

Voices of Unity: The Role of Radio Stations in Promoting Shared Values and Cultural Understanding in Nigerian Society

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess the regulatory and structural challenges that face community radio stations in Nigeria and how these challenges undermine their ability to foster intercultural dialogue and strengthen national unity. **Method:** The study used a qualitative research design based on secondary sources, including textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and governmental reports, which underwent strict content analysis. **Results:** Regulatory barriers, such as high licensing charges, obscure frequency allocation, and slow bureaucracy, limit community radio formation. Structural challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, funding shortages, and political influence, hinder culturally relevant programming and the potential for promoting intercultural dialogue and national unity. **Novelty:** The paper recommends policy changes to eliminate regulatory barriers, raise funds for infrastructure, and ensure political independence, including inclusive licensing, financial incentives, and editorial independence for community radio stations.

INTRODUCTION

Radio remains one of the most ubiquitous and available mass communication in Nigeria, in large part due to its low cost, portability, and broad geographic coverage, which are the only features that allow it to affect social norms and cultural cognition of various people. Accessibility is particularly significant in a multicultural and multilingual country; TV and internet resources are usually limited by the costs and the infrastructural factors [1]. As an example, the broadcasting activities of Wazobia FM demonstrate how the inclusion of language can be attained among the listeners of Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Pidgin English [2].

Radio has traditionally been considered by scholars as more than a medium of entertainment; instead, it has been considered as a medium through which values, heritage and social stories are conveyed at a level that transcends mere entertainment. Its ability to connect the social elements and communicate common meanings highlights its possible role in strengthening the identity of the collectives in the socio-cultural spectrum of Nigeria. Essentially, radio is not just a medium of audio transmission but a cultural action agent, which can influence group perceptions and shared norms, especially in the situation when the level of literacy and digital penetration is uneven. In the areas where inter-ethnic tensions and misunderstandings have occasionally erupted, the omnipresence of radio and its immediacy provide the possibility of getting to know each other better and share common values [3], [4], [5].

Intimately linked to its large coverage, radio in Nigeria is central to the development of cultural awareness and values especially in programming that encompasses the use of local languages, music and traditions. Empirical research shows that radio content such as traditional music, storytelling and culturally based talk shows strengthen the sense of identity and belonging of the listeners, which are key elements of cultural interpretation in heterogeneous societies [6], [7]. The studies of indigenous radio programming show that the stations serving local languages not only maintain the linguistic heritage but also foster cultural pride and unity and, thus, support the idea that media can help to overcome cultural gaps in pluralistic societies [8], [9]. Radio is able to spread common values like respect towards diversity, inclusiveness, and historical background through such content, which is usually contrary to more fragmented or conflict-based media discourses. Additionally, indigenous language programming has been reported to help in intergenerational culture transmission, enhancing the consciousness of the listeners of the common norms and practices among communities [10]. In the modern media environment of Nigeria, such culturally specific practices of radio are critical in promoting cohesion and shared meaning particularly in the face of globalised digital media where homogenised cultural content is taking precedence [11].

Examples of radio that have the potential of fostering participatory communication, civic engagement and cultural dialogue at a grassroots level are community radio stations such as campus and local radio stations. Studies have shown that community radio stations empower the local communities, especially the youth and the marginalised communities, by giving them a platform to voice, discuss and exchange with the mainstream media outlets which are usually ignored [12]. These participatory formats allow the listeners to participate in cultural dialogues, contemplate common experiences, and bargain values in changing social conditions. Moreover, research on young audiences shows that teenagers and young adults consider radio a powerful tool of cultural promotion and awareness; many of them indicate that culturally-specific programmes can help them better understand the richness of Nigeria and its values [13], [14]. Interactive programming, including call-in segments, community talk shows, and music with a mix of traditional and modern influences, is a transition point between the experience of the generations and the current Nigerian identities, highlighting the dynamic nature of radio in promoting the collective understanding of the audience of all ages. These formats do not only spread knowledge about the culture, but also provide a common experience that strengthens unity within and between local communities.

In the context of the regular social tensions and inter-group distinctions, the role of radio in fostering social integration and common values takes on special importance to the national development. There is vast literature that does not consider radio as a cultural transmitter but as an inclusion, dialogue, and mutual respect facilitator, particularly in areas where language and ethnic differences have historically hindered communication [15], [16]. Radio stations can also create narratives that cross ethnic and linguistic boundaries by incorporating a wide range of voices and cultural content, which enhances a sense of Nigérianness, which supplements local identities. The use of native

languages with the national discourse also serves to alleviate the sense of exclusion and enables the listeners with diverse backgrounds to interact with the media on their grounds. Furthermore, the fact that radio has the potential to foster fair access to information and civic engagement highlights the importance of radio to cultural knowledge and democratic growth [17], [18], [19]. Overall, radio stations, with the help of programming that values diversity, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity, are best placed to do their part in shared values and cultural awareness, and thus prove their value as a tool of unity in an ever more interconnected yet diverse country.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, radio stations are important communication, education and cultural expression tools among different communities. However, even though they have the potential to facilitate mutual values and cultural awareness, there are a number of challenges that hinder their effectiveness. The major problem is the financial limitation of most stations. The scarcity of resources limits the creation of quality content, and thus the possibility of meaningful and interesting cultural programming that is needed to unite the society. Research confirms that despite the fact that radio is still important, it is facing the severe competition of digital media platforms, which are more interactive and visually engaging to the younger generation [20], [21], [22]. This technological change has, therefore, watered down the cultural appeal of radio especially in reaching the youth who are increasingly using social media and streaming to consume information. Also, stations, particularly rural ones, have a sustainability and technological connectivity problem, and it is hard to sustain a steady flow of culturally relevant content that can connect the diverse populations of Nigeria [23], [24]. This disjunction between the potential and the actual impact of radio begs a very important question; is the Nigerian radio capable of utilizing its full potential to bring about cultural cohesion or is its usefulness being overshadowed by more contemporary and glitzy digital platforms?

In addition to the financial limitations, the other critical problem that prevents the radio to bring the multifaceted society of Nigeria together is cultural representation. Although radio provides the means of broadcasting indigenous languages and culture, studies have shown that most stations tend to focus on the major languages like English, Yoruba or Hausa, thus sidelining the minority ethnic groups [25], [26]. This cultural discrimination reflects the larger structural inequities in the Nigerian media where some cultures are over-promoted. Although certain stations, such as Wazobia FM, are trying to fill this gap by playing Pidgin and indigenous language music, they are only doing it to a handful of major groups, which is questionable in terms of inclusivity. When certain cultural discourses are playing on the airwaves and others are underrepresented, how can radio be a unifying factor in a country as diverse as Nigeria? Could the disintegration of the cultural representation on radio create a more polarized society instead of a society based on shared values? These questions help to highlight how radio is not a means of a genuinely inclusive cultural dialogue in Nigeria [27], [28].

Besides the issue of cultural representation, regulatory and structural issues have exacerbated the challenges that the radio stations in Nigeria are experiencing. Radio

stations operating on a community-level, which have a great potential of fostering participatory communication and cultural awareness, may face harsh regulatory restrictions, such as restricted access to broadcasting frequencies and political interference [29]. These limitations hinder the capacity of local stations to be used as a platform of intercultural dialogue and cultural exchange, and as a result, the ability to foster common values among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Besides, the lack of government assistance to community radio weakens their sustainability, making them susceptible to shutdown or interference [30]. Without the ability of the community radio stations to work efficiently, can Nigeria really foster the feeling of togetherness and common ground that is needed to make the nation cohesive? These structural issues in place make the role of radio in the cultural development of Nigeria to be tenuous, which makes it important to have policy changes and increase investment in the community broadcasting infrastructure. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to examine Voices of Unity: The Role of Radio Stations in Promoting Shared Values and Cultural Understanding in Nigerian Society

Based on the problem statement above, the following are three specific objectives for the study:

1. To examine the impact of financial constraints and competition from digital media on the ability of Nigerian radio stations to produce culturally relevant programming that promotes shared values and cultural understanding.
2. To assess the level of cultural representation and inclusivity in Nigerian radio programming, specifically evaluating how effectively radio stations incorporate indigenous languages and minority cultural voices to foster unity and mutual understanding.
3. To examine the regulatory and structural challenges faced by community radio stations in Nigeria, and how these challenges affect their role in facilitating intercultural dialogue and promoting national cohesion.

Literature Review

Unity

Unity is a central concept in the social sciences, which is traditionally linked to harmony, coherence, and collective cohesion, but the meaning of unity depends on disciplinary perspectives and theoretical interests. In general, unity refers to an unbroken condition in which heterogeneous entities come together to make a coherent whole [31]. This conceptualization is reminiscent of the well-known social science typologies of social cohesion and solidarity that outline the relationships that hold communities and groups together. As an example, sociological scholarship defines social cohesion, which is a concept deeply shaped by unity, as collective characteristics and actions defined by positive social relationships, a sense of identification or belonging, and a sense of commitment to the common good, thus highlighting shared values and interconnectedness within society [32]. These definitions emphasize the point that unity is not the absence of division, but an active social state characterized by shared norms, trust, and cooperative action that maintain and strengthen communal integration. As a

result, unity can be understood as a state of being one and as a social process that develops mutual understanding and collaboration among different groups of people [33].

A more sociological aspect of unity is brought out in the classical and modern theory where it is actualized by the means of shared beliefs, moral integration and interdependence between people in a society. The seminal work by Emile Durkheim is the main focus of the scholarly definitions of unity because of his concept of social solidarity that explains the ties that hold people together and form a collective conscience that overcomes individual differences [34]. This unity is not just structural but it has moral and psychological meaning, based on the shared values and collective norms according to which social behavior is organized and social order is maintained. According to modern studies on social cohesion and unity, unity is created through the constant positive social interactions, belonging to a group, and interdependence in actions and behavior that make it possible to act together and maintain social stability [35]. In this view, unity is not a passive similarity but a dynamic integration of mutual identities, trust and engagement that holds individuals together as a cohesive entity that can solve collective problems.

Academic definitions also emphasize unity as a multidimensional process that involves relational, cognitive, and affective dimensions of collective life. In addition to sociological solidarity and social cohesion, scholars define unity as entitativity, which is the extent to which a group of people is viewed as a coherent, unified unit with shared characteristics or goals [36], [37]. This psychological approach emphasizes the fact that unity is a matter of objective integration (common goals, norms, interdependence) and subjective perception (perceiving the group as a unique, meaningful entity). The general vein of definitions of unity is the same across the fields: unity occurs when various components, be it individuals, cultural practices, or social groups are connected in a manner that supports understanding, shared purpose, and identity. Additional explanation would place unity in the cultural or media communication settings, especially in the context of how the mediated discourse influences and reflects collective coherence in multicultural societies.

Radio Stations

Radio stations are one of the fundamental organizations in the mass communication industry, which act as mediums through which audio information is relayed to large and diverse audiences. In scholarly and popular research, researchers understand the concept of radio stations as broadcasting entities that relay audio programs to listeners (news, music, talk, entertainment) to geographically scattered listeners [38]. The focus of this framing is that radio stations form a bigger broadcasting system the main role of which is the spread of broadcasting on both spatial and social levels, thus, allowing exchange of culture, information flow, and discourse. In practice, these stations work based on the systematic programming plans, which are aimed at satisfying the informational and entertaining needs, which emphasizes their position as active communicative actors in the mass media complexes, but not as technical transmitters of sound. This institutional approach highlights the fact that radio stations

are not technical infrastructures alone but also social spaces that influence the way people think and experience culture by filtering content. The literature also highlights the sociocultural importance of radio stations as platforms of multiple voices, particularly where literacy and digital access is skewed. In such a way, the radio station may be regarded as a broadcasting organization that is an essential part of mass communication and culture interaction in modern societies [39].

Expanding on the role of radio stations as an institution, media theorists define these institutions as structured broadcast media, which plays various roles in society, such as education, dissemination of information and community interaction. The studies of radio broadcasting emphasize the fact that stations are organized to meet the needs of the population, broadcasting the content that informs them about social, political, and cultural events, which makes them ever-relevant even in the digital era [40]. In this scenario, a radio station is theorized as a public media organization that delivers messages in audio format based on the interests of the listeners and responsive to the needs of the audience. These definitions summarize both the old and new functions of radio stations as sources of news and entertainment, as well as to act as arenas of participatory communication and social discourse. This academic contextualization places radio stations in the larger discourses in communication research about media access, audience reach and cultural representation. Radio stations act as communication intermediaries and cultural bridges by broadcasting audio programs in controlled and licensed channels, which influence perceptions and allow collective experience among different populations [41].

Recent studies also contextualize radio stations as dynamic broadcast media organizations that respond to change in technology as well as in society and incorporate traditional roles with new media practices. The academic literature on radio broadcasting highlights that radio stations are still important broadcasting actors in the media environment and are characterized by their ability to reach large audiences at minimal cost and exist in complex media ecosystems involving digital platforms and convergent technologies [42]. In the academic literature, this flexibility makes radio stations hybrid institutions that maintain the primary broadcasting roles of information, entertainment, cultural exchange, and interact with the new tendencies in the media and participatory forms. In this case, a radio station is not only characterized by the fact that it transmits audio information but also by the continuous engagement with audience behavior, convergence of media and content delivery systems that are not limited to the traditional airwaves. These academic views represent the radio station as a versatile, durable media institution that still remains at the center of communication studies and media practice, particularly in those situations where radio still forms a major source of information and cultural interaction [43].

Shared Values

The common values are central in explaining the process by which individuals and groups organize their behavior and sustain social integration in societies. The concept of shared values is widely used in the context of social sciences, which are

generally described as a set of shared beliefs and norms that offer a consensus around what is important and desirable in a group or society. Shared values are a concept used in the study of social cohesion to mean agreement in relation to the fundamental social values and beliefs among the members of a society, which indicates an understanding of norms that govern social life and expectations [44]. This definition focuses on the social aspect of shared values as consensus not of personal preferences but of generally accepted principles that give guidance on behavior, interaction and mutual expectations. This kind of consensus is seen to help in maintaining stability, predictability, as well as cooperation in communities hence making group functioning coherent. In this view, shared values are dynamic, and they are a continuous social process, through which people negotiate meanings and expectations, and reaffirm norms that facilitate peaceful coexistence and collective action [45].

Building on this sociological framing, researchers focus on the values that are shared as the basis of trust, cooperation, and collective identity among different populations. In a comparative research, it has been demonstrated that shared values can shape the process of generalized trust and solidarity among members of a society since shared values enhance a sense of predictability and respect [46]. This method does not have a single universal definition, but shared values are considered the degree to which the members of the same society share value orientations, especially in terms of beliefs about social arrangements, fairness, and normative expectations, which consequently affect the overall outcomes of social cohesion, such as trust [47]. This viewpoint emphasizes the role of shared values in strengthening or weakening the social fabric by quantifying value diversity and similarity, and by acting at individual and collective levels to reinforce or diminish the fabric of shared values, particularly in multicultural contexts where agreement facilitates cooperation and conflict is minimized. Such definition places shared values as a social-psychological point of contact between personal beliefs and communal norms enabling peaceful and productive coexistence.

The other conceptualization that has an impact is the one that is based on environmental and communal valuation studies, where shared values are perceived as communal guiding principles that are socially constructed and are frequently discussed in a social context [48]. Shared values are explained in this literature as normative principles and beliefs that are shared by a community or group and are negotiated and articulated in social deliberation and collective decision-making processes [49]. This framing acknowledges that shared values do not just emerge out of consensus but are also the results of collective discourse, contemplation, and negotiated sense, especially in situations where different stakeholders need to reach a consensus over shared values (e.g., environmental stewardship, cultural norms). These definitions highlight the dynamic and discursive quality of shared values, and the importance of the fact that they are not pre-existing but a result of interactive processes. Collectively, these academic views explain the common values in the form of consensus, beliefs that facilitate trust, and principles that are deliberatively constructed that hold the members of a society together despite their differences.

Culture

Culture is a key concept in the social sciences, a complicated system of learned behaviors, beliefs, norms and practices that define human groups and societies. In developmental science, Jose M. Causadias defines culture as a system of people, places, and practices that interact dynamically and purposefully, organizing social life and meaning in a systemic way (e.g., enacting, justifying, or resisting power) [50], [51]. This system-based perspective underlines that culture is not predetermined but functions in interrelated social relations, ecological settings, and participatory practices, and is highly entangled with processes of inclusion, exclusion, and social agency. This definition shifts the focus of culture out of fixed lists of traits to see culture as an adaptive, relational phenomenon that is directly connected with lived human experience and social structures, especially relevant in understanding how groups sustain, negotiate, and change shared meanings across time.

The other new academic direction redefines culture as adaptive social information and emergent systemic properties. Here, culture is explained as the distinctive arrangement of moments within the information landscape of a population, and culture is seen as a multi-level, emergent and adaptive system of social information that facilitates continuity and change in shared norms and practices. This definition emphasises the role of culture in the processing and organisation of social information among individuals, institutions, and social moments and locates culture as the product and producer of social adaptation, normativity, and institutional stability. Instead of being merely a set of shared practices, this view sees culture as an adaptive informational system in which norms and institutional patterns are products of the collective regulation of information, which enables researchers to map culture across levels between individual cognition and collective social organization. This kind of conceptualization can be useful in comparative and policy research as it makes a clear linkage of culture to the dynamic processes of social life and systemic adaptation [52].

Cultural studies as well acknowledge culture as a multifaceted, historically contextual semiotic system that has profound implications on human meaning-making. Leerssen (2021) defines culture as a complicated system of meaning-making and symbolic interaction, which entails interactions between the levels of cultural exchange and development (etic) and (emic). This definition highlights the point that culture is not just visible behaviors or artifacts but rather is a part of recursive processes of interpretation and shared understanding that develop across generations and are closely intertwined with historical context and social development. In this perspective, culture is not only a store of shared meanings but also a place of constant negotiation among group members, which is the circulation of cultural knowledge, its transformation and reproduction within and between communities [53]. Taken together, these academic views point to culture as a system of interactive practices and meanings, as an adaptive information-processing system, and as a historically constituted semiotic order, providing a variety of, yet complementary, conceptual resources to the analysis of culture in dynamic social situations.

Theoretical Underpinning

The paper is grounded on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), a powerful theory of communication that prefigures the active participation of media audiences in the selection, use, and interpretation of media to meet both psychological and social needs. Originally expressed in the early forties, UGT was formalized by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s as a result of studies on mass communication patterns and motivations. Katz and his colleagues suggested that media users do not receive media content passively, but actively select and consume media that they find most helpful in meeting their needs in information, companionship, identity, entertainment, or social interaction. The assumptions of UGT are that audiences are active participants, media competes with other sources of satisfaction, and to understand media use, it is necessary to analyze individual motivations and gratifications that consumers seek. These presumptions offer a sound conceptual framework through which the interaction between the Nigerian audiences and radio content can be discussed in terms of satisfying cultural identity, shared values, and collective understanding requirements, which is why it can be particularly useful to apply them to the study of the role of radio in fostering unity in a multicultural society.

The core belief of UGT is that the media users are active participants, actively choosing the media that will meet a particular need and purpose, instead of being a passive channel influenced by media messages [54]. Within the framework of the current research, the Nigerian radio listeners might be interested in the programming that appeals to their cultural identities, promotes the development of shared values, or the understanding between the ethnic groups. UGT assumes that individuals seek to satisfy cognitive needs (e.g., learning about other cultures), affective needs (e.g., belonging), and social integrative needs (e.g., communal identity), and it emphasizes that these gratifications affect the way audiences perceive and react to media content. This theoretical orientation changes the analysis of what media do and what audiences do with media, prefiguring audience agency in consumption.

The applicability of UGT to Voices of Unity is in its ability to clarify the processes and reasons behind radio listeners listening to the content that fosters shared values and cultural awareness and how this may result in long-term social solidarity. Placing the citizen audience in the centre of the media consumption process, the theory enables the researcher to explore whether radio stations can satisfy the informational, cultural, and identity needs of different listeners in Nigeria and how these needs are connected to the perceptions of unity and belonging to the community. In addition, the focus of UGT on the interactive and purposive application of media allows this study to evaluate not only the content that is being aired by radio stations, but also how audiences perceive and internalise that content in a manner that supports cultural knowledge and shared values. Thus, basing the research on UGT offers a conceptually valid and empirically testable model of the analysis of the role of radio in the formation of collective identities and the establishment of harmony in the multifaceted society of Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHOD

The paper will take a qualitative methodology in discussing how radio stations can play a role in instilling common values and cultural appreciation among the people of Nigeria. The secondary sources of data were the textbooks, journal publications, newspapers, government reports, and international news sources that offered different views on media, culture, and communication. These materials provided contextual information on the functioning of radio stations and their role in cultural integration in Nigeria. Content analysis was used to analyse the data thoroughly to determine the recurring themes, patterns, and narratives that explain the role of radio in bringing unity and understanding to the diverse population in Nigeria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of financial constraints and competition from digital media on the ability of Nigerian radio stations to produce culturally relevant programming that promotes shared values and cultural understanding

Radio stations in Nigeria form an important tool in cultivating cultural knowledge and promoting a sense of common values between the various ethnic groups that make up the nation. However, these broadcasters face significant challenges, the most significant of them being financial limitations and rivalry with digital media platforms that limit their ability to provide culturally resonant content to viewers. With the media milieu constantly changing these stations are forced to deal with the changing economic pressures and technological advances and at the same time they are struggling to maintain their cultural mandate.

Financial Limitations and Quality of Programming in the Nigerian Radio: The endemic financial constraints is a significant challenge facing radio stations in Nigeria, significantly reducing their capacity to design and maintain culturally relevant programming that fosters common values and cultural comprehension. In the deregulated broadcasting industry in Nigeria, most of the stations are dependent on limited sources of revenue. The old forms of income, particularly advertising, have been dwindling as advertisers shift funds to online platforms that offer greater accuracy in reaching and targeting audiences [55]. This loss of financial resources forces stations to focus on material that attracts commercial sponsorship, frequently to the detriment of public-service and culturally valuable programming that will not provide any direct financial benefit. Obaje and Ebunuwele note that the trend towards commercialisation in the industry is resulting in programming decisions that are driven by profit maximisation rather than the social and cultural imperative, thus undermining the ability of radio to support the establishment of shared values in a pluralistic society.

Besides, inadequate funding has a direct negative impact on the quality of production and the scope of cultural content. Nigerian television stations have the resources they need to create in-depth cultural talk shows, documentaries, folktale series or programmes in local languages- things that are important in creating cultural awareness and preserving heritage. Without sufficient budgets, stations have a hard time

attracting experienced content producers, cultural experts, and language professionals, and they are all required to develop programmes that appeal to the various ethnic groups that make up the constituency and promote mutual respect. Empirical research on campus and community radio funding supports the argument that financial instability can reduce the ability of stations to meet their social obligations, thus restricting their ability to serve as a source of communal identity, community and cultural expression [56].

The institutional support and regulatory frameworks also overlap with the financial conundrum. Despite the liberalisation of the media environment in Nigeria in terms of ownership, this has not been coupled with sound fiscal policies like grants, public subsidies or content-development funds that are set aside to support culturally based projects. This lack of structural funding mechanisms increases the already present limitations, particularly to smaller, independent, and community broadcasters who do not enjoy the commercial strength of larger metropolitan stations. Consequently, there are instances where broadcasters have been tempted to adopt programming format that mimics mainstream entertainment at the expense of culturally substantive content in a bid to survive in the harsh competition and with little support. In this regard, financial limitations not only limit the ability to operate but also shape the very nature of the broadcast content, skewing it towards market-friendly genres that can undermine the ability of the medium to foster cultural knowledge which is a key interest of this investigation.

Digital Media Competition and Audience Fragmentation: The blistering development of digital media platforms is another strong threat to the traditional radio stations in Nigeria, particularly when it comes to the creation of culturally relevant programming that fosters the development of shared values and cultural comprehension. Online streaming services, social media, podcasts, and mobile audio apps have completely changed the way people listen to audio, especially among younger audiences. The influx of digital substitutes has also triggered the fragmentation of the audience, with listeners scattering their attention on a myriad of digital platforms, thus shrinking the traditional radio audience and reducing the medium as a cultural mediator. As explained by Ajisafe and Dada, the consumption trends have been transformed by digital technologies; listeners are now more inclined to personalized and on-demand content that traditional radio schedules are poorly positioned to provide and thus the radio has lost its previous cultural unifying role [57].

The economic sustainability of radio stations is also diminished by the competition. The high-quality analytics, targeting accuracy and global reach offered by digital media have made advertisers shift a significant portion of advertising budgets off of traditional radio. This migration not only reduces the sources of revenue that can be earned by the broadcasters, but also exacerbates the financial limitations mentioned earlier, limiting the ability to invest in culturally enriched programming that can bring small commercial payoffs.

Radio broadcasters are facing increasing pressure to be technologically and imaginatively adaptable as the digital milieu continues to grow. However, many Nigerian stations are not well-prepared to invest in the digitalization, be it in simulcasting on the Internet, creating podcasts of cultural programs, or communicating with audiences through social media, which might otherwise increase cultural presence in the modern era. Competition in digital media also fosters homogenization of content, with radio stations trying to maintain their listeners by aping popular digital genres instead of anticipating locally relevant and culturally specific programming. Although in theory digital media can promote diversity in culture, in many cases, Nigerian traditional broadcasters are in a disadvantaged position compared to digital content creators who provide more production value, increased interactivity, and customized formats. When radio does not innovate, listeners can present it as a relic or outdated and thus, further undermine its effectiveness in fostering collective cultural values among the divergent demographic groups. Therefore, the problem is not only about competition but also about relevance and innovation: the broadcasters have to realign their strategies to incorporate digital distribution channels and at the same time maintain a promise to culturally-based programming that appeals on the national mosaic.

To conclude, the interplay of financial limitations and the digital threat hinders the ability of Nigerian radio stations to produce culturally relevant content that strengthens the values and builds cultural awareness. To counter these constraints, it is important to implement effective funding systems, strong digital strategies, and innovative content models that balance economic sustainability and cultural custodianship- a necessity that forms the basis of the rationale behind this research.

Assess the level of cultural representation and inclusivity in Nigerian radio programming, specifically evaluating how effectively radio stations incorporate indigenous languages and minority cultural voices to foster unity and mutual understanding.

The media system in Nigeria, through radio as its hub, cannot be done away with in the development of cohesion and the development of mutual understanding among its myriad ethnic and cultural constituencies. Having over five hundred indigenous languages spoken in the country, radio stations have a massive potential of operating as cultural representation and inclusion platforms. However, the extent to which the Nigerian broadcasters incorporate the native languages and minority cultural voices into their programming is an issue of concern. Although there are stations, such as Wazobia FM and Orisun FM, which are actively involved in using Pidgin, Yoruba, and Hausa to create content that is easy to follow and easy to relate with by large audiences, it is clear that many other stations are finding it difficult to offer representation to the minority cultures.

Community radio stations especially those located in rural areas have always shown a great desire to promote the local culture through airing of local languages and presenting local cultures. However, commercial interests drive mainstream stations to systematically give priority to languages and content that would attract broader and

more lucrative markets, thus marginalizing the voices of the minority. This programming difference does not only limit the range of content that can be shown to the Nigerian viewers, but it also hinders the ability of the country to build a deeper intercultural discourse. The main difficulty, therefore, is quantifying the effectiveness of radio stations in their mandate of promoting shared values, understanding, and social cohesion by the inclusive representation of cultural diversity.

The representation of indigenous language in the Nigerian radio broadcasting takes a very specific niche in the national media landscape, which can be explained in large part by the fact that the country is a place where the cultural and linguistic plurality is unprecedented. Nigeria has more than five hundred indigenous languages that are spread across its federating units, which not only welcomes but also makes it difficult to mediate through media to capture and incorporate this pluralism (Obasi, 2024). The availability of indigenous languages in the airwaves is a crucial indicator of cultural inclusivity and identity confirmation since the choice of language directly influences the audience perception, cultural continuity, and communicative effectiveness. The recent research supports the idea that the use of indigenous languages in programming is positively associated with the involvement of the audience, cultural relevance, and the spread of common values [58]. The example of local languages usage in stations like Amuludun FM and Orisun FM proves that the increased listenership and loyalty are achieved when the local language is used in the station, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where the local language is the part of everyday life and cultural identity [59]. These results highlight the idea that stations that focus on indigenous languages have a deeper cultural foundation of their content hence promote mutual comprehension between groups sharing the same linguistic background.

However, the level of representation of indigenous languages is not even and is often influenced by commercial, policy, and institutional pressures. The reviews of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) stations in some areas show that native languages have little airtime compared to English or Pidgin [60]. This imbalance is usually explained by the lack of regulatory support, commercial incentives in favour of broad-market languages, and the general distrust of local speech by some media practitioners [61]. This imbalance is further solidified by the lack of a strong policy requirement that the inclusion of indigenous languages should be included in the curriculum, which means that many language communities, especially minority language groups, will be overrepresented on mainstream platforms. This marginalisation does not only erode the potential of radio as a unifying medium, but also increases the chances of isolating large groups of the Nigerian population, particularly in areas where local languages have ancestral, social and cultural values.

The academic literature also shows that specialised radio programming in indigenous languages leads to cultural preservation and strengthens communal ties. Hausa, Tiv, Igbo, and Yoruba programs have been effective in maintaining cultural norms since they spread traditional knowledge, ethics, and social mores in a way that appeals to native listeners [62], [63]. As an example, agricultural programming in Hausa

and Tiv has enhanced access to relevant information by rural communities, allowing farmers to embrace innovations and at the same time strengthening cultural identity by language-based interaction [64], [65]. This kind of linguistic anchoring does not only promote knowledge transfer, it also creates a sense of pride and belongingness, and thus strengthens cultural cohesion between generations. However, studies have shown that, unless these indigenous language programmes receive long term financial support, policy approval and institutional priority, they are likely to remain marginal and not mainstream in the broadcasting programs, which will compromise their ability to create a significant impact on the national cohesion and cultural awareness. Combined, the evidence suggests a reality in which indigenous languages are represented on Nigerian radio, but the extent of such representation is often limited by structural and commercial constraints that limit the potential of the medium as a unifying and inclusive power [66], [67].

Minority cultural voices inclusivity is another critical aspect of the role of radio in enhancing unity and understanding. Inclusive representation is not limited to linguistic plurality but it also includes the presentation of less dominant cultural narratives, artistic expressions, and community stories that all constitute the cultural mosaic of Nigeria. Although the ethnic diversity in Nigeria is rich, the minority cultures are still not well represented in the mainstream radio playlists. The literature on broadcast language policy highlights the lack of formal, binding rules that regulate the use of language, which leads to ad hoc and informal practices that differ significantly across stations [68], [69]. In the case of broadcasters like Bond FM and the Voice of Nigeria, implicit multilingual policies depict efforts to integrate linguistic diversity into programming, but these policies are disjointed and not systematic in nature and are indicative of institutional ambivalence to inclusive cultural programming [70], [71]. The resulting quiltwork of language policies can unwillingly favor major languages and dominant cultural discourses at the expense of minority voices being pushed to peripheral incidents, instead of sustained interaction.

Empirical research indicates that a greater representation of minorities inclusively tends to produce increased audience attachment and cultural unity. As an example, the studies of the local language broadcasting show that listeners value native dialects as they increase the understanding, reduce the feeling of alienation, and express respect to the heritage [72], [73]. This dynamic is particularly effective in multicultural states, where minority groups feel excluded by the national media discourse. The airing of indigenous music, oral histories, and cultural storytelling, which are often part of the minority cultures, is entertaining and implicitly recognizes the value and presence of culture, thus forming the basis of mutual understanding and social solidarity. Stations actively involved in including the voices of minorities can be used to combat the discourse of cultural superiority and provide a platform of pluralistic discourse. Still, the level of such inclusion is not even, and it is usually dependent on the personal missions of the stations, regional population, and viewer needs instead of the national needs.

More importantly, researchers believe that institutional and policy changes are necessary to promote cultural inclusivity, where radio could be more than a tool of dominant language groups [74], [75]. The current Nigerian Broadcasting Code and National Language Policy do not have effective enforcement strategies to enforce fair representation of linguistic and cultural minorities [76], [77], [78]. Without these structures, stations can tend to revert to a programming that maximises audience share and advertising revenue, often at the cost of the visibility of minority culture.

In addition, the lack of resources, lack of training in the production of indigenous content, and the ineffective community feedback system also limit the ability of stations to reflect the minority cultures [79], [80]. In this respect, the effectiveness of radio in enhancing a sense of unity by minority representation depends on the deliberate programme planning and the institutional support in the form of strategic planning that places cultural diversity at the forefront. In general, the literature suggests that despite the significant achievements of Nigerian radio in terms of including indigenous languages and voices of the culture, there are still considerable gaps on the way to the full cultural inclusiveness that will actively facilitate unity and mutual understanding among all the layers of the society.

Regulatory and structural challenges faced by community radio stations in Nigeria, and how these challenges affect their role in facilitating intercultural dialogue and promoting national cohesion

Community radio stations in Nigeria are vital platforms for promoting intercultural dialogue and fostering national cohesion by giving voice to diverse communities. However, they face significant regulatory and structural challenges that hinder their effectiveness. Issues such as restrictive licensing regulations, high operating costs, and political interference limit their ability to produce inclusive and culturally relevant content. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient funding compound these challenges, restricting the stations' capacity to reach and engage broad audiences. These obstacles undermine the potential of community radio stations to serve as unifying forces, limiting their role in bridging cultural divides and fostering mutual understanding within the nation [81], [82].

Regulatory Barriers and Legal Framework Limitations: The community radio stations in Nigeria are meant to be an important medium of grassroots interaction, intercultural interaction and inclusive communication that could enhance the national unity. There are however, serious regulatory hurdles and legal framework restrictions that cripple these stations in their effort to achieve this objective. Although community broadcasting has become a recognized level of media across the world, which is necessary to express the locality and participatory growth, Nigeria has not been able to adopt the model comprehensively. The nation is still among the few in Africa that has not yet operationalised the community radio as a third level of broadcasting, even though the country has a huge diversity of cultures and community radio has the enormous potential to promote intercultural understanding [83], [84], [85]. The present regulatory landscape has been characterized as a fuzzy one, where legal frameworks are not clear and

consistent and do not provide clear avenues of licensing, frequency assignment, and sustainable operation of community stations [86]. Such loopholes have discouraged the formation and sustenance of community radio stations by the community groups, which would otherwise be a platform of inclusion of the local communities and cultural exchange.

One of the regulatory issues is the structure of the licensing fees and compliance with the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) which is the regulatory authority of broadcasting in Nigeria. Studies of the broadcast policy in Nigeria reveal that community broadcasters are usually charged discriminatory and prohibitive fees that pose significant financial constraints to marginalized communities and non-profit making organisations. The cost of licensing and renewing is so high that it is almost impossible to get legal radio operations in community initiatives especially in rural or under-funded regions. As an illustration, in rural regions like Yobe and Borno where community radio may be of essential help to remote communities, such financial limitations prevent the development of locally relevant content. By contrast, waivers or greatly subsidised charges are available in many countries to community broadcasters, as they are considered to be non-profit, socially useful. The inability of Nigeria to implement such provisions has led to the decline in the number of legally established community radio stations, which restricts the possibility of establishing intercultural dialogue and encouraging the local cultural knowledge. Lack of affordable and transparent licensing channels to community radio stations also contributes to the underrepresentation of local communities and minority cultures, as they have fewer avenues to access mass communication media.

The assignment of broadcast spectrum has also been a problem in addition to the cost of licensing. The frequency allocation procedures in Nigeria have been described as being opaque and slow, and the community broadcasters have often been unable to get the frequencies needed to operate. This issue is especially critical in a country that has more than 250 ethnic groups and linguistic diversity where the number of people who need broadcast frequencies is much higher than the supply. The systems of regulations that exist are biased towards commercial broadcasters at the expense of community broadcasters, which further limits the accessibility of frequencies to community radio projects. This creates a regulatory bottleneck which not only makes it impossible to start community radio stations but also makes it impossible to expand them, restricting their capacity to add to local cultural discourse and intercultural interaction. This inefficiency has meant that many community radio stations are either informal or incapable of operating to their full capacity as was experienced in the case of Radio Kwara, a community radio station that had to contend with considerable delays in frequency allocation. Such regulatory barriers compromise the larger social mission of community radio, which is to provide a convenient platform of local stories, community interaction, and cultural exchange. In this regard, the legal framework that supports the recognition of community radio as an important and legitimate part of the broadcast policy in Nigeria is urgently needed. Such a model must incorporate open licensing procedures, low

charges and special attention to community media that will help in the sustainability of such stations and their contribution to national unity by intercultural communication.

Structural Challenges: Infrastructure, Funding, and Political Influence: Besides the regulatory barriers mentioned, there are also important structural issues in the community radio stations in Nigeria that have a critical impact on the capacity of the radio stations to promote intercultural dialogue and national cohesion. Such issues as infrastructural shortcomings, lack of funding and political interference are major challenges that affect the operational sustainability and social impact of community radio especially in addressing local and cultural matters.

The lack of adequate technical and infrastructural resources is one of the most urgent structural problems. Radio stations in the community need contemporary and stable equipment like transmission systems, studio facilities and technical skills to come up with content that appeals to their listeners. Nevertheless, a large number of stations, especially in rural and underserved regions, face significant challenges because of the obsolete or inadequate infrastructure, which significantly restricts the scope of their broadcast and the quality of their content. An example of this is Radio Bayelsa, a community radio station operating within the Niger Delta region; this radio has been faced with poor transmission equipment and poor studio facilities which have contributed to frequent interruptions in broadcasts. This is especially deplorable in the remote regions where the price of obtaining basic equipment is prohibitively high to the local broadcasters. The absence of the right infrastructure suffocates the potential of these stations to be used as forums of intercultural dialogue hence reducing their contribution to facilitating cultural exchange, local storytelling, and stimulating the value of shared values. This, in turn, causes uneven coverage of broadcasting, which restricts the level of audience participation, thus impairing the ability of the station to play a significant role in intercultural cognition and national unity.

Very closely related to these infrastructural challenges is the ongoing problem of insufficient funding. Although the regulations are mainly centered on licensing and standard of operations, the community radio stations in Nigeria are usually seriously underfunded. Most of the stations do not have any major sources of revenue and the absence of funds makes it hard to have regular programming or create programs that can be used to cover the cultural diversity. Radio Kogi, another community radio in central Nigeria is a radio station that has little financial aid and relies on the occasional donations and sponsorships. This is further aggravated by the fact that the community radio stations are non-profit making and thus cannot depend on advertising income as commercial broadcasters. The studies have pointed out funding as a major obstacle to the creation of culturally relevant programming because stations are not able to keep professional staff and create high-quality programming that can attract a diverse audience. The shortage of funding often results in excessive dependence on volunteer work or underqualified staff, which further reduces the professionalism and cultural richness of their work. This is highly detrimental to the capacity of community radio to

plan and present programming that is actually representative of the rich cultural tapestry of Nigeria, creating holes in intercultural communication and preventing national unity.

Political interference is another major structural challenge. Although community radio is meant to be responsive to the needs of the local communities and encourage the people to be involved, it is usually prone to political influence that may compromise its editorial autonomy and local autonomy. As an example, Radio Lagos experienced political interference through appointing managers based on political affiliations and this raised the issue of biased programming and low trust among the populace. Funding flows, frequency allocations and regulatory approvals may also be politicised, resulting in selective representation of some cultural voices and marginalisation of others. An example is Radio Benue which has been accused of avoiding critical matters that impact local communities because of the political affiliations of the management and they avoid issues that are sensitive like ethnic conflict or local governance issues. This political intrusion undermines the role of the station as an objective communicator to its audience and restricts its capacity to promote the inclusive and transparent intercultural dialogue that is the key to national unity. Moreover, the stations can be afraid of reprisals or regulatory penalties and, therefore, limit their ability to act as intermediaries of local conflicts or cultural conflicts.

Overall, the complexities of infrastructural inadequacies, lack of funds, and political interference put community radio stations in Nigeria in a situation where they cannot be sustained and play their social responsibility. Such problems greatly limit their capacity to serve as inclusive spaces of cultural expression, social inclusion, and national cohesion. To solve these structural problems, the reforms in the community radio need to be thoroughly implemented so that the community radio could become a means of intercultural understanding and cohesion and offer the resources and regulatory framework needed to achieve its potential.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: The study reveals that community radio stations in Nigeria face significant regulatory and structural barriers, such as high licensing costs, lack of transparency in frequency allocation, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, and political interference, which limit their ability to foster intercultural dialogue and promote national unity. **Implication:** These barriers hinder the potential of community radio to engage audiences in meaningful cultural discourse, thus limiting the stations' role in promoting cultural inclusivity and social cohesion. The findings suggest that without comprehensive reforms, these stations cannot fulfill their purpose. **Limitation:** The research acknowledges that the lack of resources and political influence undermines editorial independence and restricts the stations' ability to address sensitive cultural issues, limiting their effectiveness in fostering mutual understanding. **Future Research:** Further research should focus on assessing the impact of specific policy reforms, such as inclusive licensing, financial incentives, and infrastructure improvements, on enhancing the role of community radio in promoting national cohesion and cultural understanding.

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