

## Online Health Scams for Sale

How Google, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram  
Allow Dangerous Health Products to be Targeted  
at Kenyan Women. And Make Money From It.





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*ONLINE HEALTH SCAMS FOR SALE  
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## Executive Summary

A recent investigation has revealed that Facebook and Google are permitting the advertising and sale of unapproved and dangerous medical treatments to women in Kenya. These treatments exploit misinformation about health and pose a significant risk to the women who purchase them. The investigation highlights the global failures of these tech giants to control dangerous content and protect vulnerable users. In Kenya, where access to reliable healthcare information is limited, Facebook and Google's failure to regulate such content is particularly concerning. Immediate action needs to be taken to address this issue and ensure that tech companies take responsibility for the safety of their users.



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## Background

### Scams & the Online Environment

There are two primary drivers of online scams; disinformation-for-hire networks and weak oversight by technology companies related to ensuring safety standards for their products.

#### *Disinformation-for-hire*

The [disinformation-for-hire industry](#) describes a phenomenon where individuals or organisations are paid to spread false or misleading information—or products or services—on digital platforms. It is a form of online manipulation aimed at influencing public opinion, promoting certain agendas, destabilising targeted individuals, or selling unregulated commercial products or services.

The clients of such services can be political campaigns, corporations, special interest groups, governments, and commercial enterprises. There are specialised disinformation firms or “black PR” agencies that offer such services to clients.

These firms employ a network of individuals skilled in manipulating social media platforms and spreading misinformation. They may have access to automated tools or use a network of bots and fake accounts to amplify their reach. They leverage social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, using a combination of organic reach and paid promotion.

They may also exploit algorithmic vulnerabilities to maximise the visibility and reach of their content.

The disinformation-for-hire industry is unethical and can have serious consequences for democracy, public discourse, trust in institutions, and public health and safety. It undermines the integrity of information online and poses significant challenges for society as a whole.

#### *Weak Oversight of Social Media*

Social media companies play a crucial role in preventing the abuse of their products and platforms. As intermediaries that facilitate communication and content sharing among users, they have a responsibility to maintain a safe and trustworthy environment. While digital platforms purport to prevent abuse of their products, there are several ways in which they have fallen short:

- **Insufficient Content Moderation:** Content moderation is a complex task. Platforms have struggled to keep up, resulting in inadequate responses to reports of abusive, harmful content, and coordinated activity in violation of their own rules. Most social media platforms inconsistently apply their policies, allowing violations to go unchecked.

*Did you know? Meta and the third-party content moderation firm that was contracted by Facebook to provide content moderation for all of East Africa is the subject of several pending lawsuits based on liability for harm and labour abuses.*

- **Ineffective Algorithmic Systems:** Algorithms used by platforms for content recommendation and curation have been proven to amplify harmful or polarising content. Algorithmic biases and echo chamber effects can lead to the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and extremist content. Platforms have been criticised for not doing enough to address these issues and for lacking transparency in how their algorithms function.
- **Limited Transparency:** Platforms have faced criticism for their lack of transparency regarding how policies are formed, foreign influence operations thwarted, and data collected. Users and external stakeholders do not have sufficient insight into how platforms make decisions about content removal, account suspension, or algorithmic ranking. Lack of transparency can lead to mistrust and raise concerns about bias or arbitrary decision-making.

- **Inadequate Response to Harassment and Cyberbullying:** Most platforms are not effectively addressing harassment and cyberbullying, creating hostile environments for users. Victims of abuse often report a [lack of timely and meaningful action](#), allowing abusive behaviour to persist. Platforms are criticised for not implementing stronger measures to protect users from online harassment and provide sufficient support systems.
- **Privacy and Data Protection Concerns:** Platforms collect vast amounts of user data, raising concerns about privacy and data protection. Criticism has been directed at platforms for inadequate safeguards, mishandling of user data, and insufficient transparency regarding data usage. Breaches or misuse of user data can have severe consequences for individuals and society.

*Did you know? Kenya was the spotlight of a major Facebook scandal involving Cambridge Analytica, who was alleged to have played a role in the 2013 and 2017 general elections. It was reported that the company worked with various political parties in Kenya to influence voter behaviour using targeted advertising campaigns through access to user profiles provided by Facebook, in violation of their own terms of service.*

*Following the scandal, Facebook faced significant backlash for its handling of user data and its relationship with Cambridge Analytica. The incident led to investigations and hearings in several countries, including Kenya. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified before the U.S. Congress and European Parliament, acknowledging the company's mistakes and promising improvements in data protection.*

Bad actors, whether pursuing ideological agendas or commercial interests, are constantly adapting to find new ways to exploit platforms' vulnerabilities. They may create networks of fake accounts, use automation tools, or engage in coordinated disinformation campaigns. **Despite having comprehensive policies in place, platforms often fail to enforce them consistently. Inconsistent enforcement undermines the effectiveness of policies and diminishes user trust in platforms' ability to combat abuse.**

## **SCAMS & WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE**

Women are particularly targeted by health scams due to various factors, including societal pressures, gender-specific health concerns, and marketing strategies. The history of advertising products aimed at women has, unfortunately, included instances where safety concerns and sexism intersected, leading to unsafe or harmful product such as:

**Unsafe menstrual products:** Throughout history, there have been instances of unsafe menstrual products targeted at women. In the past, certain tampons were made with materials that increased the risk of toxic shock syndrome (TSS), a potentially life-threatening condition. Lack of proper testing and inadequate labelling contributed to the risks associated with these products.

**Harmful beauty products:** The beauty industry has a history of marketing products to women that have contained harmful ingredients. For instance, in the early 20th century, products such as face creams, soaps, and cosmetics often contained toxic substances like lead, mercury, and arsenic. These substances posed significant health risks, including skin damage, poisoning, and even death.

**Breast implants:** Primarily marketed to women for cosmetic purposes, breast implants have had a history of safety concerns. In the past, certain types of implants were associated with complications, including leakage, rupture, and immune system reactions. These issues raised questions about the long-term safety and efficacy of these products. Breast enlargement pills/creams are marketed to women who cannot afford surgery, claiming results with no side effects. Hip boosters tablets, pills, and creams: Such products are marketed as the ideal solution for women who want to achieve a fuller and more "attractive" figure.

The manufacturers and some self-touted health coaches brand the products as natural, made from natural ingredients such as black pepper, ginger root, clove, and cinnamon, claiming they are effective in increasing the size of one's hips, butt, and thighs within a few weeks.

### **Consumer Protection History in Kenya**

In Kenya, the Bureau of Standards banned cosmetic products in the 1990s that contained hydroquinone, steroids, mercury, and hydrogen peroxide elements which are harmful to the human body. However, unregulated clinics offer backstreet skin-bleaching injections and butt- and hip-enhancement injections, with services and products marketed through social media platforms.

Following unprecedented social media popularity and fame of young women attributed to their voluptuous shapes, there has been an emergence of products targeting women looking to transform their bodies. Internet sensations in Kenya, such as Vera Sidiki, Risper Faith and Corazon Kwamboka, have attributed their social media influencer success to their curvaceous figures (enlarged hips and butts).

During the course of the investigation, Facebook groups were discovered where women claimed to have used antiretrovirals (ARVs) to gain weight, and share information on where to procure the drugs.

Some of the long-term side effects include kidney, liver or pancreas damage, as well as Abacavir hypersensitivity reaction, which results in fever, vomiting, and/or nausea, high blood sugar, diabetes, and high lactic acid levels in the blood.

*Gendered marketing and societal expectations have contributed to the development and promotion of products that may not have prioritised women's safety. It is important to acknowledge these historical issues and recognise the importance of stringent safety regulations, consumer advocacy, and informed decision-making to protect individuals from unsafe products in the present and future.*



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## **GLOBAL DISPARITY AND HEALTH CARE: #MyAlwaysExperience**

The history of Western companies using subpar materials in products sold in the Global South is a complex and multifaceted issue that spans several decades. This practice can be attributed to various factors, including economic motivations, cost-cutting measures, disparities in regulatory frameworks between different regions, and racism. Kenya is no stranger to these disparities. Kenya is also no stranger to pushing back on global companies when product quality does not meet consumer expectations.

In 2019, thousands of Kenyan women began sharing stories of their experiences with Procter & Gamble's flagship menstrual pads, Always, under the hashtag #myalwaysexperience. Women bravely tweeted about experiencing painful rashes, itching, severe burning sensations, and unpleasant odours that typified their experience using Always pads.

The health and medical community in Kenya contends that awareness of menstrual issues is extremely low in the country.

Monthly periods have typically been discussed in hushed tones in public education settings, with boys being sent out of the classroom whenever the topic is raised, leading to girls developing a sense of shame around a normal biological process.

This perhaps explains why the average Kenyan woman may not have been loath to publicly discuss vaginal itching, burning, or odour as a result of the use of pads, especially if she believed it was her own body at fault.

P&G and its flagship feminine hygiene brand, Always, was one of the first mass market pads in the Kenyan market and the only one easily available countrywide, dating back to 1992 when it launched and developed an unparalleled market dominance. Most other pad options came into the country only in the recent past and still have limited market share.

A year after the public backlash, Always said it upgraded the quality of all the material in their pads in the Kenyan market with the Always Kenya brand manager Ivy Kimani commenting, "The hashtag on Twitter drew our attention to women whose expectations we didn't meet. We believe strongly that we must serve the needs of all Kenyan women and not only the ones whose needs we were fulfilling."

Shame, humiliation or embarrassment about these sensitive topics allow dangerous products to be marketed to women and medical science to be undermined.

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## **Investigative Findings**

### **Digital Platforms Allow for Bogus “Vaginal Detox” Products to Flourish**

The “vaginal detox” industry refers to a market segment that promotes various products and procedures claiming to cleanse, detoxify, or improve the health of the vagina. These products often include herbal suppositories, douching solutions, and other similar offerings. ***It is important to note that the concept of detoxing or cleansing the vagina is not supported by scientific evidence, and many medical professionals caution against such practices.***

The vaginal detox industry relies on misinformation and disinformation to promote products and procedures that lack scientific evidence. The industry relies on spreading false or exaggerated claims about the benefits of these products, often preying on women’s concerns about vaginal health or body image. They may assert that vaginal detox can treat infections, regulate hormones, boost fertility, or even prevent cancer—despite the lack of credible scientific research to support such assertions.

Big Tech platforms, including social media platforms, search engines, and e-commerce websites, have a role in disseminating and amplifying misinformation related to the vaginal detox industry. These platforms provide a space

for advertisers and influencers to promote these products, often without proper scrutiny or fact-checking. Some platforms have implemented policies to restrict the promotion of harmful or misleading health products, but enforcement is weak and loopholes still exist.

The rise of social media influencers has also contributed to the spread of misinformation surrounding vaginal detox. Influencers, often without proper medical expertise, endorse and promote these products to their followers, who may be swayed by their authority and perceived credibility. The viral nature of social media allows misinformation to rapidly reach a wide audience, further perpetuating false claims about vaginal health.

### **Evidence: Meta and Google’s Failure to Protect Women**

Although Yoni Pearls have gained popularity in many parts of the world, medical experts have repeatedly debunked them as misguided myths and dangerous to women’s health. (The term “yoni” is a reference to the vagina.) Any claims of benefit of such products are not supported by scientific evidence, with medical professionals cautioning against using such products.

While it is difficult to quantify the exact pervasiveness of Yoni Pearls or similar scam products, their presence and promotion can be found across various online platforms, including social media, e-commerce websites, and alternative health communities. Scammers often leverage digital marketing techniques, influencer endorsements, and testimonials to reach their target audience, which can include women concerned about vaginal health or looking for natural remedies. The viral nature of social media and the reach of online platforms have amplified the visibility of such products, making them more accessible to consumers. However, it is important to note that increased visibility does not indicate their effectiveness or legitimacy.

***Despite tech company policies banning miracle cures and health misinformation, these treatments are being actively marketed and sold on Facebook and Google, with no apparent repercussions.***

The findings from this investigation underscore how two tech giants—and their well-documented problems dealing with harmful content—can have far-reaching impacts around the world. In the case of Kenya, the companies' failures pose a serious threat to women's health in a country already struggling with poverty, high rates of maternal and infant mortality, and infectious diseases like HIV and tuberculosis<sup>1</sup>.

## **The investigation found that:**

- Numerous Facebook groups and pages and Instagram accounts are promoting dangerous vaginal detox treatments for women in Kenya.
- Facebook's own algorithms are often amplifying this content, and Facebook is letting ads for detox remedies target Kenyan users.
- The content is widely available despite the fact that it violates Facebook policies against unsafe products and miracle cures.
- Google and YouTube are also part of this harmful system, profiting off ads for vaginal detox products despite the evident health risks.
- A network of groups, including Christian organisations and a Chinese herbal company, plays a role in spreading misinformation on sexual and reproductive health in Kenya.

## **Dubious Remedies**

Two of the major treatments promoted to women are yoni steaming, which entails sitting over a bowl of herbs and boiling hot water, and "yoni pearls," which are tea bags or mesh wraps filled with herbs that are inserted into the vagina<sup>2</sup>. Yoni pearls are also known as "yoni beads," "detox pearls," or "womb cleanse," among other names.

Medical experts have warned repeatedly about the dangers of these treatments, saying vaginal steaming can cause burns as well as bacterial vaginosis and yeast infections, and vaginal pearls

can cause skin irritation, infections, and in the most extreme cases, toxic shock syndrome, which is potentially deadly<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, such products have continued to gain traction in popular culture, encouraged by celebrities like actress Gwyneth Paltrow. Paltrow, who runs the lifestyle website Goop, has touted the benefits of vaginal steaming and putting jade eggs in the vagina, drawing condemnation from gynaecologists<sup>4</sup>.

Facebook and Instagram, now organised under the parent company Meta, have become key conduits for promoting yoni-related products and peddling misinformation about them. Both social media platforms feature content promoting yoni steaming and yoni pearls as a treatment for infertility as well as other serious medical issues like endometriosis, uterine fibroids, and polycystic ovary syndrome, contrary to scientific evidence<sup>5</sup>.

Retailers operating on Facebook and Instagram often frame the painful side effects of yoni pearls as a sign of successful cleansing of reproductive systems (Warning: graphic content)<sup>6</sup>

This content violates Facebook's Community Standards, which state that the company will remove "health misinformation likely to directly contribute to imminent harm to public health and safety." This includes content "promoting or advocating for harmful miracle cures for health issues."<sup>7</sup>

But it remains remarkably easy to find dubious yoni treatments on the platforms.

*For example, the yoni pearl retailer [Goddess Detox Inc.](#), which was banned in Canada following a CBC investigation and faces a class action lawsuit in the U.S., maintains an Instagram profile with over 527,000 followers and features multiple posts pushing medical misinformation and vaginal detox products<sup>8</sup>. Two Goddess Detox ads actively promoting the vaginal detox pearls began running on Instagram on May 10, 2022 (Figure 1. Warning: graphic images)<sup>9</sup>.*

Another example is Coochie Couture, a seller of "herbal detox pearls," which operates a Facebook page with over 57,000 followers<sup>10</sup>. It remains active on Facebook despite receiving a warning from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2019 for using its social media accounts to sell products across state lines in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act<sup>11</sup>. The FDA said it had not yet approved Coochie Couture's products, which the agency considers "new drugs" that are "not generally recognized as safe and effective for the uses recommended or suggested in their labeling."

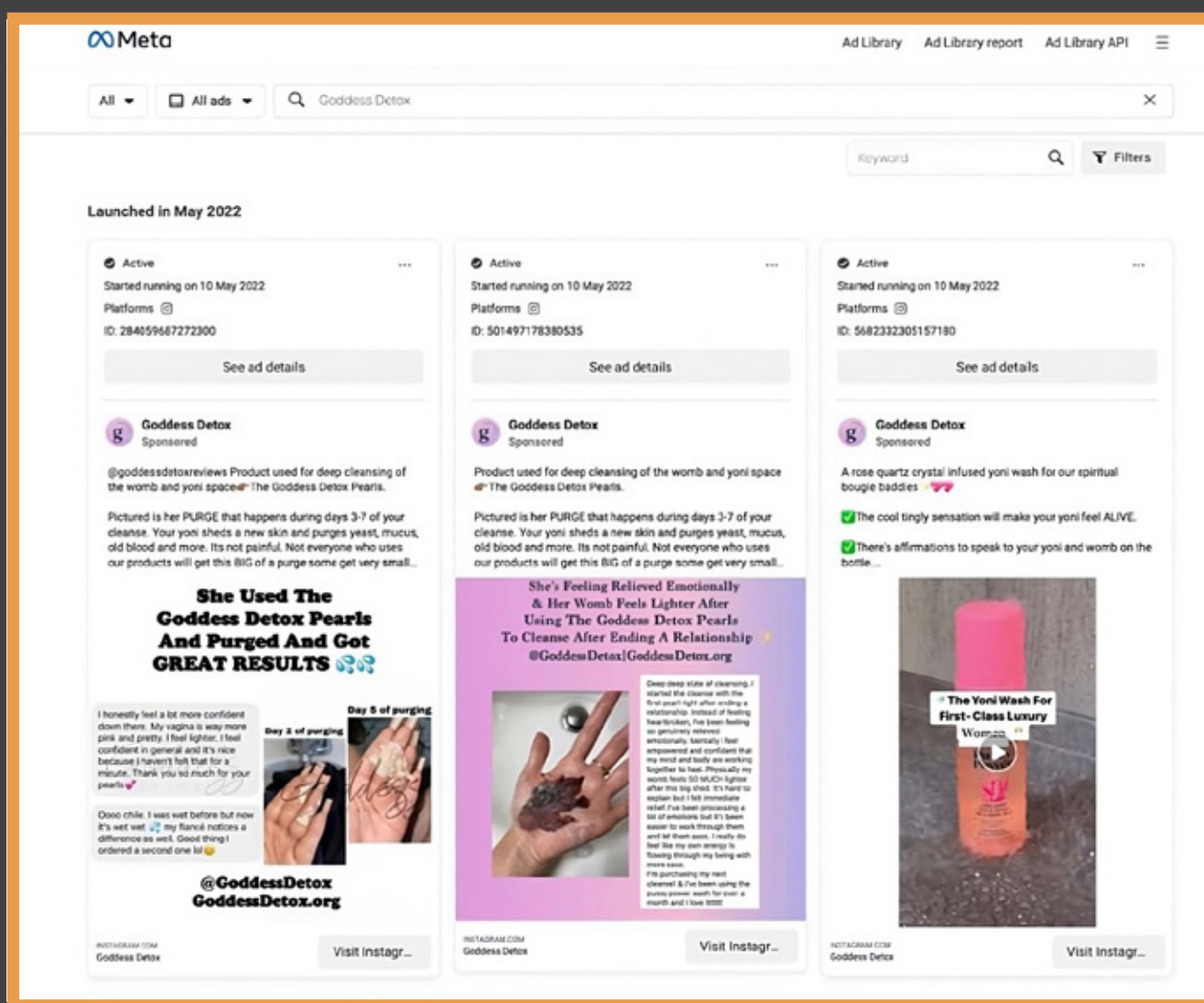


Figure 1: Instagram ads for Goddess Detox products running in May 2022

These kinds of dubious yoni remedies have gained traction in Kenya, alarming medical professionals. According to the Kenyan media outlet Debunk, which investigated yoni steaming, doctors and experts warn that the practice does not work and can also result in serious burns<sup>12</sup>.

Debunk also found that spas and other retailers instructed women to leave yoni pearls in their vagina for up to 48 hours.

In the report, an obstetrician-gynaecologist at the University of Nairobi said infections from the pearls can lead to serious issues like infertility—the very problem they're said to cure.

"They prey on people's self-esteem. They've concocted a scenario to make a woman doubt herself and use these items to solve fictitious problems," he said<sup>13</sup>.

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As in the West, Facebook and Instagram play a critical role in the spread of harmful sexual and reproductive health (SRH) misinformation and products in Kenya—perhaps even more so, given the way the internet has developed in the East African country. Facebook and Instagram—along with two other Meta-owned services, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger—made up four of the top five most popular social media platforms in Kenya in 2020. (The remaining platform was YouTube, which is also part of this investigation.)<sup>14</sup> That is not a surprise: Facebook and its sister services have achieved significant penetration in the country due in large part to sponsored free internet programs.

In 2013, Facebook launched its Internet.org initiative (later rebranded to Free Basics), a program billed as an effort to get people without internet access online<sup>15</sup>. Facebook partnered with local mobile providers in developing countries to offer low-cost internet service via so-called zero-rating programs.

The programs enabled users to access specific internet apps—including Facebook—without incurring data charges. Facebook touted the effort as a global good, but it also sparked criticism that the programs, by limiting user access to outside sources of information, created a truncated version of the internet that violated the principle of net neutrality<sup>16</sup>.

The Free Basics program made only a handful of apps—Facebook among them—available to users<sup>17</sup>. In that way, Facebook became essentially synonymous with the internet in many developing countries, including Kenya<sup>18</sup>.

The apps available on Free Basics Kenya at its launch included: AccuWeather, BBC News, BBC Swahili, BabyCenter & MAMA, BrighterMonday, Daily Nation, Facebook, Facts for Life, Girl Effect, JamiiForums, Facebook Messenger, OLX Scholars4Dev, SuperSport, Totohealth, UNICEF Ebola Information, Wattpad, and Wikipedia.

Today, Facebook has built nearly a decade of its Kenyan user growth on its fenced version of the internet. As a result, the company has an outsized role in ensuring that its users in Kenya (and other Free Basics countries) are protected from misinformation and products that can cause harm. Our investigation found, however, that Facebook is failing to protect users in Kenya from harmful SRH products and misinformation that are targeting women in the country.



## Facebook

The investigation identified yoni products marketed to women in Kenya through Facebook pages, groups, marketplace, and advertisements. In some cases, Facebook algorithmically amplified pages and groups that offered harmful vaginal detox products and promised cures for medical issues.

To examine how Facebook facilitates sales and pushes these harmful SRH products to users in Kenya, a Facebook account was set up using a Kenya-based virtual private network (VPN). The account joined groups and followed pages that offered yoni pearls for sale both in Kenya and other parts of Africa. In Facebook groups, users from other African countries like Nigeria and South Africa would offer products for shipping across the continent, creating a Facebook-based transnational economy of harmful SRH products.

Multiple Facebook groups operate for the sole purpose of offering yoni pearls and other potentially harmful SRH products to women in Africa. The Facebook groups include sellers and buyers of the product and often feature graphic images and testimonials about how the products have cured infertility. Groups with names like “Yoni Pearl Detox” include posts that claim the pearls treat a series of problems (Figure 2). None of the groups or posts carry any fact check or misinformation labels or links to authoritative health information.

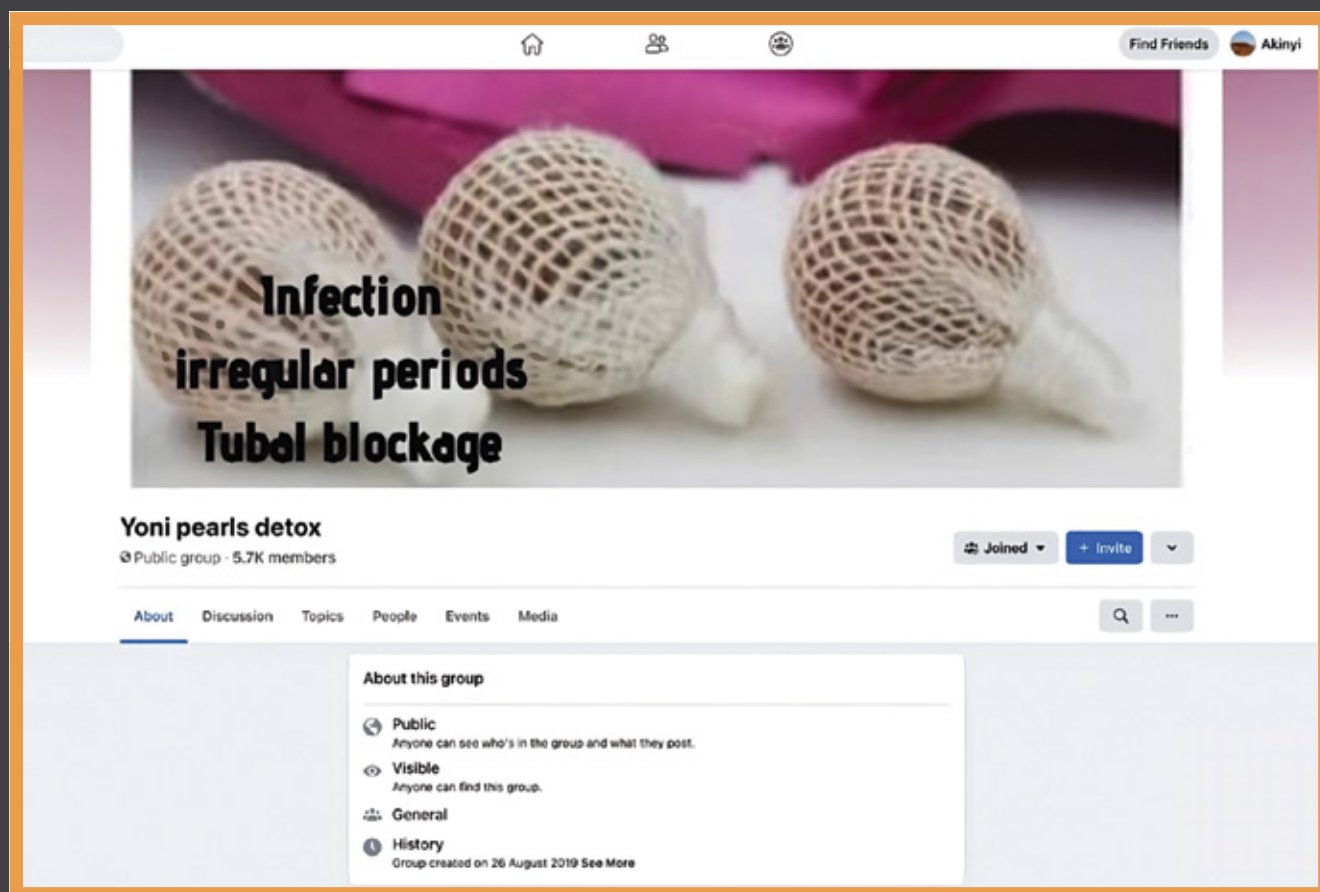


Figure 2: Facebook group “Yoni pearls detox,” with over 5,700 group members.

Facebook is amplifying the reach of these groups through its algorithmic recommendation system (Figure 3). The platform's "suggestion" features often push yoni-related treatment groups to users<sup>19</sup>.

The investigation also found that Facebook is recommending pages selling yoni detox products through its "related pages" feature (Figure 4). The feature algorithmically recommends pages to follow when a user "likes" a particular page on the platform<sup>20</sup>.

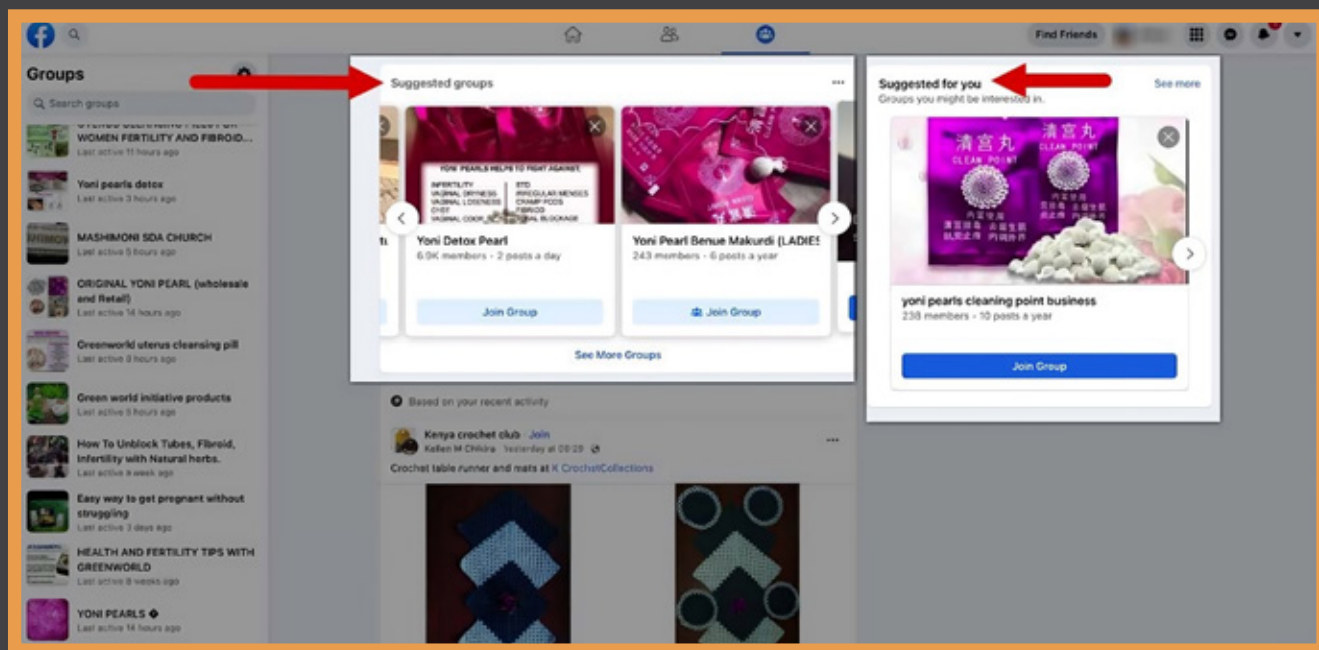


Figure 3: Facebook's "suggested" feature algorithmically recommending groups for harmful yoni detox products.

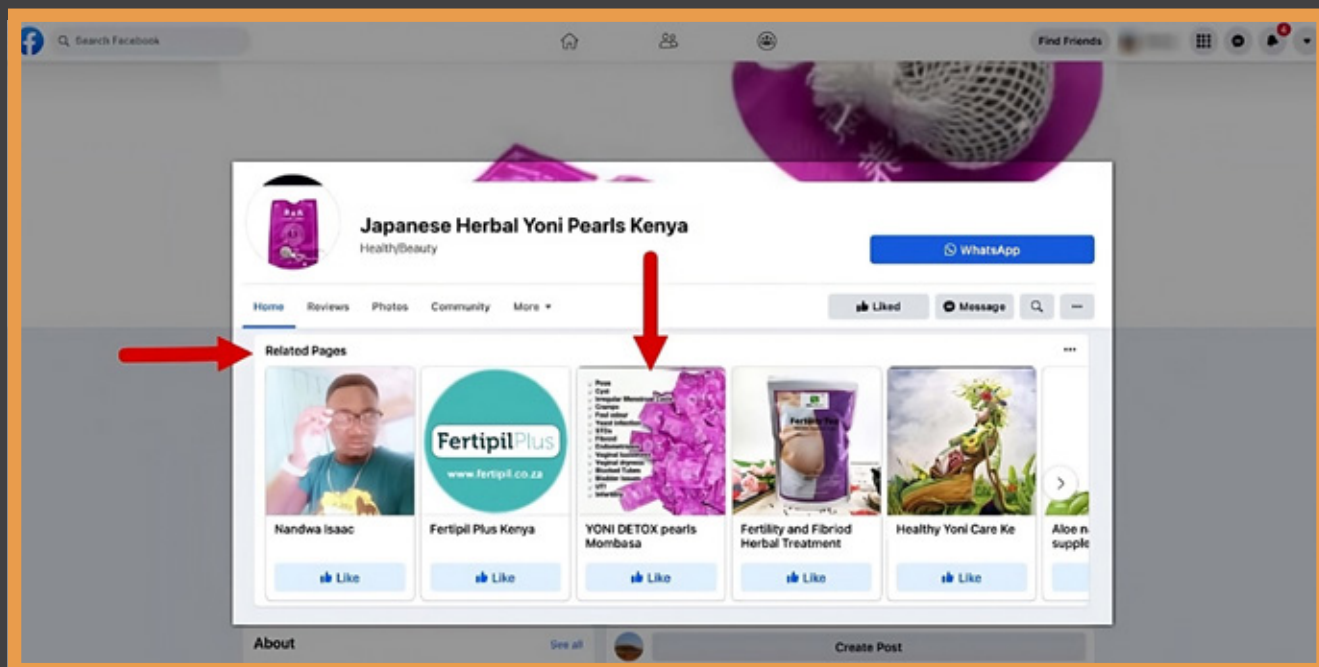
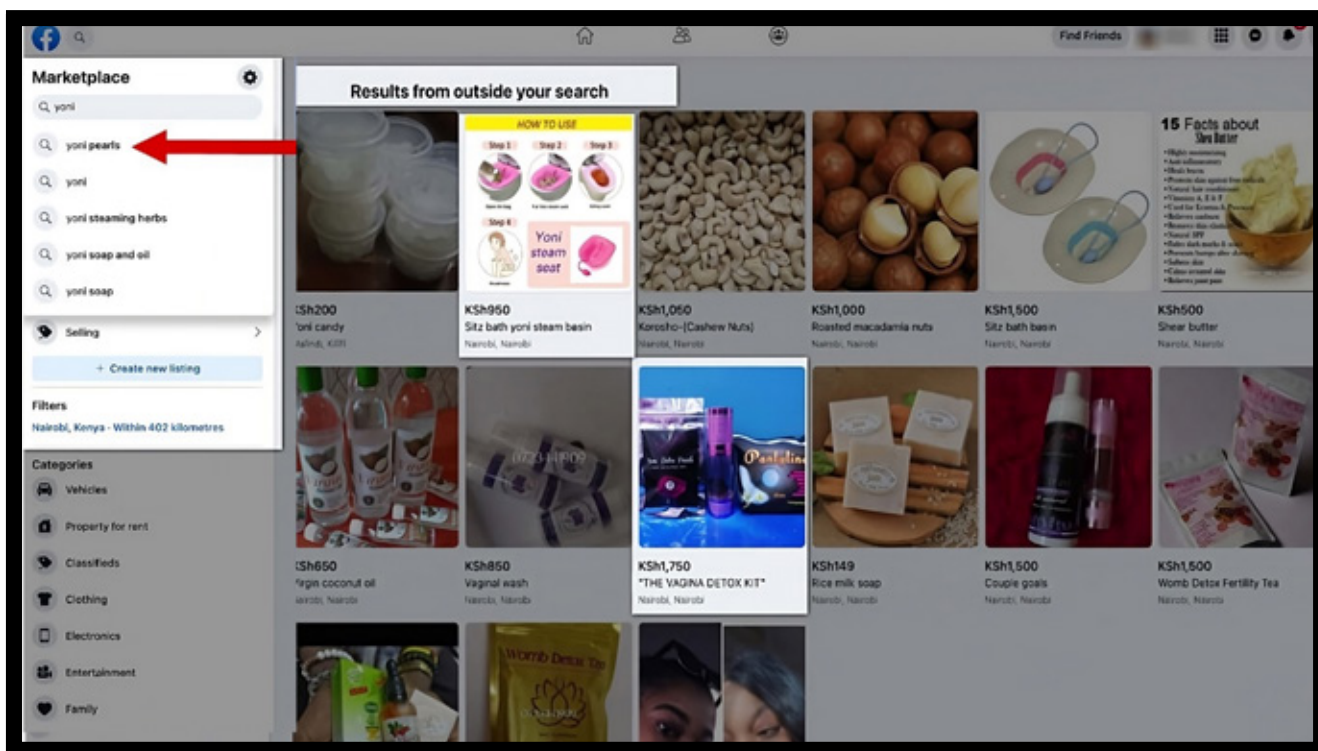


Figure 4: Facebook's "related pages" feature pushing pages selling yoni detox products

Facebook has a separate set of policies that govern Facebook marketplace and items that can be sold through that function of the platform (Figure 5)<sup>22</sup>. Facebook's Commerce Policies prohibit the sale of "medical products."<sup>23</sup> But the investigation identified dozens of yoni pearls and other SRH products in Facebook Marketplace listings in Nairobi.



Facebook is not just facilitating and amplifying the sale of harmful sexual and reproductive health products, it is also profiting from them. Multiple active advertisements marketing yoni pearls to users in Kenya were identified.



**Figure 6: (Left) Facebook auto-suggests searches for “yoni pearls.” (Right) Facebook’s marketplace algorithm recommends more harmful yoni detox products available**

Facebook’s advertising policies prohibit ads for “unsafe substances, products, or supplements as determined by Meta at its sole discretion.”<sup>24</sup> The policies also state that Facebook “doesn’t allow ads that make outlandish claims, promise miracle cures or guarantee results that would otherwise be impossible or require clinical intervention or physical support activities.”<sup>25</sup> The company’s promotional materials for advertising through the platform claim that Facebook does not “want ads that ... include misinformation.”<sup>26</sup> Despite these policies, the investigation found Facebook ads in Kenya were pushing unsafe substances that promise miracle cures and spread misinformation—violating multiple layers of Facebook advertising policies (Figure 7).

One yoni pearl retailer page called “Peaches and Cream Kenya” ran an ad on both Facebook and Instagram offering yoni detox products that promised to “remedy bacterial infections, yeast infections, vagina odor, irregular menstruation, painful cramps, fibroids, cysts, pcos, vaginal pelvic muscles tightening.”<sup>27</sup> The term PCOS stands for polycystic ovary syndrome. Another yoni pearl retailer page called “Unik V Hub254” ran a Facebook and Instagram ad pushing vaginal detox products using misinformation: “Detox pearls are used to help improve a variety of conditions including; Vaginal dryness Vaginal odor Yeast infection Bacterial vaginosis Menstrual cramps Trichomona vaginitis Urinary tract infections Irregular menses Cyst & fibroids Tube blockage Infertility.”<sup>28</sup>

### About the ad


**Peaches and Cream Kenya**  
Sponsored  
ID: 3400467447061755

#restoringwomenshealth  
Peaches and cream provide you with 100% pure herbal products for your feminine health and hygiene. 🍑  
Our products remedy bacterial infections, yeast infections, vagina odor, irregular menstruation, painful cramps, fibroids, cysts,pcos, vaginal pelvic muscles tightening.

- ✓ Yoni Bar Kes. 380
- ✓ Yoni Detox Pearl Kes. 950.. 2 packs at 1500
- ✓ Herbal Yoni Steam Kes. 750
- ✓ Yoni steam seat Kes.2250
- ✓ Maduna Wand Kes.1500
- ✓ Yoni wash Kes 550
- ✓ Yoni oil Kes 650

#Yonicare #Wellness #confidence #love #happiness




### About the Page

[See ads](#)


**Peaches and Cream Kenya**  
ID: 102982138709695  
1,254 likes • Health/Beauty  
@peachesandcreamke  
1,268 followers

#### More info

Yoni care, restoring women's health, wellness and confidence

### About the Page

[See ads](#)


**Peaches and Cream Kenya**  
ID: 102982138709695  
1,254 likes • Health/Beauty  
@peachesandcreamke  
1,268 followers

#### More info

Yoni care, restoring women's health, wellness and confidence


**Unik V Hub254**  
Sponsored  
ID: 376372387766689

\*Yoni pearls\* Are Herbs which have been compressed together for preservation and they are in a ball form. They work by pulling dirt and toxins from the womb and vagina. Yoni pearls a holistic organic approach to restore feminine health and confidence. It improves vaginal tightness and an enhanced sex life having used the product, Detox pearls are used to help improve a variety of conditions including: Vaginal dryness Vaginal odor Yeast infection Bacterial vaginosis Menstrual cramps Trichomona vaginitis Urinary tract infections Irregular menses Cyst & fibroids Tube blockage Infertility

Inbox to place your order  
6 yoni pearls is 1500

### Key Benefits Of Yoni Detox Pearls

Suitable For Females With

- Abnormal Vaginal Discharge
- Irregular Menstruation (Heavy & Painful Period)
- Bacterial Vaginosis And/Or Yeast Infections
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Ovarian Cysts & Uterine Fibroids
- Endometriosis & Cervical Erosions
- Infertility
- PCOS
- Poor Sexual Health
- Vaginal itching & Unpleasant Odor
- Tubal Blockages
- UTI's

....And many other diseases that affects the Female




**Unik V Hub254**  
ID: 105617484172361  
581 likes • Product/Service  
@unikhub254  
1,221 followers

#### More info

Beauty products

Figure 7: Facebook advertisements targeted to users in Kenya that offer harmful yoni detox products with false claims of cures for serious ailments



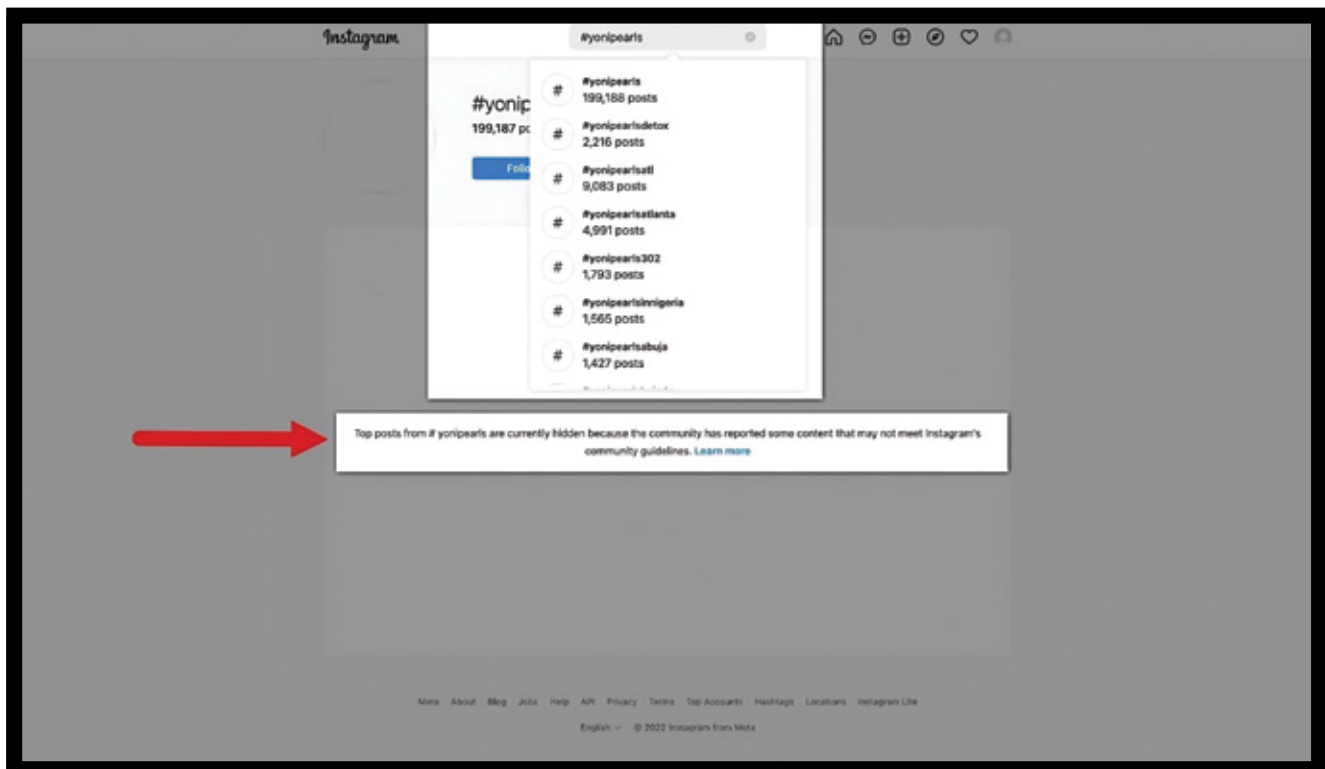
## Instagram

Kenyan journalists have documented that Instagram users in the country have access to thousands of posts containing hashtags about dangerous SRH products.<sup>29</sup>

During this investigation, Instagram exhibited different positions on hashtags related to yoni pearls. In some cases, the hashtag #yonipearl, which appear on over 199,000 posts, were blocked by the platform for potential violations of its community standards; in others, it was left unblocked. During the investigation period when the hashtag was blocked, Instagram wouldn't surface "Top" results for #yonipearl, stating, "

Top posts from #yonipearl are currently hidden because the community has reported some content that may not meet Instagram's community guidelines."<sup>30</sup>(Figure 8) However, the posts were still visible when filtering by "recent" posts on mobile.

The investigation found 690 posts on Instagram promoting the use of these dubious products to Kenyan women. The majority of the content was posted between mid-2020 and early 2021 and appears to be from storefronts and retailers in Kenya seeking to sell their products to women in their local area. (See documents in appendix for scraped content.)



**Figure 8: Instagram's blocking of #yonipearl top results included a warning that the content may have violated its community guidelines.**

Three products dominated the content of Instagram posts we collected: yoni pearls, yoni steam, and yoni candies. The most dangerous of the products, yoni steaming and yoni pearls, generated the most significant reach. For instance, content promoting yoni steaming, which can cause serious burns, has reached thousands of users. One video posted by the account @my\_happyvagina, which demonstrated how to use a yoni-steaming seat, racked up 8,554 views.<sup>31</sup>

The account @v\_goddesske, which has over 2,000 followers, posted a video of a woman demonstrating how to insert a yoni pearl using a tampon applicator. In the caption, @v\_goddesske claimed that yoni pearls can help with tube blockage, fibroids, bacterial vaginosis (BV), yeast infections, PCOS, vaginal odour, and ovarian cysts. The October 2021 video has over 900 views on Instagram (Figure 9).<sup>32</sup>

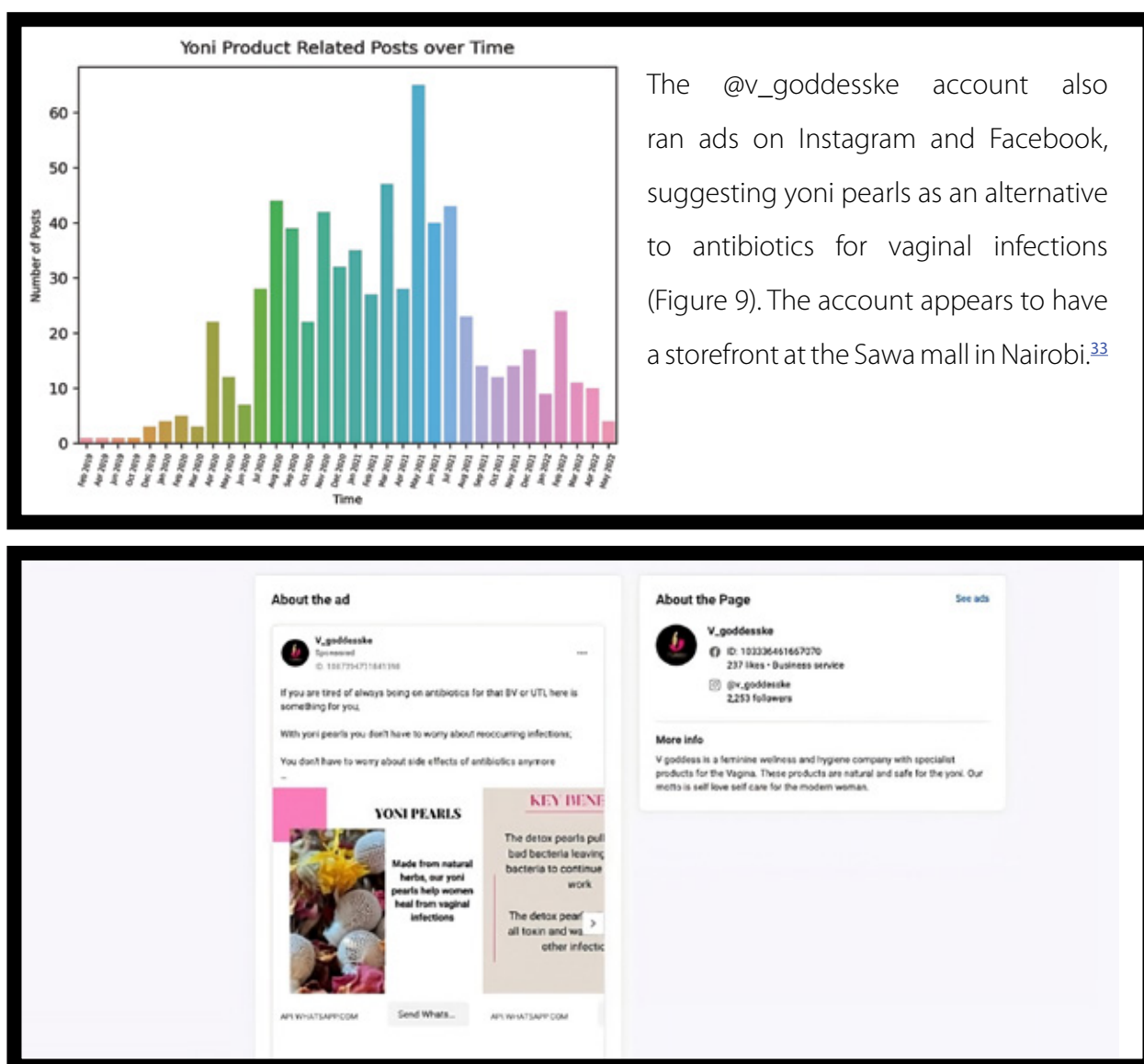


Figure 9: (left) Instagram account @v\_goddesske ad offering yoni pearls for sale. (Right) @v\_goddesske video demonstrating yoni pearl usage.

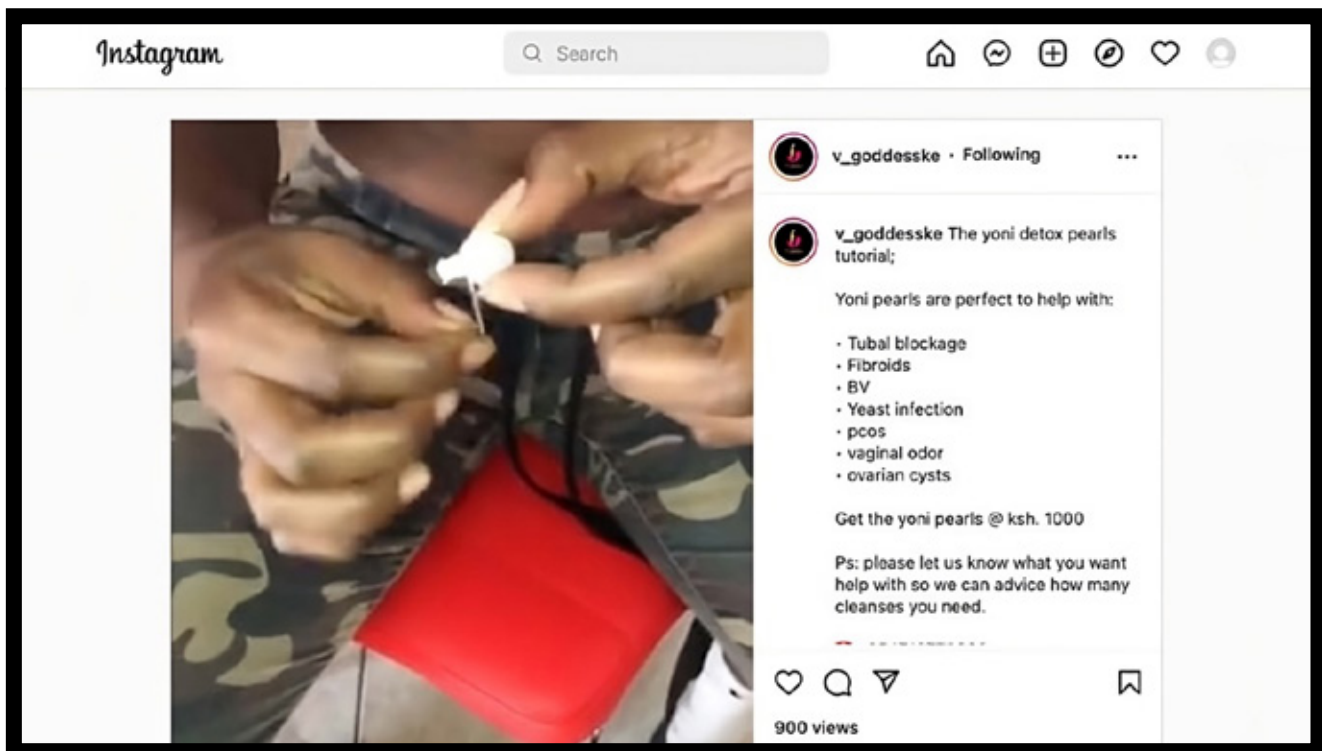
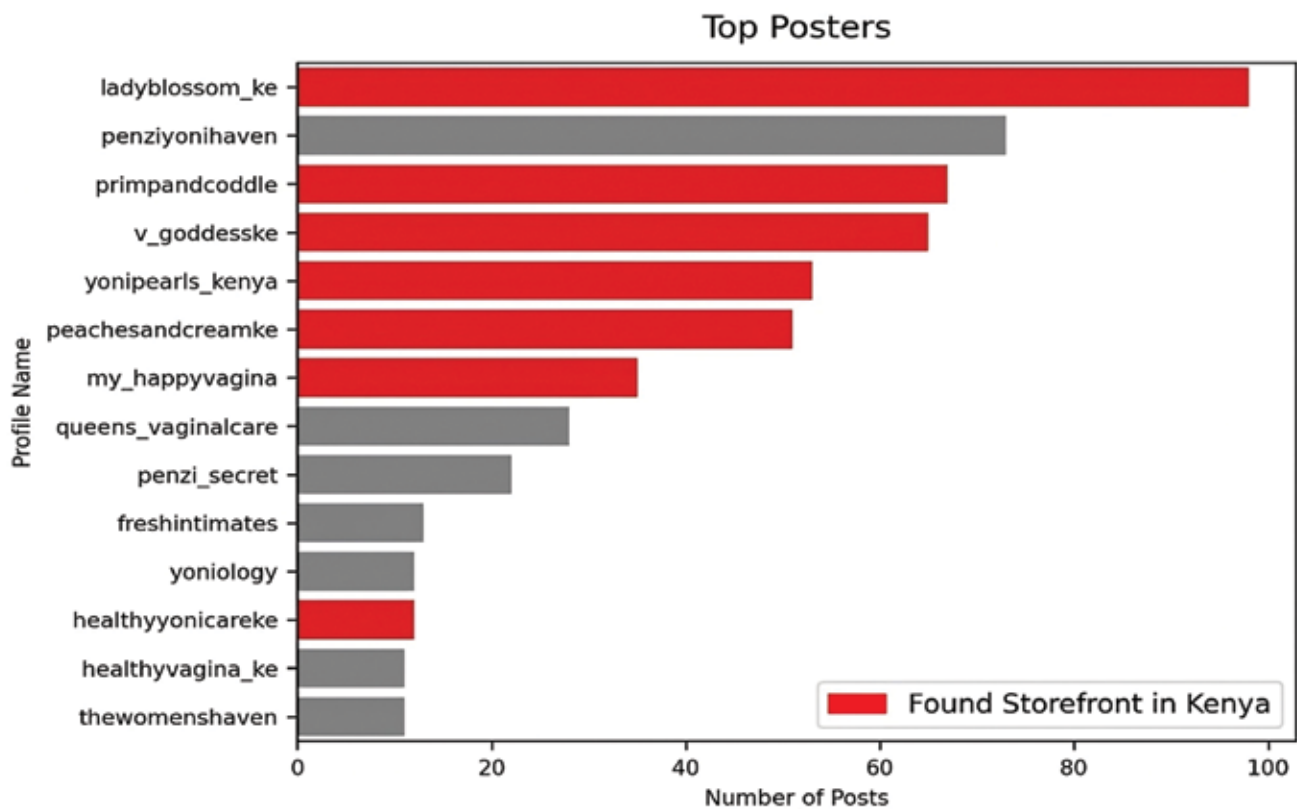


Figure 9: (left) Instagram account @v\_goddesske ad offering yoni pearls for sale. (Right) @v\_goddesske video demonstrating yoni pearl usage.



Most of the nearly 700 posts collected in the investigation came from 14 Instagram profiles. We identified physical addresses for the retailers associated with seven of those profiles. For example, the account @ladyblossome\_ke, which posted 98 of the 690 posts we collected, has over 30,000 followers and lists a storefront at the Ebrahims Shopping Mall in Nairobi<sup>34</sup>.

Other posts give very specific directions on how many yoni pearl cleanses are required to treat various ailments. The @ladyblossom\_ke Instagram profile posted a chart that suggested between one and eight “cleanses” with yoni products, depending on the health issue.

The account said a normal detox would only require one yoni pearl cleanse, while more serious issues like cysts, fibroids, infertility, blocked tubes, and PCOS require eight cleanses.

Several other accounts made false claims about the benefits of yoni pearls. The account @my\_happyvagina, which has 68,700 Instagram followers, advertised three pearls for KSh 1000, directing interested customers to a phone number.

The photo appears to be a Snapchat of several yoni pearls with the caption, “This small bomb is for destroying vaginal infection, vaginal dryness, foul odour... fibroid, cysts, tightens loose or slack vagina, balances ph level, total cleaning of the womb and fallopian tubes.” The photo was posted in April 2019 and has 2,475 likes (Figure 10)<sup>35</sup>.

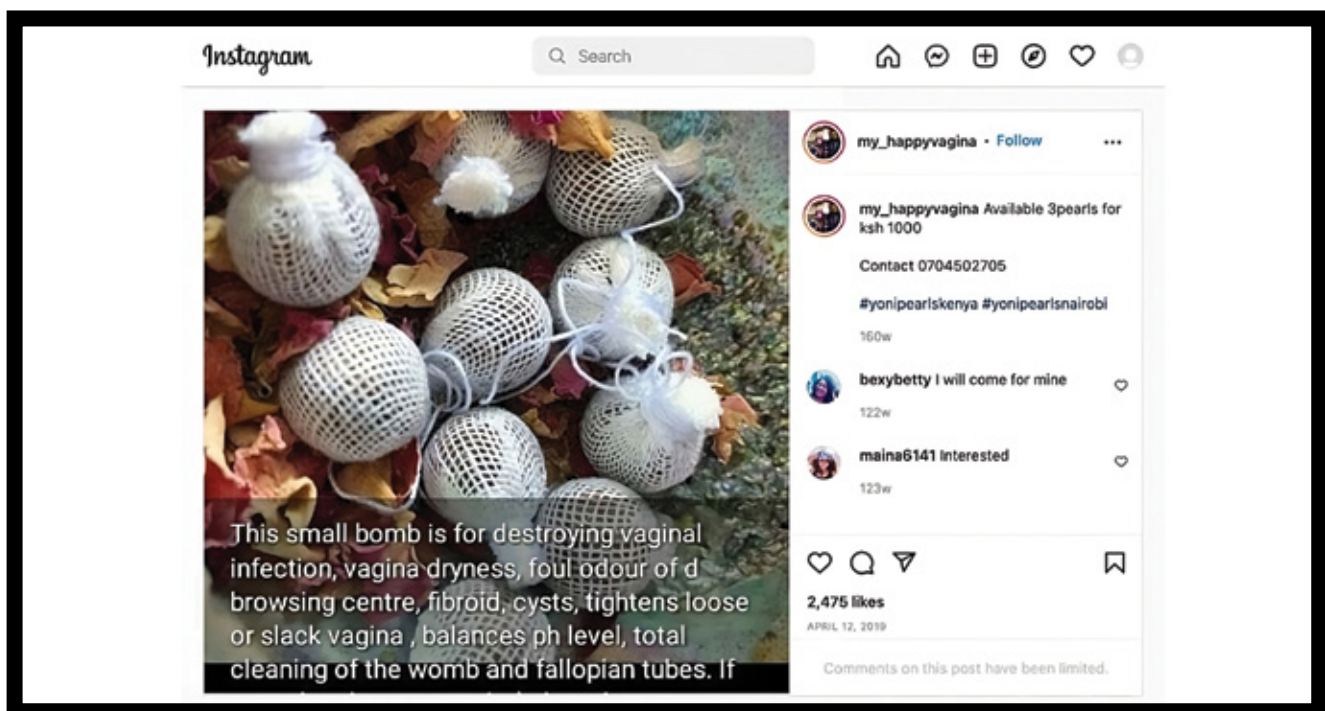


Figure 10: Instagram posts from yoni pearl retailers that contain SRH misinformation

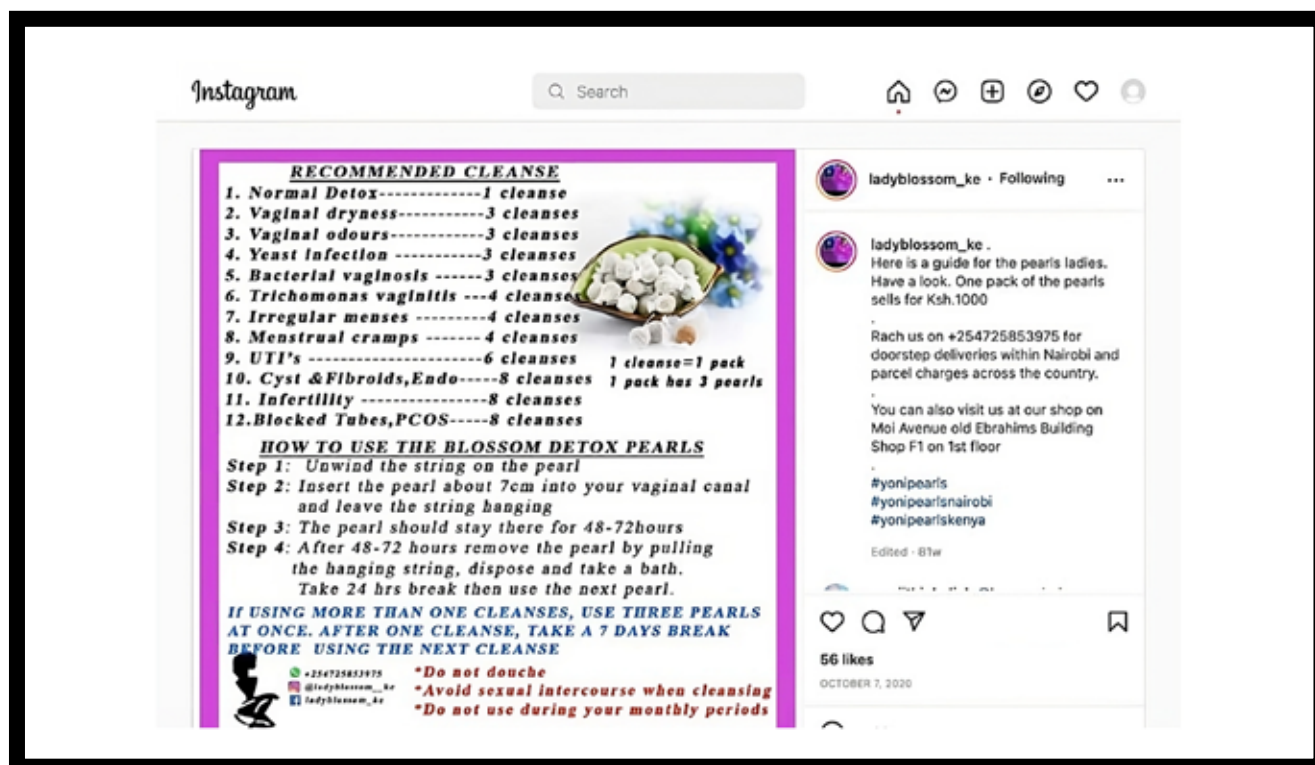
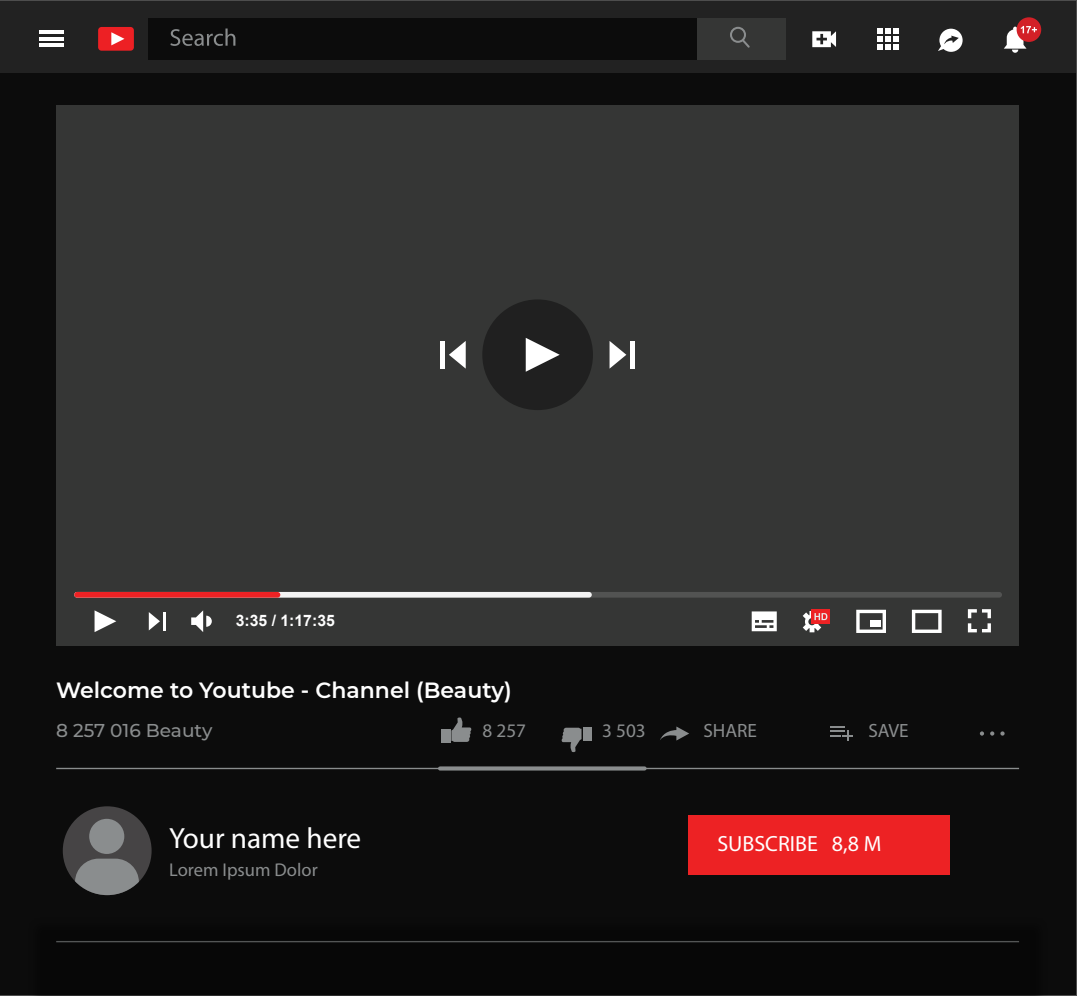


Figure 10: Instagram posts from yoni pearl retailers that contain SRH misinformation

While most of the accounts identified in this investigation appear to be controlled by retailers in Kenya, one Instagram account for a yoni pearl retailer called “Yoniology” claimed to be based in Australia<sup>36</sup>.

Several of Yoniology’s posts included the hashtag #yonipearlknairobi<sup>37</sup>. When investigators visited Yoniology’s website using a Kenyan VPN (which made it appear the site was being accessed from Kenya) the site immediately launched a pop-up notification that the business ships to Kenya.



## YouTube

The investigation also easily identified multiple monetised videos on YouTube’s Kenya site that contained harmful misinformation about yoni pearls and steaming. This shows how YouTube not only promotes harmful SRH misinformation but also profits from it via ad revenue. The examples identified in our investigation likely represent just a sample of the monetized YouTube content that contains SRH misinformation targeting women in Kenya.

For example, the YouTube channel “Healthy Kyla” features videos touting the benefits of yoni steaming, and some of them contain advertisements

(Figure 11)<sup>38</sup>. In one video, the content creator details a yoni steam that supposedly enables fertility. In another video titled “HOW TO YONI STEAM W/ HERBS | Living Pain Free with Endometriosis FINALLY,” the creator claims—from personal experience—that the steams lessen the unpleasant and painful symptoms of endometriosis, a disorder where uterus tissue grows outside of the uterus. As noted previously, doctors have debunked the claim that steaming offers these kinds of benefits<sup>39</sup>. Before this video, YouTube ran a 50-second ad for Family Bank, a Kenyan commercial bank<sup>40</sup>.

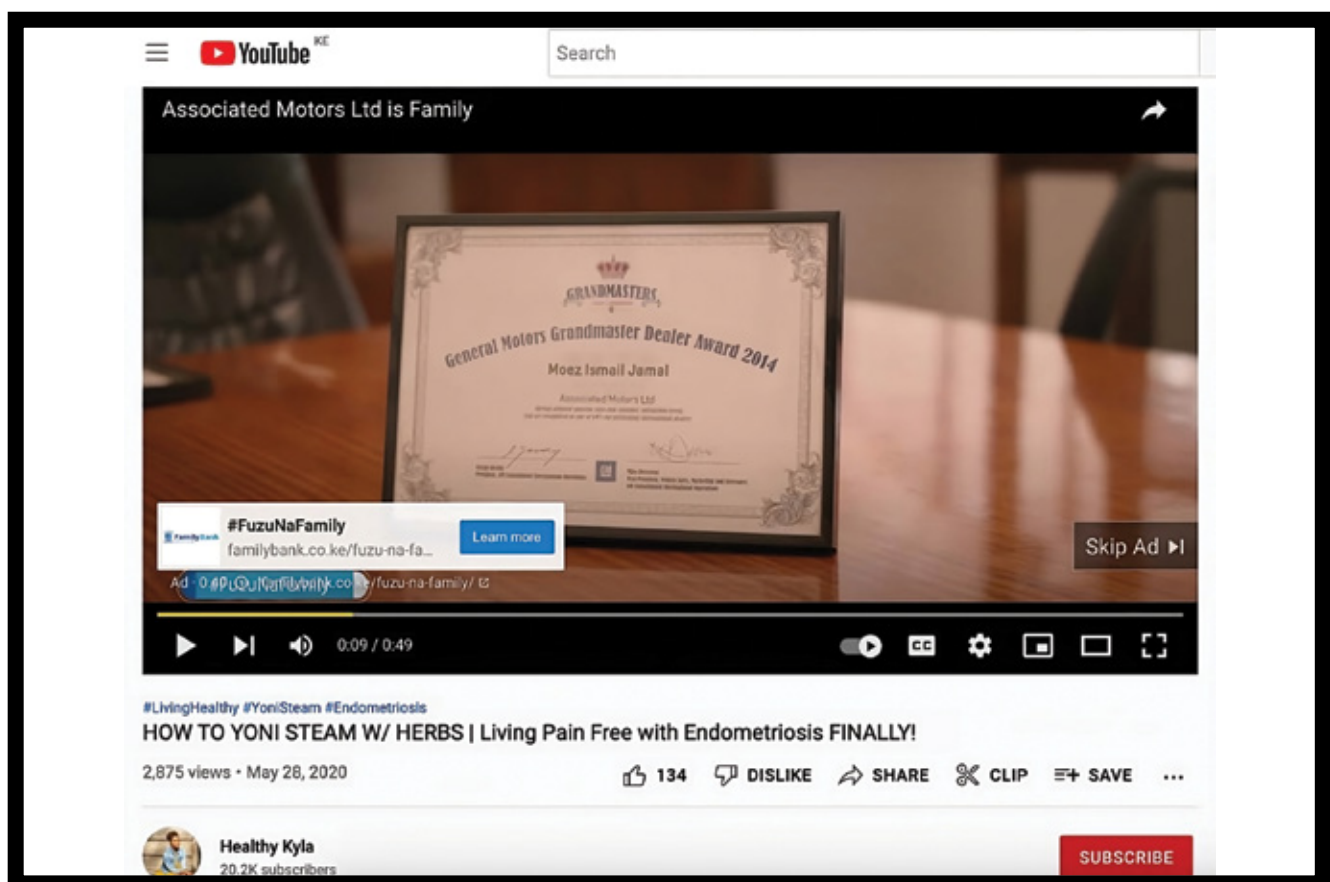


Figure 11: Advertisement running on instructional yoni steaming YouTube video.

In another example, YouTube placed an ad for Grammarly, the editing software, before the video, “At Home Yoni Steam 101 From Start to Finish.” (Figure 12) In the video (which was posted by the channel, “MsTweet”), the content creator claims that yoni steams can alleviate symptoms of premenstrual syndrome, irregular periods, vaginal dryness, and even unblock the fallopian tubes. In the video’s comment section, one individual claims to have PCOS (a hormonal disorder) and says the steam is “the next thing I’m trying.”

YouTube also ran two ads before the video shown below. One ad was for a Nivea “anti dark mark” serum sold on Jumia, a Kenyan online marketplace akin to Amazon, and the other ad was for a non-profit appealing for donations (Figure 13). In the video, the content creator, “The Find Guru,” lists the benefits of yoni steaming and says women who suffer from PCOS, infertility or menopause can benefit. The Find Guru has nearly 800,000 subscribers on YouTube and is a verified account.

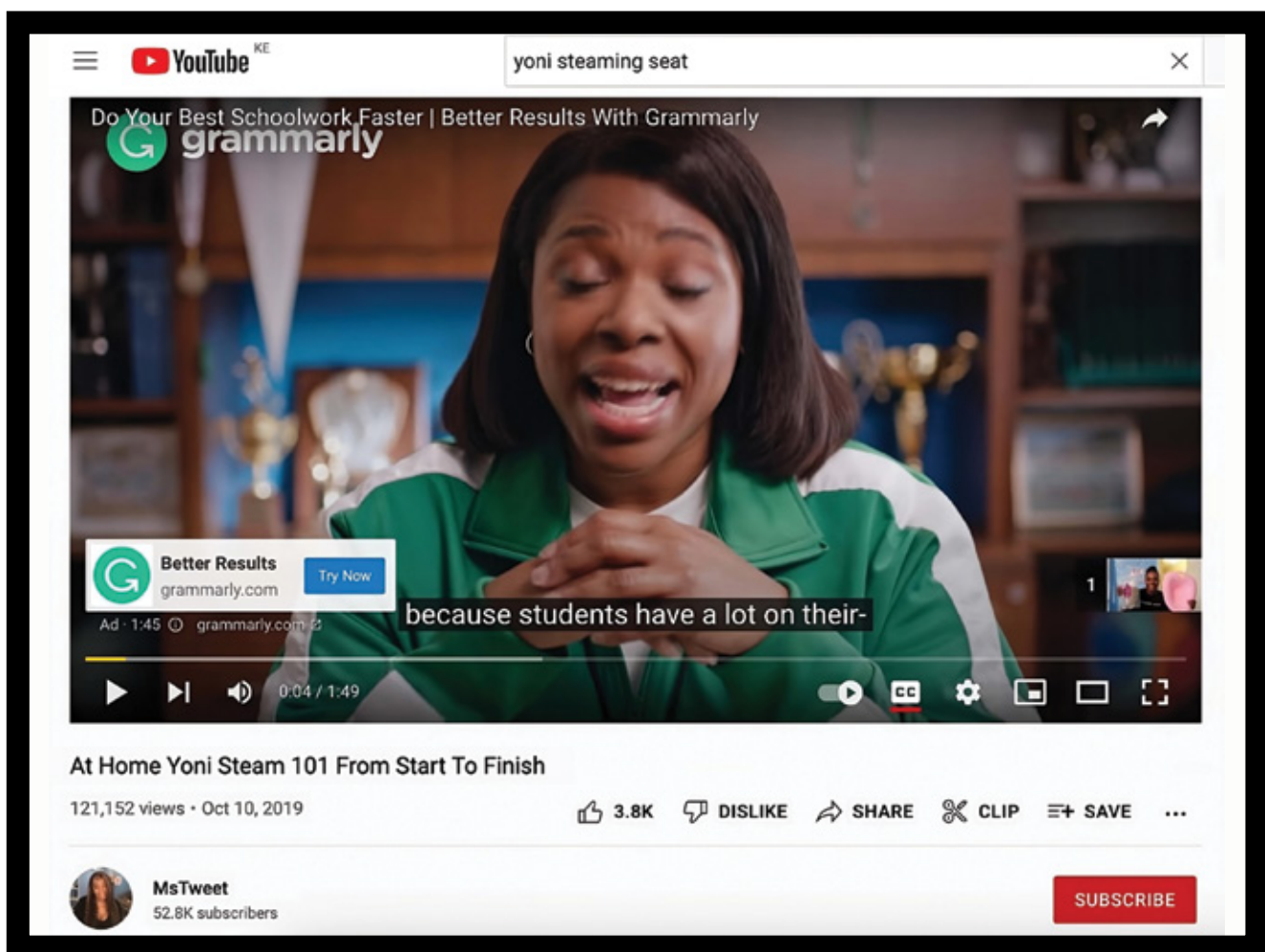


Figure 12: Ad for Grammarly running on yoni steaming YouTube video.

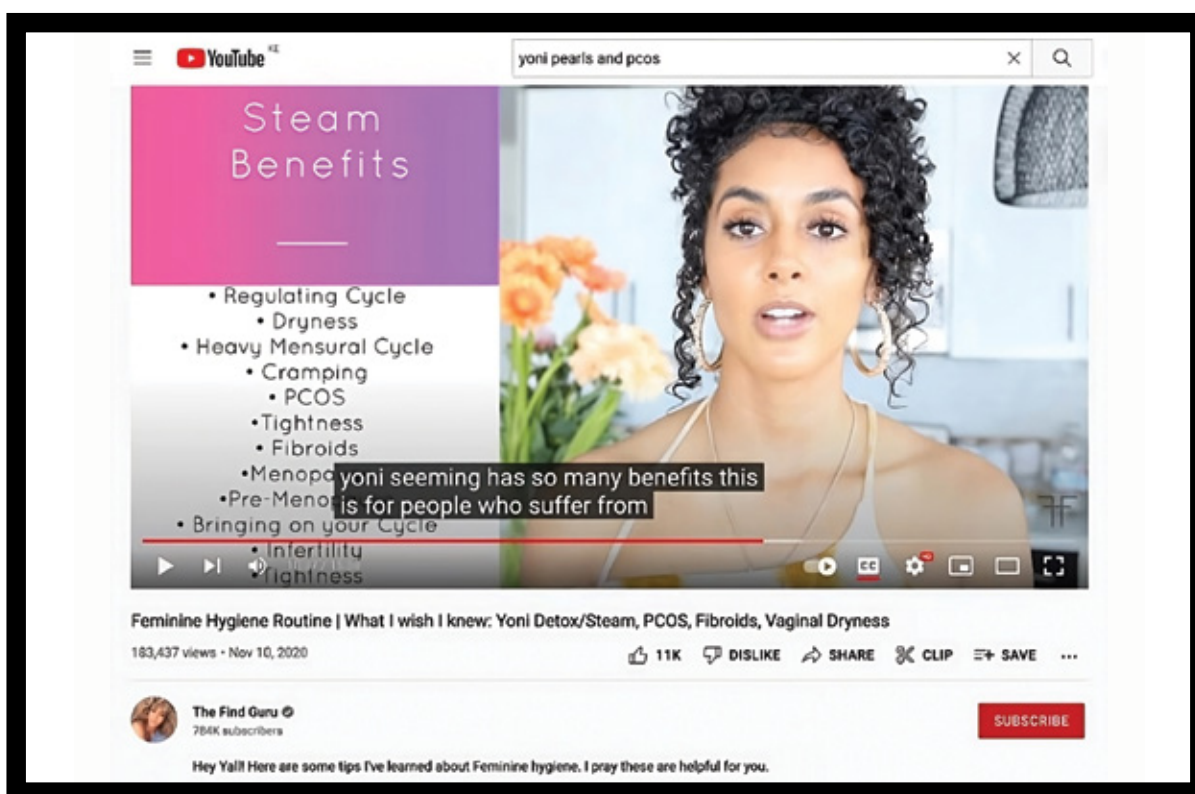
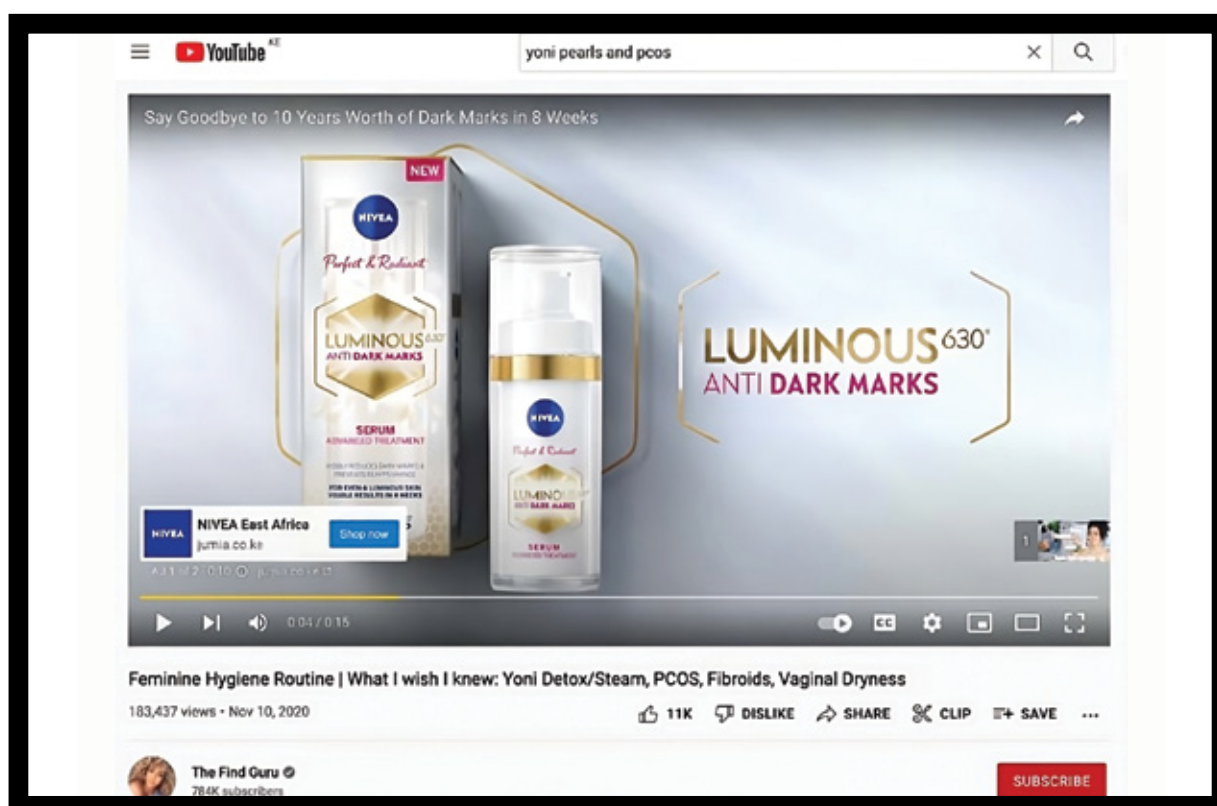


Figure 13: YouTube video that pushes SRH misinformation in a verified YouTube account.



Nivea ad that ran on YouTube SRH misinformation video

Before another video titled “ULTIMATE VAGINA DETOX: YONI PEARL REVIEW. WHAT CAME OUT OF ME + MY EXPERIENCE...OMG?!!!,” YouTube placed another ad for Grammarly. The video’s description reads, “Yoni Pearls are a natural remedy that helps women who suffer from reoccurring yeast infections/bv, painful menstrual cycles, cysts, infertility etc.” During the video, the content creator adds that yoni pearls can also draw out toxins and that there “are a lot of benefits” that come with its use.

Then the creator recounts her own experience, including that she kept one pearl in for 24 hours and replaced it with another pearl that she left in for 48 hours. Leaving objects in the vagina for prolonged periods of time can increase one’s chance of developing toxic shock syndrome, which in some extreme cases can result in death. The video has nearly 700,000 views (Figure 14). When “yoni steaming seat” was searched for on YouTube, an Alibaba ad for a “Yoni Steam” appeared at the top of the search results page (Figure 15).

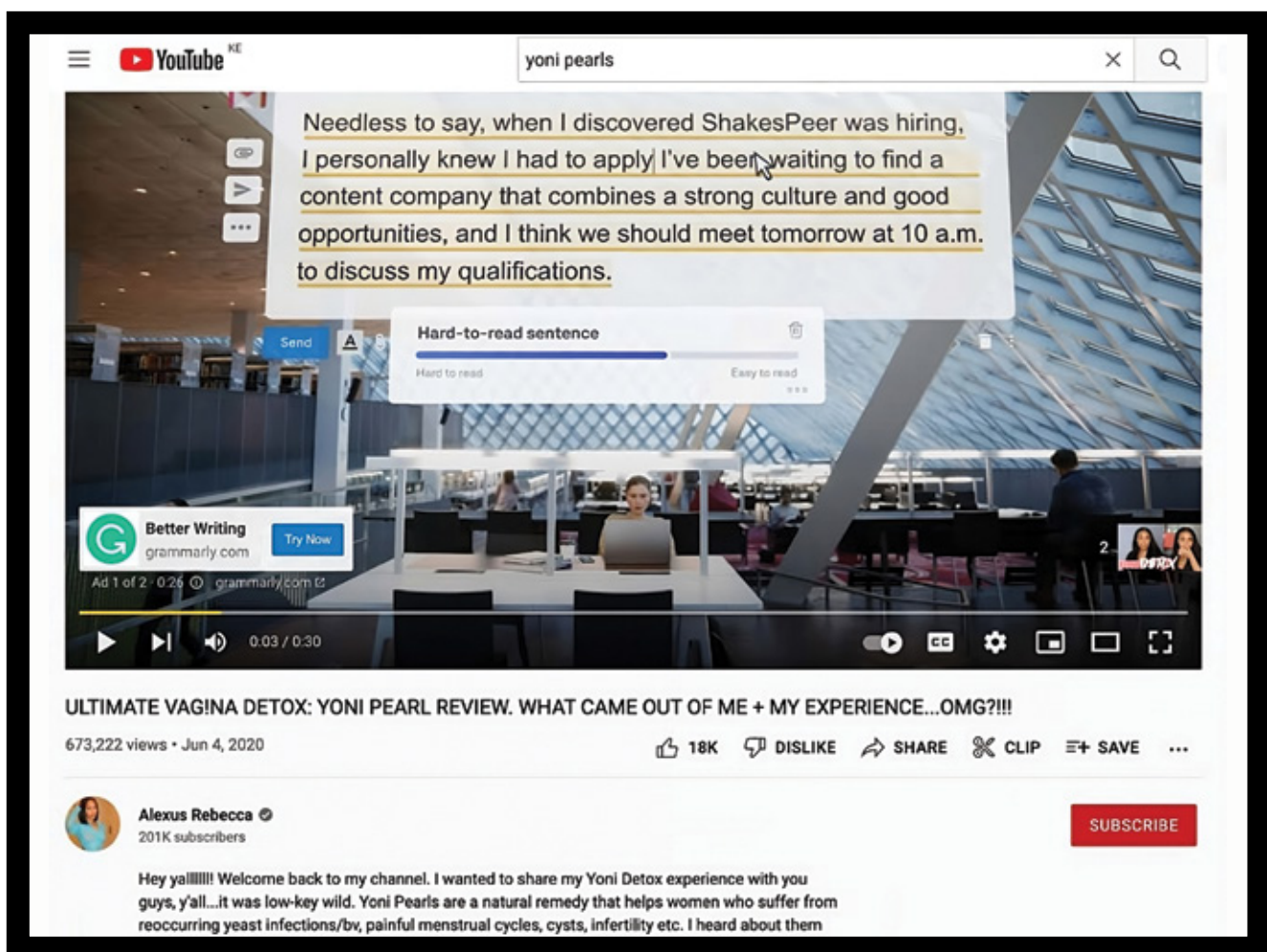


Figure 14: Monetised yoni detox YouTube video with nearly 700,000 views

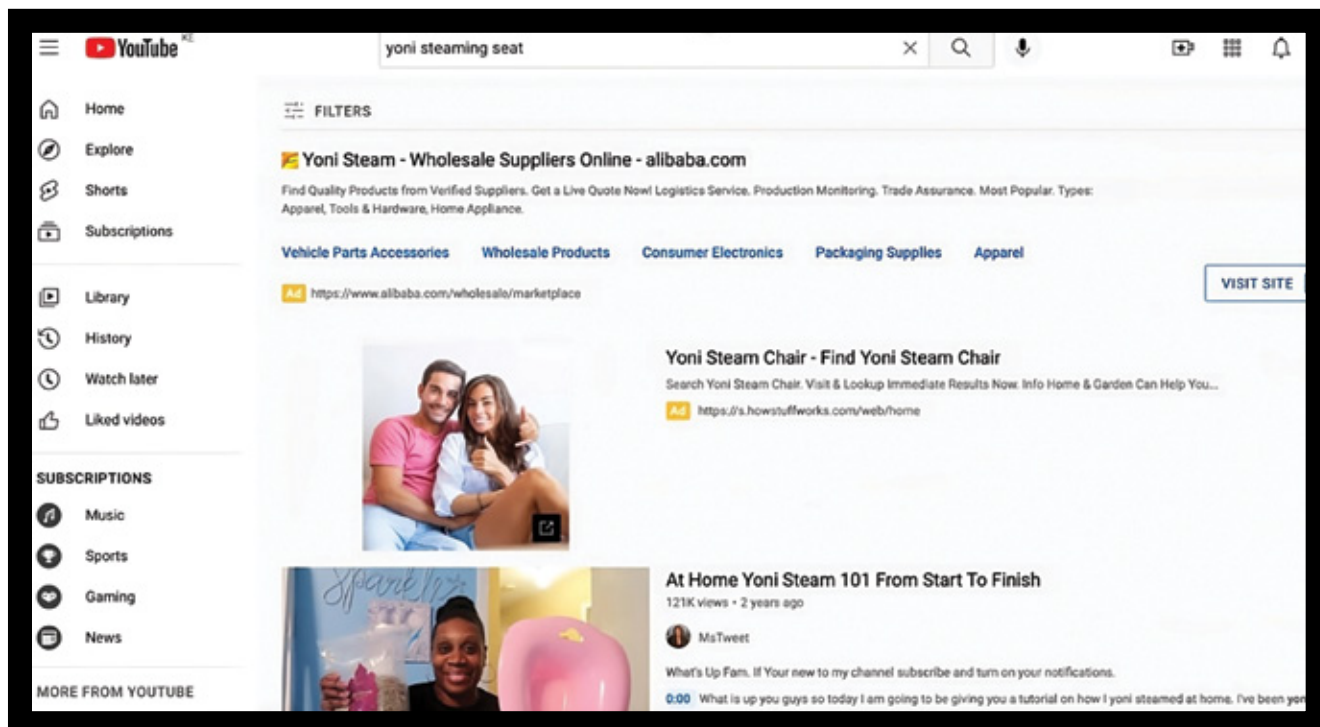


Figure 15: YouTube ads for yoni steaming products in the search results

# Google

🔍 yoni p



🔍 yoni p - Google Search

🔍 yoni pearls

🔍 yoni meaning

🔍 yoni steaming

🔍 yoni candies

🔍 yoni stones

🔍 yoni oil

## Google

The investigation also found that Google has a role in pushing yoni-related misinformation and products via its search engine.

When a user based in Kenya searched Google for “vaginal detox” and “uterus detox,” the search engine surfaced ads for yoni steaming products and yoni pearls at the top of the page. The ads were for sites such as Alibaba, Femme Detox, and other lesser-known retailers (Figure 16). Femme Detox sells “holistic feminine care” products like yoni pearls, vagina perfumes and more<sup>41</sup>.

In the case of the “vaginal detox” search, an article appeared directly under the ads stating that the pearls can be dangerous, but the search for “uterus detox” included no such warning language. Rather, the first result on “uterus detox” was a “featured snippet” from Google that mentions the website Goop condones vaginal steaming<sup>42</sup>. The products listed in the ads varied in price from less than a dollar to over \$200 (Figure 17).

Similarly, a Google search for “buy yoni pearls” returned a top result of a group of ads from retailers selling the pearls (Figure 18).

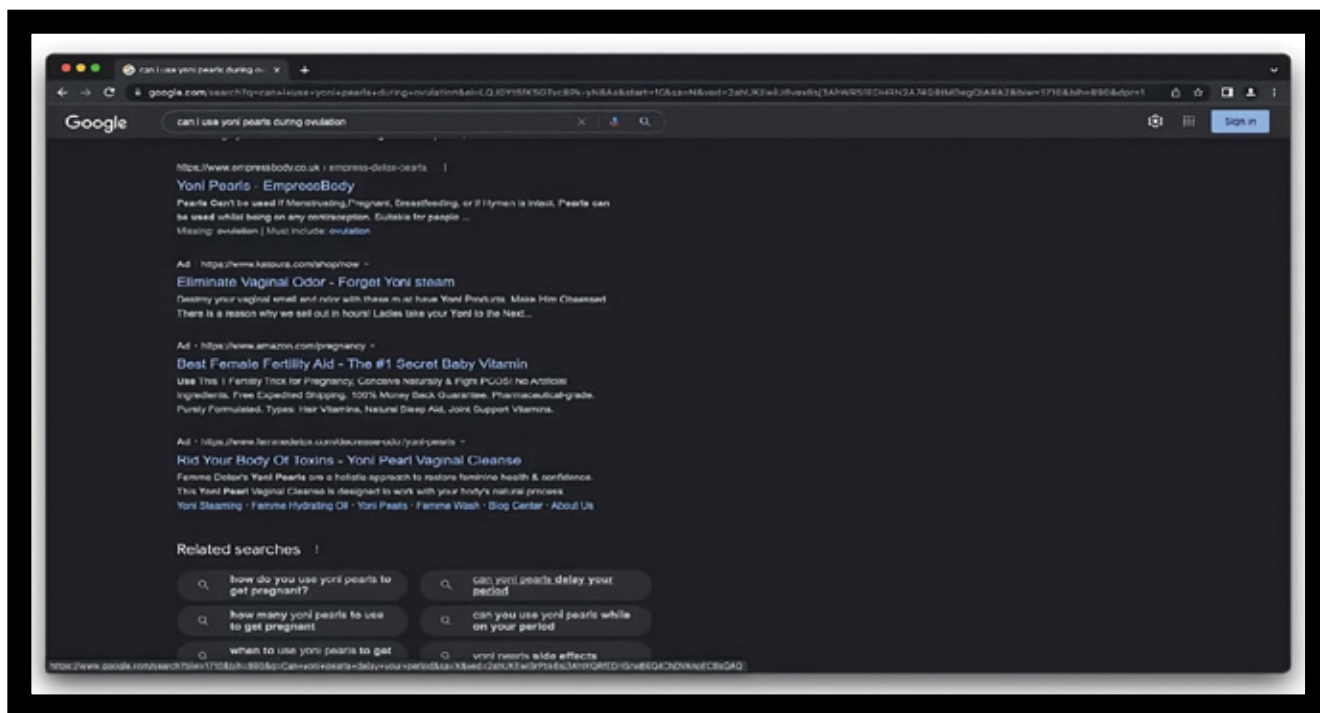


Figure 16: Google search ads for yoni products.

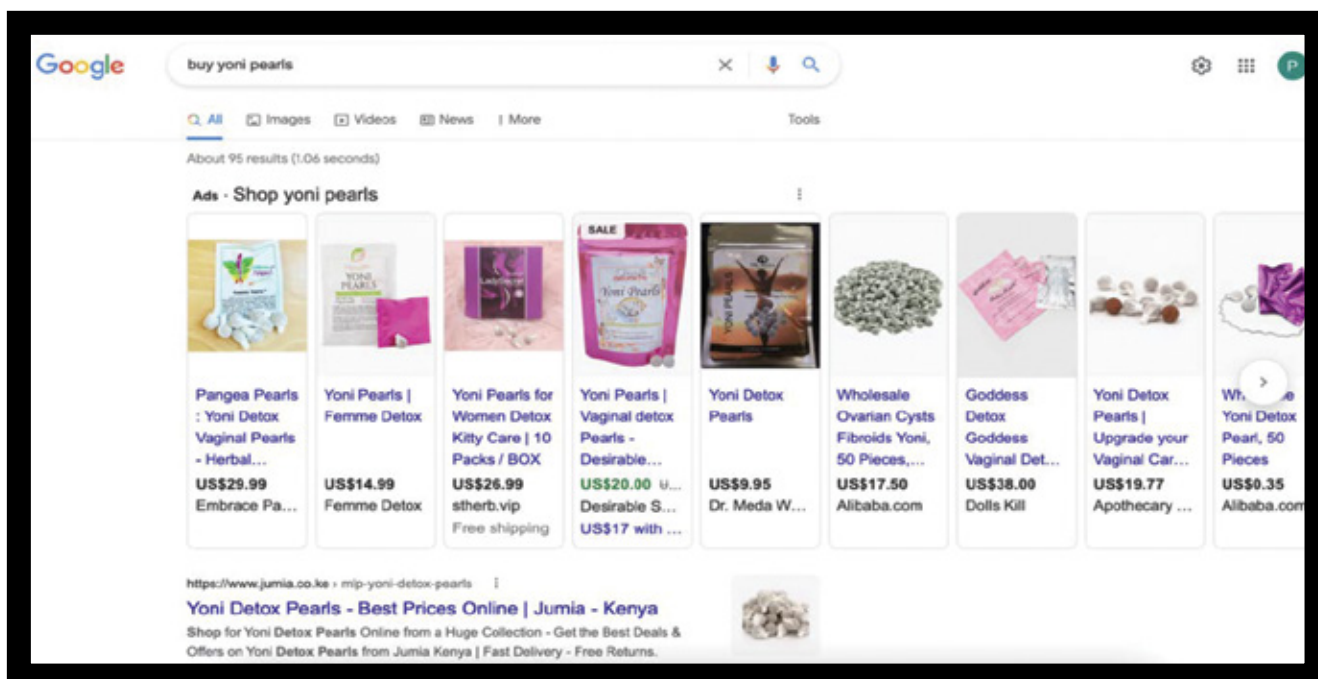


Figure 17: Google search ads enabling users to “shop yoni products.”

When the Kenya user searched Google for “can I use yoni pearls during ovulation,” multiple ads appeared. One of the sponsored results reads, “Rid your body of toxins – Yoni Pearl Vaginal Cleanse,” and said that a yoni pearl is a “holistic approach to restore feminine health and confidence.”

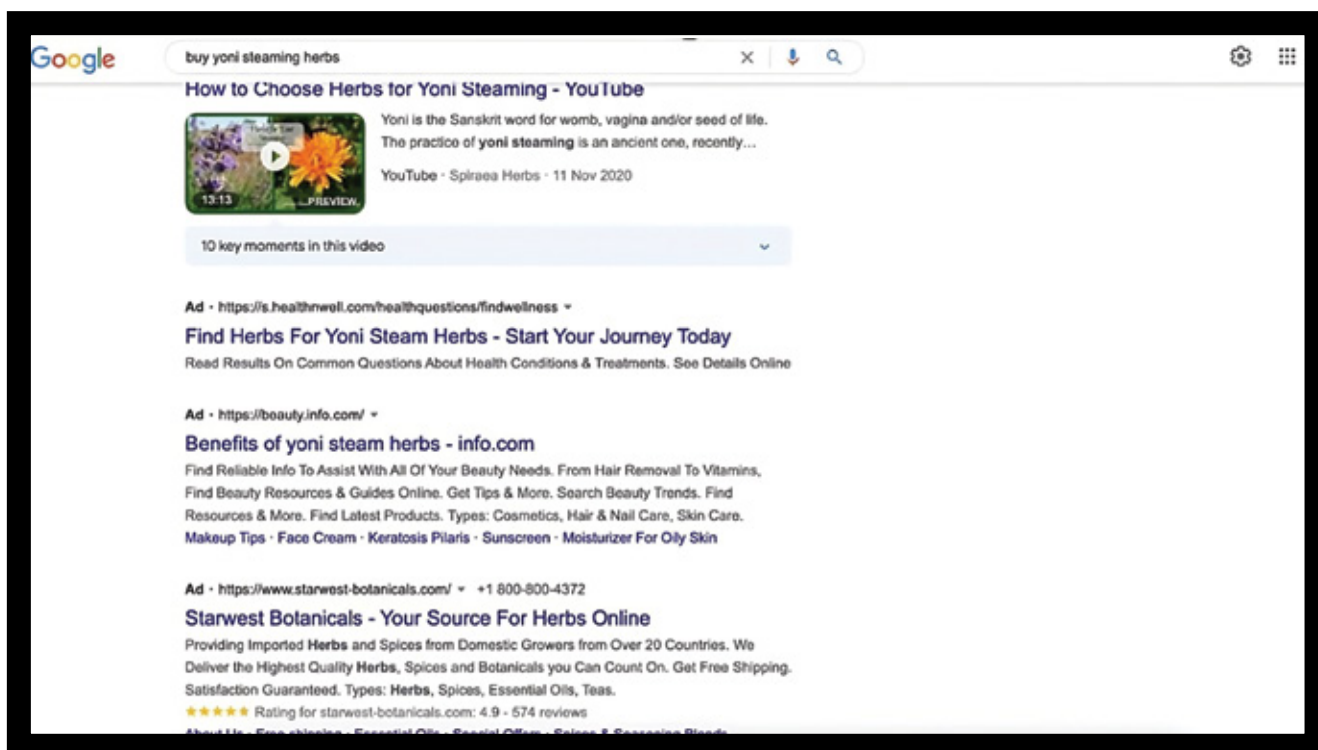
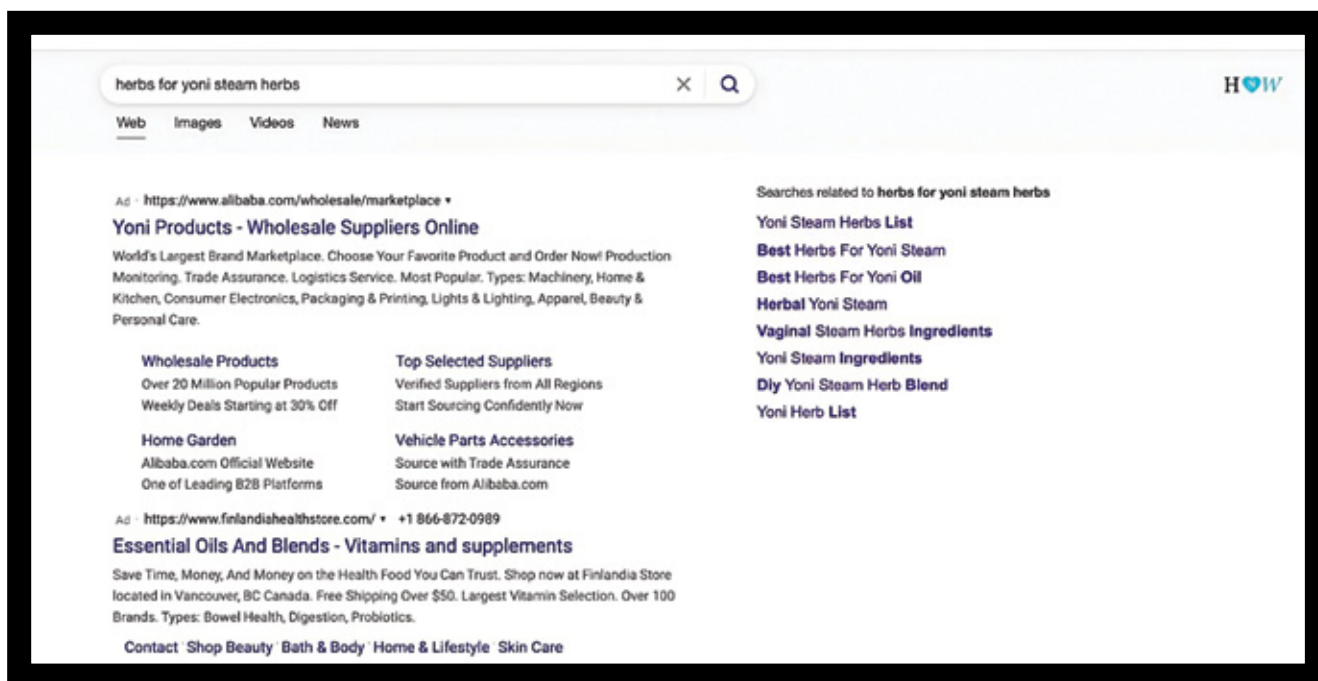


Figure 18: Google search ads for yoni products and herbs



The investigation also came across ads that redirected to low-quality, third-party search engines. For instance, with location set to Kenya, a user Googled “buy yoni steaming herbs,” an ad reading “Find Herbs for Yoni Steam” appeared, and when clicked, it took the user to a search engine called HNW. HNW featured more ads with SRH misinformation, including “Yoni Steam Vaginal Cleansing Device – Life Changing Products” and an Alibaba ad for “Yoni Products.”

Similarly, clicking the Google ad “Benefits of yoni steam herbs” redirected the user to info.com. Some of the info.com search results contained SRH misinformation, including yoni steaming. The site also suggested “cancer treatment” as a related search, giving users the false sense that yoni steaming is, like cancer treatment, a true medical intervention.

The investigation also looked at madura sticks, another piece of the SRH misinformation puzzle. Proponents claim that when the cigar-shaped object is regularly inserted into the vagina, it can tighten the pelvic floor muscles, exfoliate the vagina, and eliminate its odours<sup>43</sup>. But the sticks—which are typically made of an herb medley—have been criticised by the medical community and offer no medical benefits.

When the Kenyan user Googled “madura stick,” one of the top results was an Alibaba ad for a stick product with the phrase “instant virgin” in the name (Figure 19)<sup>44</sup>.

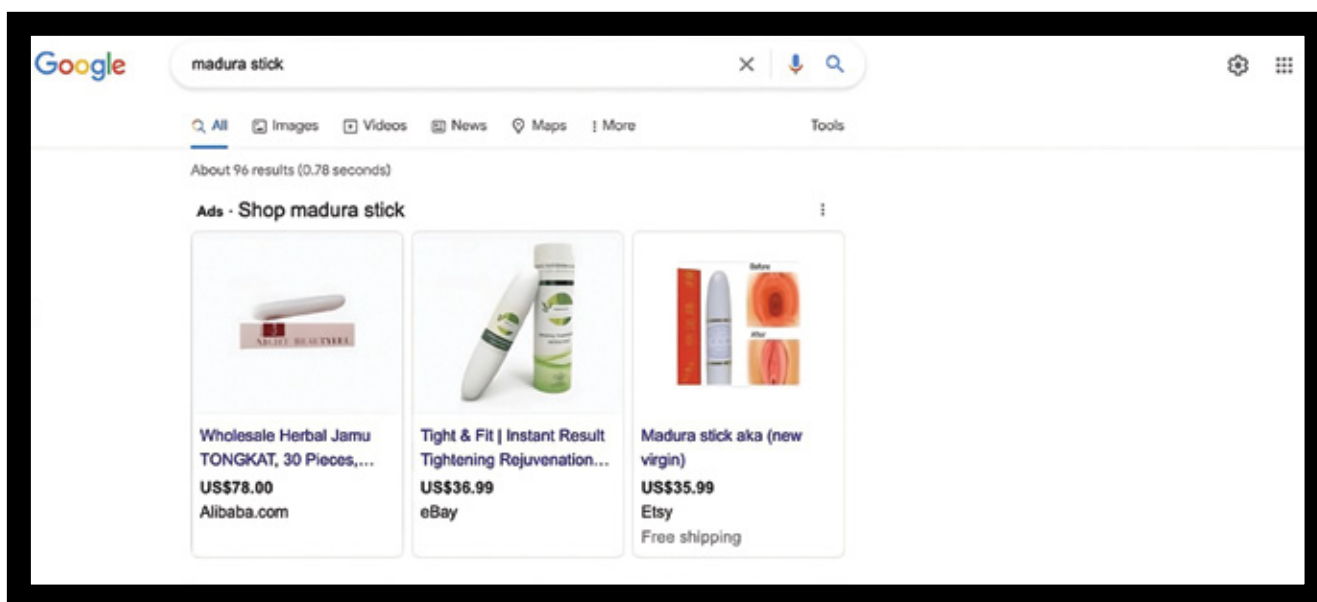


Figure 19: Google ads for madura sticks

## Who is Responsible? A Web of Bad Actors

The investigation revealed a number of local and global actors involved in a network of health misinformation targeted at women, including religiously affiliated medical doctors, and a Chinese herbal company that sells detox products. One commonality between all the actors is a focus on “natural” health treatments as a way of tracking a woman’s menstrual cycle and discouraging medications, contraceptives, vaccines, and other approved medical treatments.

Further investigation is needed to determine the web of interlocking consumer and influencer interests in selling dangerous products. Regardless of who is behind the products, the tools for reaching consumers to advertise and spread misinformation should be placed squarely on social media companies.

## Recommendations

### First Priority: Tech Accountability

The investments of social media companies in policy, safety, and integrity must be determined by the level of risk they pose to public safety and human rights, not just by the commercial value of a particular country or whether they are located in jurisdictions with enforceable regulatory frameworks. There are few incentives for social platforms to address the structural racism and global inequality baked into their system.

One of the main issues with social media platforms operating in Kenya is their lack of adherence to their own rules and lack of transparency. Many stakeholders have expressed frustration with the opaque algorithms that determine what content appears on their feeds. **This lack of transparency makes it difficult for users to understand how their data is being used and who is profiting from it.**

This poor oversight helps explain why harmful health scams and misinformation about reproductive health are being spread and targeted algorithmically at vulnerable populations. The consequences of these actions can be devastating for users who may fall victim to the scams and manipulations targeting women. Yet, social media platforms have been slow to address problems on their platforms, with many Kenyan users feeling that they are not being taken seriously.

***Did You Know:** In 2022 Global Witness conducted an **investigation** which found that despite the risk of violence surrounding the general election, Facebook failed to detect advertisements that were spewing hate speech ads against Facebook's own Community Standards, in English and Swahili. Much of the content was dehumanising, comparing specific tribal groups to animals, calling for rape, slaughter, and beheading.*

Big Tech companies should adopt voluntary codes of conduct and industry standards to address online harms, but they have not. The era of self-regulation has proven a failure. US-based companies like Meta and Google should actively work to identify and remove harmful content, invest in content moderation technologies, and improve transparency in their moderation processes. Yet, they are not.

Even prior to addressing content moderation flaws, the platforms need to fix algorithms that promote the most incendiary and hateful content for profit. Algorithms are nothing more than “coded opinions” wired into the platform, just like a news editor at a newspaper or a TV producer. These choices do not have to be in conflict with safety, yet they are.

***Did You Know:** In 2022, The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) released a two-year **investigation** into the online media ecosystem of Al-Shababb and the Islamic State in Africa and revealed that Facebook was enabling the most active, multilingual network ecosystem for Al-Shabab and the Islamic State. Their **pages and profiles** shared terrorist content openly and was a clear violation of the platform's community guidelines, but also points to language moderation blind spots.*

### **How can this be achieved?**

Strengthening accountability of Big Tech for online harms in Kenya requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders. Here are some key efforts that can contribute to this goal and should be seriously considered as Kenya matures its approach to oversight of extractive tech companies through digital platforms.

#### **Methods for Curtailing Online Scams - Tier 1 Priorities**

- New Rules of the Game, Regulation
- Greater Data Protection and Privacy
- Fix the Algorithms and Address Linguistic Equity in content moderation
- Litigation to hold Big Tech Corporations Accountable

## New Rules of the Game are Needed: Safety Standards Enforced Through Regulation

Self-regulation may be convenient for the platforms, but is failing society. In the current system, there are few incentives for platforms to address the structural problems highlighted throughout this report. Big Tech companies and how they operate outside of the West are consistently driven by public perception, business risk, the threat of regulation, and the spectacle of public relation crisis comms. That is why platforms are quick to remove harmful accounts in the US or meet data regulations in the EU, but don't show the same attention when dealing with health disinformation in Kenya, or adhering to the country's incitement of violence laws.

*Did you know? Public opinion research conducted by TIFA in 2023 indicates that 74% of Kenyans say that social media companies should be more regulated than they are right now, which is 4% higher than 2022. The demand is only increasing, despite the false promises of platforms.*

With the input of civil society, the expert community, and in consideration of Kenyan citizen's interest in having access to a safer social media experience, the government should develop and enforce safety standards and regulations that hold Big Tech companies accountable for online harms.

While standards and regulations need to be tailored to also balance the interests of society, government regulation can be an effective tool in holding Big Tech companies accountable for online harms. Initiatives should be targeted to address issues like online scams, privacy violations, and preventing the spread of harmful content. Clear guidelines and standards should be established, outlining the responsibilities of platforms, transparency from social media companies operating in Kenya and consequences for non-compliance.

*Did you know? A Council for Responsible Social Media was formed in Kenya recently bringing together eminent leaders from different sectors of Kenyan society—from CSOs, data and tech, peace and security, governance, business, health and the media—who are shaping the conversation on Big Tech harms in Kenya so that platforms are held accountable. The aim is to minimise online harms and make platforms safer for all while ensuring the protection of freedom of expression online.*

**Greater Data Protection and Privacy for Kenya:** Strengthening data protection and privacy regulations is essential to holding digital platforms accountable. Clear rules on data collection, storage, and sharing should be established, ensuring that users have control over their personal information. Effective mechanisms for reporting and addressing data breaches should be in place.

*Did you know? Public opinion research conducted by TIFA in 2022 indicates Kenyans have a generally positive view of social media, yet they are very concerned about being scammed online. This is a dominant concern among men and the younger generation in particular. Kenyans express serious concern about social media's harmful effects on society, with 46% of people reporting that they have been scammed or conned through social media. Scams regarding jobs are also a common form of disinformation on social media. Kenyans also report being conned through the sale of unapproved and unregulated health or cosmetic products, which can be dangerous.*

### **Fix the Algorithms and Address Linguistic Equity in Content Moderation:**

Platform moderation and policies guiding AI regulation are enabling neo-colonial cultural and political interference in digital spaces. Tech companies should establish a policy or set of requirements aimed at protecting users' rights, privacy, and non-discrimination in both the development and use of algorithmic systems, creating more transparency about how the algorithms work, use of machine learning, and other technologies to automate, optimise, and/or personalise use of their platforms. Platforms provide no transparency about the role of algorithms in protecting users against harm. Facebook's recommendation algorithm in particular, which offers users suggestions on

groups people might want to join, has attracted great concern due to its propensity for driving users to groups with extremist ideologies<sup>45</sup>.

US tech companies prioritise content moderation in English but are woefully understaffed and underserved when it comes to vetting disinformation in the world's other languages. Companies should be required to hire adequate numbers of content moderators and staff for every language in which they provide services in Kenya. Regulators in Kenya need more transparency about the numbers of people hired, and in addition to numbers, the quality of the training and preparedness for the content moderators. Moderators should come with culturally appropriate expertise, not something that companies can automate. On a basic level, social media companies should fully translate all of their policies into all the languages in which they operate, which they do not currently do.

*Did you know? Daniel Motaung, who worked as a content moderator in Nairobi, is suing Sama, Facebook's main outsourcing contractor in East Africa. Mr Motaung has spoken publicly about the lack of support given to moderators and the hazards to their mental health. His attempts to form a union, in order to negotiate for better terms and conditions were squashed. A year later, the first union of its kind on the continent for African content moderators was formed.*

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## **Litigation to hold Big Tech Corporations**

**Accountable:** As a result of ground-breaking revelations regarding the failure of Facebook's content moderation covering all of East Africa, as well as violations of labour laws and human rights, a lawsuit was filed in the Kenyan court in December 2022. Other lawsuits have followed, such as one against Facebook for war atrocities in Ethiopia. Facebook has since faced a barrage of criticism from stakeholders around the world, as well as human rights activists and other organisations. The cases could have a far-reaching effect on how social media platforms are regulated, and how they are held accountable for their actions.

This case is unique in that it highlights the strength of the Kenyan courts and their rule of law. It is very important for judges to be familiar with digital environments and trained on Big Tech accountability mechanisms and the gold standard laws that are in place in other jurisdictions, as there will likely be more cases like this in the future. The result of this case could set a precedent for future cases involving social media platforms. It is a momentous moment for Kenya and its judicial system.

### **(BOXED) Public Support for More Platform Accountability**

Through nationwide polling and focus groups, Kenyans report expressing serious concerns about the way social media contributes to creating harm

for Kenyans. There is a strong appetite for more information about how the system works and a desire for solutions from a variety of stakeholders (government, social media companies, and citizens). Overall, Kenyans have experienced and are sensitive to certain online harms such as getting conned online, job scams, graphic content circulating, the impact on children, damage to health, and gender-based attacks. Women identify social media harms with respect to reproductive health issues and report being exposed to more disinformation on this topic.

Overwhelmingly, Kenyans do not believe that the social media platforms are doing enough to protect consumers and citizens from harm. They do not think the platforms alone will protect them without reasonable government intervention because intervention will cut their profits. But they do not want government overreach.

### ***Methods for Curtailing Online Scams - Tier 2***

- ***Capacity Building of Government, Civil Society, Medical Community and Citizens***
- ***Collaboration with Civil Society***
- ***International Tech Regulation Coordination***
- ***Research and Innovation***
- ***Understanding the Impact of Online and Offline Harms***
- ***Traditional and Natural***
- ***Consumer Education***
- ***Journalists and Media Outlets***
- ***Continental Codes***
- ***Consumer Regulation for Online Marketplaces***

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## Secondary Interventions

**Capacity Building:** Governments, civil society organisations, the medical community, and individuals in Kenya need support to enhance their capacity to address online harms. This includes training law enforcement agencies, judges, and other relevant stakeholders in digital investigations and legal frameworks. Raising awareness among citizens about online risks is also crucial.

**Collaboration with Civil Society:** Engaging civil society organisations, human rights groups, and academia can bring diverse perspectives to the table and ensure that the dimensions of gender and the way women are targeted are taken into account. They can advocate for policy changes, monitor the implementation of regulations, and provide valuable insights on emerging challenges.

### (Boxed)

The Council for Responsible Social Media is a nonpartisan group of concerned citizens, eminent Kenyans and civil society organisations working together to ensure the protection, safety and dignity of social media users in Kenya through among other pathways, holding Big Tech accountable. The Council holds Big Tech accountable through continually providing data and evidence of online harms, surfacing policy and regulatory gaps that allow for the proliferation of these harms, raising awareness among users on

the nature, spread and impact of online harms and providing recommendations on how Big Tech business models can adhere to standards of fairness and non-discrimination, ensuring just outcomes among their varied users.

## International Tech Regulation

**Coordination:** Encouraging global discussions and frameworks for tech governance can help shape policies that transcend national boundaries. Platforms should be accountable not only to individual countries but also to international standards that promote human rights, democratic values, and responsible business practices.

**Research and Innovation:** Investment in contextual research and innovation can help identify emerging online harms and scam products and develop effective solutions to prevent this. Funding research initiatives focused on understanding the impact of technology on society and finding ways to mitigate online harms is crucial, as well as understanding the bad actors and their commercial or, in some cases, ideological motivations for manipulating health information online.

## Understanding the Impact of Online and

**Offline Harms:** Invest in research to understand the offline harms caused by online health scams and develop effective solutions.

This research can be used to develop public policies and regulations that protect consumers from fraudulent schemes.

**Be Nuanced - Traditional and Natural:**

It is important to be clear about the distinction between traditional African medicine and harmful SRH products or scams. Traditional African medicine is a rich and complex system of holistic healing that has been practised for centuries. It is rooted in ancient traditions and beliefs and is based on natural remedies and spiritual practices. On the other hand, SRH scams are fraudulent schemes that take advantage of vulnerable individuals by offering false promises of cures or treatments (that might also be natural) for which platforms have strict guidelines for. It is essential to make this distinction clear to ensure that people are not misled or deceived.

**Consumer Education:** Even though SRH scams are a serious issue and should be addressed, we do not wish to shame women who may want to seek out scam SRH products. Many women turn to these products to improve their health and wellbeing for sexual and reproductive health concerns that are often under researched and invested in, and it is important to ensure that they have access to accurate and reliable information about them.

This can be done by providing educational resources and support networks to help women

make informed decisions about their SRH needs.

**Journalists and Media Outlets:** Increase the capacity to look more deeply at online harms that are less about speech issues, and more about malign behaviour of bad actors. News stories around social media are increasingly sponsored by the tech companies themselves, which reduces the independence and reduces the focus on the role of Big Tech. Media could be organising more news panels and trigger editorial projects designed to shed light on the public health and social benefits of fact-based SRH, destigmatizing women's sexual health, and the Big Tech conditions that are enabling the targeting and sale of unapproved products in Kenya.

**Regional Codes:** Consider developing codes of conduct at a regional level or anchored within established bodies, such as the African Union, for digital marketplaces. These codes should include standards for product safety, disclosure, and advertising. Additionally, they should also provide guidance on how to identify and report fraudulent activity related to scams and transparency from the platforms on reports and actions taken. By establishing these codes of conduct, it will help create a safer marketplace for individuals to purchase SRH products and services and ensure that bad actors are held accountable for their actions.

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Consumer Regulation for Online Marketplaces: The Communications Authority of Kenya could develop standards for product safety, disclosures, and advertising in online marketplaces. Establishing these regulations can help create a safer marketplace for individuals to purchase SRH products and services, while also protecting them from fraudulent schemes. It is also important to ensure that these regulations are enforced.

**(Boxed) Gender and Consumer Protection:  
A Closer Look at Consumer Regulation**

There are many examples from Africa and Southeast Asia where regulatory responses and consumer protection agencies have curtailed dangerous products targeted at women. Here are a few examples:

**Lead-based cosmetics:** In countries like India, Nigeria, and Ghana, regulatory bodies have taken action against the use of lead-based cosmetics, which are harmful to women's health. These agencies have implemented regulations, conducted inspections, and seized and banned products containing high levels of lead.

**Counterfeit pharmaceuticals:** Regulatory responses and consumer protection agencies in countries across the Global South have targeted the issue of counterfeit pharmaceuticals, including those specifically marketed towards women's health issues.

These agencies aim to prevent the distribution of substandard and potentially dangerous medications through increased inspections, stricter regulations, and public awareness campaigns.

**Unsafe reproductive health products:**

Consumer protection agencies and regulatory bodies in various countries have taken steps to address the safety of reproductive health products targeting women, such as contraceptive devices. They work to ensure these products are safe, effective, and properly labelled to protect women's health.

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## Conclusion

The use of scam products like Yoni Pearls has gained some visibility in recent years, particularly through online platforms and social media. Yoni Pearls are marketed as vaginal detox products that claim to cleanse, detoxify, and improve the health of the vagina. These claims are not supported by scientific evidence, and many medical professionals caution against using such products. The viral nature of social media and the reach of online platforms have amplified the visibility of such products.

Social media platforms have become a ubiquitous part of our daily lives, connecting us with people all over the world. However, the impact of these platforms has been unevenly distributed, with those outside of the US or EU often being left behind, not by choice but by design. In Kenya, digital platforms have been exposed for their inadequate approach to accountability and user protection.

Kenyans do not have to be victims. There are reasonable steps forward in order to bring product safety into the online ecosystem. To strengthen accountability of social media companies in Kenya and address online harms, several key recommendations should be implemented. Firstly, there is a need for new rules and regulations enforced by the government to ensure safety standards are upheld and platforms are held accountable for their actions.

This should be accompanied by greater data protection and privacy regulations, empowering users to have control over their personal information and establishing mechanisms to report and address data breaches. Additionally, efforts should be made to fix algorithms and promote linguistic equity in content moderation, addressing the spread of harmful content and the targeting of vulnerable populations. Litigation can also play a role in holding Big Tech corporations accountable, as seen in recent lawsuits filed against Facebook.

Other interventions include capacity building, collaboration with civil society, international tech regulation coordination, research and innovation, understanding the impact of online and offline harms, consumer education, engagement with journalists and media outlets, and the development of regional codes and consumer regulations for online marketplaces. These comprehensive efforts involving various stakeholders can contribute to curbing online scams, protecting users, and fostering a safer social media experience in Kenya.

## About Fumbua

Fumbua is a collective of media and media-related organisations committed to countering mis/dis-information through collaboration, debunking, training, amplification, and advocacy. It was launched to tackle electoral mis/dis-information during the Kenyan 2022 General elections. The next phase of our work against mis/dis-information goes beyond elections and looks into the financial and social impact of mis/dis-information. Our partners work collaboratively to promote responsible and ethical journalism through media literacy activities, ultimately improving the quality of information consumed by the public.

[www.fumbua.ke](http://www.fumbua.ke)



## Acknowledgements

Research support for this investigation and analysis of gender-based online harms aimed to undermine Sexual, Reproductive Health, was provided by #ShePersisted, a global initiative dedicated to tackling gendered disinformation and online abuse, documenting the role technology and social media companies play in amplifying attacks against women. #ShePersisted supports women leaders as they navigate disinformation online while advocating for better digital platform standards.

[www.She-Persisted.org](http://www.She-Persisted.org)



## About RHNK

Insights into misinformation around Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in the context of Kenya was provided by Reproductive Health Network Kenya (RHNK) is a network of over 500 trained healthcare providers who include gynecologists, doctors, nurses, midwives and clinical officers in 43 out of the 47 counties in Kenya and are committed to provision of comprehensive SRHR to All through strategic partnerships, collaborations and advocacy. RHNK also has a network of over 200 young people in all their diversity who are centered in the organizational structure providing leadership, programming and meaningful engagement of the adolescent and youth in its work. The vision of RHNK is to create "a healthy society with comprehensive reproductive health rights and services." The mission of RHNK is "to provide evidence-based information and quality comprehensive reproductive health services in Kenya through strategic partnerships and capacity building." RHNK's strategic plan for 2022-2027 seeks to expand and address six areas of focus which include; service delivery, advocacy, adolescent and youth engagement, evidence and research, movement building and gender equality at the workplace. This five-year plan positions RHNK as a strategic leader for building a locally owned intersectional movement with global allies while creating an enabling SRHR ecosystem for women, girls and vulnerable populations to access improved comprehensive SRHR in Kenya.

[www.rhnk.org](http://www.rhnk.org)



**Reproductive Health Network Kenya**

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## Endnotes

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/kenya/why/default.htm>
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