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Effectiveness of Radio Sengerema’s Public service announcement in Promoting Voter Education During the 2024 Local Government Election in Sengerema, Tanzania

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Abstract. Voter education is a critical element in strengthening democratic participation and accountability at the local level. This study examined the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema’s public service announcements (PSAs) in promoting voter education during the 2024 Local Government Election in Sengerema, Tanzania. Guided by agenda-setting theory, the research employed a descriptive survey design supplemented by qualitative in-depth interviews. A purposive sample of fourteen community members including local leaders, radio staff, and voters was selected to provide detailed insights into PSA effectiveness. Findings revealed that the PSAs significantly enhanced voters’ knowledge of electoral procedures, responsibilities, and civic engagement. Message repetition reinforced retention and motivation to participate, while timing and clarity of announcements influenced accessibility. The study recommends that community radio stations design culturally relevant and frequent PSAs, electoral authorities collaborate more closely with media outlets, and civil society organisations support voter sensitisation initiatives. This research contributes to knowledge by demonstrating the role of local radio as an effective platform for voter education in Tanzanian local government elections.

Keywords. voter education, public service announcement, community radio, local government election, agenda-setting theory

Introduction

In democratic societies, informed citizen participation is fundamental to political legitimacy, accountability, and social stability. A key mechanism through which citizens acquire the knowledge necessary for meaningful participation is voter education. Voter education equips citizens with information on electoral processes, candidate profiles, and their civic rights and responsibilities, enabling them to make informed choices during elections (Mogambi & Ochola, 2015; Nafiz, 2012). In contexts characterised by limited resources, linguistic diversity, and dispersed rural populations, traditional mass media—particularly radio—remains the most accessible and influential channel for disseminating civic information (UNESCO, 2021).

Community radio, in particular, has emerged as a vital platform for promoting civic engagement and strengthening grassroots democracy. By amplifying local voices and facilitating dialogue on governance issues, community radio enhances political awareness and

citizen participation (Bello & Wilkinson, 2017). UNESCO (2021) asserts that community broadcasting contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16.10 by ensuring public access to information and safeguarding fundamental freedoms. Evidence from diverse contexts underscores the effectiveness of community radio in fostering civic participation. For instance, Radio Nam Lolwe in Kenya mobilised voter turnout among lake-dwelling communities during local elections (Mogambi & Ochola, 2015), while Kothmale Community Radio in Sri Lanka improved electoral awareness through multilingual programming (Nafiz, 2012). In West Africa, strategically designed PSAs, civic jingles, and radio debates have influenced voting behaviour and increased political knowledge (Makinde & Abati, 2024; Martínez-Roa & Ortega-Erazo, 2018; Verma et al., 2020). Despite these successes, community radio remains underutilised in official electoral strategies. Tucker (2013) argues that electoral institutions often overlook grassroots media in voter education initiatives, missing opportunities to promote inclusive democratic participation. Within Nigeria, Makinde and Abati (2024) observed that while interactive radio programmes and political advertisements effectively enhance political knowledge, conventional news broadcasts alone have limited impact on voter awareness. These findings suggest the need for more systematic integration of community-based media into electoral education campaigns.

In Tanzania, radio continues to dominate the media landscape, with over 80% of the population accessing it weekly (TCRA, 2025). The number of licensed radio stations increased from 86 in 2012 to over 200 in the early 2020s, many targeting rural communities (TCRA, 2025). Community stations play a crucial role in civic engagement, offering locally relevant programming addressing governance, development, and electoral participation. Radio Sengerema, located in Mwanza Region, exemplifies this role. Known for its development-oriented content, the station actively contributed to voter education during the 2024 Local Government Election by airing PSAs on voter registration procedures, eligibility criteria, polling processes, and candidate information. This initiative aligns with agenda-setting theory, which posits that repeated media exposure to specific issues shapes public priorities and awareness (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The persuasive capacity of PSAs is central to their effectiveness in shaping voter knowledge and attitudes. Research demonstrates that culturally adapted messages, repeated and delivered in local languages, significantly improve comprehension and encourage electoral participation (Davis & Owen, 2018; Kamau & Waweru, 2017). Repetition of messages reinforces retention and strengthens motivation to participate (Mtembe, 2018; Ojo & Kazeem, 2017). Empirical studies in Tanzania further indicate that community radio, including Radio Sengerema, enhances voter understanding by broadcasting culturally appropriate messages in Kiswahili and local dialects, fostering both trust and engagement (Mosha, 2019, 2020). Nonetheless, operational constraints such as limited funding, staff capacity, and inconsistent broadcast scheduling may limit the reach and impact of voter education initiatives (Intellect Discover, 2024; The Chanzo, 2024).

Given this context, assessing the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs is both timely and significant. This study examines how PSAs are designed, prioritised, and repeated to influence voter knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. By providing empirical insights into the reach, comprehension, and influence of these messages, the research contributes to understanding the role of community radio in promoting informed citizen participation in local democratic processes. The findings also offer practical guidance for media practitioners, electoral authorities, and development stakeholders seeking to enhance voter engagement in rural Tanzanian communities.

The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs in promoting voter education during the 2024 local government election. The specific objectives were:

1. To analyse how Radio Sengerema's PSAs prioritised key voter information during the 2024 Local Government Election.
2. To evaluate how Radio Sengerema's PSAs influenced and persuaded citizens to develop positive attitudes toward the voting process during the 2024 Local Government Election.
3. To examine how the content and repetition of Radio Sengerema's PSAs reinforced voter knowledge during the 2024 Local Government Election.

Literature review

This chapter examines theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the effectiveness of community radio PSAs in promoting voter education. The review focuses on the conceptual underpinnings of PSA communication, the persuasive mechanisms that shape voter attitudes, and the role of message repetition in reinforcing knowledge. It also highlights gaps in existing research, particularly regarding community radio in rural Tanzanian contexts. Community radio remains a critical tool for civic engagement, particularly in areas where television, print, and digital media are constrained by infrastructure, literacy, or economic limitations. Its accessibility, affordability, and capacity to broadcast in local languages make it a trusted medium for reaching low-literacy and rural populations. In the electoral context, community radio PSAs provide essential information on voter rights, registration procedures, polling logistics, and civic responsibilities, thereby supporting informed participation.

Theoretical Literature

Prioritisation of Key Voter Information

PSAs are short, non-commercial messages designed to inform and influence public behaviour for the collective good. In electoral contexts, PSAs disseminate essential information about voter registration, polling procedures, and civic responsibilities (Gronbeck & Donohue, 2010). The effectiveness of these messages depends on clarity, accessibility, cultural relevance, and the strategic sequencing of information. Well-structured PSAs simplify complex electoral procedures, making them understandable to low-literacy and rural populations, particularly when broadcast through community radio.

In Tanzania, scholars have emphasised the role of community radio in prioritising voter information for marginalised communities. Mosha (2020) notes that Radio Sengerema disseminates voter registration guidelines, polling dates, and civic rights in Kiswahili and local dialects, increasing comprehension and inclusivity. Mosha (2019) highlights that while community radio is accessible to rural audiences, the sequencing and prioritisation of critical voter information are often inconsistent. Similarly, Bantulaki (2017) emphasises that print media fails to reach rural populations, reinforcing reliance on radio as the primary source of voter education. This literature underscores the importance of prioritising and structuring PSAs to maximise accessibility and relevance for target audiences.

Persuasive Role of PSAs in Shaping Positive Attitudes

Beyond information dissemination, PSAs play a persuasive role by influencing attitudes toward electoral participation. Their effectiveness is enhanced when messages are culturally adapted, contextually relevant, and emotionally engaging (Davis & Owen, 2018; Kamau & Waweru, 2017). Such messaging not only informs listeners but also motivates them

to recognise the value of participating in elections. Culturally contextualised PSAs delivered via community radio can strengthen civic attitudes and reinforce social norms related to political participation. For example, Kamau and Waweru (2017) found that repeated, locally relevant PSAs positively shaped voter attitudes in Kenya. Davis and Owen (2018) reported similar results in Australia, showing that emotional appeals and narrative-driven content were more effective than purely informational messages. Within Tanzania, the use of local languages and culturally familiar content ensures that messages resonate with listeners, enhancing the persuasive impact of PSAs broadcast by stations such as Radio Sengerema.

Repetition of Messages in Reinforcing Voter Knowledge

Repetition is a fundamental mechanism through which PSAs reinforce voter knowledge and facilitate behaviour change. Agenda-setting theory posits that repeated exposure to specific issues increases their perceived importance, shaping public priorities and encouraging engagement (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Empirical studies demonstrate that repeated broadcasting of PSAs significantly improves voter comprehension of registration procedures, polling logistics, and civic responsibilities. Mtembe (2018) found that repeated, culturally contextualised radio messages in Kenya enhanced understanding of electoral processes, while Ojo and Kazeem (2017) reported similar outcomes among Nigerian youth. In Tanzania, Mosha (2020) noted that repeated messages via community radio strengthened trust and knowledge retention, though opportunities for interaction remained limited. These findings highlight the critical role of strategic repetition in ensuring that PSA content effectively reinforces voter knowledge and encourages informed participation.

Empirical insights into the reach, comprehension, and influence of these messages contribute to understanding the role of community radio in promoting informed citizen participation in local democratic processes. Mosha (2020) examined Radio Sengerema's role in enhancing electoral knowledge among rural Tanzanians using a mixed-methods approach involving 300 surveys and programme manager interviews. The findings also offer practical guidance for media practitioners, electoral authorities, and development stakeholders seeking to enhance voter engagement.

Mosha (2019) analysed equity and inclusivity in rural media coverage, highlighting the inconsistent prioritisation of critical voter information across community radio programmes. This underscores the need to examine how Radio Sengerema strategically sequences messages to ensure relevance and equitable access.

The persuasive role of PSAs in shaping voter attitudes has been documented in multiple contexts. Kamau and Waweru (2017) investigated culturally adapted PSAs in Kenya, finding that repeated, clear, and locally contextualised messages positively influenced civic attitudes among 400 participants. Davis and Owen (2018) similarly reported in Australia that PSAs tailored to local narratives and emotional appeals were more persuasive than standard informational messages. These findings underscore the importance of culturally contextualised messaging, repetition, and clarity in fostering positive voter attitudes, directly informing the current study's focus on message design and delivery. Repetition has also been shown to reinforce voter knowledge and encourage participation. Mtembe (2018) examined repeated radio PSAs in rural Kenyan communities and found that culturally contextualised, repeated messages significantly improved comprehension of registration procedures and polling logistics. Ojo and Kazeem (2017) observed similar outcomes among youth in Nigeria, noting that repeated, clear, and culturally relevant PSAs enhanced both knowledge and civic engagement. These studies provide a framework for analysing how strategic repetition and

sequencing of Radio Sengerema's PSAs can strengthen voter understanding and participation across demographic groups.

Research Methods

The present study employed a qualitative research approach to assess the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs in promoting voter education during the 2024 Local Government Election in Sengerema District. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how individuals perceived, interpreted, and were influenced by PSA messages within their socio-cultural and political environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach facilitated the collection of rich, descriptive data from listeners, providing insight into how PSA content shaped knowledge, attitudes, and civic behaviour, as well as the meanings audiences attached to repeated voter education messages. To further deepen understanding, an explanatory qualitative design was adopted to investigate the mechanisms and contextual factors through which radio-based PSAs influenced voter education. This design enabled the study to move beyond description, explaining the underlying processes and reasons behind observed patterns of awareness and electoral participation (Maxwell, 2013).

The target population comprised individuals directly involved in, or affected by, Radio Sengerema's PSA broadcasts during the election period. This included eligible voters in Sengerema District, particularly those residing in rural and semi-rural wards with limited access to television, print media, or digital platforms. Voters provided critical perspectives on how PSA content was understood, interpreted, and acted upon. In addition, the study engaged Radio Sengerema personnel responsible for developing and broadcasting PSA content, whose insights were instrumental in understanding how messages were conceptualised, structured, and disseminated. Local Government Election authorities were also included, offering perspectives on the alignment of PSA content with official electoral guidelines. Including these diverse groups ensured a holistic understanding of both PSA production and reception within the electoral context.

The sample was selected through both convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Convenience sampling was employed to select eligible voters who were readily accessible, met the inclusion criteria, and agreed to participate. Fourteen voters were interviewed, and data saturation was reached at the eleventh interview, after which three more were conducted to confirm saturation. The sample included variations in gender, age, ward of residence, and voting experience, although male participation was higher, reflecting local socio-cultural conditions. Purposive sampling was used to select Radio Sengerema personnel and Village Executive Officers (VEOs) because of their specialised knowledge of PSA production and electoral administration. Radio staff selected were directly involved in producing and managing the PSAs, while VEOs were included due to their responsibility for grassroots voter mobilisation and information dissemination.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with voters, radio personnel, and VEOs, allowing participants to share their perceptions and experiences while keeping discussions focused on message clarity, recall, emotional response, perceived influence on voting attitudes, and compliance with electoral guidelines. All interviews were conducted in Kiswahili, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative content analysis was also applied to the PSAs aired during the election period to examine language, tone, framing, repetition, and cultural relevance. This analysis helped to evaluate how messages were constructed and

provided a basis for triangulating findings by comparing the intended meaning of the PSAs with how voters actually interpreted them.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data, involving iterative coding, categorisation, and identification of patterns across both interview and content analysis data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were interpreted in line with the study's objectives, focusing on prioritisation of voter information, persuasive influence on attitudes, and reinforcement of knowledge through repetition. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation, integrating audience and content perspectives, and used member checking to validate preliminary findings. Dependability and confirmability were enhanced through detailed documentation of research procedures, coding processes, and an audit trail. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and data security, ensuring that the research did not influence participants' political opinions or behaviour.

Data analysis in this study followed a qualitative, thematic approach aimed at systematically exploring how Radio Sengerema's PSAs influenced voter education during the 2024 Local Government Election. The process involved careful engagement with the collected data, including verbatim interview transcripts and field notes, to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and perceptions related to PSA effectiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Initial coding was conducted inductively, generating concepts directly from participants' accounts, such as message clarity, trust, motivation, repetition, and comprehension of electoral procedures. Related codes were then organised into broader themes, including prioritisation of voter information, reinforcement of knowledge through repeated messages, and the persuasive role of PSAs in shaping positive attitudes toward voting. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the study objectives, and illustrative quotations from participants were selected to substantiate findings.

In parallel, qualitative content analysis of the PSA broadcasts was conducted to examine linguistic choices, emotional appeals, framing strategies, and message repetition. This analysis provided insights into how the PSAs were structured to enhance comprehension and engagement among rural listeners. Triangulation of interview data and content analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both message production and audience reception, strengthening the validity of the results. Overall, this combined analytical approach produced contextually grounded insights into the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs in promoting voter knowledge, fostering positive civic attitudes, and reinforcing electoral participation.

Findings

This study examined the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs in promoting voter education during the 2024 Local Government Elections. Findings are presented according to the three specific objectives: (1) prioritisation of key voter information, (2) persuasion toward positive voting attitudes, and (3) reinforcement of voter knowledge through repeated messaging. Data were derived from fourteen community voters and three key informants, including a Village Executive Officer (VEO), a radio producer, and a station manager.

Prioritisation of Key Voter Information

The study found that Radio Sengerema effectively prioritised essential electoral information such as the election date, registration deadlines, eligibility requirements, candidate qualifications, and voter responsibilities. The PSAs were structured using simple and clear Swahili to ensure broad comprehension among voters, especially those in rural areas with

limited literacy and restricted access to alternative media. Community participants consistently reported that the messages enhanced their understanding of electoral procedures. One voter explained, “The repeated announcements helped me remember the registration deadlines and the places to register”. Another stated, “The PSAs gave me direct understanding of the election procedures and made me confident to participate”.

Key informants supported these views. The VEO noted that PSAs helped counteract misinformation in the community, stating, “The announcements reduced confusion and strengthened my motivation to participate in voting”. The radio producer confirmed that the station intentionally used accessible language, explaining, “*The messages were delivered in simple Swahili to ensure that all community members could understand them*”. These findings affirm the media’s agenda-setting function by demonstrating how consistent emphasis on key electoral themes shaped public awareness and preparedness.

Persuasion toward Positive Attitudes on Voting

PSAs were found to be persuasive in shaping positive attitudes toward electoral participation. Messaging emphasised voting as a civic duty, constitutional right, and expression of patriotism. These moral and emotional appeals resonated with listeners. Several participants described feeling more encouraged and motivated: “The message that voting is an act of patriotism made me proud as a voter,” one respondent noted. Another said, “I realised that voting is important because it concerns my daily life”.

The VEO reported a similar experience, explaining, “The PSAs reminded me that my vote is my mandate and can influence the outcome”. The station manager further highlighted that collaboration with election authorities increased public trust in the messages. Overall, perception-based evidence confirmed that the PSAs influenced not only what voters thought about elections but also how they perceived the importance and value of voting. This aligns with second-level agenda-setting theory.

Repetition was identified as a key factor contributing to message effectiveness. Most respondents acknowledged hearing the PSAs several times per day, which improved their retention and understanding of electoral information. One voter explained, “Every time I heard the announcement, it reminded me of my responsibility”, while another added, “I knew the registration dates and places because the messages were repeated many times”. Some voters demonstrated strong recall by quoting key PSA lines even long after the broadcasts ended.

Key informants confirmed that repetition was a deliberate communication strategy. The VEO emphasised, “*The repeated announcements reduced misinformation and kept voters on the right track*”. The radio producer explained that repetition ensured reach across different listening times, especially for farmers with irregular schedules. The findings support communication theory that repetition strengthens cognitive reinforcement, recall, and the likelihood of behaviour change.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Radio Sengerema’s PSAs were highly effective in enhancing voter education during the 2024 Local Government Elections. The PSAs successfully communicated essential electoral information such as registration procedures, eligibility requirements, and key dates using simple and accessible language that enabled rural and semi-rural voters to understand and act upon the messages with confidence. Beyond informing the public, the PSAs positively shaped voters’ attitudes by framing electoral participation as a civic responsibility and an expression of patriotism. This persuasive framing strengthened

motivation, encouraged community dialogue, and enhanced the perceived importance of voting. The repeated broadcasting of these messages further reinforced voter knowledge, improved message recall, and helped counter misinformation within the community.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to understanding how media influences civic participation in local electoral contexts. The effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs supports agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which posits that media shape public perceptions by emphasising specific issues. By consistently highlighting voter education themes such as election procedures, eligibility requirements, and civic responsibilities, PSAs guided listeners to prioritise these issues in their own decision-making during the election period. Beyond issue selection, the study demonstrates the importance of message framing. Contextualising content in local languages, culturally familiar narratives, and practical examples helped listeners interpret information meaningfully within their own socio-cultural realities. This aligns with second-level agenda-setting, which suggests that media influence not only what audiences think about but also how they think about it, shaping understanding, attitudes, and perceived importance.

The findings also highlight the role of repetition as a reinforcement mechanism. Continuous exposure to PSA messages improved recall, clarified procedural knowledge, and motivated civic action. This confirms that repeated, well-structured communication is critical for translating knowledge into behavioural compliance, particularly in contexts with varying literacy levels.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of voter education delivered through community radio, particularly in the context of local government elections. These recommendations target three key stakeholders: community radio stations, electoral authorities, and civil society organisations, whose collaborative effort is essential for strengthening the reach, impact, and sustainability of voter education initiatives.

Community radio stations, such as Radio Sengerema, should focus on producing culturally relevant PSAs that reflect local languages, cultural references, and relatable stories. Tailoring content to the local context enhances comprehension and ensures that messages resonate with diverse audiences, including those with varying literacy levels. The frequency and timing of these PSAs should be carefully planned and intensified during pre-election and election periods to maximise exposure. Consistently scheduled broadcasts reinforce key messages and sustain civic awareness among listeners. Incorporating interactive elements such as live call-ins, debates, and question-and-answer sessions can further deepen audience engagement. These platforms allow citizens to clarify electoral information, share concerns, and actively participate in democratic dialogue. Establishing strong partnerships with electoral bodies, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is equally important to ensure that PSA content is accurate, timely, and aligned with official guidelines.

Electoral authorities should provide technical and financial support to community radio stations engaged in voter education initiatives. This support may include training, supply of broadcasting equipment, and timely access to accurate election data. Such collaboration promotes consistency in voter education messages, minimises conflicting information, and enhances the clarity of electoral procedures communicated to the public. Additionally, electoral

authorities should adopt systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluating PSAs and other voter education efforts. Regular evaluations help identify effective communication strategies, highlight areas for improvement, and generate evidence-based insights that can inform future voter education campaigns. This contributes to improving the overall effectiveness of radio-based voter education and enhancing public understanding of electoral processes.

Civil society organisations and NGOs also have a significant role in advancing voter education through community radio. These organisations should work closely with radio stations to deliver outreach programmes that specifically target marginalised groups, rural populations, and young people. Their involvement can expand the reach of voter education and promote more inclusive civic participation. Beyond dissemination, civil society should also invest in media literacy programmes designed to equip citizens with the skills needed to critically interpret election-related information. Enhancing media literacy empowers citizens to differentiate credible information from misinformation, make informed electoral choices, and participate more meaningfully in democratic processes.

Areas for Future Research

Although this study offers meaningful insights into the effectiveness of Radio Sengerema's PSAs in promoting voter education, several areas remain open for deeper scholarly exploration. Future research should consider conducting comparative studies across multiple community radio stations within Tanzania and in similar socio-political environments to identify best practices and understand contextual variations in PSA delivery and reception. Researchers are also encouraged to incorporate quantitative approaches, such as surveys or experimental designs, to complement qualitative findings and provide measurable evidence of how PSAs shape voter knowledge, attitudes, and participation.

Additionally, gender-specific analyses are essential to examine how women and other underrepresented groups respond to voter education messages, particularly given existing disparities in media access and political engagement. With the growing influence of digital platforms, future studies should explore how community radio can be integrated with social media and other digital communication tools to expand reach and interactivity in civic education campaigns. Lastly, longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of repeated PSA exposure on sustained civic engagement beyond a single election cycle. Addressing these gaps will strengthen theoretical understanding, inform policy development, and enhance the design of effective voter education interventions.

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