

The Impact of Mobile Integrated Radio on the Traditional Radio: The Paradigm Shift on Media use in Kenya

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Abstract: This paper explores the impact of mobile integrated radio on the traditional radio[sometimes herein referred to as terrestrial radio] in Kenya. It was born of a study that explored media, audience and technology and based on descriptive research. The research target population constituted of university and college students, in which over 84.8% were between 18 and 24 years. The reasons for targeting university and college urban youth included the fact that they are the most techno savvy population and therefore more exposed to technologies compared to other population segments. The findings show that there has been a paradigm shift from the former to the later occasioned by the technological advancement and other factors.

Keywords: mobile integrated radio, traditional radio

Impact of Technology on Radio

Studies as that of Albarran and colleagues [1] have suggested that the young generation is abandoning terrestrial radio for the radio integrated in the new technologies like MP3 players, internet radio and satellite radio. Albarran and colleagues [2] deduced that the situation in the U.S may reflect similar trend in the rest of the world.

Mobile phones integrated Radio

According to a 2009 report from Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR) the popularity of digital radio continues to increase [3]. The report showed that more people were listening to radio on mobile phones than in 2008. For example, 46 million people listened to the radio in the final quarter of 2009 recording a half a million increase compared to 2008. The report showed that 14 per cent of them tuned in via a digital platform. It was evident from studies that Radio Listenership in the UK had soared due to New Technology [4]. According to another report, the ubiquity of traditional radio broadcast over the airwaves is now augmented by a dizzying array of options received through cell phone, PDA, laptop computer, and anywhere there is Internet penetration [5]. This trend has continued to date and in the United Kingdom (UK), a lot of attention has been paid because the trend has a lot of impact on the economy just like in any other economies of the world.

Terrestrial Radio Listening Habits

A study conducted by the Council for Research Excellence (CRE) in 2009 found strong radio

listening habits. The findings show that over 75% of adults are reached by terrestrial radio on a daily basis, second only to television at 95%. The study found that that the Web/Internet (excluding email) reached 64%, newspaper 35%, and magazines 27%. In a deeper analysis of audio media titled "How U.S. Adults Use Radio and Other Forms of Audio," Nielsen found that that 90% of consumers listen to some form of audio media per day. It can be deduced that broadcast radio continues to play a major role to all ages, with almost 80 percent of those aged 18 to 34 listening to broadcast radio in an average day. While the recent emergence of portable audio devices like the iPod and smartphones was considered a threat to traditional forms of radio, recent studies prove that the new technology has had a positive impact on radio consumption [6,7]. In fact, radio was found to have a higher reach (82%) among those who listen to portable audio devices, compared to the average reach for all audio consumers. The CRE study of 2009 proves that radio is still a popular medium for the tech-savvy. The significance of radio is seen among all socio-economic groups within the United States, as well as with those that consume other audio platforms that had been perceived to be reducing radio dominance. This study concurred with an earlier research which revealed that technology did have an impact on radio listening habits and that 50% Americans had not changed radio listening habits even at the eve of technological advancement. The survey found that Americans rate radio as their primary source to learn about new music.

Radio Use and Access in Kenya

The number of private radio stations is growing in Kenya, with many smaller stations broadcasting in local languages. According to Freedom House, local language radio has expanded rapidly, “and their call-in shows have fostered increasing public participation as well as commentary that is unfavorable to the government [8]. While commercial local-language radio is vibrant, there are few community radio stations that are typically local-language, volunteer-run stations broadcasting to an 8 km radius or less [9]. As in many developing countries, radio is an indispensable tool in Kenya for delivering development information. From the findings, nearly all Kenyans are radio listeners, and nearly all of these listeners use it as a regular source of news and information.

Functions of the Media

Harold Lasswell and Charles Wright are among the early scholars who have seriously considered the functions and role of the mass media in society [10]. Lasswell [11] identifies 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 [12] (1959) adds a fourth one; entertainment. In addition to functions, the media may also have dysfunctions and consequences that are undesirable for the society members. A single act may be both functional and

dysfunctional. The 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 as essential to the economy, the public and society such as stock market reports, traffic reports and weather forecast reports among others. The correlation role of the mass media involves the selection and interpretation of information about the environment. Under this role, the media uses criticism and a prescription on how one should react to events. The correlation function is therefore the editorial and propaganda content of the media. This role serves to enforce social norms and maintain consensus by challenging status quo, highlighting selected individuals and operating 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.

Results and Discussion

The Number of FM or AM Radio Sets in Homes

The researcher wanted to establish the level of access to the FM or AM radio. Asked about how many radio sets they had in their homes 54.8% of the respondents said they had more than one, while 25.9% said they had two while 19.3% had one.

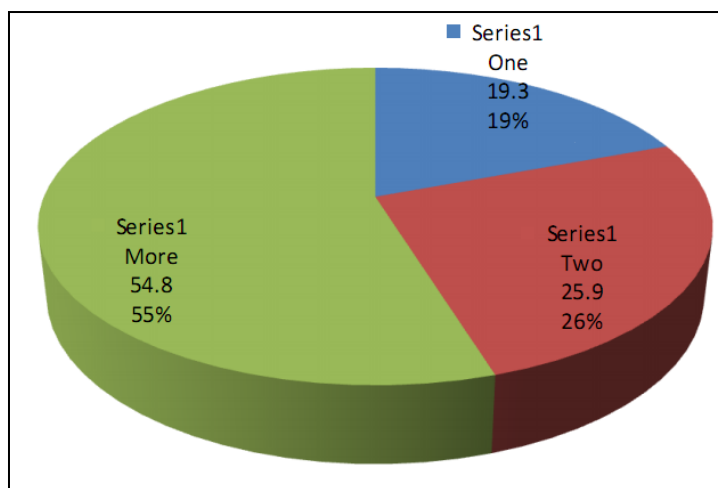


Fig-1: The number of FM or AM radio sets in homes

Radio Ownership at Home

On the question of who owned the radio they use, majority 67.4% reported that the radio sets belonged to them, 25.4% said they belonged to their

parents, 4% said they belonged to their brothers and sisters, 1.7% said their guardians while 1.2% said the radio sets belonged to their friends.

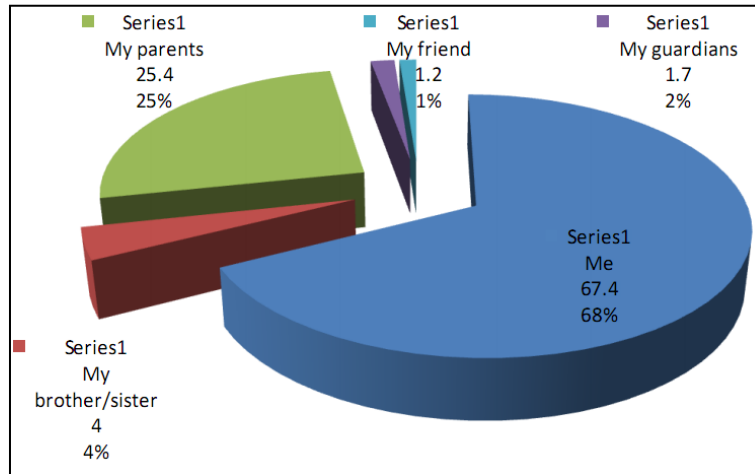


Fig-2: Radio Ownership at Home

How often they listen to FM/AM Radio on Mobile

With regard to how often they listened to FM/AM radio on mobile phones, 75.25 percent of the respondents said they listen to radio any time they want to and 14.7% said they listen to radio any time they are

away from home, 8.6% of the respondents said they don't like radio while 1.5% said they don't own a mobile phone. These results are illustrated in the diagram below:

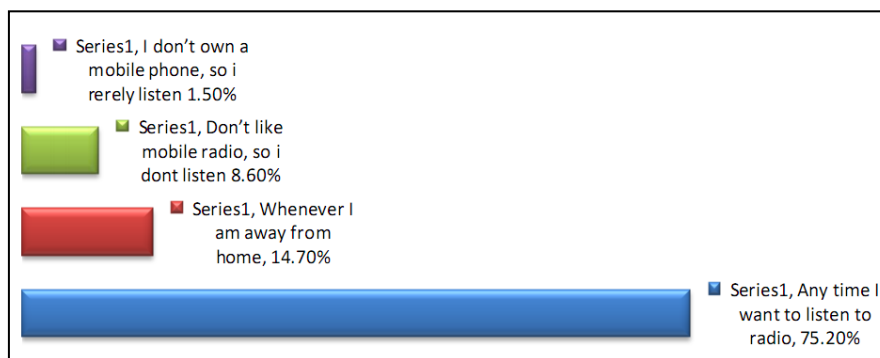


Fig-3: How often they listened to FM or AM radio on mobile

Hours Spent Listening to FM or AM Radio on a Weekday

On the question of the amount of time the respondents spend listening to FM radio on a week day, there were 314 respondents. Out of these 57.3% said

they listen to FM radio for more than an hour, 25.5% said between 30-60 minutes, 12.3% said between 15-30 minutes while 4.1% said they don't listen to radio. Figure 4 below presents the results.

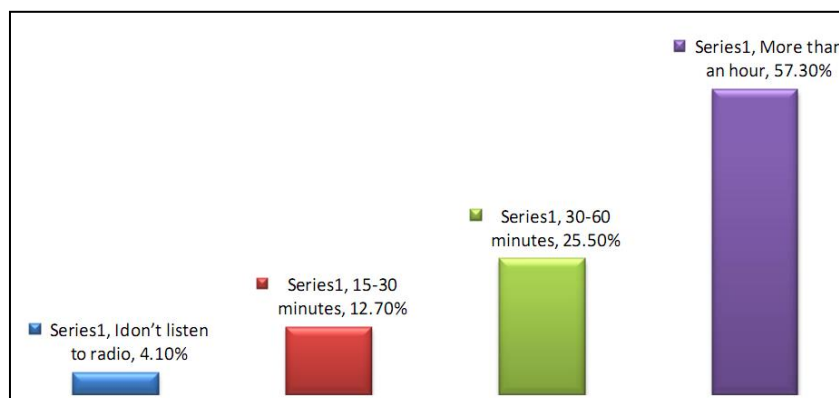


Fig-4: Hours spent listening to FM or AM radio on a week day

Reasons for Listening to Local Stations

The researcher wanted to know the reasons why respondents tune in to local stations where the respondents gave a number of reasons. 41.% of the respondents said the local stations are entertaining, 35%

said they are easy to access, 17% said they do so because of good sound quality while 7% said they do so to get the latest information as illustrated in figure 5 below:

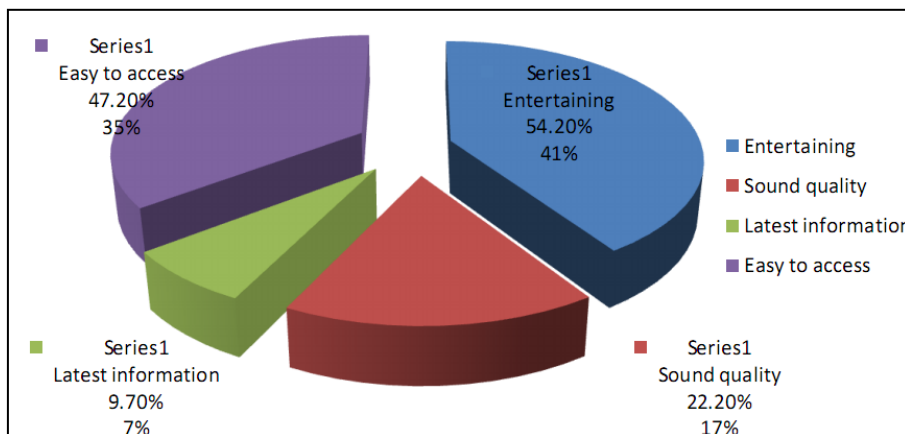


Fig-5: Reasons for listening to local stations

Reasons for the Respondents Preferring a Radio Station

Asked about the radio stations they listened to most, the leading station was Kass FM with 32% followed by Classic with 26%, Ghetto FM with 25%, Capital with 17%, QFM with 12% and Citizen Radio with 11%.The respondents gave reasons why they like

the local stations with81.2% saying they like the local stations because they meet their entertainment needs,53.8% said they liked them because they update them on current affairs, 42.8% said it is because they educate them on issues that affect them while 22% said they like them because they allow them to participate.

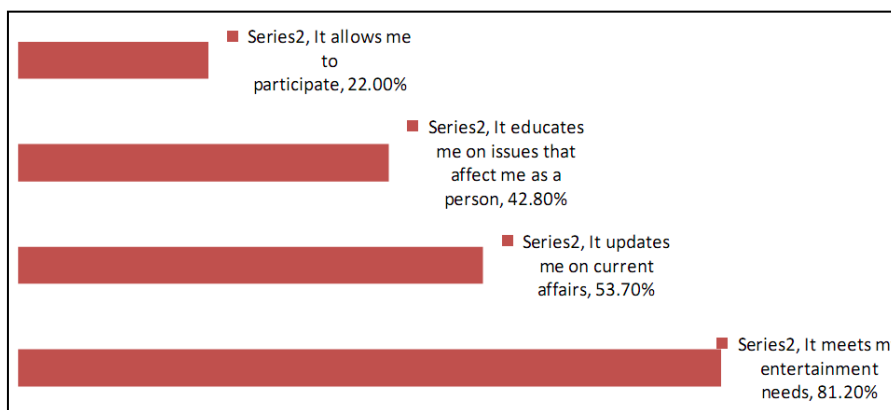


Fig-6: Reasons for the respondents preferring a radio station

TERRESTRIAL RADIO USAGE

Personal use of AM/FM radio

The researcher wanted to know how the respondents use AM or FM radio, which elicited a

number of responses;with62.8% saying they get local news updates, 36.6% use it to discover the latest music, 42.7% use it to relax while 15.3% use it to while away moments.

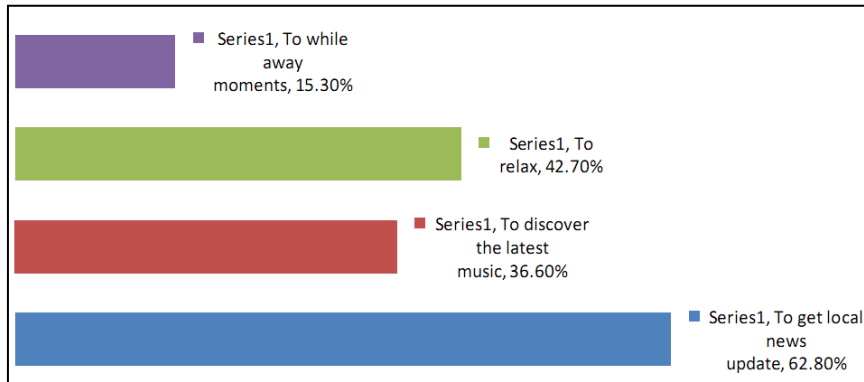


Fig-7: Personal use of AM/FM radio

Why Spend Less Time on Terrestrial AM or FM Radio

The researcher wanted to know why the respondents spend less time listening to terrestrial FM/AM radio presently which elicited a total of 316 responses. Of these, 53.5% said because the digital

music player gives them the freedom to play the music they want, 24.1% said they don't enjoy most of its stuff, 18.4% said they find it archaic and they want to move with the times while 3.8% said it is because their friends are listening to other audio outlets.

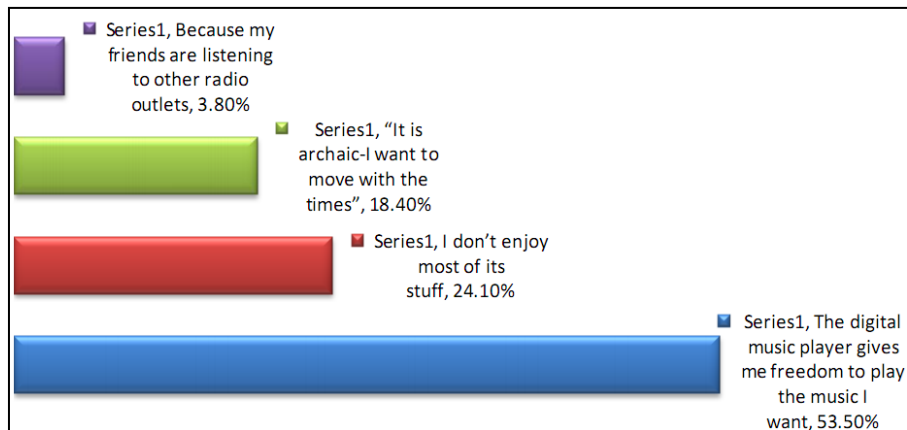


Fig 8: Why spent less time on terrestrial AM or FM radio

What can make you listen to terrestrial/FM and AM radio more often

The researcher wanted to know what can make the respondents listen to terrestrial/FM and AM radio more often. Of those who responded, 41.9% said they currently listen and will listen in future despite the

technological advancements, 39.9% said they will listen more if it is made accessible through my mobile phones, 26.9% said if it is made accessible through my PCs while 11% said nothing will make them listen to the medium:

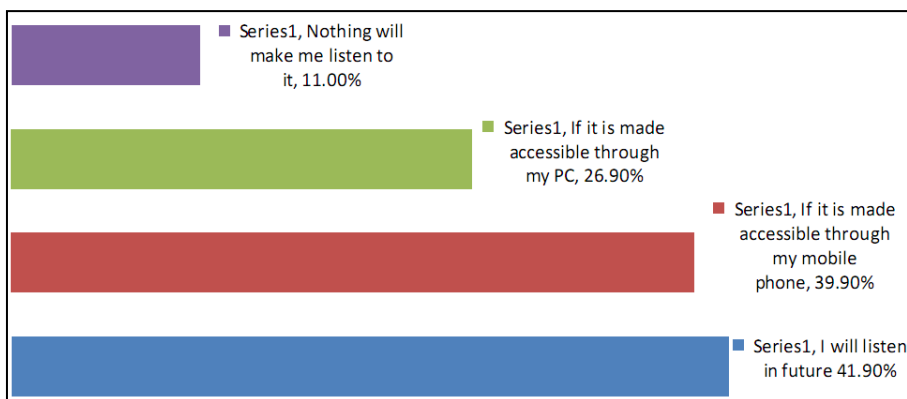


Fig-9: What can make you listen to Terrestrial Radio More Often?

Recommendations for Radio if it was to remain the only Media Outlet

The respondents gave a number of suggestions on whether the radio was to remain the only media outlet. 37.4% of the respondents recommend more music, 33.6% recommended less dialogue, 26% were

for more interactive programs and 24.7% recommended younger producers. Also, 22.1% of the respondents would go for more educative programs, 6.4% recommend improvement on signal clarity while 2.6% recommended comforting/encouraging dialogue.

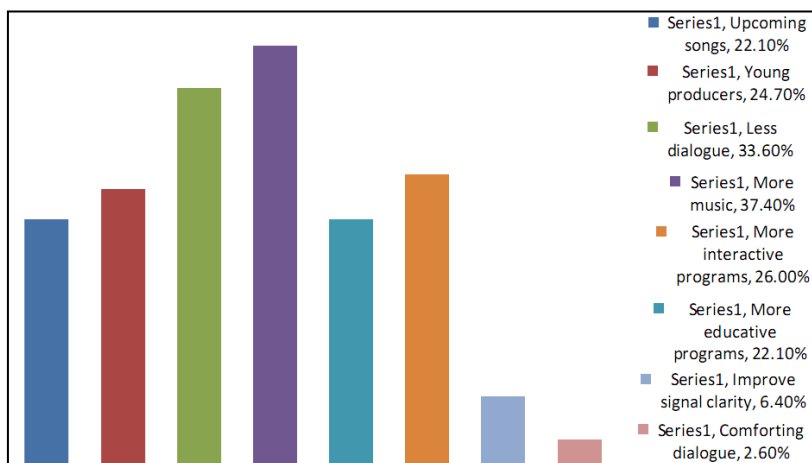


Fig-10: Recommendations if Radio was to remain the only Media Outlet

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing findings, it was established that more than half of radio listeners surveyed considered radio to be an important source of information for every topic including current events, health, agriculture, business, education and government. The news and information provided by radio were also deemed trustworthy by more than 95% of the respondents. Nearly all radio listeners 91% said they had used terrestrial radio while a fair number 16% also listened via mobile phones. Listeners were also asked to list the top three stations they use for news and information. Citizen radio emerged the leading with 46% of the responses, followed by KBC with 28% and Inooro FM with 12% responses.

The study shows that most homes have more than one radio set and that the respondents own most of the radio sets. This means that most youth have an access to the medium. This is so especially due to factors including its affordability, miniaturization as well as the emergence of the mobile radio. The study also shows that youth tune into radio via their mobile phones, the internet and satellite with higher number tuning in through the mobile phones. The respondents also indicated that they tune in any time they wanted as compared to those who only tune in away from home. This can be explained by the nature of mobile phones which are portable and therefore carried everywhere. However, there are also those who do not have mobile phones as well as those who don't tune in simply because they do not like radio. Many of those who tune in do so for more than an hour during weekdays, which speaks something about loyalty. Their preferred time

for tuning in is in the evening and early morning hours. This is in the morning when they are preparing to go to college or on their way to college where they do so to catch up with events of the day and to put them in the right mood to start the day. In the evening, they tune in to radio to help them relax their minds after a heavy day's work.

Reasons for listening to local stations

The respondents gave a number of reasons as to why they tune into FM/AM radio stations including entertainment, accessibility of the medium, good sound quality and for purposes of getting the latest information. From the data, it is clear that the least number of youth tune into Citizen Radio which broadcasts lots of serious programs. Since most youth look for entertainment, this may not be a station for them and instead, they will go for stations have contents that are light-hearted and full of entertainment like these other FM stations. They tune into the various stations since the latter meet a number of needs including entertainment, need for information, education as well as need for involvement. Again, the need for entertainment is top on the list amassing followed by need for information, education and need for involvement. However, they also criticized FM or AM radio stations on the basis of having too much dialogue, hyper-commercialization, lack of creativity, boring topics and poor presentation skills. These are issues most radio users are grappling with and are among the factors leading to switching of stations or even media outlets. This is especially dangerous in this era when technology has enabled the multiplication of media outlets. Radio broadcasters can use this to come up with

strategies to up their game by reviewing their contents as well as the general production skills.

FM/AM Radio Use

The study reveals the major uses of FM/AM radio among youth which include entertainment, local news, to discover the latest music and to while away moments. This confirms the fact that radio is mainly used for entertainment and information. The respondents also confirmed the idea that they are presently spending less time tuning into AM/FM radio. The biggest reason they gave for this state of affairs include the fact that there are alternatives that are serving them better, for instance the digital music players which give them freedom to choose they music they want to hear. This is in line with the Uses and Gratifications Theory which posits that audience members not passive, rather they actively participate in choosing the media and the contents they attend to. This is a view that contradicts earlier studies which stated that audience members are passive and have no choice other than receiving what the media bombards them with. The other reasons they gave relate to the type of content they are given; boring and archaic. However, there is a category of youth who are influenced by their peers into using other audio devices. This calls upon broadcasters to be more creative and responsive to the needs of their audiences by carrying out surveys to establish their changing needs. However, the encouraging part is that there is still a category of radio users who are quite loyal no matter what happens to the medium. These are the ones who said they will still tune into radio despite the technological advancements and they will be very disappointed if their favorite stations were no longer on air.

This lot stands in contradiction with those who have crystallized into not listening to radio no matter what is done to improve the medium. This is the same population that is most likely to feel nothing if their favorite radio stations were no longer on air according to this study. There are still others who would listen more to radio if it were made more accessible to them on mobile phones and personal computers. Since this provision is already available, what this means is that we still have quite a number of youth who cannot afford technologies including mobile phones and computers. The message is directed to the manufacturers or suppliers to reduce the cost of these technologies or for radio broadcasters to subsidize their prices in order to increase audience ratings.

Recommendations for radio if it was to remain the only media outlet

The respondents gave a number of suggestions if radio was to remain the only media outlet. Most of these recommendations touch on radio program contents; reducing dialogue, making programs more interactive through audience involvement, more

encouraging and inspirational contents and educative programs. The technical quality of the productions was also recommended including signal clarity.

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