



Content Development as a Catalyst For Listeners Participation in Community Radio Programming: Lessons From Forte FM

Topluluk Radyo Programlarında Dinleyici Katılımının Katalizatörü Olarak İçerik Geliştirme: Forte FM'den Dersler

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ABSTRACT

Content development serves as a catalyst for motivating listener participation and creating inclusive platforms for marginalized community members to contribute program ideas, which can be adopted by community radio stations globally. In South Africa, numerous community radio stations play a crucial role in informing and educating their target audiences. However, not all listeners, especially those tuned into specific developmental programming within the community radio landscape, are granted the privilege to actively participate in Forte FM's developmental programs to address their specific needs. This lack of grassroots participation and limited involvement of listeners in the developmental activities of community radio stations has led to apathy. The involvement of the general population is essential for fostering development and creating avenues for sustainable projects. This paper employs participatory communication theory to examine content development to promote listener participation in community radio programming and development initiatives. As community radio stations bear the social responsibility of serving their local communities, they should encourage the creation of more developmental programs and greater community participation in their media content and development activities. This approach can enhance the sustainability of community projects through bottom-up engagement and participation.

Keywords: Community radio, participatory communication theory, content development, listener's participation and programming

ÖZ

İçerik geliştirme, dinleyici katılımını motive etmek ve marjinalleştirilmiş topluluk üyelerinin program fikirlerine katkıda bulunmaları için kapsayıcı platformlar yaratmak açısından katalizör işlevi görmektedir ve bu platformlar, küresel çapta topluluk radyo istasyonları tarafından benimsenebilmektedir. Güney Afrika'da çok sayıda topluluk radyo istasyonu, hedef kitlelerinin bilgilendirilmesi ve eğitilmesinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Ancak, tüm dinleyicilere, özellikle de topluluk radyosu ortamındaki belirli gelişim programlarını takip edenlere, Forte FM'in kendi özel ihtiyaçlarına yönelik gelişim programlarına aktif olarak katılma ayrıcalığı tanınmamaktadır. Toplum tabanından katılımın olmaması ve dinleyicilerin topluluk radyo istasyonlarının gelişim faaliyetlerine sınırlı katılımı ilgisizliğe yol açmıştır. Genel nüfusun katılımı, kalkınmayı teşvik etmek ve sürdürülebilir projeler için yollar yaratmak için gereklidir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, topluluk radyo programlarına ve kalkınma girişimlerine dinleyici katılımını teşvik etmek amacıyla içerik geliştirmeyi incelemek için katılımcı iletişim teorisini ele almaktadır. Topluluk radyo istasyonları, yerel topluluklara hizmet etme sosyal sorumluluğunu taşımaktadır. Bu sebeple, daha fazla kalkınma programı oluşturmayı hedeflemekte, toplulukların medya içeriklerine ve kalkınma faaliyetlerine katılımını teşvik etmektedirler. Bu yaklaşımın, aşağıdan yukarıya katılımı ve katılım yoluyla topluluk projelerinin sürdürülebilirliğini artırabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Topluluk radyosu, katılımcı iletişim kuramı, içerik geliştirme, dinleyici katılımı ve programlama

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Introduction

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC, 1998), opined that community radio serves as a catalyst to ensure a good and strong society. This is shown by energizing the citizens through its developmental programs, timely reports, and by giving room to the marginalized communities. In addition, this opinion can be established through the implementation of developmental programs, grassroots participation, and maximal involvement of listeners in the activities of the community radio station, as well as participating in the program lineup of the radio station. Community radio will add to these debates by portraying people's capabilities in relation to forms of participation (Arnstein, 2020). This paper, therefore, explores how Forte FM community radio station in Alice encourages listener participation in its developmental programs as well as media content and development activities. Community radio as a branch of communication for development can in other words establish development programs. These development programs include listeners' participation, publishing of development ideas, education, public awareness, and health programs as reported (Milan, 2009).

Community media encompasses numerous topics and welcomes "social mission". For instance, developmental initiatives such as health awareness and campaigns about managing HIV/AIDS rather than spreading the virus ignorantly. More so, educational programs may feature societal issues such as childcare programs, human trafficking, adult education, farming tips, listening clubs, and public awareness. All the above-mentioned programs can only be impactful and relevant if the developmental program idea is being conceptualized by the community for the community. This paper noted that the "participation" of the common plays a vital role for development to take place. In addition, participatory communication argues that people's participation provides a platform and avenue for established projects. Hence, developmental programs are the catalyst for listeners' participation. In other words, implementing developmental programs or initiatives determines the sustainability of a project or program for the community's benefit.

This paper also noted that, community radio is usually managed by some stakeholders or foundation in a society. Therefore, there are several community radio ownerships and in view of this, this paper argued that, not all community radio stations are owned by the intended locality or community. Forte FM radio station in Alice that is the focus of this paper was founded and managed by the University of Fort Hare and other Stakeholders but relied on donor funding to be managed.

Participation in the media and its effect for developmental project is an important characteristics of community media. Carpentier (2011) categorized marginalized people's involvement in the media into two interrelated forms: participation in the media and participation through the media. The difference between the two is that participation in the media is concerned with participation in the pro-

duction of media programs (content), and in media organizational decision making (structural participation). Carpentier, (2011), stated that participation through the media involves opportunities to act as a peacemaker in a controversial discussion, and participation in public debate and for self-representation in topical discussions. This view is also shared by Mawokomayi & Osunkunle (2019) who noted that listeners are very important stakeholders in community radio's content development. Hence, their views should always be sought for and considered towards a successful running of any community radio's developmental programming.

Literature Review

Endogenous Participation

The last two decades have viewed an important shift in research and development models from the common, top-down models to more participatory, "grassroots" development models. This shift has occurred in parts because of perceived failure of many top-down models of development, as well as request from communities to be included in decision that affects them (Wallerstein, 1999). Marginalized projects are often referred as demonstrating 'participatory democracy'. Shucksmith (2000, p. 209) denotes that a shift towards the common, grassroots models of development can be determined if the models are "compatible with building the capacities of excluded individuals and redistributing power towards the least powerful". Previous researchers have different opinion inclusive of (Shortall & Shucksmith, 1998) argued that our conceptualization of integrated rural development remains inadequate, and questions the uncritical use of development rhetoric such as capacity building, empowerment and participation.

This paper wants to note that participatory approaches to research and development could be criticized constructively based on the power of participatory design applied to solving, granting legal right or empowerment. In addition, the significance of participatory approach is determined by the proportion or level of participants, practitioners, or professionals in academic. These experts help in developing and analyzing the difficult nature of participatory philosophy and practices. On the other hand, Peripheral participation has been viewed as valid and legal choice utilized by community members. Notably, participation could also be viewed as both "the means and the ends" of development. The nature of participation having many sides adds to the complexity of conducting, designing, and evaluating participatory development projects. Thus, involving in participation enhances positive experiences and it's always a social good for participants. Also, it would lead to empowerment through community radio's content development.

This paper also wants to highlight that welcoming or creating an avenue for listeners to participate and make content development will enhance benefit. The participatory approach argued that listeners participation is more profitable. This implies that it enhances inclusiveness and development compared to passive

recipients. In addition, this paper thus wants to note that most active listeners are those who can itemize how the radio station had served, and valuable to them on information about local happenings through the radio. It must also be noted that participatory communication at the grassroots level enhances, promotes, and revives cultural pride, self-esteem, and identity in vulnerable communities. Most especially involvement of listeners in the public sphere and content development will build participants whose voices count in the content.

Significantly, in situations where participation is inculcated as a dimension, people are involved in the process rather than being human subjects of social change campaigns (Radovac, 2015). Hence, involvement of participation in community radio stations content development emphasizes the predominance of ownership over mere access. The argument states that a communication process that is initiated and expressed by the community will promote equal opportunity to members (Valencia & Magallanes, 2015).

Radio is a powerful tool in relation to communication and empowerment for active listeners. However, it is noted that if community members and listeners are not being empowered and fully engaged, this means that participation and productivity are lacking. Hence, participation is essential for development and empowerment as described by amongst others (Baú, 2016). Considering the above, community radio is an alternative to the mainstream media with a distinct preference and focus on a particular community, selected geographically or by interest. In addition, it is also portrayed as a development tool operated by indigenous or local citizens. Community radios empowers listeners through education and knowledge, as well as create opportunities to acquire new skills through its development initiatives programs such as vocational and technical trainings. These additional ways of knowledge acquisition can enhance the common citizen's capabilities, as well as create access to the private and public sector. Hence, higher level of participation through content development would result in a tangible benefit for the participating individual and the communities at large.

According to Gaynor and O'Brien (2017), community radio stations can be used as a community's communication resource. This is shown by providing opportunities for the under-resourced and rural communities, to not only express themselves in their own language in a convenient manner and in ways they know how, but at the same time listen to their own voices (Megwa, 2007, p. 52). Community radio encourages listeners' participation by granting the common people the opportunity to have their voices heard on air. Voice as used contextually connotes gaining access to communication technology gadgets such as phones, radios, and program podcast of the radio station. All these resources are employed as communication tools for the community benefits.

The premise of this paper is the idea that community radio is meant to be a development tool. This is portrayed by making sure that listeners create content, development content, and participate at every level of localized program presen-

tations to enhance productivity. Therefore, these approaches are appropriate to this paper since community radio's mandates are built on trust and imaginative improvements in content development-related messages. Hence, participatory communication should be adopted extensively by community radio station's programming to enhance community capabilities and ultimately expand their listeners understanding.

Uneven Participation in Media Content of Community Radio

The usefulness of listeners participation in radio broadcast and programming cannot be over-emphasized. Participation plays a vital role in community radio and when such platform like this does not exist then comes ups and down for development initiatives. Participation "comes in a variety of forms" (Zakus & Lysack, 2011, p. 7). In line with the above, it is not easy to come about development initiatives programs that would be of great benefit to the media and community. To that end, Carpentier (2011) grouped the common people's involvement in media activities into two interrelated forms as, participation in the media and participation through the media. These forms of participation are not similar by content "participation in the media deals with participation in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media organizational decision-making (structural participation)" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 68). On the other hand, participation through the media deals with the opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and for self-representation in the variety of public spaces that characterize the social (Carpentier, 2011).

Carpentier (2011) further asserts and expatiates the differences in minimalist and maximalist form of participation. In the minimalist form of participation, the media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, restricting participation to access and interaction, to the degree that one wonders whether the concept of participation is still appropriate. In other words, minimalist form of participation from the above statement implies a way of misinforming or misleading people (community) with the notion of establishment while reducing power simultaneously. In contrast, in the maximalist form, the consensus-oriented models of democracy (and participation) emphasize the importance of dialogue and deliberation and focus on collective decision-making based on rational argument a' la Habermas in a public sphere' (Carpentier, 2011). Hence, Carpentier's contrast gives expository clue on the discourse. Significantly, the two forms of participation symbolize a set of sequences of participation that can be found on Arnsteins (2020) ladder of citizen participation. In addition, to the above claims, Arnsteins ladder of citizen participation is in sequence with non-participation at the lower end of the ladder, token participation in the middle and citizen power at the apex (Arnsteins, 2020). As shown in Figure 1 below, these stages of participation are based on different levels.

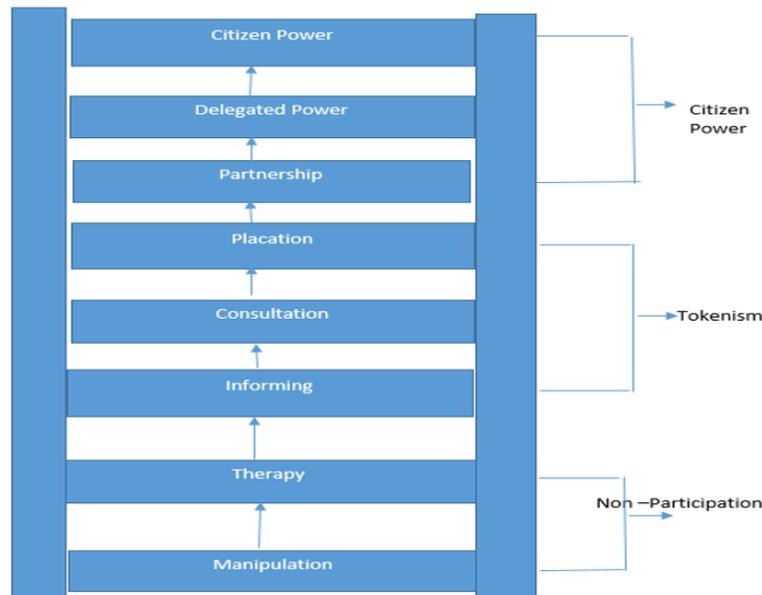


Figure 1: Ladder of participation (Arnstein 2020)

The above ladder of participation could be interpreted as follows, “In non-participation” there is no participation, and the aim are to “enable power holders to “educate” or “cure” the participants” (Arnsteins, 2020). Non-participation is equivalent to Carpentier’s minimalist participation. “Token participation” entails informing, consultation and placation. Here opinions are sought on development initiatives but excluded at implementation and decision-making stage. “Citizen Power” is the apex stage of participation where the marginalized communities are given fair treatment without any prejudice or preferential treatment and are involved in decision-making processes and resources (Tamminga, 2020). This is also in line with Carpentier’s (2011) maximalist participation. Klees et al. (2018) argue that, for advocate of grassroots content development, participation has become the benchmark of measuring the effectiveness of grassroots processes. This paper, therefore, employed Arnstein’s ladder of participation as standard of judgement for ascertaining content development as a catalyst to listeners participation in Forte FM’s radio programming. Hence, Arnsteins ladder gives us an insight and criteria on how to assess listeners or community participation in and through the media. This will aid on how to ascertain content development as a catalyst to listeners participation in Forte FM’s radio programming.

This paper also wants to establish that, community radio stations managed by donor funds are influenced by the donors. Hence, people or community participation is declining in its activities and programming and in some documents, it was questioned if participation in such contexts is genuine (Bessette, 2004). On the other hand, considering the tokenism level on Arnstein’s ladder of participation gives an insight that community radio encourages participation at different levels. The question addressed in this paper is whether there are other forms or ways by which Forte FM could involve listeners in its media content connected with different levels of participation. However, the effect of listeners participation in media con-

tent of Forte FM can be determined by the degree or rate of the commons' participation in its content developmental programs.

Significantly, the apex (highest) level is embedded with the utmost power in implementation and participation in media. Hence, participatory approach makes power equality to be minimal, it "requires specific attention to not only the knowledgeable, institutions and best practices of professionals, but also the knowledgeable, institutions and best practice of communities" (Eversole, 2012). This is one of the issues that community radios, and Forte FM as a participatory medium must resolve to reach citizen power (Arnstein, 2020).

Another issue facing community radio is how to be evenly participatory, by being focused on collective decision making (maximalist) in carrying the local people along with development agents and vice versa. This paper wants to note that Forte FM must always ensure participation of listeners at every level of program presentation, to enhance productivity. Otherwise, in situations where active participation is inefficient it becomes challenging. Thus, disempowering listeners from participating will hinder the facilitation of the community's communication and promotion of local developments initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is underpinned by content- related participation. According to Mhagama (2016), Community radio is a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design program and produce to air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny. It was reported that in the running of a radio, we take part when we present our programs to others about how we have benefited from adopting modern health sector awareness, but also when we learn from programs produced by fellow health programmers. Hence, we are taking part in building the radio's content with our program ideas. This is why it is the local people's voice that are heard in the programs of community radio stations.

As reported by Karaduman (2015), participation is used in an optimistic sense regarding the empowering role of community media production and organization management. When ordinary people participate in program production it can be seen as the most empowering aspect of community radio. By granting the listeners such opportunities, community radio is living up to expectation by meeting one of its objectives. Thus, Osunkunle (2008) opined that, it is important that community radio stations involve their listeners in programming, content development and management of the station if they are to fulfill their broadcasting mandate and bring total development to the communities being served.

Furthermore, program production by ordinary people could come to play in two forms, firstly, if community radio producer gets involved in the activities of listeners' by recording the activities and program audio clips which can be aired to everyone. Secondly, if listeners can produce and record their localized programs

with the aid of their cell phones then send the audio clips through social media to the radio station for program production or as a form of program jingle for public awareness, this idea would increase community's participation. Hence, these would motivate ordinary people's participation and enhance community development. In the same vein, it would enhance the radio station's feedback mechanism and productivity. In line with the above claims, ordinary people get involved on the level of participation based on access to technical facilities and production resources (Quick & Hall, 2015). Hence, this standard of participation can be regarded as partnership which affords ordinary people the opportunity to contribute to the programming of the community radio station.

In a related view, ascertaining listeners' participation in media content of Forte FM is strongly established by participatory communication theory which holds that, individuals are involved in the decision making, programming, and broadcasting of information relevant to the development of the community. It is a model that emerged in the 1970s and gained its popularity in the 1980s. It emerged as a counter balance to theories such as cultural imperialism (Order, 2015). Participatory communication is defined as that type of communication in which all the interlocutors are free and have equal access to the means to express their viewpoints, feelings, and experiences (Faisal and Alhassan, 2018). Participatory communication theory, therefore, promotes the involvement of communities in media broadcasting and eliminates one-way flow of information as in modernization paradigm.

Osunkunle (2008), reveals campus-based station (community radio) as a community participatory radio, and that it is a tool for community development through generation of knowledge and sharing. Hence, this paper aims to explore content development as a catalyst for listeners participation in Forte FM radio. That is, to see the kind of interactions that exist between Forte FM and its listeners. In respect to the primary roles that Forte FM plays in a community amongst which are serving as a medium and means of sending and receiving information, empowered to reach a large heterogeneous audience simultaneously and penetrates to the remote rural areas in Alice suburb regions. This paper wants to establish that Forte FM radio improves the welfare of its listeners' by performing the major characteristics and functions a community radio serves which are to educate, inform, entertain, and persuade its listeners amongst others in community development.

Communication as the life of a community has been examined by different scholars. For instance, (Tabing, 2019; Megwa, 2020; Tsarwe, 2020) were of the view that media such as Forte FM should be able to communicate development initiatives to community members and provide a platform for them to engage on content development programs. In this case, Forte FM radio is the message sender while the listeners are the receivers. This means that effective communication is being determined by senders and receivers in mass communication. While in mass media, the people in the media are always curious in talking than listening and this undermines the level at which people communicate. This also makes people to be

voiceless not because they have nothing to say, but because nobody cares to listen to them (Servaes & Lie, 2015). This is one of the challenges a development initiatives program or work encounters while carrying out a development-related project in a community, withholding information meant for the recipients for development projects.

This paper wants to note that participatory communication focuses on trust to and listening as would-be recipients of development can voice out their concerns and need, and trust the initiators of content development or projects, who in turn are willing to listen to the voice of such communities. This means that development projects must not just be carved or initiated by government or other development agencies, but that such initiators must first visit, meet with, and listen to such needy communities or people. This, therefore, helps to reduce the social distance between the communicators and receivers (Servaes & Lie, 2015).

Typical communication theories stipulate that passing across message to a heterogeneous audience in relation to development and social change, not necessarily useful. Servaes et al. (1996) concluded the statement with this notion that mass communication is less likely than personal influence to have a direct effect on social behavior (Servaes & Lie, 2015). In addition, the participatory model of communication emphasizes the significance of cultural identity of the common in an identified society and government by all the people and participation at all levels, down-top participation, international, national, local, and individual (Servaes & Lie, 2015). Participatory model focuses on the receiver (listeners) of the message than linear model. This is also applicable in this paper, as members of the community need to be incorporated and actively involved in the programming and genres of Forte FM radio programs. Servaes (2015) asserted that participatory model and “another development” approach are two sides of same coin, and also Tsarwe (2014) views reveals that, freedom of speech should be an equal right for all citizen irrespective of one’s status. Servaes & Lie (2015) expanded the above points by adding that participatory model could be viewed in two different approaches, the (UNESCO, 2005) and the (Tsarwe, 2014)- approach considering access, participation, and self-management (Servaes & Lie, 2015).

Sen (2003) and Servaes and Lie, (2015) have put forward their views on participatory approaches, Freire opined on “the oppressed” while UNESCO used the common word “the public”. The UNESCO approach portrays the media as communication tools and agents. In addition, self-management phase is the apex stage in this approach which present the public as managers who oversees the community media as well as its services. In contrary, the Freirian (1996), approach describes the audience as participators and not as recipients, strives to check and balance power from top-down to down-top participation, which aim to a sort of change in control of the media, and treat everyone fairly without any preference to status in the society. On the other hand, the UNESCO approach is not based on power structure but basically on communication as agents or tools for participation.

Methodology

This paper made use of qualitative research method and descriptive research approach to explore content development as a catalyst for listeners participation in community radio programming. Berg (2004) notes that qualitative research is adopted in many ways when dealing with several types of enquiries to aid understanding and thereby explaining the meaning of a social phenomenon, by providing a picture of a situation as it unfolds. Therefore, to achieve its aims, people's voice must be sampled qualitatively. In this paper, a descriptive research approach was adopted to explore listener's views. Focus group discussion was conducted among the residents of Golf Course and Ntselamanzi both in Alice, in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. To elicit a comprehensive data from the participants in respect of the paper, two focus group discussions were conducted comprising of eight (8) purposively selected participants from each residential area making a total of 16 participants involved, ranging from the ages of 18 to 65, comprising of both male and female.

The sampling frame focus only on listeners of the community radio station who are active listeners of Forte FM radio programs. The focus group discussions enabled the paper to complement and gathered a wide range of views on content development as a catalyst for listeners participation in Forte FM radio programming. The data collection processes were successful through the aid of a trained research assistant. Hence, the focus group discussion was conducted in IsiXhosa language, which is the commonly used language in the community and then interpreted into English Language.

Results

Golf Course focus group participant's views on listeners' participation in the content development of Forte FM radio station

The responses gathered from Golf Course focus group discussion show that Forte FM is a well-known community radio station which helps to inform and educate its listeners through its programming activities. This was revealed by Forte FM listener while the focus group discussion at Golf Course was conducted. When questioned to know if they do participate in content development programs of Forte FM, participant 1 from the Golf Course focus group said that:

"I listen to the radio station on regular basis most especially when I am on break at work, and before I go to bed. However, listeners are always encouraged to participate when programs are on air. Listeners greetings, shout-out and simple conversations are usually welcomed on their programs in IsiXhosa Language" (FGP 1- Golf Course).

Participant 2 noted that:

"I am an active participant in Forte FM radio programs because it is the only community radio located in my locality, where I can get community-based

news. However, Forte FM communicates in our local dialect mostly which makes us feel at home" (FGP 2- Golf Course).

The evaluation of the statement above implies that Forte FM community radio encourages and accommodate listeners involvement through participation through the media. The general view of all the participants from Golf Course focus group discussion was that Forte FM serves the community interest. This view is also supported by Mwaniki et al. (2017), who noted that community radio stations are classified as small-scale decentralized broadcasting initiatives which are easily accessed by local people, actively encouraged their participation in programming and which include some elements of community ownership or membership. From the above reflections it was confirmed that Forte FM listeners participate in some programs of Forte FM radio station.

Ntselamanzi focus group participant's view on listeners' participation in media content development of Forte FM radio station

The views gathered from Ntselamanzi residential area to know if listeners participate in media content of Forte FM were also like Golf Course participant's views, participant 1 noted that:

"I usually tune to the radio station's morning ride where listeners are being updated with the situation report in the community and neighboring villages or town. The accessibility of Forte FM's reception has motivated me to be involved in their entertaining and informative programs" (FGP 1- Ntselamanzi).

Participant 2 also said that:

"The radio station always broadcast community's need and economic development programs without any break in transmission across the rural communities in Nkonkobe municipality and this encourages me to keep tuning to all their programs which are mainly communicated in IsiXhosa Language for our benefit" (FGP 2- Ntselamanzi).

This view is also supported by Goswamy and Kashyap (2018) who observed that the local media are important for social, and economic development, because they are familiar with the needs of the local areas and allow free access to the media. This, therefore, confirmed that Forte FM community radio's bandwidth is well received to motivate listeners participation in its programs. However, the radio station must give room for listeners to implement various program ideas that would form part of content development programs for Forte FM radio.

Golf Course focus group participants' view on how often they participate in contributing to media content of Forte FM

The general views of the participants at Ntselamanzi focus group discussion was related to that of Golf Course. However, this paper asked the focus group par-

ticipants at Golf Course how often they participate in contributing to media content of Forte FM? Most of the Golf Course group participants revealed that Forte FM programs are always on air on regular basis. Their programs educate, informs, and entertains listeners'. Participant 3 revealed that:

"The radio station works 24 hours daily and gives room to add some comments and suggestion on daily basis through public announcement, on-line platform, which is an unlimited avenue for listeners interaction and participation" (FGP 3 – Golf Course).

In addition, participant 4 attested to the regularity of her participation in media content of Forte FM. She expressed herself by saying "They always involve listeners. I always participate in their morning programs. My mother also honors the radio station's invitation as a guest in public sphere to enlighten the public on topical matters" (FGP 4- Golf Course).

In a nutshell, Golf Course focus group participants revealed that Forte FM allowed its listener's partly participation in media content development through its public sphere programs. This makes its media content relevant to their media needs and aspirations. This view is also supported by Osunkunle (2008) who noted that community radio stations ought to provide platforms for listeners to contribute to issues that affect them, so that they are part of their development. The participatory theory also noted that listeners are to participate regularly in the content development of community radios, to have the station and to be a community radio indeed (Servaes & Lie 2015).

Ntselamanzi focus group participants' view on how often they participate in contributing to media content of Forte FM

The views gathered from Ntselamanzi residential area on how often listeners participate in contributing to media content of Forte FM was related to that of Golf Course. Participant 3 said that:

"Forte FM operates at a bandwidth which is accessible in these selected areas of the paper, and so the reception is always audible. The accessibility of the radio programs encourages listeners involvement in the media content of the radio station" (FGP 3- Ntselamanzi).

In addition, respondent 4 noted that "Forte FM's frequency is always receptive, and this motivates listeners regular participation in its local programs" (FGP 4 – Ntselamanzi).

A community radio's reception must be audible without any obstruction to its audience to enhance effective communication. Forte FM bandwidth was reflected from the above focus group report to be easily accessed by its audience. This view is also supported by Costa et al. (2013), who argued that top-down approach to building modern community radio will ultimately result to developmental sector whose incentives and purpose will ultimately move away from accepted definition and understanding of community radio. Alternative media are established for the

people by the people, to empower the common group of people by enabling them controlling the contents and operations of the radio station.

Golf Course focus group participants' view on participating in the activities of Forte FM

It was important to find out from the participants if they do participate in the activities of the radio station, and in response to this, participant 5 opined that:

"Yes, the community radio involves listeners in its programming through phone-in programs. We are not involved in the planning of the programs, but we only participate when issues or questions are raised and we contribute by calling in with our mobile phones and through the social medium platforms, or make comments on Facebook page, WhatsApp and we always make "shout-out" to our friends in our indigenous language via our phone when a program is on-going. We also select the music we like to listen to, to suit our interest" (FGP 5- Golf Course).

Additionally, participant 6 at Golf course focus group discussion suggested that the radio station does not involve listeners in its activities as expected, he stressed that, "The radio station ought to mandate its role as a community radio by seeking the community's view before program was presented" (FGP 6- Golf Course).

Most of the participants sum it well by commending Forte FM radio station on its act to public debate which motivates special guest that always enlighten the listeners on air most especially on health issues. However, this paper wants to note that Forte FM must consistently seek listeners views through an innovative participation, by inviting them to their various content development programs to fulfill its mandate as a community radio station. This view is also supported by Gilberts and Myers (2012), who opined that the innovations of new digital technologies with radio will enhance the ability of ICTs to contribute to development outcomes by facilitating and expanding opportunities for participation in alternative media.

Goggin and Clark (2009) noted that a lot of people have access and make use of mobile phones, the grassroots individuals have great opportunity to use mobile phones to meet their communication needs.

Ntselamanzi focus group participants' view on participating in the activities of Forte FM

In the same vein, the focus group discussion at Ntselamanzi is closely tied to the Golf Course focus group discussion which elucidated the opinions of the participants regarding their participation in the activities of Forte FM radio station. Aside from the involvement of the listeners in phone-in-programs, participant 5 from Ntselamanzi focus group said that:

"I am an active listener of Forte FM radio. He emphasized that he usually

gets involved in the entertainment programs of the radio station by calling the presenter often for his favorite music. Hence, listeners are involved in writing letters and production of some prelude musical contents which can suit the presentation of program locally" (FGP 5-Ntselamanzi).

This opinion was buttressed by participant 6 during the focus group discussion, who also said that:

"The presenters are community friendly and usually present pressing issues that affect the community. He also noted that community radio involves listeners in all its public sphere programs by asking for suggestion from listeners on how their programs could be more impactful. The radio station always broadcasts community news across the rural communities in Nkonkobe municipality and this encourages me to keep tuning to all its programs which are mainly communicated in IsiXhosa language for our benefit" (FGP 6-Ntselamanzi).

From the responses above, it is evident that community radio's entertainment program is often conceptualized with little listener's involvement in programming and interaction. Mhagama (2016) notes that when program contents are produced without the participation or involvement of listeners, then there comes a problem as the program would not benefit the listeners. This view is also supported by Karaduman (2015), who notes that it is the local people's voice that are heard mostly in programming of community radio station. When marginalized groups of people participate in program production, it can be seen as the most empowering aspect of community radio.

Golf Course focus group participants' view on development activities that increase listeners' participation

When inquired about their opinion on some development activities that can increase listener's participation, the participants were of the view that it is the community in community radio - the community radio cannot live to expectation without the community. Participant 7 suggested that:

"Forte FM radio has been helpful in provision of social amenities and urges the radio station to ensure its even distribution to the community but emphasized that a lot must be done to increase listener's participation on the part of the radio station" (FGP 7- Golf Course).

By establishing some groups of people, consisting of members of the community in the form of committee, who could give useful contributions and program ideas to the radio stations programming. By so doing, members of the community could be granted the opportunity to increase their content participation and development in the activities of the radio station".

Participant 8 noted that again, "If Forte FM radio could invite members of the community through the publicity medium of the community into meeting where

programming issues are to be discussed, I think this would increase audience and content participation of the radio station” (FGP 8- Golf Course).

This view is also supported by Milan (2009), who opined that community radio needs to be not only a channel to transmit to people, but also a means of receiving from them; not only an instrument to hear from or about the world, but the peoples voice, to make their voices heard.

Ntselamanzi focus group participants’ view on development activities that increase content development

When inquired about their opinion on development activities that increase content development, much of what was said at Golf course focus group discussion was closely tied to the views at Ntselamanzi. However, the participants revealed that community radio can increase listener’s participation in the community through their content development initiatives. Ntselamanzi focus group participant 7 said that:

“Forte FM radio station should organize and increase its staff strength and organize training for the staff, so that they can educate the community properly and invite more important personalities to their programming”. The community radio station can increase listener’s participation by sending letters to the community where their views can be sought on a particular issue bordering the community through musical requests, greetings as well as phone-in-programs” (FGP 7-Ntselamanzi).

Participant 8 adds that “The radio station should also go directly to the communities and ask them about their community needs, so as to meet their pressing needs” (FGP 8- Ntselamanzi).

This opinion was buttressed by participant 8 who noted that:

“The radio station should organize listening clubs where interesting issues will be addressed to increase listenership rate and broaden the listener’s knowledge in relevant areas. He also adds that Forte FM radio station should try and organize a form of relieve materials or gift to their listeners, to encourage more participation.”

Most of the participants also said that the community radio needs to intensify more efforts on the community’s needs and empowerment program to increase its listenership rate and content development programs. This shows that participation is essential for development and empowerment through community radio. Listener’s participation through content development in radio broadcast and programming is very important in community radio, and when such platforms do not exist then comes a decrease in development and listenership rate of the concerned radio station. This view is also supported by Faisal and Alhassan (2018), who argued that, for advocates of grassroots developments, content development and participation has become the benchmark for measuring the effectiveness of grassroots processes.

Discussion

From the data collected for this paper, the adoption of indigenous language as a major medium of communication by Forte FM to its audience enhances fair participation in its media content development. World Bank argues that community media assist the common to interchange information in indigenous languages, motivates debate on developmental initiatives and encourage ordinary people to identify and get more opportunities (World Bank Group, 2004 cited in Panos, 2005, p. 20). The use of local dialect for broadcasting accommodates everyone and makes them feel at home as attested by the participants during data gathering. This paper wants to note that the adoption of indigenous language as a medium of communication enhances content development in Forte FM programming. It also broadens their understanding of the intended message to be communicated.

In accordance with language and constitutional framework of South-Africa, the birth of democracy in 1994, reflects its constitutional policy of official multilingualism, with the adoption of nine major African Languages to complement English and Afrikaans nationally, including Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, IsiXhosa and Zulu. However, the utilization of IsiXhosa Language by Forte FM presenters to its communities encourages accessibility and content development participation through the media in all the programming of Forte FM radio. In addition, language is marketable if it has the potentials to serve as a tool and means by which it users can meet their material needs (Bamigboye et al., 2017). Hence, IsiXhosa language is a vital instrument Forte FM radio uses to meet the communication and developmental needs of Golf Course and Ntselamanzi residences in Nkonkobe Municipality.

This paper wants to note that the availability of Forte FM as the only community radio in Nkonkobe Municipality affords the communities the opportunity to have their voices counted beyond their jurisdiction. This, therefore, expands their access to what they value doing. More so, this is in line with section 29 (2) of South Africa Constitution which stated that; everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of her choice in public educational institutions, where that education is reasonably practicable. This implies that receiving educative information and diverse content development ideas from listeners in IsiXhosa Language is considered an access for exploring content development as a catalyst for listeners participation in media content of Forte FM.

In respect to the paper participants' view, indigenous language (IsiXhosa) was a key factor in attracting Forte FM listeners. This is for the fact that the radio station broadcast mainly in local dialect to its heterogeneous audience, to ensure effective communication to all irrespective of one's status and class. This was portrayed in their involvement in the programs of the radio station through writing of letters, phone-in-programs on air, musical request, greetings, dedications, and simple conversations.

This paper wants to establish that the focus group discussions portrayed community radio as a vital instrument to integrate the grassroots populace. The literature examined also reported that radio is one of the most common electronic devices for receiving information. It was shown in this paper that community citizens are not involved in production of media output and organizational decision-making but participate in public spheres and debate forums. They are engaged as guest presenters for topical issues in radio programs production, as well as participating through Forte FM's social platform. Listener's call-in when a program is being broadcast, through comments, suggestions, greetings, and musical request amongst others. Giving these scenarios, significantly, Arnstein (2020) ladder of citizen participation and Carpentier (2011), minimalist and maximalist versions of participation best justified content development as catalyst for listener's participation in the programming of Forte FM radio station. Obviously, community radio generally and Forte FM is being used to expand ordinary people's capabilities.

Additionally, the opinion of listeners on development activities that can increase participation in media content of Forte FM radio station shows that the gap that exist between Forte FM radio station and its listener's is not fully filled in terms of "citizen's power". This, therefore, implies that maximalist participation is lacking in Forte FM radio station against the notion of participatory theory of communication that emphasized on listener's involvement in community media programming.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that although Forte FM radio station broadcast more developmental programs, there is a need to improve and set agenda on program content, focusing more on community-based development programs such as implementing empowerment initiatives for citizens well-being. This would increase Forte FM's listeners involvement to fully operate on the maximalist versions of participation.

This paper recommends interactive radio programming for Alice community through talk shows format, promoting community-based related messages via live videos with influential community members, health workers, advocacy groups, and representatives. This would complement the community videos and demos that Forte FM community radio produces annually or quarterly. Hence, listeners' participation would be positively impacted.

Additionally, employing indigenous language such as IsiXhosa to make request for program ideas from community leaders, stakeholders, and community members would indeed broaden the significance of Forte FM's content development, as a catalyst for listeners participation to Alice community and its environs.

Forte FM would benefit from the findings of this paper by adopting an effective feedback mechanism that would give room for useful contributions on pro-

gram ideas, and insights from the community members. The feedback platform would be centered on creating content development and programs focusing community related issues that requires attention. This will encourage other community media to replicate Forte FM's successful practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the role of content development as a catalyst for listener participation in Forte FM radio. Through our focus group discussions, we have illuminated the significance of radio as a powerful tool for integrating grassroots communities. However, the findings presented here go beyond the conventional understanding of listener participation in community radio, emphasizing that it is not limited to mere engagement with media content or organizational decision-making. True participation extends to the very heart of community radio, encompassing the establishment and management of the radio station itself.

In this context, participation takes on various forms, ranging from active involvement in program presentation, as we have highlighted in this paper, to the input provided by listeners through shout-outs to friends, online platforms, and public sphere programs. Moreover, community radio stations can benefit significantly from receiving program ideas from their listeners, which can be harnessed for the betterment of both the audience and the radio station itself through effective feedback mechanisms.

Furthermore, this paper underscores the critical importance of listener participation in both media content creation and the development activities of community radio. By doing so, marginalized communities can foster democratic participation by empowering ordinary individuals to identify and define community issues and work collaboratively to find solutions. This approach not only encourages bottom-up participation, as emphasized in this paper, but also holds the potential to pave the way for a more inclusive and vibrant community radio landscape.

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