

Research Statement

Radio is one of the most ancient mediums of mass communication. As a professional and an academic thinker, I am uniquely positioned in the crux of this tension between social tradition and participation to raise the awareness about development issues. I have bolstered my experience with extensive hands-on experience with various nonprofit organizations during my various hands-on efforts of social activism. My academic background in Economics and Statistics shaped my perspective and gave me the lens through which I am able to see, understand, and explore. Working for a radio channel in India lead me to develop an extensive understanding of my prospective research focus.

Coming from a developing country like India, I have learnt that communication is often restricted to the top-most strata of society. Consequently, crucial political and social decisions are heavily influenced by opinion leaders and the socially backward sectors often have no podium to voice their opinion. My professional experience as a radio host and academic experience in Economics and Mass Communication has shaped my understanding of the potential of radio as a medium of communication for community building. My experience has taught me that radio needs to be highly participatory podium for individuals from various walks of life. As a doctoral student, four questions will shape my deep inquiry and research: (a) Why has localized radio not been able to reach the most deprived area where its service is needed the most? (b) What is the way forward in the evolution of rural radio: digital or cellular? (c) To make rural radio truly sustainable in developing countries what distribution of public private ownership should it follow? (d) Does the anonymity (or facelessness) provided by radio ensure more enthusiastic participation of the weakest/most deprived members of the Indian society, especially women?

In my research, I plan to use an amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative approach of data gathering and analysis, including an analysis of listenership records of existing community radio stations. I will carry out a comparative analysis of Indian and Latin American community radio content, reach, and executive structure. Additionally, I will carry out an analysis of audience perception on a particular anonymous content aired on a radio station to trust reliability. This study will involve a collaboration with community radio stations to host a "Radio Anonymous Day" where a controversial topic is discussed on air. A quantitative study can be carried out to see whether anonymity affects the number of radio calls. By carrying out this study in some representative countries across the world, it will be interesting to see how the response of the listeners vary across cultures.

I am concerned about and motivated by this ancient yet underutilized medium and extremely enthusiastic to be a contributor to its evolution. McLuhan had stated that some media were 'hot' and some 'cool'. "Any hot medium allows of less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than a dialogue." (*Understanding Media*, 1964, 32) While McLuhan stated that radio is a 'hot' media, I argue that radio has the potential to be much more than a medium of one way communication. Unfortunately, radio in India needs to be utilized more actively for social development. Radio inbuilt in Mobile/ Cell Phones is a platform that can be a two way form of mass communication thereby opening up several possibilities of participatory functions. How can these cellular networks be the future of development communication? What is the ideal role of radio before, during, and after emergency and disaster situations? How do we form a localized development radio networks that is both economically and socially viable? What is the regulatory framework that has to be in place to ensure it is a tool of participatory development and not propaganda? Does radio truly have the power to project the voice of oppressed so loud as to drown the roars of the powerful?

A lot of questions in need of a lot of answers!

It is my dream to do substantial work in the field of participatory communication through radio in an effort to empower the socially under privileged. My long-term goal is to be a productive scholar and researcher, and make significant and original contributions in this field.