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Influence of Exposure to Radio on Women Voters’ Participation in the 2013 General Election in Kakamega County, Kenya

Thomas Ibrahim Okinda

PhD in Communication and Media Studies candidate, Maseno University

Abstract

Introduction

Radio remains an important source of political information for the electorate in developing countries. In Kenya, radio listenership among women stands at almost 81 percent, with an average of almost 33 hours per week for each female audience member. Thus, radio is expected to influence electoral participation of women who form a large voting block in Kenya. Despite this, exposure to radio may not be enhancing political attitudes and electoral participation of women voters. A few studies conducted on the 2013 Kenyan polls acknowledge radio as an important source of political information for voters. However, the researchers did not concurrently analyze respondents’ socio-demographics, radio exposure, political attitudes and electoral participation. This limited research scope and scholarship on radio in relation to women’s electoral participation reflect knowledge gaps.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of exposure to radio on women voters’ participation in the 2013 Kenya general election in Kakamega County.

The objectives were to:

- (i) Establish the influence of socio-demographics on the level of exposure to radio of women voters during the 2013 Kenya general election in Kakamega County.
- (ii) Assess the association between exposure to radio and forms of electoral participation among women voters during the 2013 Kenyan polls in Kakamega County.
- (iii) Investigate the relationship between socio-demographics and the level of electoral participation among women voters during the 2013 Kenyan polls in Kakamega County.

- (iv) Determine the mediating effect of political attitudes on the relationship between women voters' exposure to radio and their participation in the 2013 Kenya general election in Kakamega County.
- (v) Analyze the combined effect of socio-demographics, exposure to radio, and political attitudes on women's participation as voters in the 2013 Kenyan polls in Kakamega County.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by a conceptual framework synthesized from political mobilization, feminist media, uses and gratifications theories.

Methodology

The research adopted a descriptive correlation survey design using a quantitative approach. The study population comprised of 287, 325 registered women voters in Kakamega County located in Western Kenya. Multi-stage sampling was used to select 400 women voters based on Yamane's formula. Primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data was collected using questionnaires whose reliability was enhanced through pre-testing and a pilot study. For validity, the questionnaire was reviewed and verified by two media studies experts. A total of 372 respondents' questionnaires were used in quantitative data analysis in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21.0. Bivariate data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics based on Chi-square test of independence and Pearson's correlation technique. Multivariate data was assessed using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Data was presented using frequency and contingency tables and bar charts.

Results

The study results established that there was a significant relationship between socio-demographics and the level of radio exposure among women voters. Radio exposure significantly associated with various forms of electoral participation that women voters were engaged in. It was found out that there was a significant relationship between socio-demographics and the level of electoral participation of women voters. The study outcomes revealed that the relationship between women voters' radio exposure and electoral participation was intervened by political attitudes. Overall,

the research established that socio-demographics, radio exposure and political attitudes jointly significantly predicted women voters' electoral participation. Radio exposure and political interest were identified as significant predictors in this joint impact.

Conclusion

The study concludes that radio exposure influenced women voters' participation in the 2013 Kenyan polls in Kakamega County. This influence was confounded by socio-demographics and intervened by political attitudes. Thus, this research suggests a concerted approach that addresses socio-demographics, radio exposure and political attitudes in order to promote women voters' electoral participation.

Contribution to Theory, Research and Practice

Taking the indirect media effects paradigm into account, this study proposed an inclusive and integrated model on the influence of exposure to radio on women voters' electoral participation. The research findings make contribution to policy and practice more especially in the formulation of gender-sensitive broadcasting, editorial and election coverage policies at the national level and within radio stations. Radio practitioners should continue with their political informational, educational, mobilization, entertainment and discussion roles while considering socio-demographics and psycho-political attitudes of their female audience and gender-sensitive reporting.