Disruptions in Development Journalism: Understanding Resistance and Approach of Community Radio Stations

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Abstract

To empower marginalized and socially excluded groups, community media harness the narrowcasting and community ownership as a powerful tool. Community Radio (CR), characterized by small scale broadcast, could be utilized as a grassroots development tool and voice for the poor. The radicalness, participatory, and non-commercial nature of this low-cost medium offers a chance to the community to involve in factual and impactful reporting which ultimately opens to diversified news stories, anecdotes, news anchoring talents, and news values. Despite these achievements, the CRSs (Community Radio Stations)in India are restricted from reportingthe news. The fragmentation of the audience with the advent of social media has already impacted rural parts of the country in terms of alternative or radical journalism. By employing the mixed method research method, combined with critical analysis of the doctrine of community radio journalism, firstly, this paper analyses the disruptions or obstacles rural journalists face while reporting for community radio, and secondly, the approach or methods community radio stations (CRSs) adopt to overcome and combat these impediments. Two rural CRSs in Maharashtra, Yeralavani (Sangli), and Panzaravani (Dhule) are selected for the study. Drawing on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and descriptive surveys, the researcher finds that CRSs are not interested in broadcasting news bulletins of All India Radio.Instead, they are broadcasting local newspaper readings. Volunteers and content production committee is creative in forming useful content without compromising regulations. The data also showed that most of the community members use WhatsApp groups of CRSs to listen to programming and submitting feedback. The findings demonstrated a new bracket of journalism, which delineates the array of rural reporting.

Keywords: Community Radio, Community Media, Radical Journalism, Rural Reporting, Yeralavani, Panzaravani

Introduction

The available critiques and research on the developments in the discourse of communication for development have critically articulated the concept and nature of journalism in the southern hemisphere. The end of the second world war indicated the emergence of superpowers, cultural imperialism, and the abilities of mass communication mediums which

classified the world based on the political strengths and economic prosperity. The developing nations struggled for basic needs and requirements as consequences of the imbalance in the power structure of the continents. The world was divided into the marginalized and the elites. The socio-economic attributes represented the political situation of the developing nations, which further enhanced the moral and ethical frameworks of various disciplines, education systems, and rationale of the nation. The term development journalism may not have the significance and utility to developed nations as it possesses in the third world countries. As the most affected population of the earth, the duty of journalism in developing countries is beyond reporting factual data, awareness aboutgovernment schemes, and entertaining the public. It must contribute to the development schemes, projects, plans of the country either formed by the government or public with an alternative viewpoint of the world. The process of change is required fearless reporting with the notion of social responsibility, often with reactance from the government. In this scenario, the challenge is the information-flow as the marginalized and the poor are often excluded and deprived of technology and information. Mainstream media of such nations might ignore the grassroots. In a result, their voices are left unheard to the world. On the other hand, radical media or alternative media could do the exact opposite.

Development Journalism and Community Media

As the term development varies in most discourses and social reality, the journalism associated with this term is difficult to explain. It is defined differently by various scholars based on their perceived intelligence. Ogan (1982) indicates the development of journalism terms in two contexts. First: it is a process to facilitate and implement the development goals set by the government. Second: It is similar to investigative reporting. Viewed in this manner, the role of development journalism is to evaluate the development plans formed by the government and track the implementation process and report shortcomings. According to Vilanilam (2009), development journalism is catering to the process of development in developing nations. He has added few indicators to the discourse defining the concept more elaborately. On the other hand, Murthy (2016) argues that despite covering socio-economic and cultural aspects, the discourse of development journalism does not differ drastically from regular news coverage. Development journalism occurs over a particular period, reporting, or covering the process of development rather than the events (Agarwala, 1978).

Scholars often engage in the conceptual confusion between the Alternative,Radical, Community, and Underground media. As a matter of fact, the values and conception of all these terms are similar — however, the situational characteristics and involved public divide these terms in the application. The conventional establishments of mainstream media are deliberately unfollowed by radical media articulating an alternative perspective on society and culture.Atton (2003) defines 'alternative' as simply non-mainstream while he claims the term 'radical' fueled with the notion of social change. Radical Media is dedicated to the welfare of ordinary people while playing watchdog on governmental activities.The underground press is an anti-establishment, opposing the political and cultural inventions and publishing aggressive news stories against the authorities (Watson and Hill, 2012).

On the other hand, community media caters to a limited group of people formed by race, ethnicity, religion, interests, preferences, and region. Community media is not a corporate

entity, hence confines to the interest of the specific community and operates under the code of conduct designed by the government. Howley (2010) emphasized on the 'place' while discussing the framework of community media in his detailed analysis. Among the various factors which make a community, he connects Culture (shared senses, tradition and custom, dress and food, sound, and imagery)to the regional proximity. The programming or content production in community media requires access and participation of community members. However, the transmission of information between one source to another must express the soul of the community (Berrigan, 1979).

Community Radio: A Primary Tool for Development Communication

Tabing (2002) defines community radio station (CRS) as "the one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community, and by the community." (*p.9*)Over the years, particularly in developing nations, CR has widely recognized and utilized as a powerful tool of development, change, and progress. CRSs often broadcast with low power transmission, which constrains the broadcast to a specific geographical area. Those who reside within this region can listen to the programming. This feature allows CR to cater to the local population and give exposure to the local issues with a problem-solving approach. The non-commercial structure of CR indicates the purpose and objective of this medium. CR offers community access to information and means of communication (Bhat and Ramakrishnan,2014). The medium should act as a catalyst for development conserving folk art and music, maintaining harmony and solidarity, and encouraging community participation in every aspect. Through effective programming, CR is expected to generate participatory development and collaborative campaigns. Considering the latest developments in the sector, Malik (2017) observes CR asa bottom-up participatory communication tool with an approach for social change through innovative techniques.

Characteristics of Community Radio

Autonomous	*Niche Broadcasting*
Non-commercial	*Local Reach*
Low operating cost	*Democratic*
Community Ownership	*CommunityParticipation*

Table 1: Characteristics of Community Radio

There are currently 185 operational community radio stations in India (mib.gov.in). The state of Maharashtra has 18 CRSs, actively contributing to the respective community (CR Compendium, 2019). In the global context, particularly in developed nations, this medium is known as HAM radio, as the purpose is mainly entertainment. Nevertheless, the studies have shown us the significance of CR in developing nations. However, the medium faces numerous impediments around the globe. In India, the CR sector is restricted to follow certain activities and actions which havedisrupted the model.

Restrictions on Community Radio Sector in India

There is a code of ethics of operating a community radio station worldwide. In other words, scholars and researchers have agreed upon the implements to design universal operational guidelines to facilitate the broadcasting process without compromising the ethical standards and codes. However, as long as these stations are monitored and controlled by the government, there would be a set of broadcasting policy to maintain the wellness of the nation.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, GOI has published policy guidelines for setting up community radio stations in India. In this set of instructions, the operational guidelines, after setting up the station, can also be found. In the light of the objective of the present research paper, few of the restrictions which are ultimately disrupting the journalism and information flow of CRSs are mentioned in the following table.

Sr. No.	Guidelines, Regulations, and Impositions on Community Radio Stations in India
1	It should be explicitly constituted as a 'non-profit' organization and should have a proven record of at least three years of service to the local community.
2	Community Radio should maintain separate bank account irrespective of the parent organization
3	Programs for broadcast should be relevant to the educational, developmental, social, and cultural needs of the community.
4	The Permission Holder shall have to adhere to the provisions of the Programme and Advertising Code as prescribed for All India Radio.
5	The Permission Holder shall not broadcast any programs, which relate to news and current affairs and are otherwise political.
6	The Permission Holder shall ensure that nothing is included in the programs broadcast, which: A. Offends against good taste or decency. B.It contains criticism of friendly countries.
7	CRS shall be expected to cover a range of 5-10 km. For this, a transmitter having a maximum Effective Radiated Power (ERP) of 100 W would be adequate.
8	Transmission of sponsored programs shall not be permitted except programs sponsored by Central & State Governments and other organizations to broadcast public interest information.
9	Limited advertising and announcements relating to local events, local businesses and services, and employment opportunities shall be allowed. The maximum duration of such limited advertising will be restricted to 5 (Five) minutes per hour of broadcast.
10	Revenue generated from advertisements and announcements as per Para 8 (ii) shall be utilized only for the operational expenses and capital expenditure of the CRS.

Table 2: Regulations and Policy Guidelines for Community Radio in India

(Source: https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/c1_0.pdf)

Research Methodology

This study is an attempt to find the obstacles faced by rural community radio stations, which disrupts the process of development journalism. In addition to this, the researcher will attempt to examine the approach of selected CRSs towards the solution to the restrictions and regulations formed by the government. Studying the approach will produce innovative methods and techniques of broadcasting as well as chosen alternatives. Ultimately these innovations can formulate a new bracket of journalism and stand out as an example for other

rural CRSs in India.The fulfillment of the proposed aim required the support of qualitative and quantitative data in the same study. Hence, the mixed-method research design was employed. The researcher has referred to Creswell's (2003) definition of mixed-method research in which he proposes to collect, analyze, and integrate both qualitative and quantitative data in a sustained program of inquiry. Creswell (2007) has suggested three approaches to data collection. The concurrent approach has been adopted in the present study, which allows collection of both qualitative information and quantitative data at the same time and present in a single study giving equal weightage for analysis and interpretations (Wimmer and Dominick, 2014).

Objectives

- To understand the nature ofpolicy guidelines designed for the Community Radio sector in India
- To examine the approach of selected community radio stations towards the policy guidelines designed by the government.
- To investigate the problem-solving techniques and alternative solutions adopted by selected community radio stations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Two rural community radio stations in the state of Maharashtra was selected for the study. Since this research paper aims to evaluate techniques of development journalism employed by CRS, it was apparent to select only rural CRS for study.

Qualitative information was collected using in-depth interviews and focusgroup discussions. Structured interviews were taken with the station manager, radio jockey's, volunteers, and interns. Focus-group discussion was organized with community members who frequently contributed to content production. A similar pattern of questions and framework was followed at both CRSs.

The survey method was selected to collect quantitative data. The primary aim of the survey was to analyze the listening habits, sources, interests, and preferences of community members. Also, it was necessary to investigate the perception of community members towards the programming related to news and local news reporting. Similarly, it was necessary to analyze the perception of CR staff on news reporting and rural journalism. For the purpose, three surveys were conducted.

The snowball sampling method was selected for the audience survey as there had been no survey defining the exact listenership figures at both CRSs. The questionnaire was prepared accordingly and distributed through partakers from the eight-direction surrounding a CRS. The sample size for the audience survey was four-hundred. The collected data from both stations were analyzed and presented in a single table as the respondents are considered as a universal audience group. A purposive sampling method was used for the CR staff survey. Questions were formed using the Likert scale, and the collected responses were inserted in SPSS for interpretations and analysis.

Profile of Selected Community Radio Stations

Yeralavani (Jalihal, District: Sangli) and Panzaravani (Pimpalner, District: Dhule) CRS is selected for the study. The following table indicates the necessary information about these selected CRSs:

Community Radio	Frequency	Launch Date	Parent NGO	Location	Broadcast Hours	Broadcast Timings	Language
Yeralavani	91.2 MHz	31-07-2011	Yerala Projects Society	Jalihal, Taluka: Jath, District: Sangli	11 Hours 30 Minutes	6 am to 12 pm & 4 pm to 11 pm	Marathi and Kannada
Panzaravani	90.4 MHz	16-04-2017	Lupin Human Welfare and Research Foundation	Jebapur, Taluka: Pimaplner District: Dhule	7 Hours	7 am to 11 am & 4 pm to 7 pm	Marathi and Ahirani

Table 3: Profile of Selected Community Radio Stations

Yeralavani CR operates from two studios. First is in the Jalihal village from where they broadcast, and the other is in Sangli, a district place where the original content is produced. Yeralavani operates intending to empower and develop the local community. Yeralavani attempts to the aware community about government schemes, plans as well as relevant information on various topics such as epidemics, agricultural trends, educational and job opportunities. The region is known as Yerala, and it has been declared as a drought-prone region by the government of India. This area is remote and backward. The Jalihal village is situated on the border of Maharashtra and Karnataka. As a result, the local dialect is a combination of these languages, which is challenging to grasp. In addition to this, the region faces numerous problems such as water scarcity, migration, illiteracy, and climate change.

Panzaravani is also operating under the remote and rural region. The region is populated by various tribal and communities which are illiterate. Their source of living is farming and cattle farming. The local dialect is called Ahirani, and most of the programming is produced in this dialect, which has benefited Panzaravani since its conception. The station seeks to provide information about new agricultural practices, government schemes, and create awareness about health and education. Preservation of tribal culture and helping the economy of the region has been an objective of Panzaravani.

Community Radio Journalism: Challenges, Struggle, and Solutions

Since the GOI (Government of India) banned CRSs from reporting and broadcasting news, there is no independent array of community radio journalism in India. There are no community radio journalist exists in the CRSs. These policy guidelines are acting as a disruptive factor to produce journalism at the local level. The reason behind this restriction defines the influence of this medium at a grassroots level. To keep harmony and solidarity in the rural part of India, authorities are concerned over allowing CRSs producing local news affairs, announcements, and news stories. Authorities fear that the local news reporting on

CR can lead to communal violence, political interference, commercialism, and social unrest. These concerns are aggregable to an extent since the rural regions are often sensitive and backward. However, there is also a possibility that CRSs can prove to be anexcellent instrument of mediationbetween people and government and produce social transforming news stories leading to development and progress.

Recently, the ministry of information and broadcasting amended the policy guidelines for community radio stations. CRSs across the country are allowed to broadcast news and current affairs exclusively from state-owned All India Radio stations. CRS may translate the news bulletin of AIR in the local language or dialect. However, stations cannot make changes in the original format. In addition to this, the ministry declared that CRS could not charge lower for advertisements than the DAVP (Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity). The present ad rate is 4 rupees per second. Furthermore, the ministry allowed limited advertisements, announcements related to local events and businesses, and employment opportunities. The duration of such a broadcast is restricted to seven minutes per hour. The ministry of information and broadcasting has issued a document about the difference between non-news and current affairs. The document is consisting of several content categories that facilitate the process of programming as per the ministry rules. Ministry has disapproved of the transmission of sponsored programs unless they are sponsored by state and central government and any other organization with public interest information.

SR NO	CONTENT CATEGORIES
1	Information pertaining to sporting events excluding live coverage. However, rive commentaries of sporting events of local nature may be permissible
2	Information pertaining to Traffic and Weather
3	Information pertaining to and coverage of local cultural events, festivals.
4	Coverage of topics pertaining to examinations, results, admissions, career counselling
5	Availability of employment opportunities
6	Public announcements pertaining to civic amenities like electricity, water supply, natural calamities, health alerts, etc. as provided by the local administration
7	Such other categories not permitted at present that may subsequently be permitted explicitly by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from time to time.

Table 4: Content Categories

(Source: https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/Amendment%20in%20policy%20guidelines.pdf)

These categories elucidate that the only information should be provided to listeners without opinions and personal biases. In other words, the ministry stresses on impartiality and objectivity which restraint CRSs to produce journalism. Broadcasting factual information will help communities to some extent; however, the impactful news stories and reports required elements like investigative reporting, freedom of speech, and aggressive language. To overcome the impositions, Yeralavani and Panzaravani have managed to produce alternative options. The innovative ideas have been implemented in programming without compromising

the codes and ethics designed for CRSs. Following chart indicates the innovation in programming and alternatives:

Sr. No	Yeralavani CR
1	In the program, 'Dainandin,'the announcer reads 'Sakal' newspaper every day. The relevant news stories are given preference. The duration of the show is 15 minutes. Daily newspaper reading does not tamper policy guidelines.
2	In the phone-in programs, RJ's engage community members in the interaction on recent developments in a particular field. It enables communication covering topics otherwise cannot be aired due to policy guidelines.
3	The publicity is done through the programs instead of making jingles and spots. The content strictly follows the guidelines. The announcements are always related to community welfare.
4	The program 'RojgarVarta' (Employment News) highlights the classifieds in the local newspapers. RJ reads these ads and helps job seekers.

Table 5: Innovations in Programming and Alternatives (Yeralavani)

Sr. No	Panzaravani CR
1	The program 'Majha Sandesh' (My Message) features two fictional characters talking about local news and events with each other. Theconcealed format of this show allows RJ's to communicate regional news to listeners.
2	The program 'Gav Sanvad' (Village Talks) highlights the major regional incidents and events through the discussion and expert interviews. Local news stories are covered through the panel discussions.
3	The phone-in programs often feature prominent journalistsof the district. RJ's ask for their opinion on a particular issue which elucidates the journalistic background and viewpoint.
4	Relevant programs featuring the latest events and incidents are requested from other CR of the state.With this collaborative programming, the online platform MANCH dedicated to CR programming is utilized.

Table 6: Innovations in Programming and Alternatives (Panzaravani)

While studying the approach of selected CRSs towards these restrictions, the researcher witnessed the fact that both stations have denied and reluctant to broadcast the All India Radio's news bulletins. Instead, they have found the techniques mentioned above to be aware of and entertain their listeners. On asking the reason behind not broadcasting AIR news bulletins, the station managers of both stations showed the rage and despair towards the latest amendment. According to them, CRSs should be allowed to produce news and journalism.

To understand the approach and perception of the radio jockey's, station managers, interns, volunteers, and other members associated closely with CRSs, the survey was conducted at both CRSs. The purposive sampling method was employed,and forty respondents were selected. The questionnaire consists of ten closed-ended questions on a Likert scale. The following table indicates the results:

Sr No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Natural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Reporting News and News Stories willIncreases Job Opportunities at CRS	67.05%	20%	5%	12.05%	0.00%
2	Only Information and Awareness based Programs Contribute Less Compare to Implementation Based Programs	22.05%	15%	12.05%	32.05%	17.05%
3	Broadcasting AIR News Bulletins Will Increase Listeners	10%	15%	7.05%	35%	32.05%
4	Freedom of Producing Journalistic Programs Will Increase Listeners	22.05%	5%	47.05%	20%	5%
5	Restrictions on Broadcasting of Advertisements Limits the Revenue of CR	77.05%	15%	07.05%	00.00%	00.00%
6	Sponsored Content Receives More Listenership and Participation	70%	17.05%	07.05%	5%	00.00%
7	The government should Allow CRSs to Produce and Broadcast News	90%	10%	00.00%	00.00%	00.00%
8	Duration and Rates of Advertisements should be Raised	85%	15%	00.00%	00.00%	00.00%
9	Producing and Broadcasting News on Local Level Will Disturb the Peace and Harmony in Local Community	80%	20%	00.00%	00.00%	00.00%
10	CR Journalism Will Increase Political Influence in the Working and ___ in Community	67.05%	07.05%	5%	15%	5%

Table 7: Perception of CRSs (N=40)

The data indicates that the CRSs are not satisfied with the restriction on news production and broadcasting. At the same time, they are reluctant to broadcast news bulletins of AIR. News production will not only increase listeners but also create an array of local reporters. The CRSs do not appreciate the restriction on advertisements and sponsored content. The radio jockeys and other staff demands the freedom to produce journalistic content. The responses depicted the heartburn of CRSs about the latest amendments and advertisement rules. Sinceadvertising is a primary source of revenue of CRSs, limitations on broadcasting advertisements weaken the financial sustainability of CR.

It was significant to analyze the perception of listeners towards CR journalism. Hence, the survey was conducted at both CRSs. The following table indicates the responses:

Sr No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Natural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	News and News Stories Related Programming should be aired from CRS	49.83%	23.63%	06.59%	15.59%	04.34%
2	Producing News Will does not Harm the Harmony and Solidarity of Community	64.46%	13.05%	02.73%	11.41%	07.87%
3	News Production in CR would also Produce Local Reporters	65.43%	17.84%	01.76%	10.45%	04.28%
4	CR Journalism Will Help Community Development	89.38%	04.18%	01.60%	04.18%	00.68%

Table 8: Perception of listeners (N=622)

The data revealed thatlisteners wouldperceive CR journalism positively. In fact, listeners feel a need for local journalism. Listeners believe that journalism will not generate unrest in society. Instead, it will help the local economy in various ways and open job opportunities in the region. It has been fairly evident from the survey that listeners are going to appreciate news production and broadcasting from CRS.

The Resistanceto Social Media

The reach of social media is increased in the rural regions of India. Since the Digital India campaign, the number of smartphone users in India reached its peak. The social media networks provide interactivity and multimedia experience which has impactedthe traditional mass communication networks. Radio is not an interactive medium. It is also difficult to measure the attention of listeners to specific programming when it comes to the audience survey. However, social media networks bridge this gap. The case of Panzaravani CR revealed a strange fact for the researcher. The mountains surround the CRS. Hence, many nearby towns and villages do not get reception which has become a severe issue for the NGO and CR staff. Unfortunately, the antenna of Panzaravani CR is established in the smoothened ground, which restricts frequencies to cover and reach the specific geographical region. During the focusgroup discussion, it was revealed that even the nearest towns do not get a clear signal on their smartphones and radio sets. Discussing this issue with the station manager, the researcher noticed the fact that Panzaravani CR has a strong presence on social media. Panzaravani CR has created four WhatsApp groups that have more than sixhundred participants. The programs broadcasted from CR are uploaded regularly on these WhatsApp groups. After the morning transmission, the content is uploaded within an hour and the same is followed for evening transmission. In addition to this, RJ's consistently interact with listeners and upload short videos explaining exciting facts and trivia. The RJ's find it easy to acquire feedback from listeners with a notion of interactivity. However, those who own a smartphone can only take advantage of this service. Since the region is tribal, most of the tribes do not own smartphones. As a result, they cannot listen to programming. To summarize, WhatsApp is not anauthentic platform to transmit CR content;nevertheless, it helps not only to reach a specific audience but increase interactivity with them.

The following survey was conducted in the operational region of Panzaravani CR. The purpose of the survey was to investigate theground reality.

Sr No	Statement	True	False
1	I listen to Panzaravani CR programs only through WhatsApp groups	72.5%	27.41%
2	I follow Panzaravani CRS on Facebook	54.19%	45.80%
3	I submit feedback through WhatsApp groups	69.03%	30.96%
4	I share the programs of Panzaravani on social media	60.32%	39.67%

Table 9: Social Media Habits of CR listeners (N=310)

The data suggest that most of the respondents listen to Panzaravani CRS through only WhatsApp. Further, most of them interact and share the content on other groups, which allows local content to reach a broader spectrum. The members who belong to the community but live far from it get instant access to the content. These activities help to increase media literacy in people.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of CR in India, news production and broadcasting are prohibited. A few years back, the government thought of amending policy guidelines thatare not appreciated by CRSs. In the current scenario, it seems that the government will not permit journalism production of CRSs in the near future also. However, innovations in programming can change the scenario completely. As described in table five and six, alternatives can be innovative. It is not mandatory to produce journalism in order to deliver news and news stories. It can be done with few tricks in the narratives of feature programs, discussions, interviews, and phone-in programs. There will be way outs for those who try their best. The government never banned newspaper reading on the CR. That way, innovative ideas can put out during the content production process. It will definitely require brainstorming sessions, but the outputs would be smart and beneficial.

Debating over the restriction of government on the CR sector is a worthless activity as it neither produces solutions nor leads to amendment of policy. Even though the present research leadsthe researcher to believe that the government should permit the production of journalism with an implementer structure of monitoring it, instead of censoring the content, the broadcasting should be under surveillance for a specific period. During the period, authorities and experts can guide and train the content production team of CR. The performance and broadcasting can be reviewed as per the structured parameters. The successful broadcasting can award an extension in the production of journalism.

The perception of CRSs and their listeners have limitations when it comes to regulations and restrictions. The surveys have shown that both the working staff of CRS and listeners would appreciate producing and listening to the local news produced by CRS. However, their perception has limited productive outputs. The perception should convert in collaborative efforts towards the amendment in the policy guidelines.

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