

The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Audience Engagement in Radio Programming: A Case Study of KNC Radio in Kabwe, Zambia

Natasha C. Malama

Department of Business Studies, Mulungushi University, Kabwe, Central, Zambia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1013COM0039>

Received: 04 July 2026; Accepted: 10 July 2026; Published: 24 July 2026

ABSTRACT

The shift from traditional to digital media has had a major impact on the development of media relations tactics. This study investigates the role of social media in enhancing audience engagement in radio programming, with a particular emphasis on how KNC Radio in Kabwe, Zambia, has navigated the evolving media environment. Theoretically anchored in Media Ecology, Uses and Gratifications, and Diffusion of Innovations frameworks, the study employs a mixed-methods research design utilizing a single case study approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Data was gathered from 20 audience members through structured questionnaires and from 10 staff members through semi-structured interviews. Thematic and descriptive statistical analyses were applied to examine integration strategies, audience interaction patterns, and operational challenges.

The analysis of KNC Radio's social media usage reveals that audience engagement is the primary operational theme, with platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp facilitating interactive features such as shout-outs, polls, and real-time feedback. Overall, 65% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the station's social media engagement. However, engagement remains uneven due to barriers including unengaging content, poor internet access, and a preference for traditional formats. A notable disconnect between social media followership and active participation was also identified, with only 20% of respondents engaging daily.

The study concludes that social media plays an increasingly vital role in contemporary radio broadcasting. At KNC Radio, social media has been integrated into programming to a moderate degree, creating possibilities for interactivity and audience responsiveness. However, the full potential of these platforms has not yet been achieved due to structural, technical, and resource-related constraints. In order to ensure sustainable digital engagement, the study ends with strategic recommendations for KNC Radio on how to successfully integrate digital tools while maintaining the advantages of traditional media.

Keywords: Social Media Integration, Audience Engagement, Community Radio, Digital Broadcasting, Zambia

INTRODUCTION

The convergence of traditional broadcasting with digital technologies has significantly reshaped the media landscape, particularly in how radio stations engage with their audiences. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) have emerged as vital tools for enhancing interactivity, fostering participatory communication, and expanding the reach of radio programming (Bonini, 2014; Mambwe, 2019). In sub-Saharan Africa, community radio stations such as KNC Radio in Kabwe, Zambia, are increasingly adopting these platforms to remain relevant and responsive to evolving audience expectations (Bonini, 2014; Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019). In Zambia specifically, social media has become an increasingly significant component of the contemporary media ecosystem, reshaping how news is produced, distributed, and consumed (Mambwe, 2013; Manchishi et al., 2023).

Scholars argue that social media integration enables real-time feedback, co-creation of content, and the democratization of media spaces (Carpentier, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2013). However, the effectiveness of such integration is often mediated by infrastructural limitations, digital literacy gaps, and socio-economic disparities (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019; van Dijk, 2020). While global studies have explored the transformative potential of digital media in broadcasting, there remains a paucity of localized research examining how community radio stations in resource-constrained environments navigate these shifts.

Against this backdrop, this study builds on the theoretical frameworks of Media Ecology (McLuhan, 1964), Uses and Gratifications (Katz et al., 1973), and the Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 1962) to investigate how KNC Radio integrates social media into its programming. It aims to assess the impact of this integration on audience interaction and participation, while identifying the challenges and opportunities that shape digital engagement in the Zambian context.

Despite the recognized potential of social media to enhance audience engagement in radio broadcasting, its practical implementation among community radio stations remains inconsistent and under-researched. While platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp offer interactive features that support participatory broadcasting, many stations, particularly in the Global South, struggle with infrastructural, technical, and organizational barriers that hinder effective integration (Mambwe, 2015; Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019; van Dijk, 2020). At KNC Radio, there is observable progress in adopting social media tools; however, questions persist regarding the depth of integration into programming workflows, the extent of audience participation, and the influence of digital feedback on editorial decisions (Newman et al., 2022). Studies have shown that digital followership does not always translate into active engagement (Newman et al., 2022), and that without a strategic framework, social media efforts may remain superficial.

This research addresses these gaps by exploring how KNC Radio utilizes social media to enhance audience engagement, what challenges it encounters in doing so, and how these experiences reflect broader trends in community radio's digital transformation. The findings aim to contribute to both academic discourse and practical strategies for sustainable media innovation in similar contexts.

Research Objectives

The study is guided by three objectives: to explore how KNC Radio integrates social media into its radio programming for audience engagement; to assess the impact of social media on audience interaction and participation at KNC Radio; and to identify the challenges and opportunities of using social media to enhance audience engagement in radio broadcasting.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in three complementary frameworks. Media Ecology Theory (McLuhan, 1964) explains how the shift from traditional to digital broadcasting redefines audience behavior and content consumption. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) examines how listeners' media preferences migrate from scheduled broadcasts to digital on-demand content. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1962) accounts for patterns of adoption and resistance to digital tools within the station's operational context. Collectively, these frameworks provide a multi-level lens for analyzing both the structural and behavioral dimensions of social media integration in community radio.

Literature Context and Research Gaps

While substantial research exists on social media integration in radio, there is limited focus on African community radio contexts, where infrastructure, language diversity, and economic constraints differ markedly from Western settings (Mudhai et al., 2009). Most existing studies also emphasize short-term implementation rather than long-term sustainability and impact. Manchishi, Pindayi, and Mambwe's (2023) study of social media-driven publications confirms that digital platforms now form a core and dynamic component of the

Zambian media ecosystem, generating new pathways for audience interaction and significant operational pressures simultaneously. This study addresses these gaps through a context-specific examination of KNC Radio in Kabwe, Zambia.

METHODOLOGY

The study is structured as a single, embedded case study of KNC Radio, selected as a bounded and information-rich site for examining social media integration in community radio broadcasting. Case study methodology is appropriate for questions concerned with how and why phenomena occur within real-life contexts, and is well suited to settings where existing evidence is limited (Yin, 2018). This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection within that case study framework. The mixed-methods approach enables comprehensive investigation of KNC Radio's social media integration from multiple perspectives and provides both statistical evidence and in-depth contextual understanding. Methodological triangulation through the convergence of surveys, interviews, and content analysis bolsters the internal validity and reliability of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within this design, the quantitative component serves an exploratory and descriptive function. It is not employed to generate inferential statistics or population-level generalizations, but to illuminate patterns of engagement within the specific context of this case. This epistemological positioning is consistent with the conventions of mixed-methods case study research, in which quantitative data provides contextual texture rather than statistical proof (Yin, 2018). The percentage distributions reported in the Results section should therefore be read as indicative of tendencies within KNC Radio's audience rather than as statistically representative of community radio listeners more broadly.

Target Population and Sampling

The study drew on two distinct participant groups, each recruited through a purposive approach tailored to the type of data and the specific knowledge required. For the staff component ($n = 10$), participants were selected on the basis of their direct professional involvement in the station's programming and digital communication activities. The station manager, journalists, and presenters were approached directly at KNC Radio and agreed to participate. Selection was guided by the criterion that participants had firsthand operational knowledge of how social media tools have been incorporated into editorial decisions, broadcast workflows, and audience interaction strategies at the station.

For the audience component ($n = 20$), participants were recruited from KNC Radio's broader listener community through a combination of in-person contact at the station premises and referral through the station's listener networks, including individuals who had made contact with the station via phone-in programs and community outreach activities. Purposive sampling is suitable when the goal of qualitative research designs is to investigate particular experiences or viewpoints rather than to make generalizations to a larger population (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sole inclusion criterion for audience participants was familiarity with KNC Radio's programming. Participants were not selected on the basis of their social media activity level. This was a deliberate methodological decision to ensure that the sample represented the station's listener community across the full range of digital engagement, from those who interact with the station daily on social media to those who listen exclusively through conventional broadcast means. The validity of this approach is confirmed by the sample's own internal variation: 60% of audience respondents could not identify a specific social media platform through which they follow the station, and 35% reported never engaging with the station's digital content. These figures are inconsistent with a sample drawn from active or dedicated social media followers and demonstrate that the audience component was not subject to the selection bias that would arise from recruiting exclusively through the station's digital channels.

The combined sample of 30 participants is modest in size and is acknowledged as a limitation of the study. However, within a qualitatively dominant, single case study design, small purposive samples are epistemologically appropriate. The objective of such sampling is depth and contextual understanding, not statistical representation (Yin, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) observe that

thematic saturation in qualitative data can be reached with as few as six to twelve interviews; the ten staff interviews conducted in this study comfortably satisfy that threshold. The audience survey supplements rather than drives the analysis, providing descriptive data on patterns that are then interpreted in relation to the qualitative findings and the wider literature.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected from KNC Radio listeners using a structured questionnaire that included closed-ended questions with scales to measure listener satisfaction, frequency of engagement, and preference rankings, as well as multiple-choice questions to categorize listening habits across traditional radio and digital platforms, and demographic data collection to enable statistical analysis and segmentation.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with KNC Radio staff to explore internal viewpoints on social media integration, including thematic exploration of operational changes and strategic adaptations and collaborative identification of challenges and opportunities in social media integration in radio programming.

Document analysis served as a supporting method, involving systematic examination of KNC Radio's social media accounts, website, and previous marketing reports to provide contextual background and validate findings from primary data collection methods.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was utilized to assess interview data gathered from KNC Radio Kabwe employees. The transcripts from the interviews underwent coding to pinpoint central themes associated with audience engagement strategies and media relations practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The focus of the analysis was to uncover 3–4 primary themes that directly align with the research objectives. The survey data **were** processed using basic descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to uncover listener preferences and patterns of engagement within the case. Basic cross-tabulations were employed to investigate the relationships between demographic information and media consumption behaviors.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Mulungushi University prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent, and the confidentiality of all responses was maintained throughout the study. There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

RESULTS

Social Media Usage Patterns at KNC Radio

KNC Radio's use of social media is structured predominantly around audience-facing interaction rather than operational or journalistic functions, pointing to a gap between the station's current digital practice and the fuller range of capabilities documented in the community radio literature. Figure 1 summarizes how KNC Radio utilizes social media across various operational themes, based on reported usage examples and frequency. The most prominent theme is Audience Engagement, cited 6 times, reflecting the station's heavy reliance on social media for real-time interaction through comments, polls, shout-outs, song requests, and story sharing via Facebook and WhatsApp. Content Planning follows closely with 5 mentions, showing how social media feedback, scheduling, livestreaming, and multimedia content such as quotes and clips are used to shape programming. Promotion and Marketing was cited twice, with emphasis on contests and show promotions to boost visibility. News Sourcing and Operational Integration each had one mention, reflecting emerging but less frequent uses such as accessing breaking news and syncing social media with live broadcast workflows. The concentration of activity in engagement and content planning, relative to the low uptake of news sourcing and operational integration, suggests that KNC Radio has yet to realize the full range of functions that digital tools can perform in community broadcasting (Hermida, 2010; Mudhai et al., 2009).

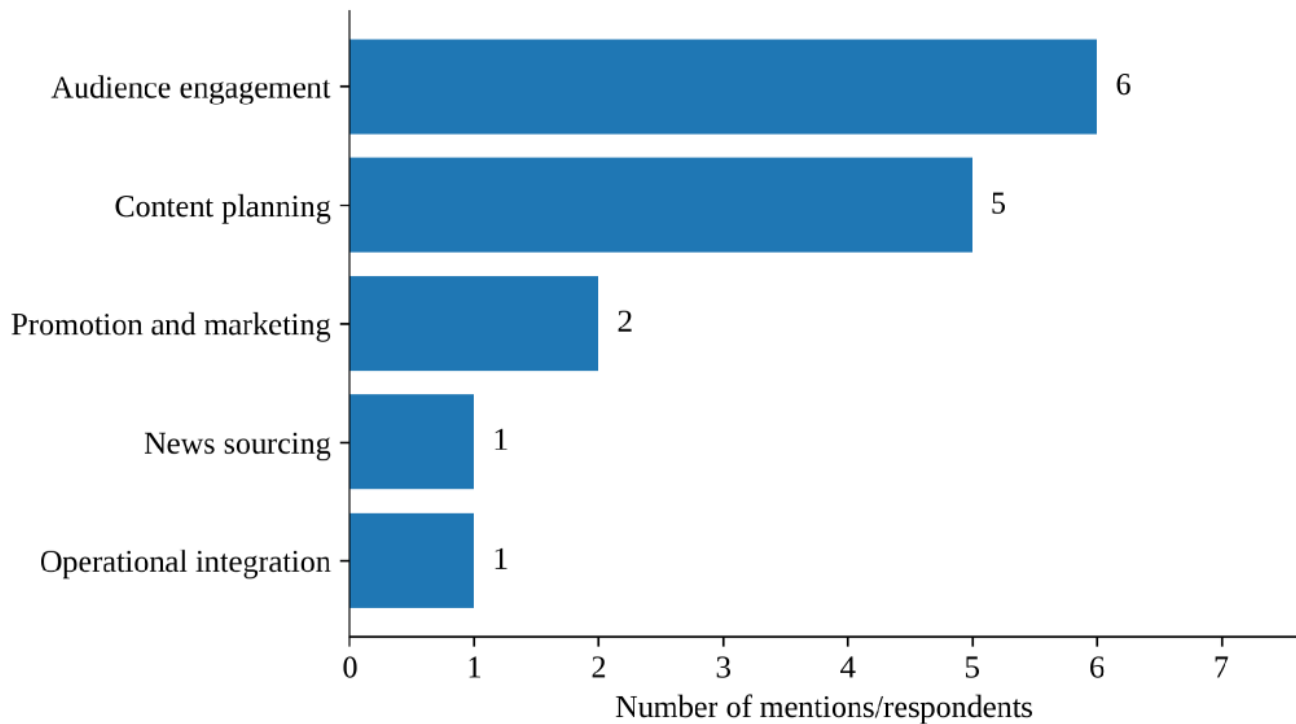


Figure 1. *Reported social media usage themes at KNC Radio.*

Audience Demographics and Social Media Followership

The distribution of social media followership at KNC Radio does not conform to assumptions about digital nativity, with engagement concentrated among the youngest and oldest listener cohorts rather than the middle-aged groups most commonly associated with sustained digital media use. Table 1 presents data on how different listener groups engage with KNC Radio on social media. Out of 20 respondents, 8 reported following the station on social media, while 12 did not. Social media followership was highest among respondents aged under 18 and 45–54, with 3 and 2 followers respectively, while the 25–34 and 35–44 groups had the lowest engagement. In terms of listening habits, daily and frequent listeners had the most social media engagement (2 followers each), though 2 individuals who never listen to the station still followed it online, suggesting social media can extend beyond on-air audiences. Male respondents had the highest followership (5 out of 8), while none of those who preferred not to disclose gender followed the station. Social media engagement was also stronger among those with postgraduate education (3 out of 5), while those with college and university backgrounds had fewer followers. This pattern suggests that content relevance and social identity may be stronger determinants of online engagement at KNC Radio than age-based technological familiarity.

Table 1. *Social Media Following of KNC Radio by Demographic Characteristics (N = 20)*

Characteristic	Category	Not Following	Following	Total
Age Group	Under 18	2	3	5
	18–24	1	1	2
	25–34	4	1	5
	35–44	2	0	2
	45–54	2	2	4
	55 and above	1	1	2
Gender	Female	4	3	7
	Male	3	5	8
	Prefer not to say	5	0	5

Characteristic	Category	Not Following	Following	Total
Education Level	Primary	1	1	2
	Secondary	4	2	6
	College	2	1	3
	University	3	1	4
	Postgraduate	2	3	5
Total		12	8	20

Platform Usage and Engagement Frequency

Despite KNC Radio's presence across multiple social media platforms, the station's audience demonstrates predominantly passive engagement behavior, with a substantial majority of listeners reporting limited or no active interaction with the station's digital content. Table 2 presents social media platform use and engagement frequency among 20 KNC Radio listeners. A majority of respondents (60%) gave no response when asked which platforms they follow, suggesting low platform-specific awareness or a reluctance to disclose. Among the remaining 40%, social media usage was widely distributed, with Facebook being the most frequently mentioned, appearing alone or in combination in 4 cases (20%). Other platforms included YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), and TikTok, often used in multi-platform combinations, indicating fragmented yet diverse engagement patterns. Regarding engagement frequency, 35% of respondents reported never engaging, while 30% said they rarely engage. Only 20% reported daily social media engagement with the station. Regarding commenting and reacting behavior, 25% said they never react or comment, while another 25% do so sometimes. Only 15% always comment or react, showing a modest level of active interaction.

Table 2. Social Media Platform Usage and Engagement Behavior Among KNC Radio Listeners (N = 20)

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Engagement Frequency: Daily	4	20.0
Engagement Frequency: Weekly	1	5.0
Engagement Frequency: Occasionally	2	10.0
Engagement Frequency: Rarely	6	30.0
Engagement Frequency: Never	7	35.0
Comment / React: Always	3	15.0
Comment / React: Often	3	15.0
Comment / React: Sometimes	5	25.0
Comment / React: Rarely	4	20.0
Comment / React: Never	5	25.0

Listener Satisfaction with Social Media Engagement

Listener sentiment toward KNC Radio's social media engagement is broadly positive, with nearly two-thirds of respondents expressing satisfaction, though a significant minority report unmet expectations that warrant attention. Figure 2 displays the satisfaction levels of 20 respondents regarding KNC Radio's social media engagement. The majority of participants reported positive experiences, with 9 listeners (45%) stating they were "Satisfied", and an additional 4 (20%) saying they were "Very satisfied", bringing total satisfaction to 65%. On the other hand, 3 respondents (15%) indicated they were "Dissatisfied", and 2 (10%) were "Very dissatisfied", totalling 25% with negative sentiment. Only 2 respondents (10%) expressed a neutral stance.

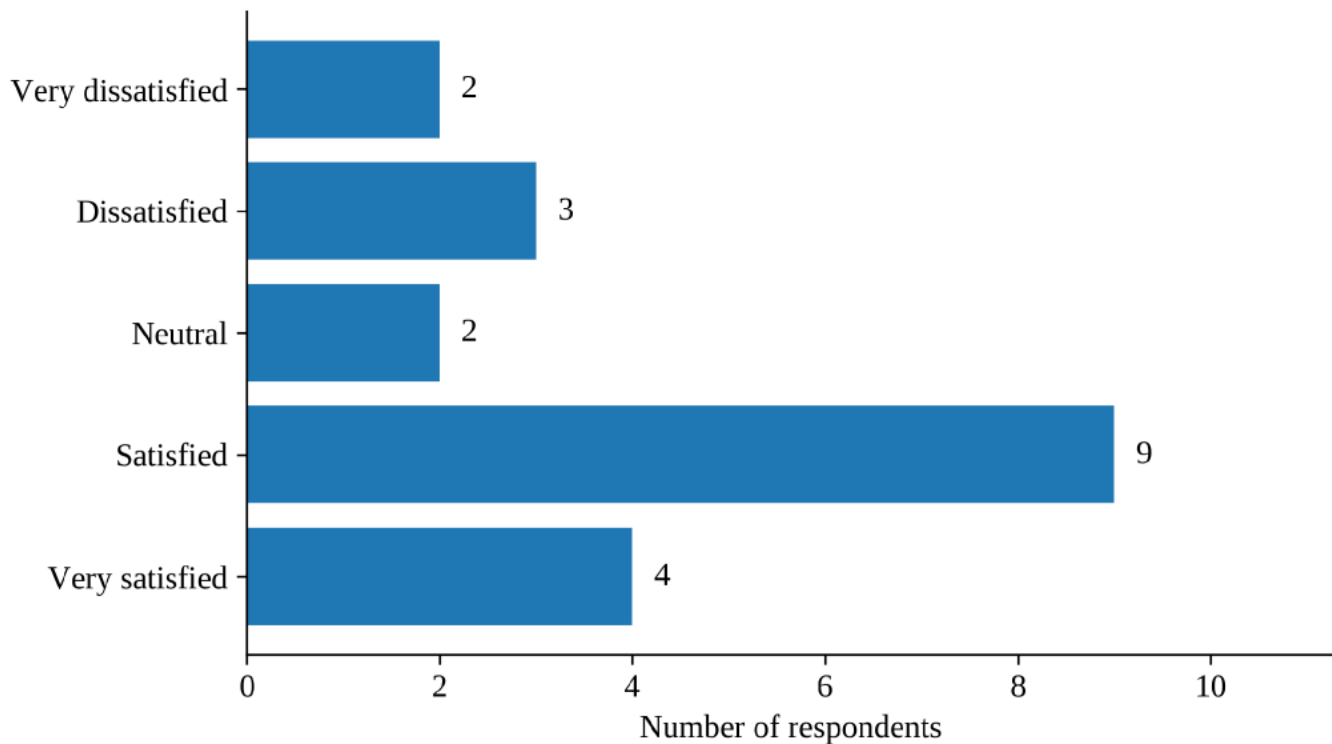


Figure 2. *Listener satisfaction with KNC Radio's social media engagement (N = 20).*

Relationship Between Satisfaction and Engagement Frequency

Satisfaction with KNC Radio's social media presence is not contingent on how frequently listeners interact with the station's content, pointing to the symbolic value of digital presence over direct participation as a driver of audience sentiment. Table 3 presents the relationship between KNC Radio listeners' satisfaction with the station's use of social media and their frequency of engagement. Overall, the data show that satisfaction is not exclusively tied to high engagement levels. The majority of satisfied respondents (9 in total) were distributed across all engagement categories, including "Daily," "Rarely," "Occasionally," and even "Never." Three respondents who reported never engaging on social media still marked themselves as satisfied, while two others in the same group indicated very dissatisfied, revealing that passive users can hold strong opinions about the station's digital presence. Among daily users, responses were generally positive, with two marking "Satisfied" and one "Very Satisfied," and no dissatisfied responses reported in this group. The "Rarely" engaged group showed a mix of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Table 3. *Relationship Between Social Media Satisfaction and Engagement Frequency Among KNC Radio Listeners (N = 20)*

Engagement	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very dissatisfied	Very satisfied	Total
Daily	0	1	2	0	1	4
Never	1	0	3	2	1	7
Occasionally	0	0	1	0	1	2
Rarely	2	0	3	0	1	6
Weekly	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	3	2	9	2	4	20

Platform Followership and Participation Methods

Following KNC Radio on social media does not reliably translate into active participation in programming, and a substantial proportion of the station's engaged audience continues to use traditional communication methods

rather than digital channels. Table 4 compares the platforms followed by KNC Radio listeners with the methods they use to participate in radio-related activities such as phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp messages, or other forms of interaction. Out of 20 respondents, 12 (60%) reported no specific social media platform followed, yet many still participated through traditional communication methods. Five respondents from this group used “Other” forms of participation, while others engaged via phone calls (2), SMS (2), and WhatsApp (1). This finding indicates that a large portion of KNC Radio’s audience may be active in the station’s ecosystem without engaging through official social media platforms. For the eight respondents who did follow at least one platform, Facebook appeared most frequently. However, these social media followers showed minimal participation through traditional methods. These results reveal a disconnect between social media followership and active program participation.

Table 4. *Platforms Followed and Participation Methods Among KNC Radio Listeners (N = 20)*

Platform(s) Followed	Phone Calls	SMS	WhatsApp	Other / None
No platform specified (n = 12)	2	2	1	7
Facebook alone or combined (n = 4)	1	0	0	3
Other platform combinations (n = 4)	0	1	1	2
Total (N = 20)	3	3	2	12

Audience Interaction During Live Broadcasts

Social media has substantially altered the character of audience interaction during KNC Radio’s live broadcasts, with real-time responsiveness emerging as the defining feature of this change. Figure 3 highlights the primary themes of audience interaction enabled by social media during KNC Radio’s live broadcasts, as expressed by respondents. Two main themes emerged: Real-Time Interaction and Responsiveness, and Audience Engagement and Participation. The dominant theme, Real-Time Interaction and Responsiveness, was referenced by 7 respondents. Examples under this category include instant listener feedback, WhatsApp call-ins, fact-checking and live challenges, real-time technical fixes, and quick responses. These forms of interaction have significantly transformed the dynamics of KNC Radio’s live shows, making them more adaptive, energetic, and engaging. The second theme, Audience Engagement and Participation, was identified by 3 respondents. Feedback in this category emphasized how social media has boosted participation among formerly passive listeners, made engagement feel more personal, and increased interaction through contests.

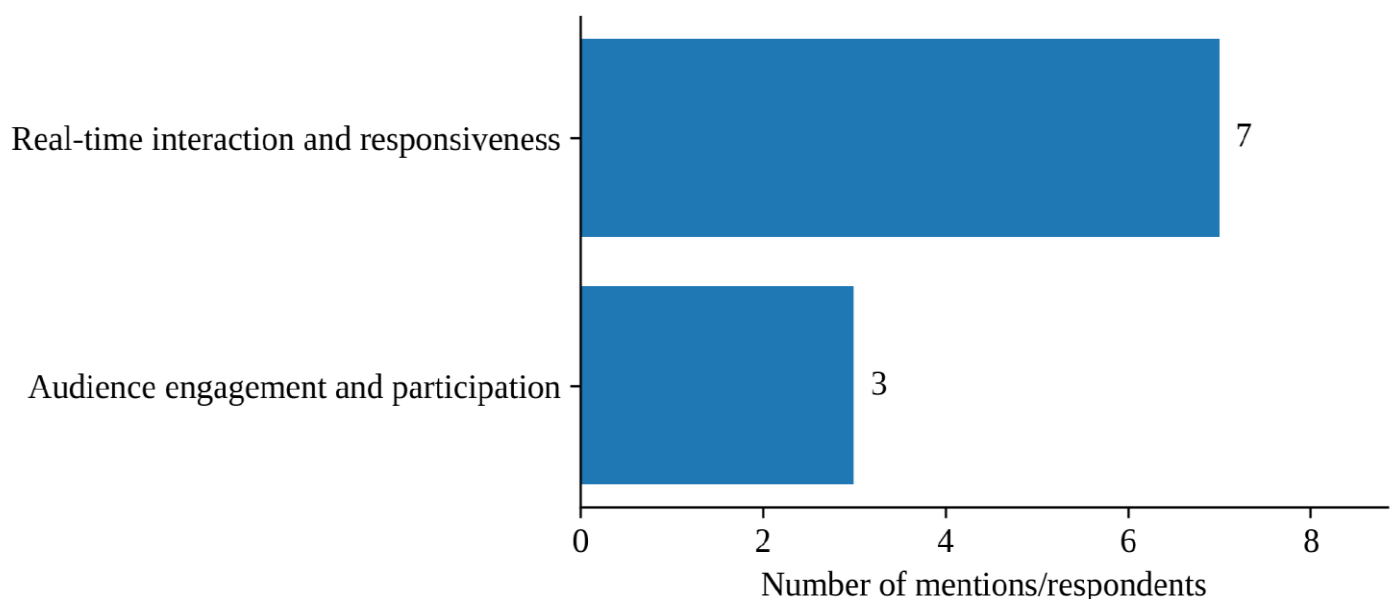


Figure 3. *Themes of audience interaction during live broadcasts.*

Listener Content Contribution and Co-Creation

A meaningful segment of KNC Radio's audience participates not merely as content consumers but as active co-creators, contributing editorial input and production assistance that directly shapes broadcast outputs. Figure 4 analysis of listener contributions reveals four distinct themes in how audiences interact with KNC Radio on social platforms. The most prominent theme, Active Content Contribution and Feedback (6 mentions), underscores listeners' proactive roles ranging from correcting on-air errors via WhatsApp and helping decide guest questions through polls, to submitting fire-incident videos before any official report, suggesting new songs, fixing sound issues with user tips, and sharing personal impact stories. The second theme, Story Sharing and Thematic Interaction (2 mentions), highlights how posts and listener-submitted stories aligned with show themes foster a collaborative narrative environment. Social Media Trend Participation (1 mention) captures moments when KNC Radio content trends on X, amplifying hot topics, while the No Engagement category (1 mention) is a reminder that some listeners remain passive on social platforms. Together, these patterns indicate that KNC Radio's audience is not simply consuming content but actively co-creating and shaping broadcast experiences through social media.

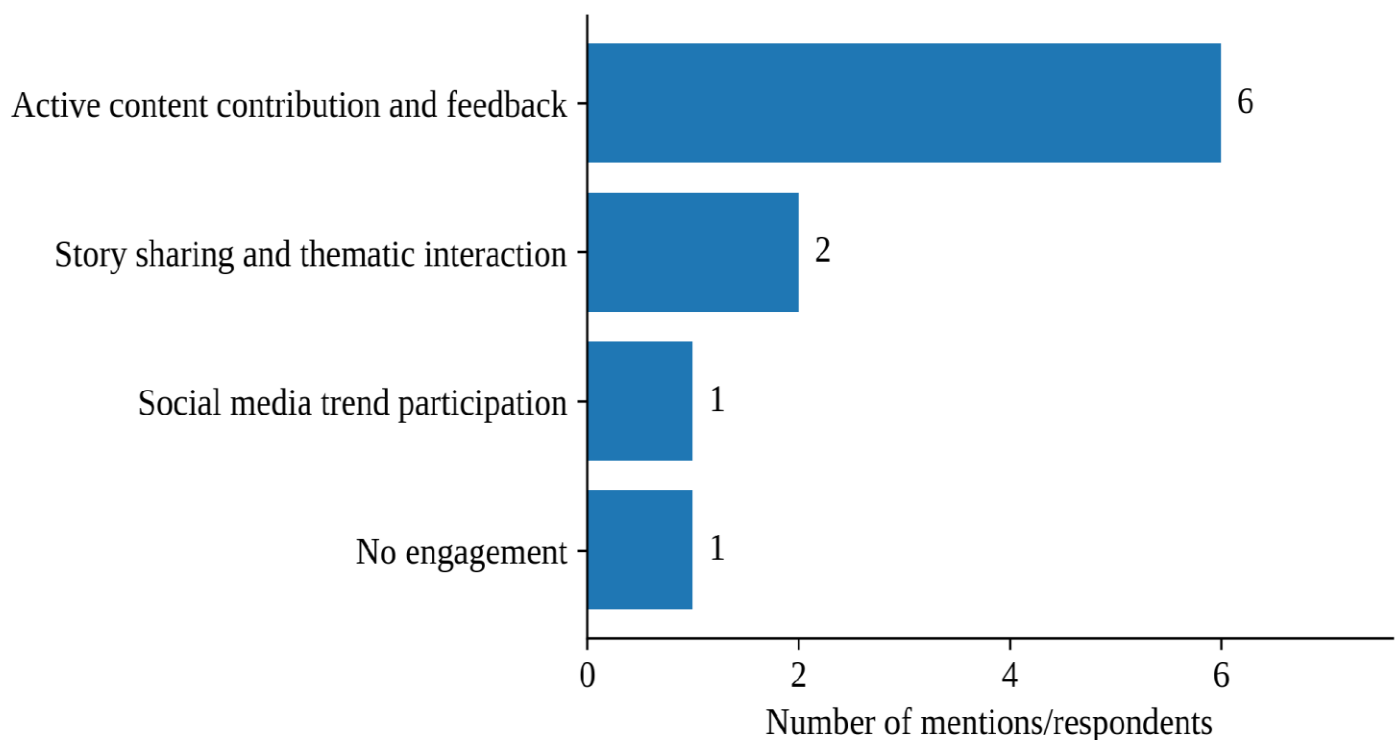


Figure 4. *Themes of listener content contribution and co-creation.*

Impact on Audience Participation

Social media has expanded both the volume and diversity of audience participation at KNC Radio, enabling forms of engagement that were inaccessible within the constraints of traditional broadcasting. Figure 5 shows that social media has overwhelmingly increased audience participation at KNC Radio, as indicated by seven mentions of greater involvement from encouraging shy listeners to speak up, to boosting post-show engagement and sparking a desire to participate across multiple channels. Two responses emphasized that this increase allows the station to improve service delivery and measure engagement through metrics such as likes and comments. Only one respondent reported no impact, suggesting that while social media's influence is near-universal among the station's active audience, a small minority remain unaffected.

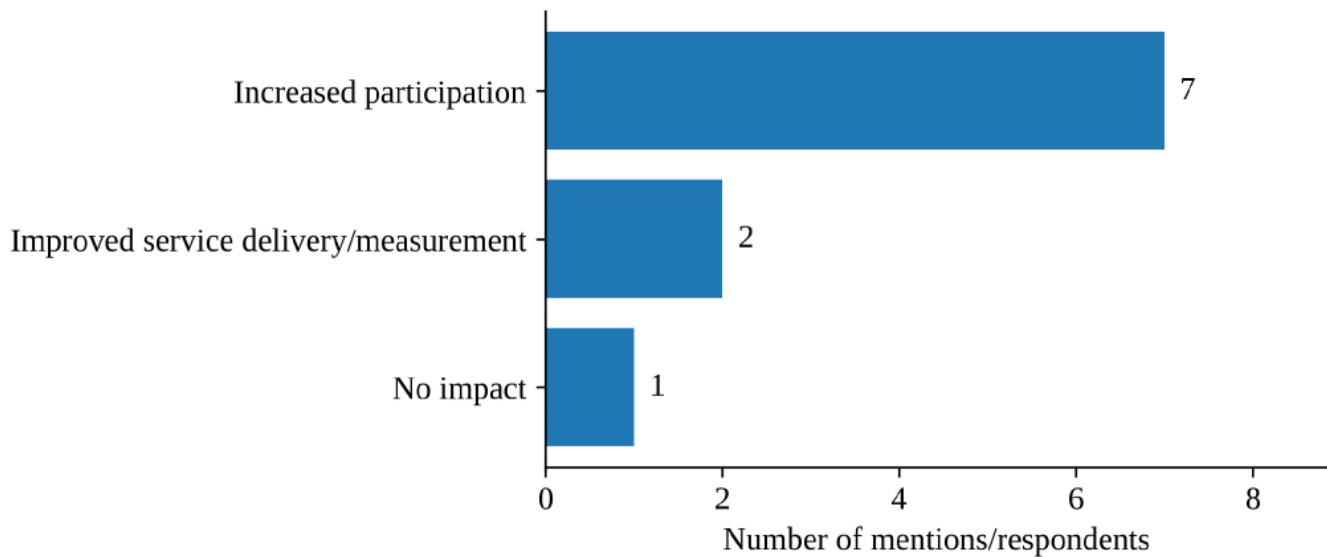


Figure 5. *Reported impact of social media on audience participation.*

Influence of Social Media Feedback on Programming

Audience input received via social media exerts a documented influence on KNC Radio's editorial and programming decisions, establishing a feedback loop between listener preferences and broadcast content. Figure 6 shows that social media feedback significantly shapes KNC Radio's programming, with the majority of responses (7) indicating that it guides content and segment planning such as topic selection, show structure, news priorities, and guest choices. Additional feedback influences technical upgrades and attracts sponsor interest (2), while popular songs suggested by listeners also inform playlist decisions (1). Overall, social media serves as a tool for aligning content with audience preferences and improving broadcast quality.

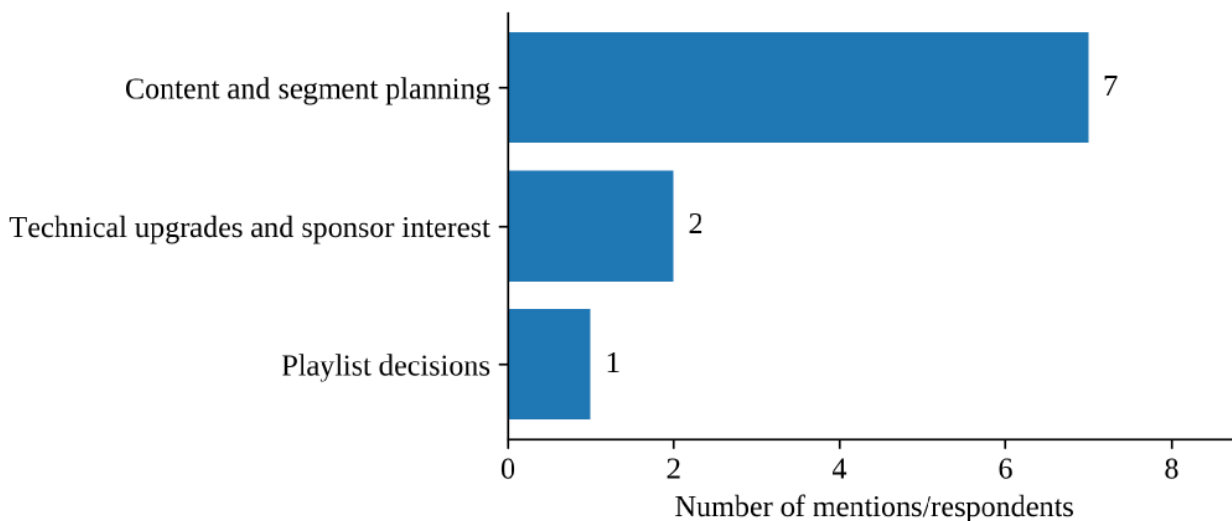


Figure 6. *Reported influence of social media feedback on programming.*

Barriers to Social Media Engagement

Participation in KNC Radio's social media activity is constrained by both content-quality issues and structural barriers, with the consistency and quality of the station's digital content identified as the primary obstacle to engagement. Figure 7 shows listener feedback highlighting key barriers to social media engagement. The most common issue was unengaging or irregular content (9 mentions), followed by poor internet access and lack of time (7 mentions each). Additionally, preference for traditional radio was noted by 6 respondents. These findings point to the need for improvements in both editorial output and digital infrastructure if the station is to broaden and deepen its social media reach.

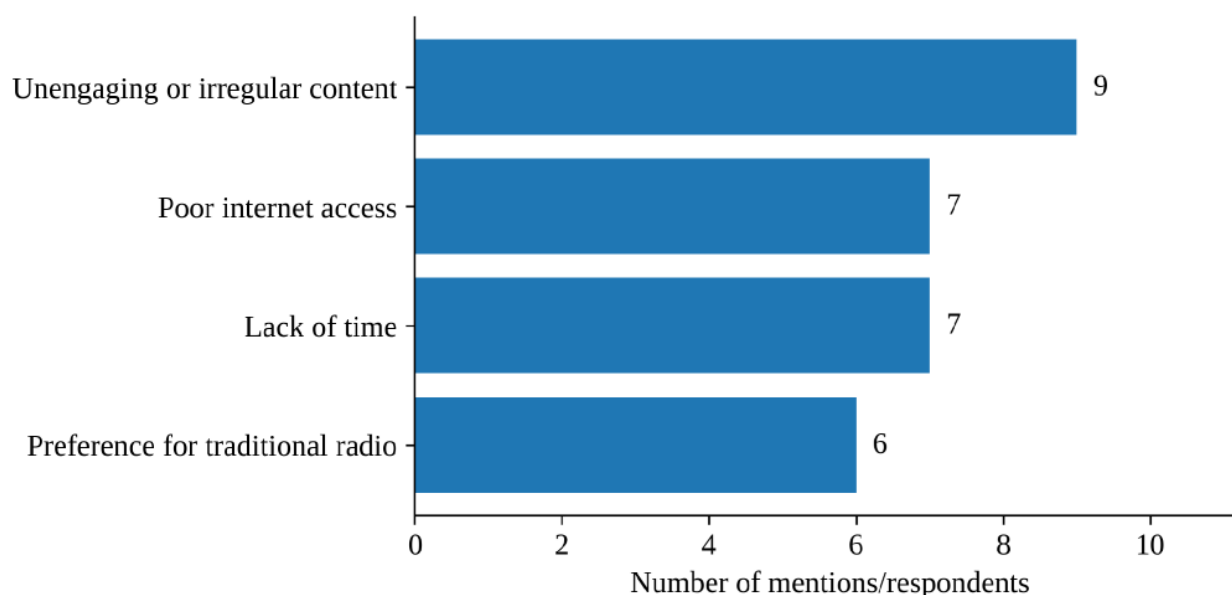


Figure 7. *Reported barriers to social media engagement.*

Preferred Strategies for Increased Engagement

Listeners articulate a clear appetite for a more interactive and rewarding digital engagement model, with a strong preference for incentive-based participation and more responsive communication from presenters. Table 5 shows that, based on 58 responses, the most preferred improvement to the program is the inclusion of giveaways and competitions, selected by 75% of respondents. This is followed by a strong desire for more interactive content (60%) and timely responses from presenters (55%), suggesting that participants value active engagement and responsiveness. Half of the respondents (50%) also expressed interest in more frequent program updates online, while 40% preferred the addition of live video or audio streaming.

Table 5. *Preferred Strategies for Increasing Audience Engagement with KNC Radio on Social Media*

Strategy	Frequency	% of Responses	% of Cases
Giveaways and competitions	15	25.9%	75%
More interactive content	12	20.7%	60%
Timely responses from presenters	11	19.0%	55%
More program updates online	10	17.2%	50%
Live video or audio streaming	8	13.8%	40%
Other	2	3.4%	10%
Total Responses	58	100%	—

Note. This was a multiple-response item; therefore, percentages of cases total more than 100%.

Staff-Reported Operational Challenges

The operational challenges that KNC Radio staff face in managing social media engagement are primarily infrastructure-related, with unreliable internet connectivity identified as the most consequential and frequently cited barrier. Figure 8 displays challenges faced by staff at KNC Radio. The most frequently reported challenge was poor internet connectivity, mentioned by three respondents. This issue often disrupted live broadcasts and delayed social media engagement, directly affecting audience interaction. One staff member explained: “Sometimes the internet just cuts out during a live session. It is frustrating because we lose the audience instantly.” Another added: “The signal is unstable, and it delays uploads to our social platforms. Listeners think we are ignoring them.” Technical limitations such as limited equipment and platform crashes were reported

twice. Other challenges include message overload, time-consuming verification processes, and a low advertising budget, each mentioned once. Two respondents reported no challenges.

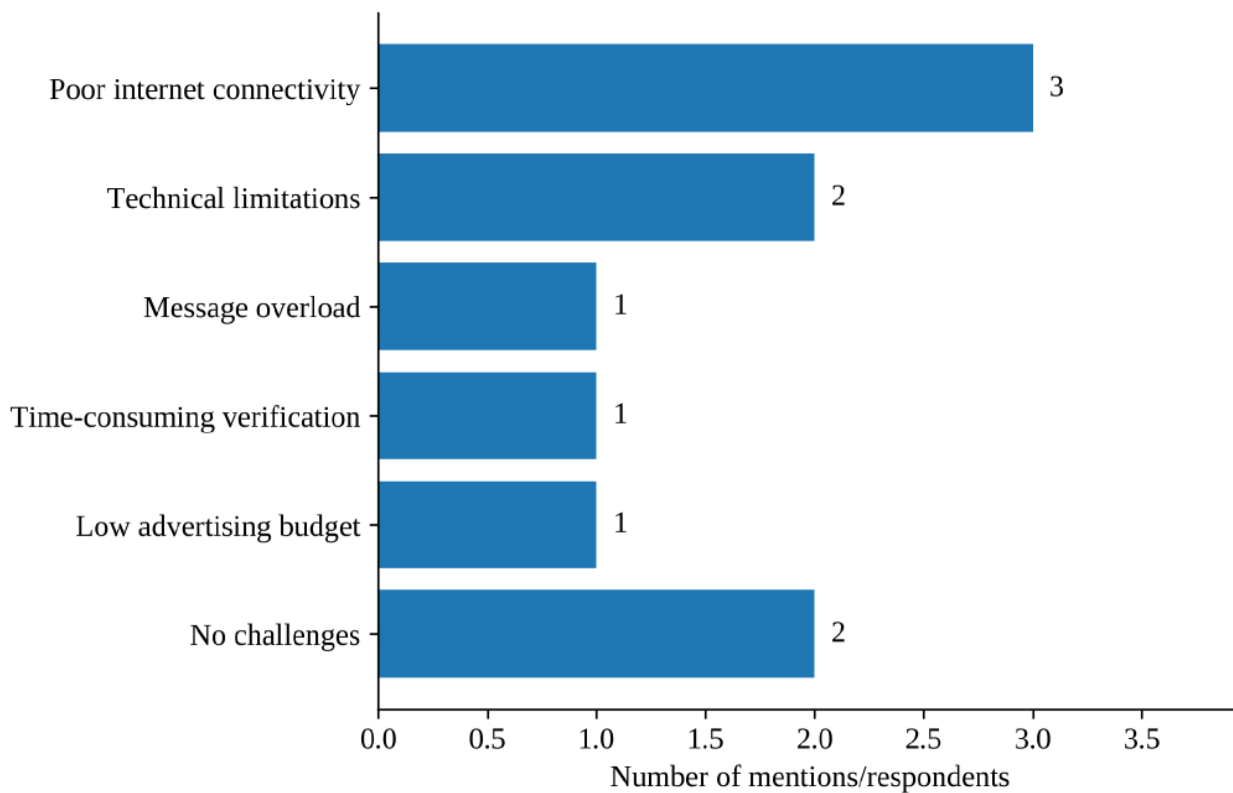


Figure 8. *Staff-reported operational challenges in managing social media engagement.*

DISCUSSION

KNC Radio's social media activity is organized primarily around audience engagement, an orientation that reflects both the station's community mandate and the as-yet-unrealized potential of digital tools in news production and editorial workflow. The centrality of engagement-oriented functions, with platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp facilitating interactive features such as shout-outs, polls, and real-time feedback, is consistent with Mutsvairo and Ragnedda's (2019) argument that participatory communication constitutes the primary value of social media in African media contexts. These findings also resonate with scholarship on the Zambian media environment, where social media platforms have come to occupy a significant position in news production, distribution, and audience interaction (Mambwe, 2013, 2015; Manchishi et al., 2023). The underutilization of social media for news sourcing and operational integration, however, represents a missed opportunity given the documented potential of digital tools in journalistic workflows (Hermida, 2010) and points to an area where future editorial development could yield measurable returns.

The demographic profile of KNC Radio's social media followers challenges conventional assumptions about the relationship between age and digital engagement. The counter-intuitive pattern of higher followership among listeners under 18 and aged 45–54, while middle-aged adults (25–44) show lower engagement, contradicts assumptions about digital nativity (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008), indicating that content relevance may outweigh technological familiarity as a determinant of online engagement. Postgraduate respondents and males exhibited higher followership, pointing to the influence of socio-educational factors on digital participation (van Dijk, 2020). The finding that some individuals who do not listen to the station on air still follow it online is consistent with Newman et al.'s (2022) observation that social media can extend a broadcaster's reach to audiences beyond its traditional listenership.

Platform adoption among KNC Radio's listeners is fragmented, and active engagement is the exception rather than the norm. A notable 60% of respondents did not specify which social media platforms they follow, which may reflect limited media literacy or a reluctance to disclose preferences (van Dijk, 2020). Among those who

responded, Facebook emerged as the dominant platform, consistent with broader trends in sub-Saharan Africa where it remains the most widely accessible channel (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019). The concurrent use of platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (X), typically in combination rather than in isolation, reflects what Jenkins et al. (2013) term “spreadable media,” where users access content across multiple channels without sustained engagement in any one space. With 65% of respondents reporting they never or rarely engage actively, and only 20% engaging daily, the station’s digital audience is predominantly passive, a pattern that mirrors Newman et al.’s (2022) broader finding that casual social media followers often consume content without participating.

KNC Radio’s social media activity generates broadly favorable listener sentiment, though the proportion reporting dissatisfaction signals meaningful gaps in meeting audience expectations. With 65% expressing some degree of satisfaction, the station appears to be cultivating a sense of community and perceived social presence (Sashi, 2012), factors consistently associated with positive digital media experiences. The 25% of respondents who reported dissatisfaction represents a substantive minority, consistent with Malthouse et al.’s (2013) finding that inconsistent content delivery and limited interactivity erode user engagement on social platforms. The 10% who expressed neutral sentiment may represent an audience segment yet to form a strong affective relationship with the station’s digital presence, pointing to further room for strategic development.

The absence of a direct relationship between engagement frequency and satisfaction at KNC Radio points to the symbolic value that many listeners attach to a station’s social media presence, independently of whether they participate in it. Daily engagement generally corresponds with positive sentiment (Sashi, 2012), but several respondents who reported never interacting with the station’s content still expressed satisfaction, indicating that perceived brand value and content visibility shape audience attitudes independently of direct participation (Malthouse et al., 2013). The range of sentiment within the “rarely” engaged group underscores the heterogeneity of audience expectations, a dimension of digital media relationships that Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) identify as a central management challenge. The minimal neutral responses further suggest that audiences form strong opinions about a station’s digital presence even from a distance.

The gap between social media followership and active participation in KNC Radio’s programming reflects a structural feature of digital broadcasting: platform presence does not automatically generate interactive engagement. A substantial portion of the audience that cannot name specific followed platforms still participates through traditional methods such as phone calls, SMS, and other channels, pointing to both the continued relevance of conventional participation modes and the limitations of digital followership as a standalone engagement metric (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019; van Dijk, 2020). Among those who follow specific platforms, participation through those same channels is limited (Sashi, 2012), reinforcing the need for integrated strategies that bridge digital and traditional engagement. This extends the observation by Newman et al. (2022) (Newman et al., 2022) that passive consumption dominates even among dedicated online followers, and raises questions about how stations can convert presence into participation.

Social media has introduced a qualitative shift in audience interaction during KNC Radio’s live broadcasts, most significantly by enabling real-time responsiveness between the station and its listeners. Staff accounts consistently point to the value of tools such as WhatsApp call-ins and live fact-checking, which enable the station to adapt dynamically to listener input as broadcasts unfold. This is consistent with Hermida’s (2010) concept of ambient journalism, in which digital connectivity provides media producers with a continuous stream of audience-generated information. The responsiveness that social media enables builds audience trust and a perception of authenticity (Malthouse et al., 2013), both of which are important to sustaining community radio listenership.

The emergence of active content co-creation among KNC Radio’s audience reflects a significant shift in the producer-audience relationship enabled by social media. The pattern of contribution, from correcting on-air errors and submitting breaking news content, to proposing topics via polls and offering technical solutions during broadcasts, is consistent with Jenkins et al.’s (2013) concept of participatory culture, in which audience members assume roles as contributors to media production rather than purely as recipients. The Story Sharing and Social Media Trend Participation themes demonstrate further how listener-generated content can amplify a station’s visibility and community relevance (Couldry, 2012). The presence of a non-engaging segment of the

audience is a reminder that participatory opportunities are not universally taken up, and that strategies for digital inclusion remain important (van Dijk, 2020).

Social media has expanded both the reach of audience participation and the degree to which listener input shapes KNC Radio's editorial decisions, creating a feedback loop that was not achievable within the constraints of traditional broadcasting. Staff respondents report that social media has enabled listeners who previously found traditional call-in formats inaccessible to engage meaningfully with broadcasts. Engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares now provide actionable data for content planning (Malthouse et al., 2013), informing topic selection, show structure, and guest choices. This two-way dynamic reflects the transformative potential of social media for community radio seeking to close the gap between content producers and their audiences (Couldry, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2013), and positions KNC Radio as an emergent example of participatory broadcasting within the evolving Zambian media environment (Manchishi et al., 2023).

The barriers to fuller social media engagement at KNC Radio are both editorial and structural in character, indicating that closing the engagement gap requires investment on multiple fronts simultaneously. Content quality and consistency, cited by nine respondents as the primary obstacle, reflects the centrality of editorial investment in digital audience development (Calder et al., 2009). Access-related barriers, including poor internet connectivity and time constraints, each cited by seven respondents, reflect the digital divide that characterizes low-resource broadcasting environments (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019; van Dijk, 2020). The preference for traditional radio formats noted by six respondents is consistent with Couldry's (2012) observation that media practices are deeply contextual and that digital transitions are rarely linear or complete. For broadcasters such as KNC Radio, this points to the continuing value of hybrid engagement strategies that serve audiences across both analog and digital channels.

Audience preferences for social media improvement reveal a demand not merely for more content but for content that is interactive, incentivized, and temporally responsive. The strongest preference for giveaways and competitions (75% of respondents) reflects the motivational power of reward-based participation, consistent with Sashi's (2012) model in which perceived personal benefit drives behavioral engagement. The significant demand for interactive content (60%) and timely presenter responsiveness (55%) signals an expectation of dialogue rather than broadcast, reflecting shifts in audience expectations toward what Jenkins et al. (2013) describe as participatory culture. Appetite for live streaming (40%) and more frequent online updates (50%) is consistent with global trends toward digital-first broadcasting (Newman et al., 2022). Staff accounts confirm that KNC Radio's capacity to deliver consistent social media engagement is materially constrained by inadequate digital infrastructure. Internet instability and outages, the most frequently cited challenge, create direct interruptions to the live broadcast responsiveness that audiences have come to expect, producing a perception of disengagement even when the station intends to be present. Equipment limitations and platform crashes compound these effects, and are characteristic of the wider infrastructure constraints facing broadcasters in resource-limited environments (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The study's findings affirm that social media plays an increasingly vital role in contemporary radio broadcasting. At KNC Radio, social media has been integrated into programming to a moderate degree, creating possibilities for interactivity and audience responsiveness. However, the full potential of these platforms has not yet been achieved due to structural, technical, and resource-related constraints. The case of KNC Radio illustrates that the transition from platform presence to meaningful audience engagement requires sustained investment in both human and technical capacity, and that community radio stations in the Global South occupy a distinctive position within this transformation (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019; Yin, 2018).

Audience engagement through social media remains relatively low, pointing to a disconnect between the station's participatory ambitions and the actual interaction levels of its listeners. The absence of a comprehensive digital strategy has further hindered the consistency and scalability of online engagement.

The study's findings also reveal practical pathways for sustainable digital engagement. Based on the findings

and conclusions, several key recommendations are offered for KNC Radio. Firstly, there is a pressing need to upgrade the station's technical infrastructure. Dependable internet connectivity and modern broadcasting equipment are essential for seamless integration of digital platforms. Secondly, the station should consider the appointment of a dedicated social media officer. This role would ensure that social media engagement is monitored, strategically managed, and regularly evaluated. Thirdly, a clearly defined social media content strategy should be established. This strategy should encompass planned interactions, platform-specific content such as short videos for Facebook and infographics for WhatsApp, and scheduled engagement campaigns to motivate user participation. The station should also implement digital literacy and promotional campaigns aimed at educating its audience on how to engage meaningfully through social media. Finally, the station ought to utilize data analytics tools to monitor engagement trends, understand audience preferences, and customize future content accordingly.

While social media has reshaped the broadcasting landscape, its effectiveness in enhancing audience engagement depends on more than platform presence alone. It requires careful planning, investment in infrastructure, and personnel capable of managing interactive communication within a dynamic media environment. The convergence of traditional broadcasting with digital technologies presents genuine opportunities for participatory media. For KNC Radio to remain relevant and responsive to its audience, the station must advance its engagement strategies beyond content delivery toward genuine two-way dialogue. By adopting a comprehensive digital communication approach, KNC Radio can become both an information source and an active platform for community expression, shared experiences, and civic dialogue.

Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. The most significant concerns the audience sample size ($n = 20$), which, while appropriate for the descriptive and exploratory function of the quantitative strand within a single-case study design, does not carry the statistical power required for inferential analysis or population-level generalisation. The percentage distributions reported in the Results section are offered as indicative of tendencies within the specific context of KNC Radio and are not intended to represent community radio audiences in Zambia more broadly. Future studies employing larger, randomly sampled audience cohorts across multiple stations would generate findings with greater statistical credibility and comparative scope. A second limitation concerns the single-station focus, which, while enabling contextual depth, necessarily constrains transferability. The findings are most directly applicable to community radio stations operating under similar infrastructural, economic, and demographic conditions. These constraints notwithstanding, the integration of staff interviews, audience surveys, and document analysis within a single embedded case study provides a methodologically coherent and contextually rich basis from which practitioners and future researchers can draw

Suggestions for Future Research

This study offers significant insights into the impact of social media on community radio broadcasting; however, additional research could broaden its scope. A comparative analysis involving multiple radio stations across Zambia could yield greater generalizability. Investigations specific to individual platforms could also examine how tools such as Instagram, TikTok, or X differ in their effectiveness at promoting real-time engagement. Longitudinal approaches would help assess whether the patterns identified here reflect a transitional phase or a settled feature of community radio in the Zambian context.

REFERENCES

1. Bonini, T. (2014). The new role of radio and its public in the age of social network sites. *First Monday*, 19(6). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i6.4311>
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
3. Calder, B. J., Malthouse, E. C., & Schaedel, U. (2009). An experimental study of the relationship between online engagement and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(4), 321–331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2009.07.002>

4. Carpentier, N. (2011). *Media and participation: A site of ideological-democratic struggle*. Intellect.
5. Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Polity.
6. Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4(3), 297–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512781003640703>
7. Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York University Press.
8. Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>
9. Malthouse, E. C., Haefner, M., Skiera, B., Wege, E., & Zhang, M. (2013). Managing customer relationships in the social media era: Introducing the social CRM house. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 270–280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.008>
10. Mambwe, E. (2013). *The use of new media in journalism and news dissemination in Zambia: The case of the internet* [Master's dissertation, University of Zambia]. University of Zambia Research Repository. <http://dspace.unza.zm/handle/123456789/8025>
11. Mambwe, E. (2019). Investigating the use and impact of social media in Zambian newsrooms between 2011-2013. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 6(4), 30-37. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2636081>
12. Manchishi, K., Pindayi, B., & Mambwe, E. (2023). Financial sustainability of social media-driven publications in Zambia: The practices, threats and opportunities at New Diggers and Kalembe. In T. Matsilele, S. Mpofu, & D. Moyo (Eds.), *New journalism ecologies in East and Southern Africa* (pp. 207–223). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23625-9_12
13. McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. McGraw-Hill.
14. Mudhai, O. F., Tettey, W. J., & Banda, F. (Eds.). (2009). *African media and the digital public sphere*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230621756>
15. Mutsvairo, B., & Ragnedda, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Mapping the digital divide in Africa: A mediated analysis*. Amsterdam University Press.
16. Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2022*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
17. Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. Basic Books.
18. Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
19. Rogers, E. M. (1962). *Diffusion of innovations*. Free Press.
20. Sashi, C. M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. *Management Decision*, 50(2), 253–272. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741211203551>
21. van Dijk, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. Polity.
22. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.