



Audience Preferences and Engagement with FM Radio in Tanzania: A Study of TBC FM and Wasafi FM in Kinondoni, Dar es Salaam

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the audience listenership preferences of TBC FM and Wasafi FM radio stations in Tanzania, focusing on three key objectives: the types of programs preferred by listeners, the motivations behind their listenership, and the gratification obtained. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study used a survey design to collect data from radio listeners in Kinondoni Municipality, Dar es Salaam, as this method effectively gathers large amounts of information from many respondents. The findings revealed a predominant preference for entertainment programs, specifically those featuring popular music genres like Bongo Flava, Taarab,

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and Singeli, as well as sports content. Motivations for listenership included entertainment, relaxation, companionship, and the opportunity to participate via call-ins. Recommendations emphasize the need for FM radio stations to cater more to listeners' preferences for popular music to retain and expand their audience.

Keywords: *Listenership preferences; FM radio; TBC FM; Wasafi FM; uses and gratifications theory; popular music; audience motivation; entertainment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Tanzania, radio remains a dominant form of communication, delivering news, entertainment, and educational content to a wide audience. With the advent of FM radio, listeners have experienced a more diverse and interactive form of media, driven by technological advancements and increasing accessibility of mobile devices that make radio listening more convenient. As of January 2022, Tanzania had over 180 registered radio stations, catering to national, regional, and community audiences (Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority [TCRA], 2022). Among these, TBC FM and Wasafi FM have emerged as two of the most popular FM stations, particularly in urban areas like Dar es Salaam. TBC FM is a national broadcaster, while Wasafi FM is a commercial station that targets younger audiences with its music and entertainment-heavy programming.

The increasing number of radio stations in Tanzania has intensified competition, compelling radio broadcasters to better understand their audiences' preferences to retain and grow their listener base. Despite this, there has been limited empirical research focusing on audience listenership preferences, particularly for the major FM stations like TBC FM and Wasafi FM. Most stations rely on assumptions or cater to advertisers rather than engaging in rigorous audience research. As a result, there is often a disconnect between the programming provided and the preferences of the listeners, which can negatively impact audience loyalty and satisfaction.

This study addresses the gap by investigating audience preferences for TBC FM and Wasafi FM, focusing on the types of programs listeners prefer, their motivations for listening, and the gratification they obtain from the content. By examining these preferences, the study seeks to provide radio stations with insights that can help them align their programming with audience expectations, thus improving listener engagement and station competitiveness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which suggests that media users are active participants who seek out media content to fulfill specific needs such as information, entertainment, personal identity, and social interaction (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Unlike earlier models that viewed audiences as passive recipients of media messages, the Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals have agency in selecting media based on their preferences and psychological or social needs. The theory is especially relevant for understanding radio listenership, as radio has traditionally served various roles such as providing companionship, information, and emotional release (Ruggiero, 2000).

In radio studies, this theory helps explain why listeners choose specific stations or programs. The motivations for listening can range from a need for entertainment and relaxation to a desire for social engagement and cognitive stimulation. This framework is critical for analyzing why listeners in Tanzania gravitate toward popular stations like TBC FM and Wasafi FM, which offer a mix of music, sports, and interactive segments.

Previous empirical studies highlight the significance of entertainment, especially music, in shaping radio listenership. For example, Ajaegbu et al. (2015) found that Nigerian university students preferred radio programs that offered popular music and interactive talk shows, primarily tuning in to radio for entertainment and relaxation. Similarly, studies conducted in Kenya by Wekesa (2016) and Magombi (2016) noted that young listeners were drawn to FM stations that played contemporary music genres, particularly during leisure hours.

In Tanzania, Moshiri (1999) identified a preference among younger audiences for pop music and sports programs, while older listeners favored news and political content. These preferences align with findings from other studies

in African contexts, where music and sports programs remain highly popular among younger demographics (Birsén, 2012; Wekesa, 2016).

Despite these insights, there is still a gap in understanding FM radio listeners' specific preferences in urban Tanzania, especially with the rise of commercial stations like Wasafi FM. This study aims to contribute to this growing field by examining the distinct preferences of listeners in the Kinondoni Municipality, Dar es Salaam.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a survey design to collect data from radio listeners in Kinondoni Municipality, Dar es Salaam, as this method effectively gathers large amounts of information from many respondents. The sample for the study consisted of 250 respondents, who were selected through random sampling. This sampling technique was used to ensure that every individual who frequently listens to either TBC FM or Wasafi FM had an equal chance of being included in the study. Random sampling was particularly suitable for this study as it minimized bias and ensured that the findings could be generalized to a broader population of radio listeners in Kinondoni. The target population for the study was individuals who are regular listeners of either TBC FM or Wasafi FM, as these stations are among the most popular in the region and serve as primary sources of entertainment and information for many residents.

To collect data, the study used a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was designed to include 12 closed-ended questions, which focused on capturing key information regarding the respondents' listening preferences, motivations for tuning into specific programs, and the types of gratification they derived from the content aired on TBC FM and Wasafi FM. The structured nature of the questionnaire ensured consistency in responses, allowing for straightforward quantification of the data. Once the data were collected, they were subjected to quantitative analysis using descriptive statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and percentages, were used to identify and analyze dominant trends in listenership behavior. This analysis method was chosen to provide a clear, numerical representation of the preferences, motivations, and gratifications of the radio listeners, making it easier to interpret and draw conclusions from the data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, based on data collected from 250 respondents in Kinondoni district, Dar es Salaam, are organized around the three core research objectives: program preferences, motivations for listening, and the gratification obtained from listening to TBC FM and Wasafi FM. These findings are contextualized within the framework of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which emphasizes that audiences actively choose media to fulfill specific needs, such as entertainment, relaxation, information, or companionship (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Ruggiero, 2000).

5. PROGRAM PREFERENCES

The first objective of the study was to identify the types of programs most preferred by listeners on TBC FM and Wasafi FM. The study found that entertainment programs, especially music, dominate listener preferences. Approximately 65% of respondents indicated that they primarily tune into Wasafi FM for its focus on popular Tanzanian music genres such as Bongo Flava, Taarab, and Singeli. These findings align with previous research by Magombi (2016), which highlighted the role of popular music in attracting youth listeners to FM stations in East Africa.

TBC FM, on the other hand, was favored for its sports programming, with nearly 40% of respondents citing sports shows like *Sekeseke Viwanjani* and *Sport Court* as their favorite programs. This preference is consistent with studies by Wekesa (2016) and Birsén (2012), which found that sports content is a key driver of listenership in both Kenya and Turkey, particularly among younger male audiences. These results demonstrate that entertainment, especially music and sports, plays a critical role in attracting and maintaining radio audiences.

The preference for these programs can be directly linked to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals select media based on their needs for entertainment and social interaction (Blumler, 1979). The music and sports programs on Wasafi FM and TBC FM serve these functions, providing listeners with not only relaxation and pleasure but also a sense of connection to the larger cultural and social world of Tanzanian youth. In this context, music helps fulfill the audience's need for cultural identity and emotional release, while sports programs cater to

the need for social interaction and shared experience (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

6. MOTIVATIONS FOR LISTENING

The second objective was to explore the motivations behind listeners' choices to tune into TBC FM and Wasafi FM. Respondents indicated several key motivations for listening, with entertainment and relaxation being the most common. Around 60% of listeners reported that they tuned in to these stations primarily to unwind after a long day, particularly during the evening hours when music programs dominate the airwaves. These findings are consistent with Blumler and Katz's (1974) assertion that media audiences actively seek content that offers diversion and escapism from daily routines. Listening to popular music allows audiences to disconnect from the stresses of their day-to-day lives, which fulfills their need for relaxation.

Social interaction also emerged as a significant motivator. Programs that allowed for audience participation, such as call-ins during live sports broadcasts or interactive music shows, were particularly popular among listeners. Nearly 50% of respondents expressed that they enjoyed the opportunity to interact with radio hosts or other listeners through call-ins, texts, or social media platforms. This desire for interaction supports Katz and Blumler's (1974) view that media serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a tool for social integration and interaction. In Tanzania's context, these interactive features help foster a sense of community, especially among youth, who feel a stronger connection to the content when they can actively participate (Padmakumar, 2015).

Another motivator identified was companionship. Around 35% of respondents indicated that they listened to the radio, particularly in the mornings or late evenings, for the sense of companionship it provided. This aligns with research by Wakesa (2016), who found that radio listeners often use the medium as a form of emotional support, especially when they are alone. The Uses and Gratifications Theory highlights that one of the key reasons people turn to media is to combat loneliness or isolation (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), and this study corroborates that finding in the Tanzanian context.

Interestingly, while news and educational content were not as highly ranked in terms of preference, a small but significant proportion of older

respondents (15%) indicated that they listened to TBC FM for news and current affairs. This finding reflects an aspect of the surveillance function identified in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, where audiences turn to media for information and learning (McQuail, 1987). For these listeners, TBC FM serves as a valuable source of up-to-date news and relevant information, which is consistent with previous studies in Tanzania that highlight the role of radio in disseminating news and political content (Moshiro, 1999).

7. GRATIFICATION OBTAINED

The third objective was to assess the types of gratification obtained by listeners from TBC FM and Wasafi FM. The study found that the primary gratification listeners obtained was emotional satisfaction. Nearly 70% of respondents reported that they felt more relaxed and entertained after listening to their favorite programs, particularly music shows on Wasafi FM. This emotional release is a key aspect of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, where audiences seek media content that provides diversion and relaxation (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

Moreover, the study found that listeners also derived social gratification from interactive programs. Programs that encouraged audience participation, particularly live call-ins during sports shows or music requests, provided listeners with a sense of social connection. Around 45% of respondents mentioned that they felt more connected to their community when engaging with these interactive elements. This supports the findings of Segbenya et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of social interaction and companionship in media consumption, particularly in radio.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that individuals use media to gratify their need for personal relationships and social integration (McQuail, 1987). In the case of TBC FM and Wasafi FM, the ability to participate in live shows or interact with other listeners through social media helps fulfill these social needs, allowing individuals to feel like part of a larger, shared community. This is particularly relevant in a country like Tanzania, where radio remains one of the most accessible forms of media, fostering a strong sense of collective identity.

Finally, for a smaller segment of the audience (around 20%), the gratification was informational. These listeners, mostly older respondents,

reported that they tuned into TBC FM to gain insights into current affairs, news, and educational content. This reflects the cognitive gratification aspect of the theory, where media consumption is driven by the desire for knowledge and understanding of the world (Ruggiero, 2000). As the data shows, TBC FM's blend of both entertainment and informative programming allows it to cater to a wider demographic, fulfilling both emotional and informational needs

8. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study have several important implications for both the broadcasting industry in Tanzania and the broader field of media studies. First and foremost, the overwhelming preference for entertainment-oriented programming, particularly music and sports, underscores the need for radio stations to prioritize content that aligns with the desires of their core audience. Wasafi FM's success with its focus on popular music genres like Bongo Flava and Taarab reflects the strong demand for culturally resonant, local content. This implies that FM stations need to continually assess and adapt their music programming to reflect emerging trends and maintain relevance with younger listeners, who constitute the majority of the audience.

Moreover, the significance of interactivity in fostering listener loyalty presents a key opportunity for radio stations to distinguish themselves from digital platforms. The study found that programs encouraging audience participation—whether through call-ins or social media engagement—were especially well-received. This indicates that expanding interactive features can deepen listener engagement, cultivate a sense of community, and strengthen long-term loyalty. The implication is that radio stations should prioritize not only the delivery of high-quality content but also the development of participatory platforms that make listeners feel involved and appreciated.

Another key implication is the necessity of content diversity. Although the majority of listeners prefer entertainment-based programming, there is still a segment of the audience, particularly older listeners, who value news, educational, and informational content. This suggests that stations like TBC FM should maintain a balanced programming schedule that caters to a wider demographic, ensuring they don't alienate any part of their audience. For the broader media landscape in Tanzania, these

findings suggest that successful stations will be those that can strike a balance between entertainment, interactive engagement, and informative content.

Lastly, the findings have implications for media research and strategic planning within radio stations. Given the dynamic nature of audience preferences, it is crucial for stations to engage in regular audience research to stay attuned to listener needs and preferences. The ability to adapt to changing tastes and trends will be essential for maintaining a competitive edge in the increasingly crowded Tanzanian radio market.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has provided valuable insights into the listenership preferences of FM radio audiences in Tanzania, particularly focusing on TBC FM and Wasafi FM in the Kinondoni district of Dar es Salaam. The findings indicate that entertainment, especially music and sports, is the most preferred form of programming, with listeners motivated by the desire for relaxation, companionship, and social interaction. The interactive nature of certain programs further enhances the appeal of these stations, allowing listeners to feel connected and involved. Additionally, while younger audiences predominantly prefer entertainment, older listeners still value informative content, suggesting the need for a diverse programming approach.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made for FM radio stations in Tanzania. Firstly, radio stations should continue to prioritize entertainment-based content, particularly music programs that reflect local tastes and cultural identities. The success of Wasafi FM in attracting younger listeners through its focus on popular music genres like Bongo Flava and Singeli demonstrates the importance of aligning content with audience preferences. Stations should invest in curating and updating their music playlists to stay in tune with evolving trends and maintain their relevance.

Secondly, radio stations should expand their interactive features to foster greater audience engagement. Programs that allow listeners to participate via call-ins, text messages, or social media platforms create a sense of community and involvement, which is key to building listener loyalty. Stations like TBC FM and Wasafi FM, which have already seen success with interactive sports and music programs, should further

explore ways to increase audience participation, such as live contests, polls, and social media integrations.

Thirdly, while entertainment is crucial, stations should not neglect the need for diversity in their programming. News, educational content, and current affairs should still be featured to cater to older and more information-seeking listeners. TBC FM, for example, has a broader audience base that values a mix of both entertainment and informative content. Striking a balance between these different types of programming will ensure that stations can attract and retain a wide range of listeners.

Finally, it is recommended that radio stations in Tanzania engage in continuous audience research to stay updated on changing listener preferences. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups, should be employed to assess the effectiveness of programming and to identify emerging trends. This proactive approach to understanding the audience will enable radio stations to adjust their content strategies in real-time, ensuring long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the market.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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