

A Contextual Analysis of Community Radio Programming and Peace Promotion in Political Campaigns in Kenya: A Case of Migori County

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Abstract

With their ability to reach and influence a large number of people, community radios wield immense power in shaping the course of political discourse and contestations. Although many examples of the media's negative contribution to escalation of violence and conflicts exist, fair and accurate journalism that builds confidence and counteracts misperceptions has the potential to transform and prevent political violence. Migori County is listed by the National Commission on Integration and Cohesion (NCIC) as one of the political violence hotspots in Kenya. The aim of this study was to investigate both programme genre and broadcast content of three community radios in the region. The objectives of the study were: To establish whether *Milambo Radio 103.8 FM*, *Radio Tarumbeta 90.4 FM* and *Radio Rameny 88.3 FM* have programmes designed for promoting peaceful political campaigns in Migori County; to determine the extent to which such programmes are used in promoting peaceful political campaigns and to explore strategies through which the programmes may be made more effective in promoting peaceful political campaigns. The study used face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Agenda Setting Theory supported by the Media Effects Theory were used.

Introduction

As nations strive to expand democratic space, challenges in ensuring violence-free elections are becoming increasingly diverse and fragmented posing more threat to peace and cohesion in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the understanding of the root causes of political violence and the interrelation between elections and violence from global point of view has consistently become dynamic (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1985). As a result, many of today's security challenges are generated by the political class and spread across to their surrounding environment. Such acts have been intensified by unhealthy political dynamics arising from the competitive power struggles between political contestants during campaigns as have been witnessed in several developing countries in Africa.

Elections tend to be recurrent constitutional events that citizens look forward to most of the time as an opportunity to exercise their democratic right to choice of leadership. Some look forward to this time to have change, or to have politicians running to support their communities with free gifts, or simply change of regime (Leo, 1984). Emotions are often high as divergent views and political ideology are exchanged during this period. Fiery verbal exchanges, and competitions are also common with rival parties promising to do better than their opponents, while propaganda and smear campaigns become dominant features of media debates and news items. Such actions, if not moderated usually sets the stage for campaign violence.

Noting that recognition of an incumbent leader by political opponents angling for the same post possibly helps to calm political tensions informed the researcher's attempts to find out whether community radio stations have got a role to play in political violence prevention in Migori County by engaging the incumbents and those opposing through radio programmes designed for peace dialogue.

Kenya has a long history of political violence which stretches back to the 1980s during the Kenya African National Union (KANU) dominance. Ethnic animosity fanned by political differences among neighboring communities ended up in full scale clashes in several parts of Kenya during the KANU regime. Ethnic balkanization was frequently used by the then ruling party (KANU) to influence voter registration and voter turn-out. Ethnic clashes were the order of the day in parts of rift valley and Nyanza during electioneering. However, it was Kenya's post-election violence of 2007/2008, which was partly blamed on hatemongering by politicians and the local media that became a pace setter in intensified academic interest on the role of Kenyan media in peace mobilization and/or violence instigation. Since 2002, politics in Kenya in general and Migori County in particular has continued to become more and more emotive. Campaigns are usually characterized by hotly contested party primaries, fiery and sometimes violent rallies as contestants or political parties sell their policies and ideologies respectively. It is common to see campaign posters, graffiti and other advertising paraphernalia strategically pasted on walls, electricity posts, stationery vehicles, and massive billboards displaying the image of a political candidate. Huge expenditure is incurred by political parties and individuals to hire armed official and/or volunteer security to offer temporary protection during outdoor rallies and door to door campaigns. The mere presence of armed security accompanying politicians whenever they are on the campaign trail is sufficient testimony of the amount of risk that politics currently attracts.

As the clock ticks towards the 2017 general elections, there is heightened media activity as various political parties as well as individual contestants compete to have their policies, plans and agenda for development transmitted to the electorate through local media outlets. In previous campaigns, political conflict easily degenerated into violence. There is fear and worry that this scenario is already replicating itself in the run up to the 2017 general elections. Community radio stations in Migori County play a role in setting an agenda or tone for peaceful, non-violent political campaigns to avert bloodshed, destruction of property and displacement of persons as has occurred in the past.

In March 2010 at the Conference on Preventing Electoral Violence in Accra, Ghana, the participants acknowledged the severity and the frequency of election conflict in Africa. According to Frazer (2011) the participants included electoral commissioners; parliamentarians; Ministers of Information, Foreign Affairs, and Security; members of the United Nations and European Union; US Government officials; non-governmental organizations, business leaders and academia. The objective of the conference was to focus on effective prevention and the mitigation of violence through credible elections and good governance (CIPI, 2010). To achieve stated objectives, the conference laid out six practical recommendations as an action plan, which includes:

1. Dismantling the structures for violent political mobilization through citizen education and empowerment using the media, and
2. Increasing and supporting research agenda on electoral violence (CIPI, 2010).

However, the conference did little to prevent the 2012 electoral violence and military coup in Guinea-Bissau, and the 2007/2008 post-election in violence in Kenya in which about 1,502 people were killed, more than 500,000 people internally displaced and property worth billions of shillings destroyed. In the Kenyan case, the media was accused of partisanship and doublespeak. In view of these examples, the study sought to explore the role of community radios in setting an agenda for peaceful campaigns with a view to reinforcing their capacity to prevent political conflicts from degenerating into violence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to study and analyze the radio programme genres, and broadcast content aired by three community radio stations namely; (Radio Milambo 103. 8 FM, Radio Tarumbeta 90.4 FM and Rameny 88.3 FM), with the aim of establishing, and re-energizing their role in peace promoting during political campaigns in Migori County, particularly in the run up to the 2017 general elections.

Research Objectives

- i) To establish the types of programmes community radios in Migori County have designed for promoting peaceful political campaigns.
- ii) To determine the extent community radio programmes are used to promote peaceful political campaigns in Migori County.
- iii) To determine strategies through which programmes designed by community radios may be made more effective in promoting peaceful political campaigns in Migori County.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- i) What type of programmes do community radios in Migori County have for promoting peaceful political campaigns?
- ii) What are the views of the community radio listeners on the effectiveness of programmes designed to promote peaceful political campaigns in Migori County?
- iii) What strategies can community radios use to make the programmes more effective in promoting peaceful political campaigns in Migori County.

Scope and delimitations of the study

This study was confined to the role of community radio stations operating in Migori County in setting agenda for peaceful political campaigns. Perennial challenges of violence that usually characterize political campaigns in Migori County largely influenced the focus of the study. This was notwithstanding the fact that community radio stations are known to play myriad roles in the communities they serve. The study was conducted through a case study which considered a sample size of twenty one participants that included radio programme managers, radio studio presenters, and adult radio listeners living in Migori County.

Secondary data for the study involved a thorough study and analysis of radio broadcast programmes and content of three community radio stations namely; Milambo FM, Radio Tarumbeta and Radio Rameny. On the other hand, primary data was collected through face to face interviews while adult radio listeners were engaged through focus group discussions. For example it would have been more in depth, extensive and insightful had it

sought to cover other genres of media such as newspaper, television and the social media which also enjoy widespread usage in Migori County. Nevertheless, focus was on community radio stations only. Secondly, even though it sought to investigate campaign violence, other forms of violence such as domestic violence are also known to occur.

Thirdly, respondents may have been inclined to preconceptions, prejudices, emotions and analysis based on their political affiliations or preference for a particular radio station. Residents of Migori County have a deep passion for politics, with the region being home to several political persuasions. This might have led to insincere answers being given. Further, the study might have been affected by the fact that the topic at hand is politically sensitive and thus respondents might have feared intimidation if they gave their honest opinions. The researcher however assured the respondents that their responses were meant for academic purposes only and therefore they won't be victimized because of their opinions.

Significance of the study

The researcher was optimistic that the study indeed brought useful findings to the surface for use by law enforcement agents, as well as key actors in the election processes in Kenya. The Kenya Police, The Criminal Investigations Department (CID) may engage community radio stations in strategic partnerships aimed at preventing political violence.

Research Methodology

The researchers adopted a qualitative research guided by the interpretivist-constructivist epistemological stance, founded on the relativist ontology assumption. The adoption of the explained pathway was influenced by the possibility of eliciting a variety of opinions and perceptions by the sampled respondents on the interview questions. The study was influenced by the pragmatic philosophical paradigm, which is a worldview that presupposes a pluralistic approach to derive knowledge about an issue (Creswell, 2004). Consequently, the study relied on Milambo FM, Radio Tarumbeta and Radio Rameny to generate research data, while using the qualitative case study approach. Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011 observe that case study is one of the popular methods in qualitative research which typically involves in-depth observation of an individual unit and is used to gain in-depth understanding of the participants, focusing on the process rather than the outcome. (Rukwaru, 2007) explains that case studies are largely descriptive examinations, usually of a small number of sites (small towns, hospitals, schools, villages) where the principal investigator is immersed in the life of the community and uses available documents, holds formal and informal conversations with informants, observes ongoing activities, and develops an analysis of both individual and cross-case findings. The choice of this method was influenced by the expected varying opinions, views and perception of divergent respondents to be sampled. (Kogan, M et al 1984), explains that coverage in terms of interviews undertaken in a case study can be founded on two principles: the notion of reputational sampling (i.e. making contact with those who are seen to be important to other people) and the more systematic coverage of a range of incumbents of formal roles which although not necessarily seen to be important in terms of reputation, plainly have legitimacy and relevance in a study.

The mix of participants interviewed in the study included radio programme managers, studio broadcasters, and adult radio listeners representing a diverse demographic and ethnic spectrum of Migori County.

(Creswell, 2009) posits that qualitative research design is suitable in natural settings. In view of this, sampled respondents from community radio stations were all interviewed while at work in their respective radio stations. Strauss & Corbin (1999) have further shown that those who use qualitative research obtain satisfactory results and appropriate answers to the central research questions being probed. The researcher is satisfied that the responses obtained were appropriate, sufficient and useful in answering the research questions. Participatory engagements with participants during data collection proved useful in bringing forth answers to the research questions, and providing insights never known before.

Study population

Kumar (2011) defines study population as the bigger group or residents of a community about whom the study is concerned while the sample as a subgroup of the population which is the focus of the enquiry and is selected carefully to represent the study population. Within the context of the study, population comprised programme staff and studio employees of Milambo Fm, Radio Tarumbeta and Radio Rameny. The three are licensed to broadcast in Migori County (CAK, 2016). Adult radio listeners residing in Migori were included in the study to give the listener's perspective on radio programme genres and how the genres are effective in peace mobilization during campaigns. The adult radio listeners were an infinite population due to the fact that any one of them had a chance of listening to broadcast content from any of the radio stations operating within Migori County. In total, twenty four (24) participants were engaged during the study. The study aimed at obtaining in depth, insightful and varied information about the role of radio stations in violence prevention during campaigns.

Study findings

In the previous chapter, the study has established that community radios are indeed influential tools of change, development tools of change, tools for development and participatory cohesion. The radios are agents of cultural promotion in local languages and are so influential to the extent that listeners believe without a doubt what they hear from the radio. The study further reveals that community radios allow participation of listeners through call-ins during live programmes. Ogenga (2014) summarizes the effect of media when he describes it as an effective tool to create counter-ideology that promotes peace.

Local audiences particularly trust community radio stations. According to the focus group participants, if an audience trusts a community radio, it should then be safely argued that the radio can serve as an effective catalyst to facilitate or forestall political violence during campaigns. A cognitive – transactional model explanation of these effects suggests that when the news media highlight certain issues or events as important, they become salient issues and events to the public (Perse, 2000 p. 103).

It is therefore safe to argue that design of programmes by community radios, as well as airing of the said programmes have got a direct bearing on what the public will view as important. If community radios in Migori County deem it necessary to design programmes aimed at mobilizing peace for political campaigns in the run up to the 2017 general elections, and proceeds to broadcast them, the public will participate by ensuring peace. As a conditional effect, the media's agenda setting impact affects people only under certain conditions. One of those conditions is political interest and involvement (Perse, 2000 P. 104).

The study has established that radio programme managers are responsible for designing content for their radios. The study has also established that radio journalists have the responsibility of selecting, editing and broadcasting content for the public. It can therefore be suggested that radio staff of existing community radio stations have the responsibility to promote peaceful campaigns through relevant programmes and broadcast content. The study has shown that community radio stations in Migori County design programme content on the basis of social, political and economic needs of the community. Further, there is evidence that no community radio has identified campaign violence as a serious matter that should be addressed the same way social and economic issues are tackled by the radios. Little attention has been given to the matter notwithstanding the fact that political campaigns have already began ahead of the general election of 2017.

Even though the researcher was unable to obtain statistics on the number of listeners each of the sampled radios have, it is evident that the community radios enjoy a substantial listenership base. This is despite challenges of transmission coverage owing to technical issues. The radios encourage regular interaction with listeners through live call-ins during debates and radio surveys. According to participants of the FGDs, listener participation was very worthy since it offered the listener an opportunity to give their independent opinion on issues under discussion. However, the study revealed that only to a very limited extent are public views sought when the radio programmes are designed. One respondent made the following observation;

“Much as we acknowledge and appreciate the fact that every community radio is owned by an entity, the public ought to play a role and participate in key decisions such as selection of radio programmes. As much as possible, this should happen as a way of ensuring and reinforcing the role of such radios as tools for community empowerment through participation”

The study observed that campaign violence is a matter of great concern to the residents of Migori County. The FGD revealed a very high level of awareness of threats to life, property, cohesion and harmony that is posed by violent and/or poorly managed political campaigns. In previous campaigns, cases of death, injury, displacement of persons and destruction of property have been reported. The study revealed a very high level of awareness of the destructive nature of campaign violence and the possible roles community radios may play to promote peaceful political campaigns.

Recommendations

Campaign violence is not in the interest of Kenya generally and residents of Migori County specifically, although some politicians thrive on it to achieve own political goals. Therefore, the need to involve community radios to promote political campaigns is more relevant now than ever before. Politics is general perceived as the gateway to power, wealth and influence. This notion has made the game more fiercely contested. Further, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) has created additional electable positions such as Member of County Assembly (MCA), County Women's Representative, County Senator and Governor. Each of these positions have attracted massive political interest because of wealth, power and influence associated with them. Consequently, prospects of fierce political contests which can easily degenerate into violence are looming large in the run up to the 2017 general elections due to an increase in the number of contestants and actors. In view of the existing political environment described above, the study offers some recommendations that could be useful to policy makers in the enhancement of community radios role in promotion of peaceful political campaigns.

“Peace Journalism” should be an integral part of professional training for journalists. This would enhance the capacity of community radio journalists to select and report news on violence in a way that ensures peace and

harmony and not escalation of violence. It would also equip them with special skills to interview guests invited to the studio to discuss matters that may incite the public into political violence. Community radio stations should consider collaborations with the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). The National Commission on integration and cohesion, the Civil Society and all peace stakeholders in the design of programmes which are aimed at promoting peaceful political campaigns during each electioneering period.

Peace experts should be invited to live debates and allowed to interact with listener-owners as they debate issued of peaceful political campaigns. Examples of high – impact programming include news items on local peace initiatives during political campaigns, micro-programmes, live debates on peace issues and quizzes on peace. Community radios should consider enlisting young ambassadors for peace, in order to apply peer-to-peer approach in peace education.

Nation's Sustainable Development Goals such as poverty alleviation and improvement of food and nutrition security in rural communities. Another potential research area is the role of other media, including the social media in

Conclusion

This qualitative research has used face to face semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and partly document analysis in exploring how community radio stations in Migori County are promoting peaceful political campaigns in the run up to 2017 general election. Central to the research is the role of community radios as a catalyst, a forum for local communication, and a network for public engagement in peace debate and information sharing.

Study findings have proved that community radio is a powerful tool whose massive potentials should be harnessed well not only to promote development, but also to enhance peace and cohesion. Since the listening public believe absolutely what they hear from the radios, care should be taken to ensure that the radios only broadcast content that is beneficial to the community in terms of development, peace, cohesion and harmony. Certainly, community radios on their own may not eradicate hate, poverty and other societal maladies; however; if harnessed well, they have a huge capacity to positively transform the mid set of residents living in the communities they serve, on peace building and transformation during campaigns.

According to the findings of the study, media has a vital role to play in creating a culture of peace in the County, however, a scan of the current content suggests that in some cases vernacular songs, programmes, musicians and guests propagate messages of victimhood that are likely to harm peace-building efforts. The researcher conducted a systematic and quantitative analysis of content broadcast on local FM Stations (MilamboFm, Radio Tarumbeta and Radio Rameny). During the study, the Researcher took time to monitor by tuning to each of the radio stations so as to listen to programmes with a view to hearing if there were any broadcasts focusing on peace and political tolerance, freedoms of expression and preparations for the 2017 general elections with focus on the on-going IEBC reforms.

The study concludes that although vernacular/community FM Radio are key platforms for marginalized communities to comment and share views on a variety of issues deemed important to development and stability. Regrettably, some station's live talk show and call-in programmes still disseminate propaganda and hate speeches. However, most guest panelists positively advocate for peace and conflict resolution mechanisms. Most local language stations in this study (and much of the rest of the media) appear to have been performing an important role in calming tensions and promoting dialogue. A strengthening of such a role by a genuinely independent community media will form a critical contribution to peace building as Kenya moves closer to the 2017 general elections.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are preferred: the community FM radio stations should discourage politicians from using their stations as a platform to pitch for individual support, but rather use broadcasts to address issues that genuinely concern peace or development within their communities; there is an urgent need for training on conflict reporting. The United Nations Education and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has developed a fantastic model curriculum for journalism education (MCJE) which could prove helpful here (UNESCO, 2016). Vernacular stations should create more air time for peace panelists. Talk shows have provided the greatest opportunities for hate speech, unfortunately, talk show hosts are not trained in conflict reporting or moderation.

However, it should be noted that invited radio panelists have a huge potential to play a major role in peace building and nurturing nationhood. The politicians, mass media, local leaders, and other relevant players need to move from the existing destructive process and stereotypes evident in the vernacular radio content towards constructive process aimed at national cohesion. Vernacular stations need to not only discuss the visible effects of reported conflict but also invisible effects, for instance, trauma and cultural shifts with a view to engendering harmonious co-existence within a multi-ethnic county - Migori. In order to cultivate good media practice, the vernacular stations need to examine long term causes and consequences of the conflict. Radio presenters should strive to give an in-depth background of the conflict, whenever they are reported and the possible peace

restoration mechanisms. Civil society and the general public should monitor the media, equally vernacular radio stations, to ensure that they are professional and independent from partisan agenda, or political and private interests.

Media owners and the government need to develop capacities to engage in change process at the interpersonal, inter-group, and social structure levels. Government needs to allocate funds for peace building and conflict training, and facilitate community peace building sessions through the vernacular radio stations. Peace ambassadors' need to envision a framework that holds the vernacular stations and the general public together and the structure of the relationship. Community FM Radio stations should ensure that they only recruit trained journalists who are able to moderate debates professionally. They should also invest more in the re-training of their journalists to improve on their skills. In an effort to safeguard against misuse, political and ethnic prejudice, and manipulation of the public, the government, through the Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK), should scrutinize ownership of stations to ensure that politicians do not own any vernacular radio stations. Politicians usually tend to display self-seeking tendencies which could compromise their moral behavior, selflessness and restraint if they were allowed to own and operate radio stations. The Media Council of Kenya should be strengthened effective policy approaches to tame any deviant media stations, vernacular or otherwise. Countries such as Belgium, Netherlands, France and South Africa have strong policy frameworks which guard against negative media content. Poor remuneration, status, and safety of journalists is hampering a free and plural media. Substantial progress in strengthening the media will not be possible unless the working conditions of journalists, especially the ones working for community radios, are improved.

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