Blueprint Academic Publishers

Journal of Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences
Journal ISSN: 3005-513X
4(3)
Received: September 04, 2026
Revised: October 23, 2026
Published: October 31. 2026

Radio Programming Practices and Perceived Good Governance in Bungoma County, Kenya: A Case Study of Sulwe FM.

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Abstract

Good governance remains a fundamental requirement for democratic development, citizen participation, transparency, accountability and responsiveness within devolved governance systems. In Kenya, radio continues to serve as an important communication platform through which citizens access governance information and engage in public affairs. Despite the increasing recognition of vernacular radio in promoting civic engagement, limited empirical evidence exists on how specific radio programming practices influence perceptions of good governance at the county level. This study investigated the effect of radio programming practices on perceived good governance in Bungoma County, Kenya, using Sulwe FM as a case study. The study was guided by the Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory and adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The target population comprised Sulwe FM listeners residing in six selected wards in Bungoma County. A sample of 400 respondents was determined using Slovin' formula, out of which 350 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 87.5%. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with ten key informants comprising radio presenters, county executive officials, and elected leaders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis with the aid of SPSS version 27, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that listeners generally held positive perceptions regarding Sulwe FM's programming practices (Composite Mean = 3.98, SD = 1.01). Governance programmes were considered informative, relevant, accessible, and participatory, particularly due to the use of the Lubukusu language and interactive formats such as call-in sessions and interviews. The study further established that respondents perceived Sulwe FM as contributing positively to good

governance (Composite Mean = 4.07, SD = 0.92), particularly in promoting public participation, transparency and accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and respect for the rule of law. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between programming practices and perceived good governance ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further established that programming practices significantly predicted perceived good governance ($\beta = 0.261$, $p < 0.001$), with the model explaining 69.4% of the variation in perceived good governance ($R^2 = 0.694$). The study concludes that Sulwe FM's programming practices play a significant role in shaping listeners' perceptions of good governance by enhancing access to governance information, facilitating citizen participation, and promoting public dialogue. The study recommends increased investment in governance-oriented programming, expansion of participation opportunities for marginalized groups, and strengthening of editorial independence to enhance the contribution of vernacular radio to democratic governance and citizen engagement within devolved systems.

Keywords: Radio programming practices, good governance, public participation, accountability, vernacular radio, Sulwe FM, Bungoma County, Kenya.

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Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article

Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials or upon reasonable request.

Competing interests: The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Introduction

Good governance, characterized by participation, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equity, and adherence to the rule of law, is widely regarded as a prerequisite for sustainable development and democratic consolidation (Kaufmann et al., 2010). In Kenya, governance outcomes remain varied despite significant constitutional and institutional reforms. The country scored 61.0 out of 100 on the 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, ranking 10th among 54 African countries (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024). Similarly, Kenya's score on the World Bank's Voice and Accountability indicator declined

from 53.3 in 2022 to 51.6 in 2024 (World Bank, 2025). These trends highlight persistent challenges in strengthening citizen participation, transparency, and accountability, thereby emphasizing the importance of communication institutions that facilitate interaction between citizens and government. Among such institutions, radio remains particularly significant because of its ability to inform, educate, mobilize, and provide platforms for public engagement on governance issues.

The importance of citizen participation is deeply embedded within Kenya's constitutional and legislative framework. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) identifies public participation, transparency, and accountability as national values and principles of governance under Article 10, while Articles 174 and 196 emphasize democratic self-governance and citizen involvement in county affairs (Republic of Kenya, 2010). These provisions are reinforced by the County Governments Act (2012), which promotes public communication and civic engagement in devolved governance. Following the introduction of devolution, 47 county governments were established with the expectation of bringing decision-making closer to citizens and enhancing responsiveness to local needs. However, empirical evidence suggests that the realization of these objectives remains uneven. Mbithi et al. (2019) found that effective public participation in Kenyan counties depends largely on citizens' awareness, communication channels, and the responsiveness of public officials. Similarly, Ngigi and Busolo (2019) observed persistent disparities between constitutional provisions for participation and actual county-level practices. Studies further indicate that many citizens possess limited knowledge of devolved governance structures (Opalo, 2020), while communication strategies employed by county governments often fail to effectively reach rural populations (Wasike et al., 2024). Consequently, a gap persists between the constitutional promise of participatory governance and citizens' actual engagement in governance processes.

Radio occupies a strategic position as a medium capable of bridging information gaps and facilitating citizen engagement. Radio remains the most accessible medium in many parts of Kenya, particularly in rural areas where literacy levels, internet access, and economic limitations may constrain access to alternative sources of information. According to the Communications Authority of Kenya (2024), there were 293 FM radio stations operating during the 2023/2024 financial year, many of which broadcast in local languages. The Media Council of Kenya (2024) reported that radio remains among the leading sources of news in the country, accounting for 23.1% of news consumption, and is also the most trusted media platform, with 64.5% of respondents expressing trust in it. Radio continues to be especially influential in Western Kenya, including Bungoma County, where local-language stations serve as important sources of news, information, and public discourse. Talk shows and interviews constitute some of the most listened-to radio content, with news remaining the primary reason audiences tune in (Media Council of Kenya, 2024). Even as overall listenership faces increasing competition from digital media platforms, radio continues to retain civic relevance through governance-oriented programming and audience interaction.

Community and vernacular radio stations have been shown to promote civic education, facilitate public debate, enhance citizen participation, and

strengthen accountability mechanisms (Okinyi, 2018; UNESCO, 2024). Interactive broadcasting formats, including call-in programmes, interviews, panel discussions, and public forums, provide citizens with opportunities to express opinions and engage with leaders on matters of public concern. For instance, interactive radio initiatives in Kenya have generated substantial citizen engagement and improved feelings of inclusion in governance processes (Africa's Voices Foundation, 2022; Participedia, 2019). Community radio programmes have also been associated with increased participation in public consultation activities (WACC, 2020). Studies conducted in Kenya and Zambia further demonstrate that interactive broadcasting creates spaces where notions of citizenship, representation, and political authority are negotiated (Srinivasan & Diepeveen, 2018), while radio talk shows have been found to facilitate public deliberation and citizen engagement (Omwoha, 2017).

Nevertheless, the mere existence of governance-oriented radio programmes does not automatically translate into effective participation, responsiveness, or accountability. The extent to which radio contributes to good governance depends on several programming practices, including the accuracy and balance of information disseminated, accessibility of programmes, opportunities for audience interaction, responsiveness to public concerns, and the inclusiveness of discussions. Programming elements such as call-in sessions, interviews, civic education segments, public forums, and local-language broadcasts may enhance citizen engagement, but their actual influence on governance outcomes remains context-dependent. Opportunities for participation through radio do not necessarily imply that citizens influence public policy decisions or that government institutions become more accountable. Consequently, there is a need to examine how specific programming practices shape citizens' perceptions of governance.

Research on vernacular radio in Kenya demonstrates both its opportunities and challenges. Studies have highlighted the role of vernacular radio in representing local voices and addressing community concerns (Mogambi, 2025). Other scholars have examined issues of conflict sensitivity in western Kenya (Ndavula & Lidubwi, 2023), the capacity of vernacular stations to either bridge or reinforce ethnic divisions (Githinji & Mathe, 2025), and the influence of geographic disparities in radio distribution on access to information (Owilla et al., 2020). Furthermore, radio increasingly operates within a hybrid communication environment where traditional broadcasting intersects with digital platforms such as WhatsApp, creating new spaces for citizen engagement and governance debates (Omanga, 2021). These developments suggest that the effectiveness of radio in promoting good governance is shaped not only by its reach but also by the nature and quality of its programming practices.

Bungoma County is predominantly inhabited by the Bukusu sub-group of the Luhya community and has a vibrant vernacular radio landscape. Previous studies have shown that stations such as West FM and Radio Mambo perform important developmental and peace-building functions within the county (Kitui et al., 2022), while market competition and sustainability challenges influence programming decisions among local broadcasters (Mudanya, 2020). The County Government of Bungoma has institutionalized public participation through its Public Participation and Civic

Education Policy, which recognizes radio broadcasts as an important channel for mobilizing citizens and disseminating governance information (County Government of Bungoma, 2020). Among the leading stations in the county is Sulwe FM (89.6 FM), a Royal Media Services station that broadcasts in the Bukusu language and serves a diverse audience across Bungoma and neighboring areas through news, talk shows, educational programmes, cultural discussions, and entertainment content.

Despite extensive recognition of radio's governance role, important knowledge gaps remain. Existing studies in Kenya have largely focused on community radio stations or on the developmental and peace-building functions of vernacular broadcasting, while limited attention has been given to commercial vernacular stations such as Sulwe FM. Moreover, although previous research has documented radio's accessibility, popularity, and credibility (Media Council of Kenya, 2024), few studies have specifically examined how programming practices such as programme formats, scheduling patterns, audience interaction mechanisms, sourcing of guests, and editorial framing relate to citizens' perceptions of good governance at the county level. Additionally, concerns regarding political influence, ownership interests, and media bias raise questions about whether radio programming genuinely promotes transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation or merely creates the appearance of inclusivity (Media Council of Kenya, 2024). Consequently, the effect of radio programming practices on perceived good governance in Bungoma County remains insufficiently understood.

Guided by the Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, this study investigated the effect of radio programming practices on perceived good governance in Bungoma County, Kenya, using Sulwe FM as a case study.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory (Arnstein, 1969) and the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Together, these complementary perspectives provide a framework for examining how Sulwe FM's programming practices relate to listeners' perceptions of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and participation in Bungoma County. While Agenda-Setting Theory explains how media coverage directs public attention toward specific governance issues, the Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory evaluates the extent to which citizens can actively engage in those governance processes.

Arnstein (1969) conceptualizes participation along an eight-level continuum grouped into three categories: non-participation (manipulation, therapy), tokenism (informing, consultation, placation), and citizen power (partnership, delegated power, citizen control). In Bungoma County, Sulwe FM's governance programming including civic education, talk shows, and call-in sessions serves as a platform that can elevate engagement from simple information dissemination toward genuine consultation and dialogue. However, Arnstein's model emphasizes that opportunities for expression do not automatically grant actual decision-making power. This distinction is particularly relevant under Kenya's devolved governance system, where constitutional guarantees for public participation often face practical implementation barriers (Republic of Kenya, 2010).

Complementing this, McCombs and Shaw (1972) posit that media significantly influence public agendas by selecting and emphasizing specific topics, thereby determining issue salience (first-level agenda setting). Expanded scholarship further demonstrates that media shape the attributes and interpretations linked to public issues and actors (second-level agenda setting) (McCombs, 2005). By prioritizing topics such as public expenditure, service delivery, and leadership performance, Sulwe FM can increase citizen awareness and shape perceptions of local governance. Nevertheless, heightened issue salience does not guarantee immediate policy reform or behavioral change.

The integration of both theories yields a comprehensive framework for analyzing media influence on local governance. Agenda-Setting Theory explains how governance topics gain public visibility through broad media exposure, while the Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory evaluates the depth of citizen involvement facilitated by those platforms. Applied to this study, Sulwe FM's programming practices function as independent variables that inform and engage listeners, ultimately influencing their perceptions of good governance within Bungoma County without assuming direct causal effects on policy outcomes.

Empirical Review

Radio programming practices refer to the approaches through which governance issues are selected, organised and communicated to audiences. These practices include programme diversity, frequency of governance coverage, language accessibility, audience interaction, diversity of contributors, and the balance and depth of discussions. Their relevance to good governance lies in their potential to improve access to public information, facilitate citizen participation, promote transparency and strengthen accountability. However, the availability of governance-related programmes does not necessarily guarantee meaningful public engagement or improved perceptions of governance.

At the global level, Espinar et al. (2023) assessed 12 community and indigenous public-interest radio stations in Colombia using the Social Profitability Indicator in Communication (IRSCOM). The study evaluated programme diversity, community engagement, management and social participation. Findings demonstrated that community involvement in programme development and station management strengthened the social relevance of broadcasting. Similarly, Padilla de la Torre and Cervantes Velázquez (2024), examining political and citizen participation among radio news audiences in Mexico, established that audience engagement was often limited despite listeners' interest in public affairs. These findings suggest that interactive programming requires deliberate mechanisms for meaningful citizen participation rather than relying solely on conventional programme formats.

In Africa, Pimpong (2024) investigated political communication through radio broadcasting and its implications for democratic consolidation in Ghana. The study found that participatory political communication supported democratic engagement, although political interference, commercialisation and biased reporting undermined public trust. Amadu (2026), examining Simli Radio in Northern Ghana, established that indigenous-language broadcasting, public scrutiny programmes and citizen journalism facilitated civic awareness and social accountability. The study demonstrated

that radio programming could provide opportunities for citizens to question public institutions and communicate governance concerns. However, institutional and political constraints limited the extent to which broadcasting translated into governance improvements. Similarly, Mpehongwa (2024), investigating community radio and access to information in local government authorities in Tanzania, found that limited coverage of local government activities constrained citizens' access to governance information. The findings highlight the importance of relevant and accessible governance content in promoting transparency and informed participation.

In Kenya, Srinivasan and Diepeveen (2018) examined interactive broadcasting in Kenya and Zambia, focusing on the relationship between radio participation, citizenship and political authority. Their analysis demonstrated that interactive broadcasting could create spaces where audiences and political actors negotiated public issues. However, the significance of participation depended on the social and institutional conditions within which these interactions occurred. Although the study predates the current review period, it provides foundational evidence on the relationship between interactive radio and citizen engagement.

Manje (2022) investigated the role of community radio in development using Pamoja FM in Kibera, Nairobi. The qualitative case study involved newsroom staff, listeners and other community informants. Findings identified information dissemination, peacebuilding, community participation and development mobilisation as important contributions of the station. The study demonstrated how locally relevant programming could strengthen communication and provide platforms for expressing community concerns. Nevertheless, its focus on community development did not directly establish the effect of radio programming on perceived good governance.

Wekesa et al. (2023) examined the influence of media laws and regulations on radio programming diversity in Kenya. The findings revealed that political sycophancy, ethical dilemmas and inadequate adherence to professional standards affected broadcasting practices. The study demonstrated that regulatory compliance and journalistic ethics were important in ensuring balanced and responsible information dissemination. However, it focused on programme diversity and regulatory issues rather than audience perceptions of governance outcomes.

Wachira et al. (2024) examined the influence of community radio on project interventions during the COVID-19 period, focusing on Voi and Marsabit. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study established that community radio contributed to public awareness, health education and community development interventions. However, its focus on pandemic-related communication and development interventions differed from the present study's emphasis on governance-oriented programming.

Awiti and Ong’ong’a (2024) investigated audience perceptions of online radio programming among university students in the Nyanza region of Kenya. The study examined programme diversity, quality, scheduling convenience and presenter engagement. Findings highlighted the importance of relevant content, quality presentation and audience engagement in shaping listeners' perceptions of radio programmes. However, its focus on university students and online broadcasting limited its applicability to

wider county populations and traditional FM broadcasting.

More recently, Awuor et al. (2026) investigated farmers' participation in co-creating sustainable food systems content through community radio stations in Migori County. The mixed-methods study found that although radio listenership was relatively high, active participation in programme production remained limited. Specifically, 75.2% of respondents reported no involvement in programme production, while only 7.5% participated as active content co-creators. These findings illustrate the distinction between passive listenership and meaningful participation in programme development. Although the study focused on agricultural communication, it provides relevant evidence on the importance of audience involvement in determining radio content.

Collectively, the reviewed studies demonstrate that radio programming practices can facilitate access to information, public participation, civic awareness and accountability. However, their contributions depend on programme relevance, diversity of viewpoints, language accessibility, editorial independence and opportunities for meaningful audience interaction. Existing Kenyan studies have predominantly examined community development, programme diversity, audience perceptions and participation in content production. Less attention has been directed towards the combined effect of radio programming practices on perceived good governance within county-level governance structures. Furthermore, findings from other geographical settings and broadcasting institutions cannot automatically be generalised to Sulwe FM because of differences in audience characteristics, programme formats and local governance environments.

The present study addresses these contextual, conceptual and empirical gaps by examining radio programming practices and perceived good governance in Bungoma County, using Sulwe FM as a case study. The study tests the following null hypothesis:

H_{o1}: *Radio programming practices has no statistically significant effects on perceived good governance in Bungoma County, Kenya.*

Methodology

This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design, which involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative data to explain and enrich the quantitative findings. Mixed-methods research enables the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem than either approach can achieve independently (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The explanatory sequential approach was considered appropriate because it allowed the study to first establish patterns in listeners' perceptions of Sulwe FM's programming practices and perceived good governance and subsequently obtain detailed explanations from key informants regarding the observed quantitative results.

The study was conducted in Bungoma County, Kenya, where Sulwe FM is widely accessible among local-language audiences. The target population comprised adult listeners of Sulwe FM residing in six selected wards within Kanduyi, Bumula, and Tongaren sub-counties. According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, the six selected wards, namely Musikoma,

Marakaru/Tuuti, Kimaeti, Bumula, Naitiri/Kabuyefwe, and Tongaren, had a combined population of 246,389 persons (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). The study targeted residents aged 18 years and above who had lived in the selected wards for at least one year and who regularly listened to Sulwe FM, thereby possessing sufficient familiarity with the station's governance-related programming.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select study participants. First, Kanduyi, Bumula, and Tongaren sub-counties were purposively selected because of their high population densities, extensive Sulwe FM coverage, and representativeness of Bungoma County's socio-cultural characteristics. Second, the two most populous wards from each sub-county were selected, resulting in six study wards. The quantitative sample size was determined using Slovin's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Based on the target population, a sample of 400 respondents was obtained and proportionately allocated across the six wards according to population size. Within each ward, respondents were selected through systematic sampling procedures. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select ten key informants comprising two Sulwe FM presenters, two county executive officials, and six elected leaders representing the selected wards. These participants were considered information-rich cases capable of providing deeper insights into radio programming practices and governance issues.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. The questionnaire was administered to Sulwe FM listeners and contained items measuring demographic characteristics, exposure to radio programming practices, citizen engagement, and perceptions of good governance. Radio programming practices constituted the independent variable and were assessed through indicators such as governance-related news coverage, talk shows, interviews, civic education programmes, and audience participation mechanisms including call-in sessions. Perceived good governance formed the dependent variable and was measured through indicators related to citizen participation, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. Most questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from key informants regarding governance programming, audience engagement, and the perceived contribution of radio to governance processes within Bungoma County.

To ensure instrument quality, a pilot study was conducted among 30 respondents drawn from Kholera Ward in Matungu Sub-County, Kakamega County. The pilot area was selected because it shared similar socio-demographic characteristics with the study area while remaining outside the main research site. Feedback from the pilot study was used to improve the clarity, wording, and sequencing of questionnaire items and interview questions. Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results yielded reliability coefficients of 0.812 for radio programming practices and 0.877 for perceived good governance, indicating acceptable levels of internal consistency since both values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Content validity was enhanced through expert review to ensure

alignment of the instruments with the study objectives, theoretical framework, and key study variables.

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained the necessary research authorization and ethical approvals from relevant authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of the information provided. Written or verbal informed consent was obtained before participation. Questionnaires were administered through face-to-face interactions with respondents in the selected wards. Qualitative interviews were conducted with key informants at convenient locations and, with participants' permission, were audio-recorded to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis. To protect participants' privacy, no identifying information was included in the final dataset or research report.

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions of the study variables. Inferential statistics were employed to examine the effect of radio programming practices on perceived good governance. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which radio programming practices predicted perceived good governance among listeners. The regression model was specified as:

$$Y=\beta0+\beta1X+e$$

where Y represents perceived good governance, β0 is the constant term, β1 represents the regression coefficient, X denotes radio programming practices, and e is the error term.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data, after which codes were generated and organized into themes and sub-themes related to radio programming, citizen participation, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results during interpretation to provide a deeper understanding of the effect of Sulwe FM's programming practices on perceived good governance in Bungoma County.

Results and Discussion

Response Rate

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to eligible Sulwe FM listeners across the six selected wards in Bungoma County. Of these, 350 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 87.5%. Chien (2009) observes that response rates exceeding 70% are generally desirable in survey research, as higher participation can improve estimation precision and reduce the risk of selection bias. The response rate achieved in the present study was therefore considered satisfactory and provided sufficient data for statistical analysis. The respondents were drawn from all six study wards, namely Tongaren (18%), Naitiri/Kabuyefwe (17%), Bumula (17%), Marakaru/Tuuti (16%), Kimaeti (16%), and Musikoma (16%), ensuring broad geographical representation across the study area.

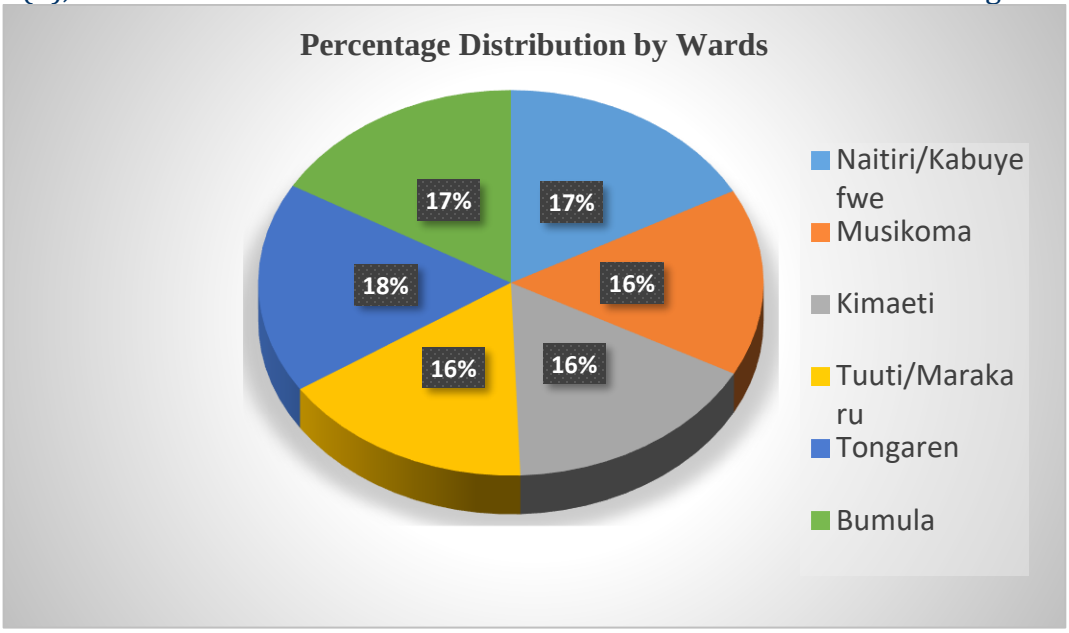


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Wards

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic information was considered important in describing the composition of the sample and establishing the extent to which the study captured views from diverse categories of Sulwe FM listeners. Table 1 presents the characteristics examined which included gender, age, and educational level.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	189	54.0
	Female	161	46.0
Age (Years)	20–29	98	28.0
	30–39	110	31.4
	40–49	82	23.4
	50 and above	60	17.1
Educational Level	Primary	53	15.1
	Secondary	142	40.6
	College/University	155	44.3
	Total	**350**	**100.0**

The findings show that the study achieved relatively balanced gender representation, with male respondents accounting for 54.0% (n = 189) of the sample and female respondents comprising 46.0% (n = 161). This distribution suggests that the study captured perspectives from both men and women regarding Sulwe FM's governance-related programming .

The age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents were within the economically active age groups. Respondents aged 30–39 years constituted the largest proportion at 31.4% (n = 110), followed by those aged 20–29 years at 28.0% (n = 98). Participants aged 40–49 years accounted for 23.4% (n = 82), while those aged 50 years and above represented 17.1% (n =

60). The findings suggest that Sulwe FM's listenership cuts across different age categories, enabling the station to reach both younger and older members of the community. The representation of diverse age groups was important because governance perceptions and levels of civic engagement may vary across different stages of adulthood.

Regarding educational attainment, the results show that respondents possessed varied educational backgrounds. College and university graduates formed the largest group at 44.3% (n = 155), followed by respondents with secondary education at 40.6% (n = 142). Those with primary education constituted 15.1% (n = 53) of the sample. These findings indicate that the study captured views from individuals with different levels of formal education. The presence of respondents with primary education further demonstrates the accessibility of radio as a communication medium capable of reaching audiences across diverse educational backgrounds. This may be attributed to Sulwe FM's use of the local language, which enhances comprehension and participation in discussions on governance and public affairs regardless of formal educational attainment.

Descriptive Statistics

Figure 2 and Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on radio programming practices and perceived good governance in Bungoma County, using Sulwe FM as a case study. The analysis is based on questionnaire responses and key informant interviews. Quantitative findings are summarised using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, while qualitative findings are used to contextualise the descriptive results. A five-point Likert scale was used, where 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. Key informants are identified as KI 1, KI 2 and so forth.

Programming Practices of Sulwe FM

Respondents were asked to rate different aspects of governance-related programming. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

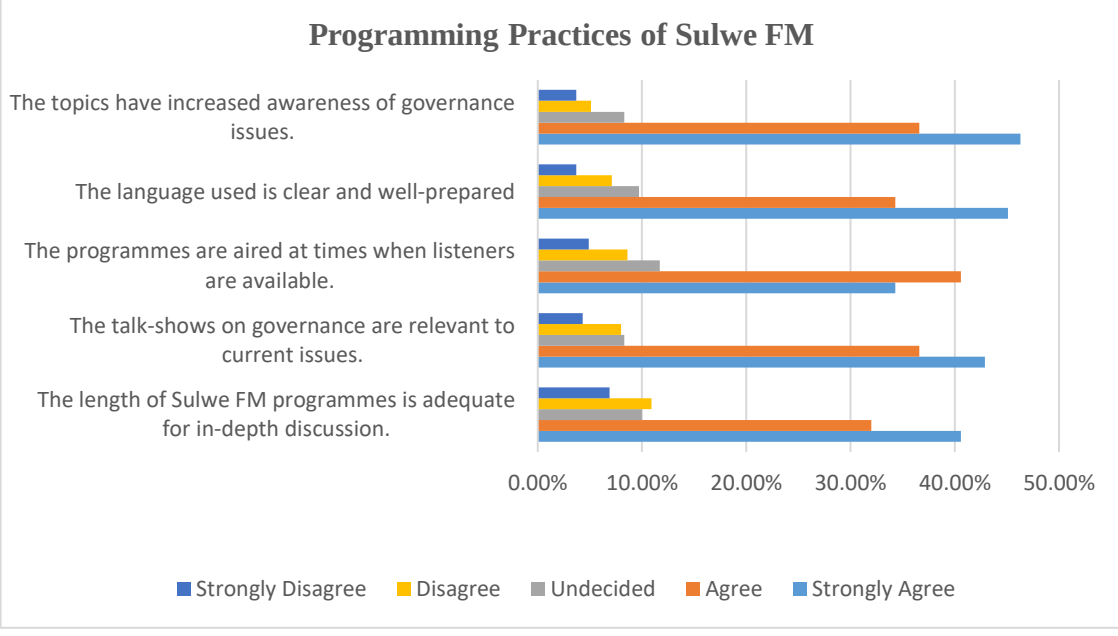


Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics for Programming Practices of Sulwe FM

The findings in Fig 2 indicated that Sulwe FM's programming practices were generally positively perceived. Respondents reported that governance topics increased awareness (48%), programme presentation was clear (48%), programmes addressed current issues (42%), and programme duration was adequate for in-depth discussion (40.6%; Mean = 3.89, SD = 1.07). Governance programmes were also viewed as regularly aired (35%) and balanced in presenting different stakeholder perspectives (34%). During interviews, one Sulwe FM presenter explained that listeners are more willing to engage when issues are discussed in a language they understand and identify with.

According to KI 2:

"*When governance matters are discussed in Lubukusu, listeners understand them easily and feel that the discussions concern their daily lives. This encourages them to call in, ask questions, and express their concerns."*

Similarly, a county executive official (KI 4) noted that announcements on public participation forums receive a higher response when communicated through Sulwe FM because the information reaches citizens in a familiar language.

These findings support the observations of Manje (2022), who found that locally relevant radio programming strengthens communication between communities and institutions by making information understandable and relatable. They also agree with findings by Awuor et al. (2026), who reported that community-based radio content delivered in familiar local contexts increased audience engagement and information uptake among listeners.

Respondents further agreed that governance programmes increased public awareness of governance issues (M = 4.08, SD = 0.96) and were presented clearly and understandably (M = 4.06, SD = 0.94). The findings suggest that Sulwe FM successfully communicates information relating to county governance, development projects, leadership performance, and public participation opportunities. According to a ward leader (KI 8), many residents often learn about county projects and upcoming public participation forums through governance programmes aired by the station.

The findings align with Agenda-Setting Theory, which argues that the media influence public attention by highlighting particular issues and giving them prominence (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By consistently covering governance matters, Sulwe FM appears to increase public awareness and stimulate discussion on issues affecting local communities.

Interactive programme formats were also highly rated by respondents (M = 4.02, SD = 0.98). Interview participants consistently emphasized the importance of call-in sessions, interviews, and panel discussions in enhancing citizen engagement.

One presenter (KI 1) stated:

"*The programmes that attract the highest audience participation are those where leaders are invited and listeners are given an opportunity to call or send messages. People feel that their voices are being heard*."

Similarly, KI 6 observed that some governance discussions generate substantial public interest because citizens use the platform to seek clarification on development projects, service delivery issues, and county priorities.

These findings are consistent with those of Srinivasan and Diepeveen (2018), who found that interactive broadcasting creates opportunities for citizens and public officials to engage in discussions

concerning community issues. They also support the findings of Wachira et al. (2024), who established that community radio facilitates dialogue and public engagement by creating opportunities for audience participation.

Although respondents generally rated governance programming positively, governance programmes being aired regularly (M = 3.85, SD = 1.11) and provision of balanced perspectives (M = 3.81, SD = 1.09) received comparatively lower ratings than other indicators. During interviews, some participants indicated that governance content occasionally competed with entertainment programming for airtime. According to KI 9:

"*Governance programmes are useful, but sometimes listeners would want more airtime dedicated to discussing public issues in greater detail*."

Similarly, KI 10 observed that political discussions occasionally featured recurring participants, which limited opportunities for broader representation of community perspectives.

These observations resonate with Wekesa et al. (2023), who reported that programming diversity and balanced representation remain important challenges in Kenyan radio broadcasting due to political influences, commercial pressures, and editorial constraints. Overall, however, the findings suggest that Sulwe FM employs accessible, relevant, and participatory programming practices that promote awareness and public engagement in governance matters.

Promotion of Good Governance

Perceptions regarding Sulwe FM's contribution to good governance were measured using five dimensions and the findings are presented in Table 2. The findings reveal that respondents generally perceived Sulwe FM as making a positive contribution to good governance in Bungoma County. The variable recorded an overall mean score of 4.07, indicating strong agreement among respondents regarding the station's governance role.

Public participation emerged as the highest-rated governance indicator (M = 4.12, SD = 0.91). More than four-fifths of respondents agreed that Sulwe FM encouraged citizens to engage in governance processes and decision-making activities.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Sulwe FM's Contribution to Good Governance

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	SD
Sulwe FM programmes promotes public participation in decision-making.	44.3%	37.7%	8.6%	5.1%	4.3%	4.12	0.91
The radio station enhances transparency and accountability.	42.3%	38.6%	8.6%	6.3%	4.3%	4.08	0.94
Sulwe FM is responsive to community concerns and promptly addresses emerging local issues.	40.0%	39.4%	10.0%	6.3%	4.3%	4.03	0.93
The station promotes equity and inclusiveness by giving all groups equal opportunity to contribute.	39.4%	40.0%	9.7%	6.6%	4.3%	4.04	0.92
Programmes aired by Sulwe FM encourage respect for the rule of law and promote effective, efficient governance.	42.9%	37.7%	9.7%	5.7%	4.0%	4.09	0.91

Interview findings further revealed that the station regularly announces public participation forums and provides opportunities for listeners to discuss development priorities and public concerns.

According to KI 5:

"*Many residents become aware of county meetings and public participation forums through Sulwe FM. Without the station, some citizens would not receive such information in good time."*

Similarly, KI 7 observed that governance discussions often motivate citizens to attend public forums because they become aware of issues affecting their communities. These findings are consistent with those of Mbithi et al. (2019), who found that effective citizen participation depends significantly on access to information and the availability of communication channels connecting citizens and government institutions. They also support findings by Africa's Voices Foundation (2022), which demonstrated that interactive radio programmes increased citizens' feelings of inclusion and participation in governance processes.

Transparency and accountability were also highly rated (M = 4.08, SD = 0.94). Respondents indicated that governance programmes provided information about public projects, leadership performance, resource utilization, and service delivery. Through discussions featuring leaders and public officials, listeners were able to seek clarification and obtain information relevant to community development.

One elected leader (KI 8) stated:

"*Radio discussions encourage leaders to explain what they are doing because they know that citizens are listening and asking questions*."

Similarly, KI 3 reported that public discussions on governance issues often generated pressure for greater responsiveness from public officials. The findings support those of Awiti and Ong'ong'a (2024), who found that audience engagement and programme quality influence public perceptions of media credibility and effectiveness. They also align with findings by Okinyi (2018), who observed that local radio stations contribute to accountability by providing citizens with information needed to evaluate leadership performance.

Regarding responsiveness, respondents agreed that Sulwe FM addressed emerging community concerns and local issues (M = 4.03, SD = 0.93). Interview participants indicated that topics raised by listeners frequently became subjects for subsequent programmes, enabling community concerns to remain visible in public discourse.

According to KI 1:

"*When many listeners raise similar concerns, programme producers often invite leaders or experts to respond in subsequent broadcasts*."

This finding supports observations by Omanga (2021), who noted that radio stations increasingly serve as public spheres where citizens raise concerns and influence local governance debates.

The study also established that Sulwe FM promoted equity and inclusiveness (M = 4.04, SD = 0.92). Nevertheless, qualitative findings revealed that challenges remained in achieving broad-based participation.

As noted by KI 10:

"*Women, youth and people living in remote areas do not participate as actively as other groups. More efforts are needed to ensure that everyone is represented."*

This finding mirrors those of Awuor et al. (2026), who observed that listenership does not necessarily translate into active participation. Similarly, Padilla

de la Torre and Cervantes Velázquez (2024) found that audience interest alone is insufficient without mechanisms that facilitate meaningful engagement.

Respect for the rule of law and effective governance also received strong support (M = 4.09, SD = 0.91). Respondents indicated that governance programmes enhanced awareness of citizen rights, legal obligations, and governance procedures. Interview participants reported that discussions involving legal experts, county officials, and community leaders helped listeners understand governance frameworks and their responsibilities as citizens.

Collectively, respondents identified several strengths of Sulwe FM, including its wide audience reach, use of local language, accessibility, interactivity, and inclusion of community leaders in governance discussions. However, challenges such as limited governance airtime, occasional political influence, inadequate investigative reporting, and underrepresentation of marginalized groups were also highlighted.

According to KI 4:

"*Governance programmes are important, but there is a need for deeper investigative discussions and wider participation from women and young people*."

Overall, the descriptive findings demonstrate that Sulwe FM is perceived as playing a significant role in promoting good governance in Bungoma County. Through governance-oriented programming, interactive discussions, and local-language broadcasting, the station contributes to public participation, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and civic awareness. These findings are consistent with Kenyan studies that emphasize the importance of local radio as a platform for citizen engagement, information dissemination, and democratic participation within devolved governance systems (Manje, 2022; Wekesa et al., 2023; Wachira et al., 2024; Awiti & Ong'ong'a, 2024).

Inferential Analysis

To determine whether Sulwe FM's programming practices were associated with perceived good governance among listeners in Bungoma County, Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were conducted. The analyses sought to establish the nature, strength, and significance of the effect of the independent variable (programming practices) on the dependent variable (perceived good governance).

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Sulwe FM's programming practices and perceived good governance.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis of Study Variables

Variable	1	2
1. Perceived Good Governance	1	
2. Programming Practices	0.684**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

The results in Table 3 indicate a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between programming practices and perceived good governance ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that respondents who rated Sulwe FM's programming practices positively were also more likely to report favourable perceptions of good governance in Bungoma County. The positive correlation implies that improvements in governance-related radio programming are associated with increased perceptions of public participation, transparency,

accountability, responsiveness, and inclusiveness.

The findings are similar to those of Srinivasan and Diepeveen (2018) who found that interactive broadcasting in Kenya created spaces through which citizens engaged political leaders and deliberated on public issues. Similarly, Manje (2022) established that community radio strengthened information sharing, community participation, and development communication. The positive correlation observed in the present study suggests that governance-oriented programming on Sulwe FM may play a similar role in shaping citizens' perceptions of governance processes within the devolved governance context of Bungoma County. The findings further support those of Awiti and Ong'ong'a (2024), who found that programme quality, relevance, audience engagement, and presenter interaction influenced listeners' perceptions and evaluations of radio content.

Regression Analysis

A linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which Sulwe FM's programming practices predicted perceived good governance among listeners.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.833	0.694	0.689	0.312

The model summary results in Table 4 indicate a strong effect of programming practices on perceived good governance (R = 0.833). The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.694) shows that programming practices explained 69.4% of the variation in perceived good governance among respondents. This suggests that Sulwe FM's programming practices constitute an important predictor of citizens' perceptions regarding governance outcomes in Bungoma County.

The relatively high R^2 value demonstrates that governance-oriented radio programming contributes significantly to explaining variation in perceptions of participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and inclusiveness. However, the remaining 30.6% of unexplained variance suggests that other factors not included in the model may also influence perceptions of governance, such as personal experiences with government services, political interests, socio-economic factors, and alternative sources of information.

Table 5: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	85.218	3	28.406	291.54	0.000
Residual	37.580	346	0.109		
Total	122.798	349			

The ANOVA results reveal that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3,346) = 291.54$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the model provided a significantly better prediction of perceived good governance than would

be expected by chance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that programming practices have no significant effect on perceived good governance was rejected.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.542	0.121	—	4.48	0.000
Programming Practices	0.287	0.046	0.261	6.24	0.000

The regression coefficients indicate that programming practices had a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived good governance ($B = 0.287$, $\beta = 0.261$, $t = 6.24$, $p < 0.001$). The positive coefficient implies that an improvement in programming practices was associated with a corresponding increase in perceived good governance among listeners.

The resulting regression equation was:

$Y=0.542 + 0.287X1$

Where:

- Y = Perceived Good Governance
- X_1 = Programming Practices

The coefficient of 0.287 indicates that a one-unit improvement in programming practices leads to a 0.287-unit increase in perceived good governance, holding other factors constant. This finding demonstrates that governance-oriented programming contributes positively to citizens' perceptions of governance outcomes.

The findings corroborate previous studies that have highlighted the role of radio in promoting democratic participation and accountability. For example, Africa's Voices Foundation (2022) found that interactive radio platforms increased citizens' sense of inclusion in governance processes, while Wachira et al. (2024) reported that community radio significantly enhanced public awareness and citizen engagement. Similarly, Awuor et al. (2026) observed that audience participation in radio programming strengthened community ownership of public discourse and local development initiatives.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Sulwe FM's programming practices exert a strong, statistically significant positive effect on perceived good governance in Bungoma County. Station practices account for 69.4% of the variance in governance perceptions, establishing radio programming as a key driver of public awareness, institutional transparency, civic participation, responsiveness, and accountability within Kenya's devolved governance framework. This positive impact is driven primarily by the strategic use of local-language broadcasting in Lubukusu alongside interactive formats like call-in shows, live interviews, and civic education broadcasts. These practices lower communication barriers, make complex governance matters accessible, and create practical channels for direct dialogue between residents and county leadership.

However, the station's ultimate effectiveness remains constrained by operational and structural limitations. These challenges include restricted airtime for governance topics, political pressures, limited investigative reporting, and the underrepresentation of women, youth, and marginalized populations.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Sulwe FM Management

1. Sulwe FM should increase the frequency and duration of governance-oriented programmes to provide listeners with more opportunities to engage with public affairs issues and obtain information regarding county governance.
2. The station should strengthen interactive programming by expanding call-in sessions, audience feedback mechanisms, interviews, and panel discussions involving citizens, community leaders, and county officials.
3. Sulwe FM should enhance investigative and analytical reporting on governance issues to promote greater transparency, accountability, and public understanding of county development initiatives.
4. The station should maintain editorial independence and ensure balanced representation of different viewpoints to strengthen public trust and credibility.

Recommendations for County Government of Bungoma

5. The County Government of Bungoma should collaborate with local radio stations to disseminate information on public participation forums, development projects, budgets, and policy initiatives in a timely and accessible manner.
6. County officials should actively participate in governance-related radio programmes to improve responsiveness, address citizen concerns, and strengthen government-public communication.
7. The county government should utilize vernacular radio as a strategic tool for civic education and public awareness on governance issues, particularly in rural areas.

Recommendations for Civic Organizations and Development Partners

8. Civil society organizations should support vernacular radio stations in implementing civic education programmes that promote citizen awareness of governance processes, constitutional rights, and public participation opportunities.
9. Stakeholders should support initiatives that increase participation by women, youth, persons with disabilities, and residents of remote areas in governance discussions aired on local radio stations.

Recommendations for Future Research

10. Comparative studies involving multiple vernacular radio stations across different counties should be conducted to determine whether the findings observed in Bungoma County are applicable in other devolved governance contexts.

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