
ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIA INTERVENTION IN ENHANCING PUBLIC SECURITY: A CASE OF CHISI VILLAGE IN MZUZU

***Debora Phambala, Justin Makamo**

DMI–St. John the Baptist University, School of Social Work, Lilongwe Campus
Malawi.

Article Received: 28 July 2026, Article Revised: 18 August 2026, Published on: 08 September 2026

***Corresponding Author: Debora Phambala**

DMI–St. John the Baptist University, School of Social Work, Lilongwe Campus Malawi.

Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.8038>

ABSTRACT

Public security is an important component of community well-being and national development. It involves the prevention and reduction of crime, promotion of safety, disaster preparedness, public health protection and community participation. Media interventions have increasingly become important tools for promoting public security by disseminating information, creating awareness, encouraging civic participation and influencing safety-related behaviours. In Malawi, community radio, social media, public announcements and community-based communication platforms are increasingly used to communicate safety information. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions at community level, particularly in rural and peri-urban settings.

This study assessed the effectiveness of media interventions in enhancing public security in Chisi Village, Mzuzu. Specifically, the study sought to determine the types of media interventions used to promote public safety, examine community perceptions of their effectiveness, and determine the relationship between exposure to media interventions and public safety outcomes. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. A total sample of 40 participants was targeted, comprising community members, local leaders and media personnel. Structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were used to collect data. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and correlation analysis, while qualitative information was analysed thematically.

The findings showed that community radio was the dominant source of public safety information, accounting for 60% of responses, followed by social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook at 25%. Public announcements and community meetings each accounted for 7.5%. Overall, 70% of respondents considered media interventions either effective or very effective. Reported behavioural changes included improved waste disposal practices (37.5%), increased reporting of crimes (30%) and participation in community policing (20%). A moderate positive relationship was found between media exposure and public safety behaviours ($R = 0.512$, $p = 0.016$), with media exposure explaining 26.2% of the variation in safety practices. However, low literacy, limited internet connectivity, inadequate digital access and weak follow-up mechanisms constrained the effectiveness of interventions. The study concludes that media interventions contribute positively to public security but are more effective when combined with participatory community initiatives and institutional support.

KEYWORDS: Media intervention, public security, community radio, social media, community participation, Chisi Village, Mzuzu, Malawi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public security is essential to the well-being, stability and development of communities. It includes protection from crime, accidents, disasters and other risks that threaten people and property. In contemporary society, media interventions have become important instruments for creating awareness, educating citizens and encouraging behavioural change. Traditional and digital media can provide timely information about safety risks, mobilize citizens and facilitate communication between communities and authorities.

In Malawi, media platforms such as community radio, mobile phones and social media have increasingly been used to communicate information on crime prevention, disaster preparedness, sanitation, road safety and community responsibilities. Community media can be particularly important in areas where formal communication structures and institutional resources are limited. However, access to information does not necessarily guarantee behavioural change.

Chisi Village in Mzuzu provides an important context for examining this issue. The community experiences public safety concerns including petty crime, poor waste disposal and other forms of community disorder. Although safety messages are disseminated through radio

programmes, social media groups, public announcements and community initiatives, concerns remain regarding whether exposure to these messages results in sustained behavioural change.

The study therefore assessed the effectiveness of media interventions in enhancing public security in Chisi Village. The research was motivated by the gap between the dissemination of safety information and the observable adoption of safety-related behaviours.

2. Problem Statement

Over the past two decades, access to communication technologies in Malawi has increased, creating greater opportunities for government agencies, non-governmental organizations and communities to use media for public safety campaigns. Radio remains particularly important because of its broad accessibility, while mobile phones and social media provide opportunities for rapid information sharing.

Despite the increased use of media interventions, public safety challenges continue to affect communities. In Chisi Village, issues such as petty theft, poor waste disposal, street vending and limited participation in community safety initiatives remain concerns. Repeated media sensitization does not always appear to result in sustained changes in behaviour.

The central problem addressed by this study was the limited evidence concerning whether media exposure actually translates into improved public safety practices at community level. Factors such as limited digital access, low literacy, unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity, lack of follow-up and community trust may affect the effectiveness of media interventions.

3. Objectives of the Study

3.1 Main Objective

The main objective was to assess the effectiveness of media interventions in improving public security among people in Malawi, with particular focus on Chisi Village in Mzuzu.

3.2 Specific Objectives

1. Determine the types of media interventions applied in promoting public safety in Chisi Village.
2. Examine community perceptions regarding the effectiveness of media interventions in improving security in Chisi Village.

3. Determine the relationship between exposure to media interventions and public safety outcomes in Chisi Village.

4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature reviewed in the project shows that media interventions can contribute to public safety by improving knowledge, shaping attitudes, encouraging community participation and promoting behavioural change. Traditional media, particularly community radio, remain important in rural settings because of their accessibility and ability to deliver information in locally relevant languages.

Digital platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS and mobile applications, provide additional opportunities for rapid information sharing. Combining traditional and digital communication can potentially increase coverage and engagement. However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on accessibility, credibility, cultural relevance, community participation and institutional support.

Previous studies reviewed in the project indicate that media interventions can substantially increase public awareness, although awareness does not automatically result in sustained behavioural change. Barriers include unreliable electricity, poor network connectivity, low literacy, language barriers, limited access to digital technologies, inadequate financial resources and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided principally by Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Communication for Development (C4D) approach.

Social Cognitive Theory explains how individuals learn behaviours through observation, modelling and reinforcement. In the context of public safety, media messages can demonstrate appropriate behaviours such as proper waste disposal, crime reporting and participation in community policing. The theory also emphasizes self-efficacy, meaning that individuals are more likely to adopt recommended behaviours when they believe they are capable of doing so.

The Communication for Development approach emphasizes participatory, inclusive and culturally appropriate communication. It encourages communities to participate in identifying problems, developing messages, providing feedback and implementing solutions. The

approach therefore promotes local ownership and increases the credibility and sustainability of communication interventions.

The theoretical relationship applied in the study can be summarized as:

Media Messages → Community Engagement and Dialogue → Observational Learning → Self-Efficacy → Behaviour Change → Enhanced Public Security.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed-methods approach enabled the researcher to measure exposure to media interventions and reported safety outcomes while also exploring community perceptions, experiences and challenges.

The study was conducted in Chisi Village, Mzuzu. The target population consisted of adults in the community, local leaders and media personnel involved in or affected by public safety communication. A total sample of 40 participants was selected using purposive sampling.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. A pilot study was conducted in Msongwe Village, Mzuzu, involving eight participants to assess the clarity and suitability of the research instruments.

Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages and correlation analysis. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between media exposure and public safety behaviours. Qualitative data from focus group discussions and key informant interviews were analysed thematically. Ethical principles including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation were observed.

6. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

6.1 Response Rate and Participant Characteristics

The study targeted 40 participants and achieved a 75% response rate, with 30 questionnaires returned. The study also incorporated qualitative information from community members, local leaders and media personnel.

The gender distribution consisted of 22 males (55%) and 18 females (45%). Regarding age, 40% of respondents were aged 31–45 years, 35% were aged 18–30 years, 17.5% were aged 46–60 years and 7.5% were above 60 years.

6.2 Types of Media Interventions Used

Community radio programmes were the most widely used media intervention, accounting for 24 respondents or 60%. Social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook, accounted for 25%. Public announcements and community meetings each accounted for 7.5%.

Community radio was therefore the dominant communication channel because of its accessibility and ability to reach households with limited access to digital technologies. Social media was valued for rapid information sharing, particularly regarding incidents such as theft and suspicious activities.

Media Intervention	Frequency	Percent
Community Radio Programs	24	60.0%
Social Media (WhatsApp/Facebook)	10	25.0%
Public Announcements	3	7.5%
Community Meetings	3	7.5%

6.3 Community Perceptions of Media Effectiveness

The findings showed generally positive perceptions of media interventions. Thirty percent of respondents considered them very effective, while 40% considered them effective. A further 17.5% considered them moderately effective and 12.5% considered them not effective. Overall, 70% regarded media interventions as either effective or very effective.

Respondents reported increased awareness of crime prevention, improved knowledge of waste management and improved communication between citizens and local authorities. However, qualitative findings showed that awareness did not always translate into behavioural change, with participants noting limited follow-up in some interventions.

Perceived Effectiveness	Frequency	Percent
Very Effective	12	30.0%
Effective	16	40.0%
Moderately Effective	7	17.5%
Not Effective	5	12.5%

6.4 Behavioural Changes Associated with Media Exposure

The most frequently reported behavioural change was improved waste disposal practices (37.5%), followed by increased reporting of crimes (30%) and participation in community policing (20%). Only 12.5% reported no noticeable change.

These findings suggest that media interventions contributed to practical changes in community safety practices, although some individuals remained less responsive to the messages.

Behavioural Change	Frequency	Percent
Improved waste disposal practices	15	37.5%
Increased reporting of crimes	12	30.0%
Participation in community policing	8	20.0%
No noticeable change	5	12.5%

6.5 Relationship Between Media Exposure and Public Safety

The correlation analysis established a moderate positive relationship between exposure to media interventions and public safety behaviours. The results were $R = 0.512$, $R^2 = 0.262$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.245$, $p = 0.016$, with a standard error of 0.623.

The R^2 value indicates that approximately 26.2% of the variation in community safety practices was associated with media exposure. The statistically significant result suggests that consistent exposure to trusted media platforms contributes meaningfully to safety outcomes, while also demonstrating that other social, economic and infrastructural factors influence public safety.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that community radio remains highly relevant to public safety communication in Chisi Village. Its dominance reflects the importance of accessible communication channels in communities where digital access may be limited. Social media, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook, provides an important complementary channel because it enables rapid and interactive communication.

The positive perceptions of media interventions indicate that community members generally recognize the value of media in providing safety information. The 70% positive effectiveness rating demonstrates that media interventions have an important awareness-building function.

However, the study also identified an important distinction between awareness and sustained behavioural change. Although respondents reported improvements in waste disposal, crime reporting and community policing, some participants indicated that people sometimes receive messages without changing their behaviour. This suggests that communication interventions need to move beyond one-way information dissemination towards participatory and continuous engagement.

The moderate positive correlation between media exposure and public safety behaviours provides quantitative evidence supporting the role of media. However, the R^2 of 0.262 demonstrates that media exposure explains only part of the observed variation. Social, economic, infrastructural and community factors also influence whether people are able and willing to act on safety information.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that media interventions play a significant role in enhancing public security in Chisi Village, Mzuzu. Community radio emerged as the most widely used and trusted source of public safety information, while social media provided an important complementary communication channel.

The findings demonstrate that media interventions contribute to public awareness and are associated with positive safety-related behaviours. Improvements were particularly evident in waste disposal practices, crime reporting and community policing.

However, media exposure alone is not sufficient to guarantee sustained behavioural change. The effectiveness of media interventions is influenced by literacy, digital access, infrastructure, community participation, trust and follow-up mechanisms. Consequently, public safety communication should be integrated with participatory community initiatives, institutional support and continuous monitoring.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Media Organizations

Media organizations should strengthen community radio programming because it remains the dominant and accessible communication channel in Chisi Village. Safety information should be communicated in locally appropriate languages and should address issues that directly affect community members.

Media organizations should diversify communication channels by combining radio with WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS and other mobile communication platforms. Participatory programmes should allow community members to contribute to discussions, report safety concerns and provide feedback.

Safety messages should be repeated strategically and supported by follow-up activities so that awareness can be translated into sustained behavioural change.

9.2 Government and Policymakers

Government and policymakers should improve communication infrastructure in communities such as Chisi Village. Better mobile network coverage, internet connectivity and reliable electricity would improve access to digital and traditional media.

Government institutions should support community-based media initiatives financially and technically and establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating public safety communication programmes. Greater collaboration between government, media organizations and community structures should be encouraged to improve the credibility and consistency of safety information.

9.3 Community Leaders

Community leaders should encourage residents to participate actively in public safety initiatives. Community meetings and dialogue platforms should allow residents to discuss safety concerns and provide feedback on media messages.

Local leaders should strengthen collaboration among community members, law enforcement agencies, local authorities and media organizations. They should also establish follow-up mechanisms to reinforce messages and encourage behavioural change.

9.4 Researchers and Academics

Future researchers should examine the relationship between media exposure and public safety in other geographical and social contexts. Studies should investigate the long-term effects of media interventions and compare traditional media, social media, mobile communication and interpersonal communication.

Longitudinal research is particularly recommended to determine whether behavioural changes associated with media exposure are sustained over time. Comparative studies

between rural and urban communities could also provide greater understanding of contextual differences.

10. Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for public safety policy in Malawi. Public safety communication strategies should combine traditional and digital media while emphasizing community participation and cultural relevance.

The Communication for Development approach suggests that communities should not simply receive information but should actively participate in identifying problems, developing communication messages and evaluating interventions. Such participation can improve message credibility, community ownership and sustainability.

Public safety interventions should therefore involve media organizations, government institutions, local authorities, community organizations and citizens working together. An integrated approach is more likely to produce sustainable outcomes than isolated media campaigns.

11. Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in only one village in Mzuzu, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other communities. The sample consisted of 40 participants, which may not fully capture the experiences and perceptions of the wider population. Some findings were based on self-reported behaviours and perceptions and may therefore be affected by recall problems or respondent bias. Financial and time limitations also restricted the geographical scope and participant coverage of the research.

12. Areas for Further Research

Future research should examine the long-term effects of media interventions through longitudinal research designs. Researchers should also investigate how traditional and digital media can be combined to produce stronger behavioural outcomes.

Comparative studies between rural and urban communities are recommended to determine how context influences media effectiveness. Further research should also examine the influence of trust, culture, community participation and socio-economic conditions on responses to safety communication interventions.

13. Overall Summary

This study assessed the effectiveness of media interventions in enhancing public security in Chisi Village, Mzuzu. The research established that community radio remains the principal channel through which residents receive public safety information, while social media provides an increasingly important complementary platform.

The majority of respondents viewed media interventions positively, with 70% rating them effective or very effective. Media exposure was associated with positive changes in waste disposal, crime reporting and community policing. The statistical analysis further demonstrated a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between media exposure and public safety behaviours.

Nevertheless, communication alone cannot solve all public safety challenges. Low literacy, limited internet connectivity, inadequate digital access, infrastructural limitations and insufficient follow-up reduce the sustainability of media interventions.

The study therefore recommends an integrated approach in which media organizations, government institutions, community leaders and citizens work together. Community radio should remain central, but it should be complemented by digital platforms, interpersonal communication, community participation and continuous follow-up.

Overall, the study demonstrates that media interventions can make an important contribution to public security in Chisi Village, but their greatest impact is likely to occur when communication is participatory, accessible, trusted, culturally relevant and supported by broader community and institutional structures.

REFERENCES

1. Abebe, T., Bekele, D., & Mekonnen, A. (2024). Integrated communication strategies and vaccine uptake in Africa: A systematic review. *African Journal of Public Health*, 18(2), 45–62.
2. Adebayo, A., Ojo, S., & Alabi, M. (2023). Mobile-based alert systems for disaster management in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 76, 103143.
3. Babbie, E. (2020). *The practice of social research* (15th ed.). Cengage Learning.
4. Banda, J., Phiri, K., & Zulu, T. (2021). Participatory media and community engagement in Malawi. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 13(3), 301–320.

5. Bandura, A. (2018). Social cognitive theory. Routledge.
6. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. Sage Publications.
7. Chavinda, R. (2023). Community media and public safety communication.
8. Creswell, J. W. (2019). Research design. Sage Publications.
9. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Sage Publications.
10. González-Torres, L. (2022). Community safety campaigns and media interventions in Southern Africa.
11. MISA Malawi. (2024). Community broadcasting and public information in Malawi.
12. Mutupha, M., & Gama, [details as cited in the original project]. (2024). Media interventions and public safety communication.
13. Ngumuya, [details as cited in the original project]. (2024). Public security and community safety.
14. Ngwira, [details as cited in the original project], & Watanabe, [details as cited in the original project]. (2019). Media communication and community engagement.
15. Tufte, T., & Mefalopulos, P. (2020). Communication for development and social change.
16. United Nations. (2023). Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions.