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Radio listeners' perspectives on its purpose and potential to support older well-being

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ABSTRACT

According to Order (2017, p. 244), community radio broadcasting is “perfectly placed to tackle the far-reaching social issue of loneliness”. This is important to note in consideration of older adult well-being. Thus, we have undertaken a program of mixed-methods research to investigate: 1) radio listeners' considerations of the purpose of radio; and 2) the potential role of radio in promoting listener well-being. With data collection still underway, preliminary analyses drawing on semi-structured focus groups with radio listeners suggest that listeners engage with radio for entertainment (e.g., music), information (e.g., news), and connection. Listeners indicate that radio presenters act as a surrogate friend in their home, whereby the listener feels that they are part of a conversation taking place. They establish perceived relationships with presenters such that a change of presenter or program is met with mourning or an adjustment period. Having consistent engagement with presenters and programs of choice appear to be associated with listener enjoyment and comfort. Project findings will be contextualised against data collected via interviews with radio presenters to consider what synergies exist. Additionally, broader implications regarding radio listening for well-being in aged-care settings and healthy ageing policies will be discussed.

Order, S. (2017). All the lonely people, where do they all belong: Community radio and social connection. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 15(2), 243-258. doi:10.1386/rjao.15.2.243_1

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Introduction

Previous research has highlighted how radio presenting and listening can promote older adult well-being (e.g., Krause, 2020; Order & O'Mahony, 2017). Krause (2020) found, for example, that radio listeners reported many well-being benefits associated to their radio listening practices, including relaxation, modifying their mood, and promoting feelings of comfort and community. However, research has not examined whether, or how, listeners might perceive one of radio's functions as promoting well-being.

Thus, we have undertaken a program of mixed-methods research to investigate: 1) radio listeners' considerations of the purpose of radio; and 2) the potential role of radio in promoting listener well-being.

Method

James Cook University Ethical Approval: H8022

Sample

- $N = 21$ older Australians who listen to the radio
- 70% female, 30% male
- Aged 64-82, with 3 not reporting exact ages ($M = 71.22$, $Mdn = 69$, $SD = 5.84$)

Focus groups

- Conversational style (Bhattacharya, 2017)

Data Analysis

- Audio recordings → verbatim transcripts
- Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

References

Bhattacharya (2017) Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. Routledge. | Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. | Krause, A. E. (2020). The role and impact of radio listening practices in older adults' everyday lives. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11: 603446. | Order, S., & O'Mahony, L. (2017). Building a purposeful identity in the older adult volunteer space: A case study of community radio station 6RPH (Radio Print-Handicapped). *Communication Research and Practice*, 3(1), 31-44.

Preliminary Results

81.00% of the sample listened to the radio daily. On average, the sample reported spending 5.8 hours listening in a day ($Mdn = 4$, $SD = 5.31$). Most described the radio more as a companion than as background noise.

Why Listeners Engage with Radio

Older adults engage with radio for entertainment (e.g., music), information (e.g., news), and connection.

"I need mental stimulation" | "Yes, so I love the company. Also the information. I've learned so much since I've had time to have the radio on." | "Well it communicates. That's what it does. It's a form of the media." | "For me, it's the connection with music" | "For the news, just to keep up with what's going on in the world and for politics. To hear music that I don't have myself, yes."

Perceived Relationships with Presenters Promotes Well-Being

Listeners indicate that radio presenters act as a surrogate friend in their home, whereby the listener feels that they are part of a conversation taking place.

Having consistent engagement with presenters and programs of choice appear to be associated with listener enjoyment and comfort.

"Yeah I think connecting is probably a really good point for me too because it - you develop a sort of connection with the presenters of programs. Over time you feel like maybe they become friends, though you have never met them, if you know what I mean. But just to have that company in the home, well as you say, in the kitchen."

"I may not necessarily want to be with people, because I need a lot of quiet time, but if I put the radio on, then I'm still getting that connection with the world."

"Yeah, [they're] sort of like family, getting to know another family member or a new family member. ... Because they tell you things about their own personal life and then regular talkback listeners who ring in, you get to know them and it becomes one big family."

Listeners spoke of presenter behaviours that assist in developing relationships and promoting well-being. These include demonstrating professionalism, a sense of humour, journalistic skills, a warm and welcoming voice and natural way of speaking, content knowledge, and an ability to share important, accurate, and timely information.

Discussion

Radio functions via the interaction of three components: the presenter(s), the content, and the listener(s). Listeners highlighted that the radio can play a different role for different people, and that they do not expect the same things from different types of programming.

Changes in Presenters

Given the importance of the relationships developed between listeners and presenters, it is important to consider how stations handle changes to presenters and programming. Such changes are met with mourning or an adjustment period.

"Obviously it takes time to adjust to someone new. I mean that happened also when [Presenter] left. Obviously, she had to retire at some point, but why did she have to retire just then? Yeah, I think I do miss those people. ... Of course, they have to have other parts of their lives, but it's almost like I think, as the listeners, we feel like they belong to us. How dare they go away and do something else. So, there's a sense of sadness when somebody finishes."

What's next? Analyses will consider the listeners' perspectives against data collected via interviews with radio presenters.

