

Patterns of Preferences and Audience Segmentation of Kiswahili Language Radio Broadcasts in Kenya: An Analysis of Content and Demographic issues

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A B S T R A C T

This paper sought to analyze patterns of consumption of Kiswahili language radio broadcasts in Kenya especially the demographic preferences of radio audiences in Kenya. It utilized the uses and gratification and cultural imperialism theory. Descriptive research design was used with both quantitative and qualitative. The study targeted 357 respondents whose ages were between 20 and 65 who listened to Kiswahili radio programs for quantitative data. Also, a purposive sample of 30 Kiswahili radio listeners, selected based on listenership and diverse demographic characteristics was used. Since the research area covered Kenya's capital City County, Nairobi, 357 questionnaires were distributed. There were also radio professionals including 5 lead radio presenters and 5 experienced producers from lead Kiswahili radio stations in Kenya and 5 Key Informants who are experts in media and communication, including academics and industry analysts. The data was analyzed through a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The paper found that factors that made the radio broadcast audience listen include the nature of the content, the timing of the radio broadcast airing, its content and response to real and current health issues, presentation style, simple language, relevant content, appropriate format, likable and knowledgeable expert in the studio, interesting topics, instructiveness with expert, likable production techniques and knowledgeable professionals. The radio broadcasts had many comparatively older people as listeners compared to the youthful, and more men than women listened. To enhance the effectiveness of Kiswahili radio broadcasts, it is recommended that stations diversify content to cater to various demographic segments, including age, gender, and education level. Additionally, incorporating more audience feedback mechanisms can help tailor programs to listeners' preferences. Investing in digital platforms and social media engagement may also broadens reach, particularly among younger audiences.

Keywords: Audiences, listening patterns, demographic, segmentation, Kiswahili radio, Kenya

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A. INTRODUCTION

Kenya has seen an overwhelming and systemic change in the broadcast industry over the last 20 years. From very few radio stations manned and owned by the government to a highly liberal radio environment with over 200 stations. The Communications Authority of Kenya (CA, 2023), indicates that there are 227 radio stations in Kenya, which include 172 commercial stations and 55 community stations. Due to this drastically changed media industry, the way audiences consume



media has also changed in tandem which has seen an increase from 74% in 2020 to 78% in 2022 (MCK, 2022). Additionally, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK, 2023) data shows that four in every five (78%) rely on radio for information which translated to a 4% improvement from 2021(74%), (MCK, 2022). Majority of households, 61%, in Kenya live in rural areas (KNBS, 2022), highlighting the significant rural population which has a central role in the nation's socio-economic fabric and development. Moreover, many rural dwellers experience high illiteracy levels and lower electricity connections, unlike most urban areas. This makes vernacular radio even more important as a medium that speaks in their mother tongue becomes handy.

Kiswahili Radio broadcasts in Kenya have therefore made a momentous leap from the traditional broadcast role years ago to enjoying a diverse range of programming from over 200 radio stations. Additionally, Kenya's radio broadcasting landscape has over 60 languages spoken, radio stations cater to this multilingual audience using a variety of languages, primarily Kiswahili, English, and the vernacular languages of the major ethnic groups in Kenya.

The radio broadcasting environment in Kenya today is characterized by a mix of these languages, addressing the need to cater to a broad and varied audience. Kiswahili, as the national and official language, dominates the radio scene, serving as a unifying medium for communication across different ethnic groups. It is widely used in news, entertainment, talk shows, and educational programs. English, being an official language, is still primarily used in more formal contexts, such as international news, business updates, and programs targeting urban, educated audiences. However, in recent years, there has been a notable rise in vernacular radio stations broadcasting in local languages taking the broadcast scene by storm. Kenya's five major ethnic groups, constituting over 70% of the population, significantly influence vernacular radio stations.

Technological advancements, including digital migration, have significantly transformed the radio landscape in Kenya. What this shows is that the quickly developing landscape has evolved drastically compared to two decades ago especially with technology changing consumption habits of most Kenyan audiences. Therefore, radio remains a powerful tool for mobilization in all fronts in Kenya. In terms of audiences, Kiswahili radio has been gaining considerable ground in the last few years competing with vernacular radio. Research data shows that the top five leading radio stations broadcasting in Kenya all broadcast in Kiswahili with a commanding combined audience share of 58% leaving other radio stations broadcasting in other languages to share the remaining 42 %.(MCK, 2023)

The landscape of radio broadcasting in Kenya has evolved significantly, with Kiswahili radio stations playing a pivotal role in shaping public discourse, providing entertainment, and serving as a crucial source of information. This literature review explores the demographic factors that impact Kiswahili radio broadcasts in Kenya, focusing on variables, like age, gender, education, occupation, and regional differences. These factors are essential for understanding audience segmentation and tailoring content that resonates with diverse listener groups. Age is a critical demographic factor that has a marked influence on radio listenership patterns in Kenya. Younger audiences prefer entertainment-based content, such as music and youth-oriented talk shows, while

older listeners gravitate towards news, educational programs, and religious broadcasts. Myers (2008) argues that the preference for entertainment among younger listeners is driven by the need for relatable content that reflects their lifestyle and cultural trends. Conversely, older audiences seek information that aligns with their interests in current affairs and societal issues.

Research by Abdi (2016) supports these findings, noting that Kiswahili radio stations in Kenya have successfully segmented their audience by offering age-appropriate content. For instance, stations like Radio Citizen and Milele FM have introduced programs that cater specifically to different age groups, ensuring that their broadcasts appeal to a broad spectrum of listeners. This age-based segmentation is crucial for maintaining a loyal audience base and attracting advertisers who target specific age demographics. There are socio-demographic like age or gender affect consumption habits of media Sinha (2020). Older adults listen to radio more than younger people.

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping radio listenership patterns in Kenya. Research has demonstrated that men and women have different preferences regarding radio content. Men are likely to listen to programs that offer classified information, such as news, sports, and political discussions, whereas women prefer programs that provide entertainment, health-related information, and discussions on family and societal issues. This gendered listening pattern shows the way gender is perceived in the traditional Kenyan society, which is patriarchal in nature Ndlela (2009). Further research by Abdi (2016) highlights the importance of gender-sensitive programming in Kiswahili radio broadcasts. The study found that stations that offer content that appeals to both men and women tend to have higher audience ratings. For example, Radio Maisha has successfully balanced its programming by including both news and entertainment segments, attracting a diverse audience. This approach not only increases listenership but also enhances audience engagement and participation.

The level of education among listeners is another crucial factor that influences Kiswahili radio broadcasts in Kenya. Educated listeners tend to demand higher-quality content that is informative, analytical, and intellectually stimulating. Ndlela (2009) argues that as the level of education increases, so does the expectation for more in-depth coverage of issues, including political analysis, economic discussions, and expert opinions. This trend is evident in the programming choices of stations like Kameme FM, which has tailored its content to cater to a more educated audience by offering programs that delve into complex social and economic issues. The correlation between education and content preferences also affects the language used in broadcasts. Stations targeting a more educated audience often use a more formal version of Kiswahili, while those catering to less educated listeners may use a more colloquial style. This linguistic variation is essential for ensuring that the content is accessible and relatable to the intended audience.

Occupation is closely linked to radio listenership patterns, particularly in terms of the time of day when people listen to the radio and the type of content they prefer. For instance, individuals in formal employment are known to tune more to radio during their commute or after work hours, while those in informal sectors or self-employment may have more flexibility in their listening schedules. This occupational segmentation is critical for radio stations when scheduling programs

and advertisements. Mugambi (2013) notes that Kiswahili radio stations in Kenya have adapted their programming to accommodate the listening habits of different occupational groups. For example, morning shows that focus on news and current affairs are scheduled to coincide with the time when most formal workers are commuting. In contrast, mid-morning and afternoon programs often feature lighter content, such as music and talk shows, targeting individuals who have more flexible work schedules.

Kenya's diverse geography and socio-economic landscape also contribute to regional differences in radio listenership. Rural areas, where access to other forms of media may be limited, tend to have a higher dependency on radio as the primary source of information and entertainment. In contrast, urban areas, with greater access to television, internet, and print media, may show a more diversified media consumption pattern. A study by UNESCO (2017) highlights the important role of radio in rural Kenya, where it serves as a vital tool for disseminating information on agriculture, health, and education. Kiswahili radio stations, which relay information and entertainment in the country's national language, are particularly effective in reaching rural populations. However, the study also notes that regional disparities in infrastructure, such as electricity and internet access, can affect the quality and reliability of radio broadcasts in these areas.

Socio-economic status is another significant factor that influences Kiswahili radio listenership. Lower-income households, especially in rural areas, rely on radio as their most important channel of information due to the affordability and accessibility of radio sets. In contrast, higher-income households may have access to a broader range of media, including television, the internet, and newspapers, leading to more diversified media consumption patterns. Most audience research data in Kenya shows that radio remains the most significant channel among low-income groups, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. The studies found that Kiswahili radio stations, which offer a mix of news, entertainment, and educational content, are particularly popular among this demographic. The affordability of radio, combined with its ability to reach remote areas, makes it an essential tool for communication and information dissemination among Kenya's lower-income populations.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study used mixed-methods to examine patterns of preferences and audience segmentation of Kiswahili language radio broadcasts in Kenya, focusing on content and demographic issues. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the topic, combining statistical analysis with in-depth insights. The quantitative phase involved conducting a survey to collect data on the preferences and demographic characteristics of Kiswahili radio listeners. The survey aimed at gathering information on demographic information like age, gender, education level, income, occupation, and geographical location, listening habits like frequency of listening, preferred time of day, and most listened to programs and content preferences like types of programs preferred (e.g., news, music, talk shows, educational programs)

and the importance of various content attributes (e.g., language, cultural relevance, entertainment value). A stratified random sampling technique was used to make sure there was good representation of different demographic groups. The sample size was determined based on the population of Kiswahili radio listeners in various regions, aiming for at least 357 respondents to achieve statistical significance.

Data was collected in 3 months between February 2023 and April, 2023 through conducting in-depth interviews to gain deeper insights into the preferences and perceptions of Kiswahili radio listeners, as well as the perspectives of radio professionals. The interviews focused on understanding the reasons behind content preferences, the impact of demographic factors, and the challenges and opportunities faced by Kiswahili radio stations and took 60-90minutes each. Participants included listeners where a purposive sample of 30 Kiswahili radio listeners, selected based on diverse demographic characteristics (age, gender, education level, income, and geographical location).

The study picked participants who represented the target population and relate to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in key demographics, such as age, gender, occupation, and experience with the topic. All participants were chosen due to their ability to generate data and perspectives and experiences related to the study objectives. Radio professionals included 5 lead radio presenters and 5 experienced producers from lead Kiswahili radio stations in Kenya according to MCK, (2023). For Key Informants (KI), 5 experts in media and communication, including academics and industry analysts were involved. Semi-structured interview guides were used to conduct the interviews, which were audio-recorded with consent from participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. NVivo software was employed to code and categorize the data, identifying key themes and patterns. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods was achieved through triangulation using research questions. Data was anonymized to protect participants' identities together with informed consent. The study acknowledged potential limitations, such as the self-reported nature of survey responses and the potential bias in interviewee selection. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations through careful sampling and methodological rigor.

C. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

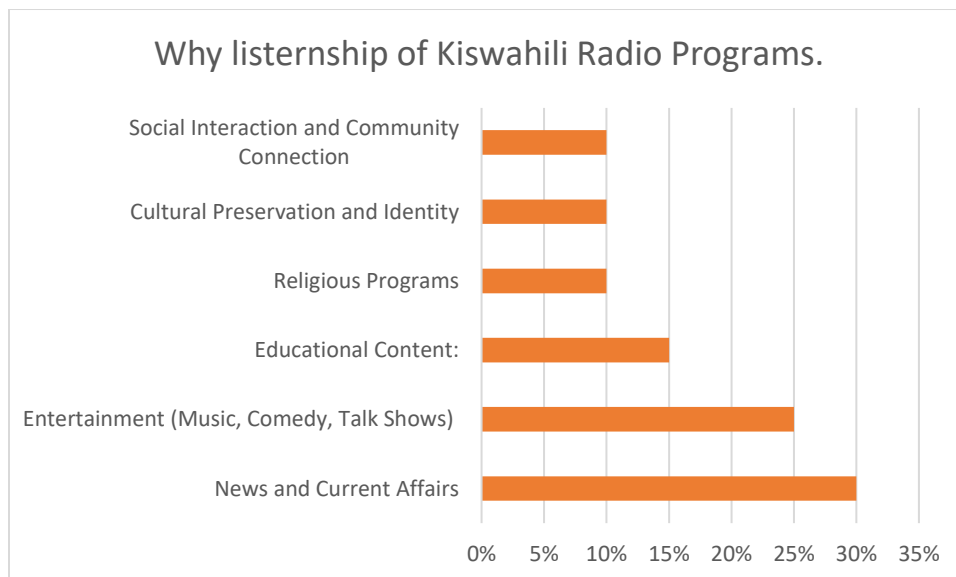
Listenership of Kiswahili radio programs

This study's objective was to analyse patterns of preferences and audience segmentation of Kiswahili language audiences especially on demographic issues. The study sought to understand why Kiswahili radio audiences listen to radio as shown below:

Table 1: Why audiences listen to Kiswahili radio programs

No.	Program	Count	Percentage
1	News and Current Affairs	108	30%
2	Entertainment (Music, Comedy, Talk Shows)	90	25%
3	Educational Content:	54	15%
4	Religious Programs	35	10%
5	Cultural Preservation and Identity	35	10%
6	Social Interaction and Community Connection	35	10%.
	Total	357	100%

Figure 1: Listenership of Kiswahili radio programs



Data from this study revealed that most respondents prefer Kiswahili radio programs, aligning with research and industry findings that Kiswahili radio is the most popular language among radio stations, followed by vernacular languages (CA, 2024). Additionally most respondents in this study, indicated that they were motivated to listen to programs on Kiswahili radio due to several reasons

First, linguistic accessibility plays a significant role. Kiswahili, being a national and official language spoken widely across Kenya, ensures that broadcasts are understood by a large demographic, transcending ethnic and regional barriers. Secondly, cultural relevance significantly boosts Kiswahili radio's appeal. Programs often incorporate local dialects, proverbs, and cultural references, resonating deeply with listeners and fostering a sense of identity and pride. This connection is particularly important in a diverse country like Kenya. Thirdly, educational content is also a key factor. Kiswahili radio stations provide informative programs on various topics, including health, governance, and civic education. This role was notably critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, where radio became a vital source of accurate information and public health advice. Fourthly, affordability and accessibility make Kiswahili radio a preferred choice. Radios are inexpensive and widely available, even to poor rural audiences who may not be able to afford other forms of media. Fifthly, interactive programming enhances listener engagement. Call-in shows and discussion forums allow listeners to participate actively, voicing their opinions and interacting with hosts and guests. This interactivity fosters a sense of community and belonging among listeners. Lastly, strong entertainment value attracts a broad audience. Kiswahili radio stations offer a mix of music, drama, and talk shows that cater to diverse tastes and preferences, ensuring there is something for everyone. Popular programs and charismatic hosts also contribute to building loyal listener bases.

The above assertions are supported by research reports which show that Kiswahili radio stations were the top five radio stations: Radio Citizen (22%), Radio Jambo (14%), Radio Maisha (11%), Milele FM (6%), and Radio 47 (5%) with a combined a total of listeners of 58% nationally leaving all other vernacular and English radio stations to fight for the remaining 42% (MCK, 2023).

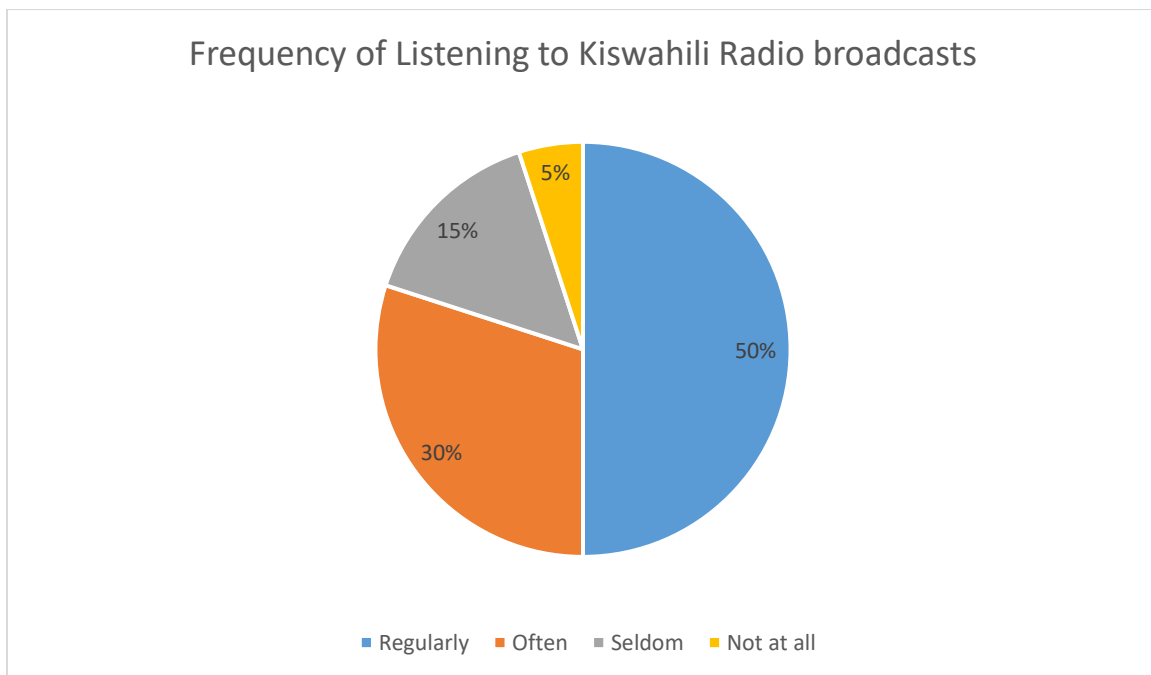
Frequency of listening to Kiswahili radio broadcasts

The study also sought to understand how regular Kiswahili radio audiences listened to their favorite radio station in order to understand the patterns and frequency of listening to Kiswahili radio programs in Kenya. This is the data which was derived from the same in table 2 below:

Table 2: Frequency of listening Kiswahili radio broadcasts

No.	Frequency of Listening	Count	Percentage
1	Regularly	178	50%
2	Often	107	30%
3	Seldom	54	15%
4	Not at all	18	5%
	Total	357	100%

Figure 2. Frequency of listening Kiswahili radio programs



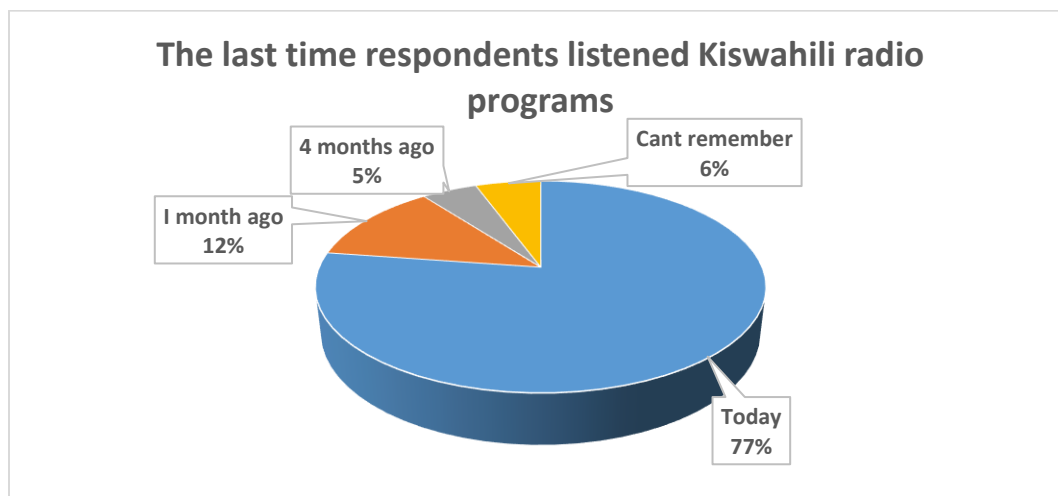
This data shows that 50% of the respondents listen to particular radio programs regularly, 30% listen to their favorite programs often while only 15% listen the programs seldom and 5% do not listen at all. These findings show a majority of respondents listen to their favorite programs on Kiswahili radio frequently, though some do not follow this habit as a routine. For those who don't listen frequently, they listen to other programs on different radio stations before moving back which makes them radio listeners but for different radio stations and programs.

It was also important to know from respondents the last time they had listened to a Kiswahili radio station program before the interview as outlined below in table 3:

Table 3: The last time listened to a Kiswahili radio program

	Frequency	Percent
Today	275	77%
A month ago	42	12%
4 months ago	18	5%
Can't remember	22	6%
Totals	357	100%

Figure 3: The last time respondents listened to a Kiswahili radio program



The data above shows that most respondents (77%) indicated that they had listened to the last Kiswahili radio program the day data was being collected. What this means is that many of the respondents listen regularly while 12% listening to a Kiswahili broadcast within 30 days of the data collection with 5% listening in the last 4 months and another 6% couldn't even remember listening to any Kiswahili radio broadcast. These findings show a positive development for Kiswahili radio broadcasts in Kenya.

Demographic preferences on the listening of the Kiswahili radio programs

One of the objectives of this paper was to find out demographic issues and their effect on Kiswahili radio listening in Kenya. This paper decided to use demographic issues like age, gender, education level and geographic location and see how they affect radio listening. This paper sought therefore to get it from respondents whether they listened the programs on Kiswahili radio and compare the same with their age which showed as below in table 4

Table 4: Demographic factors and effects on respondents' listening to Kiswahili radio

		Do you listen <i>to</i> Kiswahili programs on radio?	
		Yes	No
Gender	Male	97.2%	6.8%
	Female	75.1%	4.9%
Age band	20 - 30 years	65.1%	34.9%
	31 - 41 years	74.2%	23.8%
	41 - 51 years	81.7%	18.3%
	51 - 61 years	90.8%	9.2%
	65 +	95.6%	4.4%
Educational attainment	No education	96.2%	3.8%
	Basic education	90.3%	9.7%
	Secondary	84.4%	15.6%
	Post-secondary	74.7%	25.3%

Occupation	Not employed	89.7%	11.3%
	Labourer	83.1%	16.9%
	Smallholder	92.5%	7.5%
	Sole proprietor	90.5%	9.5%
	Officially employed	65.8%	34.2%
	Other	82.9%	17.1%

Above data shows various issues. First, level of education has an effect on listening habits of audiences in Kenya. Educated individuals tend to have diverse media consumption habits, often accessing information through multiple channels such as radio, television, the internet, and print media. However, Kiswahili radio remains a crucial source of information and entertainment across all education levels due to its accessibility and cultural relevance. For less educated listeners, Kiswahili radio serves as an essential medium for acquiring knowledge and staying informed about current events, development, health, and governance.

Educational programs on these stations are tailored to be easily understandable, thus bridging the information gap for those with limited literacy skills. This demographic relies heavily on Kiswahili radio for accurate news and practical information, which can have a direct impact on their daily lives. In contrast, individuals with higher education levels may seek out Kiswahili radio for its cultural content, language preservation, and community discussions. These listeners appreciate the intellectual discussions, analysis, and debates often featured in talk shows and news programs. Moreover, Kiswahili radio plays a crucial role in promoting civic education and awareness, which is vital for an informed electorate. Educational initiatives broadcasts in Kiswahili ensure that critical information reaches a broad audience, regardless of their formal education levels, thus fostering a more knowledgeable and engaged populace. Another demographic issues is **occupation** which impacts listening habits as working professionals might prefer radio programs that air during commuting hours, offering news and updates that are relevant to their professional and personal lives and when they are not at work stations. On the other end, those in informal sector listen to radio more sporadically, some, throughout the day, often selecting programs that offer entertainment or their likes.

Radio audiences’ participation in Kiswahili radio programs

This paper also sought to ascertain participation in Kiswahili radio broadcasts. This was in relation to how the demographic factors relate to participation levels in the radio broadcasts as shown in below.

Table 1: Audience participation in Kiswahili radio programs

		Do you participate in Kiswahili radio programs?	
		Yes	No
Gender	Male	57.3%	43.7%
	Female	53.2%	46.8%
Age band	20 - 30 years	45.2%	54.8%
	31 - 41 years	61.5%	38.5%
	41 - 51 years	65.9%	34.1%
	51 - 61 years	58.4%	41.6%
	65 +	43.8%	56.2%
Educational attainment	No education	42.1%	57.9%
	Basic education	55.2%	44.8%
	Secondary	61.1%	38.9%
	Post-secondary	58.2%	41.8%
Occupation	Not employed	43.6%	56.4%
	Labourer	58.1%	41.9%
	Smallholder	49.3%	50.7%
	Sole proprietor	68.1%	31.9%
	Officially employed	57.9%	42.1%
	Other	67.3%	32.7%

Occupation significantly influences participation in Kiswahili radio broadcasts in Kenya, shaping both the content consumed and the level of engagement with the medium. For individuals in rural and agricultural sectors, Kiswahili radio serves as a primary source of information on farming techniques, weather forecasts, and market prices. These listeners often participate actively

in programs that address their occupational needs, calling in to ask questions or share experiences. Urban professionals, on the other hand, tune in during commutes or work breaks. Their participation is typically influenced by interest in news, current affairs, and talk shows that discuss economic trends, political developments, and social issues. These listeners engage through social media platforms linked to the radio programs, contributing to discussions or responding to polls and surveys. For those in the informal sector, such as small-scale traders and artisans, Kiswahili radio offers both entertainment and practical information. Programs that focus on entrepreneurship, business advice, and community events are particularly appealing. Participation often comes in the form of listener call-ins, where individuals share their business challenges and successes, thus fostering a sense of community and shared learning.

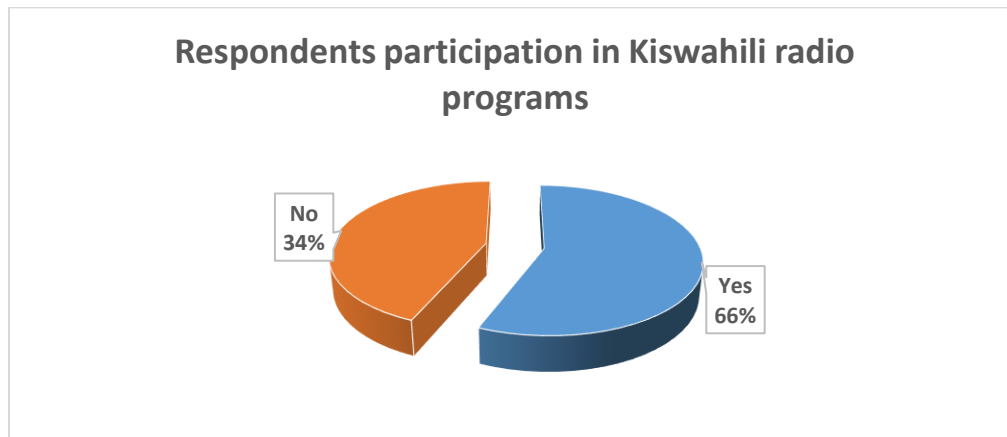
What this study and data shows clearly is that one's occupation plays an important role in shaping their radio listening habits. This is because as can be seen from the data of this paper, those in more formal employment or professional jobs tend to have planned days and schedules which means that this limits their radio listening time. Due to their schedules related to the kind of jobs that they have, they end up preferring programs like news, and other informative programs which follow their occupational interests. On the other hand, those in informal or are self-employed, and therefore have irregular day schedules, end up having time to tune to radio most of the day. Due to availability of time and personal supervision, these ones prefer talk shows, entertainment talk shows and others of that type because they give some form of "break" from their busy schedules. If one takes an example of farmers in rural Kenya and laborers, they listen to radio on particular times like very early mornings and later in the evening after work. Content which interests them would revolve around programs like agricultural topics, news and culture-related programs. What this means is that one's job or occupation affects the content which they consume.

Additionally, data from this study also shows that education has an effect on radio audiences listening habits. As the data shows, those who are highly educated prefer Kiswahili radio programs which give in-depth analysis, detailed and educational programs, and news. Most of them look out for programs which have political and social analysis. Additionally, radio audiences with lower educational attainment prefer programs which move towards music, dramas, call-in shows and entertainment of other types which have easy- to- understand programming. What this trend shows is that education has an influence on audience radio content listening preferences.

Kiswahili radio programs and strategies for increase listenership

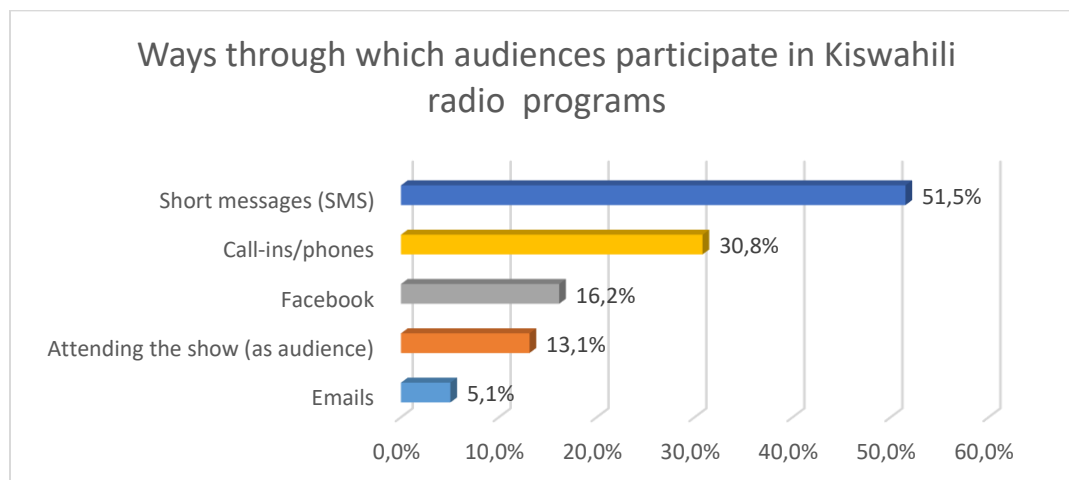
One of the main issues of this study was to establish how Kiswahili radio stations are going about efforts to increase audience participation in Kiswahili radio programs. This means looking for ways of audience interaction with Kiswahili radio broadcasts whose results are below.

Figure 4: Audiences' participation in Kiswahili radio programs



This study data shows that most respondents (66%) were actively participated in Kiswahili radio broadcasts in one way or the other while 34% were not involved in the programs. This means that the radio broadcasts facilitate active audience participation through many channels Audience to participate in one way or another. There were various ways in which the audience could participate in the programs. The ways through which Kiswahili radio audiences participated in programs were varied as indicated in the data and in figure 5 below:

Figure 5: How audience participate in Kiswahili radio programs



During FGDs with Kiswahili radio programs production teams, it came out clearly that audience feedback is critical and forms an important component on the topic selection for shows. This means that within radio production of various shows, feedback is important linking element and therefore creating the relationship between production and consumption of Kiswahili radio

programs. Participation in Kiswahili radio programs in Kenya happens through various modes, each attracting different sections of the audience. Listener call-ins are the most popular mode, accounting for approximately 40% of participation. This interactive method allows listeners to directly engage with hosts, ask questions, and share opinions, particularly during talk shows and discussions. Social media interaction is another significant mode, representing about 30% of participation.

Many radio stations leverage platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, where listeners can comment on posts, participate in polls, and send messages during live broadcasts. This mode is particularly common among younger audiences who are more tech-savvy. Text messaging (SMS) contributes to around 20% of participation. Listeners send messages to contribute to discussions, enter competitions, or request songs. This method is favored for its simplicity and accessibility, especially in areas with limited internet connectivity. Lastly, physical participation in live events and roadshows organized by radio stations accounts for approximately 10%. These events provide a tangible way for listeners to engage with radio personalities and participate in community activities. These varied modes of participation ensure a broad engagement with Kiswahili radio programs, enhancing their reach and impact across different demographics.

D. CONCLUSION

The study on Kiswahili language radio broadcasts in Kenya highlights the complex relationship between demographic factors and content preferences. The findings demonstrate that Kiswahili radio stations have effectively tailored their programming to meet the needs of a diverse audience, taking into account variables such as age, gender, education, and occupation. This findings agree with the idea that there are different ways radio is important in the everyday life of people (Krause 2023). Gender also significantly influences listening patterns, with men and women showing distinct preferences, as noted by Abdi (2016). This demographic segmentation is vital as education levels further shape content preferences, with more educated listeners seeking higher-quality, analytical content and on-demand radio to satisfy listeners' diverse need (Laor, 2022). Additionally, the rural-urban divide impacts radio listenership, with rural areas relying more heavily on radio for information due to limited access to other media. This supports the idea that radio remains an essential medium in regions with low digital penetration and therefore binds the relationship between radio and listeners (Heywood, 2023). Kiswahili radio in Kenya has successfully segmented audience by understanding and catering demographic factors. However, the ongoing shifts in media consumption, driven by digitalization and socio-economic changes, mean that radio broadcasters must continually adapt to remain relevant.

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