



Audience perception of programming of online radio platforms among university students in Nyanza Region

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess audience perception of programming of online radio platforms among university students in Nyanza region. The objectives were:- to assess the influence of content diversity on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms, to examine the influence of programming quality on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms, to determine the influence of scheduling convenience on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms and to evaluate the influence of host engagement on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms. This study was underpinned by the framing theory. The research employed a descriptive research design. The target population was 872 media studies undergraduate students in six universities in the Nyanza region, from whom 274 were selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and a pilot study was conducted at Rongo University. Collected data were cleaned and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine audience perception of online radio platforms. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify recurring themes and explore participants' perspectives. Data were presented using tables. Findings revealed that online radio platforms provide diverse, high-quality programming tailored to listeners' interests. The convenient schedule aligns with habits and hosts are engaging. The variety of genres and innovative content meets audience preferences. Timely news updates are delivered and the user interface is easy to navigate. Advertisements are less intrusive, making programming relevant. . Online radio platforms should develop new genres, topics and formats to keep content engaging and relevant, attracting a wider audience. These platforms should provide timely news updates, interactive segments and user-friendly platforms for better listener experience. They should adjust programmes based on listener habits and invest in host training to retain existing listeners and attract new ones.

Key words: Audience Perceptions, Online Radio, Programmes, Programming, University Students

I. INTRODUCTION

The internet has changed the exchange of information and communication. News organizations, television channels, radio stations and newspapers have been complemented with digital media (Ollari, 2020). This evolution has improved the interaction of consumers as it makes global communication possible (Zhai, 2024). Additionally, social media has given the power of producing and sharing information to online users without limits. Radio has grown from Guglielmo Marconi's wireless telegraph, which he invented in 1901, into an excellent medium of information and entertainment transmission. It gives the listeners news, music and represents the voice of the society. Radio is still among the best and cheapest modes of communication, particularly in the developing nations, where many people own it, in the form of either radio set or mobile phones (Toyos, 2022). New media such as the internet and social media have threatened radio as a widely-used medium of communication.

Radio has incorporated new media forms to communicate with their audience (Scanlon et al., 2020). According to Ojwang (2023), contemporary radio is an ever-changing medium using technologies to enhance its effectiveness and expand its capabilities. Internet radio came up in 1993, courtesy of Carl Malamud's "Internet Talk Radio" (Raketić, 2022). Internet access determines the working of internet radio, in terms of signal strength, number of listeners, sound quality and delivery speed (Musvipwa & Lunga, 2023). As technology develops, there have been many changes made in radio, both in its working and in broadcasting. In earlier days, radio programs were available via on-air and off-air means. Today, they are available online, owing to online production (Ollari, 2020). Such developments facilitate better advertising and accommodate changing media consumption trends.

The technologies of new media have revolutionized the character of the audience and the use of old media, encouraging increased interactivity (Leung, 2018). This is evidenced in online radio sites, where the perceptions of the audience are influenced by the interactivity of the media. Unlike conventional radio stations, online radio allows active participation by the listener through social media and comments, among other ways of engaging the site (Leung, 2018). This has led to a shift from the one-way flow of information to two-way, or even multi-way, flow of information. It has

enabled the users of media to be involved in the direction of content and preference (Miroshnychenko, 2019). Consequently, media users have greater freedom and are able to produce their own content.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Traditional television, radio and print media have integrated themselves into the digital world, resulting in radical changes in their processes. The use of digital media has been enhanced through increasing audiences, earning money, better decision making, brand building, ideation, gathering listeners' perception and collaboration with content creators. There is more focus on metrics and data-driven strategies where media houses try to find both quantitative and qualitative audience perceptions (Komodromos, 2021). Consequently, several new job roles have emerged in the newsroom such as audience engagement editors, growth editors and audience development editors. Their responsibility is analysis of audience data and communicating it to senior editors for improving editorial quality. In spite of the advanced technology used and data-driven strategy adopted, most radio stations do not have much consideration for audience perceptions. This creates a practice gap on audience perception of programming of online radio platforms, that justified this study.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess the influence of content diversity on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms.
- ii. To examine the influence of programming quality on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms.
- iii. To determine the influence of scheduling convenience on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms.
- iv. To evaluate the influence of host engagement on university students' perception of programming on online radio platforms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Framing Theory, advanced in media studies by Goffman (1974), aids explain the influence of programming characteristics on audience perception of online radio platforms among university students. The theory proposes that the way media content is selected, organized and presented influences audience interpretation and evaluation. Programming elements like content diversity, quality of programming, scheduling convenience and host engagement are the frames that influence students' perceptions of online radio platforms. Diverse and relevant content can make a platform appear more appealing, high-quality programming can enhance its credibility and professionalism, convenient scheduling can improve perceptions of accessibility and engaging hosts can foster stronger audience connection and participation. Therefore, Framing Theory helps explain the influence of programming attributes on university students' perceptions of online radio platforms.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Content Diversity and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platform

The evolving digital age has transformed traditional journalistic practices across media platforms, including the radio (Ismed, 2020). This has rekindled debate over how online newsrooms employment compares to other platforms with varying media forms and affordances (Withers 2020). In 2020, approximately 200 journalism outlets in Australia closed, reduced services, discontinued print editions, or merged with other newsrooms, with regional news outlets being particularly hard hit (Briskman, 2020).

There's the urgent need for effective government policies and business strategies to support the journalism sector. Fauteux (2017) highlights that a radio presenter's core presence in 2015 can stimulate discourse and contextualize new and independent music, as they are seen as authoritative and trustworthy individuals who guide the listening experience and the online debate within their listener community.

A study by Pop et al. (2019) examined consumer attitudes towards fake news and online information sources. The study found that fake news is a widespread issue. There were differences on social networks, with younger generations showing a stronger affinity for them. Conversely, those over 40 years old exhibited a stronger belief in the need for improved legislation and verification of online information. The study employed discriminant analysis, while this study is descriptive, hence a methodological gap.

2.2.2 Programming Quality and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

On the other hand, Ismed et al. (2024) examined the effect of integrating online, off-air and on-air methods in radio media programming. Their qualitative study utilized descriptive interviews and observations to analyze this implementation. Findings indicated that these approaches have significantly changed how radio content is produced and disseminated. The integration led to improved programming quality, allowing for dynamic and interactive content.

Dinda et al. (2023) observe that the public media public consumption is beginning to transition to platforms which are online. The digital era presents significant problems, particularly for local private radio. The authors investigated the use of digital technology to assist with the analogue transmissions of K Radio, one of Jember's local radio stations. The study took a qualitative approach, using document analysis, direct observation and in-depth interviews. The findings depicted that K Radio was fairly implemented in adopting convergence of media to support land stations. K Radio, as a news radio station, remains a mass media outlet offering information, education, entertainment and social control. The research focused on a single radio station, hence limited focus.

2.2.3 Scheduling Convenience and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

Another study by Coley (2021) explored the connection with conventional radio in addition to his availability on digital audio platforms. The research found that listeners had a strong liking for the medium and a natural understanding of radio programming. Raketić (2022) examined hybrid radio in the process of media convergence and observed that digitization and the Internet have enabled traditional radio to acquire new formats, reach new listeners and make programming available globally. The study explains that contemporary listeners expect radio stations to provide non-linear listening through on-demand and podcast options, as well as access to programmes through the same device or application even when listeners are outside the normal coverage area. This development provides listeners with greater flexibility in deciding when and where to access radio programming.

2.2.4 Host Engagement and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

Gavaza and Pearse (2023) explored how social media platforms and digital technology have evolved in South Africa, particularly in university radio programming. In their 2016 study, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were dominant platforms for content sharing and engagement. Over the years, media dynamics shifted, with radio hosts integrating live video streaming into broadcasts and new platforms emerging, boosting advertising revenue. The authors assessed the adaptability of youth-focused community radio stations to these trends. Revisited almost five years later, the study evaluated Rhodes Music Radio's social media maturity. The results indicated that RMR was at level 3 on a 5-level scale, signifying an ongoing evolution in their social media use, with no full maturity achieved. The study was conducted in South Africa, a different jurisdiction, hence a contextual gap.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

It is a systematic and organised strategy employed to perform a scientific investigation (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018) conducted the study. A design involving descriptions will be utilized. A systematic method of collecting and analyzing data without altering it, aimed at comprehending the research issue is involved in a descriptive research design (Siedlecki, 2020). The study collected data from media studies undergraduate students in universities in Nyanza region.

3.2 Study Location

The research took place in the Nyanza area of Kenya. The region was located in the southwestern part of Kenya, close to Lake Victoria. It included a section of the eastern edge of the lake.

3.3 Target population

Population is the collective number of individuals with common traits in a specific geographic region (Adam, 2020). The study was conducted among media studies undergraduate students in the six universities in the Nyanza region. Media studies undergraduate students were selected as this population was homogeneous for the study's purpose. The respondents were thus able to relate the concepts of this study to their class work and experiences. The target population was indicated in Table 1.

Table 1*Target Population*

University	1st years	2nd years	3rd years	4th years
Maseno university	57	63	58	52
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology	48	42	47	44
Kisii University	28	25	32	27
Rongo University	34	37	34	32
Tom Mboya University	26	31	24	22
Uzima University	27	24	30	28
Total	220	222	225	205

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Techniques

Sampling is a basic method in research that involves selecting a smaller sample that is representative of a larger population in order to gather information. The main objective of sampling is to gather information on a specific topic from a larger population without examining each individual in that population (Umar & Usman, 2015; Saroj & Singh, 2016). Sampling is responsible for determining the suitable size of the sample (Gumpili & Das, 2022). The research employed stratified random sampling to select students in each of the universities. Simple random sampling enabled the researcher to randomly select respondents; it was thus a probability sampling technique (Umar & Usman, 2015).

3.5 Sample Size

The appropriate sample size was determined by the sampling procedure. This research used the Yamane (1967) formula in order to get a sample size of 274, distributed as per Table 2.

Table 2*Sample Size*

University	Population	Sample
Maseno university	230	72
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology	181	57
Kisii University	112	35
Rongo University	137	43
Tom Mboya University	103	33
Uzima University	109	34
Total	872	274

3.6 Construction of Research Instruments

Data was collected through semi-structured surveys. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were included in the survey to gather the necessary and relevant data to achieve the research goals. The questionnaires consisted of five parts on details about the participants and variables. Instructions were given to participants on how to fill out the questionnaires. To ensure anonymity, respondents did not need to indicate their names when completing the questionnaires. Additionally, the study assured the participants that their involvement in the study posed no risks.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

The necessary approvals were sought from the university's ethics committee and a research permit was applied for. Two research assistants were subsequently recruited and trained by the researcher. The training entailed an overview of the study topic and the research objectives. The researcher and the assistants visited the universities and outlined the research objectives to the students. The students were issued consent forms and those who consented were given the questionnaires and advised on how to proceed with filling them out. Any issues that were not clear were clarified. The researcher assured the respondents of confidentiality. The questionnaires were collected and verified for accuracy and completeness.

3.8 Data Analysis

The surveys were reviewed for precision and uniformity. Data cleaning and analysis were performed through editing, coding and tabulation. This was done to identify any irregularities in the responses and assign specific numeric values to each for analysis. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS software, version 26. The research incorporated descriptive statistics such as frequencies, averages and percentages. The statistical measures provided a summary of how the data was spread out and what the central tendencies were, enabling an examination of audience perception on

online radio platforms. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data. Responses from open-ended questions in the questionnaires were examined to identify recurring themes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

The study issued 274 questionnaires to media studies undergraduate students in the 6 universities in Nyanza region, out of which 253 were completed and returned; hence was a response rate of 92%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) a response rate of 50% and above are acceptable for analysis. Consequently, the study's overall response rate of 92% was ideal, satisfactory and reliable. This is illustrated in Table 3

Table 3

Response Rate

University	Sample	Response	Response rate
Maseno university	72	68	94%
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology	57	52	91%
Kisii University	35	31	89%
Rongo University	43	39	91%
Tom Mboya University	33	31	94%
Uzima University	34	32	94%
Total	274	253	92%

4.2 Demographic Information

The study analyses respondents' information. Respondents' gender, age and year of study were investigated. Findings showed that out of 253 respondents 153(60%) were male and 100(40%) were female. This shows that most of the respondents were male. Out of 253 respondents, 14(6%) were between the age of 18-20, 148(58%) were between the age of 21-23 years, 86(34%) were between 24-26 years of age and 5(2%) were between 27-29 years. This shows that most of the respondents were between the age of 21-23 years. Thirty-five students (14%) were of year one of study, 115(45%) were of year two, 92(36%) were of year three and 11 (4%) were of year four of study. This shows that most of the respondents were of year two of study as shown in Table 4: -

Table 4

Demographic Information

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	153	60
	Female	100	40
Age	18-20	14	6
	21-23	148	58
	24-26	86	34
	27-29	5	2
Year of study	1	35	14
	2	115	45
	3	92	36
	4	11	4

4.3 Descriptive analysis

4.3.1 Content Diversity and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

The findings on content diversity were assessed using statements relating to the diversity of content, variety of genres, and innovation of content and provision of timely information on online radio platforms as shown in Table 5. The findings showed that 32% of the respondents strongly agreed that the content on online radio platforms was diverse, while 58% agreed and 10% were neutral (Mean = 4.23; SD = 0.611). This indicates that the majority of respondents perceived online radio platforms as providing diverse content.

Similarly, 41% strongly agreed that the variety of genres available on online radio platforms met their preferences, while 55% agreed and 4% were neutral (Mean = 4.38; SD = 0.561). Furthermore, 36% strongly agreed that online radio platforms offered more innovative content, while 59% agreed and 5% were neutral (Mean = 4.31; SD = 0.563). On the provision of timely news updates, 39% strongly agreed, 55% agreed and 6% were neutral (Mean = 4.33; SD = 0.583). Overall, the findings indicate that respondents had a positive perception of the diversity and variety of programming available on online radio platforms.

Table 5*Content Diversity and Students' Perception of Online Radio Programming*

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
Content diversity	32%	58%	10%	0%	0%	4.23	0.611
Genre variety	41%	55%	4%	0%	0%	4.38	0.561
Innovative content	36%	59%	5%	0%	0%	4.31	0.563
Timely news/information	39%	55%	6%	0%	0%	4.33	0.583

The finding in Table 5 show that respondents perceived content on online radio platforms as diverse is consistent with the changing nature of radio in the digital era. Ismed et al. (2024) found that the integration of online, off-air and on-air approaches had changed how radio content was produced and disseminated, resulting in dynamic and interactive content. The finding also relates to Mongkol et al. (2019), who examined the creation of a live-streaming show as a form of radio content in the digital era and demonstrated the incorporation of new digital formats into radio programming.

The finding that the variety of genres available on online radio platforms met respondents' preferences suggests that online platforms enable programming to address different audience interests. This is consistent with the broader transformation of radio brought about by digital technologies. The availability of diverse and innovative programming may therefore contribute to positive perceptions among university students, who constitute an audience with exposure to multiple forms of digital media.

However, the studies reviewed were conducted in different contexts from the present study. The current study focused specifically on university students in the Nyanza region of Kenya. The positive perceptions reported by the respondents therefore provide context-specific evidence on how content diversity relates to perceptions of online radio programming among university students.

4.3.2 Programming Quality and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

The findings in Table 6 on programming quality showed that 34% of the respondents strongly agreed that online radio platforms provided high-quality programming compared to traditional radio, while 59% agreed and 7% were neutral (Mean = 4.27; SD = 0.583). This indicates that the majority of respondents perceived online radio programming to be of high quality.

The findings further showed that 35% of respondents strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the user interface and ease of navigation on online radio platforms, while 61% agreed and 4% were neutral (Mean = 4.31; SD = 0.542). In addition, 34% strongly agreed that advertisements on online radio platforms were less intrusive than those on traditional radio, while 61% agreed and 5% were neutral (Mean = 4.29; SD = 0.550). These findings indicate that respondents' positive perception of programming quality was accompanied by positive perceptions of the usability and advertising experience of online radio platforms.

Table 6*Programming Quality and Students' Perception of Online Radio Programming*

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
Programming quality	34%	59%	7%	0%	0%	4.27	0.583
UI/navigation	35%	61%	4%	0%	0%	4.31	0.542
Advertisements less intrusive	34%	61%	5%	0%	0%	4.29	0.55

The findings are consistent with Ismed et al. (2024), who examined the implementation of online, off-air and on-air approaches in radio programme production. The study found that the integration of these approaches had significantly changed how radio content was produced and disseminated and had improved programming quality by allowing dynamic and interactive content.

The finding is also related to Dinda et al. (2023), who examined the adoption of digital technology by K Radio in Indonesia. The study found that digital convergence was implemented to support the radio station while maintaining its role in providing information, education, entertainment and social control. This demonstrates how digital technologies can support radio programming and its continued relevance in changing media environments.

The present study, however, focused on university students in the Nyanza region of Kenya and found generally positive perceptions of the quality of online radio programming. This suggests that digital delivery, ease of navigation and the perceived quality of programming may contribute to favourable audience perceptions among university students.

4.3.1 Scheduling Convenience and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

The findings in Table 7 on scheduling convenience showed that 47% of the respondents strongly agreed that the programming schedule on online radio platforms was convenient for their listening habits, while 51% agreed and 2% were neutral (Mean = 4.44; SD = 0.550). The findings indicate that the majority of respondents considered the scheduling of online radio programming convenient for their listening habits.

The respondents' qualitative responses further emphasized the flexibility of content availability and the ability to listen at their convenience. They appreciated the flexibility offered by online radio platforms and indicated that the availability of content allowed them to engage with programming according to their individual schedules. These findings suggest that scheduling convenience is an important feature of online radio programming from the perspective of university students.

Table 7

Scheduling Convenience and Students' Perception of Online Radio Programming

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
Scheduling convenience	47%	51%	2%	0%	0%	4.44	0.55

The finding on scheduling convenience is supported by Ollari (2020), whose study examined factors influencing podcast consumption among millennials. The study found that podcasts enabled users to combine daily activities with learning, indicating that digital audio consumption can be incorporated into users' existing daily routines. This finding is relevant to the present study because university students may similarly value audio programming that can be accessed without requiring them to reorganize their daily activities around a fixed broadcast schedule.

The findings also relate to Raketić (2022), who examined hybrid radio in the process of media convergence. The study noted the development of non-linear listening through on-demand and podcast options and explained that hybrid radio allows listeners to access content outside the limitations of conventional broadcast time and location. On-demand and delayed listening consequently provide listeners with greater flexibility in determining when and where they access radio content.

The present study found a similarly positive perception of scheduling convenience among university students in Nyanza region. The high mean score of 4.44 suggests that respondents generally regarded the programming schedule of online radio platforms as suitable for their listening habits. Unlike the reviewed studies, which examined podcast consumption and hybrid radio more broadly, the present study specifically examined university students and therefore provides contextual evidence from the Kenyan university environment.

4.3.4 Host Engagement and University Students' Perception of Programming on Online Radio Platforms

The findings in Table 8 on host engagement showed that 48% of the respondents strongly agreed that hosts on online radio platforms were engaging, while 49% agreed and 3% were neutral (Mean = 4.46; SD = 0.545). The findings indicate that respondents generally perceived hosts on online radio platforms as engaging.

The respondents' qualitative responses also emphasized interactive features as an important aspect of their online radio experience. They appreciated the interactive nature of online platforms and the ability to engage with programming beyond traditional radio formats. These findings suggest that host engagement and interaction can contribute to positive perceptions of online radio programming among university students.

Table 8

Host Engagement and Students' Perception of Online Radio Programming

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
Host engagement	48%	49%	3%	0%	0%	4.46	0.545

The findings are consistent with Fauteux (2017), who examined the role of the radio host and piloted listening in the digital age. The study highlighted the role of radio presenters in stimulating discourse, contextualizing music and guiding the listening experience within online listener communities. This suggests that the presenter remains important even as radio increasingly operates through digital platforms.

The findings also correspond with Gavaza and Pearse (2023), who examined social media use and maturity at Rhodes Music Radio in South Africa. Their study showed the changing role of social media in university and youth-oriented radio, including the incorporation of live video streaming by radio hosts. These developments demonstrate how hosts can use digital platforms to extend interaction with audiences beyond conventional broadcasting.

The present study found that university students in Nyanza region generally perceived online radio hosts as engaging, as demonstrated by the high mean score of 4.46. The finding suggests that host engagement remains an important component of audience perception even within digitally mediated radio environments. However, the studies

reviewed were conducted in different contexts, including Canada and South Africa, while the current study focused on university students in Kenya.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Online radio platforms provide diverse, high-quality programming tailored to listeners' interests. The convenient schedule aligns with habits and hosts are engaging. The variety of genres and innovative content meets audience preferences. Timely news updates are delivered and the user interface is easy to navigate. Advertisements are less intrusive, making programming relevant.

5.2 Recommendations

Online radio platforms should develop new genres, topics and formats to keep content engaging and relevant, attracting a wider audience. Diverse and well-researched content, skilled hosts and high production standards enhance the listener's experience, ensuring engagement and satisfaction. Optimal program scheduling, host training and innovative content delivery methods are important in maximizing audience engagement. These platforms should provide timely news updates, interactive segments and user-friendly platforms for better listener experience. They should adjust schedules based on listener habits and invest in host training to retain existing listeners and attract new ones.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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