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The Radio Programming and the Youth Preference in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the contents covered by FM stations in Nairobi and how the youth evaluate the preferred content. This study serves as a guide and a source of information to radio stations broadcasting for young people or organization that anticipate producing radio programs for the youth. The researcher used the descriptive survey method. This study looks at youth listenership in Nairobi because Nairobi has the biggest number of FM stations and therefore has the largest number of FM listeners. The youth in Nairobi are more exposed and outgoing and have better access to radios than elsewhere. The tool for data collection was the questionnaire, which contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The researcher selected 200 youths from day secondary schools in Nairobi to take part in the study. A research assistant helped in the administering of the questionnaires. The study revealed that youth tune to FM stations mainly for entertainment, news and information on issues affecting them. The study also revealed that peer influence is the leading factor influencing content preference among youth radio listeners. Other factors are personal identity and the need to escape from boredom among others. The study recommendations ways of incorporating music, talk shows, news and educational programs in the program schedule of youth programs. It also recommended identifying the various needs of youth and laying out strategies on how best to meet them.

Keywords: Radio programming, FM Stations.

INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore the contents covered by FM stations in Nairobi and how the youth evaluate the preferred content. The target group is youths aged between 15 and 18 years, which is basically found in public and private secondary schools in Nairobi province. The typical radio audience was thought to be a tired, bored, middle-aged man or woman whose life is empty and who has exhausted all his or her sources of outside amusement [1]. This is probably what many middle and upper class youth in Kenya thought of radio before 1996. Before this time, Kenya had only one radio station, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), which many of the urban youth did not consider a station worth listening to. This had a lot to do with the content of the programs, which until competition from other radio stations came in, was only aimed at promoting national development and consolidating nation unity [2]. Suffice it to say, the station never appealed to the youthful audience that is always after entertainment and popular music. However, following the liberalization of the airwaves in Kenya, various FM radio stations have been established and many people including youth are turning to radio as a source of delight and entertainment for their barren lives [3].

Currently, there are over 46 FM private FM broadcasters with over 145 FM stations countrywide.

Majority of the private owned stations are commercial oriented, while others are religious or community based. There is evidence of an increase in the number of FM stations with more broadcasting licenses having been given out in the recent years.

Today, the youth who previously relied on television music and videos have found significant source of entertainment in FM radio. A 2010 media survey done by Research International showed that radio is the most widely used medium. In the earlier years of FM, Capital FM had the most up-market audience of the stations in Kenya. According to the research, Capital and Metro FM were considered the favorite of 59% of the respondents. The statistics and the audiences were expected to grow as more radio stations join the market as in other countries. The youth comprise over 50% of Kenya's population, forming a very important radio audience in the country. These youth have divergent needs, making them a fertile ground for FM stations [4]. In their quest to meet these needs, the FM stations have engaged themselves in a number of activities with an aim of being at the top in the FM market.

The youth audience is dynamic and impressionistic and it is part of the society that is highly vibrant. Their loyalty often shifts from station

to station based on certain preferences and choice. Driven by their divergent needs, the youth switch from one station to another with hope that their interaction with media contents will lead to certain gratifications [5]. At the ages of 15-18, young people experience a lot of physical, emotional, psychological and social changes. They are consumed with the desire to know who they are, they want to associate with other people, yearn for freedom and so on. For those who are ardent radio listeners, their radio listening habits change to a large extend with their loyalty to particular stations becoming quite slippery, a problem that has been aggravated by the mushrooming of FM radio stations [6]. This habit of switching poses a great challenge to FM radio stations whose survival in the market highly depends on their listenership.

In their broadcast, the stations target the youth by addressing issues affecting them, with a hope that once they succeed, they will have won the majority of the listening population, which automatically earns them an upper hand. In the FM market the media have to sustain youth listenership and, therefore, they have to closely monitor and adapt to the new trends that influence youth listenership [7]. They have to shift with the times in terms of form or style of entertainment in order to survive in the highly competitive FM environment. Furthermore, they have to observe relevance. People only attend information that is helpful to them; that meets their needs. The youths needs, range from cognitive needs, diversion needs, affective needs, identity needs hi social integrative needs. The greatest challenge however, is how to keep or sustain this highly dynamic and impressionistic audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the launching of the first FM station in Kenya in 1996, more FM stations have come up. Today we have over 60 FM private broadcasters with 145 FM stations countrywide. All these stations are competing for the Kenyan listenership and especially youth who comprise half of the Kenyan population[8]. To be at the top in the FM market, the stations engage in many activities and tactics. Easy FM for instance aims at meeting the entertainment needs of its listeners. Initially called “Nation FM”, the changing of its name to “Easy FM” may have a lot to do with competition in FM market. Capital FM aims at meeting the needs of its listeners and observing relevance by addressing issues that affect the youth. Targeting young people, it organizes for school and college visits to talk to youths and music concerts where young people participate actively, making them identify with the station [9]. Apart from giving offers to its ardent listeners, it has also met more airtime to youth programs.

KBC likewise has apportioned 40% of the total FM airtime to youth programming and allowing youth

to participate in production [10]. In an attempt to meet their ever changing needs, recently, House of Reggae was launched after discovering that the youth audience is fond of this type music. Like other stations, it also tackles issues affecting the youth in the present times and ties credible professionals and people who share their life experiences, people whom young people can safely emulate. For Radio Citizen, its device has been to address issues that other stations shy away from: cases like developments in the political arena using a confrontational approach, poor governance, corruption among others. It has also moved closer to the ”citizens” by introducing vernacular cons. To popularize the station, they have also been conducting road shows to various regions of Kenya [11].

It also has youth programs which address issues affecting young people in the present times and religion has been used as a tool to persuade masses and influence behavior. Perhaps this could explain the emerging of religious FM stations in the recent past. We have FM stations for major religions including Christian FM stations among others Hope FM, IQRA FM for Muslims and East FM for Hindus [12].

This study sought to study the contents covered by FM stations in Nairobi and how the youth evaluate the preferred content. Particular reference is to youth sensational stations like Hope FM. The society views the youth as inexperienced and unable to make informed decisions which inevitably leads them into error. But other people consider the youth to enjoy something of privileged existence, unconstrained by the strictures of a working routine and spared the economic worries of adult life[13]. This only gives them more time to interact with the media. As they spend more and more time watching television and listening to radio, they begin to tune in to the channels and listen to programs that give them certain gratifications. This in turn begins to Shape their attitudes and behavior [14]. Hope FM was founded in 2003 with the primary objective of evangelization using radio as a tool of communication.

The choice of using radio to reach out to people is with a realization that 99% of Kenyans have an access to a radio set and also unlike in church services or crusades .ere there is a limitation of space and time, radio goes beyond, permeating through cultural, social and geographical boundaries [15]. The station basically covers Nairobi, Meru, Nyeri, Nakuru, Limuru and Machakos and is planning to expand its reach. It seeks to meet the needs of its audience by giving it hope in all life situations. The youth form a significant segment of its audience and it has one predominant youth program called “Plug in” on Saturdays from 6 PM in the evening to 11 PM. This is a youth show by the youth and for the youth. They have DJ mixes where they sometimes invite regular DJs to

come talk to future DJs. professionals from various fields and pastors are also invited to give them insights on issues facing them as young people [16].

Another youth program is called “Route 104 Evening Drive Program which comes between 4PM 6PM from Monday to Friday. The shows are highly interactive in nature during which there gift offers, competitions, personal communication via short message texts and call-ins encouraged [17]. From the feedback, it is clear that youth have special needs including the need for transformation, gaining direction in their lives, entertainment, need for recognition or identity needs, and information on relationships, peers pressure, relationship with parents, courting and identifying the right life partner, gifts and talents, mentorship and so on. They need someone who understands them rather than condemns them and role models. They want to know how to talk, conduct oneself in relationship, work, have a vision or dream, and find a purpose in life. To meet these needs, the station conducts periodic listener surveys to find out what their real needs are and how they want information packaged [18].

English is the language used because the target audience (youth), are in an urban setting. However, most youth also identify with slang English or “sheng.” This language helps them easily identify with the presenter or host [19]. Radio generally, achieves its goals through the process of communication. According to Davidson and Fredrick [20], there are three objectives of communication in the community including surveillance, correlation of the society in making a response to the environment and transmission of the social inheritance, Therefore a communicator seeks to inform, teach, persuade and please or satisfy the receiver’s needs.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the ‘uses and gratifications’ approach in establishing “what is consumed, when, by whom, and under what circumstances” [21]. Research into media uses and gratifications has relied heavily on the survey technique with the questionnaire as the instrument of measurement. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics Census [22], there are 10.8 million youth aged between 15-30 years in Kenya, which is 32% of the total population. Nairobi alone has around 215,600 youth aged 15-18 years. The researcher purposely used a sample that had access to radios for hours every day of the week. Sampling is the process of selecting elements from a population. For this study, the elements were the individuals selected from different schools. A questionnaire was used as an instrument of measurement.

The researcher used self-administered questionnaires among high school students in the following Nairobi schools:

1. Elyon Secondary School
2. Good Samaritan High School
3. St. Johns Secondary School
4. Strathmore High School
5. Nile Girls High School
6. Friends School Dandora
7. Langata High School
8. Huruma Girls High School
9. Eutycus Secondary School and
10. Kamkunji Secondary School.

In data analysis, the first decision was to select the unit of analysis, or portions of the messages that are to be analyzed. After deciding on the unit of analysis, the researcher sampled from all units to be studied since the purpose of the study was general and broad. The researcher then carried out data reduction and analysis of results whereby the questionnaire was quantified and the responses given corresponding code numbers. The data was then tabulated and cross-tabulated on the computer using a computer analysis program (SPSS) and be interpreted accordingly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 250 questionnaires were sent to each of the ten schools. Due to lack of time and use of mailing as a way of administering questionnaires, only 200 questionnaires were returned. This was 80% of the total thus, more than the 60% that is recommended for research. The rate was also above the expected response of 70% by the researcher.

Radio program listenership

Hours Spent listening to radio

Asked about the time respondents spend listening to radio on a normal week day, 30% (60) indicated between 15-30- minutes, 22.5(45) indicated they listen to radio between 30-60minutes and 47% (94) of the respondents indicated over one hour. On Saturdays, the respondents indicated a range of between 1-9 hours a day, with more respondents listening between 1-2 hours 34% (68) and 24.5 (49) respectively and the least number of respondents; 6% (12) being 9 hours.

On Sundays, the respondents indicated a range of between 50 minutes to 5 hours, with the highest number; 31.5 (63) listening for 3 hours and the lowest number listening for 1.50 hours.

Time of Listening to radio

On the question of the time of day the respondents listen to radio, 53% (106) indicated they listen to radio in the early morning while 46.5% (93) said they don’t listen to radio in the morning, 6% (12)

indicated they listen to radio during day time while 93.5% (187) said they don't listen to radio during day time. Those who listen to radio in the evenings were 72% (144) while those who don't listen to radio in the evenings were 27.5% (55). In the night, those who listen to the radio were 33% (66) while those who don't were 66.5% (133).

Most Preferred Radio Stations

Respondents were asked to state their most preferred radio stations. In the category of the most preferred radio stations were Capital FM 12.5% (25), Radio Citizen 12% (24), Easy FM 30.5% (61), Kiss FM 13% (26) and Metro 16% (32). In the second category of the most liked stations were Capital FM 15.5% (31), Classic FM 13% (26), Kiss FM 16% (32), Metro FM 40% (80) Ramogi 15% (30). In the third category, the respondents indicated Hope FM 28% (56), Kiss FM 59 (118) and Metro FM 12.5 (25).

Reasons for Liking the Station and the Most liked Topics

The respondents were asked to state reasons why they like the respective radio stations. 63% (126) said the stations meet their entertainment needs while 36.5% (73) said they don't, 63% (126) indicated the stations meet their need for news or current affairs while 36.5% (73) negated. A further 61% (122) indicated they listen to the stations because the stations tackle issues that affect them as young people while 38.5% (77) said they don't. The respondents were asked to mention some of the topics the stations tackle. Among the issues or topics they mentioned were issues pertaining to abstaining from sex before marriage, biblical issues, celebrity lifestyles, decision making, drug abuse, entertainment, politics, relationships, youth and sexuality, showbiz news among others.

Preferred Language and Length of a Program

On the question of the most preferred language for a youth program, 56.5% (113) said they prefer Kiswahili while 43% (86) indicated they prefer English. About the preferred length of a youth program, 94% (188) of the respondents said they prefer a 30 minutes program while 5.5 % (11) prefer a 15 minutes program.

Best time for a Youth Program

Asked about the best time for a youth program, those who indicated morning hours were 56.5% (113) while 43% (86) did not prefer morning hours. 74% (148) of the respondents suggested daytime as the best time for a youth program, as opposed to the remaining 25.5% (51). Those who preferred evening were 45 % (90) with 54.5% (109) of the respondents opposed to it. Those preferring night time were 27.5% (55) with 72% (144) opposed to it?

Program Content

The researcher wanted to know the contents

liked most by the youth. 66 %(132) of the respondents indicated music as opposed to 33.5% (67). Again 66% (132) indicated talk shows while 33.5% (67) were opposed. These were followed by sports 25.5% (51) news 20% (40) and lastly education programs 4% (8).

The study showed that the predominant contents offered on FMs with regard to youth include drug abuse, entertainment, relationships, dating, courting, preparing for marriage, career choosing, role modeling, youth and sexuality, HIV/AIDS, abstaining from premarital sex, decision making, celebrity lifestyles, politics among others. And the contents most liked are music, talk shows, sports, news and educational programs respectively.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Young people choose freely what to listen to and what to ignore. Driven by their divergent needs, they move from one FM station to another with a hope that interaction with various contents will give gratifications to their needs. Media practitioners and especially youth broadcasters have the challenge of identifying these needs and coming up with the best strategies of meeting them. Young people tune to FMs for three main reasons; entertainment, news and for information on issues affecting them as young people.

Knowing that young people have divergent needs that need to be met, most FM stations come up with contents that target youth including entertainment, drugs abuse, relationships, dating, courting, preparing for marriage, role modeling, career choice, youth and sexuality, politics, abstaining from premarital sex, decision making, celebrity lifestyles among others. And youth on their part have their own choices and preferences with regard to content. Among their most preferred contents on FMs are music, talk shows, sports, news and educational programs respectively. Young people decide what to listen to and what to ignore. However, the choices and preferences with regard to content are influenced by a number of factors, two of which are important: influence from friends or peers and the need for personal identity.

The most preferred content types among young people include music, talk shows, news sports and educational programs. The researcher recommends that these be incorporated into the broadcasting schedules of youth programs. This should be considered seriously by those broadcasting or planning to broadcast for youth, bearing in mind that young people are vibrant and want to go with the times. With regard to music, the researcher recommends the latest hits and a wide variety for them. Other content types should also be to the taste of young people.

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