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Broadcasting during COVID-19: Community language radio and listener wellbeing

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Broadcasting During COVID-19: Community Language Radio and Listener Wellbeing

Abstract

Community language radio is known to provide information and social connection for community members. This article examines the role of community language radio in Australia during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Drawing on data from interviews with four presenters at a community language radio station in Melbourne, this case study explores the station's operation during the pandemic and presenter perceptions of the station's contributions to supporting listeners' wellbeing. To situate our study more globally, the case study was preceded by an examination of press reporting on the role of radio during the pandemic. Overall, our findings indicate that community language radio has played a vital role in promoting listener wellbeing by communicating information about COVID-19; and by providing a sense of comfort, entertainment and companionship through regular broadcasting. Results are discussed considering crisis communication and resilience theory, to highlight the vital role community language radio plays for migrant communities during crises.

Keywords: community language radio, pandemic, COVID-19, wellbeing, migrant communities

Introduction

The media has played a crucial role in informing and entertaining the public during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jones 2020)—from mainstream media reporting on the global spread of the virus and local broadcasters communicating information about government restrictions and preventative measures, to movie streaming websites providing entertainment and fringe social media accounts disseminating conspiracy theories and misinformation about COVID-19 (e.g., Ephraim 2020). Given the inherent accessibility of community language radio, stations operating in this space are well-placed to provide information as well as support to their audience during such a moment of crisis (Hugelius et al. 2016; North and Dearman 2010).

As is well-known, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can cause severe physical illness and can lead to death (Australian Government: Department of Health 2021). Countries around the world have introduced restrictions and regulations to control the spread, which have disrupted everyday life (Ammar et al. 2020). Measures imposed have included limits on personal movement, restrictions on gatherings, requirements for social distancing and the use of face masks, and the closure of schools, workplaces, shops and restaurants. Those who are more susceptible to the virus have been advised to isolate in order to lessen their risk of infection, and as a result, the pandemic has exacerbated social isolation, loneliness, poor mental health and depression, as well as poor physical health due to a lack of movement and exercise (Ammar et al. 2020; Brooks et al. 2020; de Maio Nascimento 2020; Fischer et al. 2020). As the pandemic continues, there have been frequent changes to regulations and to penalties for breaches as authorities work to mitigate the effects of the virus. While government health departments and services have been making a concerted effort to distribute up-to-date information to all residents, communicating effectively with migrant communities has proven especially challenging, Australia included (Wild et al. 2020).

The wellbeing of Australian residents with a migrant background is the focus of our research. Processes of migration and the dislocation from a familiar cultural and social environment often involve traumatic events, placing a person's wellbeing at significant risk (Meadows and Foxwell 2011). Members of migrant communities have been found to commonly experience social isolation, loneliness and poor mental health, all of which may be exacerbated by low English language skills and difficulties navigating the norms of their new home (Forde et al. 2009; Davidson et al. 2008; Order 2017). In addition, misrepresentations and stereotyping in the media and the public can have negative effects on the mental health of community members, including feelings of shame, anger and low self-esteem (Meadows and Foxwell 2011). It is in this context that community language radio can play a potentially valuable role in supporting migrant communities – particularly in moments of crisis.

As part of a broader program of research aiming to increase the understanding of the benefits of community language radio more broadly, the present study explores how (a) community language radio in general and (b) presenters of a community language radio station (in Melbourne, Australia) assisted listening audiences in maintaining positive wellbeing during the COVID-19 global health pandemic. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What role has community (language) radio played for diverse communities during the COVID-19 global pandemic, as reported by global media?

RQ2: How have presenters from a community language radio station in Melbourne, perceived the station's contribution to their listeners' wellbeing during a period of COVID-19 lockdown?

To address these questions, the present research used a mixed-method approach, including a state-of-the-art review and an interview-based case study.

Community Language Radio: Promoting Wellbeing in Crises

In Australia, community language radio[1] plays an important role in the country's complex multicultural landscape. Of the roughly 450 community radio stations across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia, 131 broadcast entirely or partially in languages other than English (National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council 2018). This offers listeners from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds[2] an accessible alternative to mainstream media, which, with the noticeable exception of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS; one of three public broadcasters in Australia), has often been criticised for its lack of diversity in terms of representation and intended reach (Media Diversity Australia 2020). Community language radio allows its listeners to hear spoken segments and music in their own languages, and to keep informed about issues not covered by Australian mainstream media outlets, such as events from migrants' home countries and regions, news about their local ethnic communities, and local, state and national news relevant to their lives in Australia (Kwong 2012; Meadows et al. 2007; Order 2017).[3]

An increasing body of literature is concerned with the potential benefits to wellbeing of community radio, and of community language radio more specifically. Studies of community language radio suggest that it contributes to the wellbeing of migrant communities by enabling the maintenance of language and culture (Author removed 2020), fostering social cohesion, integration and community development (Lewis 2008; Maina 2013; Purkarthofer et al. 2008; Rodriguez 2005; van Vuuren 2002); giving marginalised communities a voice and platform for self-representation (Downing 1990; Milan 2008; Order 2017; van Vuuren 2006); mediating mental health issues through fostering a sense of belonging, pride and self-esteem (Forde et al. 2009; Meadows et al. 2007; Milan 2008; Order 2017); encouraging creativity (Author removed 2020); and by enabling social and community connections between listeners, presenters and the wider community (Community Broadcasting Association of Australia

2019; Forde et al. 2009; Author removed 2020; Meadows and Foxwell 2011; Oliveira 2013; Order 2017).

Due to its ease of access, radio is well-placed to promote public health: broadcasting health messages and recommendations has been found effective in the context of heart disease, smoking behaviours and safe sex practices, amongst other issues (Smith et al. 2011). Moreover, radio is an effective crisis communication tool during community emergencies, which call for 'access to reliable information in a language that is easily understood and culturally appropriate' (Hugelius et al. 2019: 2; Laskar and Bhattacharyya 2021). For example, radio has been reported to play a crucial role during natural disasters as well as political crises (Hugelius et al. 2016; Rodero 2020). Hugelius et al. (2016) found that after Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines in 2013, radio was used to communicate essential information about the current situation, missing persons and recovery activities, as well as health-related information regarding medical facilities, insurance policies and advice on how to minimise risks to health. In Australia, local radio stations have played a crucial role during bushfires to keep affected communities informed about local road closures, changes in weather forecasts and fire fronts, and evacuation directives (North and Dearman 2010). The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) believes that community radio stations have the potential to help their communities to prepare, survive and recover from crises, and provides free training to community radio stations to assist them to become official or unofficial emergency broadcasters (CBAA n.d.). This suggests that radio may be helpful during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. Indeed, findings from India indicate that community radio stations played a central role in exposing misinformation and providing health information as well as entertainment (Laskar and Bhattacharyya 2021). Furthermore, findings from Spain indicate that radio is perceived by listeners to be the most trusted medium that best deals with the crisis, and that radio consumption has increased during lockdown, with more listeners tuning into news and entertainment programs than before the pandemic (Rodero 2020). Overall, Rodero (2020: 10) concludes that radio 'distracts [the listener], provides companionship, reduces their loneliness, makes them feel happy, and reduces their anxiety level and worries'.

To understand how community language radio might promote wellbeing during a crisis, we are able to draw on the framework of resilience theory—and the communication theory of resilience in particular (Buzzanell 2010). Buzzanell (2010) defined resilience as a dynamic process aimed at 'the ability to "bounce back" or reintegrate after difficult life experiences' (p. 1) over the course of time and events. Community resilience has been found to enhance mental and physical wellbeing at a community and personal level, as it helps to 'reduce morbidity, mortality, and social and psychological impacts in crises' (Hugelius et al. 2016: 592; also Norris et al. 2008). Indeed, research on crisis communication has found that the most frequent and impactful type of radio messages aimed to build community resilience, through for example displays of empathy, hope and encouragement (Hugelius et al. 2016). Buzzanell (2010) has identified five communicative processes used to construct resilience: (a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors[4], (c) maintaining and using communication networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimising negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. While Buzzanell and colleagues' work has focused on resilience construction through family communication and through familial, ideological and spiritual network ties (Agarwal and Buzzanell 2015; Buzzanell 2010; Lucas and Buzzanell 2010), we argue that this communication theory of resilience may apply to how the medium of community language radio is able to contribute to the construction of individual and community resilience amongst its audience during crisis (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns). We return to this point below in the general discussion.

Study 1: A Review of Press Reporting on Radio and COVID-19

Method

      As a first and critical step in our project, we aimed to situate our research within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the broadcasting sector was scarce at the time of undertaking our research, we conducted a state-of-the-art review (Grant and Booth 2009) of recent media reporting, allowing us to examine COVID-19 as a 'current matter' which 'may offer new perspectives on an issue or highlight an area in need of further research' (Grant and Booth 2009: 101). We conducted an online search for published press reporting in English which appeared over a six-month period (March 14 to September 21, 2020) following the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic (Anon. 2020d). To conduct this search, we used different combinations of the following keywords: 'radio', 'community radio', 'ethnic radio', 'community language radio', 'COVID-19', 'coronavirus', and 'pandemic'. A total of 69 articles were found meeting the inclusion criteria of discussing radio in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these 69 articles, only 18% dealt specifically with community language radio, and even fewer (4%) were in the context of migrant communities in an English-speaking industrialised country. Because of this lack of contextually specific reporting, with this state-of-the-art review, we considered radio more generally as well as community radio and community language radio more specifically. This analysis was intended to give us an initial insight into common themes discussed regarding community radio, allowing us to identify thematic parallels with our interview data.

Findings

      Around the world, radio in all its manifestations is reported to have taken on the role of keeping their listeners informed, entertained and connected during the COVID-19 pandemic (Genetu 2020; Patel 2020; Stokel-Walker 2020). In addition to national broadcasters, local and community radio stations in particular have proven themselves as a medium trusted by listeners to provide accurate and timely information (Anon. 2020f, 2020g; Manning 2020; McCarthy 2020; Schwellnus 2020). An increase in radio consumption during the pandemic has also been reported in Australia, with survey results indicating Australians trusted radio for COVID-19 information, and felt it reduced isolation and made them feel more connected (Commercial Radio Australia 2020).

      In the developing world, community radio stations have played a particularly crucial role in communicating information about COVID-19 to marginalised communities. Due to its direct access to local communities, community radio stations are in an advantageous position to 'influence opinions, change behavior [sic] and accurately inform the public about COVID-19' (Ephraim 2020: 5). According to media reports, community radio stations in India and Bangladesh started broadcasting public health information in local dialects and languages in March 2020, thus reaching rural and remote areas whose residents might otherwise struggle to access information (Dowerah 2020; Kumar, M 2020; Kumar, NV 2020; Lal 2020; Ravi 2020; Stokel-Walker 2020). Similarly, in countries across the African continent, local radio has proven an effective communication tool to reach people, who may be illiterate or speak local languages, with up-to-date information (Anon. 2020a, 2020b, 2020h; Genetu, 2020). In addition, community radio has also been used to debunk misinformation about COVID-19 (Anon., 2020a; Ephraim 2020; Mishra 2020; Rahman 2020).

      In the West, community language radio programs have established themselves as a vital source of information for the many migrant communities. For example, in 2020, Luxembourg's only independent radio station, Radio ARA, broadcast a daily COVID-19 update in nine languages with the help of multilingual volunteers (Kelly 2020). In Australia, the Na-

tional Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC)—the peak body representing community language broadcasters—produced daily news bulletins in seven languages, which were freely available to ethnic broadcasters (Anon. 2020e).

However, extensive media coverage indicated that initial communication about COVID-19 by government health authorities in Australia failed to respond to the complex needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Wild et al. 2020). Wild et al. (2020) identified that communication failures occurred relative to: (a) the translation and contextualisation of information; (b) collaboration with communities and community leaders to test and circulate translations; and (c) the use of appropriate methods to distribute information, such as community language media and social media. In an effort to increase their capacity to record and broadcast in times of crises for the provision of timely and accurate information to multilingual communities, ethnic broadcasters in Australia sought to be deemed as 'essential services' by the government, enabling them to work relatively normally during mandated lockdowns (Anon. 2020c).

News articles also reported on specific ways that radio stations have been providing listeners, who might feel isolated during lockdowns, with social, personal and emotional connections (Anon. 2020f; McCarthy 2020; Patel 2020; Warner 2020). In the UK, the BBC established a campaign that allowed listeners to text and call in for a chat, and enabled practical help for vulnerable members of society, such as the delivery of groceries (Stokel-Walker 2020). Radio presenters are in an advantageous position to provide social connections to regular listeners, who often form strong bonds with individual presenters, for example, one popular radio presenter in the UK likens this relationship to a friendship or companionship (McIntosh 2020). To ensure that vulnerable members of society had access to news and information, the BBC in collaboration with a charity started a scheme that allowed people over the age of 70 in the UK to be nominated to receive a free DAB radio (Katalina 2020).

Reports also detail how the radio has provided listeners with a sense of comfort, routine and normalcy (Blackiston 2020; Delgado 2020; Harwood 2020; Manning 2020; Stark 2020; Stokeld 2020; Stokel-Walker 2020). As Jacobs (2020) wrote:

> A familiar, warm voice on the radio can be a soothing, familiar, and friendly presence for people well outside their comfort zones. At a time when so many of the familiar things are on hold or simply gone, a favourite radio station is still there—through thick and thin—providing companionship, empathy, and a sense of continuity to our disrupted lives.

Some stations have noticed a surge in listeners of music-based programs, offering an escape from news-based programs (McIntosh 2020).

In light of the positive effects for listeners as well as changes in listener habits during the pandemic reported in the media with respect to radio and community radio more generally, we now turn our attention specifically to a case study we undertook to investigate the role of community language radio during the pandemic—as perceived by presenters operating in that sector.

Study 2: A Community Language Radio Station Case Study
Method

Our interview-based case study involved presenters at a community language radio station located in Melbourne. The case study approach has proven a useful method in previous research on community radio, as it allows an approach to qualitative research which focuses on a selective set of issues (see e.g., Author removed 2020; Kwong 2012; van Vuuren 2002). To address RQ2, this case study explored how the community language radio presenters, and the station at large, sought to address and support the wellbeing of their listeners and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (and, in particular, during a period of extended

'lockdown'). We collected data via semi-structured, in-depth video interviews with four presenters from the station in June-July 2020. The interviews were professionally transcribed to allow for a thematic analysis. After generating initial codes, we identified and named key themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). We then systematically compared themes across all four interviews, grouping together participants' quotes according to theme. In doing so, we used a recursive, flexible approach such that semantically similar responses were clustered, but such that in addition implicit concepts were explored and included where relevant. Refining the themes led to establishing the higher order themes which best captured the data relative to RQ2.

The interviewees, identified through pseudonyms, were: Pablo, who in addition to being an experienced community language presenter, has held a range of positions at the station over 10 years, including in administration, production, and training; Paul, who started working at the radio station in 2009 and has been involved with the South Sudanese program as a presenter and convener; Marta, who has been a presenter of Spanish programs at the radio station since shortly after her arrival in Melbourne from Latin America in 2015; and Tassos, who has been involved with the radio station for around 20 years, the last 10 of which have been as a presenter of a Greek program. Participants were selected based on their acceptance of an email invitation that had previously been distributed to all presenters at the station.

As the interviewees were active radio presenters at the station, we acknowledge the chance of positive bias towards the role that the radio station and its programs play for their listeners. However, we agree with Kwong (2012) that, as active participants in the community language broadcasting sector, they have clear insight into the aims of community language radio. Hence, they were able to provide us with their lived experiences concerning the station's operation during the pandemic and their perceptions of the assumed contributions to listeners' wellbeing.

In order to better contextualise the participants' responses, some background with respect to the pandemic in Australia needs to be given here. COVID-19 case numbers as well as restrictions in Australia varied immensely amongst its constituent states and territories. In particular, the situation was much more severe in Melbourne and Victoria, where the community language radio station is located, than elsewhere. The first case of COVID-19 in Australia was discovered on 25 January 2020. Following the first community transmissions and the official declaration of a pandemic by the WHO, the Victorian government began to introduce measures to slow the spread, culminating in Melbourne's first lockdown in late March, which significantly restricted citizens' movements through stay-at-home orders, physical distancing measures and the closure of workplaces, schools, restaurants and non-essential shops. With cases beginning to decrease in early April, lockdown restrictions were gradually eased from mid-May. When an unexpected second and rapidly expanding wave of infections occurred only in Melbourne, restrictions were quickly reinstated in Victoria in late June. In the first instance, this included lockdown orders which applied to several suburbs and public housing towers in specific areas of Melbourne (with elevated numbers of non-English-speaking migrant residents). A week later, a second 'hard' lockdown was imposed on the rest of Melbourne, whereby schools, workplaces, restaurants and shops, as well as some radio stations, were closed again. It was during the first days of Melbourne's second lockdown that we conducted the interviews. Restrictions in Melbourne began to ease in mid-October, after 112 days of renewed lockdown (Lupton 2020).

Findings

Our thematic analysis identified four key themes that reflect how the community language radio presenters, and the station at large, sought to address and support the wellbeing of their listeners and communities. These were: (a) the distribution of information, (b) the

provision of entertainment, (c) the fostering of community pride, and (d) the maintenance of presenters' personal/social connections with listeners. These are each discussed in turn below.

Distributing Information

The community language radio station made a concerted effort to prevent listeners from contracting COVID-19 through the continuous provision of information, aimed at supporting listeners' physical wellbeing. All four interviewees agreed that the radio station had played an important role in keeping their listeners informed about the COVID-19 pandemic, including associated health risks as well as government restrictions and recommendations. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, the station received information and government announcements about COVID-19-related restrictions on an almost hourly basis, which presenters would pass on to their listeners. The station's audience demographic consists of older adults who are particularly susceptible to COVID-19 due to their age, and who might struggle to access government information due to a potentially limited knowledge of English—as well as more recent arrivals who are less connected or established, and who may be living in disadvantage with limited English. The station therefore played a crucial role in communicating information about the pandemic to listeners in their own languages. Pablo reinforced this, stating that the station played 'a valuable role for all the different community groups and all the ethnic groups'. In addition, he explained that while the station does not 'interfere' with the programs' content, in his role as the station's program co-ordinator, he had been inserting government announcements about COVID-19 restrictions before each program broadcast. At the start of the first lockdown in Melbourne (late-March to mid-May 2020), government authorities also asked the station to make announcements live on air, which presenters translated into their own languages and broadcast during their programs.

Through direct communication with communities that were affected by specific restrictions, and which were only partially reached by mainstream media, the station was able to provide accurate and timely information to help reduce the spread of the virus within these communities. For example, during localised lockdowns in different parts of Melbourne, the station could provide information tailored to the community language groups living in those areas. As Pablo explained: 'recently we've had the closures of some suburbs like in Broadmeadows where there's a huge Turkish population. So the Turkish program, […] they're giving information and saying they [the Turkish community] should do this, and do this, […].'

In addition to the insertion of pre-recorded announcements and the reiteration of government updates, some presenters also endeavoured to explain medical information to their listeners. For example, Marta kept her Spanish-speaking community well-informed about the virus through interviews with doctors and health professionals. She stated that she believed supporting the health and wellbeing of the community was 'the most important priority that we have' and expressed a concern that elderly people in particular might struggle to follow the continuous updates about government announcements and restrictions on their own:

> For example, at the moment we are talking about the coronavirus, for [sic] give all the information to the communities, because some people, for example, old people, don't have access to social media, and the target of this pandemic is old people. So, they need to have this information on hand to know what are the rules of the government, what is going on in Victoria, what the prime minister just announced five hours before. It's very important keeping the community updated in the news.

While she expressed a desire to ensure a balance between information and entertainment on her show, Marta saw it as her duty to communicate what was happening in Melbourne to her listeners, and to connect them 'with their actual world, what's going on with the government, what's going on with the city'.

Tassos also expressed a belief that radio had played a positive role for his audience during the pandemic. Together with his co-presenter, he discussed infection numbers and other developments each week on air. He saw his role at the radio station as a platform for helping fellow members of the Greek community by passing on information which could reduce COVID-19 transmission in a more personalised way: 'I'm taking that information [about COVID-19] and actually putting it on the program to reinforce things like social distancing, washing your hands, if you're not well stay at home, if you're over a certain age stay at home.'

During 2020, many of the station's programs were being recorded and produced remotely from presenters' homes. However, this was not an easy task for all language groups, and some chose to instead put to air previously broadcast programs when they could not easily record new programs. Paul was one such presenter who felt that recording the weekly radio program from home was not generally feasible for practical reasons and chose instead to primarily replay older programs for his South Sudanese community, limiting the number of new broadcasts. This restricted his ability to provide up-to-date information to his community via radio, although all broadcasts also started with an inserted segment updating listeners about COVID-19-related issues, and Paul created informative videos on his phone in a combination of Dinka and English, which he then shared on the radio program's social media page.

Providing Entertainment

In addition to providing essential information, the station was also seen as being able to provide its listeners with entertainment, creating a sense of comfort and normalcy in uncertain times. Pablo acknowledged that everyday life still continued despite COVID-19: 'You know life has to continue as normal. There's still music, there's still movies to talk about, there's still all sorts of things. So, I think that broadcasters know that as well.' Tassos expressed a similar sentiment by stating that his duty was 'to pass on the information in Greek, but also to be there as a comfort for those people who are regular listeners, because we're continuing to broadcast'. He noted that the other four Greek programs at the station provided little information on COVID-19 apart from the mandatory government announcements at the beginning of each program. Instead, they continued 'talking about things that are happening in Greece, […] talking about art subjects, […] talking about social issues'. Marta also observed that not every Spanish program engaged with COVID-19, but that some focussed instead on religion, science or sports.

Tassos viewed his listeners' desire for a sense of comfort and routine as primary reasons for tuning into his show: 'I think the major things that I see benefiting the listeners, one is the music that I'm playing […]. The second thing is that I'm actually saying things in Greek, which means that they are able to understand. The third thing is that it's routine, it's a program which is on every Thursday, just like the other programs.' Marta also felt that listening to one's own language allowed one's mind to relax, which may be particularly calming during a time of constant influx of critical information in English.

Fostering a Sense of Community Pride

Paul indicated that he tried to raise awareness of issues and misinformation relating to his community. For example, a television news presenter had accused the South Sudanese community of having caused the second wave of COVID-19 in Melbourne by spreading the virus at a Ramadan celebration. Paul used his radio program (as well as social media) to respond to the news presenter by refuting the claims she made and to spread accurate messaging widely. By doing so, Paul aimed to rebuild the sense of pride within his community, thus reinstating a positive sense of self and improved mental health. Paul indicated that even before the pandemic, in recognition of widely publicised challenges his community faced in integrating into Australian society, his program regularly discussed mental, psychological and

community wellbeing, for example through conversations with psychologists and mental health professionals about depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, as well as strategies to communicate with young people.

Maintaining Personal Connections with Listeners

The community language radio station also sought to foster listeners' social connectedness during the pandemic. Tassos indicated that some presenters encouraged their listeners to call in if they were feeling isolated and wanted someone to talk to. Marta saw radio 'as a companion,' a direct voice speaking into listeners' homes, which enabled them to feel less alone. Hence, Marta perceived radio to be a helpful tool to guard against feelings of isolation, especially during the strict lockdowns experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

General Discussion

In this study, we explored the role of community (language) radio during the COVID-19 global pandemic (and lockdown) with regard to supporting listener wellbeing through the lens of popular press reporting and the lived experiences and perceptions of volunteer community language radio presenters. The interconnected, higher-order themes that dominated the analyses of both the press reporting and our case study were: radio as a source of information, comfort, entertainment and companionship. We discuss these themes below, relating them to listener's physical and mental wellbeing.

Protecting and Supporting Physical Wellbeing

The findings from our review and case study reinforce that radio is a trusted and reliable crisis communication tool (Hugelius et al. 2016; Rodero 2020). Our analysis of global press reporting has shown that community radio around the world contributed (and continues to contribute) to the physical wellbeing of listeners by providing access to reliable, accurate and timely information about COVID-19 and preventative measures. All of this has been critical to ensure individuals can protect themselves from the disease. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an excessive amount of information and misinformation about the virus (Laskar and Bhattacharyya 2021), which has resulted in 'an anxious public [that] finds it difficult to distinguish between evidence-based information and a broad range of unreliable misinformation' (Naeem and Bhatti 2020).

According to the presenters we interviewed, the community language radio station where they worked was a vital source of information for its diverse audience during Melbourne's COVID-19 lockdown period. Our findings demonstrate that through the airing of real-time information in a constantly changing situation, the station strove to keep its listeners informed and safe. The station's established relationships with ethnic communities—whose members might experience language barriers in understanding the complex government directives and restrictions—enabled the station to reach and communicate with people who otherwise might have struggled to access critical information. Indeed, as a community station, it was able to respond on a local level, breaking through the (language) barriers of mainstream media by offering targeted information to their listeners, and combatting misinformation about specific communities. Yet, it is important to note that the radio station discussed here also encountered challenges arising from the lockdown, as elaborated on by the interviewees, such as the difficulties faced by some presenters to continue broadcasting from home due to limited space, equipment or technical knowledge.

Providing Comfort, Entertainment and Companionship to Support Mental Wellbeing

The present findings suggest that community radio—and community language radio in particular—has been able to contribute to listeners' mental wellbeing during COVID-19,

which is consistent with findings concerning radio more generally (Rodero 2020). As previous research has shown, media consumption can have an impact on an individual's life satisfaction (Ammar et al. 2020). For instance, [Author removed] (2021) found that listening to music during the pandemic was positively associated with improved life satisfaction, possibly because listening to music allows individual control and conveys the presence of other people during times of isolation. In addition to playing music, radio broadcasting, as exemplified by our interviewees, includes presenters addressing their listeners and on-air discussions. This likely promotes radio's capability to act as a social surrogate, i.e. a temporary 'substitute for direct personal interaction' (Schäfer and Eerola 2020: 233; see also Author removed 2020).

Interviewees were clear that they were hoping to help listeners keep their routine by continuing to broadcast. The maintenance of daily routines has been found particularly important for mental wellbeing in the context of lockdowns, as they can promote 'predictability and stability in a household' (Ren et al. 2021: 36). Radio stations around the world as well as our case study station have been able to provide this sense of routine by continuing to air expected programs, regardless of whether these were repeat broadcasts, or new, remotely produced and delivered broadcasts. They have also been able to create a sense of normalcy and comfort by providing entertainment through music and topics other than COVID-19.

The social connections and sense of companionship provided by radio (Meadows and Foxwell 2011; Order 2017) have played an extremely important role in the context of lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. As members of migrant communities already present a higher risk of having feelings of isolation and disconnectedness (Forde et al. 2009), and as these feelings may be intensified during pandemic lockdowns (Ammar et al. 2020; Brooks et al. 2020), it follows that consistency of radio programs and presenters may be of critical importance. The radio station in our case study has indeed endeavoured to reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness amongst its listeners by continuing to broadcast where possible, providing its listeners with the opportunity to hear the voices of familiar presenters addressing them in their own languages and thus helping listeners to feel connected to the presenter as well as the broader community.

Community Language Radio and Resilience

When considered through the lens of communication theory of resilience (as previously discussed above), our findings show how community language radio can assist listeners with constructing resilience through three of Buzzanell's (2010) five communicative processes: crafting normalcy, affirming identity anchors, and maintaining and using communication networks. Buzzanell (2010: 4) describes, for instance, how families who were affected by job loss constructed normalcy 'through talk and through maintenance of family rituals'. In our study, radio presenters' decisions to continue regular broadcasting and to talk about issues other than COVID-19 were informed by a similar desire to create and maintain normalcy. Furthermore, during periods of lockdown community language radio enabled listeners to affirm their identity anchors, especially those of ethnicity, culture, country of origin, languages spoken, and religion. One of the presenters, Paul, was also able to affirm a positive sense of identity and community pride through his program by refuting misrepresentations of his community in mainstream media. Moreover, stable communication—and social—networks are crucial to resilience. Our case station represents a vital communication and social network for many of its listeners. By continuing to broadcast, the station thus enabled listeners to maintain and use their already established network. There are also parallels between radio presenters and disaster-relief workers. While the scale of their physical involvement in disasters differs—disaster-relief workers rebuild infrastructures and provide medical aid—both 'help individuals and communities [to] recreate familiar routines, rebuild […] community networks, and counter feelings of isolation through emotional assistance' (Agarwal and

Buzzanell 2015: 408). Thus, Buzzanell's communication theory of resilience can be extended from familial communication networks to communication networks more broadly, including community-led media.

Limitations and Further Research

The present research focussed on exploring the role of ethnic broadcasters in enhancing community wellbeing during the COVID-19 global pandemic, and more broadly contributes to addressing a research gap concerning the role of ethnic broadcasters in society more generally. The findings from the review of press reporting and our case radio station showed strong thematic parallels, providing initial insight into the role of community radio. However, while the impact on listeners was inferred from the popular press reporting, the case study drew on the perspectives of radio presenters, such that further studies are needed to generate more comprehensive data about listener wellbeing. A large-scale study exploring the listeners' perspectives during the pandemic—which could build on the themes identified here— would assist in drawing more general conclusions. In particular, it would allow for a comparison with and the testing of the perceptions of community radio presenters who are by the voluntary nature of their contribution likely to emphasise perceived positive benefits of their activity with respect to listener and community well-being. Additional research might also consider how community language radio adapts and responds to local community needs during crises, how it communicates during such crises, and how its responses differ to those provided by commercial radio/media. This may also extend existing resilience theories, by investigating how community language radio, and media more broadly, can contribute to the construction of resilience and promotion of wellbeing amongst migrant communities during crises.

Endnotes

[1] Community radio belongs to the 'third sector media' (Lewis 2008: 11), complementing the public and commercial radio sectors. Operating on a not-for-profit model that relies heavily on volunteer broadcasters, community radio stations typically serve specific communities of certain locations, identities or interests (Community Broadcasting Association of Australia 2019; Milan 2008). Within the community radio sector, community language radio, also referred to as ethnic, minority and diasporic radio (see e.g., Deuze 2006), encompasses stations with a focus on broadcasting in community languages, i.e. languages spoken by members of minority groups such as migrant communities within a majority language context. Community language radio stations and other media outlets have grown significantly in number and popularity amongst their target audiences since the start of the 21st century—a result of increasing global migration flows as well as 'the worldwide emergence of all kinds of community, alternative, oppositional, participatory and collaborative media practices' (Deuze 2006: 263).

[2] Approximately one third of Australia's population was born overseas, and more than one fifth of the population speak a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2017a). Large established migrant communities from Europe, East Asia and Southeast Asia, along with more recent waves of migration, contribute significantly to Australia's language diversity, and add to the more than 250 Indigenous languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (ABS 2017b).

[3] First Nations media, which focuses on broadcasts by, for, and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is an important category of community broadcasting (Forde et al. 2009), but in the present study we focus our attention on community language radio broadcasting that targets Australians with a migrant background.

[4] Buzzanell (2010: 4) defines identity anchors as a 'relatively enduring cluster of identity discourses upon which individuals and their familial, collegial, and/or community members rely when explaining who they are for themselves and in relation to each other'.

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