

**REACH, EFFECTIVENESS AND LISTENERSHIP OF COMMUNITY RADIO-
A STUDY BY NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OPEN SCHOOLING (NIOS)**

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Abstract

Mass communication has been playing a major role in education, and particularly in open and distance education. Among them, many means of mass communication, community radio has emerged as one of the best means to educate communities. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), the world's largest open schooling recently launched its own community radio, a first of its kind, by any open and distance institution in India with an aim to educate not only its learners but also people of nearby communities who are not aware of many social and educational features.

This research was done for NIOS to get feedback from the community, to promote its own community radio and also to find the reach, effectiveness and listenership of the existing nearby community radio station, so that NIOS may strengthen its future course.

Purposive stratified sampling was used for selecting 500 respondents for the survey. Observation and survey methods were used for data collection within the radius of 5-7 kilometers from NIOS headquarters. Findings of the research showed that community radio was not as popular in the region as compared to other well known existing FM channels. Low levels of awareness, lack of entertainment value, no publicity, no participation from community has resulted in a small audience. However, findings showed that the respondents were interested and enthusiastic to participate in the programmes of community radio. They wanted to share their feelings and knowledge with others and also suggested format and styles of programmes which can give maximum benefit to the community.

This study was an attempt to know the advantages and short comings of community radio and its utility in open and distance education. No doubt, community radio has become the best medium to deal with local problems; it also gives a voice to the voiceless, enabling people to speak and make their opinions, grievances and ideas known to those who have the power to make decisions.

Keywords: *Reach, Effectiveness, Listenership and Community radio*

Introduction

Community radio is a dynamic and vibrant community broadcasting system to enhance pluralism and diversity. It is a truly people's radio that perceives listeners not only as receivers but also as active citizens. Community radio gives a voice to the community which they serve with programmes in local languages, respecting local culture, traditions and interests.

A Community radio is confined to a small geographical area. It is characterized by its limited local reach as it depends on low power transmission covering not more than a radius of 10-15 kilometers. It serves a community which uses common resources for livelihood, has common development issues and concerns, which are relatively localized, but nevertheless connected to regional and national development goals. It reflects the educational developmental and socio-cultural needs of the specific community it serves. It gives a voice to the voiceless, enabling people to speak and make their opinions, grievances and ideas known to those who have the power to make decision. Besides, doing services for the community, it has helped a lot to people to come forward and share their views on many prevalent issues existing in the society.

Since, radio has been an important mode of communication in open and distance education, National Institute of Open Schooling took the initiative to open its own community radio for its learners.

NIOS Community Radio

National Institute of Open Schooling launched its community radio, 91.2 FM, as a part of its new initiatives on 25th December 2015. It is now operational from the NIOS headquarters based at NOIDA and is covering a radius of 8-10 kilometers, reaching approximately five lakhs people for almost all six hours every day. Since, as a government policy community radio can have coverage of 5-10 kilometers with low frequency transmitter, NIOS intends to utilize the community radio facility to deliver need based educational content to the local communities in general, and particularly for the learners who are enrolled with the NIOS for different courses. It is expected that it will become popular with out of school children as well as homemakers and working adults.

NIOS utilizes this community radio to educate the local communities in general, and particularly the learners who are enrolled with the NIOS for different courses. Now, it reaches out to secondary and senior secondary learners who are out of school and able to listen to lectures delivered from the studios of NIOS and can ask questions. NIOS, through its community radio intends to reach a wider range of areas as well as a diversified audience.

The main thrust areas of NIOS community radio are to broadcast learner centric community based programmes such as:

- Phone-in programmes with the experts on health and hygiene, anti-smoking, AIDS, gender-sensitization, environment, education, stress management, interpersonal relationship between parent and children, examination stress, etc.
- Spreading awareness among the learners about various careers, career counseling and broadcasting other socially relevant programmes.
- Conducting (including academic counseling) interactive programmes for the learners enrolled at NIOS, who could not get the opportunities for face to face teaching-learning process.
- Broadcasting different community-based programmes with the help of community members residing in the slum areas and the community residing around headquarters of NIOS, NOIDA.

Review of related literature

Review of related literature showed that community radio has been playing an important role in educating and upliftment of people in communities and people are being benefited by the programmes, which are being aired on these radio stations.

Akhter (2010) in her study, conducted in Bangladesh, discussed how women in particular will be benefited from community radio and to reach the "unreached," women in remote areas, which is one of the most vulnerable groups in Bangladesh. Community Radio appears to be the easiest way to reach these vulnerable groups and thereby give a voice to the voiceless.

Khan (2010) in his study found, community radio plays a pivotal role in making the masses aware about their basic rights and duties. Not only limited to solving problems which a common man faces in his day-to-day life, community radio provides him a strong platform from where he can freely disseminate his ideas among his community members in the best possible manner. Thus, community radio becomes one of the important instrument in strengthening our 'Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression'. Community radio also acts as an intermediary between the Government and the local masses. This is the place from where local people can air their grievances to the Government as well as get the solutions to their problems too.

Nadew & Gissila (2009) in their study surveyed the audience and took their feedback about the programme being aired on radio and found that there was a need of direct participation of audience in the program for effective community participation. Depending on experts' views and research outcomes mostly, it would be better if the program includes opinions and comments of ordinary people from the society.

Rationale

Though, research findings and status of existing community radios in and around national capital region (NCR) and throughout the country could not be traced much, but it was found that very few community radio stations existing now are running successfully. NIOS community radio is first of its own kind as no schooling system or school board has ever launched a community radio till now. So, it was important to get feedback from the local community about their perception and requirement from this community radio. Also, to know what kind of programmes they want from the NIOS community radio to broadcast. From the learner's point of view, this survey was important to know their needs and demands in real life situation. Since, advocacy of community radio was also an important factor, this survey was aimed at interacting face to face with the common people of community.

Radio reaches various sections of the society and media programmes and audience are dynamic by their very nature. Many changes occur within a very short span of time. Thus, an audience survey was required to determine the effectiveness and to understand how to continue the programme in the years to come.

Thus, this audience survey was conducted to identify the effectiveness of community radio to determine the programme's future and identify which sections of the society are more interested in the programme.

Objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the programme's content, style, language and time of broadcasting from the audience point of view
- To evaluate audience perception of the radio programmes compared to other FM radio programmes
- To estimate the listenership and the reach of the community radio in the society
- To identify useful suggestions from the audience for the future implementation of the community radio programme
- To provide a platform to students and the community at large to exploit the potential of this creative media
- Social development of the area by focusing on relevant social issues through NIOS community radio
- To provide future directions for NIOS community radio.

Methodology

This research was descriptive in nature. Observation and survey method was employed for data collection. Area within the radius of 8-10 kilometers from NIOS headquarters was selected for the study. This area was restricted due to the range of community radio which is 8-10 kilometers. In the course of this study, people from the local community were interviewed and attempt was made to understand the ground realities as well.

Semi-structured interview schedule was used to gather information such as listening of radio/community radio, types of programmes, respondents' interest and preferences, etc.

Purposive stratified sampling was adopted to do the survey, selecting 500 respondents from the surrounding community of NIOS headquarters within the frequency reach of community radio. However, data selected was incidental audience groups from youth associations, and selected community members and stake holders in 8-10 kilometers radius of NIOS headquarters. Other community radio stations were also visited in Delhi (NCR) to get first-hand information about the functioning of these stations.

Profile of respondents

The results from the questionnaire shows that 60% were male while 40% were females. 2.8% were from the age group of below 20 years, 16% were from the age group of 20-30 years, 44% were from the age group of 30-40 years, 14% were from the age group 40-50 years, 18% were from the age group of 50-60 years, 2.8% were from the age group of 60-70 years and 2.4% were from the age group of 70 years and above.

Respondents' profile shows that the audience selected for this survey was diversified in nature. Male audiences were slightly higher than the female audience. Audience who are in the age group of 26-35 years and 36-50 years were in the majority. The educational background of these respondents ranged from class tenth to doctorate level while a remarkable number of respondents did not have formal education. It was found that the members of the audience came from various professions and work places. These factors have a definite impact on the audience behavior and knowledge, which in return determines how they perceive a certain type of media outlet, how they understand it and how they react to the audio programmes.

Analysis of data

Feedback forms were computed and analyzed question wise. Percentages were calculated against the responses received and are being presented in a tabular form.

Table 1: Feedback about radio listening

Item	Options	Percentage
Where do you listen radio the most?	At home	40
	In the car	48
	At work	2
	While commuting	40
	Never listen to radio	0.8
	Other	0.8

The above table shows that 40% people listen to the radio at home, 48% responded that they listened to the radio while they are driving a car and 40% of the people replied that while commuting from one place to another they utilize their time by listening to the radio. This shows that the, radio is an effective medium of entertainment and people listen to radio as and when they get time.

Table 2: Feedback on maximum numbers of Hours spent on Listening to the Radio

Item	Options	Percentage
How many hours a week, on average, do you spend listening to the radio?	Less than 1 hour	24
	1-3 hours	80
	3-6 hours	12
	More than 6 hours	08

From the above Table 2, it may be observed that most of the respondents (about 80%) listen to radio programmes for 1-3 hours followed by 12% people listening to radio programmes for 3-6 hours. It was found that 24% people listen to radio for less than one hour. While interacting with the people, it was observed that people who travel or commute longer distances listen to radio for a longer duration as compared to others. This also shows that people are interested in listening to the radio, subject to their choice and preferences. Moreover, availability of many FM channels, has given more options to listeners.

Table 3: Radio Stations heard the Most

Item	Options	Percentage
Which radio station do you listen to the most?	91.1 Radio city	32
	93.5 Red FM	28
	94.3 Radio One	8
	95.0 Hit 95 FM	6
	98.3 Radio Mirchi	48
	102.6 FM Rainbow	16
	104.0 Fever FM	4
	104.8 Radio Today	1.6
	106.4 FM Gold	44
	Any other radio station	8

The above Table 3, shows that Radio Mirchi, FM Gold, Radio City and Red FM are the most favorite channels and are being listened to by most of the people. Above percentage shows that these FM channels are more preferred.

Table 4: Respondents Preference of their favorite radio station over others

Item	Options	Percentage
Why do you prefer this station over others in your area?	More entertainment	80
	More education related	24
	Good news content	24
	Favourite music	80
	Quality of the presenters	16
	Famous personalities on radio station	8
	The relevance of programme for you on radio station	4
	Involvement of the radio station with the local community	4
	Best reception in your area	8
	State any other reasons why you listen to this station	0

The above Table 4- shows that 80% respondents prefer to listen to their favorite channel because it is entertaining and they are happy to listen to music of their choice. Moreover, their preferred channel consists of a variety of programmes. News content and education related programmes were the choice of only 24% listeners each. Only 16% respondents listen for the quality of presenters. However, less than 10% respondents listen to programmes related to famous personalities or because of best reception in their areas. It may be concluded that respondents prefer some channels to others because of their liking of programmes being broadcast. It shows these FM radios are more entertaining and their programmes are well organized and full of recreation.

Table 5: Respondents' Awareness about Community Radio Station

Item	Options	Percentage
Do you listen to any Community Radio Station in your area?	Yes	8
	No	92

The above Table 5- shows that 92% respondents do not listen to community radio. This shows either people are not aware of community radio or they do not want to listen to community radio.

Table 6: Reasons for not listening to Community Radio

Item	Options	Percentage
If no, then why do you not listen to community radio?	I am unaware of any community stations where I live	56
	I prefer listening to the stations I am familiar with	32
	Lack of music programmes	4
	Lacking in relevant programmes	8
	Quality of broadcast	8

	Lack of any commercials/Trailers/Jingles	00
	Lack of variety	4
	Others (Please Specify)	4.8

Responses in the above table were given by those who were not listening to community radio due to any reason. 56% people replied that they are not listening to community radio as they are not aware of any local community radio station in their nearby area. Surprisingly, two community radio stations are also aired in the vicinity of NIOS headquarters, but people are not aware of these community radio stations. 32% responded that they prefer listening to the stations which they are familiar with.

8% respondents gave reasons as lack of relevance and quality of broadcast. 4% responded that, since music and entertainment element is missing from community radio that is why they do not listen to this radio. It may be concluded that community radio is not popular in the community and people do not want to listen to community radio due to many reasons such as, lack of awareness, entertainment programme, lack of variety quality of broadcast, etc.

Table 7: Time spent on listening Community Radio

Item	Options	Percentage
If yes, then how often do you listen to community radio?	Daily	10
	More than once a week	6
	More than once a month	4
	Around once a year	0

Table 7 reveals that only 10% respondents listen to community radio daily, 6% of respondents replied that they listen more than once a week, whereas, 4% of respondents replied that they rarely listen more than once a month.

Table 8: Preference for most appropriate time slot to listen to the Community Radio

Item	Options	Percentage
Most appropriate time slot to listen community radio?	9-12 AM	15.2
	10-1 AM	4.8
	11-2 PM	56
	12 -3 PM	5.2
	1-4 PM	2.8
	2-5 PM	16

From the above Table 8, it is clear that 56% people responded that NIOS should broadcast its community radio programmes preferably from 11AM-2 PM and 16% preferred 2-5 PM whereas, 15.2% preferred 9-12 AM and 5.2% preferred 12-3 PM. Overall, respondents have different opinions regarding the time of transmission.

It is evident from the earlier responses that people from the service class do listen to radio programme but most of them were listening to these programmes while commuting from one place to another or while going to office etc.

Women respondents preferred the 11AM-2 PM, slot, saying that they are busy with household chores during the morning and evening hours, and they may not even get access to the radio set, due to the fact that men around the house would use it. Thus, they suggested that the programmes should be aired somewhere around noon.

Respondents, who were students and teachers, suggested that the programmes should be transmitted over the weekends, since it is not easy for them to tune in during the day. They

were of the opinion that it is better if the programme is aired on Saturdays and Sundays. It is on these days they are free and can listen to the radio programme without being rushed. In addition to the time of transmission, respondents commented on the time slot. Respondents were of opinion that twenty minutes is not enough for such heavy issues. They suggested that it should be for at least thirty minutes. But, all respondents did not agree with this, there were others who said twenty minutes is enough, because the programme deals with serious issues, and there is a chance that it might be difficult to follow it if it is on air for more than twenty minutes. They suggested that there should be provision for music and songs in between the programmes, so that one may not feel bored. On the other hand, respondents from youth groups said that they are not listeners of community radio, because they find the programme to be very serious. Thus, they find it hard to tune in to this channel at all. They suggested that it should be presented in a simple manner, incorporating entertaining packages. They said that the programme needs human elements, plays, poems and music. According to the respondents, the programme should be able to attract more audience by encouraging audience participation.

Table 9: Preference of Programme to be heard or to participate in Community Radio

Item	Options	Percentage
Kind of programme you would like to hear or participate in Community Radio	Pollution and Environment	88
	Poverty and food security	83.6
	Sanitation and health issues	74
	Gender Policy	76.8
	Agriculture/rural development issues	62.4
	Social challenges	70.8
	Children's issues	64.8
	Education and Life Long and continuing Education	61.6
	Educational Guidance and counseling	80.4
	Any other social issues	40.4

In the above table, responses for every option were more than 60%. Respondents felt that all the above mentioned options should be covered through community radio. This shows that these issues are sensitive and important in community and should be addressed time and again to resolve these problems. Besides, respondents also commented on problems such as, lack of appropriate sanitation facilities, waste disposal mechanisms including sewerage system, inaccessibility of potable water at household level which contributes to poor environmental sanitation. Elder members of the community suggested programmes for nearby villages and slums about family planning.

Table 10: Format for Broadcasting of Community Radio Programmes

Item	Options	Percentage
Format or combination preferred for broadcasting of community radio programmes	Dramatization	26
	Lecturing	31.6
	Interview/Phone- in programme	62.4
	Story telling	34.8
	Discussion	68.8

	Role playing	12
	Any other	0

From the above table 10, it is clear that for 68.8% responded that, discussion may be the most preferred format of the broadcast followed by interview/ phone-in programme as responded by 62.4% respondents. 34.8% responded in favour of storytelling and 31.6% responded in favour of lecturing. Dramatization and role playing received 26% and 12 % responses respectively.

From the above responses, it was clear that people from the community want direct interaction and direct involvement, which shows if programmes are made well and according to the need of community they will definitely react and respond to the programmes.

Respondents also commented that the participation of audience could impact the style of presentation. They said if some audiences are invited to discuss certain issues on the programme, it would attract more listeners. “You can select one social issue and invite the audience to participate directly in your programme.” A respondent, adding to this said, “The programme will have its own strength and weaknesses. Its strength will be that it would be presented by two persons and good for variety. However, its weakness will be that it would be not participatory in nature.

Respondents also mentioned that they can learn more from livelihood of ordinary people who have first hand information about the issues under discussion and willing to share their experiences in the programme than opinion of experts invited on the programme.

Adding to this, another respondent said she would prefer the presenters to rather present the programme in a way of conversation, than reading straight from the script.

Respondents said, “Although the issues dealt with are important and interesting, it will be appropriate if programmes are presented in the form of drama, incorporating entertainment package. It is hard to focus on dry facts for more than ten minutes; we need a break in between.”

Discussion

The major objective of the survey was to conduct a thorough audience survey on the existing radio/community radio programmes and to evaluate the programme’s effectiveness and the impact on the audience to determine future direction for NIOS community radio. This survey, specifically tried to identify that section of the society which listens to the programmes and to evaluate audience feedback, to examine the programme’s content, style, language and time of broadcasting from the audience point of view, evaluate whether the topics raised for radio programmes are closely related to the livelihood of the majority of the audience.

Survey results show that more has to be done to guarantee its listenership. It requires continuous efforts to improve the programmes. Audience feedback from the survey demonstrates that there is a need of direct participation of audience. Respondents suggested that there should be an entertaining element (like light music, folk songs, live/music, original performance etc.) to attract and keep the audience engaged. Variations were found among the opinions of audience groups, thus, need of audience segmentation are necessary while planning and implementing a programme. Community radio provides a strong platform from where one can freely disseminate one’s own ideas among community members in the best possible manner making community radio one of the important instruments in strengthening ‘Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression.’

Group discussions with various sectors in the community like farmers, businessman, shop-owners, teachers, artisans, etc. are essential and will be helpful for community. It is also crucial to consult women and youth, who are traditionally marginalized in many rural

societies. The points to be ascertained are to know about the listener's need, listener's preference and their listening habit. Recorded programmes should be broadcasted the next day if possible, or as soon as possible, which will motivate the people to participate more and more. Programmes must be evaluated and the opinion of the community be taken regarding their liking and disliking of the programmes. Further, their suggestions regarding the programmes should be considered and implemented.

Challenges for community radio

In the present scenario, community radio faces challenges in effective and quality programme production. Content, production quality and community involvement is not up to the level of community need. Lack of skilled and trained staff, lack of funds and its management has worsened the situation. Community radio is often situated in locations where basic services, like a constant supply of electricity, are lacking. Due to these conditions equipment suffers and needs to be maintained and replaced regularly. Most importantly, in many countries there is still a lack of a clear regulatory framework and guidelines in which community radio operates.

In addition to this, the participation from the people is the major problem. No community radio can survive without participation of people, as it demands more participation of the community people.

Conclusion

Community radio is still evolving and it might be possible that in the near future, one may witness its various new forms which will be technologically more superior as well as user friendly. It has been a great success in developed nations but has lagged in developing countries because of illiteracy and lack of awareness among people. Whatever the case may be, community radio will prove to be one of the best media of information for the community and learners in open and distance education.

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