

Community Radio, Internet, and Diaspora: From Local to Global

Irfan Wahyudi¹

Abstract

The community radio station provides the opportunity to broadcast information from within the community, to reflect the community's cultural interests. It could be seen as a new face of democracy: from the community, by the community, for the community. The importance of Internet to community radio cannot be underestimated. Internet, with its unique quality of interactivity, can involve communities in participatory community radio broadcasting. Internet not only encourages local participation, but also significantly expands the social-cultural horizons of its users. The conjunction of the local and the global is embedded in this technology. The Internet also allows the community radio to communicate with transnational societies in the context of international migration and globalisation. This prodigy has introduced new outlooks for understanding the dynamics of community diaspora and the communication practice.

Key words: community, radio, internet, local, globalization

Introduction

The community radio station, operated by people in the villages and rural areas became significant to the community because of its ability to address their immediate concerns. It provided the opportunity to broadcast information from within the community, to reflect the community's cultural interests. Community radio could be seen as a new face of democracy: from the community, by the community, for the community.

Community radio operates in the socio-cultural context of the environment it serves. Community radio deals with local issues in the local language(s). Community radio is also pertinent to local problems and interests. It also has the potential to guard the political concerns of the community. These benefits cannot be completed by commercial media, which aim for a mass audience and does not recognise the diversity of local communities.

The importance of the internet to community radio cannot be underestimated. The internet, with its unique quality of interactivity, can involve communities in participatory community radio broadcasting. Internet not only encourages local participation, but it also significantly expanding the social-cultural horizons of its users. The conjunction of the local and the global is embedded in this technology. The internet also allows the community radio to communicate with transnational societies in the context of international migration and globalisation. This prodigy has introduced new outlooks for understanding the dynamics of community diaspora and the communication practice. This essay discusses discourses of community radio, the internet, and community diaspora, in the contexts of technological advancement and globalisation.

¹ Correspondence: Irfan Wahyudi, Department of Communication, FISIP, Airlangga University. Jalan Airlangga 4-6 Surabaya 60286, Indonesia. Telephone: +62 31 5011744. E-mail: irfanferro@gmail.com

Role and Benefit of Community Radio

To understand the role and benefit of community radio, first we need to explore the definition and ideas of community radio itself. Fraser and Estrada (2011:3) state:

Community broadcasting is a non-profit service that is owned and managed by a particular community, usually through a trust, foundation, or association. Its aim is to serve and benefit that community. It is, in effect, a form of public-service broadcasting, but it serves a community rather than the whole nation, as is the usual form of public broadcasting described above. Moreover, it relies and must rely mainly on the resources of the community. A community is considered to be a group of people who share common characteristics and/or interests.

Additionally, Lewis and Booth (in Howley 2005:1) say that community radio is non-commercial and does not portray the general attitudes of commercial and public broadcasting: “the key difference is that while the commercial and public service models both treat listeners as objects, to be captured for advertisers or to be improved and informed, community radio aspires to treat its listeners as subjects and participants.” Arnaldo (in Fraser and Estrada 2011:1) describes community radio as “a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design programs and produce and air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny.” The stress is on the ownership and the use of the media, which portrays the effort of the members of the community.

In the relation to the mainstream media, we can see an extreme segregation. As stated by Josiah (in Fraser and Estrada 2011:5), mainstream commercial media tend to oppose the establishment of community media, and underestimate the ability of community broadcasting in serving community needs. Josiah also emphasises that commercial media “have not yet come around to accepting that the special character of community media is complementary rather than antagonistic and mutually exclusive.” Community radio is not in the same position as commercial radio. Community radio aimed to present what cannot be offered by commercial radio station, which is the local program with the local approach. Tabing (in Fraser and Estrada 2011:4) says that the local radio station’s power placed on its capabilities to get involved in local events, issues and concerns. Additionally, Hope-Hume (1997:9) emphasises, that “radio resist invasion when it engages with communities and the public rather than with demographic.” Clearly, commercial radio’s concern is different from community radio. Commercial radio put their decisions based on the business circumstances, while community radio consider all their assessments based on community’s interests.

An essential function of community radio lies in the relevance of these media for people in their role as community members and as inhabitants of a specific area. Other radio may consider the audience as radio drama fans or music lovers, but community radio’s primary involvement is to what Hennig Dunckelmann (1975) describes as *bürgerschaftliche Identitätsbildung*: the configuration of an identity as a member of the local civil society (cited in Hollander et al., 2008:64). The existence of community radio always relies on the community members’ supports and participations.

Another function of community radio placed in the social and cultural relations within the community. Community media are supposed to strengthen community’s identity. Jankowski (2002:35) explains that community radio’s social-cultural function is meant to strengthen social and cultural identity of the individual in the community. A lot of effort in the western society has been placed into this “community building” aspect of community media, from print media to digital networks. These steps are motivated by the concern of a weakening sense of community belongingness.

The Concept of Community

The advancement of technology within today’s society forms an expanding physical and virtual connectivity between users local and global. The internet indicates a progress away from prior unidirectional forms of mass media such as television and radio, towards an interactive communication process offering an environment for users to participate and become a part of communities. These online communities are interrelated and characterised by specific cultural and social patterns.

An intensive communication and interaction are the important elements in conducting the sense of commonality among community members. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006:7) explored the concept of how group members feel related, even in the situations where they have never met. Anderson identifies community as "imagined" rather than a specific form of social interaction. In this sense, Anderson investigates how print media forms the basis for national sentiments. These shared connections "distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." Similar to print media, the Internet also creates the notion of commonality for community members.

Community can be valued not only as a group of people that lived in the same location. Community is also understood as a group of people that have the same interest and linked together by several factors such as occupations and religious beliefs (Smith 2001). Community cannot simply be associated with particular space. Information and cultures shared by community members are not statically bound to a specific time and space, but are "continuously changing dynamically in relation to time, space, and significance of meaning" (Christensen 2003:13). The use of the Internet as an interactive space allows the community members in different locations to redefine their cultural and ethnic boundaries.

Those involved in community media hoped to empower the community through increased broadcasting capability. Empowerment generally is connected to wider aspects such as citizenship and democracy. Meadows, Forde, Ewart and Foxwell (2007:11) adopting the concept from Grossberg (1987), articulate community radio as the media institution that can empower station workers and the audience to 'live their lives' through the media 'in different ways'. Rather than being complicated with financial matters, which limit the variety of broadcasting content of commercial media, community radio institutions are free to elaborate their content and practice, in ways which characterise their community's interest. Community radio, in fact, can empower people with media access, which in the information era is arguably the most powerful medium for the socialisation and maintenance of culture.

The empowerment practised by community radio can be analysed from three angles: 1) the community, 2) the media, and 3) the society (Meadows et al. 2007:12-15). In the community context, community radio empowers the audience ability to access and contribute to the media. This model of participatory communication is the strength that cannot be achieved by mainstream media. Participatory communication means the community can reassert and reclaim their rights in a public sphere. Besette briefly explains that community participation can "enable people to go from being recipients of external development to generators of their own development" (Howley 2010:184). Actual community participation means that the community media is accepted and used by the community. In the media context, the participation of the community members had dispersed the traditional edges between media producers and their audiences. Community radio has challenged:

the status quo nature of mainstream media by providing a space where citizens can encounter, debate, or experience alternative viewpoints and lifestyles. ... Community media (also) empowers the representation of other ideas and assumptions and this is its strongest contribution to 'communicative democracy'. (Meadows et al. 2007:13)

By opening the chance for community members to participate in the broadcasting process, community radio not only enables the democratisation in the mass medium, community radio also giving a voice to the voiceless.

Finally in the society context, community media is considered as a significant site for democratisation through media (Meadows et al. 2007:15). Community radio can be considered as a part of civil society that promoting citizen participation in public life. Moreover, community radio also enables a dialogue with their audience at the local level, discussing themes that were closely related with their everyday lives. In addition, Fairchild (2010:25) argues that community radio is an unavoidable part of civil society. It is exactly the type of institution that identifies the forms of civil society. The community radio station is self governing and exists as a non-profit activity in mutual collaboration with the society.

The strength of fulfilling the community's own needs of information and knowledge is the asset of one community radio. Jayaprakash (2002:58) asserts that "community radio is not about doing something for the community, but about the community doing something for itself, i.e. owning and controlling its own means of communication". Community radio is the medium through which members of society can express their local culture, besides helping people to identify their roles in the community itself.

Community Radio and Globalisation

Radio with all its social and technological developments can be considered as a global medium. Howley (2005:1) says that "radio has been somewhat paradoxical: at once local, national and international." Furthermore, Fairchild asserts that "radio organises its listeners not as citizens but as consumers, fragmenting its national and local audiences into ever more discrete market niches" (in Howley 2005:1). Hendy (2000:7) also emphasises that "on the one hand, radio enlarges our world, inviting listeners to participate in distant events and to hear music, sounds, and voices from around the globe."

In the effort to understand the role of radio in the globalisation era, Girard (2005:1) explains, "the radio is more than just a technological advance. It was also an important milestone for the rapid globalisation that was one of the most significant phenomena of the last century, and of the large scale social and economic consequences that accompanied it." Radio brings voices from around the world to the listeners hearing space, shares different entertainment, news, information and aspirations.

In the relations with the community broadcasting, Ellie Rennie (2007) states that community media holds different characteristics of new social networking media. Community media depends on local networks and the information sharing happens through voluntary conditions. Rennie (2007:25) asserts, "community media has always been "prosumer", it enables consumers (audiences) to become producers. However, community broadcasting is distinctly 'old media' in its technologies, codes of practice, legal restrictions and standards. Nevertheless, community broadcasting's effort to make use of new technology such as the internet, has created the opportunity to diversify its service and reach wider audiences.

The internet allows people to access information and engaged in cultural production and dissemination. Rennie sees non-profit manufacture and mutual cooperation between elements in the community as the answer to post-industrial social and economic change. In the words of Benkler (Rennie 2007:26), these trends "have increased the role of nonmarket and non-proprietary production, both by individuals and by cooperative efforts in a wide range of loosely or tightly woven collaborations."

The audience participatory involvements also had consequence in the technological cooperation. Lessig (Rennie 2007:26) perceives technological cooperation among community broadcasting audience is based on the activities of ordinary people, friendship groups and hobbies, rather than based on professionalised industry and private profit. The internet has appeared as an outgoing form that people use to generate, sustain and become part of communities. The internet also became an important medium in the development of concrete interactions between community members in the virtual world. Information and news displayed on the website play a significant function in establishing commonalities among community members.

Community, Diaspora and Technology

Diaspora can easily understand as the activities of immigrants outside their homeland. Alonzo and Oiarzabal (2010:4) explain that the term *diaspora* comes from the Greek. It means the spreading of populations from their native soil to settle in various places, while digital diaspora means the activities of immigrants expressed through and connected by informational technology (Laguette 2010:49). Reis (2004:43), asserts that diaspora can be explained by historicising the phenomenon. Reis examines diaspora from the classical period and the contemporary period. The classical period is connected with the Jewish diaspora. Jewish diaspora gain a negative meaning because this conceptualisation entailed the destruction of the homeland and victimisation of the Jewish people (Tillyan in Alonso & Oiarzabal 2010:2). However, the Jewish experience has become an important "blue print for interpreting diaspora as a

concept” (Reis 2004:44). The definition of diaspora in the contemporary period had been extended not only on the aspect of victim, but also in the factors of labor, trade, imperial and cultural.

In contemporary period, Reis (2004:46) emphasises that diaspora is closely connected with the issues of transnationalism and globalisation. According to Reis (2004:47), “diasporisation and globalisation can thus be considered as coeval processes, with globalisation having the most impact on the contemporary phase. The intense technological revolutions in communication and information sectors are the most common example in the relations of globalisation and diaspora. These technological advancements “created the conditions for increased cross-border communication and exchange, and, therefore, laid the basis for an expansion of economic transactions among states on a global scale” (Hall & Ben 2000:24).

The way in which globalisation has been the most valuable to diaspora remains in the fact that communication technologies can maintain even closer bound between homeland and hostland. In the relations between globalisation and the use of the communication technologies, Appadurai (1996:21) explains: “globalisation has shrunk the distances between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labour and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments”.

Technological and transportation advances over several decades have supported population movements and also improved community connection with the diaspora. The internet, along with other communication tools (satellite, television, mobile devices), has become what Alonzo and Oiarzabal (2010:3) call: “the new harbour for contemporary immigrants.” The diasporic community is using the internet to virtually maintain their communal space, and constantly treat this medium as their cyber home (Ros 2010:20). The application of cellular phones, electronic mail, social media networks, and other World Wide Web facilities, has opened the possibility for trans-border communications to occur at any time.

Through the internet, community radio develops networks not only with the local audience, but also with the audience abroad. Community radio’s decision to use the Internet as a medium to communicate with its audience has several advantages. One of the advantages is in the matter of diasporic community empowerment. Laguerre (2010:55) explains, that “the internet undivides what was previously divided”. The computer makes it possible for the diasporic audience to access and participate in the homeland social interaction. The internet helps the diasporic community to maintain their original culture and develop native knowledge. The use of the internet allows the diasporic community to synchronise the host-land and homeland’s activities based on the listeners’ needs and wants.

Communication technologies also used by diasporic communities to maintain and broaden their social networks. Alonzo and Oiarzabal (2010: 5) assert that it is not only people who migrate, but also networks. Boyd (Alonzo and Oiarzabal 2010:5) states that migration is a social product, “not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction”.

Global communication has also reduced the ‘emotional distance’ felt by members of diasporic community (Stalker 1994:32). To overcome the homesickness, immigrants are using communication technologies such as the internet to access their favourite indigenous electronic media, including an online community radio. The diasporic community are also using the internet to maintain and broaden their established social network. Immigrants also can participate in an online community radio broadcast, by sending messages or calling directly to the radio station. By accessing and interacting in an online community radio broadcast, immigrants maintain a relationship with their homeland, even though they are separated by distance.

Conclusion

Community media holds the characteristics of new social networking media, because it depends on local networks and the information sharing happens through voluntary conditions. Community broadcasting’s effort to make use of new technology such as the internet, has created the opportunity to

diverse its service and reach wider audiences. The internet allows people to access information and engaged in cultural production and dissemination.

The internet has gradually changed the way humans communicate with each other. The internet has also opened opportunities for community radio to extend their broadcasting scope. By using the internet, community radio is able to communicate with transnational societies in the context of international migration and globalisation. This prodigy has introduced new outlooks for understanding the dynamics of community diaspora.

The audience participatory involvements also had consequence in technological cooperation. The internet has appeared as an outgoing form that people used to generate, sustain and became part of communities. The internet also became an important medium in the development of concrete interactions between diasporic individuals with their community in the virtual world. Information and news displayed on the website play a significant function in establishing commonalities among community members, and allow diasporic community to maintain the bond between the homeland and the hostland.

References

- Anderson B (2006) *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arnaldo CA (1998) Localism and the displacement of politics: Place based communication. In Fraser C & Estrada SR (2001) *Community Radio Handbook*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Benkler Y (2006) *The Wealth of Networks; How Social Production Transforms Market and Freedom*. In Rennie, E. (2007), December. *Community media in prosumer era*. [Electronic version]. (Vol. 3, pp. 25-32) *3C Media: Journal of Community Citizen's and Third Sector Media and Communication*.
- Besette G (2010) *Development communication in West and Central Africa: Toward a research and intervention agenda*. In Howley K (ed.) *Understanding Community Media*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Boyd M (2010) *Family and personal networks in international migration: recent developments and new agendas*. In Alonso, A. & Oiarzabal, P. (Eds.). *Diaspora in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community*. (pp. 49-64). Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.
- Christensen N (2003) *Inuit in Cyberspace: Embedding Offline Identities Online*. University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Dunckelmann H (2008) *Lokale Öff entlichkeit. Eine gemeindesoziologische Untersuchung*. *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, 15(3): 59-74).
- Fraser C and Estrada SR (2001), *Community Radio Handbook*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Fairchild C (1998) *The Canadian alternative: A brief history of unlicensed and low power radio*. Howley, K. 2005. *Wireless World: Global Perspectives on Community Radio*. Media Communities: Local Voices (vol.10, 1st ed.). Retrieved 23 May 2010, from http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_10/article_01.shtml
- Fairchild C (2010) *Social solidarity and Constituency Relationships in Community Radio*. In Howley, K. (ed.). *Understanding Community Radio*. (pp. 23-31). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Girard B (2003) *The One To Watch: Radio, New ICTs and Interactivity*. Rome: FAO-UN.

- Grossberg L (1987) Critical Theory and the Politics of Empirical Research. In Meadows M, Forde S, Ewart J, Foxwell K (2007) Community Media Matters: an audience study of the Australian community broadcasting sector. Griffith University. Retrieved 02 February 2011, from http://www.cbonline.org.au/%5Cmedia%5CGriffith_Audience_Research%5Creports%5CCommunityMediaMatters_final.pdf.
- Hall K and Benn D (2004) Globalisation a Calculus of Inequality: Perspectives from the South. *International Migration* 42(2): 41-60. DOI 10.1111/j.0020-7985.2004.00280.x
- Hendy D (2000) Radio in the Global Age. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hope-Hume B (1997) Radio, community and the public: Community radio Western Australia. Unpublished master thesis, Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley, Western Australia.
- Howley K (2005) Wireless World: Global Perspectives on Community Radio. *Media Communities: Local Voices* 10(1). Retrieved 23 May 2010, from http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_10/article_01.shtml
- Howley K (2010) Understanding Community Media. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Jankowski N (2002) Creating community with Media: History, theories and scientific investigations. In Lievrouw, L. and Livingstone, S. (eds.) *The Handbook of New Media. Social Shaping and the Consequences of ICTs*. 34-49. London: Sage.
- Jayaprakash YT (2002) Remote audience beyond 2000: Radio, everyday life and development in South India. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley, Western Australia.
- Josiah J (2001) Presentation on Media for Community Building in the Caribbean during Roundtable on Communication for Development, Brazil. In Fraser C, & Estrada SR (Eds) *Community Radio Handbook*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Laguerre MS (2010) Digital diaspora: Definition and models. In Alonso, A. and Oiarzabal, P. (eds.) *Diaspora in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community*. (49-64). Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.
- Lessig L (2007) The Future of Ideas: The Fate of The Commons in a Connected World. *Journal of Community Citizen's and Third Sector Media and Communication* (3):25-32.
- Lewis PM and Booth J (1989) *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial, and Community Radio*. Howley, K. (2005) *Wireless World: Global Perspectives on Community Radio. Media Communities: Local Voices*, 10(1).
- Meadows M, Forde S, Ewart J, Foxwell K (2007) Community Media Matters: an audience study of the Australian community broadcasting sector. Griffith University. Retrieved 02 February 2011, from http://www.cbonline.org.au/%5Cmedia%5CGriffith_Audience_Research%5Creports%5CCommunityMediaMatters_final.pdf.
- Reis M (2004) Theorizing diaspora: perspectives on “classical” and “contemporary” diaspora. *International Migration* 42(2): 41-60. DOI 10.1111/j.0020-7985.2004.00280.x

- Rennie E (2007) December. Community media in prosumer era. [Electronic version]. (Vol. 3, Pp. 25-32). 3C Media: Journal of Community Citizen's and Third Sector Media and Communication.
- Ros A (2010) Interconnected immigrants in the information society. In Alonso, A. and Oiarzabal, P. (eds.) *Diaspora in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community*. (pp. 19-38). Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.
- Smith MK (2001) Community' in the encyclopedia of informal education. Retrieved 11 October 2010 from <http://www.infed.org/community/community.htm>.
- Stalker P (1994) *The Work of Strangers: A Survey of International Labour Migration*. International Labour Office, Geneva.
- Tabing L (2001) *Community Radio Handbook*. Paris: UNESCO.
- T 1 lyan K (2010) Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless power in the trasnational moment. In Alonso, A. and Oiarzabal, P. (eds.) *Diaspora in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community*. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.