

Module name/ title: Researching Community Media

Paper: Community, Media and Society

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Component II: Description of the Module

| Items | Description of Module |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Subject Name | Media & Communication Studies |
| Paper Name | Community Media and Society |
| Module Name/Title | Researching Community Media |
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| Pre-requisites | |
| Objectives | |
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1. Module: Researching Community Media

2. Introduction

In this module you will learn about major research works and debates surrounding community media across the world. While preparing an exhaustive list is impossible, the following paragraphs will attempt at delineating the tangents of research done on the issue. The learner is supposed to glean through the cited literature to pick up clues to further readings.

Historically the research on Community Media has centred on concepts like community, empowerment, participation, global/local, ownership of media, technologies, etc. This module brings together a few notable works available on the conceptual framework about the trajectories of community media research around the world and in India as well. Although the list may not be exhaustive yet it delineates the major developments in this field over the last fifty years.

3. Learning Outcome

You will learn the basic literature available on the topic of 'Researching Community Media' and be accustomed with the major debates and discussions on the topic. The module will also enlighten about various approaches to community media research. On a broader note, the module offers a conceptual understanding of community media research in global as well as Indian context.

4. Conceptual Literature from Around the World

Frances J Berrigan conducted a study during 1979-1981 titled "*Community communications: The role of community media in Development*". This study is one of the earliest studies that brings to fore the debates surrounding Community media. Commissioned by UNESCO, which indeed took a leading role in the formative years of community media, this study assumed that development can be achieved through media and its technologies. Berrigan states that development is a key word for future societies and media and communication has the potential to play a major role in this direction. Development through the use of media was the crux of this study. While at the same time she warns of the dangers of media being projected as the sole concern for development. The over emphasizing of media in this context is not free from its own pitfalls. Media cannot be a panacea for development, she argues. Berrigan suggests that the idea of community based media goes hand in hand with how societies accept these new norms of access and participation. Depending upon the nature of societies, the concept of community communications will have different shades concerning how it performs and finds acceptance. Tied to this argument is the interpretation of basic constitutional definitions of the rights of individuals as

against the state's right to control. Thus there is a legal as well as societal angle to the functioning of community media in any given situation. It becomes increasingly difficult to assume that each and every community media project would be able to guarantee equal levels of participation to the population. The extent of the situational changes in people's participation and access will have a direct consequence on the development objectives. Berrigan cites that the variables will change with each project; in some cases people's participation will be at the initial stages of planning while in others it will be at the outcome level and again in some other cases it will be emphasised on the feedback factor of the project. Depending upon case to case basis as explained with the varying degrees of acceptance by societies, the character of community media with each situation will be different. More so is the fact that community media is not limited to only a particular type of media as assumed rather community communication techniques are integral to print media, such as local newspapers, pamphlets and booklets, and they are an essential part of traditional communications projects. Berrigan thus rightly looks at development as holistic approach and does not limit herself to particular forms of media, rather looks at any media that comes from the communities.

Peter Lewis, in his study titled "*Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local*" published in 1993, looks at community media as an alternative form of media. He goes on to argue three distinct reasons for the growth of alternative media. Firstly, he categorises the new forms of protests which arose out of movements such as 'women's movement, ethnic minorities, migrants, environmentalists, gay rights activists and anti-racist organizations.' Characteristically, these types of movements have extra-parliamentary origins and are largely ignored, misrepresented or marginalized by the mass media. In the second instance he argues for movements which have existed for a long period and are essentially leftist in ideology like 'human rights, language rights, trade union (labour) rights, on behalf of rural populations against the urban centres of power, for the poor against the rich and powerful.' While in the third instance, he cites alternative media as a tool used by groups and people to fight for political demands: 'for example, native people in North America, Western European nations that lack statehood, the post-Communist nations of Eastern Europe, or African nations moving to multi-party rule.' Here there is a temporal dynamic: what starts off as underground, illegal or marginalized protest can end up being recognized within the system, or as a separate unity, or a new nation.' Peter Lewis' contention is the linkage between the local and globalizing forces. He looks at the gaping holes which led to the rise of alternative forms of media as he states. The marginal, the periphery and the minorities according to him always needed alternative media to air their concerns and voices.

Kevin Howley undertook a study "*Community Media: People, Places and Technologies*" published in 2005. This study discusses the ways in which community uses various forms of media such as radio, television, print and computer networks as tools to meet their urge for a local form of communication. Howley goes on to give

a definition of community media, as a means for a community to freely express its own voice more in the pattern of a participatory democratic institution, which actually is an outcome with the disillusionment with mainstream media outlets. Such forms of community media are bound to enhance, Howley predicts, a sense of belonging and free speech which goes a long way in maintaining community relations. He bases his studies on downtown community television and radio networks in the United States which are run by migrant and minority populations. It is his research on one such station in Bloomington, Indiana that led to his study on the role of people and their media.

Linda Fuller wrote a book titled “*Community Media: International Perspectives*”, which was published in 2007. She divides her book into three sections viz. Indigenous experiences, case studies and virtual communities’ visions. Her idea of the participatory use of media/communications by individual and organisations to express people’s issues is both flexible and participatory in nature. She argues that participatory forms of communication change shape and size depending upon time and place, yet providing both access and opportunity for community development and based on observations forwarded by Maslog (1997, p. 3), Linda Fuller cites the following characteristics of community media:

- Owned and controlled by people in the community;
- Usually smaller and low-cost;
- Provides interactive two-way communication;
- Non-profit and autonomous, therefore, non-commercial;
- Has limited coverage or reach;
- Utilizes appropriate, indigenous materials and resources;
- Reflects community needs and interests;
- Its programs or content support community development.

The book details community media experiences from around the world in different geographical, political and community perspectives.

In their study titled “*Making Community Media Work*”, published in Jan Servaes’ edited volume “*Approaches to Development: Studies on Communication for Development*”, Servaes, Lee and Carpentier identified four approaches that can make community media work in modern societies. They argue that community media can sustain itself under specific roles where it exists as an active agent of change. The four identified approaches are as follows:

Approach One: Serving a Community

Which Community? (The definition of the community is in question)

Approach Two: Community Media as a relative alternative to Mainstream Media

Supplementing, Contesting and Resisting Mainstream Media Discourse (Presence of mainstream media validates community media)

From Alternative to Marginal? (Running the risk of falling into marginal categories)

Approach Three: Linking Community Media to the Civil Society

Deepening Democracy (In the process strengthening participation of society)

Approach Four: Community Media as Rhizome

Community media's role as a linkage to civil society and other such segments of civil society without losing its own identity. Community media's link with the state and the market are relevant in this approach.

Carpentier, Lie and Servaes published, more than a decade ago, an article titled "*Community media: Muting the democratic media discourse*" in 2003, which attempted to chart different approaches used to understand community and alternative media. The outcome was a typology of four approaches (Figure 1), where the first two approaches are strongly media centred. Built on community media (Approach 1) and alternative media (Approach 2) theory, these two models capture the more traditional ways of understanding community media.

Colin Fraser and Restrepostrada in their study on "*Community Radio for Change and Development*" published in 2002 identified five functions of community radio in a developmental paradigm viz.:

- To promote local culture based on the principles of local identity and local character;
- To give everyone equal opportunity and thus promote equality of voices and participation of all;
- To provide space for open dialogue and democratic participation by providing a platform for interactive discussion about issues related to mutual interest of the community at large;
- To promote social change and development; and
- To promote good governance and civil society by playing a community watchdog role that makes local authorities and politicians more conscious of their public responsibilities.

Their emphasis is on the idea of participation of all in the process of production which leads to the development of community. They also entrust the role of watchdog to radio.

5. Community Media Literature in the Indian Context

Community Media research in India has caught on in the last two decades. Although community media initiatives have been around for a long time, literature flourished

with the opening up of the airwaves for the public in 1995 and resultant granting of licenses for community radio initiatives to different stakeholders.

Pavarala and Malik wrote a book in 2007 titled “*Other voices: The struggle for community radio in India*”. The book is a testimony to the struggle for opening up of the government hegemony over radio waves in India. Across the world a need was felt by civil society to have a media of its own free from the commercial interests of mainstream media and thus the fight for a community media initiative in India. The book looks at the different legislations and government policies relating to media in India. It gives a detailed analysis of policy frameworks in other countries and approaches it comparatively. In the ensuing chapters, it takes a critical look at the broadcasting policy of India which was not very conducive to community based media issues and was always suspicious to anything beyond government control. Vinod Pavarala and Kanchan Malik highlight the Bangalore declaration, 1996 and also the Pastapur Convention, 2000 which were important landmarks in this fight for community radio in India. The role of Deccan Development Society (DDS) one of the earliest NGO’s to work in this area has been highlighted in the book.

Savita Bailur in her article, “*Who is the Community in Community Radio?*” published in 2012, dwells on the concept of community in community-radio and questions the composition of this community. She, through her intensive field work, forms three essential understandings of community and what constitutes community participation:

- Community is not a discrete entity;
- Communities are dynamic; and
- Communities are cognitive.

She goes on to argue the case for this three pronged community with the help of her study with *Avaaz*.

Nitin Paranjape conducted a study titled “*Community media: local is focal*” published in 2007. Through his work with *Abhivaykti* - a people centred media group, Nitin Paranjape argues that the formation of a community becomes more meaningful through community media and its diverse means. From being just mere receivers of media messages, community members go on to become active agents of change who contribute to the overall creation of a more meaningful society. He cites five major functions of community media in the Indian context:

- Media for ushering in localization;
- Media as a tool for hosting dialogues;
- Communication process as a means for harvesting knowledge;
- Streets as nodes for showcasing their media; and
- Inspiring others to create.

Ilamparithi did a study which is the author's doctoral work completed in 2011 titled "*Community Radio for Rural Development: A Social Capital Perspective of the Role of NGO Initiatives in Tamil Nadu*". The study looks at how NGOs which run the Community Radio stations bring social, political and economic development by not only providing access to information and encouraging participation of the community members but also play a major role in enhancing Social Capital of the community members which leads to further participation and actual development thereby. The study is an important look at the role of external agencies in bringing about change and empowerment to communities and critically examining this relationship. The argument thus is that community media in isolation cannot contribute much to development. It needs financial support from external agencies or institutions, like the NGOs in this case, to catalyse the communication process. The participation of the community members also depends on their 'community spirit' which actually decides the level of participation. Some of the important findings of this research are:

- Demographic structure of the community has a significant relationship with the pre-existing level of Social Capital among them;
- Another finding of the research is that not all the community members participate in CRS. People with more 'community spirit' are more likely to participate in the radio;
- It is also evident from the results that the NGOs play a major role in enhancing Social Capital of the community members as well as in encouraging the community members to actively participate in CRS which leads them towards development;
- And finally, it is also proved that there is a significant association between the level of Social Capital and rural development which was measured in terms of quality of life, self esteem and freedom.

Neeraja Prabakar's doctoral work titled "*A Study on the Role of Campus Community Radio (Anna FM) in Inculcating Everyday Science Awareness among Marginalised Women*" completed in 2009 examines the role of Campus Radio especially Anna FM in this study. Anna FM was one of the earliest community radio stations provided with a license to broadcast programmes. Although essentially a campus station yet it provided a unique case where the government was unwilling to give license to external agencies in the initial years. To quote in the researchers own words: Anna FM to a great extent reflects and shapes the richness of the campus community radio model and is the university's platform to express its social concerns and execute its social responsibility beyond its academic core. This thesis has shown the connection between participatory approaches, university resources and public private partnership both from within and outside the campus, as they intertwine to form a rare form of synergy between campus, community and supportive partnerships. The thesis highlights the fact that experiences from studies such as these can help us learn how to effectively bridge a media practitioner's mindset with the academic

research paradigm, cultivating greater sensitivity to the different needs of the participating community, media students, faculty, staff and administrators, navigating the universities' bureaucratic systems and securing needed resources, while at the same time keeping the community development focus as the highest priority. This study has established the potential of campus community radio (Anna FM) in inculcating everyday science awareness among marginalized women through the implementation of participatory communication projects for the development of the global campus community radio movement and in particular for the CCR sector in India. The researcher concludes that it is the success of Anna FM that has influenced policy makers to open up the sector for NGOs. In a sense, Anna FM has redefined campus community radio from being a participatory media tool designated to fulfil the government's community radio mandate to one with limitless potential waiting to be explored further.

Bidu Bhusan Dash did his doctoral work on "*Media for Empowerment: A Study of Community Radio Initiatives in Bundelkhand*" and completed it in 2005. The author conducted his fieldwork in Bundelkhand, looking at the construction of community and role of community media. He also tries to theoretically establish different definitions of community that have cropped up at different times. It is understood differently he argues 'by different scholars, especially in Indian context. Bidu goes on to cite Pokharapurkar (1993) in his study on Rural Development through Community Television where he argues that television sets distributed among the villagers by the state are community television. In the 1960's and 1970's television and radio sets were the diffuser of government information on matters relating to farming and other such issues related to village development. This was a state run experiment where the concept of the community was bound by the notion of the technology being accessed by the community. In late 90s, the community radio movement was led by the activists and academicians in India to set up CRSs.' Dash argues in his thesis 'the common thread among all the definitions is the idea of communities' participation, ownership and empowering the underprivileged. Such prefixes assert an emphasis on rights, and in many cases, the priorities of local systems and local people over the larger units of corporation, region and nation.' The rights based approach especially in the third world countries has been one of the common features of community media. The thesis goes on to delineate the community media process in different situations across societies. He writes "Community media, which is participatory and democratic in nature has correlations with the empowerment processes in any set up, be it a developing country like India or developed country like United States of America (USA). For instance, People's Video Theatre (PVT) in New York City facilitates community communication and promotes progressive social change. PVT's commitment to using video as a means of community empowerment was something of an anomaly in New York City's alternative media scene (Howley, 2005, p. 146). In Philadelphia, Neighbourhoods Online was set up by community activists with the aim of making it easy for groups and concerned citizens to access information about issues relevant to neighbourhood empowerment (Schwarz, 1998).

In Australia, indigenous radio and television play a central role in boosting communities' self-image.”

6. Summary

You have now learned about some of the critical topics concerning community media and the debates surrounding the topic. Community media has always been surrounded by questions of community, of what constitutes community, empowerment, development, and so on. Different scholars have argued in their own ways depending on various field researches. In this module we have provided an analysis of some of the crucial research studies on the topic both from Indian as well as global perspectives.

