

Media Preference and Motivation among the Urban Youth in Kenya

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Abstract: Media may present a rather unrealistic and skewed account of human romance and sexuality leading some commentators to raise concerns that youth media, with their formulaic portrayal of gender roles and sexuality, is developing and sustaining stereotypical gender-role schemas; for example, ideas that, for women, looks and sexiness are all important and, for men, sexual obsession is normal, and sexual prowess an asset. Media have emerged as an important socialization determinant, yet there still exists serious gaps in our knowledge on what drives the motivation and preference of media among the youths in urban area. This paper is inspired by the need to answer three questions:

- i. Which media are urban youth currently interacting with?
- ii. And what are the motivations for their media choices?
- iii. What is the future of new media audience?.

Keywords: Media, Urban Youth, Motivation, Media Audience

INTRODUCTION

The youth audience is highly dynamic. Driven by their divergent needs, their loyalty often shifts from one media source to another with a hope that their interaction with various media contents will lead to certain gratifications. From the advent of FM radio broadcasting, young people have been a major target, with FM radio stations across the country working competitively to win their loyalty. However, the rapid technological advancement has seen some youthful audiences leave terrestrial radio for new technologies. Owing to the fact that they are increasingly dividing their attention among a growing array of tech-driven options including the television, cable technology, MP3 players, the internet radio, satellite radio, ipods among others, it goes without saying that radio is losing in terms of audiences [1]. The urban youth are the most affected since most of them are techno-savvy, learned and can afford the technologies. The purpose of the study is to determine the impact of technology on terrestrial radio listenership among urban youth. This will be accomplished by establishing their current media choices, the uses to which they are putting the media and the kind of gratifications they derive from consuming them. This is with a view to coming up with recommendations and suggestions to stations that want to serve the needs of young people in this technological dispensation.

Human beings make choices according to the fine distinctions of personal preference. According

McQuail [2], media preferences may be related to social background, but they are also specific and unpredictable. Individual media tastes are formed in childhood through teenage [3]. The appeal of certain staple items or genres of media content (such as news, film, music, entertainment, drama) cuts across the many differences of social and cultural background and the distribution of such preferences also varies in broadly predictable ways. In general for instance, there is more demand for amusement, vicarious excitement or romantic stories than for education, religion or pornography. Some types and specific items of content type have only a restricted appeal. According to Handelsman and colleagues [4], the media is an important source of knowledge for the physical, social and emotional aspects of dating, romance and sex. Young people turn more readily to media that presents 'forbidden fruits' in a far more overt, detailed and appealing way than most parents or educators offer [5]. Youth oriented entertainment media include movies, TV, magazines, pop music and music videos. These media forms target a teenage audience and provide a vast array of messages on love, relationships, and sexual content. The internet with increasingly easy access and highly explicit sexual content has become another important source of information [6].

Media as Role Models Theory

The study relied on the Schema theory [7], which posits that, during adolescence, the understanding of socially dominant definitions of male

and female roles, or gender role schemas is extended and refined through media. The physical maturing of the body and mind and the socio-cultural context defines how to evaluate and handle these changes and prompts adolescents to develop their social and sexual selves in ways that are congruent with socially prevailing environment provided by media. Parents generally follow socially defined patterns concerning these roles and socialize their children accordingly. However, in terms of modeling and instructing on romance and sex the parents lack control. This way, adolescents not only turn to their peers, but also to media that provide ample examples of such situations [2]. This theory, informed this study in understanding the ways in which media motivates youths in its use as preferred information source for their social, educational and otherwise modeling.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive research design where the researcher utilized both the quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection.

The researcher gathered the data for this study from youth in Nakuru town. The target age group was young people aged between 18-35 years. The results were presented using descriptive statistics such as means, percentages and cross tabulations. The researcher used purposive sampling method to identify the young people who participated in the study. Therefore, a sample of 200 youth were selected in the criteria of those who were techno savvy and had access to the technologies for a number of hours every day.

RESULTS: PREFERRED MEDIA AND REASONS FOR MOTIVATION

Motivations for Media Usage

The researcher wanted to establish the respondents' motivations for interacting with media. It was established that 73.4% (276) reported having interacted with the media for entertainment, 75% (283) for information, 47.1% (177) for education purposes and 32.2% (121) for socialization. Such results are presented in the figure below.

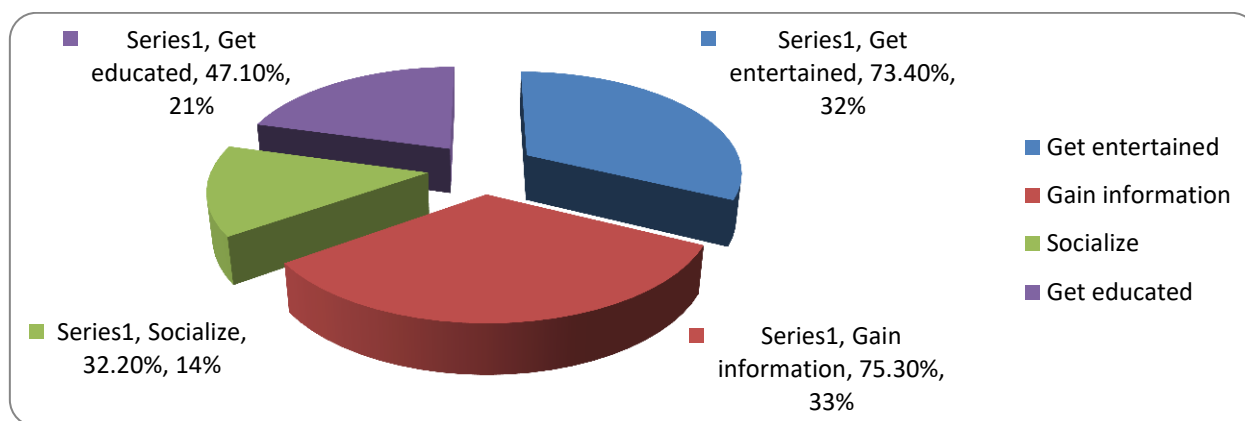


Fig-1: Preferred Media and Reasons for Motivation

The findings of the study had it that gender is a determinant of media use and the functions. Of the respondents, 48% males versus 52% females indicated they interacted with media entertainment, 54.8% males versus 45.2% females interacted to get information, 50.4% males versus 49.6% females interacted to socialize while 50.3% males versus 49.7% were interacted for education purposes.

Reasons for Turning to the Most Preferred Media

The researcher wanted to find out why the respondents turn to some specific media. 59.8% (207) indicated they turn to some media because of educative programs, 45.1% (156) turn to the media for entertainment, and 29.2% (101) do so because it treats them to various genres of music while 27.2% (94) do so because media enables them to socialization. Still, 16.5% (57) of the respondents said they turn to their most preferred media because the media are within their

control while 15.6% (54) do so because of sound and picture quality.

Sometimes, the youths find themselves watching alternative media instead of their preferred ones. The researcher sought to establish the reasons behind this and 45.2% (160) said they do so to escape from the boredom of daily existence or routine, 9.3% (33) said they do so to escape from problems, 28.8% (102) do so for emotional release while 15% (53) do so for personal identify reasons. Moreover, 2.5% (9) said they listen to alternative audio forms because their family members are also doing it, 3.1% (11) said they are influenced by their friends, 59.9% (212) reported that they seek information while 9.3% (33) are inspired by the technological advancements.

Preferred media and meeting needs

The researcher wanted to know whether the preferred media met the respondents' needs. Out of the

355, 344 (96.6%) said their preferred media met their need for entertainment, 6(1.7%) negated while 6(1.7%) were not sure. Out of 360, 324(90%) said their preferred media met their need for information, 25(6.9%) said they did not meet the need and 37(10.7%) were not sure. Out of 344, 146(42.4%) said the media met their

need for diversion, 131(38.1%) negated while 67(19.5%) said they were not sure. Out of 346, 236(68.2%) said their preferred media met their social needs. Out of these, 73(21.1%) said they did not while 37(10.7%) were not sure. The preferences versus needs data is presented in the figure below.

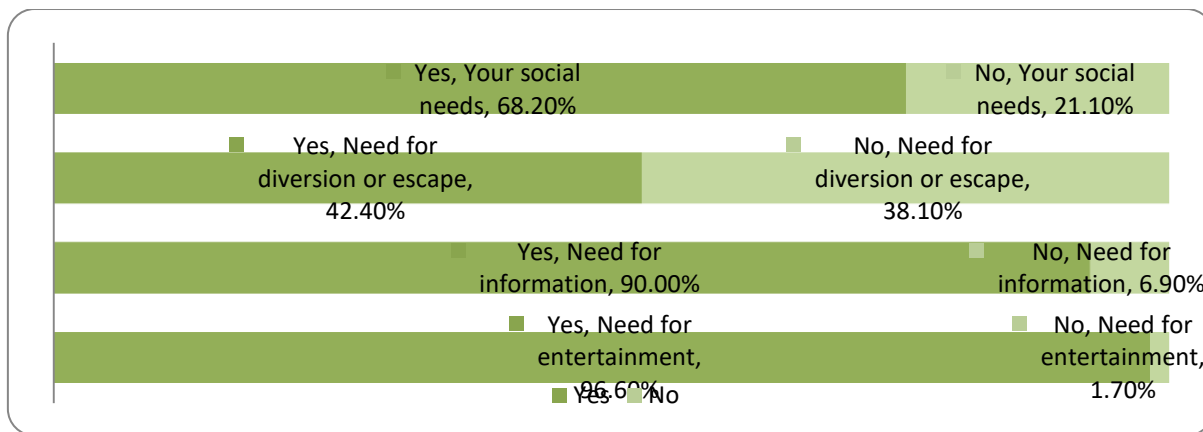


Fig-2: Preferred media and meeting needs

The researcher sought to find out what the respondents did not like about new technologies. This question elicited a number of responses whereby out of the total, 42.6% of the respondents said they don't like new technologies because they have immoral contents, 32.5% said they are expensive, 30.4% of 72 they have no access while 17.3% of 41 said the new media has tribal content that do not augur well with them. 12.2% of the respondents said they don't like the new technologies because they are addictive while 3.8% said they have too much western content.

DISCUSSION

Media Use and Youth Culture

In an article entitled *The Naturalistic study of media use and Youth culture*, Lull argues that many adolescents are engaged in a heroic struggle against what is to them profoundly irrelevant social-cultural environment, replete with relentless and unreasonable expectations of conformity to dullness. Teenage years provide a first opportunity to explore exciting cultural ground that differs sharply from terrain controlled by the ubiquitous forces of conventionality that surround them. Youth are known to take risks to fulfill the vague, inwardly sensed, largely unreinforced promise of creative expression, personal growth, relevant cultural awareness, meaningful relationships, spontaneity, and fun that lie in consciousness and activity not prescribed by the authoritarian agents that have directed nearly every aspect of their preadolescent lives. The uses and gratifications literature has provided several ways of classifying audience needs and gratifications. Some have spoken of immediate and deferred gratifications [8]; others have called them informational-educational and fantasist-escapist-entertainment [9].

The findings of the study showed that most youth respondents indicated that they turn to their preferred media for a number of reasons including the ability to meet their entertainment needs (95%), treating them to a variety of music (100%), their preferred media update them on current affairs (97.2%) as well as while others said their preferred media gave them the flexibility they needed (20%). This shows that most youth turn to media for entertainment purposes. Also, the findings show that gender influences motivation for media choice. For instance, among the 186 respondents who gave reasons for their preferred media, 59.8% of the males turn to their preferred media because they treat them to various music genres ask compared to the lower 40.2% of the females et cetera.

The study shows that most youth aged 18-24 interact with the media for purposes of entertainment, gaining information (news) and socialization. These findings confirm again that the need for entertainment and education are among the factors motivating youth people to turn to their most preferred media; with 59.8% of the respondents indicating they turn to their most preferred media because they have good educating programs and 45.1% saying the media help them relax (entertainment).

It also shows that more males (59%) than females (41%) are driven by the need for education to turn to the media while slightly more females (50.6%) than males (49.4) are driven to turn to the media by the need for entertainment. This is a true reflection of what happens where more men go for serious contents that provide them with information and education on various issues while more women than men for instance, go for soaps and stuff that contains humor. The findings also

show that the media play a bigger role in the lives of men than females in helping them meet their need for interaction; 60.6% versus 39.4% males to females respectively. This is true since naturally women interact more than men, meaning that media only complements their nature as opposed to men who may have to rely on the media more to meet this need.

Reasons for listening to alternative audio forms

The study reveals that the factors that motivate youth to turn to their preferred stations are the same ones that explain why they tune into alternative audio forms including boredom from daily existence, escape from problems, for emotional release, peer pressure, social integrative as well as personal identity reasons. Still others do so for purposes of keeping up with technology. The study also makes it apparent that the technology choices youth make are influenced by factors such as peers and family members. This is true particularly because it is at this age the need for identity and belonging are quite strong in them. This is a time most of them bend their principles and engage in habits or behaviors different from the way they have been socialized.

The findings show that technologies gratify a number of needs among the respondents including decision making, identity, social integrative, need for romance as well as learning. Gratifications are obtained most in learning with 61% (230) of the respondents saying high, followed by that of making them feel less lonely with 44.3% (167) saying high and making decision at 35.3% (133) saying high. The respondents also gave reasons for interacting with their most preferred media including having something to talk about, to relax, to get away from worries, keeping them in the mood they would like to be in, identity reasons, social integrative reasons, among others. The highest number of respondents 62.9% (237) interact with their preferred media for purposes of getting the latest information and tunes followed by the need to relax 52.3% (197) and putting them in the right moods with 48.5% (183). Despite their usefulness in meeting their needs, the study also established the downside of technology including access to immoral contents, costly, tribal content and addiction. These are aspects that technology users need to be wary of.

New media and the Future of the Audience

According to McQuail [2], new media developments have brought about four changes which have affected the audience (and ideas about it). First, there are possibilities for delivering television (and radio) broadcasting via cable and satellite. Supply has previously been limited by the range of terrestrial transmitters carrying a very few channels. The result has been a relative "abundance" of supply of audiovisual media and content and a greatly increased choice for many. Adding to this increased supply is an

enlargement of reception possibilities as apparatus becomes cheaper. Much greater ease of message reproduction and distribution has also affected print media and various branches of the music industry. A second challenge has been the rapid development of new ways of recording, storage and retrieval of sound pictures, now beginning to approach the ease and flexibility of print storage. The video recorder and playback machine has had a considerable impact, because it shifts control of the timing of television of film reception from the sender to the receiver, thus increasing abundance and choice. Even the television remote-control device tends to increase choice, by making it easier to look for alternatives.

Taken together, these changes are reducing the homogeneity of audience experience. As a result, there are more numerous and more fleeting audiences for television, and audience segmentation and fragmentation have been widely predicted. A third change relates to the increased trans-nationalization of television flow, as a result of the worldwide growth of new services, the capacity for satellite transmission to cross national frontiers, and the greater import and export of film and television program content. This impact is likely to see worldwide audiences recruited for events or spectacles of especial interest. We can see the evidence of increased global marketing of media stars and products. In smaller countries, especially local or national audiences are less protected from global cultural influences. The fourth innovation derives from the increasingly interactive capacity use of various media as a result of computer-based systems. One-way systems become two-way or in the multiple networks. The media user can acquire the control of the information environment. The resulting interactive media networks have been welcomed by some as the basis for local community or for wider, interest-based associations and cyber communities [10].

In principle, this would seem to run counter to the general trend of media history, restoring a human scale and individuality to mediated social communication, restoring the balance of power of the receiver at the individuation of use and fragmentation of the mass audience. It is also still unclear how far the audience wants to be interactive. In a fully decentralized network, the traditional concept of audience is hereby abolished or becomes a misnomer, replaced by countless sets of consumers of information services of unlimited variety. If this should happen, it certainly means the 'breakdown of the referent,' as noted earlier. The concept of mass medium is equally threatened, because no one will be obliged to accept the same package of information at the same time as anyone else. Arguably, without a mass medium, there is no –single, collective, audience-only chance similarities of patterns of media use. However, this is only a theory – not yet a reality. The most far-reaching technical possibilities

seem more to have extended rather than to have replaced the older patterns of “audience behavior.” Audiences can now be larger and more “massive” than ever before. This serves as a reminder that audiences are not just a product of technology, but also of social life. There re continuing social forces that generates the formation of audiences. It is the same forces, rather than the media, that will determine whether or not we find ourselves in an atomized and alienated world. The possibility of entering an interactive utopia is also as much dependent on social factors as on technological possibilities.

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