Transitioning from Analogue to Digital Broadcast

A Case Of Communicative Inequality

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1 ABSTRACT

Initiated as a move to solve radio spectrum scarcity, a binding resolution was signed calling on broadcast systems in many parts of the developing world to switch to digital systems by 2020 at the latest. Locating this move within a media development and ICT4D paradigm, this study uses theories of community participation and technological amplification to assess how communicative inequality is implicated in the switch over. The concept of communicative inequality is used as a framework to answer three central questions; (1) In what ways do digital broadcast technologies reduce or reproduce inequality in the community radio sector? (2) What impact will ICT usage have on the normative understanding and practice of community radio? (3) Will universal access to the airwaves be achieved by switching over to digital audio broadcasting? In depth interviews with twelve community media producers were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis. The study finds that gender inequality will be further entrenched, radio stations in rural communities are will not adapt to technological changes and more regulatory frameworks are needed to ensure financial survival in a digital world.

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2 INTRODUCTION

> *'ESTABLISH the Media Development and Diversity Agency to help create an enabling environment for media development and diversity that is conducive to public discourse and which reflects the needs and aspirations of all South Africans;*
>
> *REDRESS exclusion and marginalisation of disadvantaged communities and persons from access to the media and the media industry;*
>
> *PROMOTE media development and diversity by providing support primarily to community and small commercial media projects' (Media Development & Diversity Act, 2002:2)*

The Republic of South Africa welcomed a historic Act in 2002 that asserted the state's commitment to an often-neglected tier of media, community media. This Act was a bold move in affirming citizens that the newly democratic country recognised the importance of community participation, democratic dialogue and reconfiguring media power. Community media is understood as "grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity'(Howley, 2005).

As a media professional with experience in the community media sector and having worked in the Media Development and Diversity Agency, I have both a personal and an academic interest in the sector that is driven by the increasing social inequalities in South Africa. Furthermore, the growing tension between policy, community media scholarship and practice urged me pursue this study to attempt to bring attention to an increasing ICT focus that has the ability to cripple a sector that is important to South Africa's democratic fiber. In 2015, a moratorium was implemented in the community broadcast sector which ceased the issuing of community radio licenses. For many of us, community media practitioners, this was a moment

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which called for extensive reflection and this study serves to articulate my reflections on the critical state of community media and the cross roads that lie before it.

In an increasingly digitized and networked communications era, many have questioned the existence of analogue radio. The internet and changing broadcast systems globally have changed the business models of radio stations. Community radio is not immune to these changes and in fact, is about to face one of its biggest challenges, transitioning to digital broadcast systems. This medium operates in a globalized and networked society and constantly has to wrestle with its local objectives in a globalised world (Friedman, 1995). When the decision to migrate broadcast systems from analogue to digital was taken by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2006), this put the spotlight on Television broadcasting. The process of '*Digital Migration'* as it is formally termed has been adequately theorized using television and commercial radio as the focal point (Haggard and Mclachlan 2008; Bassey, 2009; Berger, 2012; Ndonye, Khaemba, Bartoo, 2015). This research seeks to contribute to the scholarly neglect on the impact of digital systems in the community radio sector. This move together with mobile telephony and internet usage have taken analogue radio out of its 80-year comfort zone. The traditional models and approaches are fast changing (Cordeiro, 2012) alongside growing inequalities in the country which calls for urgent inquiry into the third tier of broadcast, known as the people's radio.

This study aims to historically locate the rise and importance of community broadcast in local communities and argues for the importance of radios survival in a digital world. The low cost, minimal equipment requirement and ubiquitous nature of radio make it a formidable communication tool globally and locally. In rural communities, its importance cannot be overstated. Using the concept of communicative inequality, this study attempts to analyse the technological changes in the sector and raises concerns that urgently need to be addressed before the implementation of the digital switchover. The study proceeds in three stages. First it historically locates community broadcast from a social movement, community participation and critical political economy lens. Next, it unpacks the research design and methodological

rationale. Finally, it presents the findings from data collected and concludes that the digital switchover and increasing ICT usage results in communicative inequality along social, economic and regulatory lines. This research will begin with reviewing the relevant literature regarding community media, its history of struggle and regulatory origins to provide a theoretical background for the analysis of the digital turn in radio and its impact on community radio.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Community broadcasting has a rich history dating back to the early 1900s and has been characterized by political struggles and social movements. As a communications technology, radio has been lauded for its accessible and affordable technology (Megwa, 2007; Olorunnisola, 2002; Siemering, 2000), making it an appealing tool for grassroots political mobilizing. Although communication scholars have theorized community broadcasting from several vantage points, from the temporary takeover of the airwaves by revolutionaries during World War I (Kidd, 1998; King, 2017); to the development of radio technology to the international debates in the 1970's which enshrined communication as a human right (UNESCO, 1974); two dominant perspectives have remained steadfast. The technical perspective which places an emphasis on the technology such as spectrum distribution (Innis, 2007; (Moss & Fein, 2003) and the alternative media perspective which place an emphasis on community media's function as democratic, participatory, developmental and counterhegemonic (Winseck and Cuthbert, 1997; Buckley, 2000). These perspectives are fundamental in our understanding of community radio's existence in an increasingly digitized communications sector. The school of thought which believes that 'there is something particular in its (community radio) resilience as a medium to persist in this era of online, networked communication, globalization, and digitalization' (Coyer, 2011, p. 168) will be unpacked using a communicative inequality lens.

Communicative inequality is drawn from normative communication theories and sociological studies of inequality. Both concerned with social and structural inequality stemming from unequal access, participation and power in society and exacerbated by communicative technologies. Community media, through its various theorization over the past decades has evolved in a way that allows us to map its preoccupation with community participation; local ownership and access; and the production of counterhegemonic media content.

Historically, community participation within communications technologies and models has not always been central. Approaches have evolved from the early linear, top down modernization paradigm to Freirean approaches which emphasised community building, empowerment and redistributing power. Community broadcast models also evolved along a similar trajectory where community participation was both ideologically (conscientization) and practically (redistributing power) a necessity. 'The goal of participation efforts should be to facilitate conscientization of marginalised people globally of unequal social, political and spatial structures in their societies' (Melkote, 2003, p.138). This research will thus address; issues of ownership, the creation of a level economic field, regulation to allow for plurality and diversity, democratic discourse and infrastructural capacity, all pillars in creating communicative equality. However, community media has not experienced such a normative understanding of equality. Offline axes of inequality are experienced differently by urban, rural and township community media entities where matters of class, gender and race are all prevalent in the navigation and negotiation of communication technologies.

3.1 Defining Community Media

The term "community media" suffers from definitional issues and needs clarity in order to set the parameters of this research. Normatively, alternative and community media are understood to stand in opposition to the media of the state and the market which are thought to channel hegemonic discourses (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Community media is a subset of alternative media and has been approached from four theoretical perspectives; serving a community, an alternative to mainstream media, as part of civil society (Keane, 1998; Servaes,

1999) and community media as a Rhizome (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008; Carpentier, Lie, & Servaes, 2003). Each approach has its own political commitment but the basic premise that runs through all approaches is that community media is local, participatory and inclusive by definition.

Other scholars have attempted to further question and reconceptualize the term 'community' in community media and have characterized it as an unhelpful term, asserting that it raises more questions than it answers (Bosch, 2003). Questions about who is included and who is excluded, on what basis and who has the right and power to make those decisions are linked to theories of power and political economy. Thus, the use of the word is approached with caution and an understanding that it is unhelpful and is always open to deconstruction. Nonetheless, it is appropriate in the context of this research on community radio as it coincides with legislative and policy documents in South Africa. Other scholars such as Cohen (1989) have proposed 'a shift away from the structure of community towards a symbolic construction of community and in order to do so, takes culture, rather than structure as point of departure' (Carpentier et al., 2003, p. 54).

The theoretical contestations and debates about the name of this sector are further complicated by the introduction of ICTs in broadcasting as they have challenged the geographical orientation of the understood definitions of community radio being rooted in geographic communities. Some scholars have gone as far as arguing that 'the small scale and independent characteristics of community media are what render them insignificant in creating large counter public sphere. Their resource constraints are integral in their inability to work cohesively as a unit to produce counter hegemonic discourses' (Fuchs, 2010).

Even though community media suffers from definitional issues, formal regulation which began in the 1970s consolidated some important concepts that are central to this sector such as local ownership, the importance of counter hegemonic content and the participatory nature of this sector. When Italy declared state monopoly of the airwaves illegal in 1970, a more solid

definition of the sector emerged that included local ownership, participatory and non-profit characteristics (King, 2017).

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, (AMARC), acknowledges: 'There is no single definition of community broadcasting, and there are almost as many models as there are stations. Each ... is a hybrid, a unique communication process shaped by its environment and the distinct culture, history, and reality of the community it serves' (Buckley, Duer, Mendel, and Siochru, 2008, p. 207). Taking into account the local realities, regulatory frameworks and economic environments that shape this sector, there is a common yet normative agreement that community media is 'media for, by and about the community' (Coyer, 2011 in Mansell & Raboy, 2011) as simply defined by the African Charter on Broadcasting in 2001. Community radio is defined as 'a non-profit station … which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio' (AMARC-Europe 1994).

3.2 Brief historical overview

By the 1940s community radio broadcasting was no longer sporadic. Communities came together to set up permanent radio facilities which were centred around resistance movements like Radio Mineras in Bolivia which was established by the miner's union to broadcast labour issues (Huesca, 1995). Between the 1940s and 1970s, radio became a constant feature in liberation and independence struggles and was used as a weapon of resistance. Its affordable and accessible technology, along with its commitment to community participation at all levels and independence from state and market, made it a convenient liberation tool (Girard, 2007).

During this time, a wave of independence was sweeping across Africa as states fought for their independence from colonial powers. Many other countries were rebuilding their political systems, economies and social fabric post World War II. In the spirit of liberation, a proliferation of community stations was established, and hundreds of unlicensed stations

emerged globally (Lewis, 1984; Rodriguez, 2001) in a period termed 'wildfire' by King (2017). These stations challenged state and colonial media models. In general, social movements and political mobilisation have characterised this tier of broadcasting that provided a platform for minority groups to broadcast their experiences.

From Latin America, Australia, Europe to North America, community radio grew from repressive socio-political environments to serve the purpose of liberation movements. For example, across much of Latin America, community radio could be seen as giving voice to the poor, the shack dwellers, the landless peasants and the trade unions (Olorunnisola, 2002). But at the same time, a counternarrative has also been theorised about where community radio stations were taken over by armed forces and gave voice to propaganda such as in Rwanda, Kenya, Latin America and in South Asia, where far right movements and large businesses co-opted hundreds on community radio stations for their ethno-religious propaganda.

The early days of community broadcasting were preoccupied with state, military and commercial contestation. Scholars such as Howley (2005) have captured this dissent by defining community radio as:

> 'grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity' (Howley, 2005, p.2).

The history of this medium takes away the romanticized notions that come to mind when scholars write about community media. Raymond Williams (1985) noted that the use of community media is always afforded a positive status, but history is rife with varied examples of community media being used for democratic and undemocratic practices depending on the historical context. It is 'well documented that radio stations established in the name of communities have also been used to spread hatred and incite genocide' (Da Costa, 2013, p. 135). The normative ideals invoked by the concept of community will be further unpacked in this study in the wake of corrupt and politically unstable democracies.

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Historically situating community broadcasting helps us to see how this tier of broadcasting has had its roots in counter hegemonic discourses even before community radio as a sector was recognised and regulated, which only began in the 1970's and more scholarly work on the regulations emerged in the 1980s with a heavy focus on regulating the three tiers of broadcasting. Although it is important to note that regulation of community radio suffers from scholarly neglect compared to its public broadcast and commercial radio counterparts. This gap in literature becomes even more apparent when we try to locate scholarly work on digital broadcasting in Africa.

Communication scholars have gone to great lengths to discuss how the radio spectrum, as a state resource, was colonized by imperial powers and distributed among colonial powers to spread propaganda before regulatory frameworks emerged (King, 2017). This is evident in 1930 Germany and later again in the 1990s in Rwanda where state broadcasting was used to fuel propaganda, hate and civil war (Buckley, 2000). Current literature revives this use of radio for propaganda in the wake of far-right populist groups funding community radio stations in the name of democracy to spread undemocratic messages (Atton, 2006; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018; Downing, 2001). The lack of adequate regulatory frameworks and scholarly rigor on community media regulation have left this tier of broadcasting open to co-option by corrupt political figures and far right groups.

3.3 Digital turn in radio

Alongside the historical use of radio technology and content for authoritarian purposes, the scarcity and distribution of spectrum remains a concern in the 21st century and is further compounded by the digital turn in radio. But to what does this term refer? Moyo, (2013, p.215) notes that 'The digital turn in radio refers to a paradigmatic shift from analogous to binary forms of representation….these radical changes occasioned by digitization mean that apart from the traditional terrestrial radio, radio content can easily be distributed through a myriad of digital delivery platforms such as podcasts, webcasts, websites, and social media'. The

digital turn has given rise to increased digital divides and inequalities between the young and old, to gender differences, the exclusion of the disabled and further widening the gap between urban and rural areas. These digital inequalities are inevitably combined (race, class and gender) and interact with offline axes of inequality (Banaji, Livingstone, Nandi, & Stoilova, 2018). Even though the relationship between technology and gender has been theorized by feminist scholars and activists (Faulkner, 2007; Wajcman, 2007, 2010), my research will continue to interrogate it further in the community media space and unpack the place of technology in shaping and maintaining gender differentiation and inequality.

A study undertaken by Gender Links and South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) has been tracking women's participation in media over a twenty-five-year period since democracy. The two main objectives that are relevant to this research are Gender Links' inquiry into: gender equality in the media, at decision-making and other levels; and the gendered impact of the digital revolution on the composition, earnings and work culture in the media. The study's representative sample was dominated by community media, indicating an overall decline in the proportion of women in media. The numbers have halved since 2009 (GenderLinks, 2018).

3.4 The South African Context

The research study looks specifically at South Africa's community radio sector which was formally regulated in 1994 through a Parliamentary Act. The establishment of community broadcasting was one of the conditions listed in the Council for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations which facilitated the country's transition from Apartheid (a system of institutionalised racial segregation) to a democratic country. Many scholars have theorised about the importance of media ownership and control when a country politically transitions. Among such scholars, Folarin (2002), and Olorunnisola (2002, 2006) argue that when a nation transitions from autocracy to democracy (as South Africa did in 1994), restriction on media ownership should slacken to allow for media plurality and the reconstruction of a new national identity (Ojebode & Akingbulu, 2009).

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Trasitioning from Analogue to Digital Broadcast – A Case Of Communicative Inequality

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South Africa is an important site for community radio research for three reasons. First, the sector was set up to address a specific historical concern; Apartheid segregationist polices. The role of the media in post-apartheid South Africa was to build national unity and a democratic citizenry (Barnett, 1999). Community radio was thus enlisted to play an integral role in the reconstruction, nation building and democratic project of the day (Barnett, 1999; Olorunnisola, 2002). Community radio was particularly crucial because of its inexpensive technology, linguistic and geographic reach (Bosch, 2003; Olorunnisola, 2002). 'Community radio has increasingly become popular in rural communities in the country partly because it is owned by the community, relatively affordable, and enjoys a certain unique intimacy with its owners and audience, pertinent to the illiterate and rural population, and local culture and tradition' (Mekgwa, 2007, p.338).

Second, supportive legislation and NGO funding resulted in a rapid increase of community radio stations. More than 200 community stations have been licensed in South Africa. Scholarly work remains divided on this rapid increase in licensing. On one hand, South Africa has been applauded and used as a blueprint and on the other hand, serious sustainability concerns have since emerged (Banda, 2003). Nonetheless, this overcrowding has led to frequency congestion and a subsequent moratorium. As of 2015, no new licenses were awarded and the solution for spectrum shortage is being sought after in ICTs such as Digital audio broadcasting and digital migration policies. The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, (ICASA) is the regulatory body responsible for spectrum distribution.

> *'We develop regulations, issue licences to telecommunications and broadcasting service providers, monitor licensee compliance with rules and regulations, plan and manage the radio frequency spectrum' (ICASA, 2019).*

In 2015, ICASA cited 'the scarcity of analogue frequencies' and the intention to 'develop a new regulatory framework for community broadcasting' as the primary reasons for halting community radio licenses. A national inquiry into digital broadcasting was commissioned and the findings indicated the need for South Africa to switchover to digital broadcasting (ICASA

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Position Paper, 2019). The committee's findings were in part informed by the 'challenges and lessons' learned in Germany, Norway, United Kingdom, Australia and the USA (ICASA Position Paper, 2019).

In this discussion, digital radio refers to 'the use of digital signals, as opposed to analogue, in the transmission path of broadcast radio. The use of digital signals for transmission distinguishes this conception of digital radio from both digital radio production systems and from analogue radio receivers with digital tuning and digital displays' (Lax, 2003). The latter have been in existence and do not require the purchase of a new receiver in order to listen to radio. However, the transmission of radio by digital signals requires listeners to purchase new receiving equipment to decode those transmissions.

Third, South Africa is characterised by high levels of inequality and any solutions involving digital communication technologies have the potential to deepen existing inequalities. The heavy focus on ICTs to address inequality has been echoed in policy documents and has created a pathway to digitising the broadcasting sector. This ICT for Development (ICT4D) approach is captured in the Broadcast Digital Migration Policy under the Electronic Communications Act of 2005. According to the policy, Digital Migration simply means 'the migration of broadcasting services from analogue broadcasting technology to digital technologies. The primary objective is 'to clear the radio frequency spectrum currently occupied by broadcasters to enable the provision of wireless mobile broadband and other innovative applications' (Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy, 2008). The process to switch over television signals is currently underway and radio's impending switchover is fast approaching, as echoed by the Act (2008)… 'after analogue television switch-off more radio frequency spectrum will become available to accommodate digital sound broadcasting in the allocated band' (Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy, 2008). These processes impact each other; however, the radio aspect suffers from scholarly neglect.

Community media scholars (Rodrigues, 2002; Howley, 2010; Coyer, 2007; Downing 2001) have successfully documented and traced the preoccupation of community radio with democracy,

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citizenship, voice and participation. This research seeks to build on that by facing forward and examining radio's relevance within digital communications and critically evaluating the impact of the impending transitions, mergers and switchovers. This research will locate radio's approaching switchover within two broad fields; media development, to understand the historical and ideological underpinning of media technology and ICT4D, to assess whether these technologies will indeed deepen or reduce exiting inequalities.

The field of media development is crucial to our understanding of media infrastructure and how the debates on access, participation and ownership are controlled and framed. The moratorium on broadcasting licences has created an opportunity to reflect and revisit the debates on media infrastructure, regulatory frameworks and the ideological underpinnings at play. 'Media development refers to organised efforts at supporting and building the capacity of media institutions, policies, structures and practices as pathways towards consolidating citizenship and good governance, building fragile democracies as well as enhancing sustainable development initiatives' (Manyozo, 2012, p.113). The regulation and allocation of spectrum frequency has been championed by the United Nations International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and subsequently, governmental bodies following the guidelines set by the ITU and the Global North. The proposed switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting was initiated by the ITU in 2006 at the Regional Radiocommunications Conference (RRC-06).101 nations in Europe, Africa and the Middle East adopted a resolution and signed a treaty binding them to the switch over by 2015. Many countries have missed the deadline, including South Africa for several political and economic reasons. South Africa has extended the deadline to 2020 to fully migrate broadcasting systems.

In summary, the switch over allows more television and radio stations to be held in the same frequency than would be possible for analogue frequency. A process termed 'multiplexing' allows several streams of broadcast content to be combined into a single signal, thus freeing up signals. 'The space freed-up by switching to DTT (Digital Terrestrial TV) is known as the "digital dividend" and it means that some of the vacated bandwidth can be used for other

purposes… with the case of digital radio, a Multiplex can facilitate an ensemble of up to 50 channels on a single signal' (Berger, 2010).

The 2006 ITU Treaty set in motion the process of digitising broadcasting systems in Africa. A Process which requires costly and sophisticated equipment and has implications for universal access in developing countries (Berger, 2009). In a country with the highest inequality rates according to the World Bank (2018), any attempts at reducing digital divides and digital inequalities will remain a difficult task. Scholars who were critical of this project said:

> *'There is not a burning scarcity of frequencies on the continent. However, the driver of digital migration internationally is not the conditions and needs in Africa. It is, instead, the way that developed country agendas impact on globalisation, international regulation and aspirational trends' (Berger, 2010, p. 18).*

> *'The intention is clear: a purely commercial purpose to seek competitive advantage for the European electronics industries over their Far East counterparts. The technology was to be developed in the absence of any demand – the radio market is 'virtually saturated'…the UK Radio Advertising Bureau acknowledges that 'the move to Digital Radio is not currently consumer-led' (RAB 2001: 6 cited in* (Lax, 2003, p. 330).

The above scholars perfectly encapsulate the various paradigms and ideologies laden in the digital migration process. The advancement of the modernisation paradigm, critical political economy arguments and the material cost of global relevance will be unpacked in the research to show who will benefit and who will be negatively impacted by an emphatic emphasis on digitising the African broadcast sector.

Two dominant approaches have dominated the media development field; modernisation and dependency theories, with political economy being at the centre of media development (Manyozo, 2012). The work of Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964) illustrated the powerful role that mass media played in thinking around the modernisation project: 'Mass media were the vehicles for transferring new ideas and models from the West to the Third World…by

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establishing a climate for modernisation' (Melkote, 2003, p. 134). Modernisation was the process of social transformation modelled after western countries where development was synonymous with economic growth. Progress in a society involved the industries, science and technology. Communication practitioners were thus co-opted by economists to take on the task of modernising communities on a mass scale. Lerner (1958) calls for the scaling up and scaling out of mass media, both content and infrastructure, 'the mass media should continue to spread around the world—inexorably and unilaterally' (Lerner,1958, p. 870). The foundation of media development is based on western-centric media systems and is characterised by technological diffusionism, hence ICASA looking to the Global North for a blueprint on the digital switchover. 'The design and implementation of most global media development initiatives are strategically led and funded by Western governments and development institutions' (Manyozo, 2012, p.115) such as UNESCO, ITU, BBC World Service and several others. The development and sustainability of community radio is integral in media development initiatives premised on western-centric media models. The democratic ideals that are inscribed in community media can thus be located in western notions of development which are synonymous with technological diffusionism.

The digitisation of media systems is thus presented and discursively understood as 'common sense', and a natural progression for developing countries to bridge knowledge gaps, decrease inequality and strengthen democracy. By 'common sense', Gramsci (1971) was expounding on the set of ideas that people use to make sense of their lives, ideas that are historically inherited and accepted as normal and unchangeable. 'Gramsci used the term…to denote this uncritical and partly unconscious way that people perceive the world' (Simon, 2001, p. 29). The discursive formations of spectrum as a scarce resource and the increasing digitisation of the broadcast communication technologies enables digital migration and the increased usage of ICTs to appear as an inevitable reality that the sector needs to prepare itself for.

Conversely, scholars (Fourie, 2001) have raised concerns about ICTs ability to promote social development and address inequality. The possibility of ICTs deepening the gap between First

and Third worlds and urban and rural communities is a contention that Mansell (1999) calls the 'dialectic of abundance and scarcity'. The players in the media market have the potential to create monopolies and control access to systems to retain their power. Switching over systems has an inherent financial cost and material barriers to access. Socio-economic conditions are serious barriers for rural communities who rely on traditional radio for information. The rise of ICT's in broadcasting affect community media in a particular way and couching the ICT for Development discourse in a way that prefaces access to information and knowledge for the overall goal of reducing inequality is a function of political economy and power led by western international agencies who have vested interest in the technology. Policy makers and international bodies are aware that the the direction of technological innovation is implicated in rising social and economic inequality, especially in the context of development and hence are placing an emphasis in the winning the war on ICT discourse. Research has shown that 'producing technology…means producing instruments of control and influence over other individuals, firms and nations. The capacity of technology to transform the nature, orientation and purpose of development is such that the question of who controls technology is central to who controls development' (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation [1975] 2006, 93 in Mansell 2017, p.148)

The South African radio industry's efforts to become more web-based and evolve into a multimedia business (Cordeiro, 2012) has implications on its developmental role, however a political economy perspective explains the push behind digitising the sector at all costs. Already community media scholars have theorised about community radio's its inability to have transformative political potential because of its small-scale orientation. Comedia (1984) characterizes small-scale alternative media as an 'alternative ghetto' that lacks resources and therefore political relevance. 'Resource scarcity can result in time- and energy-consuming internal conflicts and divisions that further undermine the political potentials of alternative media'(Fuchs, 2010, p. 177). The current policy focus on digitizing broadcasting in South Africa has initiated a debate on communication and digital inequalities and how they can reinforce

existing social inequalities by carrying over preexisting differences in human capital into online and digital contexts (DiMaggio & Garip, 2012).

In conclusion, the digital switchover has long been coming and has centered on three key assumptions and arguments that are relevant to my research, namely:

- The inevitability of digital systems
- Spectrum inefficiency as a national crisis
- The promise of improved technical quality and universal access

4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Communicative inequality has its theoretical foundations in community participation and critical political economy of communications. Understanding how communities relate to each other along class, racial and gender lines is crucial in mapping out participatory process. Critical political economy is concerned with structural inequality, universal access to technology and shifting power dynamics that are inherent in society to achieve transformation.

Additionally, technology amplification theory will look at the switchover through a sociotechnical lens. This theory challenges technological deterministic approaches that understand technology as a powerful tool to reduce inequality. It views technology as a multiplier of existing inequalities. It highlights three mechanisms of amplification; differential access, differential capacity and differential motivation which are all crucial in understanding the impact of technological changes in community radio.

In view of the above, I will map out how communicative inequality is implicated in the switchover by drawing out the importance of community participation, structural inequality and the capacity of the community radio stations to transition into a digital ecosystem.

This research aims to carefully address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do digital broadcast technologies reduce or reproduce inequality in the community radio sector?
2. What impact will ICT usage have on the normative understanding of community radio?
3. Will universal access to the airwaves be achieved by switching over to digital audio broadcasting?

5 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Rationale for Methodology

A pilot study of this research was conducted to test the suitability of interviews as a method. One-on-one in-depth interviewing was found suitable and employed for this study. It is an important empirical approach for this study as it highlights the exploratory nature of the research question. Qualitative research by definition gives room for exploration through text and interviews (Kvale, 1996; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Qualitative interviews are defined as 'a guided conversation in which the researcher carefully listens "so as to hear the meaning" of what is being conveyed (Warren, 2002, p. 85). This method proved particularly strong for this research question as it allowed for inductive probing which is a technique that deploys the use of follow up questions. Probing 'produces the meanings, insights and causal chains that provide the richness of qualitative interviews' (Guest et al, 2013, p. 114) that I would not have been able to retrieve using other methods such as surveying.

A semi structured conversation (Warren 2002) with community radio producers was used as that format provided a window into their attitudes towards technology. This method was instrumental in revealing their fears about the occurring changes in the sector and what opportunities they see in their immediate work environments. Most importantly, interviews proved to be the best way of understanding the intersection between technology and inequalities, over other forms of data collection. Focus groups would have proved impractical as I interviewed participants located in different regions of the country. The power imbalances between the urban stations, online stations and rural stations would have been difficult to navigate. One-on-one was a more appropriate approach to this inquiry.

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5.2 Research Design

5.2.1 Data collection

The *who* aspect of designing the research and interviews was important in my pursuit of a suitable sample. I interview twelve producers in the community radio sector. I followed Robinson's (2014) four-point approach, (1) setting a sample universe, (2) selecting a sample size, (3) devising a sample strategy and (4) sample sourcing. I employed convenience sampling, a technique Robinson describes as a process which 'proceeds by way of locating any convenient cases who meet the required criteria and then selecting those who respond on a first-come-first-served basis until the sample size quotient is full' (2014, p. 32). In order to the avoid unwarranted generalisations, a common critique of convenience sampling, I used a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria's in for the recruitment process (Robinson, 2014). The sample universe had two inclusion criteria, the respondents must have been currently working in the community radio sector and should be in a management position. This was important because the interview guide was addressing issues of strategy and budget which is a function of management. The next important factor was to locate a variety of stations across the country, with varying socio-economic conditions. The twelve producers were composed as follows; three stations were based in the urban areas, three stations based in townships, three stations were online stations (unable to get an FM licence because of the moratorium) and three were based in rural areas. The stations were spread across four different provinces across South Africa. The online stations were not conceived of geographically, these were communities of interest.

5.2.2 Interview guide

The interview guide was created during the pilot stage of the research. The same guide was adapted and augmented for this study. In an effort to address three dominant themes from the literature, the interview guide was split into three topics of interest and an additional introductory segment which sought to get the participants relaxed before delving into the research areas. During the pilot phase, the interview guide was followed rigidly. However for this research, it was used as a guide and it was 'designed to capture the aims and objectives of

the research….based on a combination of a critical reading of the appropriate literature [and] a reconnaisance of the field'(Bauer & Gaskell, 2007, p. 4). I also used more anecdotes and shared my experiences in the field to create an open and relaxed atmosphere.

5.2.3 Interview

I conducted twelve interviews in total, two were telephonic and ten where face to face. Interview locations varied but majority were conducted at the respective radio station and at an annual Radio Conference that I attended. The interview employed three kinds of questions, (1) main questions (2) probes and examples and (3) follow ups to contradictory statements that needed further clarification. In writing about power asymmetries in research interviewing, Gubrium and Holstein's (2002) observation that this conversation is taking place between unequals assisted me in understanding that the 'initial inclination may be to follow the norms of everyday conversation, to limit answers to what is presumed to be relevant and informative (Grice, 1975), and to adopt positions on issues that match a particular self-image' on the side of the respondent. (Bauer & Gaskell, 2007). At the beginning of the interview, most respondents gave positive and standardised responses which later changed as the interview progressed. The semi structured nature of the conversation allowed me to go back to their previous answers and get more clarity and examples from them. Other respondents seemed distracted by my note taking, at which I followed Rapley (2011) suggestion and refrained from note taking. This allowed me a better opportunity to make eye contact, be engaged and see non-verbal cues. Other respondents had language constraints and I switched to a local dialect that we could both understand. The more interviews I did, the quicker I was able to make them feel at ease. Transcription and note taking took place soon after.

5.3 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

 The study sought informed consent from the participants in line with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedures (2014). After extensive guidance from my supervisor, the appropriate forms were signed and approved, giving me the go ahead to recruit respondents. As I am familiar with the community radio field and had people in mind to assist with contact details,

I made sure to not make contact until ethics approval was granted. Thereafter, all the respondents received an email containing a consent form. I took the consent form to the interviews for them to sign and ask any questions they had before proceeding with the interviews. In addition, as a student researcher, I made sure that I communicated their right to withdraw at any time and explained how I would anonymise their identity. Some respondents chose their own pseudonyms and others left preferred I do it, therefore for the sake of uniformity, the respondents will be labelled numerically.

5.4 Coding framework and analysis

For this study, I employed thematic analysis to analyse the interview transcripts and generate themes to discuss my findings in relation to the conceptual framework. 'Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a novice researcher, I was drawn to this method because it has been noted as 'the first qualitative method of analysis that a researcher should learn as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Recognised as both a tool and a method of analysis, I used a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis.

The pilot study assisted in drawing out dominant codes and themes from the research question and conceptual framework which I was interested in pursuing further in this research, to test preconceived theories and hypotheses (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 83). This form of deductive analysis was driven by the conceptual framework and sought to code for various inequalities in the data. The other themes emerged from the patterns in the data itself, a bottom up approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997) closely linked to grounded theory (Frith and Gleeson, 2004). The inductive approach was used to interpret recurring patterns in the data.

Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide was followed where I acquainted myself with the data and manually organised the data to identify codes and patterns. Doing so enabled me to

recognise important moments that needed to be interpreted. 'A "good code" is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon' (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 83).

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section of the study deals with the themes identified using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six step method. Multiple themes emerged that were unexpected, which is one of the benefits of using in-depth interviews for data collection. However, the study will focus on four themes that best address the research question at hand. The themes deal with various forms of inequality caused by inadequate participatory approaches; the financial sustainability of the sector and the regulatory challenges faced which all threaten to deepen existing inequalities within various communities. The first theme tackles social inequality by discussing the overwhelming male dominated nature of the sector. The second deals with financial sustainability and the third discusses regulatory concerns emerging from respondents. The last theme offers a way forward for the sector as it grapples with technological changes geared towards an increased focus on digitisation in the communications sector.

6.1 Further marginalising women in the technological revolution

Community participation has remained a pillar in the conceptual understanding of community radio. Unlike its counterparts in commercial or public service broadcasting, community media has been understood and widely accepted for being participatory. It is precisely because of "participation" that this sector has been used to propel ideas like democracy, citizenship and community itself. However, the most common critique is that participation is rhetoric that merely reconfigures and reinforces unequal power relations by ignoring class inequalities, patriarchal structures and the negative impacts of socioeconomic structures (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Kapoor, 2002).

Furthermore, access to media through ICTs have been found to be instrumental in supporting participatory democracy and participation in general (Unwin, 2009). ICTs have been attributed to the increased participatory nature of community radio, through the creation of multiple

platforms where communities can engage and participate in programming (Tomlinson, 1999). The creation of civic agency has also been attributed to ICT usage in community radio stations. A case study conducted by Moyo (2012) of Radio Islam in South Africa was used to argue for and illustrate the use of mobile phones and the internet in increasing participation. The cultural public sphere became more inclusive of geographic and communities of interest as more people were able to participate in dialogues curated by the community radio stations using ICTs (Nassanga, Manyozo, & Lopes, 2013).

The interviews conducted revealed gendered patterns of inequality and exclusion in the community radio sector. The data collected shows that participation has been undermined as a result of its exclusionary nature against women. The field is male dominated at the highest level of participation, at board and management level for individual stations and again within provincial structures (NCRF, 2017). Interviewees responded as following to their stations gender balance:

> *'At board level, its 80/20 the women in the minority' – 1*

> *'It's mostly females if you judge it from participation, a lot of females are calling in and sending texts' – 7*

> *'It's not balanced…for instance, from provincial level...female station managers we are only two in the province out of 24 member stations' – 2*

> *'I think its unbalanced. We have more males than females, we have about 6 females in total who are in programming..out of 30..you can see its bad'- 6*

The decisions taken about how a station should run, operationally, editorially and strategically are disproportionally in favour of the men in the community. Women's involvement is relegated to the operational level and they are viewed as listeners more than content producers. This finding indicates a structural inequality that is in danger of being reinforced with the introduction of ICT's and digital broadcasting services as there are no concrete plans in place to restructure this imbalance or fundamentally reshape the power dynamics in the

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stations. During the interview process, many of the male respondents were visibly uncomfortable during this discussion and my role as a female researcher exacerbated their unsettled and dismissive responses. Gender equality was a discussion that they were not comfortable to have, which is testament to how they deal with gender issues at a structural level. The absence of gender mainstreaming plans indicated that this is low on the list of priorities. When asked about the gender imbalance, none of the interviewees at management level, indicated an active plan to address this issue, instead a Gramscian hegemonic common sense surrounded the issue, as if it was natural and inevitable that there are few women in decision making roles. An unquestioned acceptance and lack of contestation over meaning lies at the root of Gramsci's notion of hegemony and common sense. A sentiment echoed by the following interview:

> *'From a general station numbers, we've got about 65% females staff compliment.*
> *It's a bit skewed when it comes to management for some reason, we've got about*
> *70% male in management…it just kinda happened like that' - 11.*

International and regional bodies have affirmed their commitment to enhancing women's participation in key decision-making roles within media and communication, through several key documents. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development have been instrumental in setting the global standard for women's participation. These sentiments have yet to be taken on in earnest in South Africa, however there is room for change, provided the imbalance is acknowledged and plans to remedy it are put in place. As Mouffe (2005) well argues that hegemony is not absolute, 'every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 18). The acceptance of inadequate or non-existent gender mainstreaming policies is fundamentally damaging because community radio itself is characterised as a sector which exists to offer counter hegemonic views and contribute to media plurality; which begs

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the question, how can an organisation offer counter hegemonic views when it is consumed by a patriarchal lens and operates with one dominant worldview in mind?

A rich body of theories can be used to explain how communicative inequality is intersecting with gender, ICT usage, power and participation. At a normative level, it is widely agreed upon that transitioning and introducing ICT's in community radio has the potential to strengthen community participation, through the creation of multiple platforms. The challenges emerging from the data collected indicate that the existing inequalities have resulted in a severe imbalance of who benefits and who is excluded. This means that in as much as ICT's will democratise the airwaves, they will also deepen existing social inequalities. These phenomena happen simultaneously because of how technology intersects with power. Toyama's (2011) amplification theory posits that technologies have a multiplicative and not additive effect on people and communities. 'People have intent and capacity, while technology is merely a tool that multiplies human capacity in the direction of human intent' (Toyama, 2011, p. 2). Currently, there is very little intent as far as concrete strategizing and planning in place to deal with gender imbalances at every level of the station, with no intent, the existing inequalities will deepen.

This finding challenges theories that imply that technology in and of itself has transformative capabilities. Without a concrete plan, policy, budget, monitoring and evaluation mechanism, the gender inequalities will not dissipate as a result of ICTs and digital strategies in a community radio station. Merely having access to technologies will not level the power dynamics at play. Taking Bourdieu's (1991) notion of symbolic power which he defines as: 'that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it' (Bourdieu, 1991,p. 164). This form of power that constitutes reality is at play in the sector because of the prevalent unquestioned and normalised social structures of power. The way in which power, gender norms and technology intersect indicates that special attention needs to be given to the sector's efforts of transforming technologically in a way that is beneficial for vulnerable and

marginalised groups in those communities. Castells (2001) aptly reminds us that technologies can create a world where the information underclass can be excluded and discarded.

This study recognizes Mohanty's (2003) postcolonial scholarship which warns against homogenising "third world women". The communities in question, are mostly rural and township communities which have various ethnic groups, elites, subalterns, with differing religious and sexual identities. The ways in which women experience inequality and negotiate power is not homogenous, each occupies their own subject position, within ideology and in the community. Advocating for more women in decision making positions in the community radio stations is done with an understanding that constant negotiation and resistance to domination is currently occurring, through individual, collective and editorial strategies. However, to shift power relations, more voice needs to be given to women to break down, reimagine and rebuild their community radio stations. The very notion of 'community participation' which usually embodies a feel-good character, carries the appeal of optimism and considerable normative power (Cornwall and Brock, 2005), needs to be approached critically in community radio as it ventures into a new terrain of digital audio broadcasting.

6.2 Sustainability

Stories attesting to the power of community radio for social change have resulted in many donors showing an interest in the sector. International donors have funded a large majority of community radio stations in the Global South, focusing on social development programs and equipment funding. Various models of revenue generation are employed by stations, however as Hussain & Tongia, (2008) caution, 'CR [Community Radio] stations that are initially funded through a grant or donor money (international, regional or local) are likely to face financial crisis sooner than other types. After external funds run dry if the proper plan regarding financial sustainability is not in place, irrespective of any CR initiative being socially accepted or operationally sound, things tend to fall apart' (Hussain & Tongia, 2008, p. 5).

South Africa was particularly prone to donor funding post-Apartheid when the country shifted focus to reconstructing and rebuilding a multiracial nation.

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> *'Open Society Foundation used to fund, we used to have your ABC Ulwazi. We used to have training that was organized by MDDA. We used to have a institute for the advancement of journalism. We were funded by them and we were able to…. get, you know capacitated in many fields of radio but at the moment we are on our own…. community radio has not yet been sustainable as yet. Now, it's no longer the case. We are struggling to even get our dilapidated studio being renewed.' – 3*

This interview brought out an important and re-occurring theme in this research, the importance of ensuring sustainability. A holistic definition of sustainability is offered by Gumucio Dagron (2001), where he differentiates between, institutional, social and financial sustainability. Each has its own function but the three are interrelated. The data collected indicated a particular concern towards financial insecurity. I will thus narrow the scope of sustainability to refer specifically to financial sustainability, defined as 'the station's model for generating revenue and how its funds are managed and accounted for' (Da Costa, 2013. p. 140).

6.2.1 Funding models

The South African community radio sector was initially heavily funded by local and international donors, alongside governmental assistance. 'The Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA) is credited with having given the utmost support to the sector. Between 1995 and 2000, OSF-SA gave grant support of about R 15 million to community radio stations' (Olorunnisola, 2002, p. 143). Donor funding substantially decreased, and advertising models began to emerge and eventually dominated the sector. The transition into digital audio broadcast has the potential to leave some stations prone to needing large grants and donor funding to assist them in making the transition operational in their communities through the provision of free digital radio sets to their communities and upgrading their analogue studios to digital studios.

The sector in general struggles to remain financially sustainable and the introduction of ICTs, using online radio, producing multimedia content, switching to digital audio broadcast and

navigating the new terrain through training workshops all come at a heavy cost. Operating in both the offline and online environments brings different challenges for market share and advertising models as indicated by the interviewees:

> *'…the digital space is taking over and that is obviously affecting us as community radio stations. I'll give you an example, when it comes to advertising, we took a knock because now brands are no longer investing too much money with us, they give influencers, people who have much following to place their products to see them.'- 1*

> *'They [advertisers] don't understand the concept of online radio and how we sell…you can't even get the media buyers to understand what we do never mind selling anything to them. They understand the risk of [traditional] radio; they know that works.' – 5*

The effectiveness of new technology is difficult to measure because technology projects have unintended consequences. When introducing new technological systems to a community, the uptake is not guaranteed since people negotiate their response to technology differently. Critical ICT4D scholars also provide an array of reasons to explain the failure of ICT projects which range from; lack of designing context-appropriate technology, not accounting for poor infrastructure, not providing a viable financial model or merely, not providing incentives for all stakeholders (Toyama, 2011). These reasons where all echoed in the data and literature.

> *'I don't know if our communities or everyone will then migrate, because the system might migrate, but you'll find that people are stagnant, especially from poverty-stricken townships like Alexandra and we still have a debate on data issues [high cost of data] you know such things' – 1*

According to Mansell (2014) and as Berger (2012) has consistently argued, the transition to digital broadcasting systems was not driven by community media itself but by the market and developed countries. This is what Mansell (2014) calls exogenous models in ICT4D where

exogenous models and discourses are employed to justify interventions aimed at using new technologies to stimulate economic growth in the developing world. The same argument can be extended to the very idea of migrating broadcasting systems, a model that was designed in the Global North is being implemented in the Global South because the dominant discourse on development prioritizes neoliberal policies. Furthermore, even though investments in ICTs are a concern for endogenous growth models, because of how they influence the market, they can still be pursued to the detriment of local communities. Mansell pushes her argument further, 'in spite of their emphasis on endogenous factors that influence change, this model from economics often is used to justify policies encouraging the openness of developing countries to knowledge and technologies from exogenous sources' (Mansell, 2014, p. 111).

In the context of digital audio broadcasting, the data is in agreement with existing literature that spectrum frequency is a challenge, in urban areas more than in rural areas. Therefore, the implementation of a blanket moratorium that applies to all community radio stations creates a gap where voice and the public sphere become a privilege of the few in society. I am referring to Habermas' (1962) conceptualization of the public sphere as 'the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs…This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state' (Fraser, 1990, p. 57). By limiting access to the airwaves in rural communities that are not experiencing spectrum challenges, this policy move has effectively removed many vulnerable communities from the public sphere.

This move inadvertently undermines the democratic discourse that was foundational in the emergence of the sector. In addition, in order to create and justify the urgency for a switchover, a policy which is exogenous in its nature and affects the market positively was implemented. The introduction of digital audio broadcasting and an emphasis on digital radio, will undoubtedly handicap rural community stations who are grappling with day to day operational survival.

*'we have lost hope, because for instance, if we are struggling prior to the
implementation of digital migration, what more when we have digital migration
and we going to be having, you know, the competition is going to be high to be
honest. It's a reality and then we need, it's something that we need to face it, the
competition is going to be high and then some of the community radio for sure are
going to be closed down. Definitely. That's what we need to know.' – 3*

*'Digital has its good things, but we have to focus on the bad things because I feel
it's going to expose a lot and a lot of stations are going to get closed because of that.
They won't be able to keep up, cope or adapt. That's my biggest worry' - 10*

The closure of community radio stations as a real possibility is a finding that needs to be
understood in the context of the political and economic lens in which the media operates. The
very premise of the switchover is to allow for more entries, better quality and overall, improve
radio the sector. However, the fact that the existing stations have the possibility of closing
down because they are unable to adapt to technological changes results in communicative
inequality where only the urban stations who can afford the transition in all its facets will
survive.

6.3 Unlicensed and Unregulated

The moratorium that was implemented in 2015 did not stop any of the stations operating
online. The interviews conducted revealed this persistence. When their hopes of receiving a
terrestrial licence were crushed, stations were not deterred in their plans and saw this an as
opportunity to operate and broadcast in a way that is free from regulation. This was likened
to freedom of speech and was viewed in a positive light by one of the respondents.

*'They [regulators] weren't fast enough, they didn't catch up to the online hype
and we don't have regulations, that's why online is a really nice, fertile ground to
play on if you are interested in the media space because…I mean we wanted the
FM situation so that we have both options available for those kids who can't have
the data to access us and for those who do. ICASA were not issuing licences
anymore so we said you know what we are going to do it our way then…and we
are having a lot of fun without regulations'- 4*

However, the majority of respondents, operating offline, viewed the absence of regulation as detrimental to their existence. They cited various issues such as unfair competition because the new online entrants have no measurement or standard advertising rate, they can technically charge any amount they want to for an advert. This lack of regulation extended beyond the financial, but more findings indicated a need to regulate for the continued survival of existing stations. Online stations also agreed that in some cases, advertisers are not willing to move forward with contracts because there is no measurement tool. For both terrestrial and online stations, the need to regulate was a pressing issue.

> *'I think community radio is going to suffer a lot, that time there will be free WIFI everywhere. People are going to be going online, do their own radio station. In a way there needs to be more regulations. They need to review broadcast regulation like how they are going to monitor online radio'- 2*

> *'I think two people use the same system, of the seven. Everybody used a different system…we need one sort of measuring standards for online that we know we'll be talking about…Because there's no one standard. The advertiser doesn't know who, you know, what are you doing? What is this live stream?... what does it mean? What do they call it, um, sessions? What is the session? People don't understand any of those terminologies, you know. Um, so we're in a very tight spot at the moment' – 5*

While it is widely accepted that innovation precedes policy regulation, two matters emerged; the importance of regulation and the need to issue out licenses more strategically going forward or reissue licences if needs be.

South Africa's broadcasting policies and community radio legislation notably stands out in literature as exemplary and has been used as a blueprint by many African countries (Estrada & Fraser, 2001). The sector is governed and regulated by The Broadcasting Act (1999) and The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA, 2000), listeners can also report complaints to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa. These Acts currently do not recognise online radio stations and without a licence to operate, accessing

funding becomes a challenge. For example, the MDDA can only disburse grant funding to stations with a valid operating licence. These issues need urgent attention before digital audio broadcasting is implemented or accepted as a viable option as is indicated by the position paper on the inquiry into digital sound broadcasting:

> *'The Authority has concluded the inquiry into the use of DSB in South Africa. In Summary, the Authorities finds are that: There is a need for DSB in South Africa*
>
> *The Authority finds that the market can take further players as DSB is meant to make spectrum more efficient allowing more players in the market' (ICASA, 2019, p. 277)*

The absence of regulation can open the sector up to illicit financial flows which are detrimental to its democratic and development goals. The current legislation is explicit about funding. 'In keeping with the Charter of the World Association of Community Radio (AMARC), some legislation specifies that no single source should provide more than 50 percent of a station's revenue. Funding from political parties or from other special interest groups is forbidden in some legislation' (Estrada & Fraser, 2001, p.31). The normative understanding of community media has been critiqued for its complicity in hiding the deep contestations prevalent in the sector, such as co-optation and corruption. One interviewee echoed these sentiments when asked about her fears concerning the transition:

> *'Well I listen to a lot of radio and there is a station that comes to mind that kind of took the regulation advantage/disadvantage, however you want to see it, they took it the other way. So, they are using it the way Afriforum would probably use it…they say very racial comments...it's like we are not regulated so we are going to say whatever we want to say…. With moving online, it means that we are just going to be cliques and not really fulfil the purpose of media anymore.' – 4*

The respondent highlights a tension that needs to be given attention. The possibility of the cooption. In a country with a racially divided past, this lack of regulation leaves room for far-right groups such as Afriforum to fund online stations. "Founded in 2006, the organisation

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styles itself as a civic rights grouping, whereas in actual fact it could be described as South Africa's answer to the alt-right movement in the United States: strongly nationalistic, suspicious of government, antagonistic towards liberal or progressive values, opposed to immigration and integration and with a strong focus on ethnic mobilisation" (HuffPost, 2017).

Far right groups will have an opportunity to spread undemocratic messages online which are masked as media criticism. This idea was argued by Stiernstedt (2014) in stating that "the purpose of criticism is to improve or alter the news media and distinguishes between pragmatic and interest-based form of criticism…the latter is driven by the particular concerns of specific groups' (Figenschou & Ihlebæk,2018)…such as Afriforum which have the possibility of sowing racial discord, going against the very idea that the rainbow nation project was built on.

At the heart of communicative inequality lies the issue of voice and power. The impending transition will effectively drown out some voices and amplify those who have access to the market, capital and politics. These are the critical questions that regulators need to pay attention to. The former Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, stated: "Because radio can be very powerful, it may sometimes be detrimental to the people it aims to serve. We saw in Rwanda that a radio station, Radio Mille Collines, contributed greatly and criminally to the tragedy that hit that country' (Estrada & Fraser, 2001, p.68). The importance of regulation cannot be overstressed and if a regulator has no capacity to undertake such a regulatory task, it is advisable to look at each tier of broadcasting independently to phase in digital audio broadcasting instead of taking on a task that if left half done, would create severe democratic and inequality issues.

6.4 Global vs Local Relevance

Respondents showed an overpowering desire to rethink the relevance and usefulness of the current three tier system used to categorise broadcasters in light of technological changes and digitisation. In a converged environment, some respondents said the following:

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> *'We don't see ourselves as a radio station, we see ourselves as a media company, an*
> *online media company with a live stream element, which makes us unique from*
> *other media companies' – 5*

This particular sentiment was interesting because of the contradictions that emerged from a majority of the respondents. At first, there was a general excitement and appreciation of digitisation with many citing the need for quality sound and wanting to grow their brands and be heard by listers beyond their licence conditions. Towards the end of the interviews, after discussing and interrogating the complexities that digitisation brings to certain communities such as rural communities and the costs associated with catering to offline and online listeners, the respondents began to change their earlier positions. They started reflecting quite critically about who they would like to prioritise and how to reconcile their desires for growth and international reach with their purpose and reason for existence as community radio stations. When asked about the need to move online, create multimedia content, service local and international listeners, their positions started to reflect a return to the core features of community radio; small-scale, participatory and not for profit.

> *'Online will always be our secondary listeners, our priority will always be the*
> *people we reach via our frequency but it is not a matter of choice, we are forced to,*
> *this thing is here and its coming and we cannot be left out so as a station we have*
> *to divide this thing into two, but our area of focus will always be our primary*
> *listener who we know because of where we are positioned' – 1*

> *'I think other people are scared that all these moves and stuff would somehow*
> *threaten the existence of radio. I don't think so. I think radio has always survived*
> *in its natural form and all these things and it will always find its voice within that*
> *space. So I am not that worried about it. I think it will, it'll find its way as within,*
> *within that and, and still stand out' - 7*

The pressure to concentrate on digital strategies was seen as a result of industry pressure. For stations that are based in rural areas, when asked why they see the need to focus on creating

online content if they know that majority of their listers rely on FM broadcasting, they responded as follows:

> *'You see, our community, they are still stuck in the analogue world….[so why the need to move online and get apps if your community is not there?]… because everyone is doing it, we should also do it but there are disadvantages of that'* - 6

> *'Everyone is moving online and digital, we cant be left behind'*- 9

> *'The only good thing is that we are going to be on par with the rest of the world'* -2

A preoccupation with global relevance and wanting to appear modern has gripped South Africa's relationship with technology, to the detriment of the poorest and vulnerable communities.

7 CONCLUSION

By approaching the switch over from analogue to digital broadcasting systems through the lens of community participation and critical political economy, this research was able to map out how communicative inequality rears its head within the community radio sector in South Africa. Critical political economy 'goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good' (Golding and Murdock, 1991). This view was adopted in the study by not exclusively focusing on the technological advantages or disadvantages on the impending digital migration process. Speaking to producers in the sector who will be affected allowed the study to grapple with issues of equity and justice and understand how structural inequalities are reconstituted at an operational and human level.

The data collected indicated a strong disregard for gender equality within the sector. The existing gender inequality will be reproduced with the introduction of ICTs, further deepening social inequality in communities. Using Toyama's theory of amplification was useful in its focus on human intent as an important prerequisite to ensuring that technology enhances

participation and gives voice to community members. The absence of intent witnessed in the data indicates that technology on its own will not democratise the airwaves and create an inclusive community radio sector, thus further marginalising women in any technological changes prevalent in the sector.

Two mechanisms of amplification strongly emerged from the data, differential access and differential capacity. Put simply, this study concludes that technology is more accessible to the profitable and powerful stations in urban areas. This communicative inequality indicates that universal access will thus not be achieved with the switchover because many stations will not be able to adapt and will close down. Community radio stations based in urban areas are more likely to cope and adapt to the sectors increased focus on multimedia content and digital broadcast. The second mechanism of capacity suggested that in order for the switchover to be successful, more support needs to be given to the sector. The data collected reveals that there is currently not enough capacity, from both a regulatory perspective and infrastructural perspective to effectively transition the community radio sector to digital systems.

The switchover from analogue to digital systems brings with is the promise of new entrants that can further enhance participation in the public sphere and contribute to media plurality, in terms of ownership and voice. Community participation in all its facets is the strongest characteristic of community radio and is essential in its existence, however the high costs of data, the infrastructural challenges and gender biases prevalent in the sector show that community participation is merely rhetoric and only a few in the community enjoy the right to participate, further entrenching communicative inequality.

In conclusion, the digital switchover has been presented along three main arguments, which this study has addressed and concludes that, spectrum inefficiency is a challenge in urban areas and the solution to digitise the all tiers of radio is detrimental for the community radio sector. Further study can focus on how the commercial broadcast sector will benefit from the transition thus contributing to the systematic collapse of community radio. The promise of universal access and improved technical quality is not an attractive incentive in a market that

is over saturated, where existing stations are struggling to remain viable. Lastly, the inevitability of radio convergence in a digital world clearly indicates how the modernisation paradigm has a stronghold in South Africa's broadcast policy, as indicated by an insistent focus on technological changes to the detriment of the most vulnerable in society. In an effort to appear developed and progressive, this move will produce communicative inequality if adequate measures are not put in place to shift the power imbalance in favour of the poor and marginalised communities in South Africa.

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Appendix A – Consent Form

From Analogue to Digital broadcasting in South Africa
Depertment of Media & Communication , LSE

Information for participants

Thank you for considering participating in this study which will take place from April 22nd – May 11th. This information sheet outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant, if you agree to take part.

1. What is the research about?
The study aims to research the impact of transitioning from analougue broadcasting to digital broadcasting for the community radio sector in South Africa. The method for collecting data will be interviews with producers and station managers in the community media sector.

2. Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do decide to take part I will ask you to sign this consent form. Please sign and return in advance of the interview.

3. What will my involvement be?
You will be asked to take part in an interview about your knowledge and experience in the community radio sctor. It should take approximately 30 mins by phone or skype. You can choose which works best for you.

4. How do I withdraw from the study?
You can withdraw at any point of the study, without having to give a reason. If any questions during the interview make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. Withdrawing from the study will have no effect on you. If you withdraw from the study I will not retain the information you have given thus far, unless you are happy for me to do so.

5. What will my information be used for?
I will use the collected information for a dissertation as part of the requirement for an MSc in Media, Communication and Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

6. Will my taking part and my data be kept confidential? Will it be anonymised?
The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to the files and any audio tapes. The information will also be stored on a password protected device Any hard copies of research information will be kept in locked files at all times.

7. What if I have a question or complaint?
Do not hesitate to contact me at xxxxxx if you have any questions regarding this study. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of this research, please contact my Dissertation Supervisor, xxxxxxx

If you are happy to take part in this study, please sign the consent sheet attached.

CONSENT FORM

Name of researcher:

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I have read and understood the study information dated [DD/MM/YY], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	YES / NO
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	YES / NO
I agree to the interview being audio recorded	YES / NO
I understand that the information I provide will be used for a dissertation and that the information will be anonymised.	YES / NO
I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs.	YES / NO
I understand that any personal information that can identify me – such as my name, address, will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone other than myself and my supervisior	YES / NO

Participant name:

Signature: _____   Date _____

Appendix B – Topic Guide

INTERVIEWS WITH PRODUCERS AND MANAGERS IN COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

TRANSITIONING FROM ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL BROADCASTING: A CASE OF COMMUNICATIVE INEQUALITY

About you:

How long have you been in the community media sector?

Which community media characteristics appealed to you over public service broadcast or commercial?

What is unique about community radio that attracted you as a profession?

About your station:

Can you tell me about the profile of your station? (Listenership rates, urban/rural region, music/talk ration)

Can you share your listener's demographic factors? (Socioeconomic characteristics – average age, sex, education level, income level, occupation)

For provinical representatives: What is the state of the sector? Gender, governance, financial , local content?

Can you share your thoughts on the importance of the three-tier system

About the transition:

What do you understand about the digital migration process as it relates to radio?

Do you think this a good move for your radio station?

Did you, your station or a representative body participate in the ICASA inquiry into digital sound broadcasting services?

How does the transition affect your station/online radio? (financial sustainability, cost of FM transmission, spectrum scarcity, content, staff training)

How has the moratorium on broadcasting licenses affected you?

How would your content production process change to adapt to the technological changes taking place? Can you give me an example?

What is your worst fear/ experience of the digitisation process?

What kind of regulation do you think needs to be in place for the transition to work?

About multimedia content:

Would your current listeners be able to access your online/digital content offerings? (If yes, how…if not, why not)

How did you prepare yourself and your station to produce online and offline content?

How are you equipped to face competition from digital media content/programs?

Appendix C – Interview Information

Interviewee	Gender	Position	Format	Region
1	M	Station Manager	Face to Face	Gauteng – Township
2	M	Station Manager	Face to Face	Gauteng – Township
3	F	Station Manager	Face to Face	Gauteng – Township
4	F	Station Manager	Face to Face	Online
5	Q	Station Manager	Face to Face	Online
6	M	Programmes Manager	Face to Face	Limpopo – Rural
7	M	Station Manager	Face to Face	North West – Rural
8	M	Station Manager	Face to Face	North West – Rural
9	F	Programmes Manager	Telephonic	Gauteng – Urban
10	F	Station Manager	Face to Face	Free State – Urban
11	M	Programmes Manager	Telephonic	Online
12	M	Station Manager	Face to Face	North West – Urban