

# Strategies Employed by *Wakilisha* Program in Communicating Alcohol Abuse Messages to the Youth in Vihiga Sub County, Kenya

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**Abstract:-** Numerous studies emphasise the media's crucial role in spreading health information, encouraging healthy behaviours, and influencing public health outcomes. Radio remains the dominant medium for accessing information in Kenya, with around 74% of Kenyans aged 18 and above and approximately 21 million citizens, regularly consuming radio content. Despite the *Wakilisha* radio program running from 2016 and focusing on topics like drug and alcohol abuse, alcohol abuse remains a significant issue in Vihiga County, especially among the youths. This study therefore purposed to assess the strategies employed by the *Wakilisha* Program in communicating alcohol abuse messages to the youth in Vihiga Sub-County. This study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-method research design. The study population consisted of 22,047 youths, the head of programmes and one radio presenter. The researcher used Yamane (1967) formula to get a sample size of 393 listeners. The study used systematic random sampling to select radio listeners' respondents from Vihiga subcounty and purposive sampling to select the two radio personnel. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data from *Wakilisha* programme listeners and two radio personnel. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analysed through textual analysis. The study found out that the programmes used the following strategies; audience-preferred language, the preferred programme format, and preferred timing and engagement of listeners in determining *Wakilisha* content.

**Keywords:-** Radio Programmes; Campaign; Alcohol Abuse; yYouths; Communication.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This study intended to assess *Wakilisha* radio programme as a campaign platform against alcohol abuse among the youth in Vihiga sub-county. The role of media in health communication and social behaviour change is significant in disseminating health information, promoting health behaviours, and influencing public health outcomes (Korda & Itani, 2011; Sharma et al., 2020). Mass media, encompassing traditional outlets like television, radio, newspapers, and social media platforms, have been

acknowledged for effectiveness in health promotion and behaviour change campaigns (Maher et al., 2014; Korda & Itani, 2014).

These platforms offer significant potential for delivering health behaviour change interventions and encouraging health improvement (Maher et al., 2014). Mass media interventions have the potential to instigate beneficial changes in population health behaviours by indirectly influencing individuals through changes in their living and working environments (Abroms & Maibach, 2008). By conveying information to enhance health outcomes and encouraging behavior modification, health communication aims to drive social change through knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Redmond et al., 2010).

Mass media campaigns have been effective in addressing alcohol-related disorders by disseminating information, changing behaviours, and promoting healthier choices (Hasin et al., 2007). Therefore, Brem et al. (2019) emphasized that efforts to combat alcohol abuse should include awareness campaigns, prevention programs, and interventions to address the knowledge and attitudes of individuals regarding alcohol abuse.

Within Kenya itself, alcohol abuse is becoming an increasing problem. According to studies carried out by Population Communication Africa (Masita, 2004), almost every Kenyan youngster, at one time or another, experimented with drugs, especially with beer. A study by NACADA (National Agency for the Campaign against Drug Abuse) in 2017 revealed that nationally, 13% of the Kenyan population presently drinks alcohol and that illicit brews and cheaply brewed beer, including Changaa, are consumed by over 15% of 15-34-year-olds. In research by NACADA 2022, the Western Region is leading in the prevalence of drug and substance abuse among Kenyans aged 15–65 years old by 23.8%, followed by Coast 13.9%, Central 12.8%, Nairobi 12.1%, and Nyanza 11.4%. The western region is also leading in the prevalence of Chang'aa use among Kenyans aged 15–65 years old, the prevalence of use of traditional liquor, and the prevalence of alcohol use disorders among Kenyans aged 15–65 years old.

The media are powerful platforms for disseminating information to the general public and can, as such, be used to send developmental messages to mass audiences (Kioussis & Wu, 2008). According to a report by Mwita (2021), radio remains the predominant medium for information dissemination among Kenyan citizens, boasting over 158 licensed stations. Nationally, approximately 21 million individuals listen to radio. Notably, this viewership demographic is more pronounced in rural than urban environments (MCK, 2021).

Vihiga FM Radio Station is a commercial regional radio station based in Mbale town, Vihiga County, Kenya. It was launched in May 2016 and broadcasts on 105.0 frequency using Kenya's national language Kiswahili and four other local languages namely; Kimaragoli, Kiteriki, Kinyore and Kiterik. The station boasts of a largely youthful workforce of presenters, reporters, producers and marketers. The programming is broken into music, talk shows, newscasts and sports with a priority of pushing forward issues that are of the public interest. It also endeavours to steer its audience towards positive thinking and actions, aiming to improve every aspect of people's life.

Vihiga FM's radio station offers a variety of newscasts and programs which are highly interactive. *Wakilisha* is a youth program aired from 2.30 pm to 4 pm every Monday to Thursday. Every Wednesday the program focuses on educating youth on alcohol abuse with the theme being 'Vijana Tuepuke Matumizi ya Dawa za kulevya na Mihadarati.' It focuses on creating awareness of alcohol abuse among the youth, advises the local administration on the need to educate the youth in villages on alcohol abuse through organising public Barrazas and meetings, counselling the youth through interviews by key speakers including health experts, education experts, religious leaders, government officials among others.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Media strategies are essential in behaviour change communication, effectively disseminating messages to target audiences. Various research studies, as presented in this section, have demonstrated this. Randolph and Viswanath (2004) studied public health mass media campaigns in the U.S. The study reviewed the literature on mass media campaigns and involved a review of campaign literature and reports of mass media campaigns in professional literature over the last five years. The study did not involve primary data collection but synthesized existing information to conclude. The findings related to media techniques used in public health mass media campaigns included developing campaigns based on a careful understanding of health behaviour determinants. This included framing messages in culturally appropriate ways when targeting specific ethnic groups and maximizing exposure through various channels and strategies. The study found knowledge gaps, including the need for more rigorous evaluation based on prospective data since the results obtained were secondary.

In San Diego, Nolan et al. (2009) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of public service announcements in changing behaviour. The study involved a field experiment with 120 people. The participants included 107 males, eight females, and five individuals who did not specify their gender. They were recruited from various Kragen Auto Parts stores in San Diego, California. The findings indicated that using the disrupt-then-reframe technique effectively encouraged proper disposal of used oil by overcoming resistance and low perceived behavioural control. The study's main glaring weakness was a need for a more theoretical framework in guiding mass-media campaigns aimed at behaviour change.

Abroms and Maibach (2008) conducted a study titled "The Effectiveness of Mass Communication to Change Public Behavior." The research involved a systematic review of literature based on the effectiveness of mass communication programs to change HIV/AIDS-related behaviours in developing countries. The findings included insights into the effectiveness of different approaches, such as using social cognitive means, health promotion strategies, and specific messaging tailored to target audiences. Knowledge gaps identified in the study include the need for further research on the long-term sustainability and impact of mass communication interventions on public behaviour change. This is because Abroms and Maibach's (2008) study was based on a one-off campaign instead of a sustained programme such as *Wakilisha* alcohol-based campaign.

In Indonesia, a study by Hanson et al. (2020) focused on the impact of a national communication campaign on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) knowledge and behaviours. The study analyzed data from 1734 participants using multiple logistic regression analysis to examine the relationship between intervention exposure and study variables. The findings showed that exposure to media and interpersonal communication (IPC) interventions were linked to increased knowledge and improved behaviours related to WASH. In particular, combining both media and IPC interventions greatly enhanced knowledge of defecation and hand-washing. On the other hand, exposure to either only media or only IPC had varying levels of impact on WASH-related knowledge and behaviours. This study highlights the success of communication campaigns integrating mass media with interpersonal communication strategies to promote behaviour change. The emphasis placed on interpersonal communication is important. The present study built on this by examining the impact of experts invited to the programme to provide informed opinions.

In 2000, Papa et al. studied the effects of an entertainment-education radio soap opera called "Tinka Tinka Sukh" in India. The research was conducted in Village Lutsaan in the Uttar Pradesh state of India, where the soap opera appeared to have particularly strong effects. The researchers adopted a case study approach to explore how the soap opera influenced its audience, focusing on Village Lutsaan. The study included a random survey of 1,472 respondents in the Gonda District in the U.P. State, with 88 listeners and 1,384 non-listeners. Additionally,

approximately 150,000 letters were received by All India Radio in response to "Tinka Tinka Sukh," and a sample of 260 letters were analyzed. The survey data was collected in 50 localities of Gonda District, and the letters were obtained through All India Radio. The study emphasized entertainment education as a mass communication strategy influencing audience members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour regarding educational issues. The radio soap opera intentionally integrated educational content in an entertaining format to bring about social and behavioural Change. The current study further developed this by providing insight into what techniques apply to creating awareness.

Al-Dmour et al. (2022) conducted a study in Jordan titled "The Role of Mass Media Interventions on Promoting Public Health Knowledge and Behavioral Social Change against Corona Virus Disease in Jordan." The research methodology used in the study was based on an exploratory and descriptive approach. Data was collected using questionnaires. The sample size consisted of 2,555 participants reached through social media platforms. A convenience sampling procedure was used to collect responses from potential Jordanian respondents between March 15th and April 30th, 2020. The study found that mass media interventions significantly promoted public health knowledge and influenced behavioural social Change during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study emphasized the importance of specific mass media channels, types of messages, and sources in influencing public health knowledge and behavioral Change. Additionally, the findings indicated that mass media campaigns, especially through videos, have the power to encourage the adoption of healthy behaviors and discourage harmful practices in society. The knowledge gap in this study was the use of multiple mass media channels as influencers of knowledge and behavior. Therefore, it needed clarification on the type of media that is effective. This study addressed this gap since it only focuses on radio instead of using mixed media.

In Africa, Kagurusi (2013) did a study on the impediments to effective family planning. The study used a mainly qualitative research design, gathering data through semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews. The sample size included a group of journalists selected based on their previous experience and interactions with the Ministry of Health. The findings related to media techniques used included preferences for information from health workers and challenges in comprehending scientific information on the internet. Knowledge gaps identified in the study included a need for more specific information concerning the countries where the studies were conducted. The findings are generalized.

Nonetheless, Chebet and Mathooko (2023) conducted a more specific study in Kenya on communication for social and behavioral change during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a qualitative and case study research design to analyze the use of puppetry for social behavior change communication (SBCC). The sample size included ten episodes from Project Hand Up's YouTube channel, selected

based on media content analysis guidelines to ensure comprehensive coverage of puppetry for SBCC. The sampling method included purposeful, criterion, and convenience sampling, with specific criteria for episode selection. These criteria included the use of English, production dates between January 2020 and March 2023, and the presence of puppets in at least 50% of the episode, production in Kenya, airing on Kenyan T.V., and the communication of COVID-19 prevention measures. The study's findings on media techniques highlighted the effectiveness of puppetry in conveying advocacy messages through influence, persuasion, and social marketing. It also emphasized the role of puppetry in social mobilization at both community and national levels. The study noted the popularity of episodes translated into Kiswahili and Kikuyu languages and identified challenges such as perception, motivation, cultural, psychological, and production issues. The gap in knowledge in this study was whether such findings would be similar for radio programmes. It is, however, inarguable that this study by Chebet and Mathooko (2023) was quite detailed, especially methodologically.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### A. Research Design

Research design is the plan and structure of investigation conceived to obtain answers to the research questions (Kothari, 2004). This study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-method research design. This method is suitable when researchers aim to gather data at a single time to understand a particular phenomenon comprehensively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The mixed method research design involves the researcher combining elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches for in-depth understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### B. Area of Study

This study investigated Wakilisha Radio Programme as a campaign platform against alcohol abuse among the youth in Vihiga Sub County. Wakilisha Programme airs on Vihiga FM Radio Station, a community radio station launched in 2016. The radio station broadcasts on 105.0. Broadcasting uses Olulogoli, Nyore, Tiriki, Terik, and Kiswahili languages. Wakilisha is a youth program that airs from 2.30 pm to 4 pm every Monday to Thursday. Every Wednesday, the programme focuses on educating youth on alcohol abuse, with the theme being 'Vijana Tuepuke Matumizi ya Dawa za kulevya na Mihadarati.' In Kenya, alcohol is the most abused substance, with a prevalence of 12.2% among individuals aged 15–65. Vihiga County, particularly Vihiga Sub-County, has one of the highest rates of alcohol abuse, with 8,839 cases reported.

Vihiga Sub-County is in Vihiga County, in the western parts of Kenya. It is one of the five sub-counties in Vihiga County, with a population of 95,292. Out of this, youth between 18 and 34 are 22, 047. The sub-county has a population of 45,788 males, 49,501 females, and five intersex people. The number of households is 23,375, and the average is four people per household (KNBS, 2019). The sub-county has four wards: Mungoma, Lugaga Wamuluma,

South Maragoli and Central Maragoli (See Appendix G). The sub-county is dominated by the Luhya tribe (KNBS, 2019).

### C. Study Population

A population is an entire group of individuals, events, or objects with a common observable characteristic (Mugenda, 2003). This study targeted 22,047 youths between 18 and 34 years old in Vihiga Sub County (KNBS, 2019). It also targeted two personnel from Vihiga FM: the head of programmes and a radio presenter.

### D. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The sample size for Wakilisha programme listeners was obtained from those aged 18–34. The youth population between 18-34 years old in Vihiga sub-county is 22,047 (KNBS, 2019). To get the sample size for listeners of Wakilisha programme, the researcher used Yamane (1967) formula which is suitable when researchers are faced with finite populations and seek to achieve a specified level of precision in their estimates. The formula is as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

**n** = the required sample size

**e** = level of precision or sampling error, which is 0.05

**1**=constant

**N** = population size (Yamane, 1967) = 22,047

The sample size for the targeted number of youth was  $(22,047/1+22,047 (0.05)^2 = \text{therefore } n = 393 \text{ respondents})$ .

The study utilised systematic random sampling to select respondents from Vihiga Sub County. Systematic random sampling guarantees that each unit in the study population has an equal chance of being chosen. This method is employed when attaining the desired sample size, which involves multiple steps (Kothari, 2004). The researcher used a simple random walk procedure to select households for the desired sample size. According to Kothari (2004), the random walk procedure involves using an identified sampling interval (kth number).

To obtain the sampling interval, the formula below was used.

$$k = \frac{N}{n}$$

N is the population of houses required to obtain the required sample size ( $393 \times 4 = 1572$ ), and n is the desired sample size (393). Using the above formula, the researcher used a sampling interval of 4, meaning every fourth house was selected in each case, picking a youth from the house.

The researcher selected every kth house while moving along one side of the street/road. This process continued until the desired sample size was reached, ensuring that one Wakilisha program listener was selected from every chosen

household which had a listener. For qualitative data, the researcher purposively sampled 2 Vihiga FM staff including the head of programmes and one radio presenter.

### ➤ Data Collection Techniques

To properly collect the necessary data, the researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection instruments included a questionnaire administered to 393 respondents and interviews with two radio personnel. The questionnaires were administered within one month. The data collection begun in February 2024 through to June 2024, with the help of four research assistants.

### ➤ Questionnaires

A general survey using structured questionnaires was used to collect primary data from 393 radio listeners aged between 18 and 34. The first part of the questionnaire focused on the age, gender and level of education of the 393 radio listeners. The second part focused on the awareness of Wakilisha Programme youth listeners about alcohol abuse in Vihiga Sub Count, the third part focused on Wakilisha programme strategies used in communicating alcohol abuse messages and the fourth part was based on the perception of Wakilisha programme listeners about alcohol abuse.

### ➤ Interviews

For the interviews, the key informant guide was used to gather data from the targeted radio personnel from Vihiga FM. The content of the radio interview schedule was based on the programme schedule, programme format, programme length, and listenership engagement method.

### ➤ Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to a measurement that supplies consistent results with equal values. It measures a research study's consistency, precision, replicability, and trustworthiness (Bryman, 2012).

The reliability of the research instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha, whose values range from 0 to 1. Values less than 0.7 are considered unreliable, while values greater than 0.7 are considered reliable (Keith, 2018). Appendix E shows that the Cronbach alpha values for radio strategies, perception of youths and level of awareness were 0.84, 0.754 and 0.785. Considering the results, it was clear that all study constructs were deemed reliable since their values were more than the required alpha value of 0.70. The researcher also used the pre-test method to ensure the internal reliability of the instruments (Bryman, 2012). Pilot studies were conducted for the questionnaire and the interview schedule. The pilot study for the questionnaire was done at Lurambi sub county, Kakamega County with 39 radio listeners. Viechtbauer et al. (2015) suggest at least or at least 9% of the main trial's sample size. For the interviews, one radio staff from Radio Ingo was interviewed. The individual hosts a similar programme in terms of content at Radio Ingo.



Validity concerns the extent to which a measure reflects the concept it has been designed to measure (Bryman, 2012). Face validity was used as a means of pre-testing to ensure the instruments' accuracy, suitability and relevance for the study. This was through reviews by experts from the Department of Communication and Media Technology, Maseno University.

#### ➤ *Data Analysis and Presentation*

Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23. After entering data, analysis was accomplished through descriptive statistics that involved measures of distribution (percentages) and describing the findings in written text, making inferences from the analysed data, and doing graphical presentations for illustration purposes using frequency distribution tables.

Objective one of the study was to determine the awareness of Wakilisha Programme youth listeners about alcohol abuse in Vihiga Sub County. In addressing this research objective, the analysis focused on whether the Wakilisha programme had a slot on alcohol abuse, the frequency of Wakilisha programme listenership, and the knowledge gained from listening to the segment. Qualitative analysis was also conducted along the areas to triangulate the findings. Quantitative data analysis was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23. Qualitative data analysis was done by Atlas 8. Data presentation was done using tables, figures and textual forms.

Objective two was to assess the strategies used by *Wakilisha* programme to communicate alcohol abuse messages to the youth in Vihiga Sub County. The researcher used descriptive and textual analysis for this objective. Hunt and Linos (2022) proposed a framework for assessing media strategies for social behaviour change campaigns. Among the techniques highlighted by the researchers, they included whether the programmes used the audience-preferred language, the preferred format, the preferred timing, and engaged listeners in determining Wakilisha content.

For analysis of descriptive statistics from the questionnaires, questions were posed to the listeners based on the programme's choice of , the formats for the programme, the programme scheduling and whether the programme engaged listeners in determining the content of the programme. Qualitatively, the researcher considered responses from the head of programmes and radio presenters based on programme schedule, programme format, programme length, and programme and listenership engagement method. This was done through textual analysis where the researcher first transcribed the voice-recorded interviews. This was then followed by textual analysis with a focus on responses on the areas of audience-preferred language, the preferred format, the preferred timing, and engaged listeners in determining Wakilisha content. This was done to corroborate the findings from the listeners.

The third objective of the study was based on the evaluation of the perceptions of Wakilisha Programme youth listeners about alcohol abuse in Vihiga Sub County. The researcher focused on the perceived threat in response to research objective two. Perceived threat/risk is a critical construct encompassing two central components: perceived severity and perceived susceptibility (Witte et al., 2002; Lin & Chen, 2021). The perceived severity of the threat refers to the individual's assessment of the seriousness and potential harm associated with the threat. On the other hand, perceived susceptibility relates to the individual's belief in their likelihood of being affected by the threat (Gore & Bracken, 2005; Lithopoulos et al., 2021; Witte et al., 2002; Lin & Chen, 2021).

These two dimensions of perceived threat shape individuals' overall risk perceptions and drive their decision-making processes in adopting protective behaviours (Vaala et al., 2021; Poggiolini, 2020). The researcher used descriptive statistics in the analysis. The listeners were asked on their perceived susceptibility or severity about alcohol abuse. In this measurement, the researcher used a 5 level likert scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.

#### ➤ *Ethical Considerations*

The researcher took into account several ethical considerations. One of the considerations included obtaining a research permit from NACOSTI. Voluntary participation and informed consent from participants were sought before collecting data. The purpose of the study was clearly and faithfully explained to the respondents. The researcher maintained privacy and confidentiality during data collection, processing and reporting.

All the study protocols were shared with the supervisor for approval. Additionally, the researcher had to get consent to access the records and documents at the radio station, including the name of the radio station and staff in the report and other quotations associated with the study.

## IV. FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to assess the strategies used by the *Wakilisha* radio programme to communicate alcohol abuse messages to the youth in Vihiga Sub County. This was done by considering whether the programmes used the audience-preferred language, the preferred programme format, and preferred timing and engaging listeners in determining Wakilisha content.

**Table 1 Suitable Language for the Presentation of Wakilisha Programme**

	Frequency	Percent
Kiswahili	120	32.4
English	65	17.6
Luhya	104	28.1
Sheng	46	12.4
Others	35	9.5
Total	370	100.0

The findings in Table 1 showed that 32.4% preferred Kiswahili, 17.6% preferred English, 28.1% preferred Luhya, 12.4% preferred Sheng and 9.5% preferred other languages. From these findings, it is established that the majority of the respondents within Vihiga County preferred Kiswahili and Luhya languages for the presentation of *Wakilisha* programme at Vihiga FM.

The researcher also sought responses from the radio head of programmes concerning the preference for language use, as shown below;

*“...Kiswahili is the main language used by Vihiga FM radio in broadcasting all programmes and news. This editorial policy was agreed on to reach a wider audience, keeping in mind that Vihiga County is diverse and using a local language may disadvantage some listeners who do not understand the language. The programme is therefore presented in Kiswahili to reach the target audience...”* Head of Programmes, Vihiga FM.

The above comments from the Head of Programmes were in line with those from the Table. 1. The findings from the radio Head of Programmes indicated that despite the listeners being predominantly Luhya, the most preferred language in reaching the audience; *“The programme is therefore presented in Kiswahili to reach the target audience..”*

The findings from the head of programmes and radio listeners align with those of other studies. For example, Chebet and Mathooko (2023) conducted a study in Kenya on communication for social and behavioural change during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers noted that most audiences preferred the programmes aired in either Kiswahili, a national language, or Kikuyu, a vernacular, to the programme audiences. According to Potter and Stapleton, (2011), using the audience's preferred language in social behaviour change communication campaigns is crucial for effectively conveying messages and influencing behaviour. This approach aims to ensure that the language used in campaigns aligns with the audience's preferences and cultural nuances, thereby increasing the likelihood of message acceptance and behaviour change.

From the Uses and Gratifications perspective, the findings align with the assumption that audience members actively select media that suit their preferences. If the programme uses the audience-preferred language, as in this study, it meets the audience's specific needs and preferences, leading to higher engagement and satisfaction. The findings also relate to the assumption that social and contextual aspects shape audience preference. Therefore, those who are well-versed in certain languages will prefer them, as is the case with Kiswahili.

#### ➤ Preferred format in the *Wakilisha* programme

Respondents were asked to state their preferred programme format that Vihiga *Wakilisha* programme uses to air the *Wakilisha* program. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Preferred Programme Formats in *Wakilisha* Programme**

	Frequency	Percent
Calls-in	83	22.4
Expert interviews	53	14.3
Interview	57	15.4
Radio discussions	129	34.9
Radio documentaries	48	13.0
Total	370	100.0

The findings on the programme's preferred formats for airing alcohol-related content on the *Wakilisha* program revealed that the most favoured discussions as indicated by 34.9% of respondents. Calls-in were the second most popular at 22.4%. Interviews and expert interviews were preferred by 15.4% and 14.3% of respondents, respectively. Lastly, radio documentaries were the least favoured, with 13.0% of respondents selecting this format.

These findings were supported by comments from *Wakilisha* Programme host and the radio Head of Programmes as shown in the excerpt below;

*“...The programme uses call-ins, discussions and live interviews with experts, county officials and opinion leaders as strategies to raise awareness of alcohol abuse. Through call-ins, the presenter engages with listeners as the listeners get to ask the experts questions on the topic of discussion...”* *Wakilisha* Programme Host

*“County government officials including health experts are always invited to give their expertise on alcohol abuse matters. They are invited in advance to prepare themselves adequately.”* Head of Programmes, Vihiga FM.

The comment from the programme host affirms that the show adopts a multi-approach strategy to reach out to the listeners. These findings are similar to those indicated in Table 2 where it is evident that discussion, call-ins, interviews, and expert interviews are the most preferred formats by the radio programme in that order.

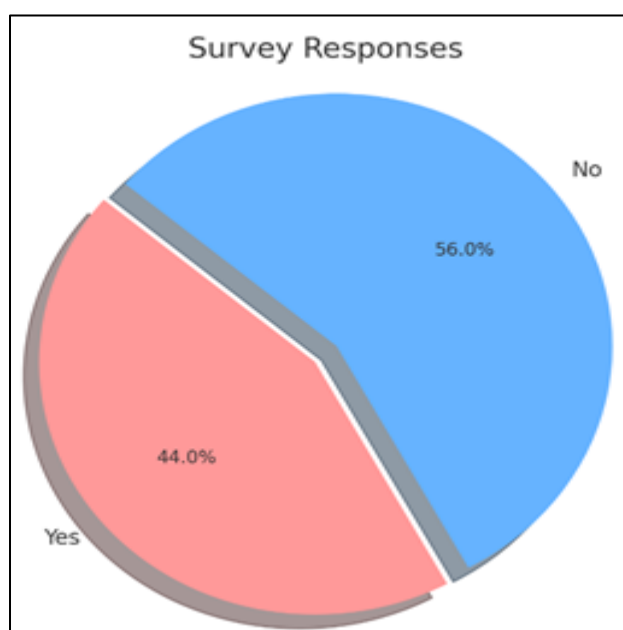
The qualitative responses from the radio host and Head of Programmes and the quantitative outcomes from Table 2 also show that the most preferred formats were call-ins and radio discussions. The results were similar to the findings from the study conducted by Johnson et al. (2010), who established that calls-in is one of the unique formats radio channels use to pass information to listeners. Most listeners prefer this format since it is one of the most efficient and effective methods of communication, and it has helped to pass information and get feedback from those abusing alcohol.

In addition to the findings mentioned in this study, other research has focused on various techniques. For example, Papa et al. (2000) emphasized entertainment education as a mass communication strategy to influence audience members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour regarding educational issues. Furthermore, Chebet and

Mathooko (2023) highlighted the effectiveness of puppetry in conveying advocacy messages through influence, persuasion, and social marketing. These results also align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory assumption that media compete for audiences' attention. They do so by being conscious that there are many options for media consumption, so they create media content in which audiences are interested. The media outlets must compete for attention by tailoring their content to match audience preferences, ensuring higher engagement and retention, in this case, the use of discussions and call-ins.

#### ➤ Preferred Scheduling of Wakilisha Programme

Respondents were asked whether they were satisfied with the timing of the *Wakilisha* programme. The findings are presented in Figure 1 below.



**Fig 1 Respondent Preferred Scheduling for Wakilisha Programme**

Figure 1 shows that 44.0% of respondents (163 individuals) indicated that they were satisfied with the program's scheduling, while a majority of 56.0% (207 individuals) expressed dissatisfaction.

To confirm the findings from Figure 1 from *Wakilisha* programme listeners, the investigator probed the radio Head of Programmes on whether they seek the opinions of the listeners when deciding on timing. The response was as shown below:

*As the Head of Radio Programmes, I acknowledge the feedback regarding program scheduling. We strive to align our programming with audience preferences and regularly seek listener opinions through surveys and direct engagement.* Head of Programmes, Vihiga FM.

The qualitative responses from the Head of Programmes indicate that the audiences are consulted in determining the programme's scheduling. This, however,

contradicts what is shown in Figure 1, where the majority of listeners (56%) note that they are not considered in determining the programme timing. Miller et al. (2021) argue that ensuring campaigns are consistently aired strategically can help reinforce messaging and encourage listeners to adopt the desired behaviours.

Miller et al. (2021) arguments have also been supported by Moffat et al. (2022), who noted that exposure to various communication channels, including radio campaigns, is a successful strategy for disseminating knowledge and influencing behaviours.

However, the findings suggest that the radio did not factor in the assumption that social and contextual elements shape audience activity according to the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This is because the timing of the programme relates to the social and contextual aspects influencing media consumption. Scheduling the programme at a preferred time ensures that it fits into the audience's lifestyle, enhancing its effectiveness and reach Miller et al., (2021).

#### ➤ Engagement of listeners in determining Wakilisha programme Content

Finally, as part of the assessment of radio strategies, respondents were asked to state whether the youth listeners are always involved in determining the content of the *Wakilisha* programme. Table 3 shows the responses from the respondents

**Table 3 The Youth Listeners are Always Involved in Determining the Content of Wakilisha Programme**

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	90	24.3
Disagree	117	31.6
Undecided	26	7.0
Agree	69	18.6
Strongly agree	68	18.4
Total	370	100.0

The findings in Table 3 show that the majority of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed, 24.3% and 31.6%, that the youth listeners are always involved in determining the content of the *Wakilisha* programme. A total of 37% either agreed or strongly agreed that they were involved in determining the alcohol content of the *Wakilisha* programme. 7.0% were undecided.

This may imply that the presenters need to engage the youth to determine most of the information presented by the *Wakilisha* programme. These findings are contrary to the comments from the Head of Programmes, as shown in the excerpt below;

*"...We aim to involve listeners in shaping our programming, particularly on important topics like alcohol abuse. While some listeners may feel that their voices are not fully heard, we are always committed to improving our*

*engagement strategies...*" Head of Programmes, Vihiga FM.

From the excerpt, the head of programmes states that they engage the audience in determining the content of the programmes on alcohol abuse. This is contrary to what the listeners stated in Table 3. These findings are also contradicting the best practices outlined in the literature. For example, Randolph and Viswanath (2004) found that they were more effective when they included youth input in their development. They noted that this approach makes the messages more relevant and engaging, increasing the likelihood of capturing and sustaining audience attention in a highly competitive media landscape. This approach has been supported by other researchers, such as Hunt and Linos (2022), who emphasized the importance of including members of the target population in message design and maintaining consistent messaging. Furthermore, Capitão et al. (2022) highlighted the significance of tailoring health communication messages to the target audience. They found that actively involving the health promotion target audience is crucial in improving health campaigns' development and effectiveness.

The findings contradict the Uses and Gratifications assumption that audience members are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their needs, and media are considered to be only one factor contributing to meeting needs. Engaging listeners in determining programme content reflects media consumption's active and goal-directed nature. Not engaging audiences in shaping content may result in the needs of the audiences not being effectively met (Capitão et al., 2022).

## V. CONCLUSION

The study sought to evaluate the communication strategies employed by the Wakilisha radio programme to deliver alcohol abuse messages to youth in Vihiga Sub County, focusing on language preference, programme format, scheduling, and listener engagement. The findings reveal a nuanced understanding of audience preferences and areas for improvement.

In terms of language, most respondents preferred Kiswahili (32.4%) and Luhya (28.1%) for the Wakilisha programme. This aligns with the radio station's decision to broadcast in Kiswahili to reach a diverse audience. However, the station must balance catering to regional linguistic preferences, as a significant number of listeners also favor Luhya. This is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which emphasizes that media must cater to audience preferences to achieve effective engagement and message acceptance.

Regarding programme format, radio discussions (34.9%) and call-ins (22.4%) were the most preferred methods of content delivery. This suggests that interactive and dialogue-based formats resonate most with the youth audience, reflecting the importance of active audience participation in media consumption. The findings align with

existing research that highlights the effectiveness of call-ins and discussions in enhancing listener engagement and facilitating social behavior change.

However, scheduling remains a challenge, with 56% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the current timing of the Wakilisha programme. Although the radio station claims to seek audience feedback, there is a disconnect between the station's strategies and the listeners' perceived involvement in programme scheduling. To increase effectiveness, aligning scheduling with the preferences and availability of the target audience is crucial.

Lastly, while the radio station claims to involve youth in determining programme content, the findings suggest otherwise. A majority of respondents (55.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are consistently involved in shaping the content. This discrepancy points to the need for more deliberate and meaningful engagement with the target audience, particularly youth, to enhance programme relevance and impact. The lack of audience input undermines the active and goal-directed nature of media consumption, as postulated by the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

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