

Orientation of broadcast contents in community radio stations to political environment in Migori County

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ABSTRACT

Globally, radio stations broadcasting in native languages have high potential to influence the naives. This influence has contributed in determining the political swing by election campaigns. Broadcast contents that enhance peace are associated with reduced political violence. In Kenya, the National Commission on Integration and Cohesion classified Migori County as election violence hotspot. This study explored the broadcast contents of community radio stations in Migori County and the extent to which such broadcast contents promote peaceful political campaigns in the County. This was qualitative case study involving 21 participants. Discussions among focus groups, as well as face-to-face interviews, were used to get qualitative data. The data was analyzed where it was found that the broadcast contents of community radio stations in Migori county do not adequately foster peaceful political campaigns. The study recommends that community radio broadcast should include peace related broadcast contents to strategically enhance peaceful political campaign during elections in Migori County.

Key words: community radio stations, Election violence Migori county, peaceful campaigns, broadcast contents, elections.

INTRODUCTION

Kenya experiences political violence in every election at different magnitudes, a trend that can be historically traced back to the regimes of single party system in Kenya. The country is inhabited by over 40 ethnic tribes characterized by multi-lingual populations. Political animosity is mostly fueled by differences among political classes associated by the local Kenyan communities. This mostly results into ethnic clashes in several parts of the country. The polarization among the local communities has been exploited by political opportunists to influence voter registration, electorate turn-out during elections and even the actual pattern of vote casting. In the apex of political violence in Kenya, the 2007/8 post-election violence was blamed largely on the broadcast contents of some community based radio stations. What followed was the inclusion of a popular community based radio journalist in the list of individuals prosecuted an

international criminal court based in Neither-Lands. This was on charges related to the crimes committed against humanity during the post-election violence.

The inclusion of radio journalist in such a high profile criminal case together with the regular electoral violence witnessed in Migori County draws scholars' attention to a possibly interesting relationship. This is a possible relationship between the contents of a community radio broadcast and political campaigns environments. The researcher was concerned with the broadcast contents and political environment, whether the contents make it hostile or friendly during elections. Accordingly, there is academic interest on the effects of community radio broadcast contents and peace existence during political campaigns in Migori county.

Political violence in Migori County is of paramount importance in this study. This is because whenever election related violence breaks out in the county, inhabitants experience assault, deaths, loss and destruction of properties as well as displacement of persons. Such unfortunate occurrences were witnessed in the year 2007 elections. Therefore, the researchers in this study have explored the role of broadcast contents of community radio stations in fostering peace in Migori County.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya's general election is expected next year and as such, various aspirants are flocking media space to broadcast their campaign promises to the wider electorates in their respective local communities. The worry is that in recent past elections, there have been numerous cases of election related violence in the country and also violence in Migori County, with unfortunate outcomes. With their potential to reach and influence large population, community radio stations can do so much in setting political environments. However, the series of broadcast contents with likelihood to affect political environments in community radio stations within Migori County still remains a grey area within existing scholarly spectrum. It is against this backlash that this study was designed to explore the broadcast contents of community based radio stations, and their orientation towards fostering peace during political campaigns within Migori County.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to establish broadcast contents of community radio stations and the contents' orientation in fostering peaceful political campaigns in Migori County.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by two main objectives;

1. To establish broadcast contents of community radio stations in Migori County.

2. To establish the orientation of broadcast contents of community radio stations in fostering peaceful political campaigns in Migori County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Radio communication involves transmission of audio signals from a broadcasting station to a radio set or radio receivers, (Charles O Oguk, Karie, & Rabah, 2017). The signals are referred to as audio and are transited via electromagnetic waves, from the transmitter to the receiver, through aerial which picks them up from the air, (Oguk, 2020). The antenna basically picks up the audio signals and directs them to the receiver, which is usually called radio by the listeners.

According to Mac'Ouma, (2021), community radio is a profit free venture that is mainly for building humanity, whereby local people design and produce their own broadcast programs in the radio station. This is usually done to foster community self-expression on issues that matter to the large local audience. Such radio stations has are owned and operated by volunteers who are drawn mainly from local community membership. They Stations are therefore designed to be as responsive as possible to the needs of the community and as such, they consistently employ the utilization of feedback from the audience to improve their daily programs.

Community radio stations play a great role in understanding cultural diversity, political trends, economic activities and various opportunities which are usually not captured at national media levels in country, (Mac'Ouma, 2021).

In this study, the researchers believe that community radio station is often built around concepts of locality, inclusion and participation by the locality membership. In most cases, the community radio is understood to serve the given geographical area. This also extends to the individuals' who can receive the signals and content as well as their potential to participate in live debates of the radio stations. Further, the community radios are always responsive to the needs and thoughts of the host community, Balan and Norman (2012). This brings affirmation that community radio is for the community and usually also by the community that it serves.

Political campaigns and conflicts

Agbehonou (2014) defines conflict as the situation which results from the struggle for power and resources, usually due to lack of compatibility of purposes and interests of parties involved. On the other hand,

Taylor, Pevehouse and Straus, (2017) explains electoral violence as coercive intimidation, physical violence, physical harm and displacements related to an impending contest in electoral process or election results that are already announced. Such violence is instigated by stakeholders with vested interests in electoral results. Such violence is usually committed by the parties with vested interest around the incumbent leadership in order to maintain power. The violence can also be instigated by the stake-holders around the opposition, with the aim of changing the status quo by dislodging elected leaders from power, Taylor, Pevehouse and Straus.

During any elections, political campaigns aim to persuade voters to prefer one candidate or party to others running for the same political positions. Successful campaign requires multiple resources like financial, material, and human, resources (Agbehonou, 2014). Conflict is drawn into these campaigns due to scarcity of the mentioned resources. Distribution of access to media among competing candidates during elections has been a great issue of concern. The occurrence of violence is highly likely to erupt once candidates and their supporters realize inequitable distribution or accesses to the scarce resources. Such violence has negative consequences in voting participation and patterns (Tucker, 2013).

According studies, countries like Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Togo, Zimbabwe and also Kenya, experience characteristic violent elections. Here in Kenya, violence marred ODM primary elections just prior to the 2017 general elections in Migori County, leading to loss of at least three lives. In Migori county and the general Nyanza area, ODM party enjoys overwhelming support from the electorates, hence the party's primaries are usually hotly contested as there exists a perception that the party nominee has guaranteed victory for a political seat, (Mac'Ouma, 2021).

Community Radios and peace

Muthoni and Lukalo, (2000) indicates that radios area stations located within the conflict areas of the lake areas like Kwizera of Tanzania, Studio Ijambo of Burundi, and within the conflict areas of the horn of Africa like the Civic Education and Peace Radio Project, and the new project of ACROSS in South Sudan. These radio stations have relied on well-wishers, funding procured from international funders that

focus on peace and security initiatives. This is because; it is believed that radio stations in general have vast influence on the general public. This influence might be positive or negative depending on the character of broadcast content. For instance the post- 2007/2008 election violence in Kenya where Kass FM and other media were on the spot over hate speech (Somerville, 2011). Likewise in Rwandese Republic, Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) were on the spot for 1994 Rwandan race murder, which degenerated into killing of and by civilians (Strauss, 2007).

Ndirangu (2014) argues that community radio is a profound tool in promoting good governance through public participation in Murang'a County. The findings of his analysis indicate that community radio extremely contributes to promotion of fine governance in Murang'a County by encouraging community participation through use of the native language and providing participants to freely supply their opinion on governance problems. His analysis highlighted Kangema FM as being valedictory to the farming community by current weather data and alerts for agricultural activities. Chibanda (2015) during a study on 'A Cry to be Heard'; which is a community radio amplifying voices of rural ladies Zambia and its role in fighting gender based violence. She found that despite the tough conditions for operating community media, they do empower rural ladies.

This agrees with Bell (1991), that media language and content affects attitudes and opinions of people in society through the way in which it presents the contents and the issues). In this respect, the researchers conducted an audit of radio broadcast content of the community radio stations within Migori County, with a view to establishing their contribution in peaceful political campaigns in the County. This study was focused on the type of broadcast contents aired from community radio stations in Migori, as well as the orientation of the contents to promotion of political campaigns environment (whether peaceful or violent). As reviewed above, many studies have been conducted on radio stations, political violence and its consequences to the community. However, they are not comprehensive enough to explain potential of community radio contents in fostering political campaign environment within the context of elections in Migori County.

Conceptual framework

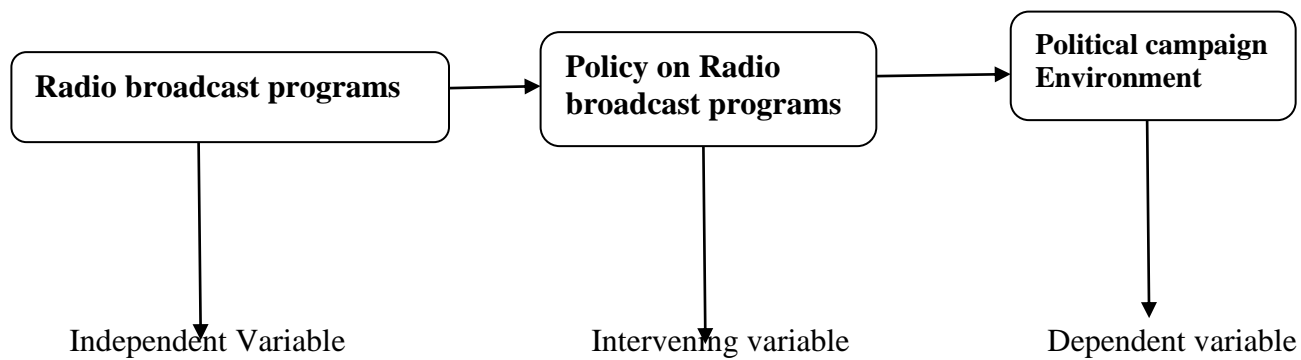


Figure 1: Conceptual framework.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to establish the community based radio broadcast contents in Migori County, air in facilitating peaceful campaign environment. This research registered 21 participants. Face-to-face interviews, documents' analyses and focus group discussions were employed to supply qualitative data. The data analysis was done according to the research objectives.

The respondents were mainly; radio broadcasters, community radio program managers, and radio adult listeners living in Migori County. Purposive samplings in conjunction with convenience sampling techniques were employed to derive the focus group discussion participants, and also to select the radio stations and their respective staff for the study. These respondents were considered information rich with regards to the research objective.

Table 1: Sampling for programs managers and broadcasters

Radio station	Experience	Female	Male	Total
Milambo Fm	At least 3 years	1	1	2
Radio Rameny	At least 3 years	0	2	2
Radio Tarumbeta	At least 3 years	0	2	2
Total		1	5	6

Table 2 Sample distribution and focus group discussion:

Ethnic Background	Preferred language	Female	Male	Total
Luo	Dholuo	4	4	8
Kuria	Kuria	2	2	4
Luhya	Kiswahili	1	2	3
Total		6	6	15

FINDINGS

The researcher had sought to answer the following research questions: What are the community radio stations' broadcast contents in Migori County for promoting peaceful political campaigns?

Table 3: Sampling of respondents by age and gender

Age bracket	Male	Female	Total
19-25	4	6	10
26-35	4	4	8
36-55	2	1	3
Total			21

Analysis of radio content aired by the Community Radios

The most listened to community radios in Migori County were found to be Milambo FM, Radio Tarumbeta and Radio Rameny. Participants rely on radio for information that includes news. It was established that listeners absolutely trust what they get from the radio. Also the participants get entertainment from the radio. The radio stations broadcast contents focus mainly on evangelism and family life education (Radio Tarumbeta), Social issues and politics (Radio Rameny) and politics and economy (Milambo FM). The pie chart below illustrates distribution of aired broadcast contents.



Fig: 4:2 Distribution of broadcast contents among the three community radio stations

The orientation of broadcast contents of community radio stations in fostering peaceful political campaigns in Migori County.

Most participants interviewed cited broadcast contents such as live debates, adverts, polls, and news features as important for peace mobilization in political campaigns. Every participant acknowledged that community radio stations are powerful in their capacity to influence change in society both positive and negative. Participants concurred that design of radio broadcast contents should be participatory, where views should be sought from the community membership on peace, ethnic tolerance, religious tolerance,

political tolerance and national cohesion. Also, such peace promoting broadcast contents should to be aired after the 7 pm and as such times to get high volumes of listeners.

The study found that some of the challenges impeding the effectiveness of community radios in mobilizing peace include: Inadequate attention to peace issues, inadequate involvement of community residents on peace contents, inadequate radio broadcast content on peace (adverts, specially composed music, announcements, poems, sermons, drama,), lack of dedicated broadcast contents on peace mobilization, and excessive music for entertainment instead of peace mobilization.

An analysis of music and songs played by the community radios stations showed most music played is secular in nature. However, for the early morning hours during opening of the studio gospel music is played as interlude with radio-evangelical preaching. The study revealed that none of the radios stations have a collection of music selected specifically for peace building purposes.

The study found that Migori County business community is aware of the power of community radios and the business men pay to advertise goods, events and services. However, neither the elections management body, nor Non-Governmental Organizations send any adverts to the community radio stations for promotion of peace.

CONCLUSION

The design of broadcast contents by community radios, as well as airing of the said broadcast contents can highly influence political campaign environment, thus determining whether it will be hostile or peaceful. However, such vital contents are conspicuously lacking in all the community radio stations studied. If community radio stations in Migori County choose to incorporate peace related materials in the design of their broadcast contents, this can go along way in mobilizing peace during political campaigns in the run up to elections, and this can reduce the likelihood of political violence in the county.

RECOMMENDATION

Since the community based radio broadcast contents have great influence among the inhabitants of Migori County, it is recommended that the contents that broadcast contents which promote peaceful political campaigns should be incorporated in the radio stations, as this will alleviate chances of violent election environment.

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