

Community Radio's Contribution to Political Awareness and Participation in South Africa: Lessons from Radio Grahamstown and Forte FM Radio

Oluyinka OSUNKUNLE

University of Fort Hare

Department of Communication, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

Alice, South Africa.

oosunkunle@ufh.ac.za

Abstract

Community radio has over the years served as an important tool for informing, entertaining and educating its listeners and such duties include political awareness and participation. Based on this premise, this paper looks at the contributions of community radio to political awareness and participation in South Africa using Radio Grahamstown and Forte FM as case studies. Grounded in the agenda setting theory, the study explores how community radios have been instrumental in setting a positive agenda towards ensuring political awareness and participation in the communities where these radio stations broadcast from. The study adopts qualitative research method and focus group discussions were conducted with some selected listeners of the two community radio stations. In addition, in-depth interview was conducted with the station managers of these two radio stations. The findings of the study revealed that these two radio stations provide platforms for political awareness and participation for their listeners. The findings also revealed that the stations provide necessary political information to educate and inform the listeners and community members towards ensuring that they are politically literate. It can therefore be concluded from this paper that community radio is indeed a democratic medium for the subaltern communities as it seeks to continuously provide platforms for them to be part of the democratic process. This paper also notes strongly that the survival of any democracy would always depend on the continuous and active participation of citizens in the political processes and that the role of the media in ensuring this is paramount.

Key words: Community Radio, Politics, Democracy, Communities, Participation, Programs, Developments

Kamu Radyosunun Güney Afrika'da Siyasal Farkındalık ve Katılma Katkısı: Radio Grahamstown ve Forte FM Radio'dan Dersler

Özet

Kamu radyosu yıllar içinde bilgilendirme, eğlendirme ve eğitime amaçlı önemli bir araç olarak iş gördü ve bu görevler siyasal farkındalık ve katılımı da içeriyordu. Bu öncüle dayanarak, bu çalışma Güney Afrika'da kamu radyosunun, Radio Grahamstown ve Forte fm örneklerinden yararlanarak siyasal farkındalığa ve katılma katkılarına bakıyor. Gündem oluşturma kuramına dayanan bu çalışma kamu radyolarının, bu radyoların yayın yaptığı topluluklarda siyasal farkındalık ve katılımı güvence altına almak için olumlu bir gündem oluşturmada nasıl da araçsal bir rol oynadığını açıklıyor. Bu çalışma nitel bir araştırma

yöntemini benimsiyor ve bu iki kamu radyo istasyonunun seçilmiş kimi dinleyicileriyle odak grubu tartışmaları gerçekleştiriliyor. Ek olarak, bu iki radyo istasyonunun yöneticileriyle derinlemesine görüşmeler yapıldı. Çalışmanın bulguları bu iki radyo istasyonunun dinleyicileri için bir siyasal farkındalık ve katılım platformu sağladığını ortaya çıkardı. Bulgular ayrıca radyo istasyonlarının dinleyicilerine gerekli siyasal bilgileri sağladığını ve dinleyicilerle topluluk üyelerinin siyasal olarak okuryazar olmalarını güvence altına almak için bilgilendirdiğini gösterdi. Bu nedenle, kamu radyosu, dinleyicilerinin demokratik sürecin bir parçası olabilmeleri için sürekli olarak platformlar sağlama arayışında olduğu için, bu makalede kamu radyosunun gerçekte en aşağıdaki topluluklar için demokratik bir araç olduğu sonucuna varılabilir. Bu makale ayrıca demokrasilerin her türünün sağ kalmasının yurttaşların siyasal süreçlerdeki sürekli ve etkin katılımına dayandığını ve bunu güvence altına almada medyanın rolünün çok önemli olduğunu altını iyice çiziyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kamu radyosu, siyaset, demokrasi, topluluklar, katılım, programlar, gelişmeler.

Introduction

The importance of community radio as a tool for rural or community development cannot be overemphasised considering its unique contribution and history globally as it brings various kinds of developments to the people it serves. According to Kombol (2014), the history and achievements of community radio has seen it addressing various community and societal needs such as poverty, diseases, illiteracy, traditional mind sets, hunger, agriculture, and other issues that affect communities. As further noted by Kombol (2014), these are serious community issues that affect at the grassroots and, which translate to the economic, health, and social implications, which community radio may bring to bear and address. This paper however wants to note that apart from these characteristics, there is also the political influence of community radio, which also confirms the role of radio as a powerful tool for informing and educating the people. The general belief is that people at the grassroots are usually marginalised and without a voice on who is elected into public offices (Osunkunle, 2008; Mawokomayi and Osunkunle, 2019). It must however be noted that people at grassroots also have an important role to play to decide who gets elected into public offices and must be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with political campaigns and all other forms of political processes before and after an election.

Regarding this, it is important to highlight that community radio plays an active role during election campaigns as various political parties and their candidates set their electioneering campaigns in motion to reach out to people at the grassroots to canvas for their support and votes. While the important role of the media in this process cannot be overemphasised, it is important to point out that the role of community radio is quite unique as it is seen to be very close to the communities at grassroots unlike the public broadcasters.

While public broadcasters are seen to serve the agendas of the government and advertisers, community radios on the other hand serve the agendas of the communities or people as it is generally seen as the radio of the people, by the people and for the people (Osunkunle and Wozniak, 2015).

So, during election period, political parties usually make concerted efforts through the media to convince the populace to vote for them. In the context of this paper, community radio is therefore used to reach the diverse groups of people in the country depending on their media use habits (Kombul, 2014). While it has been established globally that community radio makes huge contributions to the public sphere, this paper also seeks to ascertain this and this contribute to scholarship in this area. This paper also seeks to highlight the relationship between community radio and political awareness and its capacity to facilitate political inclusiveness as it seeks to facilitate political participation for the elite and the masses in rural settings. With the media and community radio in the context of this paper, having the capacity to facilitate political awareness and participation, this paper seeks to know and also chronicle the efforts of Forte fm and Radio Grahamstown in this regard.

Statement of the problem

Political awareness and participation are necessary for democracy to thrive and this is because citizens need to know the political parties and political candidates to vote for during the election. Citizens also need to be familiar with the ideals and manifestos of the various political parties to be able to make informed choices on which party to elect into power and also be able to participate in topical political debates. Political awareness is also important for citizens to know the dates set for various categories of elections as well as the electoral processes involved. With the collapse of the apartheid era and the enthronement of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the country has continuously witnessed a great increase in political activities. It has also been well documented that community radios have played significant roles in the collapse of the apartheid regime as people and groups used community radio as channels for protest and gathering support (Bosch, 2003, Osunkunle, 2008). Community radio has since continued to play vital roles as the voice of the voiceless and the marginalised communities in South Africa. Knowing this strong features and power of community radio, political parties have also been using it as a platform to garner political awareness and eventual participation. It is therefore germane to examine the relationship between community radio and political awareness and participation in South Africa.

Research questions

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- In what ways can community radio enhance political awareness and participation?
- What are the features of community radio that make it possible for it facilitate political awareness and participation?
- To what extent do listeners see community radio as being helpful in creating political awareness and facilitating political participation?

Literature Review

Political Participation

Mhlomi and Osunkunle (2017) note that political participation refers to the activities or actions by members of a population directed at influencing the resolutions and plans of government officials, such as voting in elections, meeting with community members, communicating with political representatives. Intrinsicly, this is what political participation entails as people are allowed or given platforms to play an important part in policy and decision-making process, especially on developmental issues that affect them. Scholars like Briggs (2016) have noted the importance of ensuring citizen consultation and participation in a normal democratic setting. The view here is that since democracy is a government of the people by the people and for the people, then it is important for any democratic system not to leave the citizens behind when it comes to electing people into public offices during elections.

Another important thing to note is that even, as policies are being developed and envisaged development plans are being conceptualised, it is also important for citizens to contribute to these debates as would-be beneficiaries of these development and policy initiatives. This is very important as democracy allows for citizens or electorates to have the right to make their views and opinions known for policy makers to consider as inputs when formulating government policies that would bring development to the society. This also means that in any democratic system, it is important for governments and policy makers to hear the voice of the masses, engage with them and seek to implement policies that will benefit them and bring various forms of development to the society. This would however be possible when democratic governments are sensitive to various topical issues in the public sphere and then translating these inputs into cutting-edge policies (Briggs 2016). As noted by Utter (2011), there are three key features that underpin political participation and these are voting attendance of national elections, partisan attachments, which is the feeling of closeness and loyalty by members of a party, as well as protest activities, which are usually a way to show dissatisfaction by members of the community to their leaders.

Political Awareness

Various literature have over the years documented the important roles that community radios have played in ensuring political awareness, making sure that people at grassroots are fully aware of the identities of various political parties, their manifestoes and plans for citizens. As noted by Kombol (2014), political awareness refers to political knowledge levels among the electorate and other concerned actors who are supposed to be involved in or are involved in any country's political processes. It is therefore important that citizens have a high level of political knowledge to be able to participate successfully in a political process. However, in situations where the citizens' political knowledge levels are low, political participation is hindered and this also affects community development (Osunkunle, 2014). As also noted by Kombol (2014), political awareness is determined by the level of media reception available to citizens, which is linked to the political messages disseminated as well as cognition. This also means that as various political messages are sent out by political parties and these messages are received as intended, then the level of political awareness increases and citizens are able to make informed choices, decisions and participation in the political processes.

Political parties' use of the media as a tool for information dissemination is therefore very vital in ensuring political awareness and participation. While citing Zaller (1996), Kombol (2014) notes that there is a relationship between mass media and political awareness considering the fact that while fulfilling its information dissemination role towards ensuring political awareness, the mass media carry competing political messages. This is true as mass media try as much as possible not to be bias and in the process disseminate information from different political parties and their party manifestos. For instance, in South Africa, mass media and community radio in the context of this paper, would always disseminate information on the various political parties like the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), United Democratic Movement (UDM) and other political parties too. Interestingly, all these political parties have manifestos, which are public declaration of policy and aims usually issued by political parties and their candidates before an election.

Mass media's role in enhancing participation and development

The role of mass media in facilitating citizen participation in governance and development cannot be over-emphasised as the media usually provide the needed platform for a well-informed populace and also act as a catalyst of development. It must be noted that people desire progress and positive developments in their lives and would not want to remain stagnant or unproductive. Mass media and radio in particular therefore in some ways provide

platforms for citizen participation and brings development to the people. This is also attested to by media scholars like Ziegler and Asante (1992) as they emphasized the vital role of mass media in facilitating development initiatives. They further defined national (or social) development as an on-going process that should afford any government the opportunity to meet the basic human needs of the majority of the people of the nation. This means that government activities and development plans are usually supported and strengthened by the participation of a properly informed and competent public. On the other hand, Marchant (1988: 24) states that “development takes place when there is an overall improvement in people’s living conditions”. Usually, common development aims include the alleviation of poverty, malnutrition and other health problems, unemployment, illiteracy, stable economy, and improving the lives of the masses generally (Rodney, 1972). It is of importance to note that development is usually brought about in two ways: through economic growth and / or social change. Osunkunle (2014) notes that the government as the sole innovator of change in the community and country at large cannot however achieve this alone and this is where the vital role of mass media and community radio, in the context of this paper, as an agent of change and development comes in. In addition, Bosch (2010) also observed that community radio stations have a role to play in getting people at the grassroots involved in national development.

Research has also shown globally that radio is very essential for disseminating development-related messages to the people, as noted by media scholars such as Murrilo (2009), Manyozo (2017), Backhaus (2019) and Mawokomayi and Osunkunle (2019) in their various research works on the valuable role of the media in development processes. They all noted that the media and especially community radio stations usually act as a link between the government and the citizens as the government tries to bring about the necessary development and provide basic services for use by its citizens. Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2020) and Jallof (2012) however note that all these developments can only take place when there is adequate and effective communication. They also stressed the valuable roles of community radio stations in getting their listeners engaged in meaningful discussions, which can make change easier and possible at all levels. The advent of community radio in South Africa also points to success stories across the country, as community radio stations have in many ways ensured the development of the communities, improved service delivery and facilitated empowerment of the people (Olorunnisola, 2000; Bosch, 2003).

The power of radio as a tool for education

From the early days of wireless radio in the 19th century through the efforts of Guglielmo Marconi and other scientists, radio has expanded into an almost universal medium of communication. Radio is now transmitted in a variety of ways, including short wave (sw), amplitude modulation (a.m), frequency modulation (fm), medium wave (mw) and nowadays increasingly internet-based; linking listeners and producers of the various continents of the world together in a fraction of seconds (Sosale, 2002; Olajide, 2003). Radio has been a technology that has influenced the growth of nations and changed the world (Jallov, 2012; Alfandika and Muchetwa, 2019)).

Soola (2003) states that radio has been used, with varying degrees of success, to promote both formal and informal education in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Thailand, Botswana, Kenya, Gabon, Nigeria and other developing nations of the world. Interestingly, as radio is also affordable to both the poor and the rich, it plays a valuable role in society as a multiplier of change that speeds up the process of informing a population and eliciting response from audiences (Manyozo, 2018; Mhlanga, 2016).

Apart from providing information that cuts across the economic, political, environmental, health and other spheres of life of the listeners, radio may also act as a watchdog over power holders and provides contact between them and the public. A radio station, furthermore, helps to develop agreed objectives and political choice, enabling social and political debate by exposing issues and options for action (Ziegler & Asante, 1992; Manyozo, 2012). However, this is possible only if the radio station speaks to the listeners through its programming; implying that sound ethical principles must be strictly adhered to if radio stations are to fulfill their mandate of informing, educating and entertaining their listeners.

The Food Agricultural Organisation (FAO, 1998: 11) similarly acknowledges the role of radio as an important mechanism for rapid diffusion of development information and a channel for interactive communication, dialogue and debate on major issues of development. It is also a platform for democratic and pluralistic expression of the opinions, needs and aspirations of rural communities and a medium for collecting local information on social issues, which is essential for defining, planning and implementing development efforts (FAO, 1998). This means that beyond its conventional role of providing information, education and entertainment, radio can be used to sensitise, conscientise and mobilise communities in the pursuit of development objectives and nurture political and cultural integration (Osunkunle, 2020).

Various media scholars have also written about the effectiveness of radio as a medium for education (Libiero, 1993; Olorunnisola, 2000; Backhaus, 2019). For instance, Fourie (2001) notes the power of radio and adds that since its invention, the potential of radio as a medium for use in education has always been upheld. This was because early developers were able to think deeply on what radio could offer as a medium for education. This was due to the fact that radio and the media in general are considered to have enormous powers in influencing behavioural changes in the society and educating people on how to live their lives better, handle situations and behave as moral beings. Another important thing to note is that radio also speaks to the people through its programming.

Theoretical Underpinning: Democratic-participant theory

This paper builds on the democratic-participant theory, which postulates that individual citizens and minority groups have rights of access to media and information with a right to communicate, and also rights to be served by the media according to their own determination of needs (McQuail, 2000: 123). This also impacts on the way programmes are produced so that the needs of the listeners are met. The theory further outlines that groups, organisations and local communities should have their own media such as community radio stations with the aim of addressing developmental issues that affect communities. This means that listeners are to be involved in identifying their own perceived needs, participate in electoral processes, dialogue with policy makers and come up with solutions, using community radio as a platform for achieving this (Soola, 2003; Yarhere, 2003). The focus of democratic-participant theory, therefore, lies in the needs, aspirations and interests of the receivers of information (Fourie, 2001).

The theory further postulates that the media should provide relevant information to their audiences, give them the right to answer back, and, most importantly, provide an avenue or medium to use the means of communication for interaction in small-scale settings of community, interest group and sub-culture (Osunkunle, 2020). This also highlights the important role of the media and most importantly, community radio as a tool for political awareness and participation. McQuail (2000: 239) further argues that this theory opposes any alleged need for uniform, centralised, high-cost, highly-professionalised, neutralised, state-controlled media. Instead, the democratic-participant theory supports multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, de-institutionalisation, interchange of sender-receiver roles, horizontality of communication links at all levels of society, interaction and commitment (Osunkunle, 2014). Community radio should therefore aim to promote these principles so that there is interaction and continuous interchange of information between radio stations and their listeners and

between policy-makers and the citizens. Through this, several opportunities are offered to enhance the development of people and communities. Using community radio for political awareness and participation therefore offers the media, political parties and the citizens the opportunity to interact, dialogue and ensure good governance. This also means that the usually marginalized citizens are given platforms to be involved in the scheme of things and voice in governance and policy-making.

Methodology

Participants

For the purpose of this study, two community radio stations, Forte fm community radio in Alice and Radio Grahamstown in Grahamstown were used as case studies. The study adopts qualitative research method and one focus group discussion each was conducted with a section of these two radio stations' listeners club. Purposive sampling was used to select eight participants in each focus group. In addition, in-depth interview was conducted with the station managers of these two radio stations. The aim was to know their views on the role of community radio in political awareness and participation in their communities and South Africa. Both the focus group interviews and in-depth interviews were recorded on audio tape to ensure the accurate capturing of information and the recording was subsequently transcribed and analysed accordingly through thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Community radio's enhancement of political awareness and participation

It was important to know if community radio enhances political awareness and participation and in response to this, the focus group participants noted that community radio enhances their political awareness and participation. They noted that they get to know about election dates and other election updates through the community radio station. They added that they get to know about the political parties that are contesting elections, their manifestoes, and the dates to go and vote.

A participant from Grahamstown noted that:

“Grahamstown community radio tells us regularly about the date for election and also the need for us to go out and exercise our civic rights”

(Participant 1 – Grahamstown)

A participant from Alice also said similar thing about Forte fm:

“Forte fm is also busy with information dissemination when its election time as we are informed about the date for election and the need for us to go out and vote”

(Participant 7 – Alice)

Looking at the responses of the station managers, both Radio Grahamstown and Forte fm station managers noted that the stations are doing their best to enhance listeners' political awareness and participation. Their views are below:

“We are doing our best to educate our listeners and also provide platforms for them to participate in the political process. We bring in political parties to enlighten the listeners on their plans and manifestoes and the listeners also get the opportunity to engage with these political parties” (Radio Grahamstown Manager)

“We know that radio is a powerful tool for education and information dissemination. So we try to get our listeners informed adequately so that they can make informed choices and decisions during the election period” (Forte fm Manager)

The participants also noted that the stations provide platforms for dialogue with representatives of some of these political parties and this gives the listeners the opportunities to phone in, ask questions and also express their community needs to the would-be government office holders and policy makers. All these point to the views of Kombol (2014) and Osunkunle (2014) who note that the media, especially community radio acts as a catalyst for political awareness and community development.

Features of community radio that make it possible for it to facilitate political awareness and participation

It was also important to find out from the participants on the features of community radio that make it possible for it to enhance political awareness and participation. In response to this question, the participants noted that community radio has peculiar features that enable it to communicate effectively with the community and most importantly its listeners. Some of the key views are below:

“Community radio uses our local language to reach out to us. Grahamstown radio uses Xhosa language mostly and we are able to hear clearly their messages when telling us about the political activities going on in the country”

(Participant 5 – Grahamstown)

Another participant stated that:

“We don't struggle to listen or understand things about the elections. In 2014 and even 2019, Grahamstown radio passed the messages across to us. We know when the election dates will be and every other information”

(Participant 8 – Grahamstown)

A participant from Alice also added her voice strongly:

“We like our radio station, Forte fm, as it keeps us informed on everything that we need to know about the elections. What makes it better is the use of Xhosa language as we are able to understand these messages clearly unlike when English is used and we struggle”.

(Participant 1 – Alice)

Another participant also stated that:

“The language being used by Forte fm, which is our local language, helps us to receive the right information that we understand clearly. This also helps us to participate well in the election”

(Participant 6 – Alice)

Looking at the responses of the station managers, both Radio Grahamstown and Forte fm station managers noted that community radio has distinct features, which aids its functioning as a radio choice for the subalterns and indeed a wider group of listeners within its broadcasting radius. The views of these station managers is that these features enhance listeners’ political awareness and participation. Their views are below:

“We speak the language of the people and our use of local languages in most of our programmes endeared our listeners to us and our radio station. We encourage them to phone in, to visit us and also speak in a language that they are comfortable with and this makes them to get all the election and political information clearly during election period”

(Radio Grahamstown Manager)

“At Forte fm like any other community radio station, we use more of local language, a language that is spoken in the community and which the people understand very well. You know the use of the right language is very important for understanding to take place. So people tend to get the political information very clearly as we communicate with them”

(Forte fm Manager)

The above views of the participants all corroborate the thoughts of various scholars who have noted the importance of local language usage on community radio, which sets it apart from state or commercially driven radio stations who use mostly English in their programming and with agendas to make profit. Scholars like Manyozo (2012), Soola (2003) and Yahhere (2003) also note that broadcasting in local languages help community radio to reach out to all community members in their own language which increases their

understanding of the messages being sent unlike when English is used, which some listeners may not be comfortable with. This in a way also makes listeners to have a sense of belonging that their needs are being met by the radio station.

Suitable Programming during election to ensure political awareness and participation

Participants also talked about the right or suitable programming that community radio usually put in place when it is election time, which helps them to be aware of and also participate in the election process. The participants noted that some programmes are put in place while some are adapted to accommodate political awareness and participation as election messages are passed to them while also making it possible for them to be well informed. Some key views are below:

“Some programmes focus on political awareness and participation to make us to be aware of everything about elections that year”

(Participant 2 – Grahamstown)

“We listen to programmes that inform us about the political parties taking part in the election and what plans they have for us”

(Participant 4 - Grahamstown)

“We get to know about the political parties, their plans for us, what date to vote, and why it is important for us to vote for the right party”

(Participant 3 – Alice)

“The community radio motivate us to vote, they tell us why it is important to vote and not sit at home... because at times, we don't even want to vote.. because these politicians don't fulfil their promises... but then the radio encourages us to go and vote”

(Participant 5 – Alice)

Looking at the responses of the station managers, both Radio Grahamstown and Forte fm station managers noted that the stations usually come up suitable programmes that would make it possible for the listeners to be educated and informed during elections. They both noted that the aim is not to allow the listeners to be left behind in the scheme of things towards making informed choices and voting in the right political parties and candidates. Their key views are below:

“Most of our programmes allow for our listeners to be well educated and informed during elections. Our programmes provide room or platforms for dialogue and for our listeners to phone-in and engage with the representatives

of the political parties. We provide platforms for discussions, questioning and things like that.... the aim is to ensure that there is clarity and understanding by the listeners during this period and we are committed to doing that over the years”

(Radio Grahamstown Manager)

“Our programmes are packaged in a way that they allow for listeners to raise issues that affect them and which they want the political parties to know and then try to see which party to vote for. We just do not give the people political information.... we allow them to engage with it, understand it, give their own views and then go back to make informed decisions about their future and the future of developments in their communities. That is community radio”

(Forte fm Manager)

The above views from the participants support the notion that good radio programming is an important variable in political awareness and that community radio stations promote political awareness and participation through the types of programmes which they produce (Kombol, 2014). Osunkunle (2020) also supports this view by noting that community radio usually have well designed programmes that are tailored towards meeting the needs of the community and listeners in general on topical societal issues that would eventually bring development to the people. This also supports the views of Freire who notes that people should be allowed to be part of their own development as they are also able to reason and come up with suggestions on what they want and how to improve their lives (Freire, 1973). Effective and thorough participation will therefore be possible when there is public involvement in communication systems and when the public is allowed to exercise the power of decision-making on issues that affect them (Osunkunle, 2014).

Extent to which listeners see community radio as being helpful in creating political awareness and facilitating political participation

The participants were also asked to confirm the extent to which community radio is helpful in creating political awareness and participation. Most of the participants noted that community radio is very helpful in this regards. Some key views as expressed by the participants are below:

“Radio Grahamstown is number 1 when it comes to keeping us informed about political information. They keep us updated regularly”

(Participant 3 – Grahamstown)

“We hear about political news on Radio Grahamstown and we don’t move to another station as we know that we will get all the information from the station”

(Participant 5 – Grahamstown)

“Forte fm never disappoints us when it comes to giving us first-hand news. Even during the elections, we get all the needed information from the radio station”

(Participant 2 – Alice)

“We hear about the preparations for election and all other news from Forte fm... we hear it in English and we also hear it in Xhosa, which is good for us”

(Participant 8 – Alice)

In the views of the two station managers, they both noted that consistency is the key in their functioning as they seek to inform and educate their listeners at all times. Their key views are noted below:

“We do research and interviews to get the latest information to ensure that we give our listeners what they should know. Our mandate as community radio is to educate and inform our listeners regularly and we cannot afford to fail in this regard”

(Radio Grahamstown Manager)

“Our community radio station is for the people and so we seek to meet their various needs regularly. Especially when it is election time, we don’t want them to be left behind. So we communicate with them regularly”

(Forte fm Manager)

The above views also concur with the thoughts of Jallof (2012), Bosch (2010), Fox (2019) and Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2020) as they all noted that community radio has over the years being at the forefront of consistently educating, informing and entertaining the communities they serve. These scholars see community radio as the radio of the people, for the people and by the people and the aim is always to bring different kinds of developments to these communities.

Discussion

The findings of this paper has revealed to a large extent that the study participants see the selected community radio stations as enhancing democracy and citizen participation. The participants’ general view was that these radio stations broadcast programmes familiarising listeners with the various political parties and their manifestoes and this is reassuring for the

stations' functioning. This in a way also enhances voter education and indicates the formation of a politically informed citizenry through radio, which is needed for productive democratic society. The participants have noted that these community radio stations do give them the opportunity and platforms for dialogue on what the people / masses expect from the parties when they are eventually elected into offices. The fact that these radio stations have been observed as very busy with various election updates and voter education also points to the power of radio as a very important medium for participatory communication, representation and citizen participation. Hence, it is evident that radio contributes in many ways to make possible an encouraging citizen participation in the democratic process of the country. These views are also supported by scholars like Bosch (2010), Osunkunle and Wozniak (2015) and Fox (2019) as they wrote on the important role of media, especially community radio in enhancing democratisation, which this study has also confirmed. Freire (1993) also believes that individuals have the capacity for reflection, for conceptualizing, for critical thinking, for decision-making, for planning and for social change, which leads to empowerment as a consequence of liberatory learning, which community radio stands for. In addition, the study has found out that community radio has good features such as the use of local languages, which makes it suitable to disseminate necessary information to the listeners. Some scholars have also noted that the use of local languages has endeared listeners to the programming of community radio stations as listeners enjoy listening to radio in a language that they are comfortable with, which in turn enhances understanding of messages (Osunkunle, 2014; Manyozo, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper notes strongly that the survival of any democracy would always depend on the continuous and active participation of well-informed citizens in the political processes and that the role of the media in ensuring this is paramount. Interestingly, this paper has revealed that community radio provides opportunity for continuous discussion, which in turn helps to create awareness and participation. Participants have revealed that community radio provides them with platforms for dialogue among themselves and also with politicians. This process therefore keeps the listeners informed and with the opportunity to participate in the political process. It is also important to note that these selected community radio stations make use of suitable programmes to ensure listeners' political awareness and participation. These stations therefore provide necessary political information to educate and inform the listeners and community members towards ensuring that they are politically literate. It can therefore be concluded from this paper that community radio is indeed a democratic medium

for the subaltern communities as it seeks to continuously provide platforms for them to a be part of the democratic process.

References

- Alfandika, L & Muchetwa, S.K. (2019). Redefining Community: Community Radio Licencing in Zimbabwe at Crossroads, *African Journalism Studies*, 40:3, 42-56.
- Backhaus, B. (2019). Community Radio as Amplification of Rural Knowledge Sharing. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 29(2) 137–150.
- Bamigboye, F.B and Osunkunle, OO. (2020). The Role of Development Communication in Enhancing Listeners' Participation in Community Radio: A Case Study of Forte FM Radio. *J Hum Ecol*, 69(1-3): 52-64.
- Bosch, T. (2003). Radio, *Community and Identity in South Africa: A Rhizomatic Study of Bush Radio in Cape Town*. Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted at Ohio State University, 2003.
- Bosch, T. (2010). *An overview of community radio, fifteen years into democracy, in The Citizen in Communication: Re-visiting traditional, new and community media practices in South Africa*. Claremont: Juta.
- Briggs, J. (2016). *Young people and political participation: Teen players*. London: Springer.
- Food and Agricultural Organization. (1998). Training for Agricultural and Rural Development. *Economic and Social Development Series*. No: 55. Rome.
- Fourie, P (Ed). (2001). *Media Studies. Volume 2: Content, Audience and Production*. Lansdowne: Juta.
- Fox J (2019) *Community Radio: Social Process and Democratic Intent*. In: *Community Radio's Amplification of Communication for Social Change*. Palgrave Studies in Communication for Social Change. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Jallov, B. (2012). *Empowerment Radio: Voices Building a Community*. Gudhjem: Empowerhouse.
- Kombol, M.A. (2014). Potential Uses of Community Radio in Political Awareness: A Proposal for Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication*. Vol.24, 2014. pp. 1 – 19.
- Libiero, A. (1993). Community Radio: An Alternative for Broadcasting. *Media Asia*, Vol. 20 (4): 218 – 223.
- Marchant, H. (1988). *Communication Media and Development*. Durban: Butterworth.
- Mawokomayi, B and Osunkunle, O. (2019). Listeners Perceptions of Forte FM's Role in Facilitating Community Development in Alice, South Africa, *Critical Arts*, 33(10):1-13.

- Manyozo, L. (2012). *People's Radio: Communicating Change Across Africa*. Penang: Southbound.
- Manyozo, L. (2017). *Communicating development with communities*. London: Routledge.
- Manyozo, L. (2018). The Context Is the Message: Theory of Indigenous Knowledge Communication Systems. *Javnost - The Public*, 25:4, 393-409.
- McQuail, D. (2000). *Mass Communication Theory*. 4th Ed. London: Sage.
- Mhlanga B. (2016). *The Return of the Local: Community Radio as Dialogic and Participatory*. In: Salawu A., Chibita M.B. (eds) *Indigenous Language Media, Language Politics and Democracy in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. pp 87-112.
- Mhlomi, Y & Osunkunle, O. (2017). Social media and youth political participation in South Africa's 2014 general election. *Communitas: Journal for Community Communication and Information Impact* 2017 22: 149-158.
- Murillo, M.A. (2009). "Indigenous Community Radio and the Struggle for Social Justice in Columbia" In Howley, Kevin (Ed.). 2009. "Understanding Community Media". Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Olajide, W. (2003). *Basics of Broadcasting Technology*. Ibadan: Claverianum Publishers.
- Olorunnisola, A. 2000. *Community Radio As Participatory Communication In Post-Apartheid South Africa, 2000*.
Available at: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/a/x/axo8/Joburg/manuscript.htm> (Accessed 7 July 2020)
- Osunkunle, O. (2008). Using radio as a tool for rural development in Limpopo Province of South Africa : An evaluation of case studies. *Ejournalist*, Vol. 8 (2): 1 – 11.
- Osunkunle, O and Wozniak, J. (2015). Faith-based radio: Beyond spirituality, encompassing development. *African Journalism Studies*, 36:2, 77-94.
- Osunkunle, O.O. (2014). *Participatory radio as the voice of the community: A comparative study of selected radio stations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa*. Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington: Howard University Press.
- Soola, E.O. (2003). *Communicating for development purposes*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.

- Sosale, S. (2002). Communication and development in the international and global 'eras': Understanding continuities and changes. *Journal of International Communication*, Vol. 8: 2, pp. 8 – 25.
- Utter, G.H. (2011). *Youth and political participation*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Ziegler, D & Asante, M. (1992). *The Mass Media in Africa*. New Jersey: African World Press.