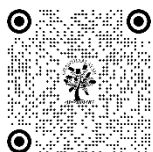


EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS AND LISTENERSHIP OF COMMUNITY RADIO

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ABSTRACT

Community radio has long been recognized as a powerful tool for empowering marginalized communities by providing them with a platform to voice their concerns, share their stories, and access essential information. Community radio (CR) is a third-tier media, together with broadcasting on public and privately owned radio. This research paper throws light on the listenership pattern of listeners of community radio, their program preferences and CR programs' effectiveness on listeners. A survey was conducted among listeners of 'Radio Varsha' which is situated in the Gopalganj district of Bihar for the purpose of data collection and analysis. This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative survey data and extracts of discussions held with stakeholders and listeners. The research discovered that programs are effective in generating awareness on various topics among listeners. The broadcast content in local languages and dialects was liked by the listeners, thus, leading to the effectiveness of the programs.

Keywords: Community Radio, Listenership, Effectiveness, Development

1. INTRODUCTION

In many nations around the world, community radio stations (CRSs) represent a significant component of the media landscape. CRSs are part of a three-tier radio system, the other two parts are commercial and public radio. With the intention of giving communities a platform to connect freely with their government, community radio was established. CR has been characterized in a variety of ways by academics, international organizations, and media groups. Non-profit status, ownership by community and control, and community involvement are the three components of community radio.

Community radio is a distinct media sector and a vital alternative to state-owned public broadcasters and commercial private media. It is an important medium for communities to express their issues and concerns in their own languages and in ways that are culturally appropriate for them. [AMARC. \(2018\)](#)

[Tabing \(2002\)](#), defines CR as “one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community, and by the community”. The author claims that the community can be geographical or territorial, such as a township, village, district, or an island. It can also be a group of people who share similar interests. Various communication studies around the world have proved the contribution and effectiveness of community development through community media. [Dagron \(2001\)](#) highlighted the potential of community radio to involve marginalized communities in society. “Local area radio gives a stage to people, gatherings, and networks to communicate their interests and encounters in a media-rich world” [Sharma et al. \(2021\)](#), p. 5679.

In the realm of mass communication, community radio stands out as a powerful tool for engaging and empowering local populations. Unlike mainstream media, CR programs are tailored to address the specific needs and interests of their audience, often representing marginalized or underrepresented communities. One of the primary functions of CR programs is to disseminate relevant information to the local population. Unlike mainstream media outlets, community radio stations have an intimate understanding of the needs and interests of their audience, allowing them to deliver targeted and contextually appropriate content [Lewis \(2018\)](#).

Research has shown that CR programs are particularly effective in reaching marginalized and underserved populations, including rural communities, indigenous groups, and linguistic minorities [Birhane & Woldemariam \(2020\)](#). By broadcasting in local languages and addressing local concerns, community radio stations bridge information gaps and empower communities to make informed decisions about their lives and livelihoods.

Through educational programs, public service announcements, and interactive talk shows, community radio stations contribute to raising awareness, changing attitudes, and influencing behaviour within their target communities [Dagron \(2001\)](#). There is very little data available on CR in Bihar which is one of the most underdeveloped states in India. So, there was a need to assess the situation of CR in Bihar. This research paper is based on research done on the CRS Radio Varsha, which is situated in the Gopalganj district of Bihar state of India, with a particular emphasis on the effectiveness of the programs on listeners, listenership patterns and program preferences of listeners.

2. COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA

On 9 February 1995, the Supreme Court of India in its historic decision declared the airwaves as public property. Due to this, private broadcasting became possible in India. Up until November 2006, India's broadcast law prohibited community radio, as it was conceived by media advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to democratize the airwaves. Long-standing demand for the set up of CR in India came as a form of ‘campus’ avatar of community radio. The guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in 2003 allow only reputed educational institutions to operate radio stations and install FM transmitters on their campuses. “The decision diluted somewhat the hegemony of the state and market over the radio, but to open up the broadcasting sector for an urban, educated, elite coterie in areas that are already well-served by

media violates the fundamental philosophy behind community radio” Pavarala & Malik (2007). In the year 2006, the MIB revised the guidelines and allows NGOs to set up FM transmitters for community radio broadcasting. According to the most recent information provided by MIB in November 2022, there are a total of 332 community radio stations operational in India.

3. COMMUNITY RADIO IN BIHAR

The first community radio station in the state of Bihar launched its operations at the Indian Institute of Business Management in the Patna region in October 2004. Nine community radio stations are now in existence in the state of Bihar as of November 2022. Out of nine community radio stations, two are being operated by educational institutions and seven are being operated by NGOs.

Table 1

Table 1 List of Operational Community Radio Stations in Bihar					
S. No.	Name of CRS	MHz	Organization	Category	Launch Date
1	Radio Rimjhim	90.40	Ayodhya Lal Kalyan Niketan	NGO	15.01.2009
2	Radio Snehi	90.40	Snehi Lokotthan Sansthan	NGO	17.11.2010
3	Radio Active	90.40	Lokhit	NGO	01.04.2012
4	Krishi Vigyan Kendra	91.20	Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Agwanpur	Educational	28.10.2013
5	Radio Mayur	90.80	Mayur kala Kendra	NGO	16.07.2016
6	Radio Varsha	90.80	Dhenu Chiraiya Lok Seva Sansthan	NGO	18.03.2018
7	Radio Risarch	90.80	Sri Radha Krishna Samajik Vikash Sansthan	NGO	15.09.2018
8	FM Green	90.80	Bihar Agriculture College	Educational	05.08.2019
9	Radio Madhubani	89.60	Prachar Prasar	NGO	16.03.2020

Source Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

4. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To assess the listenership patterns of listeners.
- 2) To find out the preference of programs by listeners.
- 3) To study the effectiveness of radio programs among listeners.

The above objectives prompt queries such as: What are the demographic and socio-economic structure of the listeners of CR? Who are the listeners of CR? What are the preferences of listeners when they listen to CR? How do the listeners like to listen to the CR? What is the relationship between the demographic structure of the community and its listenership pattern? How effective are CR programs among the listeners?

5. METHODOLOGY

The overall aim of this study is to find out the listenership pattern, program preferences of listeners and effectiveness of community radio programs among listeners. Practically, three objectives have been realized using mixed method both qualitative and quantitative. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection for this study. As Bryman (2004) has stated, the aims,

purposes, and research issues would eventually determine the research methods to be employed.

To fulfill the first two objectives quantitative data was required to find out the results. For that, a detailed and well-structured survey questionnaire was prepared. A survey is an efficient way of reaching a large number of people at relatively low cost Olsen (2011). The final objective which deals with the effectiveness of community radio programs among the listeners required systematic collection of data from both listeners and community radio stakeholders. Taking this requirement into account, a survey was conducted among the listeners, and an interview with the station manager and a few of the listeners was conducted.

6. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The study aimed to investigate the listenership patterns, program preferences, and effectiveness of community radio, focusing on Radio Varsha, located in the Gopalganj district of Bihar. The selection of Radio Varsha was random, considering its coverage of semi-urban and rural areas within the district. Due to the scattered audience base, determining the total number of listeners was challenging. To address this, the researcher limited the sample size to 160 respondents, evenly distributed across the east, west, north, and south zones of the coverage area.

With the assistance of community radio volunteers, two villages or localities were selected from each zone. A list of listeners was compiled by assigning numbers to individuals, and a cluster sampling method was employed to gather data. This involved selecting every 3rd individual from the list, with a maximum of 20 respondents chosen from each village or locality. Although 160 questionnaires were administered, only 152 were returned, and after applying criteria for meaningful analysis, 148 responses were considered suitable.

The questionnaire used for the survey had four parts. The first was intended to collect information on the respondent's profile. The second part dealt with device preferences and program choices. The third part dealt with the listenership pattern and time devoted by listeners to CR. Questions for understanding the effectiveness of community radio were included in the fourth part.

For qualitative data collection, a comprehensive set of interview questions was meticulously developed. Two distinct sets of questions were crafted for conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholders associated with community radio and its listeners. The responses gathered during these interviews were documented through diary entries and recorded using voice recording devices. Subsequently, the recorded interviews were transcribed to facilitate analysis of the gathered information.

7. PROFILE OF RADIO VARSHA

Radio Varsha started broadcasting on 18th March 2018. The parent organization of Radio Varsha is 'Dhenu Chiraiya Lok Seva Sansthan' which has been working for the welfare of society since 2001. The community radio broadcasts programs in both Hindi and Bhojpuri languages. The majority of people in the Gopalganj district speak and understand Bhojpuri. Though Radio Varsha broadcasts programs on many topics, education, women, and health are on the focus. The majority of the programs are broadcast in interactive formats, which encourages community involvement. Infotainment programs in which folk songs or Bollywood songs are linked with talks and discussions are very popular among listeners.

8. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

8.1. RESULTS

8.1.1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Table 2

Table 2 Respondents' Age Range and Sex Distribution			
Age Range of Respondents	Sex of Respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Less than 20 years	4	24	28
21 – 30	44	26	70
31 – 40	18	14	32
41 – 50	12	4	18
51 – 60	2	0	2
Above 60	0	0	0
Total	80	68	148

Source Field Data

The Table provided illustrates the distribution of respondents by age and gender. Among the total respondents, the highest proportion fell within the age range of 21-30 years, accounting for 47%, while the lowest proportion was in the age range of 51-60 years, comprising only 1.5%. This shows the popularity of CR among young listeners.

8.1.2. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Table 3

Table 3 Educational Background of Respondents'		
Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
No Formal Education	2	1%
Primary	6	4%
Middle School	16	11%
Secondary School	40	27%
Higher Secondary School	44	30%
Graduate	34	23%
Post-Graduate	6	4%
Total	148	100

Source Field Data

The data illustrates the educational attainment levels of respondents, revealing a diverse distribution across various educational stages. The majority of respondents have completed either Secondary School or Higher Secondary School education, constituting a significant portion of the sample at 27% and 30% respectively. Furthermore, there is a notable presence of individuals with Graduate-level education, comprising 23% of the respondents. Interestingly, a smaller proportion of respondents have attained education beyond the undergraduate level, with Post-Graduate qualifications representing 4% of the sample. Additionally, there are smaller percentages of respondents at lower educational levels, such as

Middle School (11%) and Primary (4%), while a negligible percentage lack formal education, comprising only 1% of the sample. Overall, the data reflects a diverse educational background among the respondents, with a substantial portion having completed education up to the secondary and higher secondary levels.

8.1.3. SOCIAL GROUP OF RESPONDENTS

Figure 1

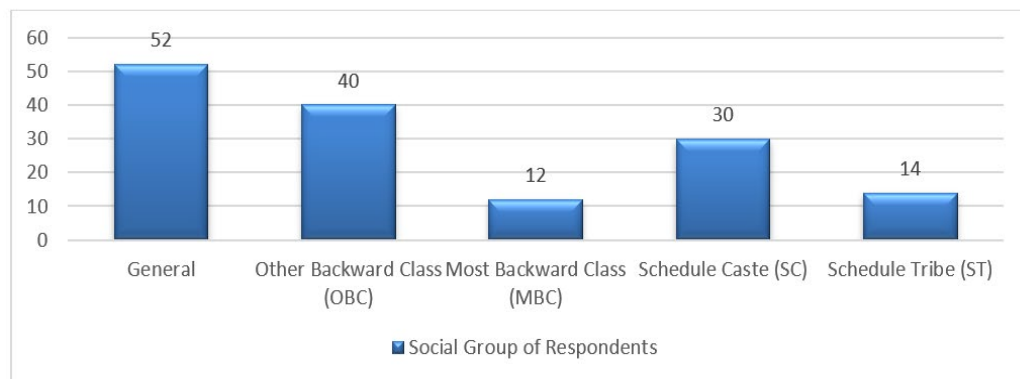


Figure 1 Bar Graph Showing the Social Group of the Respondents
Source Field Data

According to the social background graph shown above, the bulk of respondents (35%) fall into the General group, followed by the OBC (27%), Schedule Caste (20%), Schedule Tribe (10%), and Most Backward Class (8%). According to this information, the upper caste makes up the bulk of the listeners.

9. PREFERENCES

After analyzing the surveyed data about the preferred Device, Place, Time, and type of program. It was found that Radio Set (42%) is the most preferred device to listen community radio followed by community radio mobile app (41%) and mobile (18%). The majority of the respondents (i.e., 81%) preferred place to listen to community radio was their home. The most preferred time to listen to community radio was in the morning (i.e., 53%) followed by nighttime (45%), evening (35%), Leisure time (32%), and afternoon (28%). Here most of the respondents prefer more than one specific time to listen community radio. Radio Varsha broadcasts programs based on Bollywood music, folk art, and music frequently. The majority of programs are broadcast in interactive formats, ensuring listeners' participation and engagement. Due to this interactive nature of programs, most of the respondents listen to Bollywood music (39%) followed by programs on education (28%) and women (27%).

10. BASIC LISTENERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Table 4

Table 4 Findings from the Study on Fundamental Listening Habits	
Items	Statistics
How many hours CR is being listened to in a day?	
Less than 1 hour	8%

1-2 hours	46%
2-3 hours	36%
More than 3 hours	10%
How often is CR being listened to in a week?	
Everyday	34%
Once or twice a week	1.5%
2-3 times a week	8%
3-4 times a week	8%
4-5 times a week	11%
5-6 times a week	37.5%
For how long CR is being listened by respondents	
Less than 1 year	16%
1-2 year	40.5%
2-3 year	24%
3-4 year	11%
More than 4 year	8.5%
Profession of respondents	
Daily wage laborer	5%
Farmer	8%
Businessman	9%
Homemaker	26%
Student	32.5%
Employed	18%
Unemployed	1.5%

After analyzing data from Table 4 about the basic listenership characteristics of respondents, it was found that the majority of the respondents listen to community radio between 1-2 hours a day and the percentage of respondents listening to community radio every day was 34% and 5-6 times a week 37.5% respectively. When asked about how long respondents have been listening to community radio, 40.5% of respondents replied that they have been listening to community radio for 1-2 years and 24% replied that they have been listening to community radio for 2-3 years.

11. EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY RADIO PROGRAMS TOPIC WISE

Table 5

Table 5 Mean Showing the Effectiveness of Programs on Different Topics.

Effectiveness of programs scores		
Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Radio Varsha has brought change/development in your locality through their programs.	4.06	0.62
Radio Varsha plays an important role in discussing and resolving social issues.	4.09	0.50
Programs broadcast by Radio Varsha are informative in nature.	4.2	0.55
Radio Varsha has helped in development in your area.	4.16	0.61
Radio Varsha has brought changes in your lifestyle.	4.16	0.57
Knowledge gained after listening to the radio Varsha has helped you.	4.14	0.61

Programs broadcast by radio Varsha on health issues like Immunization, disease outbreaks, prevention, hygiene, HIV/AIDS, safe childbirth, etc., have increased your knowledge on health issues.	4.21	0.66
Programs broadcast by radio Varsha on social issues like dowry, child marriage, domestic violence, birth control, the importance of trees, etc., have been useful to you.	4.20	0.66
Educational or career-related programs on the radio Varsha have been useful to you.	4.20	0.54
Radio Varsha programs on government schemes like the Right to education, AADHAR, social security scheme, livelihood programs, and skill development programs have helped you.	4.17	0.72

The data in [Table 5](#) presents the effectiveness scores of various programs broadcasted by Radio Varsha, as perceived by the respondents. Each statement is rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Here's an analysis of the mean scores and standard deviations:

- 1) **Change and Development in Locality:** The mean score of 4.06 indicates that respondents perceive Radio Varsha as having a positive impact on bringing change and development to their locality, with a moderate level of agreement (SD = 0.62).
- 2) **Role in Discussing and Resolving Social Issues:** With a mean score of 4.09 and a relatively low standard deviation (SD = 0.50), respondents strongly agree that Radio Varsha plays an important role in discussing and resolving social issues.
- 3) **Informativeness of Programs:** The highest mean score of 4.20 suggests that respondents find programs broadcasted by Radio Varsha to be highly informative, with a moderate level of agreement (SD = 0.55).
- 4) **Contribution to Local Development and Lifestyle Changes:** Both statements regarding Radio Varsha's contribution to local development and lifestyle changes received mean scores of 4.16, indicating a strong agreement among respondents, with relatively low standard deviations (SD = 0.57 and SD = 0.61, respectively).
- 5) **Knowledge Enhancement on Health and Social Issues:** Programs focusing on health and social issues received mean scores of 4.21 and 4.20, respectively, indicating a high level of effectiveness in increasing knowledge among respondents, with moderate standard deviations (SD = 0.66 for both).
- 6) **Educational and Career-related Programs:** Respondents also find educational and career-related programs to be effective, as indicated by mean scores of 4.20, with a relatively low standard deviation (SD = 0.54).
- 7) **Impact of Government Schemes Programs:** Programs highlighting government schemes received a mean score of 4.17, suggesting that respondents find them helpful, although with a slightly higher standard deviation (SD = 0.72).

Overall, the data suggests that respondents perceive Radio Varsha's programs to be highly effective in addressing various issues, providing information, and contributing to positive changes in their lives and communities.

A participant spoke of the effectiveness of community radio was due to their program format and use of the local language (Bhojpuri) while broadcasting.

I am listening to Radio Varsha since its starting days and regularly send feedback. I also, participate in quiz programs through SMS and Phone-In and SMS. I feel more comfortable when they run the program in Bhojpuri. I work as a staff at a local shop. So, whenever I am free at my workplace I listen to community radio. They run a music program where songs are played from 70's and '80s period on demand by listeners.

Listener

Another participant who is a homemaker enthusiastically shared her experience of talking to a radio jockey.

I am a homemaker and most of my time is spent doing household chores. I generally listen to the radio in the afternoon. Once, I had a conversation with the program presenter during a program on women. I placed my queries in front of them over the phone and helped me out by suggesting me solutions to my problem. Since then, I am a regular listener to radio and frequently send feedback to them.

Listener

Every day, I eagerly tune in to catch up on the latest news updates, insightful discussions, and engaging cultural content that our community radio offers. The programs cater to a wide range of interests and concerns, addressing everything from local events and community initiatives to health, education, and environmental issues that directly impact our lives.

Listener

The listener emphasizes the utmost importance of community radio programs in his daily routine. He highlights the relevance and impact of the diverse topics covered, ranging from local events to health and education issues. The programs resonate deeply with the listener, addressing concerns that directly impact his life. Through engaging content and insightful discussions, community radio serves as a valuable source of information and empowerment.

The radio station's station manager revealed in an interview that the station first conducts research among the listeners to determine their wants and concerns before deciding on the kind/type of programs and their substance.

Our team, while deciding the theme and content of some programs gives priority to the audience-based research outcome. We ask people about their expectations from our programs. Their responses are used by our core team to plan and design the programs. I must however also admit that this is not done routinely as we do not have adequate resources to conduct audience-based research regularly.

12. CONCLUSION

Radio Varsha has served as one of the widely used communication channels in Gopalganj that has motivated the target audience to actively participate in programs. Listeners can now participate in live-studio discussions while listening to the program thanks to the proliferation of mobile phones. Mobile phones are fast becoming an alternative option to listening to the radio. It was found that people primarily like community radio station not just as a medium of entertainment but as a source of information. The radio station is providing the community local news, current affairs, culture, music, women, and health programs. The majority of the audience of community radio is aged between 15-40 years which indicates that community radio is very popular among young, millennial, and middle-aged

listeners. After the analysis of data from the survey, it was found that the major audience base of the CRS is students and women. The major advantage of CR programs is the use of local dialects during the broadcast which creates a better impact on the audience. After the analysis of data, it was found that the programs have a high level of listener participation. The high degree of listener participation strongly indicates the high effectiveness of programs which is also found after the analysis of survey data. There is a need to increase the sources of income for the proper functioning of community radio and its outreach activities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Every author affirms that they have no affiliations or involvement with any group or organization that has a vested interest, whether financial or non-financial, in the subjects or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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