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A Study on Young Adult Listeners' Perceptions of English Usage on Hitz FM and TraXX FM in Klang Valley

Chai Hui Yee^{1*}

¹Faculty of Communication and Creative Industries, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: chaihy-wp20@student.tarc.edu.my; ORCID iD: 0009-0000-2264-8164

ABSTRACT

Radio has been a powerful medium for educating and informing audiences through various types of content, whether informative or entertaining. This study explores the relationship between the formality of English language usage on radio and audience perceptions, focusing on Hitz FM and TraXX FM. Examining the characteristics of each language style used by the two radio stations, associated perceptions, and their impact on listeners' station preferences sheds light on the language factor influencing listenership in this research. For data collection, the target population focuses on young adults aged 18 to 29 residing in the Klang Valley region who are listeners of both Hitz FM and TraXX FM. The data was analysed using SPSS software through three methods: descriptive analysis, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, and cross-tabulation to assess the relationships between language style, audience perception, and listenership. The findings indicate the relationship between language style, audience perception, and radio listenership. Results showed that listeners preferred Hitz FM's informal language style over Hitz FM's formal style of TraXX FM, leading to higher listenership for Hitz FM.

Keywords: audience perceptions, language formality, radio listenership, Hitz FM, TraXX FM

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Introduction

In Malaysia, there are 20.2 million listeners every week who listen to the radio daily, making it one of the most popular communication mediums to reach Malaysians (The Star, 2018). According to the MCMC Radio Users Survey 2017, young adults were the primary age group with the highest radio listenership. They ranged from age 20 to 34 years. Selangor stood out as the highest percentage of active listeners (23.5%) among all the states in Malaysia (MCMC, 2017). Besides, radio serves multiple purposes for young adult listeners, including as a habitual pastime, a source of entertainment, or a platform for language enhancement on their listening and speaking skills (Birsen, 2012).

Malaysia's linguistic diversity has shaped its radio landscape, with stations broadcasting in Malay, Mandarin, English, and regional dialects (Nielsen, 2015). As a result, code-mixing (inserting phrases from one language into another) and code-switching (alternating between languages within a conversation) are common in Malaysian English, or "Manglish" (Lee, 2015). While some radio stations maintain a strict single-language approach, many embrace this multilingual blend to connect with audiences.

Malaysian English is a unique adaptation of standard English, shaped by the country's multicultural influences (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). With its localised vocabulary and grammar, informal Manglish fosters a sense of closeness and relatability (Grusha, 2020). On the other hand, standard English, structured and precise, is typically associated with professionalism and is often used in news, academia, and formal workplace settings (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Indeed, 2022). In the media industry, however, these distinctions are not always clear-cut. Radio stations tailor their language styles to their audience, blending entertainment with information to influence listener engagement.

Among the English-language stations in Malaysia, Hitz FM and TraXX FM stand out with their distinct approaches. Hitz FM, a commercial station under Astro, is Malaysia's leading English-language radio station, attracting 2.4 million weekly listeners (Astro, 2023). Its success lies in its engaging, informal style, which includes frequent code-switching and a conversational tone that resonates with its predominantly young audience (Astro, n.d). On the other hand, TraXX FM is a public radio channel owned and funded by the Malaysian government through Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) (Astro, n.d.). Its programming adopts information with entertainment in a mixed format, focusing on news and talk shows with a structured tone.

While both radio stations target the same audience (young adults), they use different language approaches to communicate with their audience. Hence, it is important to understand young adults' language preferences. They mostly value the blend of casual and engaging content from entertainment radio stations like Hitz FM (Gutiérrez et al., 2011). However, at the same time, they also recognise informative radio stations like TraXX FM that are professional with dull content while being highly credible (Curran, 2021). Due to their contrasting perception of language usage by these two types of radio stations, this study aims to find out whether the language formality of radio stations will affect listener perception and radio station preference.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Does radio stations' English style usage directly affect their listenership from the comparison between Hitz FM and TraXX FM?
2. How do audiences perceive informal English usage by Hitz FM and formal English usage by TraXX FM?

Literature Review

English Usage of Media in Malaysia

Society employs language to communicate effectively with one another. The media must use language proficiently to form clear messaging that can resonate with their target audience. In order to achieve this, media utilise a set of beliefs on how language should be accurately used in different contexts (Jones et al., 2020). This is known as language ideologies. These ideologies function as a compass across different media outlets, be it traditional print media or modern new media, to guide their tone, style and linguistic strategies.

Malaysian English media industry has a history of shifting language policies over the past fifty years (Prasithrathsint et al., 2019). These policy changes have disrupted the instruction and utilisation of the English language. Consequently, English's status as an "official language" aligns with its prominent usage in the upper echelons of English media. The content generated by the media can be categorised into two distinct levels, which are the symbolic level and the literal level (Jones et al., 2020):

- The symbolic level is where language reflects cultural norms and identity.
- The literal level is where the focus is on storytelling and delivering information.

New media platforms, notably social media, stand as emblematic embodiments of the symbolic level of communication. Within this context, English-language status updates, stories, and other posts on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram predominantly adopt an informal tone while emphasising human interaction (Koliska et al., 2021). Youlton (2022) revealed that employing informal linguistic styles tends to foster audience loyalty, leading them to return to a brand for social media marketing. This approach is associated with a higher rate of interactive engagement, as audiences appreciate the sense of human connection inherent in a more casual register.

In contrast, traditional media, such as newspapers, operate at the literal level, prioritising precision, structure, and professionalism (Anyim, 2021). Publications like *The Star* and *New Straits Times* follow strict linguistic standards, using formal English with structured writing formats like the inverted pyramid style (*The Star*, 2020). Unlike digital media, newspapers avoid excessive code-mixing or code-switching, maintaining linguistic professionalism. However, culturally significant phrases such as *buka puasa* (instead of "break fast") are often retained to preserve authenticity (Youlton, 2022). This approach reflects the prestige associated with written media, which continues to set the standard for professional communication.

English Usage of Radio in Malaysia

Radio is a purely audio-based medium. Hence, it relies heavily on language style and delivery to connect with its audience. The way broadcasters speak, whether formally or informally, plays a key role in shaping listener engagement. For the Malaysian radio industry, the language used is not fixed. This is because of the operation of radio stations under different ownership: state-owned or independent radio stations.

For state-owned radio stations such as TraXX FM, broadcasters are responsible for maintaining the 'standard' variety, particularly in terms of pronunciation. The pronunciation they tried to refer to is the Received Pronunciation (RP), known colloquially as 'the Queen's English' (Jones et al., 2020). Other than news, programmes like frequent PSAs and important BBC English programmes aired on TraXX FM are designed to be densely packed with information. Hence, given such content context, the broadcasters will use a professional tone to deliver messages by aiming to build credibility and trust with their audience (Boateng & Acquaye, 2021).

On the contrary, private stations such as Hitz FM adhere to innovative concepts in their programme designs. Their programming usually involves drama, quizzes, phone-ins, and chat shows. In such a context, broadcasters will take a more stylistic and conversational approach to delivering their content. In this case, informal English with code-mixing of Malay will often be heard as their approach to resonate with their younger audiences, slowly building immediacy and familiarity (Fakir et al., 2021).

Public-owned radio stations were conceived as a form of "public address" based on standard English, which labels the standard as preserving all costs under the ideology of standardisation (Jones et al., 2020). Conversely, private FM, which operates as commercial broadcasting, has to become more responsive to audience ratings where it must respond to the needs and interests of varied groups if they want their media products to be listened to, which falls under the ideology of innovation (Jones et al., 2020).

Young Adults' Language Style and Identities

Besides being a communication tool, language also holds the power to signal affiliation with specific communities. This linguistic choice is often tied to the desire to align oneself with a particular social group and its associated lifestyle (Turner, 2023). The way individuals speak is a deliberate act to establish membership within a specific social stratum. This notion holds particular significance in the context of the young adult age group, which constitutes the target audience of radio stations.

Young adults aged 18 to 30 belong to the "millennial" generation, which was born during the digital era of the Internet's rapid expansion. Their linguistic inclinations are substantially influenced by internet slang, formed by its cultural backdrop and linguistic variations (Turner, 2023). In Malaysia, this phenomenon takes the form of Manglish.

However, as informal language gains prominence, it has become a subject of critique. According to Jones et al. (2020), media critics have labelled this style as a toxic phenomenon rather than a social identity marker. They further explained that such an informal style frequently used in the media to convey non-linguistic attributes will reinforce stereotypes. Lastly, it will lead to the phenomenon of iconisation in which specific language features are tied to broader social identities (Jones et al., 2020). In young adult listeners' context, it means their language style is iconised with their age.

Audience Perception towards Radio

Despite the rise of digital media, radio remains a relevant and widely consumed medium, especially in Malaysia. Its accessibility, portability, and ability to provide real-time audio content make it a trusted companion for listeners during their daily routines, whether commuting, working, or relaxing at home (Phiri & Hossain, 2022). Unlike television or online media, radio relies entirely on audio engagement, making voice delivery and conversational style key elements in shaping audience perception.

One of the aspects influencing radio listenership is the radio jockeys' personality and style. Their captivating voice, engaging storytelling, and relatable tone are important to keep listeners entertained and loyal. Many private commercial radio stations like Hitz FM have RJs who embrace a casual conversational style that adds a unique twist to their voices. Many will also incorporate code-switching by humanising the content to build intimacy with the audiences (Ranasuriya, 2015). This informal approach makes radio feel personal and interactive as the audience recognises their voice as a "close friend" who constantly speaks with them.

Additionally, successful radio stations will incorporate two-way communication to boost their language interactivity in the eyes of the audience. This shift empowers audiences to transform from passive listeners to active contributors (Jones et al., 2020). These interactive approaches include involving audiences in discussions by encouraging their call-in for quiz shows or sharing their viewpoints on radio stations' social media posts.

Engaging participants' discussions often revolve around their perception of the informativeness and formality of broadcasts. Participants tend to compare the level of information a broadcast provides and its degree of formality, with more formal broadcasts generally being perceived as more informative (Youlton, 2022). This highlights the interplay between the formality of language and the perception of information quality in radio content.

Relationship Between Language Style, Audience Perception, and Radio Listenership

Language style and audience perception operate within the framework of language ideologies. This concept plays a pivotal role in shaping the perceived suitability of specific languages for various media platforms. As highlighted by Chukwunalu et al. (2022), the use of appropriate language is paramount for effective information dissemination. Failing to employ the language perceived as appropriate by the audience may lead them to believe that the conveyed information is not intended for them, subsequently hindering their comprehension and engagement with the content. Consequently, the language adopted by a radio media outlet, aligning with audience perception expectations, significantly influences the extent of listenership and the overall effectiveness of its services.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which conceptualizes media audiences as active participants who deliberately select media content to satisfy specific needs. Rather than focusing solely on the content provided by media, UGT emphasizes the motivations behind individuals' media choices (Baran & Davis, 2013). It offers a user-centred approach that highlights the purposive nature of media consumption.

The origins of this perspective can be traced to Harold Lasswell's (1948) identification of four core functions of the media: surveillance, or the role of informing the public about current events; correlation, which helps audiences interpret and understand their environment; entertainment, providing enjoyment and escape from routine life; and cultural transmission, the conveyance of societal norms, values, and traditions. These foundational ideas were later extended by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), who categorized audience motivations into four broad dimensions: diversion, referring to the use of media for relaxation and escape; personal relationships, involving social utility and shared media experiences; personal identity, through content that resonates with an individual's values or lifestyle; and surveillance, as a means to remain informed about current affairs and societal developments.

In the context of radio listenership, UGT is particularly relevant, as listeners actively select stations that align with their psychological and social gratifications (Beachy, 2024). These needs have been further refined into five specific categories, as outlined by Azhar (n.d.): cognitive needs, which involve the acquisition of information and understanding; affective needs, related to emotional satisfaction and sensory experience; personal integrative needs, associated with reinforcing self-confidence and personal values; social integrative needs, involving a desire for affiliation and social bonding; and tension release needs, where media function as a tool for stress relief and escapism.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which audience behaviour, particularly in the domain of radio can be analysed, emphasizing the centrality of user motivation and the fulfilment of diverse personal needs in shaping media consumption patterns.

Methods

This research utilised a quantitative approach to explore young adults' perceptions of the English language used on Hitz FM and TraXX FM. Quantitative research enables the development of systematic, reproducible, and generalisable results (Allen et al., 2008). This approach ensures that the conclusions are relevant for the young adult population in Klang Valley.

After specifying the research method, data was collected through an online survey using Google Forms. The survey link was sent to identified respondents who listened to both radio stations. These respondents then recommended others who shared the same traits to the researcher. Hence, snowball sampling was utilised to recruit participants aged 18–29 who were regular listeners of both radio stations. The survey was also shared across social media platforms (Instagram, Xiaohongshu, TikTok) to recruit participants. This method addresses the challenge of identifying TraXX FM listeners by harnessing the power of networking. A sample size of 300 respondents was targeted.

The data collection instrument was a Google Form survey, which consisted of 16 questions divided into four main groups: demographics, English usage on Hitz FM, English usage on TraXX FM, and general perspectives on English usage by radio stations. One of the variables obtained from the questionnaire was nominal data (demographics), and the second was interval data (emotional perception of command on language styles).

After receiving the questionnaire responses, the data was analysed using SPSS. Three statistical methods were applied: descriptive analysis, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, and cross-tabulation, in order to assess the relationships between language style, perception, and listenership.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

According to Table 1, the descriptive analysis of listeners' perceptions of Hitz FM focuses on four aspects with an overall high mean score and small standard deviation compared to their respective mean score, implying a higher level of consistency in listeners' assessment.

It proves that respondents are more inclined to perceive Hitz FM's language usage as informal, with an entertainment-oriented programme that involves code-switching and code-mixing and agreeing with their language style as professional.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis of Listeners' Perceptions of Hitz FM

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception of Informal Language Usage	4.25	0.772
Perception of Entertainment-Oriented Programming	3.98	0.861
Assessment of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Usage	4.01	0.745
Agreement Level of Language Style Affecting Professionalism	3.88	0.866

According to Table 2, the descriptive analysis of listeners' perceptions of TraXX FM focuses on four aspects with an overall high mean score and small standard deviation compared to their respective mean score, implying a higher level of consistency in listeners' assessment.

It proves that respondents are more inclined to perceive TraXX FM's language usage as formal, with an information-oriented programme that involves a formal tone, while agreeing that their language style is professional.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Listeners' Perceptions of TraXX FM

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception of Formal Language Usage	4.21	0.802
Perception of Information-Oriented Programming	4.34	0.678
Assessment of Formal Tone and Received Pronunciation	4.20	0.783
Agreement Level of Language Style Affecting Professionalism	4.26	0.740

Pearson Correlation Coefficient

According to Table 3, the correlation analysis highlights statistically significant relationships between key variables related to listeners' perceptions of Hitz FM. A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$) was found between listeners' perception of entertainment-oriented programming and informal language usage, indicating that as perceptions of entertainment programming increase, so does the perception of informal language. Similarly, a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.247$, $p < 0.001$) was observed between informal language usage and the assessment of code-switching and code-mixing, suggesting that the more informal the language is perceived, the higher the acknowledgement of code-switching and code-mixing usage. Lastly, a very weak positive correlation ($r = 0.146$, $p = 0.011$) was identified between informal language usage and agreement on its impact on professionalism, demonstrating a subtle but significant relationship. These findings emphasise the interconnectedness of Hitz FM's informal language style, its entertainment focus, and its perceived professionalism.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis of Listeners' Perceptions of Hitz FM

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (p)
Perception of Informal Language Usage ↔ Entertainment-Oriented Programming	0.249	< 0.001
Perception of Informal Language Usage ↔ Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Usage	0.247	< 0.001
Perception of Informal Language Usage ↔ Agreement on Language Style Affecting Professionalism	0.146	0.011

According to Table 4, the correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between listeners' perceptions of TraXX FM's formal language usage and key aspects of its programming. A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.406$, $p < 0.001$) was found between listeners' perception of formal language usage and information-oriented programming, suggesting that audiences perceive the station as more formal and associate it with delivering informative content. Similarly, a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.449$, $p < 0.001$) was observed between formal language perception and the assessment of formal tone and Received Pronunciation, reinforcing that listeners equate linguistic formality with a structured and professional radio tone. Lastly, the strongest correlation ($r = 0.532$, $p < 0.001$) was found between the perception of formal language and the belief that TraXX FM's language style enhances its professionalism. This indicates that as listeners perceive greater linguistic formality, they are more likely to associate it with credibility and professionalism in radio broadcasting.

Table 4

Correlation of Listeners' Perceptions of TraXX FM

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (p)
Perception of Formal Language Usage ↔ Information-Oriented Programming	0.406	< 0.001
Perception of Formal Language Usage ↔ Formal Tone and Received Pronunciation	0.449	< 0.001
Perception of Formal Language Usage ↔ Agreement on Language Style Affecting Professionalism	0.532	< 0.001

Cross Tabulation Analysis

Crosstabs between Listeners' Preference of Language Style and Listeners' Perceptions of Formal Radio Style Characteristics

According to Table A1 in Appendix A, notable shifts in listener perceptions were observed in the characteristics of formal language style and language preferences. Among those strongly disapproving of informal language over formal language on radio, 28.6% strongly disagreed that the formal style is boring and rigid, while none (0%) strongly agreed. Conversely, 57.1% of those strongly disagree that the formal style is boring and rigid strongly preferred informal language, compared to 40.6% of those

strongly agreeing with the formal style's rigidity. This indicates a relationship between listener perceptions of language style and their views on the formal style's characteristics.

For instance, when respondents strongly disagreed that the formal style of radio is boring and rigid and strongly preferred informal over formal language, a notable count of 4 was observed, compared to the expected count of 1.9. This difference, indicated by a standardised residual of 1.6, suggests a notable deviation from what would be expected if the variables were independent.

Conversely, when respondents strongly agreed that the formal style of radio is boring and rigid and strongly preferred informal over formal language section, the observed count substantially exceeded expectations, with an observed count of 26 compared to the expected count of 17.1. This difference is highlighted by a standardised residual of 2.2, showing a significant deviation from what was expected.

These findings indicate a potentially meaningful association between listeners' perceptions of the formal radio style and their preference for language style when listening. When the observed counts were higher than expected, it indicates a notable difference from what would be predicted if the variables were unrelated. In this context, people who find formal radio styles boring and rigid prefer informal language. Similarly, those who did not see formal styles as rigid also preferred informal language, although not as much. Overall, these observations highlight the nuanced relationship between listeners' perceptions of radio language styles and their preferences, underscoring the dynamic nature of audience responses to different linguistic approaches.

Moreover, according to Table 5, with 16 degrees of freedom and a p-value of <0.001, the chi-square test indicates a highly significant relationship between the variables. This suggests a strong association, rejecting the null hypothesis of independence.

Table 5

Chi-Square Tests of the Listeners' Preference of Language Style and Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style Characteristics

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	197.238	16	< .001
Likelihood Ratio	74.400	16	< .001
Linear-by-Linear Association	48.850	1	< .001

N of Valid Cases: 300

Note: N = valid responses; df = degree of freedom

a. 14 cells (56.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.

Crosstabs Listeners' Preference of Language Style and Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics

According to Table A2 in Appendix A, notable shifts in listener perceptions are observed in the characteristics of informal language style and language preferences. Among those who strongly disapproved of informal language over formal language on the radio, 66.7% expressed strong disagreement with the notion that the informal style is interesting and flexible, while none (0%) strongly agreed with this view. Conversely, among this same group, 33.3% strongly preferred informal language, compared to 41.6% of those who strongly agreed with the formal style's rigidity. This indicates a relationship between listener perceptions of language style and their views on the informal style's characteristics.

For instance, when respondents strongly disagreed that the informal style of radio is interesting and flexible under the section of strongly preferring informal over formal language, a notably observed count of 1 was recorded, compared to the expected count of 0.8. This difference, indicated by a standardised residual of 0.2, suggests a notable deviation from what would be expected if the variables

were independent. Conversely, when respondents strongly agreed that the informal radio style is interesting and flexible under the same language preference section, the observed count substantially exceeded expectations, with an observed count of 42 compared to the expected count of 26.9. This difference is highlighted by a standardised residual of 2.9, indicating a significant deviation from what was expected.

Based on the provided data, it can be concluded that listeners who perceived formal radio styles as boring and rigid tend to prefer informal language, especially if they find the informal radio style interesting and flexible. Surprisingly, those who did not see formal styles as rigid also exhibit a preference for informal language, albeit to a lesser extent. This suggests that while the conventional expectation is for individuals to associate formal styles with rigidity, some respondents in the study did not perceive formal language as rigid or had no strong feeling about its rigidity but still favoured informal language. They confirm the characteristics of informal and formal language; however, informal language emerges as the clear winner in any situation.

Moreover, according to Table 6, with 16 degrees of freedom and a p-value of <0.001, the chi-square test indicates a highly significant relationship between the variables. This suggests a strong association, rejecting the null hypothesis of independence.

In essence, these findings suggest that respondents who perceived the informal radio style as interesting and flexible are more likely to strongly prefer informal language over formal language when listening to the radio.

Table 6

Chi Square Tests of Listeners' Preference of Language Style and Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	108.032	16	< .001
Likelihood Ratio	68.507	16	< .001
Linear-by-Linear Association	28.615	1	< .001

N of Valid Cases: 300

Note: N = valid responses; df = degree of freedom

a. 11 cells (44.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis results obtained from the previous section, the study has successfully responded to the two research questions. As per the first research question, in terms of comparing the English language style of Hitz FM and TraXX FM in affecting their listenership, it has been found that the informal language style prioritised in Hitz FM is favoured more by the listeners than the formal language style that is frequently incorporated by TraXX FM, leading to the higher listenership of the former than the latter after proving that the language style is one of the direct factors affecting a radio station's rating.

The common perception is that people do not like the formal language style. Hence, they might be more likely to prefer the informal language style in Hitz FM. However, as the result shows, no matter how the listeners feel about the formal language (favouring, neutral, or disliking), they are all predominantly favoured in the informal radio language usage media. This could be mainly due to the young adults' listeners' perceived identities, with the interactive and informal language style commonly incorporated in new media (Gvirsman, 2023).

The second research question aimed to examine the audience's respective perceptions of informal English usage on Hitz FM and formal English usage on TraXX FM while indicating the characteristics they used to identify and classify such usage and their expectations towards them. Based on the results, as an informal English usage radio platform, it must focus on providing entertaining content, with frequent code-switching and code-mixing, allowing for interesting and flexible "language-playing" to create a humorous atmosphere. As the results show, the quality of radio content may be compromised in listeners' eyes. However, they can accept it as long as the language is informal, which contributes to a chilling and relaxing effect for them.

As suggested by the results, a formal English usage radio platform should focus on providing informational content with high expectations and a quality standard of formal English usage. Although listeners may find the content dull and rigid, as long as they perceive it as necessary for delivering the content or propaganda, they are willing to compromise and remain engaged. However, in such a context, they expect the English formality to be high, with formal codes of Received Pronunciation used as perfectly as possible to align with the quality of delivered content (Youlton, 2022). The reason for such expectations is to align with their common classification; once they hear such pronunciation incorporated, they will immediately recognise it as formal content for serious purposes, such as gaining important information or learning English, whereas the opposite applies to informal language (Birsen, 2012).

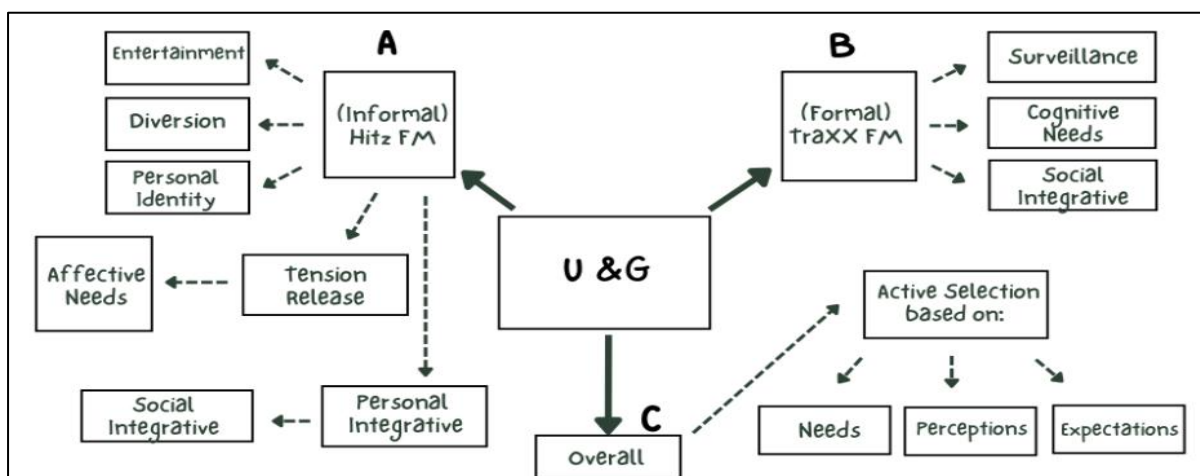
Overall, both radio stations serve as great companions during commutes or as supplements while doing other tasks. However, it largely depends on the immediate purposes of the audiences as to which station they tune into.

Theoretical Implications

Figure 1 shows how U&G theory is applied in listeners' selection of radio stations. The diagram is divided into three parts: A, B, and C. Part A explores how the theory applies to Hitz FM with its informal language style. Part B elaborates on the theory's application to TraXX FM with its formal language style. Part C summarises the core principles of the theory in relation to the overall fulfilment of audience needs. The application of UGT theory here refers to Beachy's (2024) research on the uses and gratifications analysis of traditional radio strategies to engage listeners.

Figure 1

U&G Theory Applied to Radio Listeners' Active Station Selection



Hitz FM (Part A)

As listeners perceive Hitz FM as a radio station with informal language usage, they will have active expectations as it provides content such as talk shows and music that are entertaining and relaxing to experience, thus leading to the diversion of their daily life routine and problems, fulfilling release of tension and affective needs. Simultaneously, it aligns with their personal identity by tuning in a channel that could identify them as young and vibrant, as Hitz FM has K-pop songs and entertainment content under *Hitz Gayo* that aligns with their diverse interests. Hence, such a part fulfils the personal and social integrative needs of the theory suggested by their identity seeking and fulfilment (Beachy, 2024).

TraXX FM (Part B)

As listeners perceive TraXX FM as a radio station with formal language usage, they will have active expectations that it will provide high-quality informational content that fulfils their cognitive and social integrative needs. Listeners value its emphasis on news, PSAs, and timely updates, contributing to their understanding of societal issues (Beachy, 2024). The formal tone and Received Pronunciation reinforce its credibility and align with listeners' expectations for informative programming.

Listeners' Active Selection (Part C)

The study demonstrates that audiences actively choose radio stations based on their specific needs, perceptions, and expectations (Sherwood, 2015). Informal and formal language styles serve as indicators of the type of content and experience a station offers, guiding listeners' preferences (Beachy, 2024). This reflects the core principle of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, where media users seek out platforms that best fulfil their needs (Baran & Davis, 2013).

The study demonstrates a strong relationship between language style, audience perception, and radio listenership. While informal styles are more engaging for younger audiences, formal styles retain their value for credibility and information delivery. Ultimately, the success of a radio station lies in its ability to adapt to audience preferences while maintaining professionalism, ensuring its place in an increasingly competitive industry.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on this topic can focus on broader social factors such as age, gender, social class, etc., which could potentially influence the results. As such, the study can further comprehensively analyse all these external contextual and social nuances, thus expanding the depth of understanding regarding the relationship between language formality and listenership in the radio industry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has answered the two research questions. It demonstrated a strong and positive relationship between language style, audience perception, and radio listenership. While the investigation focused on Malaysian radio stations by using Hitz FM and TraXX FMs as examples, the findings may have broader implications for radio industries in other countries, as evidenced by Chukwunalu et al.'s (2022) case study on Nigeria's radio stations.

Overall, it becomes evident that the informal style with slang or other languages is more captivating and appealing, leading young adults or future generations to tune into a channel. This trend may contribute to the growing popularity of podcasting, which is gaining momentum as a preferred platform for audio content consumption.

However, internal voices articulated by media professionals through Tan's (2017) and Sufi et al.'s (2020) research should not be overlooked. Although their criticism of the "improper" and "unprofessional" labels on informal language was rejected by the study, their concerns regarding the importance of maintaining a standard of formal style should be acknowledged.

Hence, future research should incorporate their perspectives for comparison and balance with the audience's views. It is important to consider their concerns for the betterment of the radio industry while at the same time meeting the audiences' needs, perceptions, and expectations.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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Author Biography

Chai Hui Yee is a student at Faculty of Communication and Creative Industries, Tunku Abdul Rahman, University of Management and Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Her research interest includes media and language.

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Appendix A

Crosstabs between Listeners' Preference of Language Style and Listeners' Perceptions of Formal Radio Style Characteristics

			Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)					
			SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Listeners' Preference of Language Style (Informal over Formal)	SNP	Count	2	1	0	0	0	3
		Expected Count	.1	.4	.8	1.1	.6	3.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)	28.6%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
		Standardised Residual	7.3	.9	-.9	-1.0	-.8	
	NP	Count	0	9	5	5	2	21
		Expected Count	.5	2.9	5.4	7.7	4.5	21.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)	0.0%	21.4%	6.5%	4.5%	3.1%	7.0%
		Standardised Residual	-.7	3.5	-.2	-1.0	-1.2	
	N	Count	1	7	23	13	3	47
		Expected Count	1.1	6.6	12.1	17.2	10.0	47.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio	14.3%	16.7%	29.9%	11.8%	4.7%	15.7%

		Style Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)						
		Standardised Residual	-1	.2	3.1	-1.0	-2.2	
	P	Count	0	17	41	58	33	149
		Expected Count	3.5	20.9	38.2	54.6	31.8	149.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)	0.0%	40.5%	53.2%	52.7%	51.6%	49.7%
		Standardised Residual	-1.9	-.8	.4	.5	.2	
	SP	Count	4	8	8	34	26	80
		Expected Count	1.9	11.2	20.5	29.3	17.1	80.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)	57.1%	19.0%	10.4%	30.9%	40.6%	26.7%
		Standardised Residual	1.6	-1.0	-2.8	.9	2.2	
Total		Count	7	42	77	110	64	300
		Expected Count	7.0	42.0	77.0	110.0	64.0	300.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Formal Radio Style	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

		Characteristics (Boring & Rigid)						
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Note: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree

SNP = strongly not prefer; NP = not prefer; N = neutral; P = prefer; SP = strongly prefer

Appendix B

Crosstabs between Listeners' Preference of Language Style and Listeners' Perceptions of Informal Radio Style Characteristics

			Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)					
			SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Listeners' Preference of Language Style (Informal over Formal)	SNP	Count	2	0	0	1	0	3
		Expected Count	.0	.1	.4	1.6	1.0	3.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	1.0%
		Standardised Residual	11.4	-.2	-.6	-.4	-1.0	
	NP	Count	0	2	9	7	3	21
		Expected Count	.2	.4	2.5	10.9	7.1	21.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)	0.0%	40.0%	25.0%	4.5%	3.0%	7.0%
		Standardised Residual	-.5	2.8	4.1	-1.2	-1.5	
	N	Count	0	1	13	27	6	47
		Expected Count	.5	.8	5.6	24.3	15.8	47.0
		% within Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)	0.0%	20.0%	36.1%	17.4%	5.9%	15.7%
		Standardised Residual	-.7	.2	3.1	.6	-2.5	

P	Count	0	1	10	88	50	149
	Expected Count	1.5	2.5	17.9	77.0	50.2	149.0
	% within Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)	0.0 %	20.0%	27.8%	56.8%	49.5%	49.7%
	Standardised Residual	-1.2	-.9	-1.9	1.3	.0	
SP	Count	1	1	4	32	42	80
	Expected Count	.8	1.3	9.6	41.3	26.9	80.0
	% within Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)	33.3%	20.0%	11.1%	20.6%	41.6%	26.7%
	Standardised Residual	.2	-.3	-1.8	-1.5	2.9	
Total	Count	3	5	36	155	101	300
	Expected Count	3.0	5.0	36.0	155.0	101.0	300.0
	% within Listeners' Perception of Informal Radio Style Characteristics (Interesting & Flexible)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Note: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree

SNP = strongly not prefer; NP = not prefer; N = neutral; P = prefer; SP = strongly prefer