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Political messaging as communication strategy for university politics among undergraduate students on MMUST FM –Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aims to establish the use of political messaging as a communication strategy by undergraduate students for campus politics on MMUST FM.

Methodology: The study used a cross-sectional mixed research design suitable for gathering data from a large group of subjects (undergraduate students) and comparing differences between groups (student leaders and political program producers). This design also helped in drawing inferences about how the quantitative results explain the qualitative results from different individuals simultaneously. The study employed a survey research design for the quantitative approach and a phenomenological research design for the qualitative approach.

Findings: The study findings show that student leaders use political messaging more often than undergraduate students. However, the political messages broadcasted on MMUST FM do not focus on student concerns or highlight their issues on campus. It is suggested that political messages should address campus student issues. These results go against the democratic participant media theory (1987), which states that local users use local media to promote their local issues and needs. The study indicates that students only partially depend on the grassroots media platform (MMUST FM) to address their local political issues and needs.

Implications to theory, practice and policy: Democratic participant media theory may support future studies examining the relationship between university radio and coverage of local issues and concerns affecting the campus student community. Additionally, universities operating university-based radio stations are encouraged to develop inclusive editorial policies that serve students' interests within universities.

Keywords: Political messaging, university politics, university-based radio stations

Introduction

According to Myers (2008), radio is the most effective medium for political communication in Africa due to its broad reach and wide audience. Radio is an effective political communication tool that mobilizes large audiences (Muswede, 2009). According to Bosch (2007), radio is a critical means of communication that involves its audience. The statements above highlight the potential of radio in politics, including on university campuses. In Kenya, the first university radio station in a public university that broadcasts student-based political programs was licensed to operate at MMUST-Kakamega in March 2006, Communications Authority of Kenya, CA (2022). MMUST FM's editorial policy mandates that the radio station provide unlimited coverage on matters concerning the students' community including students' political activities on campus (MMUST FM, 2023). Given this, the study sought to establish how the radio station functions in campus politics, just like in any other democracy where radio has proven to be a critical medium in sustaining democracy. The study first established how MMUST FM sustains democracy through its campus political messaging strategy.

According to Ngugi and Kinyua (2014)^[16], four classifications define radio stations: state-controlled public radio, privately owned commercial radio, community-owned radio and international radio. Radio outside state-owned media systems has developed in Africa since the late 90s (Ngugi & Kinyua, 2014)^[16].

In the early years of independence, Africa's critical source of news and information was state-owned and commercial mainstream broadcasters. In 1981, things changed in South Africa when the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) licensed Radio Tuks to broadcast from the University of Pretoria, Hatfield Campus. Focusing on South Africa, scholarly works on university radio argue that university radio stations are critical in political messaging and advertising (Osunkule, 2009) ^[17]. The political messages helped enhance political mobilization during the apartheid in South Africa. Given this, this study focused on establishing the use of political messaging by undergraduate students on campus as a communication strategy.

Kol HaCampus, which means "Voice of Campus", is a radio station at the University of Tel Aviv in Israel. It broadcasts in Hebrew and is considered critical for its educational role. Professors have used the radio station to direct students to educational podcasts. It offers a variety of programming, including local news, campus-related politics and sports, spoken word programmes, and general music. The station is described as having freeform programming with much creativity among the student community radio presenters, Israeli Broadcasting Authority (2008). The study examined how stations like MMUST FM make exceptional contributions to enhancing the campus community's political growth through local and student-centred political messages.

In 2002, the federal government of Nigeria granted a radio license to the University of Lagos through the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). This move marked the establishment of university radio in Nigeria (Fatunde, 2009) ^[5]. The University of Lagos utilised the license to create a university radio station, strengthening radio as a teaching and instruction medium. Students from various departments, such as science, languages, theatre arts, marketing, and advertising, utilised educational podcasts created by their lecturers to enhance their learning. Following the success of the University of Lagos radio station, NBC issued licenses to twenty-seven tertiary institutions nationwide by 2007. The government expanded this broadcasting sector in Nigeria to support the newly founded National Open University, which provided university education to school leavers who could not secure admission due to limited slots in universities (Fatunde, 2009) ^[5]. University-based radio stations in Nigeria have proven to be an effective means of communication among university students. It is noteworthy that campus radio stations in Nigeria have had a significant impact on academics. Consequently, this study addressed the gap by focusing on students' politics in Kenya.

Three pillars define community radio setups where university-based radio stations fall: access, variety, and independence. Under access, community radio setups should make available an avenue for proactive and voluntary contribution to media production rather than passive media consumption. Variety implies that community radio setups adopt innovation, originality, and diversity. Independence emphasizes that community radio setups should operate not for profit but service to the communities they serve. This definition explains how MMUST FM should operate when dealing with student politics. This study aimed to establish how students access MMUST FM's resources to air their political voices through political messages and advertisements. The arguments above formed

the basis for this current study, which first established the use of communication strategies by undergraduate students for campus politics on MMUST FM, focusing on political messaging.

The concept of university-based broadcasting is familiar in Kenya. Kenya's first-ever university-based radio station was established in March 2006 (CA, 2022). By 2015, the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) had licensed the following institutions to operate university-based radio stations on a community license: Equator FM in Maseno University, Shine FM in Daystar University, Light FM in St. Paul's University Limuru Campus, KU FM in Kenyatta University Main Campus, MMUK radio in Multimedia University-Main Campus, USIU FM in United States International University Main Campus and MMUST FM in MMUST-Main Campus to mention a few. Through its licensing regulation, CAK directs that campus radio stations in Kenya must render their services to university communities. (Ngugi & Kinyua, 2014) ^[16].

Previous studies have established that radio plays a pivotal role in politics. Yankem (2013), for instance, posits that despite other desirable mass media tools like social media platforms, more than 80% of Kenyans used radio adverts as a political medium in the 2013 presidential general elections. Chibita (2010) ^[3] avers that radio played a critical political role during the dictatorship in Uganda. She observes that the Amin regime understood the political power of radio and went out full throttle to control this medium through controlled political messaging. Ngugi and Kinyua (2014) ^[16] argue that radio, specifically community radio, fosters political participation in the community it serves. He further points out that community radio provides a platform for discussing political ideas using a specific political language that only that community understands. Through this, local opinions are heard and respected at the community level.

This study aims to provide scientific data on how university radio stations are strategically used as political spaces among university students on campus. It demonstrates how campus radio stations have enabled students to express their interests and needs through political messages.

Statement of the Problem

University-based radio stations exist in various universities in Kenya and are helpful in many ways. Recent studies have proven how these radio stations contribute to progress in universities through training, education, and providing information and entertainment to the student community in universities. The reality, however, is university radio stations that broadcast student-based political programmes are acting as critical mediums in students' politics, just like in any democratic society where radio is a channel between the political elite and the masses and a platform for public discourse. With increased political activity in electing representatives of the students' governing councils and the existence of university-based radio stations like MMUST FM broadcasting student-based political programmes within the university environment, it is critical to examine how the student community at MMUST leverages the existence of MMUST FM as a political space. Despite evidence on how critical university radio has become in institutional communities, there is a lack of proof explaining how university radio functions as a political space in the campus setting.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Participant Media Theory

This study is guided by McQuail's Democratic Participant Media Theory (1987) ^[12]. According to this theory, local users should have access to localized media, which limits the influence of state-controlled and commercial media systems that do not encourage community-based political participation in the media. The theory is against the commercialization and monopolization of private media entities and opposes the bureaucratization of media organizations. It emphasizes communitarianism and encourages citizens to contribute to community matters. The theory upholds that communication can work at the grassroots level. The guiding principles for this study are access to local media by local users, community engagement, citizen participation in community matters, and the idea that small communities should run mass communication at the grassroots level.

The study was based on the tenet of giving local users access to media that represents their community. By offering relevant media that aligns with their interests and needs, local community members can use it to their advantage. The study used this tenet to establish the use of communication strategies by undergraduate students on MMUST FM, namely political messaging.

Empirical Review

As political communication studies progress, scholars have examined how the political elite uses various strategies to communicate with the public. A study by Moy, Mazzoleni, and Rojas (2012) ^[14] argued that political communication wields immense power in shaping the outcome of political processes. They further suggested that a successful campaign relies on effective communication strategies that deeply resonate with the electorate. When analyzing the 2012 presidential elections in the United States, these scholars found that political communication extends beyond words; it embodies the aspirations and beliefs of a political campaign. Many scholars (Spitulnik, 2002; Hyden & Leslie, 2002; Graber, 2003) ^[18, 9, 7] agree on the role of radio in facilitating political discussions in Africa. They also contend that compared to other radio strategies, such as public discussions, promotional campaigns, political speeches, news media coverage, and ordinary citizens' talk, strategic political messaging has remained the dominant approach for reaching the masses through radio. Graber (2003) ^[7] suggests that a close examination of radio messaging could provide insights into the future of political developments.

Spitulnik (2002) ^[18] states that radio political messaging and advertising strategies are becoming increasingly popular among listeners. They encompass various forms of communication, including humorous tales, folk music, poems, gossip, and other verbal genres transmitted through word of mouth. D'Angelo (2012) ^[4] adds that political messaging allows communicators to frame messages, enabling political candidates to present different views and opinions from their competitors throughout a campaign. However, the research on political messaging and radio advertising is relatively limited.

The importance of radio messages as a means of political communication by political leaders cannot be ignored (Chibita, 2010) ^[3]. Radio has played a significant political

role since the establishment of the first radio station in Pittsburgh in 1920. By 1930, President Roosevelt was among the first political figures to strategically use radio as a platform for political messaging with his unique fireside chats and podcasts. This was arguably one of the earliest and most effective ways for political leaders to use radio for political purposes, as noted by Herman and Chomsky (1988) ^[8].

Although this phenomenon exists, it does not necessarily mean that student political leaders on campuses also use university radio for political messaging. The study needs to determine whether student leaders purposefully use MMUST FM for political messaging, similar to the way President Roosevelt did. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how student leaders have adopted political messaging as a communication strategy for political purposes on MMUST FM.

Scholars have studied how political messages on radio cater to the needs of the public. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988) ^[8], conservative talk shows in the 1980s disseminated political messages that focused on the electorate's needs during the United States presidential elections. These needs included infrastructure, medical facilities, water, sanitation, and electricity. Fraser and Estrada (2001) suggest that radio stations can address challenges and contribute to the development of communities. Chambers and Constain (2000) ^[2] found that when the media addresses the needs of a society, it creates a forum for the public to discuss issues that affect them. Scholars examining the characteristics of politically engaged students have talked about the needs of campus political activism, which range from physical spaces for learning, accommodation, recreational facilities, and conducive health facilities. Altbach (2006) ^[1] defines these needs as the socio-economic dynamics of campus students ingrained in political activism on campuses. In this context, this study aims to establish how MMUST FM's political messages address students' needs on campus.

During the 1990s, a series of conservative talk shows emerged in the USA. These shows were broadcast on state-owned radio stations and allowed members of the public to discuss issues that affected them. The issues ranged from unemployment, health insurance, and recession to access to quality education for marginalized communities. The talk shows became incredibly popular, providing a platform for the public to express their concerns on issues that impacted them for the first time in history (Herman & Chomsky, 1989). This development confirms radio's unique ability to serve as a medium for political messaging among the masses. As a result, this study aims to investigate how political messaging highlights students' issues on campus.

According to Mwesige (2009) ^[15], political messages in political programmes can help the public raise their issues and allow ordinary people to challenge ruling establishments. Osunkule (2009) ^[17] also supports this view by stating that campus radio stations significantly addressed pertinent political issues during apartheid in South Africa. These studies support the hypothesis that stations like

MMUST FM could foster political growth on campuses by highlighting students' issues through political messages on campuses.

Methodology

The study utilized a cross-sectional mixed research design to gather data from diverse individuals using quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously. This design was chosen because it allowed the study to collect data from a large pool of subjects (undergraduate students) and compare differences between groups (student leaders and political program producers), as noted by Kabir (2016) ^[10]. The cross-sectional design guided the study's use of a survey research design for the quantitative approach and a phenomenological research design for the qualitative approach. The survey design provided a numeric description of the population's trends, attitudes, or opinions. Meanwhile, the phenomenological research design enabled the study to describe the experiences of individuals (student leaders and political program producers) about the phenomenon as described by participants (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) ^[6, 13]. Moreover, the phenomenological design allowed the study to use multiple data collection methods, such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews, to explore MMUST FM as a political space among students from an in-depth perspective.

The cross-sectional design guided the study during data collection. First, quantitative data were collected, followed by qualitative data. The cross-sectional approach strengthened the study by minimizing weaknesses related to dependence on one method.

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data. The design also facilitated the data analysis through descriptive and inferential statistics guided by the research questions and objectives, drawing inferences about how the quantitative results can simultaneously explain the qualitative results from various individuals.

The study selected its area from a pool of public universities in Kenya that have university radio stations. The reason for choosing public universities was due to the large number of students in these institutions. The decision to settle on a public university is supported by Kombo and Tromp (2014), who argue that a large study population yields more credible results than a small population. From this pool, the study selected MMUST FM for the following reasons: first, the radio station is located in the Western region of Kenya, which has the highest level of radio listenership in the country, at 79%; the region where the station is located has the highest percentage of listeners who listen to radio for more than three hours in a day, which is 44%; furthermore 93% of radio listeners in the region access radio via FM radio receivers a module that MMUST FM solely broadcasts in, this is according to Media Council of Kenya State of the Media Survey Report (2021) ^[19]. These traits were critical for the study because the student community

resides in this region when on campus, and the general population's radio consumer behaviour could have influenced theirs. Second, the radio station started broadcasting in March 2006, making it the first campus radio station to be licensed in a public university in Kenya by the Communications Authority, CA (2022). It implies that MMUST is the public university with the longest time with a university-based radio station compared to other public universities. Third the university radio station broadcasts student-based political programmes from the university's main campus.

The sampling frame for the study was drawn from 10,311 undergraduate main campus students. The study targeted only the main campus population because main campus students can access the radio station's FM signal, which means they can easily access student political programmes on MMUST FM. This population constitutes the electorate during students' elections and the public in political governance. The study targeted 31 student leaders because they can access the radio station for political purposes. This population constitutes the political candidates during students' elections and political leaders in political governance. The study also targeted two producers in charge of student-based political programmes on MMUST FM.

The study used systematic random sampling and stratified sampling to select participants. These methods ensure that each member of the population has an equal chance of participating in the study (Kombo & Tromp, 2014). To pick respondents from the student community, the study obtained a list of all students from eleven academic schools on the Main Campus and used these methods to select participants. The study systematically sampled respondents from each academic school (stratum) using a sequence of numbers from a random numbers table. The respondents came from this sampling frame. The study used purposive sampling to select student leaders serving in the students' governing council and radio producers in charge of student-based political content at the radio station.

The study used the formula for determining the sample size for a finite population, as developed by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) ^[11]. Since the population of undergraduate students who have access to the radio station's student political programmes at the main campus was $N=10,311$, the formula yielded a sample size of 370.

Since the population size (N) is 10311 then we have,

$$s = \frac{3.841 \times 10311 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2(10311 - 1) + 3.841 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}$$

$$s = \frac{9901.13775}{25.775 + 0.96025}$$

$$s = \frac{9901.13775}{26.73525}$$

$$s = 370.3402$$

Table 1: Sample size distribution of respondents per academic school

No.	Name of School	Total Number of Undergraduates=N	Sample Size=N
1.	School of Education	3333	120
2.	School of Business and economics	2476	89
3.	School of Arts and Social Sciences	929	33
4.	School of Nursing, Midwifery & Paramedics	772	28
5.	School of Computing and Informatics	532	19
6.	School of Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance	507	18
7.	School of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences and Technology	473	17
8.	School of Engineering and Built Environment	434	16
9.	School of Public Health, Biomedical Sciences & Technology	422	15
10.	School of Natural Sciences	407	14
11.	School of Medicine	26	1
	Total	10311	370

The study utilized a quantitative approach and sampled 370 undergraduate students proportionately distributed across the 11 academic schools at the university's main campus. The distribution of the students is shown in the calculation and table 1 above.

Concerning the qualitative approach, the study purposively picked all thirty-one (31) student leaders and two political programme producers at the radio station. The study targeted (370+31+2=403) four hundred and three (403) respondents.

This research used questionnaires, focus group discussions, and key informant interview guides to collect primary data from the participants. The questionnaires collected quantitative data while focus group discussions and key informant interviews collected qualitative data.

First, quantitative data was collected via questionnaires, and qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions targeting 31 student leaders. Three in-depth interviews were conducted, targeting radio political content producers at the radio station.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze quantitative data, and qualitative data was analyzed thematically based on emerging themes informed by research.

This study presented quantitative data in tables and graphs, while qualitative data was presented in text to address the study's qualitative gap.

Results

Table 2: Questionnaire return rate

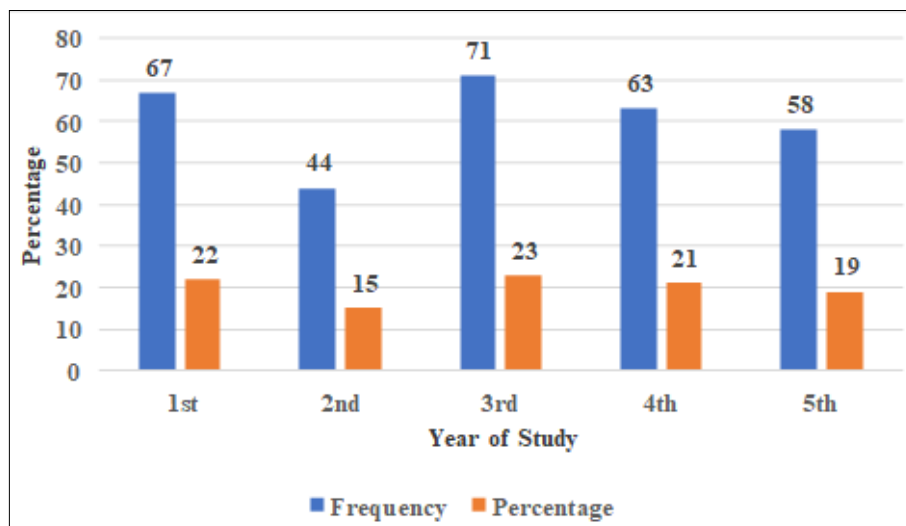
		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Returned	303	81.9
	Not Returned	67	18.1
	Total	370	100.0

Source: (Researcher, 2023)

During the study, 370 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, out of which 303 were filled correctly and returned, resulting in a response rate of 81.9%. According to Saunders, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007), a response rate of 50% is considered satisfactory, 60% is good, and 70% and above is considered perfect. The study also conducted four focus group discussions with elected student leaders, with each group having at least 8 participants, and all groups had a response rate above 90%. Additionally, three key informant interview sessions were held with the political programmes producers at the radio station and all three producers participated. The research questions and findings were based on the responses provided by the respondents.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study identified the academic year of undergraduate students at MMUST's main campus, which included first — to sixth-year students.

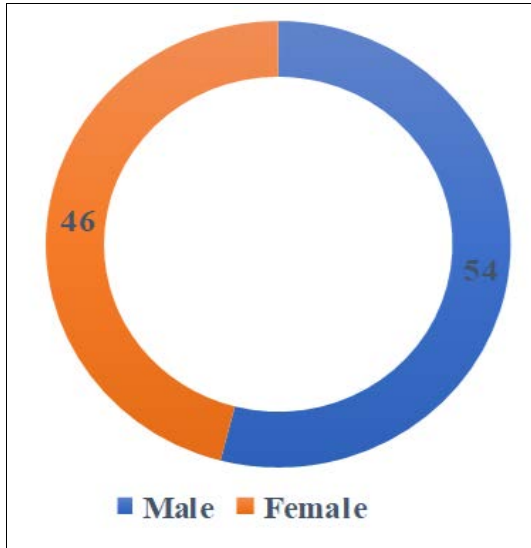


Source: Survey Data 2023, N=303

Fig 1: Year of study of respondents

Figure 1 displays the distribution of respondents by their year of study. The participants included undergraduate students from the 1st to the 5th year of their studies. The highest proportions of respondents, 23%, were third-year students, followed by first years, at 22%. Fourth-year students made up 21% of the sample, while second years accounted for 15%. Finally, the fifth year constituted 19% of the sample. This distribution pattern suggests that the sample was spread out evenly across all years of study. Therefore, the findings of the study represent the views of undergraduate students from all years of study.

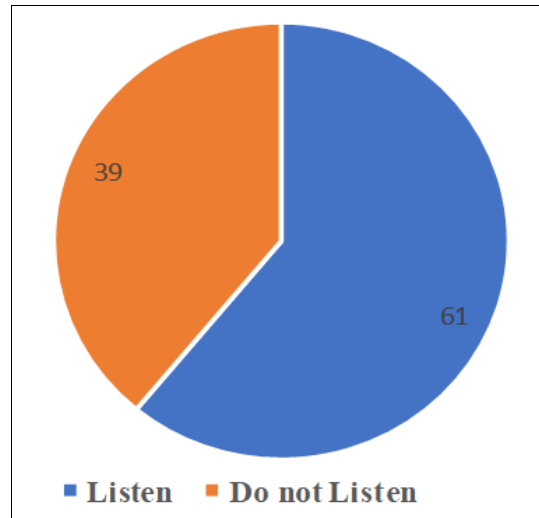
Gender of Respondents



Source: Survey Data 2023, N=303

Fig 2: Gender of respondents

Figure 2 displays the distribution of respondents based on gender. The data reveals that 54% of the respondents were male, while 46% were female. By examining gender patterns, the study identified gender biases among undergraduate students regarding how political messaging functions in university-based radio stations like MMUST FM. This made the research findings more accurate and the results more inclusive.



Source: Survey Data 2023, N=303

Fig 3: Responses on listenership of student-based political programmes on MMUST FM

Figure 3 shows undergraduate students' listenership of student-based political programs on MMUST FM. It demonstrates that the majority of the sampled respondents, 61%, indicated that they do listen to student political programs on MMUST FM compared to 39% who stated that they do not listen to these programs. The findings infer that most of the respondents who contributed to the study were familiar with student-based political programs on MMUST FM, which also enhanced the accuracy of the study results.

Political Messaging

Under political messaging, the study analyzed the variables in the following order: disseminating political messages by undergraduate students in MMUST FM, addressing students' needs through political messaging, and highlighting students' issues through political messages on campus.

Dissemination of political messages by undergraduate students in MMUST FM: The following parameters were used by the study: 1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2= Agree (A), 3 = Not sure (NS), 4=Disagree (D) and 5 = strongly disagree (SD), N=303

Table 3: Dissemination of political messages

Description	N	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
MMUST FM allows students to disseminate political messages on campus.	303	49(16.2)	42(13.9)	51(16.8)	85(28.1)	76(25.1)	3.32	1.405

Source: (Researcher, 2023)

Table 3, displayed above, reveals that a low percentage of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that MMUST FM allows students to disseminate political messages on campus. Only 16.2% agreed, 13.9% strongly agreed, and 16.8% were unsure. Meanwhile, 28.1% disagreed, while 25.1% strongly disagreed. This finding shows that political messaging as a communication strategy is not popular among the undergraduate student population on campus. Therefore, it is important to consider giving students the convenience of disseminating political messages on MMUST FM. This finding contradicts Herman Chomsky's (1988) [8] argument that radio had already assumed a significant role in political messaging through

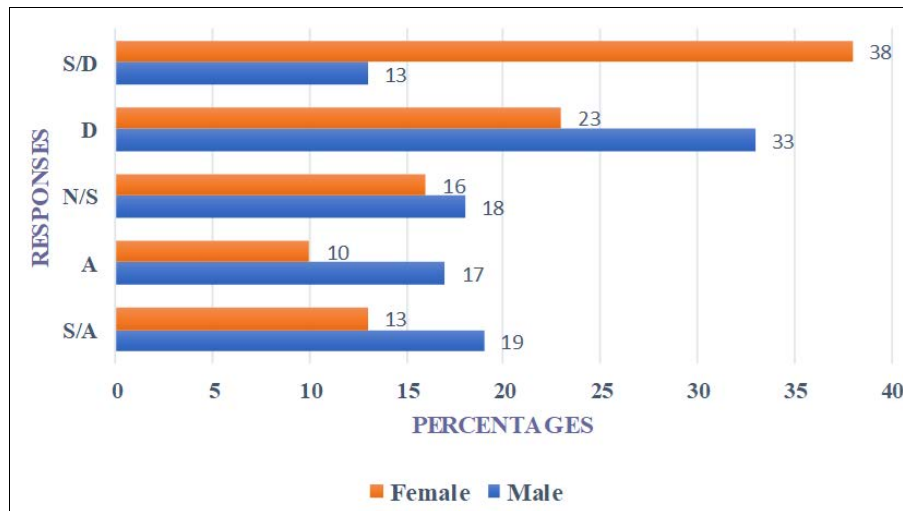
fireside chats and podcasts by 1930.

Political Messaging in MMUST FM based on gender

The data presented in Figure 4 indicates that 19% of male undergraduate students strongly agreed that MMUST FM provides them with a platform to disseminate political messages. In comparison, only 13% of female students felt the same way. Additionally, 17% of male respondents agreed with the statement, compared to only 10% of females. On the other hand, only 13% of males disagreed with the statement, compared to 38% of females. These findings demonstrate that male undergraduate students are more engaged in political messaging on campus than their

female counterparts. This confirms the existence of a gender gap where male students tend to be more active in political

communication than female students.



Source: (Researcher, 2023)

Fig 4: Responses on political messaging in MMUST FM based on gender

During a focus group discussion with student political leaders, the qualitative approach revealed that MMUST FM provides a platform for disseminating political messages to the student community. One of the participants emphasized this point by stating that the radio station allows them to voice their political views to a broader audience:

‘I do send political messages to comrades on MMUST FM. One example is when I was campaigning, I was allowed to draft and send targeted political messages to supporters of our coalition during live interviews and talk shows at the radio station.’ Personal Communication (Focus group discussion, 2023)

The study has found that political messaging is a popular communication strategy used by student leaders on MMUST FM but less by the undergraduate student community. These findings support Chibita (2010) [3], who, in a study in Uganda, suggested that radio is an effective medium for political leaders to contest political matters.

While most student leaders noted that MMUST FM allows them to disseminate political messages, only some student community members responded positively to the questionnaire. The results indicate that using political messaging as a communication strategy on MMUST FM is more prevalent among student political leaders than the student community. Key informant interviews also confirmed this finding. One of the radio producers at MMUST FM stated that political messaging is popular

among student leaders.

‘We allow students, especially those who campaign, to send specific political messages through our political programmes. We consider it every time because this radio station belongs to them.’ Personal Communication (Key Informant Interview, 2023)

This study firmly corroborates the position that disseminating political messages on radio is a communication strategy popular among political leaders in a democracy.

Addressing students’ needs through political messages in MMUST FM.

Scholars have examined how political messages on radio address the needs of the public they serve. Reviewing the characteristics of politically engaged students, scholars have discussed needs in campus political activism ranging from physical spaces for learning, accommodation, and recreational and conducive health facilities. In his submission, Altbach (2006) [1] defined these needs as the socio-economic dynamics of campus students ingrained in political activism on campuses. In the context of MMUST’s main campus, the study contextualized students’ needs to include lecture halls, accommodation, health facilities, quality of meals, electricity, water and sanitation, internet connectivity, and library services.

Table 4: Political messaging and students’ needs

Description	N	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
Political messages on MMUST FM address students’ needs on campus	303	41(13.5)	49(16.2)	34(11.2)	106(35.0)	73(24.1)	3.40	1.365

Source: (Researcher, 2023)

The following parameters were used by the study: 1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2= Agree (A), 3 = Not sure (NS), 4=Disagree (D) and 5 = strongly disagree (SD), N=303

Findings from the questionnaires presented in Table 4 indicate that 35% of the respondents disagreed that political messages broadcasted on MMUST FM cater to the needs of students on campus, with 24.1% strongly disagreeing. Only 13.5% of the respondents strongly agreed with the

statement, while 16.2% agreed. Those who were unsure constituted 11.2% of the total respondents.

During focus group discussions, student leaders reported that MMUST FM’s political messages do not address students’ needs on campus. For instance, one student leader exemplified this issue:

‘In as much as we are allowed to air political messages in MMUST FM, I do not think these messages capture our

needs as comrades. Sometimes, our needs are censored because they seem too sensitive to management. When dealing with student’s needs, the radio station avoids combative topics that can stir constructive debates’ Personal Communication (Focus group Discussion, 2023)

From political messages and students’ needs points of view, it can be established that political messages do not address students’ needs in MMUST. The findings demonstrate that the radio station has somewhat isolated students’ needs in its messaging strategy. The findings do not support Herman and Chomsky (1988) [8], who established that conservative talk shows on radio in the 1990s were used to disseminate political messages that focused on the needs of the American electorate. Another study that this finding does not support is by Fraser and Estrada (2001), who, in their conclusions, opine that community media platforms highlight challenges and their solutions, thereby defining challenges that meet the needs of local people in a democracy. Findings by Chambers and Constain (2000) [2] argue that when media addresses the needs of a society, it sustains a platform where members of the public can deliberate on issues. These study findings dispute these arguments. From the findings, it is ideal to argue that MMUST FM has shortcomings in meeting the threshold of a

perfect community media platform for not addressing the needs of its audience (students) through political messages, which other scholarly works have advanced. The radio station tends to avoid the agentic needs of students through its political messaging strategy.

Highlighting students’ issues through political messages in MMUST FM

The study contextualized issues in a political context, as advanced by Herman and Chomsky (1988) [8] in a survey conducted in the USA. These scholars found out that the most popular issues in the USA in a political context ranged from unemployment, war and conflict, health insurance, recession, racism, press freedom, and access to quality education by the marginalized black community. Looking at South Africa, for instance, Osunkule (2009) [17] established that campus radio stations have significantly impacted the communities they serve by addressing pertinent political issues during Apartheid. This study focused on the following issues in the context of MMUST’s main campus: HELB funding, scholarships, bursaries, quality of learning, access to affordable health care, security, examinations, and access to students’ welfare services such as counselling.

Table 5: Political messaging and students’ issues

Description	N	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
Political messages on MMUST FM highlight students’ issues on campus.	303	39(12.9)	41(13.5)	27(8.9)	109(36.0)	87(28.7)	3.54	1.368

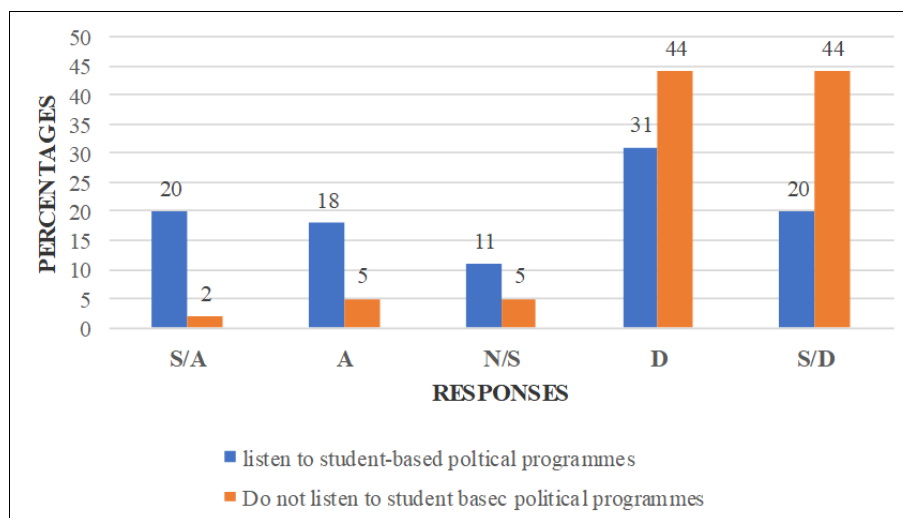
Source: (Researcher, 2023)

The following parameters were used by the study: 1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2= Agree (A), 3 = Not sure (NS), 4=Disagree (D) and 5 = strongly disagree (SD), N=303

The data collected from the questionnaires in Table 7 reveals that only 12.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that political messages broadcast on MMUST FM addressed the issues faced by students on campus, while 13.5%

agreed. The majority of the respondents, 36%, disagreed, while 28.7% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 8.9% of the respondents were unsure.

Responses on political messages highlighting students’ issues on campus based on listenership of student-based political programmes on MMUST FM



Source: (Researcher, 2023)

Fig 5: Responses on political messages highlighting students' issues based on listenership of student-based political programmes

The results in Figure 5 illustrate that only 2% of the respondents who do not listen to student-based political programmes on MMUST FM strongly agreed that political messages on MMUST FM highlight students' issues on campus. However, those who listen to these programmes make up 20% of the total. Additionally, only 5% of those

who do not listen to these programmes agreed, compared to 18% of the respondents who listen.

In comparison, 44% of the respondents who did not listen to the programmes strongly disagreed with the statement, compared to only 20% of those who listened. These findings indicate that respondents who listen to MMUST FM’s

student-based political programmes feel that their issues are highlighted by the political messages compared to those who do not. Therefore, students must listen to student-based political programmes on MMUST FM to stay informed about their issues.

In the focus group discussion sessions, student leaders strongly felt that MMUST FM does not prioritize their issues. One student leader elaborated:

'Just like my colleague stated earlier regarding political messages and students' needs, I think the same applies to student issues. Most political messages disseminated by MMUST FM do not highlight core issues that affect us as students. The messages are random, just regular announcements about the electoral cycle and peace messages concerning students' elections. The radio station censors political messages highlighting specific issues on campus, claiming that some of the issues might incite the students to violence.' Personal Communication (Focus group discussion, 2023)

According to the study's qualitative and quantitative approach, it is evident that MMUST FM is not providing an adequate political platform for students to voice their concerns, unlike in other democracies. Radio has a significant impact on politics, as demonstrated by previous research. However, MMUST FM's political messages have failed to promote and nurture campus democracy due to their inability to address students' issues. These findings contradict Mwesige's (2009) ^[15] survey, which analyzed political talk-show programmes functions in grassroots media settings. Mwesige's study in Zimbabwe revealed that political messages in such programmes can help the public highlight their issues, allowing ordinary people to challenge ruling establishments. In conclusion, MMUST FM needs to leverage radio's unique ability as a medium for political messaging to address students' issues and promote campus democracy.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Many students feel that the political messages broadcasted on MMUST FM must adequately address their needs and concerns. Additionally, censorship of sensitive topics prevents constructive political debates, limiting inclusivity and preventing the radio station from engaging in political discussions. Consequently, the lack of constructive dialogue negatively affects the radio station's ability to engage in meaningful political discussions.

Recommendation

The following are recommendations based on theory, practice and policy.

- **Theory:** Democratic participant media theory may be used to support future studies that examine the relationship between university radio and coverage of local issues and concerns affecting the campus student community.
- **Practice:** Universities operating university-based radio stations are encouraged to develop inclusive editorial policies that serve students' interests within universities.
- **Policy:** Media Council of Kenya and Communications Authority should draft policies and develop a legal framework that supports university-based broadcasting on university campuses.

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