

The Role of Radio in Enhancing Family Values: A Study of 'Hutia Mundu' Programme of Inooro FM

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Abstract

Increasing media reports on sexual perversion, immorality and family violence have reached alarming levels that call for innovative ways of enhancing family values. One vernacular radio station, Inooro FM airs "Hutia Mundu" programme which is inclined to family life education. The objectives of this study were to establish whether radio serves as a medium of family life education and the issues it addresses. This study's literature review covered media theories, history and role of radio in relationship to culture, technology, and education. An interpretive approach including face to face interviews with two key staff of the station, a thematic content analysis of three sampled editions of the programme aired in April 2011, four FGDs comprising of 24 married and unmarried men and women, and a field survey comprising of 150 listeners was applied. Indicative Solutions Program was used to analyse the field survey. The total target population were listeners of "Hutia Mundu" programme drawn from Central Province's population of 4,383,743 out of which 47.3% or 2,081,200 listen to Inooro FM. The study's findings were that the programme covered all the ten family life themes including sex, and communication. The programme was found educative by 95% of the respondents. It also plays counseling, advisory and therapeutic roles. The programme was, however, critiqued for occasionally offering 'questionable advice,' gender bias, causing embarrassment and having shortcomings in Kikuyu language expertise. This study recommends that the government and media policy makers formulate a national policy for family life broadcasters' training especially for vernacular broadcasters.

Keywords: *medium, sex, education, uses & gratifications, agenda-setting.*

Introduction

Increasing media reports on sexual perversion, incest, rape and domestic violence are an indication of moral decay in society. The reports are occurring at a time when institutions formerly entrusted with family life education such as the extended family and religious institutions have failed to provide the necessary guidance in family life education leaving families vulnerable. Discussing the new status in the families, Mbaya (2009) posits that there is a gap in family life education since the extended members of a family no longer play a role in bringing up children.

As a result of the declining prominence of traditional values-teaching institutions, the media is performing a compensatory function to meet needs and desires of the people (Orlik 2001). The media has been alternately commended and condemned for playing certain roles in society at varying times. Since the founding of radio in the 1920's for example, radio has aimed at such noble functions as informing, educating, entertaining, propagandizing certain ideas and values as well as persuading (McLeish 2005). On the negative side, radio, has been blamed for perpetuating violence, profanity and sexuality (McKenzie 2006) and of fomenting political unrest, subverting important cultural norms, and contributing to the collapse of the social order (Baran and Davis 2009).

The media criticism is bound to raise a lot of interest in Kenya which has experienced a fast growth of FM stations whose listenership is over 85 percent of the country's population of about 40 million people (Wekesa 2009). Among the FM stations are vernacular stations that cater for different ethnic communities in the country. According to the Stedman Group (2009), vernacular radio commands over half of the audience share in Central and Lake region in Kenya. The local FM stations receive their share of criticism including employing comedians, disc jockeys (DJs) and beauty queens instead of professional journalists (Media Workshop 2010). Vernacular FM stations in particular have been blamed for employing untrained or poorly trained

personnel who compromise professionalism, negate ethical responsibility and fan inter tribal violence (Nguri, Risah and Kamweru 2009) and airing content equated to soft pornography (Wekesa, the OBSERVER 2009:9-17).

The above accusations notwithstanding, talk shows which are said to have proliferated radio and television from 1960s Hume (Online resource) are among the most popular radio and television genres as they are cheap and easy to produce and hold a broad audience appeal. This holds true in Kenya where a Media Council of Kenya (MCK 2012) study found that the leading radio programmes in the country are music which attracted 58% responses followed by talk shows at 40%.

Despite the genre's growth scholars have generally ignored it. Erler, and Timberg (Online resource) argue that scholars neglect the genre because they consider it as a disposable form. Lack of interest by mass media researchers means that the genre's short and long term effects remain unknown (Frisby 1998). In spite of the criticism that radio highlights themes of violence, profanity and sexuality, (McKenzie 2006), Inooro FM a vernacular radio station airs a talk show programme, "*Hutia Mundu*," which aims at offering family life education.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- a) Find out whether the radio enhances family values
- b) Find out what family life topics "*Hutia Mundu*" programme addresses
- c) Identify the uses and gratifications of the programme to its audience

Literature Review

This study's literature review covered two key theories, the agenda setting theory advanced by Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs and Uses-and Gratifications theory advanced by Elihu Katz, history and role of radio in relationship to culture, technology, and education and major family life issues.

The **Agenda Setting-theory** presumes that the media have the ability to set the public agenda. Agenda-setting which is a causal hypothesis suggests that media content influences the public perception of the importance of issues (Severin and Tankard 2001). Leon (2003) posits that the media shape the public space and citizenry itself as a result of the weight they bring to bear on the definition of public agendas and their capacity to establish legitimacy of certain debates. This is to say that through their ability of framing, the media are able to activate the people's interpretive schemas (Baran & Davis 2009). This study attempted to find out the family life education issues that are given prominence by "*Hutia Mundu*" programme and whether the programme coverage contributes in their setting a family life agenda.

Uses and Gratifications theory on the other hand considers the audience to be active and goal-oriented and suggests that audiences are selective in the kind of programmes they expose themselves to and they have specific motivations for selecting those programmes (Griffin 2000). According to Orlik (2001), uses and gratifications theory finds out such issues as what audiences find enjoyable in

a programme or show “was it the show’s locale and basic premise? Was it the script/plot development? The talent who were cast? What exactly about these factors brought about audience satisfaction? And just what was that satisfaction anyway?”

History and role of radio in relationship to culture was of interest to this study considering that “*Hutia Mundu*” programme takes place within a specific cultural environment. Culture has been defined as everything that humans make, use, learn, know and believe and includes accumulated knowledge, beliefs, ideas, values, goals as well as material objects that groups of people have ever invented or used (Perry and Perry 2009).

The media are said to have an effect on culture since media messages and images constitute a powerful social, cultural and political force (Gallagher 1982:151). The mass media “constitute a primary source of definitions of and images of social reality and the most ubiquitous expression of shared identity” (Devereux 2003:7). Media has also been described as a cultural industry that has already taken shape, an industry that is exclusively governed by commercial criteria whereby the profit motive outweighs public interest Leon (2003). Although Inoro FM is a commercial radio station, it has similarities with community or ethnic media which. Georgiou (2004) describes as one that allows members of a group to communicate among themselves to share common information and common cultural tastes. Georgiou explains that there is a dynamic process that goes on in the construction of meanings in the media which involves the media producers, the media content and the media audiences. This study took cognizance of the three aspects of communication.

Discussing the effects of different types of media, Littlejohn and Foss (2005) compares radio to oral tradition and argues that orality creates a culture of community while literacy creates a culture of class and electronic communication creates a culture of “cells” made of groups pitted against one another. The said groups promote their special interests especially as a result of media’s narrowcasting, a common phenomenon today.

Technological changes and narrowcasting: In 1989 European regulators adopted rules that were geared to permit the free television programmes across borders (Hirsch and Petersen 1994) that led to an increasing number of television channels, and commercialization. The wind of change spread to developing countries and gradually saw countries like Kenya liberalizing their airwaves. The changes in the media have led to either polarized, segmented audiences based on their specific needs or into large audiences suitable for standardized media content in order to survive (ibd.).

Narrowcasting has to do with targeting information to a niche audience. Such information is personalized to the requirement of individual users. Wahlstrom (1992) describes narrowcasting as the production of mass messages for specialized groups while Neumann (2007) defines narrowcasting as “new domains of special interest and special purpose communication whereby like minded individuals band together and speak out spontaneously in response to a public concern, event or issue of self interest.” The niche’ audience in regard to “*Hutia Mundu*”, programme is an audience that shares a common language, Kikuyu, and perhaps the same cultural norms and could therefore fit into the definition of a narrowcast.

Radio as a medium of education: Radio can play an important educational role. Marshal McLuhan suggested that teachers would turn an outdated ivory

tower into a modern-day control tower by plunging into the vortex of electronic technology (Griffin 2000), implying that they could use electronic media to educate. Some attempts have been made to use radio as a medium of education. In 1969, Sesame Street broadcast became the first attempt by a government to use media (TV) to try and achieve some educational goals for disadvantaged preschoolers. According to Severin and Tankard (2001) that was a bold step to reach a large audience and hold their interest by combining information and entertainment.

The US government's attempt to serve the public educational needs led to the establishment of the National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the 1960s to provide educational and other socially useful programs on radio and TV (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000). The Nigerian Broadcasting Service opened on 16th June, 1952 was also intended to provide special broadcasting services in the field of education (Adesonaye 1990). Some educational institutions in Kenya such as the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC), Kenyatta University, Maseno University and Daystar University and Moi University own FM radio stations which they use for training.

Major family life issues: Discussing family life issues is a daunting task considering that there are different types of family systems such as monogamy, i.e. a marriage where each person has only one mate, polygamy, where one man has more than one wife, sororal polygyny whereby a man marries a woman and her sisters, polyandry where a female has more than one husband, and fraternal polyandry whereby all brothers in a family share one wife. Group marriage on the other hand includes a household in which several men and women "have legal sexual access to one another" while serial polygamy is a rather sarcastic

term used especially in the United States where one person has several mates but one at a time, single parent families and same sex families among other types Grunlan and Mayers (1988).

This study considers the family to be an offshoot of marriage whereby marriage is defined as "a permanent union of an adult man and a woman as husband and wife, as long as they shall live upon the earth" Kilioba (2008). The study was interested in finding out how the programme covers problems that afflict marriage and affect family values, otherwise known as marriage stressors. Gichinga (2005:25) breaks the said stressors based on their magnitude into ten categories, namely, communication 100%, abuse (physical and emotional) 23.4%, parenting challenges 21%, trauma (chronic and terminal illness) 13.7%, infidelity 13.1%, alcohol and substance abuse at 12.6%. Other stressors below 10% are finances 5.6%, infertility and/or childlessness 4%, family origin (in laws) 3.4% and sexual dysfunctions 3%.

Research Methods

An interpretivist approach intended to help unearth the nature of reality surrounding the role of a vernacular radio station socially constructed by sources, content and audiences (Puttergill 2000) was used. The approach enabled an investigation into why the "*Hutia Mundu*" programme was established, how the programme accomplishes its aims, the audience's perception and opinions regarding the programme, how the audience use the programme and how the programme gratifies them. The approach involved the following methods:

- a) A documentary study of the content of "*Hutia Mundu*" programme aired in April 2011. A content analysis helped to describe and interpret the characteristics of the programme's message. The programme was thematically analysed to explore whether its content carried any family life agenda based on the ten family life themes of communication, abuse (physical, psychological and emotional), parenting challenges, trauma (chronic and terminal illness), alcohol and substance abuse, finances, infertility and or childlessness, family of origin (in-laws), and sexual dysfunctions.

- b) Two face- to-face interviews with two key staff of Inooro FM, the Head of Department of Inooro FM and the producer cum presenter of *"Hutia Mundu"* programme,
- c) Four Focus Group Discussions comprising of married men, married women, unmarried men and unmarried women. Each focus group discussion which was held separately comprised of six participants. The focus groups were made up of people who understand Kikuyu language, listen to the programme, and were willing to participate in the research and
- d) Questionnaires were administered to listeners of *"Hutia Mundu"* programme in a field survey comprising of 150 respondents from Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri, the three counties where Inooro FM is widely listened to and Kikuyu language is widely understood. There were 50 respondents from each county.

Target Population

The target population of this study included the content of all the *"Hutia Mundu"* programmes aired between 2004 to 2010, all the staff of Inooro FM station, and all the listeners of Inooro FM in Kenya. The total number of programmes since the inception up to January 2010 were 1248 made up as 6 (years) x 52 (weeks) x 4 (programmes) =1248. Inooro FM one of the 13 vernacular radio stations owned by the Royal Media broadcasts in Kikuyu language and it is the most listened to radio station in Central province of Kenya boasting of an audience of 47.3% of the population in the region (Media Council of Kenya 2006). According to the 2009 national census, Central province region has a population of four million, three hundred and eighty three thousand and seven forty three (4,383,743) people. That places the listenership of *Inooro* FM at 47.3% of 4,383,743 at 2,081,200. The Kikuyu community throughout the country is 6.62 million people (Otieno *D/N* Sept. 2010 pp 1,4).

Sampling:

Due to the very nature of this study which involved a specific group of people who understand a particular language, Kikuyu, and listen to *"Hutia Mundu"* programme, non-probability purposive sampling was done that included only people who listened and understood the programme and who were willing to participate in the research. The FGDs participants were reached through the use of government offices and institutions that helped to identify people who listened to the programme and who in turn mentioned others they knew who listened to the programme.

The study chose two key staff on Inooro FM based on their knowledge and involvement with the programme and in the belief that they would provide insights into the thinking of media professionals involved in a family life education broadcast and that they would share information regarding ideologies

guiding the programme, their training background and any challenges they encounter in such a programme. The choice for the content aired in April was based on the fact that April is normally a school holiday month in Kenya and more family activities and concerns are likely to occur at such a time.

The field survey participants were identified through self introduction, then inquiring whether they listen to the programme, and their willingness to participate. After informing them of the ethical requirements of the study and their signing of consent form, they were given the questionnaire which they read, indicated they had understood, filled in and returned to the researcher. Indicative Solutions, a user friendly software was used to code the data gathered from the field survey.

Results and Discussions

The triangulated data answered the following research questions:

Does the radio serve as a medium of family life education? The HOD explained that the establishment of *"Hutia Mundu"* programme followed stories that were circulating in the country that 'the Kikuyus were laid back in matters

of sex', were not affectionate, and that 'sex was sures, and actually call their wives baby" and that Kikuyu men walked many miles apart from their wives.

Survey responses received through telephone and short text messages formed the basis of the topics that were to be discussed in "*Hutia Mundu*" programme intended to be a forum for demystifying sex by 'explicitly talking about sex in marriage" and encouraging listeners to express themselves. The team also decided that they wanted the family life issues to be addressed from the Biblical point of view. They therefore sought and employed a talk show host who was a counselor, a pastor and already a radio personality, from another radio station, with great appeal. According to Larson (2001), the appeal of the host is key when examining the potential of a talk show. The HOD explained that sex was to be the focal point of the programme.

The host explained that "*Hutia Mundu*" means touch someone. He broke the programme topics into communication, sex, money management, cleanliness and what he called God's prayer. He said he intended to teach listeners to communicate properly by not just exchanging words but exchanging of feelings. Regarding sex, the host said through proper planning, sex should satisfy couples both physically and psychologically as explained in the Bible Book of Song of Solomon Chapter Four which involves a step by step process of preparation leading to a climax. Sex, communication, and money management are among the ten important family life education thematic areas.

From the three editions of "*Hutia Mundu*" programme analysed this study established that the radio provides family life education in that the content included all the ten thematic areas. Communication was for example mentioned twenty three (23) times, abuse appeared sixteen (16) times, followed by finances which was mentioned fifteen (15) times while infidelity was mentioned eleven (11) times. The other themes received fewer than 10 mentions.

Does the programme set a family life agenda? Agenda-setting function of the media establishes the salient issues or images in the minds of the public through their ability to select and choose what to report and how to report it (Littlejohn and Foss 2005). To find out the topics that have become salient to the listeners, the FGDs were asked the most memorable topics from the programme. Although sex was the least discussed in the programme content sampled, it was the most remembered topic by listeners who mentioned it eight

(8) times. It was followed by communication mentioned six (6) times followed by infidelity raised five (5) times. Other topics had fewer mentions. The study therefore found out that the two topics of sex and communication emphasized by the HOD and the host of the programme had become salient in the listeners minds.

Sex (Sexual Dysfunctions): The married women FGDs said they had learnt of the necessity of preparation for sex, for serious concentration during the sex act without creating interrupting activities like questions, arguments or prayers and for a couple to satisfy one another. The married men FGDs recalled a topic on preparation for sex which they said was based on the Bible book of the Song of Solomon. The FGDs said they had learnt that a man should never jump on a woman as if she is a bicycle and that unlike men, women take some time to get prepared for sex. That women can be compared to "charcoal stove which burns up slowly. The man was compared to gas fire, the one that goes lights up at once." In addition, they had learnt that sex was supposed to satisfy couples both physically and psychologically. Both married women and married men FGDs related the topic of cleanliness to sex. The unmarried men FGDs highlighted a topic that had been titled; "*Hutia mundu na ndukahutie wakwa*" meaning touch someone but don't touch mine. The group explained that the programme was cautioning people not to get too intimate with another person's partner, advice that is likely to reduce immorality. They also recalled another programme which discussed situations where people were 'married but still single' since the marriage was devoid of physical intimacy. The unmarried women FGDs mostly recalled a topic warning young people against

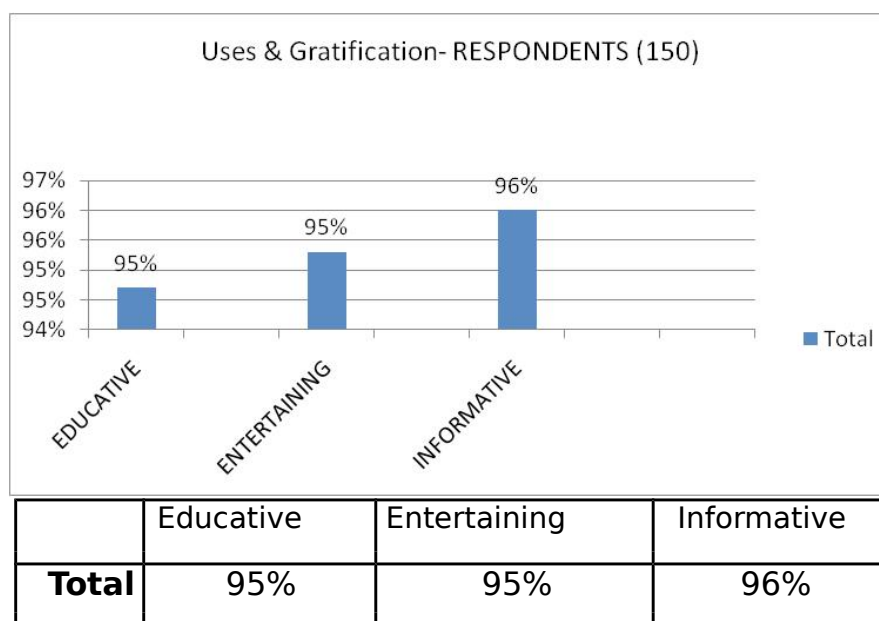
masturbation. They had also learnt that sex was very important in marriage and the need for a woman to satisfy her husband sexually. Taken seriously and practiced, the advice would contribute in curbing sexual perversion and strengthen the marriage institution.

On communication, the married women FGDs recalled a teaching that encouraged women to gently discuss in-house matters with their husbands instead of gossiping about them especially in regard to sex. Similarly the married men FGDs recalled the teaching that encouraged married couples to solve their own problems without publicizing them out of the home. They also learnt that communication should be relevant and timely. Improved communication should prevent domestic violence.

What are the Uses and Gratifications of the programme to its audiences? During the field survey Ninety five percent (95%) of the respondents described the programme as educative, 95% said the programme was entertaining while 96% said the programme was informative as shown in the diagram below.

The four FGDs explained how the programme gratified them and how they used it. Participants in the unmarried women FGDs indicated that besides acquiring information the harmful effects of masturbation, they were able to warn others to keep off the practice. They had also been entertained by the programme presenters who they described as charming, creative, have “vigour and psyche” and help them enjoy the programme.

Among the points raised by participants in the married women FGDs were that they had learnt about healthy relationships between a husband and a wife, how to stay together and build steady marriages. They added that the programme acts as a mediator between quarreling couples by reducing stress and causing them to laugh. They further posited that the presenters are knowledgeable and credible because they quote from the Bible. They added that they enjoy listening to the programme because “the programme presenters are very funny and humorous.



Participants in the married men FGDs, compared the programme to a school which progressively teaches its students important topics especially in the traditional Kikuyu way of life and suggested that the programme should be

made a national programme, translated into Kiswahili and English, be published in books and be available to other communities in Kenya. The unmarried men FGDs said that the programme teaches them what their parents would not teach them i.e. on how to approach a girl for marriage without fear, and how to live as couples when they get married. They also advocated for expansion of the programme into TV and magazine formats in order to reach more young people.

What is the level of training of the media practitioners producing and presenting family life programmes in vernacular radio stations?

The HOD who holds a diploma from the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) says his knowledge of Kikuyu language is by default and through his personal initiative. He obtained experience in establishing and running vernacular stations from his previous job in another radio station. His background notwithstanding, he proposes that vernacular broadcasters should

be trained in the language of broadcast in order to articulate themselves and adequately address the concerns of their audience since there is potential for niche vernacular stations to be established in future. Training should include coursework, term papers and demos in local languages to enable students to

The host of the programme holds a Certificate of Primary Education and has studied Theological Education by Extension (TEE) through which he specialized in family problems. Regarding his work as a broadcaster, he says he was the first person to teach people openly about nudity of the family and that his work has caused some people to dislike him.

Challenges: According to the HOD one of the biggest challenges they experience is when some listeners think they are being targeted in the programme and write letters castigating the programme or when the programme hurts listeners un-intentionally. The HOD recalls a time when the host said “when it comes to matters of sex it does not matter how you are, whether you are blind, whether you are deaf, whether you are whatever...,” An organization that represents people with disabilities accused the programme of exhibiting bad taste and had implied that people with disabilities can not have sex. The station issued an apology.

Other challenges are technological in nature in that the programme which is strictly intended for adults infiltrates to young people and children who have personal radios or mobile phones that access radio stations. That is a concern since the programme is quite explicit and not suitable for children.

Among the challenges the host has faced includes being misunderstood especially by female listeners who think that he is a “sex machine” “because I teach very well about preparing a woman before having sex which their husbands do not do.” As a result, some women have gone to great lengths to try and seduce him. The other challenge is that some people consider his teaching negatively and describe him as naughty, obscene and accuse him through the telephone for being a drunkard and a prostitute chaser.

The said challenges were reflected in the field survey whereby 50% of respondents below 25 years of age found some words used to discuss sex embarrassing. Out of the total survey population, 22% found words used to describe sex to be obscene and 5% felt that words used were insensitive. The said weaknesses related to the programme are ethical in nature. According to Larson (2001), ethical issues in communication focus on value judgments concerning degrees of right and wrong, goodness and badness, in human conduct. Among the value-related issues raised by FGDs include advice given by the host that women should f

out more about their rivals and imitate them to earn their husband’s love. The married women FGDs questioned the validity of that advice. The unmarried men FGDs argued that the host was biased against men and tended to blame them for most domestic problems including being drunk, getting home late and

failing to sustain their families. The married men FGDs stated that the hosts should stick to Kikuyu language and stop mixing it with English or Kiswahili as they sometimes do. They suggested that some elderly people could join the programme and help provide the necessary linguistic help.

Summary and Conclusions

This study found that Inoro FM which set out to demystify sex accomplished much more.

Through "*Hutia Mundu*" programme the station serves as a medium of family life education and touches on all the ten family life themes. The programme also contributes to the setting of a family life agenda especially regarding sex and communication themes. Both themes had been named by the station's staff as forming the basis for starting the programme. The findings offer some credence to Corcoran's (2003) argument that media have taken over the master narrative role once occupied by other cultural institutions such as religion, nationality, family and work place.

In addition, the station was found to inform as indicated by 96% of the respondents, educate 95% and entertain 95%. The programme audience found the programme useful as it met three major needs described by Severin and Tankard 2001 as **Cognitive needs**; acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding; **Affective needs**; Emotional, pleasurable or aesthetic experience, **Personal integrative needs**; - Strengthening credibility, confidence, stability and status.

The above accomplishments notwithstanding, the study identified some shortcomings related to use of vernacular language, technological and lack of audience media literacy whereby some programme audience were unable to distinguish between the public role of the host and his private life; as demonstrated by some women fans thinking that the host is a sex machine and trying to seduce him. Media stakeholders should promote public media literacy in order to boost citizenry's understanding of the media. Literacy campaigns should be preceded by research in order to identify actual needs and training to build capacity in campaign facilitators especially journalists.

The study recommended that the government, media owners and media trainers should recognize the potential of radio due to its affordability and accessibility to serve as a medium of family life-education. They should combine their efforts to ensure that vernacular broadcasters are trained in ethics to enhance accuracy, good taste, objectivity and fairness in their work as well as language of broadcast expertise including culture, cultural norms and cultural sensitivities.

Vernacular broadcasters should be offered training to help them understand the impact of information communication technology on society and the best ways of using ICT for positive effect. In addition to journalism, journalists should also acquire training in other fields of their respective specialization be it in counseling, military, psychology, law or family life to make them respected authorities in their work. In addition, this study recommended for further research on the role and impact of the media that can help the radio to break away from its old reputation of being a largely entertainment channel that specializes in trivia.

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rounded by a lot of taboos' within the community. The HOD together with his colleagues interrogated the issue and followed it with an on air survey that revealed that indeed the Kikuyus are not affectionate, do not have very affectionate names for their spouses compared say to other communities who walk hand in hand with their wives