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The dilemma of building campus radio stations on a business model: the case of ATL FM in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The quest for competitiveness and popularity of a campus radio station needs to be balanced with the epistemological frames of community radio, which include participation, community ownership, and opposition to hegemonic discourse in the mainstream media as well as independence from political and market influences. I contribute to these reflections by highlighting how within this frame ATL FM is facing dilemmas and challenges that have not occupied community media theorists so far. Through content analysis and in-depth interviews, I investigate whether a community radio can serve and encourage the participation of the local community when professional rather than community members exclusively manage it. I propose a conscious incorporation of stakeholders in the community radio business model as a possible solution to this dilemma.

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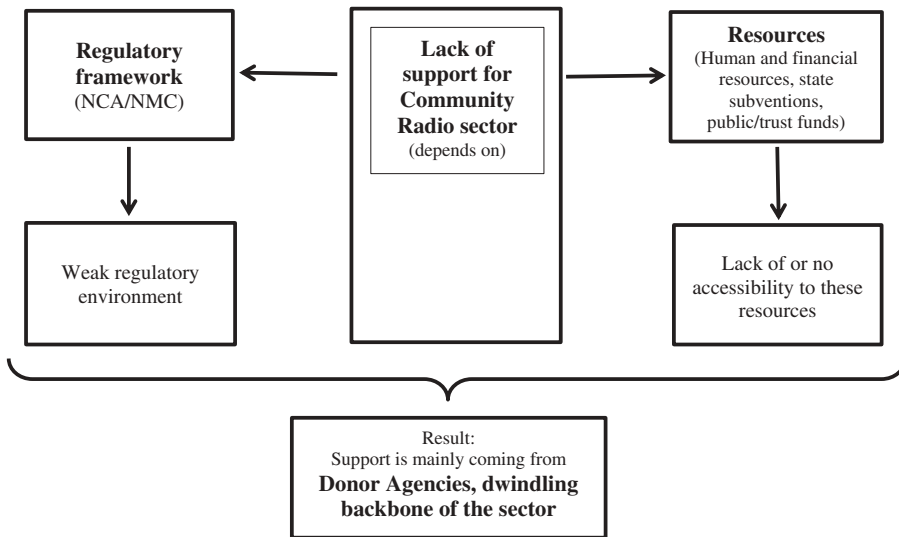
Community radio; campus radio; programming; sustainability; participation; strategic plan

Introduction

Community radio and its challenges

The lack of support for the community radio tier as a distinct type of broadcasting in Ghana dates back to the era of deregulation of the broadcasting sector, when the law ignored community broadcasting (Apenteng, 2007; Government of Ghana, 2005). Since then, the regulatory framework and the environment did not get any better and the lack of support still represents the main challenge for community broadcasting both in terms of regulatory framework and of available resources (see Figure 1).

Apart from “being unfavourable to and inconsistent” with the sector, the regulatory framework is managed by two state agencies – the National Communication Authority (NCA) and the National Media Commission (NMC) – whose duties somehow overlapped (Government of Ghana, 2005, pp. 34). On one hand the national constitution mentioned explicitly the NMC as the regulator of media content. On the other hand, the “ACT 642” of the NCA Law assigned to the NCA the right to authorise and issue broadcasting frequency as well as to develop policies to regulate the broadcast media (Apenteng, 2007). Despite the overlap of duties, laws were set in place. However, the



National Communication Authority, NMC=National Media Commission

Figure 1. Macro-view of the lack of support as main challenge for community radio in Ghana. NCA = National Communication Authority, NMC = National Media Commission.

regulation of the broadcasting sector in Ghana remained weak or almost non-existent along the years (Karikari, 1994).

The resources such as human and financial resources, state subventions, and public/trust fund (s) represent the second broad domain where support lacks, as pictured in Figure 1. Most rural communities in Ghana do not have readily available human resources with the needed expertise in media. The few community members available and willing to contribute require training. Community radio stations are mostly located in rural areas and as such do not have access to any significant advertising markets and sponsors. State subventions are not one of the options for funding community radio stations in Ghana except in cases where campus radio stations depend on government subvention to their host universities. There are no national public or trust funds accessible to the community radio sector. International and national donor agencies and civil society organisations have thus become the backbone of the sector so far. Their continued assistance is motivated by the idea that the community radio sector could drive social change and community development. They also consider the sector as an important support facility for democracy. However, donor support to the community radio sector in Ghana is dwindling. A deeper reflection on possible replacements for donor agencies’ support that are consistent with the aims of the sector appears thus as necessary.

The goal of this paper is to contribute to this reflection by highlighting the case of ATL FM, a campus radio station, the activities of which – in contrast to most community radios – base on a partly commercial business model. For this reason, the radio station faces dilemmas and challenges that have not occupied community media theorists and policymakers so far. These challenges include communities either lacking

the capacity or being denied the opportunity, by the “business professional team”, to manage their radio station. By focusing on participation structures, programming, and funding, this article investigates whether the claim that community radio serves local communities and encourages participation exists in practice even when media business professionals rather than community members are running the radio station. The following specific research questions motivated and guided the study: (1) How do the primary audiences participate in the station’s content generation and decision-making processes? (2) What is the focus of ATL FM’s programming in terms of consideration of community stakeholders? (3) How does the professional team’s management of ATL FM influence the station’s participation structures, programming, and funding activities?

Advent of the campus radio

In Ghana, campus radio stations are nowadays considered as smaller community radio stations and therefore part of the community-broadcasting tier. Almost everywhere campus/college radio stations started as experimental radio stations, operating on university campuses (Sauls, 2000). In the United States, for instance, before the commercial model of broadcasting was introduced in the 1920s, an alternative non-commercial system existed that included campus radio stations. Those radios were hosted on both state supported and private universities (Slotten, 2006). The development of campus radio in Ghana is quite recent but not very different. Some campus radio stations existed as pirate radio stations before the deregulation of broadcasting in 1996 (Prof. Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, personal communication, 6 September 2013). Even after the deregulation community/campus broadcasting was neither offered any definition nor regarded as a distinct type of broadcasting by the law (NCA, 1996, Act 524). In 2007, the NCA finally issued a directive that considered campus radio as part of community radio and defined it as: “a radio that is about, for, by, and of a specific marginalised community, whose ownership and management is representative of that community, which pursues a participatory social development agenda, and which is non-profit, non-sectarian, and non-partisan”.

The term “community” is rather elastic as noted by McCain and Lowe (1990). In many cases in Ghana and elsewhere, a community refers to specific geographical boundaries and a community radio service is meant to reach people in dispersed localities who have shared interests whether at ethnic, religious, political, or educational level. Even though the term “community” has been extending its borders on the Internet following the idea of network societies (Castells, 2000), a community radio still needs to know its community very well.

Today, there are about 17 *campus radio stations* across Ghana that have been categorised by the NCA as part of the community radio tier. Table 1 provides an overview of the stations currently authorised by regional distribution (NCA, 2016, 3rd Quarter). In this paper we will focus on the case of ATL FM.

Table 1. List of campus radio stations authorised in Ghana.

	Region	FM Radio	Institution
1	Greater Accra	Radio Univers Radio VVU GJJ FM	University of Ghana, Accra Valley View University, Accra Ghana Institute of Journalism
2	Ashanti	Focus FM Mynd FM	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi University of Education, Winneba, Kumasi campus
3	Western	Dynamite FM T-Poly FM	University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa Takoradi Polytechnic, Takoradi
4	Eastern	Poly FM	Koforidua Polytechnic, Koforidua
5	Central	ATL FM Eagle FM Radio Windy Bay	University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast Cape Coast Polytechnic, Cape Coast University of Education, Winneba
6	Volta	Volta Premier	Ho Polytechnic, Ho
7	Upper West	Radio FAS WA Poly FM	University for Development Studies, Navrongo WA Polytechnic
8	Northern	Tamale Poly FM	Tamale Polytechnic, Tamale
9	Brong Ahafo	Radio UENR Catholic Uni FM	University of Energy & Natural Resources, Sunyani Catholic University College of Ghana, Fiapra

Source: NCA, 2016.

ATL FM

ATL FM is a campus radio station located at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The station started its broadcasting activities already back in the 1980s, when it was still illegal for anyone except the state to operate a broadcast medium in the country. The first official request for a licence was submitted by the station to the Office of the President of the Republic of Ghana in 1990. Totobi Quakyi, the secretary of information for the military government in power at the time, responded to the request with the donation of a transmitter during the 1992/1993 annual festival at Atlantic Hall, a student hall of residence. This way, ATL FM became the first independent broadcaster to operate in Cape Coast, the Central regional capital. Cape Coast has about 120,000 inhabitants and 8 radio stations currently in operation: 5 commercial radio stations, a public broadcaster, ATL FM, and another campus radio station owned by the students of the Cape Coast Polytechnic. Clearly, the competition for audience and advertising money is fierce within the radio market in the Ghanaian Central region.

As any other community radio station, ATL FM is required by the NCA, 2007 directive to broadcast within the maximum range of 10 km. However, the station transmits through a 1,000 W transmitter within an area of approximately 40 km² in complete defiance of this rule. It has an online presence that transcends the borders of Ghana. According to a survey conducted by SINO VAT, an audience research company, at the time of this research ATL FM was the leading radio station in Cape Coast in terms of audience, market share as well as brand visibility.

The exploratory analysis conducted for this study indicates that most campus radio stations are either wholly dependent on compulsory student levy or full funding from the host university. ATL FM's uniqueness emanates from its capability to run a self-financed and sustainable independent broadcasting activity. Its operation costs are being paid through advertising income. However, the station submitted a proposal to the university asking to receive general student levy for financing the creation of a permanent accommodation for the station

Literature review

Funding and management of community radios

Most scholars within the field of community radio view the sector as free from political and market influences, encouraging participation and community ownership as well as running against the mainstream discourse in the private and public media (Atton, 2002; Berrigan, 1979; and Girard, 1992). This view has come under strict scrutiny as several scholars pointed out how using means other than the community itself for supporting community radio has worked against the ideals of independence and participation (Boas & Hidalgo, 2010; and Keefer & Khemani, 2011). Conrad (2014) extended the critiques to East Africa focusing on influence of donor agencies on the realisation of the ideals of community radio. He contended that, unless the communities fund their radio stations themselves, the theorised benefits are far from been achieved because the reality of donor agency funding limits independence and participation.

The influence of financing and organizational structure on media content, participation, and conduct of local discourses have been significantly studied using the lenses of political economy theory (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006; Herman Chomsky, 1994). Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova, and Schlifer (2003) further elaborated on the issues of public versus private media ownership and media market structure. They upheld the view of public choice theory according to which a government-owned media outlet would distort and manipulate information to entrench the incumbent politicians, preclude voters, and consumers from making informed decisions, and ultimately undermine both democracy and markets. They therefore recommended private media ownership on the assumption that competition among media firms ensures that voters, consumers, and investors receive, on average, unbiased and accurate information (Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova and Schlifer, 2003). Other scholars have argued that the reality of market failures has hugely flawed the claims that when the media is competitively organised, public interest will be served.

Howley (2010) argued that both government and private business cannot uphold the interests of vulnerable communities and hence communities need to own and run their radio stations themselves. This solution represents a form of resistance to “centralised, commercialised, state-controlled, and professionalised media that exist in the mainstream” (McQuail, 2000, pp.160). Consistent with these ideas, the participatory model of communication emerged that considers audiences more as active agents of social change than ordinary recipients of information and development (Jacobson and Serves, 1999; Schramm, 1963). Subsequent proponents have argued that participatory communication, one of the founding principles of community radio, encourages a horizontal process of communication, and thus a higher degree of collective involvement in media content production compared to the top-down approach of public and private ownerships (Jallov, 2007; Morris, 2003; White, 1994). In support of this paradigm, Saeed (2009) described community radio as being free from market actors, state, multilateral agencies and hence producing content in local languages about issues that matter to the communities and not to the mainstream discourse. Much of what these theories seek to highlight is the participation of community members in broadcast content decisions in “their” community radio as well as their contribution to the public discourse.

Some scholars have also questioned the sustainability and efficacy of donor-driven development assistance by showing that donor-driven community radio did not enhance independence and local community participation (Kivikuru, 2006; Castells-Talens, Rodirgeuz and Concha, 2009; Manyozo, 2009; Salazar, 2009; Awowi, 2010; Conrad, 2014). They further described how international donor agencies replaced the oppressive political regimes in young democracies in perpetuating mediated access and negotiating space for local communities. In addition, Keefer and Khemani (2011) argued that “economic interests” and not “local issues” drive community-broadcasting decisions in the Republic of Benin. Apparently, communities are thus selling their space on air to donors and ministries who are interested in reaching their audiences.

The audience or customer orientation of a community radio – when the community served does not have the capacity or is denied the opportunity to fund and manage its own radio station – is an issue that has not been addressed by the literature so far. This introduces us to the struggle between participation and sustainability, two concepts that have not coexisted well enough in the community radio practice until now.

Community participation versus sustainability

Campus/community radio has traditionally been perceived as an alternative media opposed to mainstream public and commercial media. Atton (2002) argued that media cannot be considered as alternative simply in terms of differences in content and medium, but rather in relation to how communication as a social process is construed. This requires taking a more comprehensive perspective in mapping alternative media, thus including the description of the organisational structure, content production, financing as well as distribution activities. Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2008) satisfied such a rigor when they located community media in a more holistic approach by describing it as an organisation that stands outside of mainstream media through its attempt to offer “an alternative for a wide range of hegemonic discourses on communications, media and economics ...”. According to Bailey et al. (2008) “alternative media must serve their community, offer counter hegemonic discourse to power and be autonomous from the state and market influences”.

Atton (2002), Bailey et al. (2008), Downing (2001), and Waltz (2005) have all underlined that participation remains key to alternative media. This means that the creation, production, and dissemination of content, as well as stimulating social experiences through media – all as part of the communication process – should not be restrictively controlled by media professionals but left to the larger society with improved access and participation. However, the literature that describes such ideal participation of community members as well as the autonomy from state, commercial and media professionals have ignored or downplayed the business aspects related to the creation and maintenance of self-sustaining structures. For community or campus radio stations to achieve greater levels of participation and quality content, a re-conceptualisation of the participation discourse is needed which takes into account also the resources pragmatically available in the community and their management. This is exactly where this article seeks to locate the discussions by describing how ATL FM is trying to balance the issue of sustainability and participation in practice.

Until recently, sustainability was narrowly defined in financial terms (Fairbairn, 2009; Lush & Urgoiti, 2011). Gumucio-Dagron and Dlamini (2005) contended that sustainability is a complex construct characterised by a social, an institutional, and a financial aspect. According to this tripod typology, community media are sustainable when they succeed in addressing all these three independent and interrelated aspects. The social aspect of sustainability refers to all social processes needed to create sustainable community media, including community participation in issues such as the governance, management, operations, content production, income generation, and feedback. According to Gumucio-Dagron and Dlamini (2005) the “community ownership of the communication process and the development of local content through community participation in the selection of topics and research” are at the heart of this aspect. Further, the financial aspect of sustainability concerns the ongoing income-generating potential of community media, including cash and donations of goods and services. The independence from state, political control, commercial and religious interests is crucial as much as ensuring that income-generation activities are consistent with the mission and goals of the organisation (Gumucio-Dagron & Dlamini, 2005). Finally, institutional sustainability refers to the governance and management structures, partnerships with external organisations as well as the legal and regulatory environment. Gumucio-Dagron and Dlamini (2005) cite two critical factors for this aspect of sustainability: enabling legislation for community media and internal democracy. Fairbairn (2009) sums up the argument neatly by saying that sustainability of community media is not just about generating income and managing it efficiently. It is about mobilising the right kinds of resources at the right time, to fit changing needs and contexts. In this interpretation of sustainability, we can recognise some constituting elements of the business model concept, which will be briefly explained in the next section.

Business model

Fetscherin and Knolmayer (2004) argue that business models for content delivery should have five components: the product, the customer, the revenue, the price, and the delivery. This description is quite consistent with an earlier argument by Timmers (1998) who argued that a business model has three parts: product features, description of the activities involved in the business, and sources of funding. Ricart (2009:14) provides a rather simplistic view of how one should think about a business model. He argued that the business model fundamentally refers to “how businesses generate income”. Johnson, Christensen, and Kagermann (2008) have also defined business models as consisting of four interlocking elements that, taken together, create and deliver value. These four elements include customer value proposition, profit formula, key resources, and key processes.

Magretta (2002) offered a more elaborate description of business model when she argued that business models are:

Stories that explain how enterprises work. A good business model answers Peter Drucker’s age-old question: who is the customer? And what does the customer value? It also answers the fundamental questions every manager must ask: How do we make money in this

business? What is the underlying economic logic that explains how we can deliver value to customers at an appropriate cost (p.4).

Zott and Amit (2010) confirmed that scholars do not agree on what a business model is. However, prominent among the recurring elements is value creation, which underpins the purpose of being in business in the first place. Value creation can be measured by performance. A report by IBM Global Business Services (2006) showed that firms outperforming in terms of growth put twice as much emphasis on business model innovation as did underperformers. That means that the value proposition is constantly being questioned and updated to fulfil or anticipate customer needs. Customer-focused value creation is well summarised by Teece (2007:1329) who argues that a business model reflects a “hypothesis about what customers want and how an enterprise can best meet those needs and get paid for doing so”. The customer-focused approach of the business model falls into Magretta’s (2002) view, which invoked Peter Drucker’s questions of who the customer is and what he/she values. Whether in the media management or community media literature, the customer – who is also the audience in this case – occupies a crucial place in product design and delivery, i.e. in the value creation and proposition activities of an organisation.

The link between the customer and value creation/proposition has been clearly made by Osterwalder and Pigneur in their business model canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). According to the authors, business models are characterised by nine building blocks, all of which need to be taken into account in order for a business to successfully operate and be sustainable. Within Osterwalder and Pigneur’s canvas (2010) we can recognise the tripod sustainability concept related to community media: (a) the cost and revenue blocks picture the financial sustainability aspect, (b) the partners, resources, and activities blocks enabling the creation of value well describe the institutional sustainability aspect while (c) customer relationships and the channels to the customer refer to the social sustainability. The only difference is that, in order to respect the participation and social change premises of community media, the relation between the organisation creating content (its value proposition) and the community (its customers) is reciprocal.

Methodology

The study is primarily qualitative in nature based on the analysis of secondary data and expert interviews. In addition, the entire programming grid of ATL FM was coded with the assistance of three programming staff members of the station (the programme coordinator and two presenters) to determine how the station programming fits the constituents of the Kasoma reciprocal agenda-setting model. According to Kasoma (1994), communication within development-oriented media such as community media needs to be dialogic and transactional. Further, it must play a critical role in offering new philosophies, concepts, and models that might facilitate participation at all stages of the development process.

The researcher aimed at understanding how much of the station’s programming was dedicated to the following programming groups and thus addressed to specific community stakeholders: individual, religious, syndication, government or civic education,

men/women, youth/children, cooperative and local/traditional programming. Community stakeholders were defined based on the reciprocal Kasoma participatory communication framework (Singh, 2010, p 3). It is worth noting that syndication was not part of the Kasoma framework, but showed up significantly in the coding. Syndication was thus added and defined as the right to rebroadcast a radio show that is wholly produced by another station. In the case of ATL FM, programmes from Joy FM, Voice of America, BBC, and Radio France International were captured under this new category. The programming staff members were introduced to the programming definitions as per the coding guide a week before the coding began. The staff coded the programming grid simultaneously in different rooms in order to avoid one coder influencing the other. Inter-coder reliability was tested using Holst's Alpha that yielded a 98% agreement. The coding guide had also been pilot tested at Eagle FM, another campus radio station in Cape Coast.

After this, the station manager, the deputy station manager, and the programme coordinator were interviewed face to face. The regulatory officer of the NCA was then interviewed on the policy direction for the campus radio sector. The four interviews were conducted in June 2012, and lasted about 60 min. Further, the researcher had access to the correspondence with the NCA and financial statement files for 2 weeks long; this helped to understand the station's operations with reference to the issues discussed in the interview.

Content analysis is a popular method for the examination of recorded communication text in many forms. For this paper, it provided an objective and systematic approach to describe the manifest amount of time allocated to each of the constituents of the audience members. However, the content analysis only revealed the amount of time dedicated to each stakeholder group without offering any insights as to why the programming grid looks that way. The addition of in-depth interviews with the managers and the analysis of further internal documents added illumination and explanations about the managerial challenges of running a campus radio station.

By applying different methods and thus following a triangulation strategy, the study facilitated the cross-validation of data, and so its validity and reliability (trustworthiness) (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The prolonged engagement with the radio station as well as the access to internal documents allowed the researcher to develop good insights for later conducting the interview. The review of interviews' transcripts by the participants ensured further illumination on the subject of discussion, an approach that is consistent with Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013).

Findings and discussion

Participation in content generation

The primary audiences of ATL FM as a campus radio station include students, faculty, and administrative staff of the university, local decision makers, and unions on campus. Others include community members and policymakers within the city. Almost everything broadcast on ATL FM is produced by a staff of 20 full-time and 15 part-time media professionals. The students, staff, and unionised groups of the University of Cape Coast are not involved in the decision of what is broadcast. The programming

coordinator confirmed that there are no avenues for students and faculty to contribute to the content generation at the station. Apart from this fact, at the time when the study was conducted no concrete policy existed to seek and include the audience view in terms of programme creation and content generation. What exists, however, is the annual phone-in programme where audiences discuss and suggest ideas for the station programming in general. This has little effect on what the station puts up on air since the staff at the station could not identify how two or three of these comments have resulted in a new programme or change in some programmes. The programme coordinator explained how the station involves the audience:

One is phone-ins, they suggest to us what they expect us to do. We review our programmes annually with their contributions. There can be reviews within the year but that input might come from management. We consult them to some level. We consult some of them personally especially those who have knowledge of radio. But the station does not involve them in creating programmes. The station does not have a framework in which audience can participate wilfully. Individually, we consult our friends and bring the inputs.

The analysis of ATL FM's programming grid revealed that student-oriented programming was only aired once a week (over the weekend). The programme coordinator at the station asserted that the station's primary audience and owners were the students and lecturers. However, he explained that their participation and influence is minimal because, as the station was involved in general programming and faced fierce competition, it was reluctant in allowing amateurs' participation:

My audience is the university community and other people who listen to us. It is a high-class audience. However, we do not do any specific programmes for them, sometimes, we do not even do a specific programme for some days and I mean some days. It is bad. When that happens, the students enjoy the general programming. However, we do 2 hours for the students every week. Time with the student has not been regular like our general programmes. But groups and departments are represented on our management board.

In order to evaluate ATL FM in terms of participation, it is useful to frame these quotes within the argument of Carpentier and Scifo (2010), who claimed that "community radio must not only be sites but the masters of actual organisation of democracy" (p.116). On one hand, structural participation shall create space for "decision-making, which must allow members to co-decide, [albeit] in varying degrees" (p. 116). On the other hand, content-related participation needs to essentially "allow members of communities to have their voices heard thus validating and strengthening the community" (Carpentier & Scifo, 2010, pp.116–117). Moyo (2012, p. 490) argued that the two approaches were not mutually exclusive, "as structural participation has direct implications on the diversity of voices on community radio". In the case of ATL FM, different interest groups serve on the board, but this has not directly or even indirectly improved participation. That questions the effectiveness of the board in managing the station's content, and reminds us that the station is run by "professionals" who are conversant with lobbying. There is also little display of relational dynamics, i.e. the power play between competing groups is weak, as the "professional team" usually hijacks every opportunity for community members to stay in control of debates and decisions.

Focus of ATL FM's programming

If the challenge of competing for advertising income and popularity with mainstream media limits community participation in content generation, it further complicates the situation regarding the focus of programming. Programming is the backbone of any radio station that operates with a specific purpose (Whaites, 2005). ATL FM's programming is expected to be campus based, i.e. discussing core campus issues, student life, new and unpopular music, among other issues. As mentioned earlier, the station's programming grid was analysed based on the reciprocal agenda-setting model by Kasoma (Singh, 2010). The total weekly broadcast for each of the stakeholder groups revealed an over concentration of the station's programming around popular music, entertainment, 5-min news flashes, and sport. This denotes a clear strategy to keep the station competitive and popular, an approach that characterises mass-market mainstream media. It is also worth noting though that ATL FM broadcasts some specific community-oriented programmes e.g. the fishermen programme (coded under cooperatives), women targeted programmes, civic responsibility, and health education programmes.

The need to incorporate sustainability and survival dynamics into the epistemological frames of community media is crucial in understanding the other complexities that hinder or enhance the participatory nature of campus radio. The station manager stated:

We have programmes for the specific groups you have mentioned in the framework but our running expenses and condition cannot allow us to do more of those programming we are noted for because we need to sustain ourselves. We need money to produce those programmes and those programmes are not the ones selling us.

Perhaps when the station's funding structure changes, the programming outlook could also change by giving more programme time to local stakeholders and pursuing non-elite media discourse. Participation, access, and interaction are currently lacking because of the fierce competition for advertising money that comes with its own rules of the game: mass market and general programming. Table 2 presents the constituents of the amended Kasoma list of stakeholder groups and hours of weekly broadcast dedicated to them on ATL FM.

From Table 2 it is clear that ATL FM's programming has no specific customer (audience) as its niche market. As explained earlier, the customer attributes of the

Table 2. Percentage of average weekly programming time by stakeholders groups, according to the amended Kasoma reciprocal agenda-setting list.

Constituents	Average hours	Percentage (%)
Individual (music, entertainment, and sports)	101.7	60.54
Religious	6	3.54
Syndication	51	30.36
Government (civic education)	5	2.98
Youth/children	0.3	0.18
Cooperative (agriculture)	1	0.60
Men	0	0.00
Local leadership	1	0.60
Culture/traditional leadership	1	0.60
Women	1	0.60
Total	168	100

Source: Serwornoo, 2013, p. 35.

station's programming are not pronounced. This approach is inconsistent with Peter Drucker's quest for a better understanding of the customer. Sustainable growth of any enterprise hinges significantly on how well it satisfies the customers' needs overtime. The station manager agreed with this and explained: "as the first radio station in the region, we were serving everyone with no specific niche market in mind and it has been difficult to wean ourselves of this philosophy".

Funding and income generation

Funding for broadcasting in Ghana is a very debatable issue at all levels. Community radio broadcasting, in some parts of the world, is supported by a mixture of several resources such as community donations, human resources from the community, assistance from development agencies, public funds, subventions, reduced license renewal fees, and advertising. In Ghana, the regulatory authority has insisted that "communities" or donor agencies need to provide all the needed resources for the community radio to operate. The Ghana Broadcasting Study (2005) considered this as inconsistent with the reality of the sector. In addition to this challenge, there is the fact that public funds, subventions, and human resource support from the communities are usually non-existent. Furthermore, there is also a de facto ban on advertising as funding source for community radio stations. From the respondents' point of view, this ban is a major issue for campus radio stations. In situations where the communities receiving the broadcast cannot afford the cost associated with it, advertising becomes inevitable. In defiance of the NCA orders, the respondents at ATL FM confirmed the use of a mixture of funding sources. The station manager further elaborated:

The station gets funding or funds from its own Internally Generated Funds (IGF) from the stations itself. It is done through sponsorships or donations from agencies like the VOA and the BBC in terms of equipment, and then other bodies like that, as well as paid announcements and promotions. These are the main sources. To survive we run a tight business model of rigorous marketing and financing. We receive letters from the NCA saying no adverts but we disagree with those letters.

The NCA revealed that they allow minimum advertising but the researcher saw letters sent by the NCA to ATL FM that categorically stated advertising was not allowed. This inconsistency between claims and directives could be interpreted as the result of inadequate engagement and communication between the NCA and campus radio stations. In fact, the NCA admits that their agency never met with the campus radio stations as a group. However, they have issued several directives and guidelines they expect the campus radio stations to obey.

The argument put forward by Bailey et al. (2008), according to which the communication process should not be seen as a series of practices that are restrictively controlled by "media professionals" but as human rights that cut across societies, is not amenable in the case of ATL FM. This idea needs to be confronted with the issues of survival and competition, especially when the community radio significantly relies on advertising or donor funding. The approach of ATL FM in dealing with the difficulties of the community media sector was to develop a business model requiring a

professional management touch and hence the restrictive access to/participation for community members.

ATL FM launched this approach through a rebranding campaign including a new logo, new letterhead, and billboards. As part of the rebranding programme, the station introduced a new billing software in the radio industry in Ghana (AirWatch). Most advertising agencies require this software to monitor the airplay of their advertisements. The station also adopted a new website and provided a corporate email address and complimentary call cards to all staff. Soon after these activities started, ATL FM commissioned a 5-year strategic plan aimed at providing a blueprint for the station's competitive engagements in the market and her position as a campus based radio. For a period of 6 months, once every 2 weeks ATL FM organised training for staff members on different aspects of the strategic plan. After that an Implementation Committee headed by the station's head of marketing and sponsorship was formed. The committee started the implementation of the strategic plan in 2013, and is due to complete its work in 2018.

The vision statement of the 5-year strategic plan was to "make ATL FM, a leading global media centre of excellence", driven by the three core values of integrity, responsibility, and scholarliness. The station's mission was rectified as part of this strategic plan into "serving as a professional platform to the University and its audience through the provision of responsible and scholarly broadcasting services with integrity by employing modern technologies". To accomplish this mission, the station outlined five broad objectives:

- (1) To provide training for staff and students
- (2) To provide community-based programming
- (3) To provide a platform for the dissemination of research findings and lectures on radio
- (4) To employ the use of modern technologies
- (5) To create an avenue for the future funding of the station

Transcending several functional areas of the plan, these objectives reflected the values and philosophy of the station's stakeholders and provided direction to specific operations. The need to find a synergy between the issues of student participation, university regulations, responsible broadcasting, and community-centred programming, as well as that of attracting sufficient funding clearly emerged. In search of that synergy, the station elaborated six specific strategies: (a) to increase market share through good customer services, which they identified as the station's strength; (b) to develop new programmes; (c) to improve community-based programmes; (d) to attract funds from donor agencies in addition to the advertising income through the station's previous relationships; (e) to get the best out of the engagement of part-time staff; and finally (f) to vigorously employ appropriate radio and media technology as a tool for innovation and competition.

The staff strength at ATL FM is phenomenal with almost half of them holding different types of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The station has a vigorous marketing plan and delivers proposals on weekly basis to different companies. Transmission certificates, invoicing, and client account management are seriously conducted as corporate activities.

Even if the NCA once published a directive in a national newspaper (Daily Graphic) asking businesses and advertising agencies to desist from placing adverts on community radio stations including ATL FM, the station still attracts advertising income. The manager of the station finds such publications laughable and he explained in these words: “When we meet advertisers they tell us about that publication but they are, as well, quick to add that their advertising placement decisions are based on audience research and presence – not on NCA directives or publications”.

By virtue of being part of the University of Cape Coast, the station also has access to accountants, auditors, and investment teams that have provided very esteemed services. The quarterly accounts and target reviews at the departments of marketing and finance are routine commercial business activities. Marketers are required to meet the target by using several strategies including barter deals. All idle financial resources are immediately invested in high-yielding investment portfolios.

The business model described above mistakenly ignores the participation of audiences. Apart from free announcements and the coverage of activities within the university, it is quite difficult to locate community participation in programming and income generations. The “professional team” handled these two very important activities, which according to McQuail (2000) are fundamental to community radio. In addition, the station shows a good grasp of Internet and new media use. Carpentier and Scifo (2010) and Moyo (2012) have reported on how community media are using diverse technologies to achieve more participation. However, in the case of ATL FM, the use of technology and social media applications are essentially geared towards income generation. This emerges from the statement that the station included in the strategic plan concerning its realignment/rebranding efforts: “To re-position ATL FM as a University-owned, campus-based radio offering full access and participation of both immediate and remote communities to boost competition and self-sustainability through the use of technology” (Felix Adu Poku, personal communication, deputy station manager and Chairman of the Strategic Plan Implementation Committee). The table of relative revenues and expenses in Appendix 1 indicates clearly that ATL FM meets its overhead costs far above its expectation. This allows for excess resources that are thus available for investments. The Chairman of the Strategic Plan Committee reiterated the station’s viability through a telephone conversation:

We are the only independent campus radio station in Ghana regarding running expenses, we have progressively increased our annual investments in high yielding facilities and we would soon launch our TV project without University contribution to its running costs.

Conclusion

Conrad (2014), da Costa (2012), and McQuail (2000) have all argued that top-down approaches of “professionals” and “donors” to build, manage, and sustain community radio will end up with distorted incentives and purpose. This article however contends that striking a balance between the goals of media “professionals” or “donors”, and the theorised epistemological frames of community radio will result in a sustainable sector. Granting sufficient interaction between business model imperatives and the

epistemological frame of the community radio seems to be beneficial as adjustment measure for the ATL FM's defective model.

The analysis within this study shows that ATL FM uses advertising money to finance the bulk of its activities, which include running costs, paying part-time and full-time staff members, allowances for manager, training and travelling expenses of both staff and management, as well as many other costs. In addition, the fact that the station is holding the largest market share in the regional capital of Cape Coast (according to the SINO VAT survey) suggests that it is doing well in terms of resource generation and popularity (see table of relative revenues and expenses in Appendix 1). However, as mentioned earlier, sustainability must exhibit the three multifaceted and interrelated elements of financial, social, and institutional sustainability. These elements are well represented within the business model concept. Thus, in order to be truly sustainable, a community radio needs to base its operations on a business model, however adjusted to the ideals included in its epistemological frame (see Figure 2).

Such a business model can be conceptualised according to the specific business strategies rolled out by ATL FM in its entirety and even more. Figure 2 highlights the fact that a business model can drive a sustainable community radio without necessarily having any commitments to the epistemological frame (this relation is represented by the arrow A in the figure). The scenario where a business model drives a sustainable community radio that does not commit to community participation in managerial and content generation activities could be regarded as a community radio with a distorted purpose. To avert such a distortion in purpose, as it was the case of ATL FM, an interaction (represented by arrow B in Figure 2) between the business model and the epistemological framework is needed so that the resulting sustainable community radio is one that amply exhibits the elements included in the epistemological frame. The ATL FM approach did not show any such interaction between business model and epistemological frame, and as a result the campus radio did not amply exhibit the elements/ideals of the epistemological frame. This paper argues that for a sustainable community

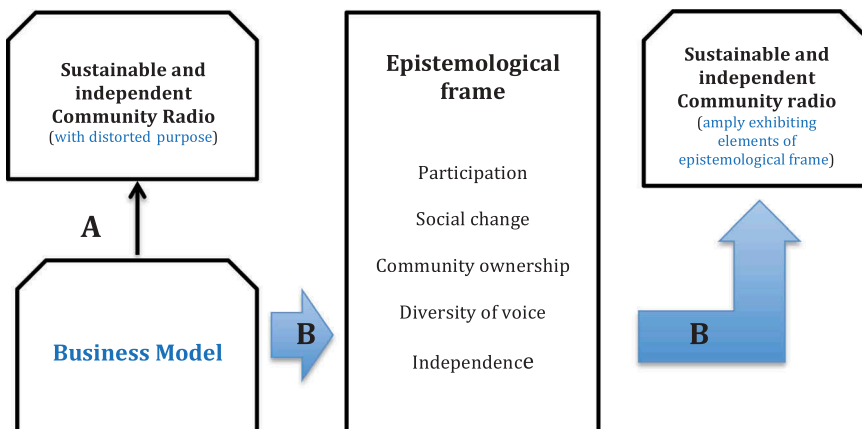


Figure 2. The business model as foundation for the sustainability of community media and its interaction with the epistemological frame to align sustainable community media with their purpose.

radio to amply exhibit the elements of the epistemological framework, the business model on which it is based must represent the foundation of its operations while constantly interacting with the epistemological frame. This approach is consistent with the social aspect of the tripod sustainability typology discussed by Gumucio-Dagron and Dlamini (2005) as well as with the customer-driven nature of business models in the argument of Magretta (2002). The second aspect of the Gumucio-Dagron and Dlamini's model relates to funding. The mode of funding described in that model is inconsistent with the ATL FM's approach because it requires that funding activities are independent of state, religious, and commercial interests. This sounds idealistic and not creative. The caution about the income generating strategies should concern whether or not those strategies are consistent with the mission and objective of the community radio station. The income generating activities of ATL FM express creative ways of building an independent and self-sustaining campus radio. Even though ATL FM digresses from the model on this aspect, the station's approach proves to be creative and pragmatic, while preserving the mission and goals of a community radio at the same time. The third and final aspect of the Gumucio-Dagron and Dlamini's model concerns the institutional sustainability, i.e. enabling regulatory environment and internal democracy. These two core issues lack in the frame of ATL FM's operations. The defiance of regulatory requirements could result in dangerous consequences if not realigned. Insufficient and ineffective internal democratic structures, which are deemed to characterise community/campus radios, needs to be resolved, too.

To conclude, this article argues that the ATL FM's business model – like any other business model for a community radio – needs a reflexive and iterative interaction with the epistemological frame of community radio to ensure that its final outputs are consistent with the theorised ideals of the sector. Nonetheless, ATL FM represents a strong indication that a community radio can be built on a sound, self-sustaining, and independent business model. For this business model to be consistent with the ideas of the community radio sector, there is the need for an enabling regulatory environment and effective internal democratic structures that regularly encourage community participation.

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Appendix 1. Relative revenues and expenses as of July 2013 (monthly overview).

Expenses	GH ₵	Revenues	GHC
Running cost	5,000	Advertising/sponsorship	25,000
Staff allowances	5,000	Services to University ³	–
Electricity and water ¹	1,000	Interest on investment ⁴	2,000
Permanent staff salaries	–	Donations ⁵	1,500
Miscellaneous exp.	4,000		28,500
Annual staff and board party ²	2,000		
Balance of Revenue	11,500		
Total	28,500		

Notes to Account

- (1) Electricity and water services earmarked for Atlantic Hall (students hall of residence) cover ATL FM as well. However, the station contributes 1,000 GHC (Ghana cedis) every month towards the fuelling of a common power plant for the hall. Electricity and water bills for the purposes of this analysis are set off against services that the station renders for the University as captured in note 3.
- (2) ATL FM shares some of its permanent staff with the main University administration. These include accounting and audit staff, station manager and deputy station manager and other announcers. However, the cost related to these staff and other permanent staff is also set off against the service rendered to University free of charge in note 3.
- (3) ATL FM announces all University activities relating to staff, students, and immediate university community. The station also gives live coverage to many University activities such as Academic lectures, graduations, and most official event on campus. The station further compiles special reports for the University on healthcare, environment, and other social responsibility activities of the University towards its surrounding villages. An unofficial estimation of these activities based on ATL FM's rate card in 2014 amounted to a monthly average of GH 30,000.00
- (4) Donations to the station are in the form of equipment, accessories, food to staff during special programmes, financial assistance, and free broadcasting software (AirWatch). When all this is put together for the year and divided by 12, a monthly average of GHC 1,500 is realised.
- (5) Investment in bonds and securities as of 2013 stood at GHC 100,000 with a current account balance of GHC 50,000. Currently, the station's investment amounts to GHC 150,000 but with current account balance of GHC 30,000 (personal communication, Felix Adu Poku, deputy station manager, and management board secretary).