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THE ROLE OF AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHIC AND INFORMATION NEEDS ANALYSIS IN ENHANCING PERFORMANCE FOR COMMUNITY RADIO IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the profile of media consumers is central to success of any media in addressing the information needs of their audiences. This research is informed by Laswell Theory of communication (1948). This theory explains the act of communication as, "who says what, in which channel, to whom and with which effect". This theory posits that communication has five components, the source (who), the message or content (says what) the transmitter (through which channel), the receiver (to who or audience) and responses (with which effect). This communication model formed a suitable theoretical framework for this study because the tenets of this theory imply that Communication success involves the skills of the sender, relevance of content as determined by audience needs and demographic analysis, media analysis including the language of communication. Self-administered questionnaires were completed by 9 Reports/ Presenters of Kangema community radio who participated in the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected the study. The findings indicated that understanding of the audience demographic profile and information needs is crucial in developing media products which meets the information needs that listeners seek to gratify by establishing audience cultural values, economic activities and matching content with the information needs. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to report the findings.

KEY WORDS: Community radio, audience demographic analysis, audience needs analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Audience is made up of individuals who are receivers of message disseminated by community radio. The audiences for community media generally possess common characteristics due to their homogenous nature in terms of culture, geographical location and economic activities. It is important to conceptualize audience and make decisions about programmes and contents to be transmitted. The decision concerning the program selection depends on the needs to be gratified. Demographics or target audience which is based on such aspects as age, sex, socio-economic status and

educational level which makes program content preferences to differ.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To determine ROLE OF AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHIC AND INFORMATION NEEDS ANALYSIS IN ENHANCING PERFORMANCE FOR COMMUNITY RADIO IN KENYA

➤ Establishing audience demographic characteristics

These preferences are also different for different parts of the Audience characteristics. Mass communication is mostly defined by description of its audience where messages are sent directly to the receiver and are normally not mediated by other

persons. Community radio therefore, must identify the best processes to reach their target audiences and make impact. Meaningful communication needs to meet the information needs to the audience. For community media to succeed they need to be in a position therefore to examine and address the social or cultural and economic identity or demographic characteristics of the communities they reach.

The Social Responsibility Theory emphasizes upon responsibility of the media, to society. The theory maintains that media are free but should accept obligations to serve the public good including social interventions. This idea is supported by Media dependency theory, proposed by Sandra Ball-Rokeah and DeFleur (1976), in McQuail (2005), which states that, audiences depend on media for education and information needs. According to UNESCO (2006), media are part of an environment and are to be seen in the context of a specific culture and its institutions, its social demographics and its historical evolution. It becomes relevant according to the information value it has to the audiences.

News are beneficial to audiences if there is value compatibility to the audiences' socio- economic expectations. Palmgreen and Rayburn (1984), proposed the Value Expectancy Theory of media use. This theory posits that audiences use certain media due to the value or rewards they get in terms of information satisfaction. This is an approach to finding out what content will be sought in order to obtain gratification hence audience expect news to have some certain attributes to address issues related to them in order to receive positive outcome or the intended effect.

➤ **Information needs and Media uses and gratification**

It is important for grassroots media to define their audience in terms of information needs. Wainwright (1978), comments that news

worthiness in an audience is determined by the prominence of their information needs. In general, audience refers to people who have chosen voluntarily to attend to certain content or medium or an aggregate of people one intends to reach. These preferences reflect user needs, moods, attitudes, or tastes. Authors in media research across the board seem to agree that User's needs – related contents of community media productions will deliver the desired gratifications to the society and make the media relevant to the audience.

The uses and Gratification theory developed by Blumler and Katz (1974) in Mc Quail (2005), posits that people turn to media to achieve gratification and satisfy needs. These needs could be needs personal, social, cultural, political or all these. By doing audience analysis, community radio discovers how best to meet information needs gratifications for the local communities

➤ **Research methodology, design, sampling and data collection instruments.**

Mixed methodology was used to collect the data where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research is designed to obtain precise information concerning the current status phenomenon and drawing conclusions from the facts discovered. According Kothari (2004), descriptive research includes surveys and fact-finding enquiries of different kinds. The researcher purposive sampling technique to hand-pick all the 10 media staff (Reporters and Presenters). Orodho (2009), suggests that this criterion is applied in order to identify important sources of information because of their knowledge and position. Self-administered questionnaires were completed by the media staff. The response rate was 9 out of 10 amounting to 90% response rate as represented by Figure 4.1

Table 4.1: Response Rate

| Age | Frequency | % |
|------------------|-----------|-----|
| Below 24 yrs | 2 | 22% |
| 25-34 yrs | 6 | 67% |
| 35-44 yrs | 1 | 11% |
| 45 yrs and Above | 0 | % |

➤ **The Role of Audience Demographic and Needs Analysis in Enhancing Performance of Community Radio**

This research aimed at analyzing the effects of audience demographic and needs analysis in

enhancing performance of community radio. One of the indicators of a performing community radio is the ability to demonstrate knowledge of audiences' demographic characteristics. According to UNESCO (2006), media are part of an environment and are to be seen in the context of a specific culture and its institutions, its social

demographics its historical evolution. Audience analysis is therefore critical in identification of specific communication and information needs within the socio- cultural context of the community they aim to reach. For the purpose of this research, questionnaires were prepared and distributed to the 9 Reporters/ presenters seeking their responses on how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the fact that audience demographic analysis enhances the performance of community Radio. The questionnaires were self-administered and were filled independently.

The responses were recorded by indicating, *strongly- agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly*

disagree. The findings were analyzed and presented as indicated in the frequency Table 4.2

From the findings, 33% of Reporters/Presenters indicated that they strongly agreed that audience analysis helps in establishing audiences social cultural values while 67% indicated agree in grid provided. A high number of reporters indicated strongly agree on the importance establishing the economic activities of the audiences which accounted for 56%. 44% of respondents strongly agreed that it is important for matching content aired with audiences information needs. Among the respondents none (0%) of them indicated a neutral stand, disagree or strongly disagree.

Table 4.2 The role of Audience Demographic and Needs Analysis

| Role of audience analysis | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Neutral | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | |
|--|----------------|----|-------|----|---------|----------|------|-------------------|--|
| | freq | % | freq | % | freq % | Freq % | freq | % | |
| It leads to establishing audiences social cultural values | 3 | 33 | 6 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| It leads to establishing audiences Economic activities | 5 | 56 | 4 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| It helps in Matching content with audiences information needs | 4 | 44 | 5 | 56 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

The findings indicate that the media staff of Kangema community radio is of the common opinion that audience demographic and needs analysis is crucial in establishing media products which are relevant for particular audiences. This is supported by Blumler and Katz (1974) in Mc Quail (2005), who maintained that media is used for gratification of certain information and communication needs. Hence Community radio is found relevant if it is able to meet specific needs of the community. This can only be achieved through effective audience demographic and needs analysis. This helps to establish the community’s economic, political and social-cultural values.

➤ **Discussion of the Results and conclusion**

A performing community radio needs to demonstrate richness in its ability to establish and address the communication and information needs the community seeks to gratify. Hence performance of a community radio can be measured by its ability to understand the characteristics of its audiences such as their age, gender, socio-economic and cultural settings. Lengel and Draft (2002), noted that audiences choose to use a medium in regard to its appropriate richness. This means that mediums vary in their ability to enable users to communicate by relating to information transmitted.

This research examined and analyzed the role of audience demographic and needs analysis as a communication strategy of enhancing the performance of community radio, the results show that the staff of the community radio was able to package relevant content related to community’s issues of concern. On economic activities the media staff seems to share similar idea about the audiences’ social-cultural and economic activities of the community reached by their radio. AL-Hassan et al (2011), remarks that community Radio promotes Small Scale and medium Enterprise (SME) operators and consequently improves sales and income for communities. For this reason the station has embarked on weather observation updates reporting aired twice a day i.e. early in the morning at 8.15 am and in the evening. Hence, there is need for the radio to air accurate weather observations and advice to farmers. From the questionnaires, it was indicated that communities are engaged in live shows with agriculture extension officers. In addition the Kangema community Radio station is put under a meteorological officer who is in charge of the radio station as well as sub-county’s meteorological department. Hence community radio will be relevant if it meets the needs that the audiences seek to gratify. Other programmes of community concern includes; Hiv/Aids, business, health,

religious inspirations, entertainment and political debates. These are issues that the audiences of Kangema community radio find relevant and easily relate to on their daily lives.

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