

## **Mass Media Needs and Consumption Culture among the Urban Youths' in Kenya**

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**Abstract:** Media has been tasked with the transmission of social heritage across generations. This role of the media serves to enforce social norms and maintain consensus by exposing deviants confers status by highlighting selected individuals and can operate as a check on the government. It is therefore, important to study mass media needs and consumption culture among the urban youths' in Kenya, given that the role of media among the youths and the trend of their consumption is an elusive phenomena that comes with the technological advancement. The objectives is to establish the hours spent on a particular media, the reasons behind the youth's most preferred media, and the content predominant in their preferred media. The study from which this paper was pulled targeted university and college youth, most of whom fall within the age range of 18-24 years. The data obtained from them using questionnaires was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings show that the youth in Kenya are interacting with radio, television, internet, mp3 and other portable devices, cellphones, ipods CDs and tapes in that order. The choices depend on their preferences which when order in priority are music, news entertainment and information. They have also adopted new media technologies for multiple purposes that gratify their social and psychological needs.

**Keywords:** mass media, consumption culture

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Functions of the media**

Wright [1] defines mass communication in terms of the nature of the audience, the nature of the communication experience, and the nature of the communicator. Lasswell [2] notes three functions of the mass media: surveillance of the environment and the transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next. To these three functions, Wright adds a fourth, entertainment. In addition to the functions, the media may also have dysfunctions, consequences that are undesirable for the society members. A single act may be both functional and dysfunctional. Surveillance role of the media informs and provides news. In performing this function, the media often warn us of expected dangers such as droughts or a threatening military situation. The surveillance function also includes the news the media provide that is essential to the economy, the public and society such as stock market reports, traffic reports weather forecast reports et cetera. Correlation role of the mass media involves the selection and interpretation of information about the environment. The media often include criticism and prescribe how one should react to events. Correlation is therefore the editorial and propaganda content of the media. This role of the media serves to enforce social norms and maintain consensus by exposing deviants confers status by highlighting selected individuals and

can operate as a check on the government. In carrying out the correlation role, the media can impede threats to social stability and may often monitor or manage public opinion.

#### **Social Uses of the Media**

One of the most fundamental roles of mass media is to transmit social heritage across generations. This role involves the media communicating information, values and norms from one generation to the next or from members of a society to newcomers. In this way, they serve to increase cohesion by widening the base of common ground. They aid the integration of individuals into a society by continuing socialization after formal education has ended and as well as by beginning it during the preschool period. Media is viewed as a causally motivated sequence of behavior, which is open to both prediction and modification in some relevant way. Webster and Phalen [3] argue for three main audience models in communication policy that position the audience respectively as: "victim"; "consumer"; and "coin of exchange." Whatever the model, the audience in these conceptualizations is more a statistical abstraction than a human constellation. However, research on media has tried to counter this way of looking at audiences by treating media use as an integral part of something more fundamental, namely the patterns of everyday social

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interactions and experience that not only influence specific media behaviors but that also governs the meaning that media use has for its audiences.

There are many people strongly addicted to media use behaviors that might reinforce their isolation. Most uses of the media have been effectively rendered sociable. Media use is itself a ubiquitous form of normal social behavior and an acceptable substitute for actual social interaction. It is also widely perceived as a significant “agent of socialization”—an occasion for social learning and a means toward participation in the wider society [4]. The sociability of the audience experience is evidenced by the fact that we often share the experience of attending to the media with others.

For example, most media content is intended for entertainment. Media entertainment serves to millions to a mass culture or art and music, and some people contend that they raise public taste and preference in the arts. In the case of film and television; the media are used to entertain other people or to ease social interactions; attending to the media is often accompanied by talk about the ongoing experience; the content of media provides and object of shared attention for many as well as topics of conversation. Media-related talk is especially useful in providing a nonintrusive basis of contact with strangers. Media in the home are frequently a background to virtually every other kind of activity, without necessarily impeding or displacing these activities.

Moreover, it is significant to note that certain forms of media have a distinctly public character, both in the sense of taking place outside the home and also in having a wider significance as a shared response to public performances and to public events. Mass media that are located in their use primarily in the home (especially television, video, music, and books) can be considered to bridge the gap between the private, domestic, world and the concerns and activities of the wider society. Under some condition, being a member of an audience has the meaning of sharing in the wider life of society, while in other circumstances; it is a self-initiated experience that may be entirely personal or shared only by a small circle of friends or family members. It is not so much the physical location of the audience experience that matters as the definition of its meaning as more public or more private.

The private type of audience experience is constructed according to personal mood and circumstances and does not involve any reference to society or even to other people. When not purely introspective, it is likely to be concerned with self-comparison and matching with a media model, role, or personality in the search for an acceptable identify for public self-presentation. The difference between the public and the private types of audience experience

depends on a combination of factors: the type of medium and content and the frame of mind of audience member. Expansion and development of media seem to be opening up relatively more possibilities for private audience, by bringing more of media experience within control of the individual to choose at will.

### **Individual Needs and Media Uses**

The uses and gratifications literature has provided several ways of classifying audience needs and gratifications. Some have spoken of immediate and deferred gratifications. According to Schramm, Lyle and Parker [5] this gratification can be referred to as informational-educational and fantasist-escapist-entertainment. McQuail, Blumler and Brown [6] based on their research in England, suggested four categories of gratification. The first is the diversion-escape from routine and problems (emotional release); the second is personal relationships-social utility of information in conversations (substitute of the media for companionship); the third is personal identify or individual psychology-value reinforcement or reassurance; self-understanding; reality exploration, and the last one is surveillance-information about things that might affect one or will help one do or accomplish something. Katz, Gurevitch and Haas [7] argue that the mass media is a means used by individuals to connect or disconnect themselves with others.

### **Media Use and Youth consumption Culture**

When it comes to media use, 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 and dullness [8]. He goes on to say that 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.

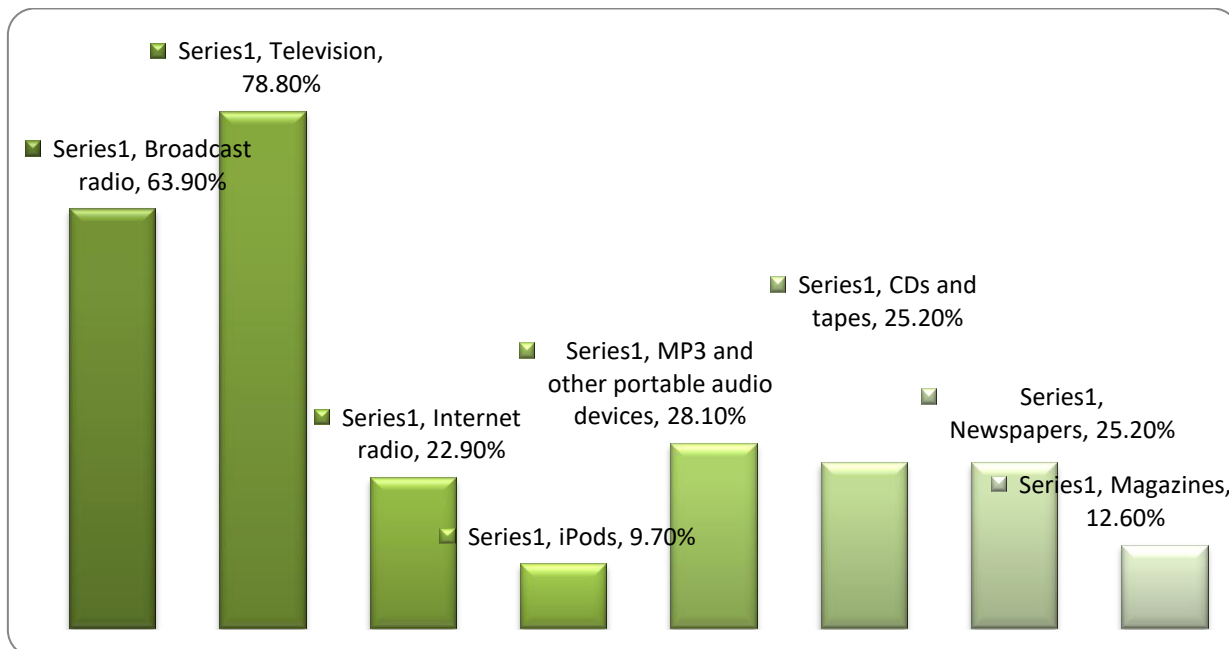
### **METHODOLOGY**

The research targeted university and college youth, most of who (313; 84.8%) fall within the age range of 18-24 years. Those between 25 and 30 were only 27; 12.7%. The reasons for targeting university and college urban youth included the fact that they have a higher purchasing power, are more techno savvy and therefore more exposed to technologies compared to their primary and high school counterparts.

**RESULTS**

The first thing the researcher sort was to establish the media that youth liked or preferred most. Asked about the media they like most, 275(78.8%) of the respondent youths said television, 223 (63.9%) broadcast radio, 98 (28.1%) said mp3 and portable

devices, 80(22.9%) said internet radio, 88 (25.2%) CDs and tapes 88 (25.2%) while 34(9.7%) preferred ipods. It is therefore, established in the findings that the respondent youths in this study, like television the most. The results are presented graphically below.

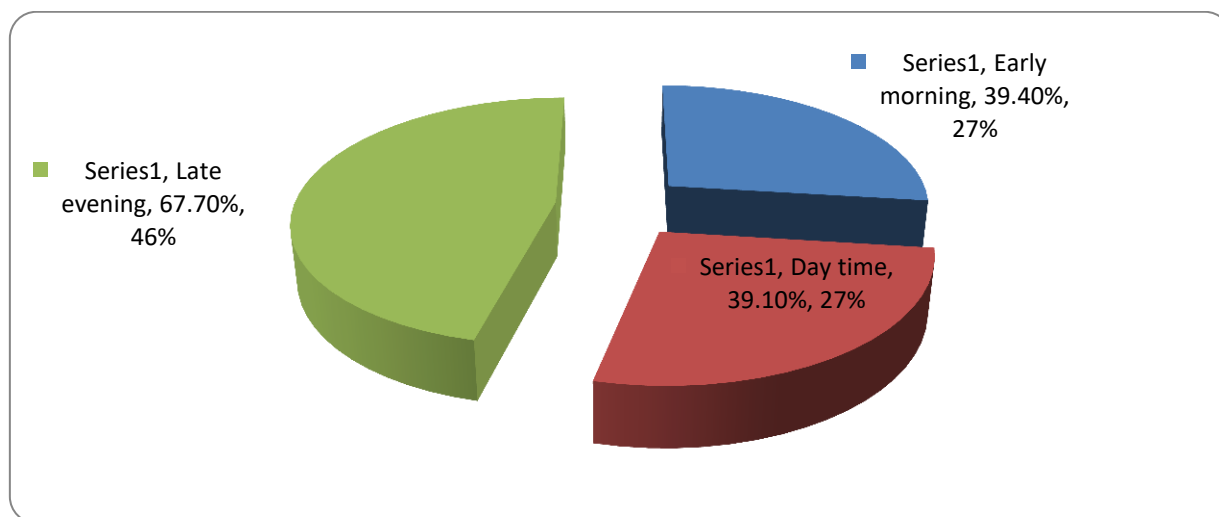


**Fig 1: The media preferred most by youths and their rating**

**Hours spent on respective media**

The researcher also wanted to find out the time of day when the respondents interacted with media. 239

(67.7%) said late evening, 139(39.4%) said early morning, 138(39.1%) day time.

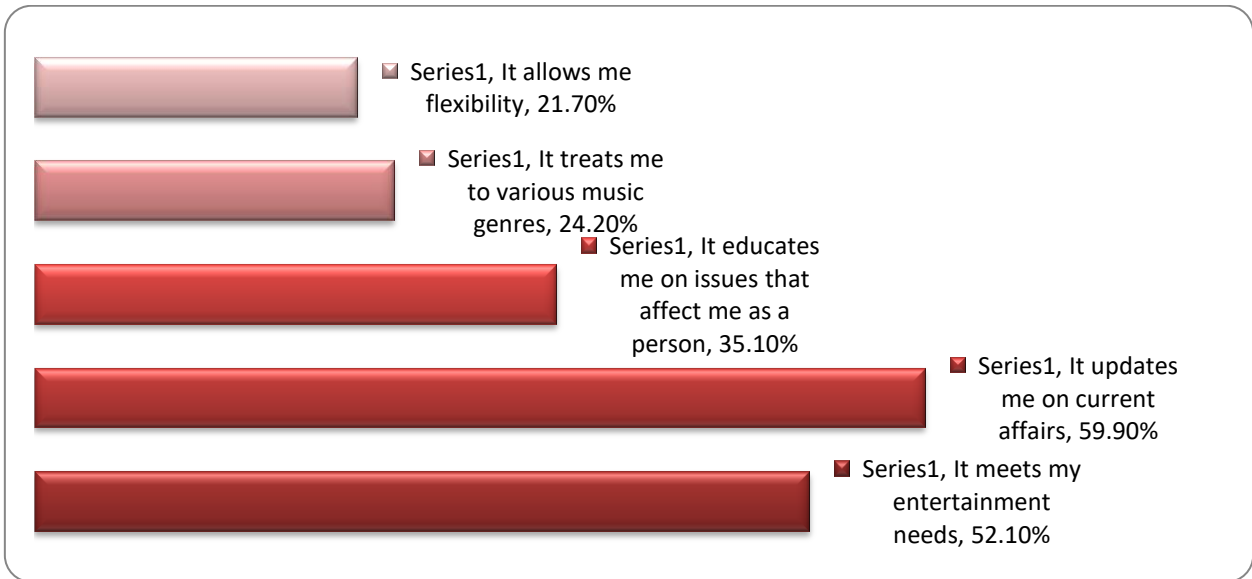


**Fig 2: Hours you interact with the media**

**Reasons for the Most Preferred Media**

Asked to state reasons for their most preferred media, 52.1% (187) said their preferred media meet their entertainment needs, 59.% (215) said their preferred media update them on current affairs in form

of news, 35.1%(126) said they educate them on issues affecting them and the society, 24.2%(87) said the media entertains them while 78 (21.7%) said the preferred media gave them the flexibility they want.

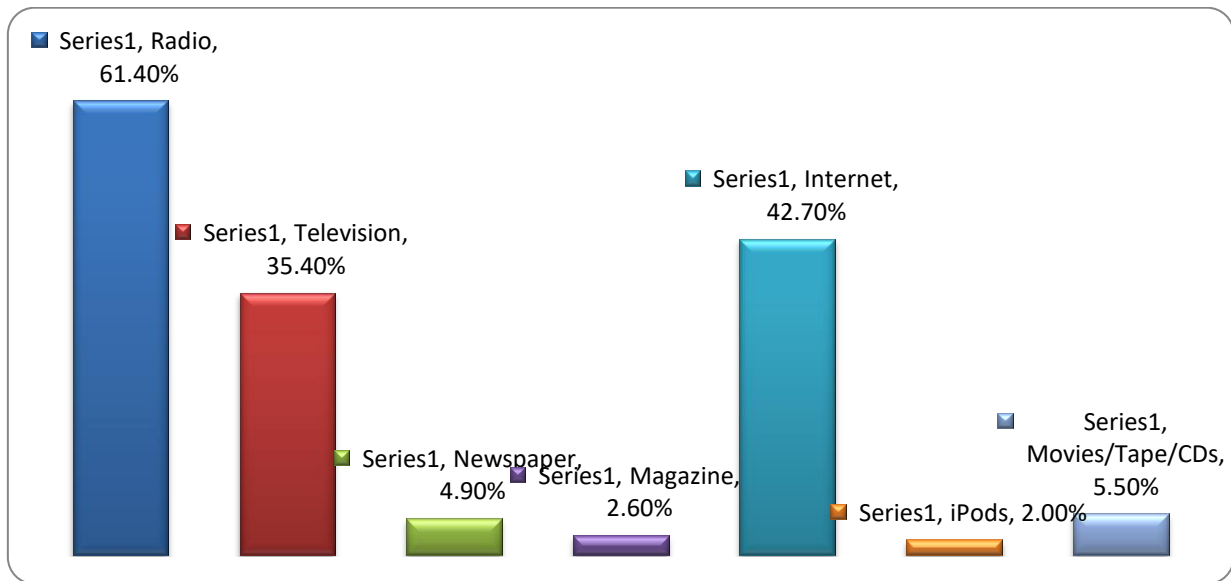


**Fig 3: Reasons for the most preferred media**

**The Media for Music**

The researcher wanted to know the media the respondents turn to first to learn new music. 61.4%(213) indicated broadcast radio, 35.4%(123)

indicated television, 42.7%(148) indicated internet, 5.5%(19) indicated CDs and tapes, 4.9%(17) newspapers, 2.6% (9) magazines while 2%(7) said they use ipods:

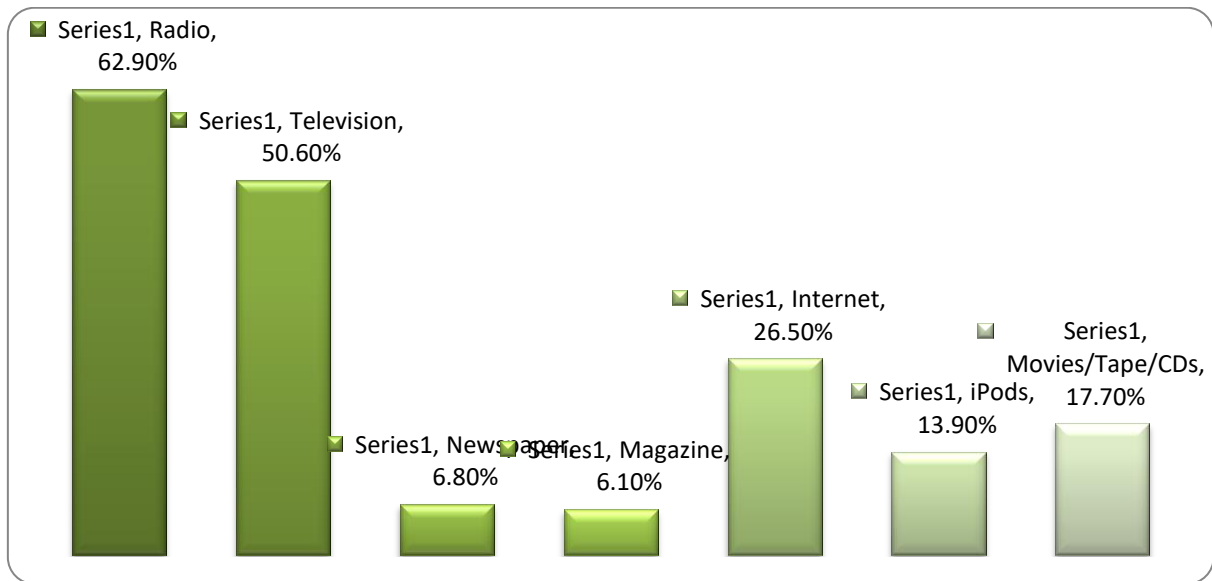


**Fig 4: The media for music**

**Media for Entertainment**

The respondents were asked about the media outlets they turn to for entertainment where 50.6 % (157) indicated television, 62.9% (195) radio, 26.5%

(82) internet and 17.7% (55) indicated CDs and tapes. Among the respondents also, 13.9% (43) indicated ipods, 26.8 % (21) newspapers while 6.1%(19) indicated magazines.



**Fig 5: Media for Entertainment**

## DISCUSSION

This research shows that the media young people are interacting with include radio, television, internet, mp3 and other portable devices, cellphones, ipods CDs and tapes. The choices they make depend on what they are looking for which for these youth include new music, information and entertainment. They use all the media technologies to obtain these media contents although their preferences for particular media vary. For instance, majority (61.4%) of them turn to radio when they want to learn about new music as compared to (35.4%) who use television, (42.7%) who use the internet, (5.5%) who use CDs, (2%) who use ipods et cetera.

### Television, the most influential

For news, majority of the youth 69.4% (286) television followed by broadcast radio at 21.2% (111) while for entertainment, again majority of the respondents indicated television at 62.9% (195) followed by radio at 26.5% (82). The technology most used is the cell-phone integrated with 63.9% (230) of the respondents saying they use it most followed by FM/AM radio with 61.5% (216).

The study shows that the television is the medium most youth interact with (58.6%), followed by radio (41.9%) and mp3 and portable devices (36.8%). The reason for television taking the lead is due to its audio-visual aspect which makes it more appealing, authoritative and persuasive to its audience. Fragmentation of the audience started right with the invention of television with most radio listeners, programming and talents moving to television. Thus, audience fragmentation has become more evident as the audience gets divided along the various media outlets brought about by technology.

This is in line with a 2006 research done in the US United States which suggested that younger audiences were leaving terrestrial radio for new technologies like MP3 players, Internet radio, and satellite radio [9]. The study shows that most of the technologies used by youth are owned by them (63.9%). This makes it easier for them to access and interact with the technologies whenever possible. It also puts into their hands the power to choose the media outlets as well as contents that would meet their needs.

This is in agreement with an earlier research by Merrill and Lowstein [10] that identified factors influencing media and content choices including their availability as well as the potential for personal gain. Thus, the audience tends to read, view and listen to media and messages that are most accessible. Secondly, that the audience members expose themselves to messages that will give them the greatest reward. The study further reported that members often seek, unconsciously, messages that reinforce their opinions, perceptions and biases. They in effect take in those messages that are compatible with their mental and psychological predisposition. According to them past experience and philosophy of life influence the media choices and contents they choose.

### Radio, the most Egalitarian

The study also shows that most youth turn to media for entertainment where radio features prominently as a source of entertainment. This can be attributed due to the various roles radio plays including giving information or news, entertainment as well as informing audiences about new things. This concurs with earlier study findings by Mendelson [11] that radio provides listeners with much more than practical information and general entertainment. That people use radio to release tension, as an accompaniment for

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various moods and as a companion. This is particularly true since many people listen to radio when they are alone. As a companion, radio keeps people in touch with the outside world and brings that world into the listener's realm of activity.

Supporting this view, Robert Snow gives talk shows as one of the best examples of radio as a companion. To him, some talk shows are so successful that with clear channel broadcasting and syndication, they command a nationwide audience. To him, radio provides some of the same satisfaction that people obtain from normal face to face conversations [12]. Mendelson also emphasizes that radio gratifies certain listeners' needs and also serves as a social lubricant. He argues that radio binds people together through common shared experiences and provides subjects for discussion. "Since radio functions much like highly specialized magazines, listeners with these interests come to depend on a particular station for the content of their sub-cultures. As a result, a radio station becomes symbolic of a particular identity for the listener." [11].

He goes on to say that for the person who listens to radio while performing other tasks, radio has become more than incidental to the activity at hand; it may be part of what makes the activity appear normal. Thus, this use of radio makes it part of the activity. Some people for instance, find it very disconcerting to drive a car without listening to a radio, being in a house alone without a radio turned on, or going anywhere without carrying a portable radio blasting their favorite music. In these situations, according to him, radio enables people to manage the situation with greater ease than if it were absent.

Radio also helps in relieving tension through relaxing music to enhance romance. Thus listeners use radio to initiate and support desired feelings. In a survey conducted by Snow in 1983, of the 203 urban listeners in their late teens to middle age, 96% said radio enabled them to relax or reduce tension, and 74% claimed they used radio to enhance particular moods. Further, the survey report said that in addition to facilitating transient moods, radio can also play a major role in providing emotional support for listeners who identify a station with a particular sub-culture.

From this, we can also safely conclude that these roles played by radio explain how the medium has stood the test of time and technology.

### **New Media; most Recent**

The study confirmed that youth are the best users of new media technology and always try new developments that come up in a bid to remain on top of things at all times; 82.2% use broadcast radio, 83.3% use television, 78.2% use internet radio, 86.8% use ipods, 85.3% use mp3 and other portable devices,

86.6% use magazines while 81.8% use newspapers. Since the respondents are university and college students, this is also a pointer that educational level contributes to the usage of new technologies whereby those with higher literacy levels understand the technologies and adopt to them fast.

Everett Rogers [13] in his book *Diffusion of Innovations* calls this group of audience 'innovators'; the first individuals to adopt an innovation. Innovators are willing to take risks, youngest in age, have the highest social class, have great financial lucidity, very social and have closest contact to scientific sources and interaction with other innovators. According to Rogers, the risk tolerance helps them adopt technologies which may ultimately fail and the financial resources help absorb these failures.

The study revealed that the age bracket that used new media technology most is between 18 and 24 years. For instance, 94% of this age bracket use ipods, 94% use CDs and tapes, 89% use broadcast radio, 84% use television, 83% use mp3 and other portable devices while 73% use internet radio. Still, 98% use magazines while 80% use newspapers. This proves the notion that youth are the best users of technology and always try new developments that come up in a bid to remain on top of things at all times.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing results, the study concludes that youth interact most with television more than any other media because of its audio-visual nature. The results of such interaction were ranked in the study as television (58.6%), followed by radio (41.9%) and mp3 and portable devices (36.8%). However, radio leads in terms of the media that youths prefer most for entertainment especially music content because it is the most egalitarian. Merrill and Lowenstein argue that the factors influencing media and content choices include availability and the potential for personal gain. The study therefore shows that most youth turn to media for entertainment and radio features prominently as a source of entertainment. The study findings also support Robert Snow that talk shows are the best examples of radio as a companion that makes Kenyan youth to be glued to radio. By its own nature, radio gratifies certain listeners' needs and also serves as a social lubricant. It is the only media that enables listeners to listen as they perform other tasks. Radio, therefore, has become more than incidental to the activity at hand; it may be part of what makes the activity appear normal. The youth also use radio because it is best for relieving tension and enhancing romance through music. Thus youths use radio to initiate and support their desired feelings. The findings also confirm that youth are coming up as the best users of technology and always try new developments that come up in a bid to remain on top of things at all times. The use of new media technology is



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dependent on the age and the education status. The findings conclude that most new media technology users are between 18 and 24 years.

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