12	3.8	14	4.2	26	4
Means of transport between school and home	With parents	107	33.8	3	0.9	110	16.9
	Walking	12	3.8	76	22.8	88	13.5
	Bicycle	4	1.3	5	1.5	9	1.4
	Motorcycle	154	48.6	224	67.3	378	58.2
	Car	33	10.4	17	5.1	50	7.7
	Public transport	3	0.9	7	2.1	10	1.5
	Others	4	1.3	1	0.3	5	0.8

### 3.4. Digital and social media use

#### 3.4.1. Access to social media

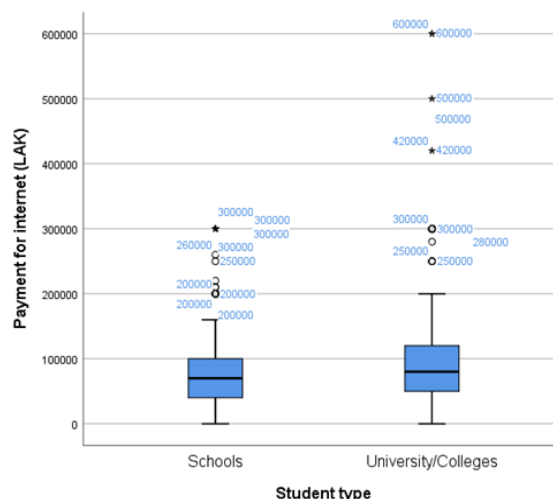
Of the total number of students interviewed, only five reported that they did not have a smartphone. Figure 1 shows the percentage of different brands of smartphones owned by high school and university/college students. Regarding smartphone brands, iPhone, Samsung, and Oppo were the most common used by the students interviewed – 44.6% and 39.8% of high school and university/college students, respectively, had an iPhone. In addition to the smartphone, a personal computer was another common electronic device owned by 56.3% of the students surveyed. Of the high school students, 97.2% brought their smartphones to school, and 75.7% brought them to school every day. Meanwhile, 99.1% of university and college students brought smartphones to their university and college, and 95.5% brought them every day.

*Figure 1: Smartphone brands of high school (left) and university/college (right) students*



Data on monthly payments for Internet access was skewed; thus, the median and interquartile range is used to report an average monthly payment. On average [median (interquartile range)], high school students paid 70,000 (60,000) LAK per month for Internet access, while university and college students paid more per month, at 80,000 (70,000) LAK (Figure 2). However, there was no statistically significant difference in expenditure on Internet access among both groups ( $p$ -value=0.511).

*Figure 2: Payment for Internet access (per month)*



When asked about Internet access, 49.5% of high school students and 54.1% of university and college students reported having problems. For high school students, the most common reason for not being able to access the Internet was the teacher not allowing them use of a smartphone during class hours (47.9%), while being unable to afford the price of an Internet connection was the most common reason for university and college students (45.1%).

**Table 2: Difficulty in accessing the Internet**

Reasons	High school		University/College		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No device	27	18.5	38	22	65	20.4
Can't afford Internet	29	19.9	78	45.1	107	33.5
Not allowed during class	70	47.9	51	29.5	121	37.9
Not allowed during school days	18	12.3	5	2.9	23	7.2
Not allowed during the weekend	2	1.4	1	0.6	3	0.9

There was no statistical difference in time spent on smartphones and social media between high school and university/college students in this study. On average, during class hours, students spent between 20 and 30 minutes using smartphones. Both high school and university/college students spent 120 minutes on smartphones and social media after school hours. The time spent on smartphones and social media increased three-fold during the weekend compared to school days (after school hours) in both groups.

**Table 3: Average time spent (minutes) on smartphone and social media use**

Period	High school		University/College	
	Median	IQR	Median	IQR
During class hours	20	115	30	50
After school hours	120	180	120	180
During weekend	360	360	360	420

On average, the students interviewed went to bed at 10:00 PM during school days and 11:00 PM during weekends. There was no difference between high school or university and college students. During school days, 15.1% and 28.8% of high school and university/college students, respectively, went to sleep after midnight. The percentage of students who went to sleep after midnight increased between two- and three-fold during the weekends.

**Table 4: Average time of going to bed during school days and weekends**

Period		High school		University/College	
		N	%	N	%
School days					
- Average time to bed (median, IQR)		10:00 PM (60 minutes)		11:00 PM (120 minutes)	
- Sleep after midnight	Yes	48	15.1	96	28.8
	No	269	84.9	237	71.2
Weekends					
- Average time to bed (median, IQR)		11:00 PM (140 minutes)		12:00 AM (120 minutes)	
- Sleep after midnight	Yes	130	41	166	49.8
	No	187	59	167	50.2



### 3.4.2. Platforms and purpose of social media use

We asked students what social media applications they used the most by asking multiple-choice questions. Of the total response, Facebook was the most popular platform among high school and university/college students (29.0% and 29.9%, respectively). TikTok and YouTube were the second and third most popular applications among both student groups. WhatsApp was more popular among university and college students than high school students.

*Figure 3: Common social media platforms of studied students*

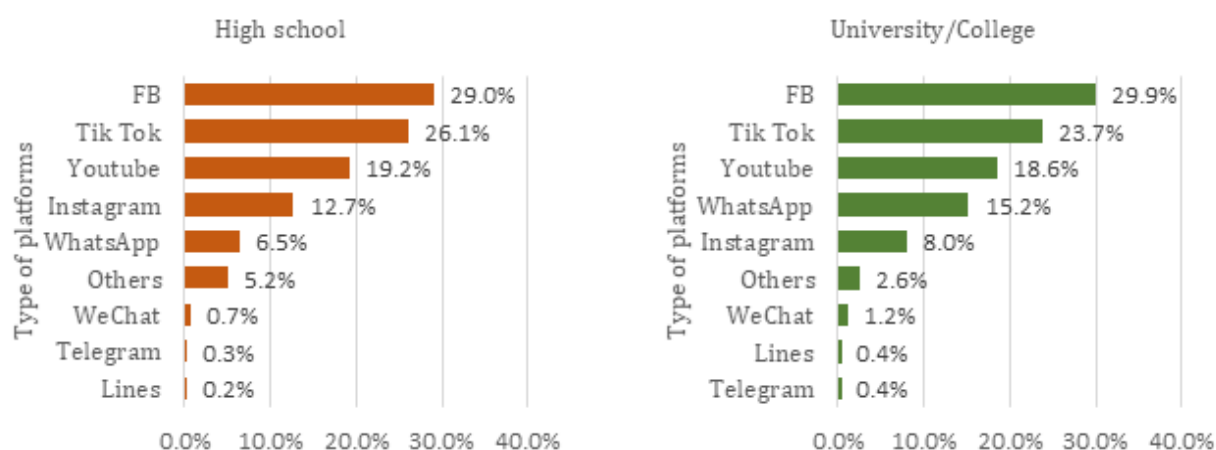
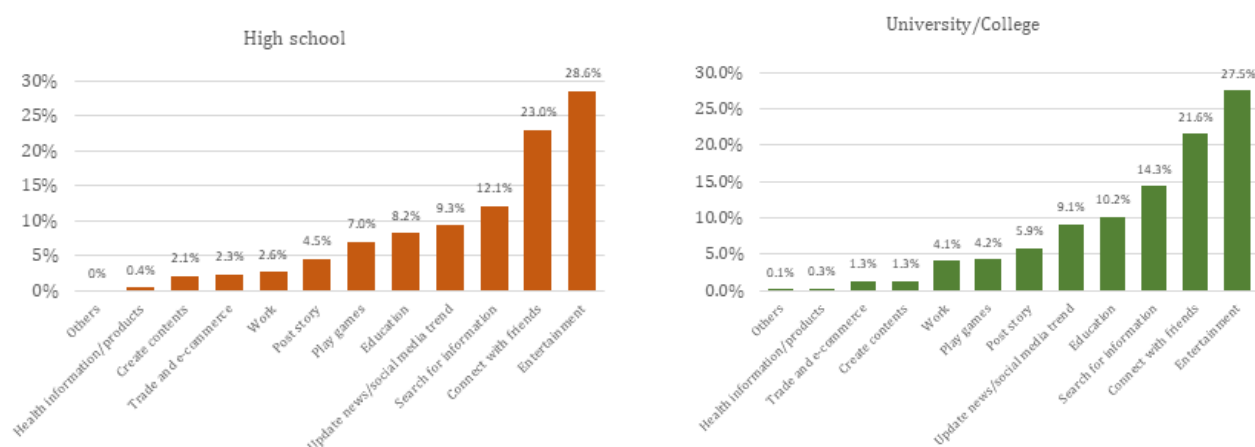


Figure 4 shows the rationales for social media use among both groups of students. Using social media for entertainment (music and movies) represented the biggest proportion of social media use among both high school and university/college students (28.6% and 27.5%, respectively). Connecting with friends, searching for information, updating news and social media trends, and education were among the top five reasons for social media use among high school students. Regarding education, 8.2% of high school students used social media for education purposes, lower than 10.2% among university and college students. Of the high school students interviewed, 7.0% used social media to play games, almost double that of university and college students (4.2%). The percentage of high school students who used social media for trade and online selling was higher than university and college students. However, the trade and online selling percentages were relatively small in these students interviewed (2.3% for high school students and 1.3% for university and college students).

*Figure 4: Rationales for social media use*



Home, school, and public places were the most common places to access social media among both groups of students. At home, in public places, and at school were where 98.3% of high school students accessed the Internet and social media; only 1.7% used Internet cafés and online game shops to access the Internet and social media. Similarly, 96.9% of university and college students accessed the Internet and social media at home, school, and in public places, with 2.5% using internet cafés and online game shops.

**Table 5: Places to access the Internet and social media**

Place	High school		University/College	
	N	%	N	%
Home	313	40.8	302	35.6
School	206	26.8	262	30.9
Public Places	236	30.7	258	30.4
Internet Café	9	1.2	16	1.9
Game Shop	4	0.5	5	0.6
Others	0	0	6	0.7

### 3.4.3. Experiences in social media use

Table 6 shows the experiences of the students interviewed regarding the impact of using social media. Of the students surveyed, 93.4% had seen news stories on social media they later learned were fake or fabricated. There was no statistical difference between the two groups of students. When asked what they did when encountering fake news, 39.8% searched for more information and 34.5% used their opinions to verify the fake news; only 3.8% asked their parents, and 0.3% asked their teachers to verify fake news. In terms of sharing fake news, 11.7% of high school students and 25.2% university/college students had actively shared fake news. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant (OR=0.4,  $p<0.001$ ). Among those who shared fake news, only 12 (1.9%) students received warnings from their family, school, or authority.

Regarding social media account security, 26.2% of students interviewed reported that their social media account was hacked, and more than half (58.6%) reported that they had friends whose social media account was hacked. There was no statistical difference between the two groups. As a result of hacked accounts, 12.8% expressed that there was a social and financial impact on them, and 37.7% of their friends whose accounts were hacked suffered some social and financial impact.

**Table 6: Effects of social media use**

Variable		Schools		University/ Colleges		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Ever seen fake news	Yes	294	92.7	313	94	607	93.4
	No	23	7.3	20	6	43	6.6

Variable		Schools		University/ Colleges		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
How fake news was verified	Personal opinion	88	27.8	136	40.8	224	34.5
	Ask friends	61	19.2	48	14.4	109	16.8
	Ask parents	23	7.3	2	0.6	25	3.8
	Seek further information	127	40.1	132	39.6	259	39.8
	Ask teacher	0	0	2	0.6	2	0.3
	Others	18	5.7	13	3.9	31	4.8
Share fake news <sup>*,β</sup>	Yes	37	11.7	84	25.2	121	18.6
	No	275	86.8	248	74.5	523	80.5
	Skipped answer	5	1.6	1	0.3	6	0.9
Result of sharing fake news	Nothing happened	32	10.1	72	21.6	104	16
	Family warning	1	0.3	7	2.1	8	1.2
	School/authority warning	1	0.3	2	0.6	3	0.5
	Authority punishment	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.2
	Skipped/missing	283	89.3	251	75.4	534	82.2
Account hacked	Yes	79	24.9	91	27.3	170	26.2
	No	237	74.8	241	72.4	478	73.5
	Skipped answer	1	0.3	1	0.3	2	0.3
Social/financial impact of account hack	Yes	42	13.2	41	12.3	83	12.8
	No	37	11.7	50	15	87	13.4
	Skipped answer	238	75.1	242	72.7	480	73.8
Friend's account hacked	Yes	185	58.4	196	58.9	381	58.6
	No	131	41.3	130	39	261	40.2
	Skipped answer	1	0.3	7	2.1	8	1.2
Social/financial impact of friend's account hack	Yes	118	37.2	127	38.1	245	37.7
	No	67	21.1	69	20.7	136	20.9
	Skipped answer	132	41.6	137	41.1	269	41.4
Digital footprint used	Yes	50	15.8	69	20.7	119	18.3
	No	267	84.2	264	79.3	531	81.7
Friend's digital footprint used*	Yes	107	33.8	143	42.9	250	38.5
	No	210	66.2	190	57.1	400	61.5
Ever been bullied	Yes	97	30.6	102	30.6	199	30.6
	No	220	69.4	231	69.4	451	69.4
Response to bully	Do nothing	56	17.7	66	19.8	122	18.8
	Consult friend	20	6.3	22	6.6	42	6.5
	Consult teacher	1	0.3	1	0.3	2	0.3
	Consult parents	7	2.2	6	1.8	13	2
	Report authority	1	0.3	1	0.3	2	0.3
	Others	10	3.2	4	1.2	14	2.2
	Skipped answer	222	70	233	70	455	70

Variable		Schools		University/ Colleges		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Tricked into transferring money*	Yes	68	21.5	100	30	168	25.8
	No	249	78.5	233	70	482	74.2
Friend tricked into transferring money	Yes	108	34.1	133	39.9	241	37.1
	No	209	65.9	200	60.1	409	62.9
Tricked into sending photos	Yes	37	11.7	36	10.8	73	11.2
	No	280	88.3	297	89.2	577	88.8
Tricked into marrying	Yes	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.2
	No	317	100	332	99.7	649	99.8
Ever punished/ prosecuted	Yes	9	2.8	4	1.2	13	2
	No	308	97.2	329	98.8	637	98
Person to be consulted if faced with social media problem	Do nothing	49	15.5	80	24	129	19.8
	Friend	170	53.6	189	56.8	359	55.2
	Teacher	0	0	6	1.8	6	0.9
	Parents	77	24.3	34	10.2	111	17.1
	Authority	2	0.6	3	0.9	5	0.8
	Other	16	5	8	2.4	24	3.7
	Skipped answer	3	0.9	13	3.9	16	2.5

\* Statistical difference between two studied groups by Chi-square test; 6 students shared then realised it was fake or fabricated news or stories.

Regarding digital footprint, 15.8% and 20.7% of high school and university/college students, respectively, reported that unknown persons had used their digital footprint. The difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups who reported that their friends' digital footprint was used without permission. High school students were less likely to have friends whose digital footprint was used without permission than university and college students (OR=0.7,  $p<0.05$ ). A proportion of 30.6% of the students surveyed had experienced bullying through social media; there was no notable difference between both groups. Of the students who reported experiencing bullying, 62.6% did not respond, and 21.5% consulted with their friends, while 6.7% discussed and consulted with their parents, and only 1.0% consulted with their teachers.

When asked about financial scams, 21.5% of high school students and 30.0% of university/college students reported being tricked into transferring money. High school students were less likely to be tricked than university/college students (OR=0.0,  $p<0.05$ ). However, this study did not investigate reasons for transferring money. A smaller proportion of students, 11.2%, were tricked into sending their personal pictures to unknown social media friends, and only one university/college student reported having a friend who was tricked into marrying someone they had met through social media.

Only 2.0% of studied students were punished or prosecuted due to harmful social media use; however, the study did not explore the details of such punishments. When asked about who they consulted when facing social media-related problems, 55.2% consulted with friends and parents, while 19.8% decided not to do anything. Less than 2% consulted with their teacher.

### 3.4.4. Scores of the social media use

This study applied a Likert scale questionnaire to allow students to describe themselves concerning social media use. The questionnaire consists of four components, including academic, socialisation, entertainment, and informativeness, with 11 items. Students were asked to score 1 to 5 for each item: One means the statements are not true to themselves, while five means the statements are true to themselves. Table 7 presents the average scores of both student groups.

On average, more university and college students use social media to solve academic problems, take part in collaborative learning, and seek help from their teachers compared to high school students. However, there was no statistically significant difference ( $p>0.05$ ). Similarly, more university and college students used social media to socialise than high school students. A statistical difference was found among university and college students who used social media more to strengthen their interpersonal relationships in contrast to high school students ( $p=0.01$ ). More university and college students used social media to entertain themselves and to search for information in comparison with high school students, especially to share their pictures, read news articles, and share new ideas ( $p<0.05$ ).

*Table 7: Social media use behaviours among studied students*

No	Items	Mean (SD)*			p-value*
		High school	University/ College	Total	
I	Academic				
1	I use social networking sites to solve my academic problems.	3.4 (1.1)	3.6 (1.1)	3.5 (1.1)	0.067
2	I use social networking sites for collaborative learning.	3.6 (1.1)	3.8 (1.0)	3.7 (1.0)	0.059
3	I use social networking sites to seek help from my teachers.	3.1 (1.4)	3.2 (1.2)	3.1 (1.3)	0.29
II	Socialisation				
4	I use social networking sites to become more sociable.	3.6 (1.2)	3.7 (1.0)	3.6 (1.1)	0.323
5	I use social networking sites to create my social identity.	3.0 (1.3)	3.2 (1.2)	3.1 (1.3)	0.076
6	I use social networking sites to strengthen interpersonal relationships.	3.4 (1.2)	3.7 (1.1)	3.6 (1.2)	0.001
III	Entertainment				
7	I use social networking sites for sharing pictures.	3.0 (1.3)	3.4 (1.1)	3.2 (1.2)	<0.001
8	I use social networking sites to look at funny sharing.	3.9 (1.2)	4.1 (1.0)	4.0 (1.1)	0.053
9	I use social networking sites to watch movies.	4.2 (1.1)	4.2 (1.0)	4.2 (1.0)	0.927



No	Items	Mean (SD)*			<i>p-value</i> *
		High school	University/ College	Total	
IV	Informativeness				
10	I use social networking sites for reading news.	3.2 (1.2)	3.4 (1.1)	3.3 (1.1)	0.006
11	I use social networking sites to share new ideas.	3.2 (1.2)	3.4 (1.1)	3.2 (1.2)	0.037

\* *p-value* by T-test

## 4. Discussion

To the research team's knowledge, this is the first study on digital rights and social media use among high school, college, and university students in Laos. This study initially intended to describe the social media use behaviour among national representative samples recruited through random sampling. However, the field data collection period was shortened due to a delay in the procurement process. Therefore, we collected data only in the capital, Vientiane. We received clearance to collect data after most high schools entered the summer holidays; thus, we asked teachers to gather sufficient students at the selected schools. Our data collection team interviewed all students presented at the school during our team visit. We applied convenient sampling techniques for college and university students to recruit sufficient students. Despite the limitations, we collected data from 650 students: 317 high school students and 333 college and university students. To some extent, we believe this study could describe the use of social media among high school, college, and university students in Vientiane.

Over the past 10 years, the Government of Laos has endorsed many laws and decrees related to communication technology, computers, and media. Most encourage national individuals, legal entities, and organisations to participate in digital and ICT infrastructure, software development, and the use of digital and social media platforms. Dissemination of these laws and decrees seems to be inadequate. Only some key informants who participated in this study were aware of them and could provide their comments concerning the enforcement of the laws, especially on the promotion of safe social media use and protection among young people. Moreover, most expressed that circulation of the laws should be strengthened to raise awareness of said laws among wider groups of the population, particularly the law on cyber and computer crime. Some key informants insisted that the knowledge of these laws only belonged to those responsible for law enforcement.

All reviewed laws and decrees clearly addressed issues on gender equality, ethnicity, and disadvantaged populations. Our findings also indicate no difference in Internet access between male and female students. In this study, we did not investigate how these laws were translated into action. We suggest that subsequent research should examine how the laws were implemented, the current status of the implementation, and how non-public sectors can contribute to strengthening law enforcement and implementation.

We investigated the use of social media among high school, college, and university students and found that 99.3% of students interviewed had a smartphone and access to the Internet, and surprisingly, there was no difference between high school and university/college students. This percentage of 99.3% was far higher than the 49.1%

estimated by the Digital-Government Center, MTC, in 2021 (Luanglath, 2021). The high percentage of access to smartphones and the Internet in this study might be explained by the study taking place in Vientiane, where people tend to be more affluent than other parts of the country. These high access rates among high school students might also be attributable to selection bias since the study was conducted after many high schools were closed for summer vacation. Teachers contacted students and asked them to come to schools for interviews; thus, it was likely that teachers could contact only students who owned a smartphone.

Before the study, we hypothesised that bringing smartphones to educational institutions was less common among high school students than college and university students because many schools implemented and applied a smartphone restriction campaign. After analysing the data, we found no difference between the two investigated student groups. As a result, we observed no difference in time spent on smartphones and social media use among these two groups. A smartphone ban when in school is very common in most high schools in Vientiane. Many schools do not allow students to bring a smartphone to school, while others prepare a smartphone-dropping space, such as a special locker or containment box. Both public and private schools applied this campaign. Again, we collected data during school vacations; thus, many schools allowed students who attended summer special courses to bring their smartphones.

On average (we used the median to present data because it was not a normal distribution), the students who were interviewed spent two hours on social media during school days. The time spent on social media became three times higher (six hours) on weekends compared to school days. Among the students asked, the most popular social media platforms were Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Many studies have demonstrated the negative impact of time spent on social media, such as Facebook addiction and depression (Hanprathet, et al., 2015); two hours a day of social media use has been linked with anxiety and depression (Tsitsika, et al., 2014); and use of social media for more than two hours has been linked with a higher intensity of psychological distress (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015). It is understood that parents might allow their children to spend more time on social media during school vacations; however, this can pose a long-term risk to their development and lead to potential physical and mental distress. We need some public campaigns communicating the impact of prolonged social media use among young people to raise awareness of risks among parents and students.

Our study found similar results with many previous studies from different countries regarding reasons of social media use (Martin, et al., 2018) (Gupta & Bashir, 2018). Entertainment, connecting with friends, and searching for information were the top three reasons for social media use in this study. A study in India also found that research for academic purposes was a primary reason for using social media (Gupta & Bashir, 2018). In this study, social media use for education was rated 5 out of a possible 5 (making it very true) for high school students and 4 out of a possible 5 for college and university students; however, both groups reported using social media for group and collaborative learning. Surprisingly, we found that only a small proportion of students used social media to play games. Since this is the first study in Laos, we could not make a suitable comparison at present. However, these findings will be an important reference for any following research.

In this study, we investigated negative experiences on social media use, such as fake news, account hacking, bullying, identity theft, and digital footprint use by someone without permission. The results shown in Table 6 will be an important reference for the following research and the Civic Space project formulation. We also asked students who they consult with or would consult with if they faced social media problems in future. The most popular option was their friends: More than half of students said they would consult their friends if they had social media problems. This was followed by consulting their parents; around one-in-five students would ask their parents for guidance. Even though students spend most of their time in school, college, and university,

consulting with teachers was among the last choices, representing less than 2%. Providing teacher training and appropriate social media use-related information, including laws and regulations, to teachers to conduct safe social media use campaigns in schools would help prevent students from being social media victims. Integrating safe social media use and the use of social media for academic solutions into a regular computer curriculum should provide long-term benefits for both high school and university students.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This is the first study on digital rights and social media use among young people in Laos. The study reviewed existing laws and government decrees related to digital technology, media and cyber, and computer crime, while also seeking expert opinions on enforcing laws and regulations. Many laws and decrees have been endorsed in recent years; however, dissemination of such laws and decrees did not sufficiently cover the entire Lao population. Only those responsible for implementing the laws and regulations and telecommunication business people were aware of them. The Internet access rate was very high among students interviewed; moreover, students spent a significant amount of time on social media, which might have a long-term impact on their physical and mental well-being and development. Students reported negative experiences related to social media use, such as fake news, account hacking, bullying, identity theft, and use of digital footprint without permission. Most students first consult their friends when facing social media problems, then their parents.

Based on our findings and considering the study limitations mentioned earlier, we recommend the following actions and activities to address social media use among young people and the general population in Laos.

### General recommendations:

- Disseminate digital and communication technology-related laws and laws on cyber and computer crime to the general population through different means, such as short course training, posters, and short audio and video clips.
- Schools and educational institutions are the most appropriate place to raise awareness of cyber and computer crime and social media use for young people. Therefore, we recommend training teachers on safe social media use, the use of social media for academic purposes, and the cyber and computer crime law. Teachers could play an important role in educating students on safe social media use and protecting them from becoming victims on social media.
- Integrate safe social media use campaigns and related laws and regulations into compulsory computer course curriculums and informal education courses.
- Continue smartphone restrictions in school during the summer vacation to minimise time spent on social media among the students while in school.

### For the government:

- Develop short guidelines or posters of the legal process when facing digital rights and social media-related problems and publish these widely through different social media platforms.
- Create a hotline to provide counselling to victims of social media use.
- Strengthen law enforcement to ensure the rights of Lao citizens, especially young people, in accessing social media, regardless of gender and ethnicity, and participating in digital and communication technology development, implementation and management.

### **For CSOs and development partners:**

- Provide technical and financial support to raise awareness of digital and communication technology-related laws and cyber and computer crime laws, especially among CSOs members and young people, preventing them from becoming victims.
- Engage in promoting a safe environment for young people by building the capacity of teachers and organising campaigns on safe social media use in schools, while supporting schools to implement smartphone restrictions.
- Collaborate with the education sector to potentially develop curricula related to safe social media use, communication technology laws and law on cyber and computer crime and integrate them into the general teaching-learning curriculum, such as ICT subjects.
- Based on findings from this study, CSOs and development partners should conduct further studies to deepen the understanding aiming to identify factors associated with social media use and risk factors for becoming victims of social media, cyber, and computer crime among young people.



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# Annex 1: In-depth interview guides

Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

Good morning/afternoon, my name is: \_\_\_\_\_. We are from the CSO Laos. We are studying digital rights and social media use among students and young people in Vientiane. In complement to our literature review of existing laws, policies, regulations and etc., related to digital rights and social media use and a questionnaire survey among students which includes enhancing a safe digital civic space and feedbacks/recommendations for a safe use of media for young people, we would like to obtain more in-depth information from experts and organizations promoting digital use in Laos. Our interview will take 30-40 minutes.

Before we start the interview, we would like to obtain your consent. There is no experiment or intervention to your body besides the face-to-face in-depth interview. If you feel inconvenienced by answering, please skip any questions. You can stop the interview at any time without any repercussions. Your participation is voluntary. This is an anonymous study; thus, the report will not contain your name and personal identity.

In addition, we would also like to obtain your permission to have a voice recording of this interview. This recording will be used for our transcription after this interview, and we will delete it once it is finished.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## In-depth interview questions

### Digital Development and Legal Frameworks

**1. What are your overall opinions regarding digital development in Laos, especially on the socioeconomic development of Laos?**

**2. The digital world is developing so rapidly. Based on your knowledge and experience, how does the current digital use, ensuring security, the limitation of use rights, and equally accessibility?**

- a. What already exists?
- b. What needs to be improved?
- c. What needs to be developed?

**3. In your opinion, are the existing laws and reinforcement of laws consistent in promoting safe access to social media for the people of Laos, especially among young people?**

**4. In Lao PDR, what are the rights related to the use of digital media in terms of the enforcement and implementation of laws, policies, and regulations of the government?**

- a. What should be done to improve enforcement and implementation in Laos to contribute to the socioeconomic development of Laos?
- b. How do the private sectors, CSOs, LYU contribute to the reinforcement?

### **Use of digital and social media among young people**

**5. What is your observation regarding digital rights among the general population in Laos? What are the major enabling factors and barriers to digital rights in Laos?**

**6. To be more specific, what are the major enabling factors and barriers to digital rights among young people in Laos?**

**7. Do you think that the use of digital technology in Laos can reduce or increase the disparity in access to information and development opportunities between**

- a. Ethnicities?
- b. Between genders, boys and girls?
- c. And people with disabilities?

**8. Are the laws, policies, and regulations well-developed to strengthen digital rights among young people, ensuring equality among ethnic groups, genders, and people with disabilities?**

**9. Based on your opinion, do you think young people are well-informed regarding digital rights and enhancing access of social media for all Lao young people?**

**10. How do the private sector and partners such as CSOs and INGOs contribute to improving and promoting digital rights among young people, especially among ethnic groups, girls, and people with disabilities?**

**11. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations regarding the scope of digital rights and social media?**

Thank you!

## Annex 2: Questionnaire for students

Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

### Informed consent

Good morning/afternoon, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. We come from the CSO in Laos. Using a structured questionnaire, we are studying digital rights and social media use in high school, university students, and young people in Vientiane. Before we start the interview, we would like to obtain your consent. There is no experiment or intervention to your body besides the face-to-face interview. We will ask you questions; please pick the most appropriate answer using a smartphone. If you feel inconvenienced by answering, please skip any questions. You can stop the interview at any time without any repercussions. Your participation is voluntary. This is an anonymous study; thus, the report will not contain your name and personal identity.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

- a. Yes
- b. No

### Start the interview

### Questionnaire

#### Part 1: Sociodemographic information of students

1. *Date of birth:*

2. *Sex:*

- a. Female
- b. Male

3. *Ethnicity*

- a. Lao-Tai
- b. Hmong-Mieun
- c. Mon-Khmer
- d. Chin-Tibae

4. *Grade:*

- a. Secondary school; grade: \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- b. High school; grade: \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- c. College; year: \_\_\_\_\_ years.



d. University; year: \_\_\_\_\_ years.

5. *Education of father*

- a. No school
- b. Primary school
- c. Secondary school
- d. High school
- e. Above high school

6. *Education of mother*

- a. No school
- b. Primary school
- c. Secondary school
- d. High school
- e. Above high school

7. *Student living with parents:*

- a. Living with father and mother
- b. Living with father
- c. Living with mother
- d. Living with relatives
- e. Living in another place, separated from parents and relatives

8. *Father's main job:*

- a. Civil servant
- b. Private employee
- c. Self-employed
- d. Merchant
- e. Farmer
- f. Labourer
- g. Other (identify): .....

9. *Mother's main job:*

- a. Civil servant
- b. Private employee
- c. Self-employed
- d. Merchant
- e. Farmer
- f. Labourer
- g. Other (identify): .....

10. *Main mode of transport between home and school*

- a. Accompanied by parents/relatives
- b. Walking
- c. Bicycle
- d. Motorcycle
- e. Car
- f. Public transportation

**Part 2: Accessibility to social media**

11. *Do you have a smartphone?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. *If "Yes", what brand do you use?*

- a. iPhone
- b. Samsung
- c. Huawei
- d. Oppo
- e. Realme
- f. Redmi
- g. Others

13. *Do you have other devices for social media access?*

- a. Tablet
- b. Laptop
- c. Desktop computer

d. Others

14. *Have you ever brought a smartphone to school/education facilities?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. *If “Yes”, how often do you bring a smartphone to school/educational facilities in one week or in one month?*

- a. Every day
- b. 3 days a week
- c. 2 days a week
- d. 1 day a week
- e. Less than 1 day a week
- f. One day or more for every week
- g. One day or more for 3 weeks in a month
- h. One or more days for 2 weeks in a month
- i. One or more days for 1 week in a month
- j. One or more days for less than 1 week in a month

16. *How much do you spend (in Lao currency) on Internet access in one month?* \_\_\_\_\_ LAK

17. *Do you have any difficulty in accessing social media?*

- a. Yes
- b. Sometimes
- c. Not at all (select “not applicable” in the following question)

18. *If “yes” or “sometimes”, can you explain why? (multiple choice)*

- a. No device to access
- b. No internet
- c. Teachers do not allow access during school hours
- d. Parents do not allow access during school days
- e. Parents do not allow access during the weekend
- f. Other
- g. Skip this question

19. During the most recent time you brought a smartphone to school or educational facilities, how often did you use/touch your smartphone during school hours?\_\_\_\_\_Times

- a. Did not use or touch a smartphone
- b. 1 to 5 times
- c. 6 to 10 times
- d. More than 10 times

20. On average, during school hours, how much time do you spend using a smartphone? \_\_\_\_\_ Minutes

21. After school yesterday, how much time did you spend using a smartphone approximately?\_\_\_\_\_Minutes

22. Last weekend, how much time did you spend using a smartphone in one day approximately?\_\_\_\_\_Minutes

23. On average, during school days, what time do you go to bed?\_\_\_\_\_.

24. On average, during the weekend, what time do you go to bed?\_\_\_\_\_.

### Part 3: Social media platforms

25. What social media platforms or applications do you use the most? (please rank the top 3 platforms you use the most, 1 (most use) to 3 (use but not the most))

- a. Facebook and Messenger; number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Instagram; number:\_\_\_\_\_.
- c. TikTok; number:\_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Twitter; number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. Telegram; number\_\_\_\_\_.
- f. YouTube; number:\_\_\_\_\_.
- g. WhatsApp; number:\_\_\_\_\_.
- h. LINE; number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- i. WeChat; number:\_\_\_\_\_.
- j. Others; number:\_\_\_\_\_.

26. What are the top 3 main reasons for using social media? (please rank the top 3 reasons, 1 (most use) to 3 (use but not the most))

- a. Post story; number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Entertainment (movie, music); number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. Update social media trends/topics; number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Search for information; number: \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. Communicate with friends; number: \_\_\_\_\_.

- f. For studies; number: .
- g. For work; number: .
- h. E-commerce; number: .
- i. Content; number: .
- j. For health and wellness; number .
- k. Game; number: .
- l. Others; number: .

27. *In general, when you access social media, where do you access it? (select 3 answers)*

- a. House
- b. Education facilities
- c. Internet shop
- d. Game online shop
- e. Public area
- f. Other, identify: .....

#### **Part 4: Negative experience of social media use**

28. *Have you ever seen fake news on social media?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

29. *What methods do you use to analyse what is fake news?*

- a. Personal thinking
- b. Ask friends or acquaintances
- c. Ask parents
- d. Search for information from other sources
- e. Ask teacher
- f. Other, identify: .....

30. *Have you ever shared any fake news on social media?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

31. *If you have shared fake news with intention or without intention, what is the result of that sharing?*

- a. No result
- b. Being criticised by family
- c. Being criticised by school or organisation
- d. Being punished
- e. Being prosecuted by law

32. *Have you experienced a digital or social media account of yours being hacked by unknown people?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

33. *Did the account hacking have any negative social and/or economic impact on you?*

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

34. *Do you know any of your friends whose (his/her) account was hacked?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

35. *Did the account hacking have any negative social and/or economic impact on him/her?*

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

36. *Have you experienced someone using your digital footprint without permission?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

37. *Do you know of any friends who have had experience with their digital footprints being used without permission?*

- a. Yes
- b. No



38. Have you experienced bullying through social media platforms?

- a. Yes
- b. No

39. If “Yes”, what did you do?

- a. Nothing, I just left it
- b. Consulted with friends
- c. Consulted with a teacher
- d. Consulted with parents
- e. Reported it to the authorities for prosecution according to the law
- f. Other, identify: .....
- g. Skip this question

40. Have you ever been tricked by a fake website or fake Facebook posts/accounts into transferring money?

- a. Yes
- b. No

41. Do you know of any friends who have been tricked by a fake website or fake Facebook posts/accounts into transferring money?

- a. Yes
- b. No

42. Do you know of any friends who have been tricked through social media into taking pictures of his/her body and sending it to people he/she knows or doesn't know?

- a. Yes
- b. No

43. Do you know of any friends or acquaintances who were lied to through social media to marry unknown people or enter human trafficking?

- a. Yes
- b. No

44. Have you experienced being admonished or prosecuted by the authorities for spreading disinformation or misinformation through social media?

- a. Yes
- b. No

45. Who do you consult when you have a problem using social media?

- a. I do not consult anyone, I keep it to myself
- b. Consult with friends
- c. Consult with a teacher
- d. Consult with parents
- e. Consult with authorities
- f. Other, identify: .....

**Part 5: Statements of social media use (Likert scale, 1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)**

Item No	Description	Likert scale				
Academic						
1	I use social networking sites to solve my academic problems	1	2	3	4	5
2	I use social networking sites for collaborative learning.					
3	I use social networking sites to seek help from my teachers.					
Socialization						
4	I use social networking sites to become more sociable.					
5	I use social networking sites to create my social identity.					
6	I use social networking sites to strengthen interpersonal relationships.					
Entertainment						
7	I use social networking sites for sharing pictures.					
8	I use social networking sites to look at funny sharing.					
9	I use social networking sites to watch movies.					

Item No	Description	Likert scale				
Informativeness						
10	I use social networking sites for reading news.					
11	I use social networking sites to share new ideas.					

## Annex 3: Summary of digital-related legal documents in Laos

No	Name	Endorsement date	Digital Rights of Young people
1	Law on Information Communication Technology	December 12 2016	<p><u>Article 4: State Policy on ICT Work</u></p> <p>Paragraph 2: The state encourages individuals, legal entities or organizations both domestically and internationally to invest and participate in the development of ICT by creating facilitating conditions and providing policies in accordance with laws and regulations.</p> <p>Paragraph 3: The state creates the conditions and facilitates students, Lao people of all ethnicities, clergy, disabled people, and disadvantaged people to learn and access ICT.</p> <p><u>Article 18: Software Development</u></p> <p>Paragraph 3: Software development work has been promoted by giving priority to students, researchers and developers in the country to develop such work to be modern and as a tool to promote economic and social development in accordance with laws and regulations.</p> <p><u>Article 21: ICT System Development</u></p> <p>Paragraph 3: ICT system development work has been promoted by giving priority to students and developers in the country to develop diverse systems to reduce the use of foreign information in accordance with laws and regulations.</p>

			<p><u>Article 25: ICT Curriculum Development</u> The Ministry of Education and Sports develops and integrates the ICT curriculum into the national curriculums.</p>
			<p><u>Article 47: Prohibition for ICT Service Providers</u> 5. Access, collect, use, disclose or disseminate information of individuals, legal entities or organizations without authorization. 6. Provide, use, modify, destroy or disclose personal information provided by the service without permission.</p>
			<p><u>Article 48: Prohibition for ICT service users</u> 1. Access, collect, provide, use, modify, destroy, disclose or disseminate information of individuals, legal entities or organizations without authorization. 2. Using ICT to promote propaganda that is against laws and regulations. 3. Create and disseminate information that is obscene, distorted, promotes terrorism or opposes the government of the Lao PDR.</p>
			<p><u>Article 67: Penalty Measures</u> Individuals, legal entities or organizations that violate this law will be fined in the following cases: 5. Access, collect, and use information of individuals, legal entities or organizations without permission. 6. Provide and use personal information provided without permission. 7. Use ICT to promote propaganda that is against laws and regulations.</p>
2	Media Law (updated version)	December 8 2016	<p><u>Article 5: Principles of Media Work</u> The activities of the media must follow the following principles: 3. To ensure that Lao citizens exercise their freedom and obligations regarding the media, protect information providers, express opinions, and express critical views that do not conflict with laws and regulations.</p>
			<p><u>Article 9: The Freedom of Lao Citizens in the Media</u> Lao citizens have the right and freedom in the media by expressing opinions, giving views and having access to information both domestically and internationally about the situation, information, entertainment and other issues that do not conflict with laws and regulations which are beneficial to the nation and the people of the ethnic groups.</p>

Article 10: Lao Citizens' Freedom of Expression

Lao citizens have the right freedom to comment through the media on:

1. Creation and implementation of party policies, constitutions, state laws and regulations, socio-economic development plans and state budget plans
2. Perspectives on domestic and foreign situations
3. Constructive feedback to individuals, legal entities and organizations.

Article 11: Lao Citizens' Freedom of Information

Lao citizens have the right and freedom of information through the media as follows:

1. Access and receive information about the domestic and international situation, knowledge, entertainment, etc
2. Provide information to the media accurately, clearly, timely and legally responsible for the content of that information.

Article 46: Getting Information from Society

Paragraph 2: Individuals, legal entities and organizations must contribute to the provision and have legal responsibility regarding the content of the information provided to the media through online social media, press conferences, interviews and other forms. The media organization must use the content of the information provided correctly and must inform the source of the information.

Paragraph 5: The media will not disclose the name and image of the information provider if it is seen to have a damaging effect on the information provider, family members and that organization unless it is provided according to the proposal of the investigation agency or the People's Prosecutor's Office or the People's Court.

Article 48: (updated) Answer to media question

The media has the right to propose that individuals, legal entities or related organizations answer the problems that Lao citizens or organizations ask for clarification. When individuals, legal entities or organizations receive such proposals, they must respond within thirty days after receiving the proposal and be responsible for their answers.

3	Law on electronic information protection	June 23 2017	<p><u>Article 4: State Policy on Electronic Information Protection</u></p> <p>The state attaches importance to protecting e-information to ensure the safe use of that information and the use or dissemination of individuals, legal entities or organizations' information without permission.</p>
			<p><u>Article 16: Use or Dissemination of Electronic Information</u></p> <p>Paragraph 1: Data managers can use or disclose personal information they have collected, maintained or managed only after obtaining permission from the data owner unless the law stipulates otherwise.</p> <p>Paragraph 2: Data managers can only provide personal data that they collect, maintain or manage to third parties if they have permission from the data owner or a government organization with relevant authority as defined by law.</p>
			<p><u>Article 31: General Prohibitions</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access, collect, use, disclose, destroy, intercept, modify, falsify, or provide confidential e-information of the state, individual, legal entity or organization without the owner's permission.</li> <li>2. Send or transfer e-information without the permission of the owner.</li> </ol>
			<p><u>Article 32: Prohibitions for Information Owners</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Create fake electronic data or dangerous data and cause damage to individuals, legal entities or other organizations.</li> </ol>
			<p><u>Article 33: Prohibitions for Data Managers</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access, collect, use, disclose or disseminate electronic information of the state, individual, legal entity or organization without authorization.</li> <li>2. Access, collect, use, disclose, provide, update, destroy electronic information that it manages without permission</li> <li>3. Collect, use, disclose electronic information about race, ethnicity, political opinion, religious belief, sexual behaviour, criminal history, health information or other information that affects national security, peace and social order.</li> </ol>
4	Law on Electronic Transactions	January 17 2013	<p><u>No article related to the digital rights of young people</u></p>



5	Law on Combating and Suppressing Cybercriminal	August 28 2015	<p><u>Article 5: Principles of Cybercriminal Combating and Suppressing</u></p> <p>3. Maintaining national secrets, the secrets of the government, individuals, legal entities and organizations.</p>
			<p><u>Article 8: Computer Crime Behaviors</u></p> <p>3. Unauthorized editing of content, images, motion pictures, audio and video</p> <p>5. Creating damage through online social media</p> <p>6. Spreading pornography through computer systems</p>
			<p><u>Article 11: Unauthorized editing of content, images, motion pictures, audio and video</u></p> <p>Unauthorized editing of content, photos, motion pictures, sound and video is the creation, addition or modification of the original by electronic or other means to disseminate through the computer system, which causes damage to individuals, legal entities and related organizations.</p>
			<p><u>Article 13: Creating Damage through online social media</u></p> <p>1. Bringing computer information that is slanderous, blasphemy, using obscene words to log in to the computer</p> <p>2. Bringing information that is violent, fake information, or deceptive information into the computer</p> <p>3. Bringing computer data that destroys national security, peace, social order, culture and good customs of the nation</p> <p>4. Bringing persuasive computer information, inciting and encouraging people to oppose the government or divide unity</p> <p>5. Advertising for the sale of drugs, military weapons, chemical weapons, human trafficking, prostitution and illegal items</p> <p>6. Dissemination or transmission of computer data as defined in Articles 11 and 14 of this Law, including Sub-articles 1 to 5 of this Article</p>

			<p><u>Article 14: Spreading Pornography through computer systems</u></p> <p>Pornography is information that contains explicit content such as pictures, animations, sounds and videos about people's genitals and sexual behaviour.</p> <p>The dissemination of pornography through computer systems is the trading, distribution, transmission, introduction and dissemination of information as defined in paragraph 1.</p>
			<p><u>Article 62: Criminal measures</u></p> <p>3. Unauthorized editing of content, photos, animations, sound and video will be punished with imprisonment from three months to two years and will be fined from three million to ten million kip.</p> <p>5. Causing damage through online social media will be punished with imprisonment from three months to three years and will be fined from four million to twenty million kip.</p> <p>6. Publishing obscene material through a computer system will be punished with imprisonment from one year to five years and will be fined from five million to thirty million kip.</p>
6	Law on Gender Equality	January 9 2020	<p><u>Article 8: Gender equality in various aspects</u></p> <p>7. Science, technology, information and communication, and environment</p>
			<p><u>Article 15: Equality in Science, Technology, Information and Environment</u></p> <p>Paragraph 1: Women and men have equality in research, use of scientific advances, modern technology and access to useful information.</p> <p>Paragraph 2: Women and men are equal in offering opinions, using media, technology, all forms of communication, knowledge, skills, production methods and scientific experience in research, in novation, service, and developing high-quality products in new ways for society.</p>
7	The Law on Persons with Disabilities	January 22 2019	<p><u>Article 22: Economic, Cultural and Social Equality</u></p> <p>People with disabilities have equality in economic, cultural and social activities such as education, public health, business operations, trade, services, sports-physical activity, literary arts, customs, research, technical innovations, science according to the conditions and actual abilities.</p>

			<p><u>Article 25: The Rights of disabled people</u></p> <p>4. Access to education, vocational training, job, social welfare, physical activity, art, literature, culture, access to buildings, public transportation and information technology</p> <p>5. To be promoted in using their creative ideas and talents in scientific research, modern technology and the production of materials to serve society.</p> <p>6. Provide comments related to their rights and interests, including the interests of the nation and society</p>
			<p><u>Article 42: Access to information</u></p> <p>Paragraph 1: People with disabilities can access information through print media, electronic media, modern technology and other media as appropriate</p>
			<p><u>Article 43: Access to Communication</u></p> <p>Paragraph 1: People with disabilities can access telecommunications services such as postal services, Internet, and other necessary and appropriate communications.</p> <p>Paragraph 2: Telecommunications service providers must create conditions for disabled people to access such services</p>
8	Law on Telecommunications	December 29 2021	<p><u>Article 43: Prohibitions for Telecommunication Providers</u></p> <p>8. Disclosure of official and user information of telecommunication services without permission</p> <p>10. Advertising exaggerating the truth, slandering individuals or legal entities, publishing obscene material, promoting gambling</p>
9	Advanced Technology Law	December 29 2021	<p><u>No article related to the digital rights of young people</u></p>
10	Decree on digital government administration and services	August 17 2022	<p><u>Article 36: General Prohibitions</u></p> <p>2. Bringing, accessing, modifying, destroying or disseminating information related to government digital administration and services without permission</p> <p>3. Advertising defames government administration and digital services</p>

			<u>Article 37: Prohibitions for Users</u>	
			1. Using government digital administration and services to modify, destroy, publish, penetrate the system, and steal state information that causes damage to the state, individuals, legal entities and other organizations	
			2. Using government digital and services to send or spread computer viruses	
			3. Bringing fake or untrue information into government digital administration and services	
11	Decree on Information Communication Technology	February 16 2009	<u>Part 2: Communication and information technology policy</u>	
			<u>2. Targets</u>	
			Bullet 4: Promote conditions to facilitate rural, remote and disadvantaged people to access and use information and communication technology to improve their living conditions	
			<u>3.1. HR Development on ICT</u>	
			Bullet 2: Create conditions and promote firmly bringing ICT into the curriculum in the general education system as appropriate.	
			Bullet 3: Create conditions for rural, remote, disadvantaged people and the whole society to be able to use ICT so that they can solve their problems and participate in development work	