

The Impact of Local Radio on the Canadian Community

Radio Centre-Ville Montréal

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Abstract:

Local Radio is one of the most important and prevalent means of communication in various societies; however, it has not received the level of attention as modern technology such as television, the internet, and electronic media. Thus, the present paper aims to study Canadian local radio to highlight its various functions and the effective role it plays in the public life of the Canadian citizens as well as its influence on the target social environment and the challenges it encounters.

Keywords:Local Media; Communication; Radio.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Local Media, since its emergence and until today, has gained a leading role in shaping public life and directing communities toward critical issues as it has an undeniable power in the development of the global community. This power enables the community to reshape the way of thinking, as well as the collective thought and awareness towards previously planned matters by the communicator or the content producer whether this is via television, radio, newspapers, or any other social media channels that are now prevalent as leading information management tools. Despite this, traditional media channels remain a more credible source for the audience. The present paper explores one of the means of audio communication, which is the local radio that promotes citizens' participation and defends their interests.

The historical philosophy of local radio is to allow the voiceless to express their opinions. Local radio improves society in a way that enables its citizens to know one another, become closer, and make their voices heard by the authorities. It is worth noting that local radio does not only aim to mobilize the community but also to offer it an opportunity to do something for its own benefit.

The present study sheds light on local media in Canada, specifically local radio, to discover its various roles, functions, and impact on the public life of Canadians and to figure out how effective the radio is in fulfilling the various roles through free media and community engagement in this broadcast output. Accordingly, the study addresses the following question:

How does local radio affect the Canadian community?

To answer and explore the various aspects of this question, the study addresses the following questions:

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What are the functions of Local Media in Canada?

What are the aspects of the influence of local media in Canada?

What are the challenges that local Media encounters in the Canadian community?

2. What is Radio?

There are various definitions for the term “Radio” offered by many authors. These definitions are related to various fields and sciences; however, the present paper focuses on the definition from the perspective of journalism and its primary concept. According to this perspective, radio is “an indispensable tool that allows direct communication with the audience in their language to communicate with them in a better way, raise their awareness to facilitate taking decisions while considering the limits and obstacles that hinder the local development. It raises the awareness of the people regarding the social and cultural challenges that prevent them from achieving development (Riboreau, 2002).

According to Flaconia et Francois Xavier, the word radio refers to radio communication, radio broadcasting, radio call, or shortwave radio. The following are the four most common meanings of the word “radio”:

- 1- A set of operations and technologies that enable the immediate and wireless transmission of sound, images, or voices over considerable distances. This involves analyzing, encoding, and converting the original content into waves that can be received by an audience.
- 2- Reception of any radio programs.
- 3- All activities related to the production or distribution of radio programs.

4- The activities that emerge from radio broadcasting technology and are presented by media personnel in full (Falkoni & François-Xavier, 2009).

Another author explains this concept by attaching a new and specific feature, which is:

2.1. Local Media

Local media is “an independent non-profit communication organization supported and run by individuals from a specific community. It is a communication tool that aims to provide high-quality programs to meet the informational, cultural, educational, developmental, and entertainment needs of the community or organization it belongs to” (Colin & Estrada S, 2001).

The privacy feature of local radio lies in the exclusive presence of a program that has local or regional importance and has been produced by its own means. Local radio broadcasting refers to a type of broadcasting that focuses on providing local services and entertainment, often with an educational, cultural, or news and information focus. Moreover, it continues to perform the mission of activating and informing a community that has certain cultural and geographical standards (JurisPedia, 2014).

The Canadian local media is “a private community broadcast directed to a certain region, aiming to address all the community members as it promotes citizens participation, defends their interests, meets the needs of different tastes, and boosts moods. It also provides authentic information and helps solve many daily problems by discussing all ideas in its programs where all points of view are respected, cultural diversity is encouraged, and no dictatorship is tolerated.

Historically, radio is considered the philosophy that enables whoever is voiceless to express their opinion and be speakers. In general, radio is a development tool that has three main aspects. First, it is a non-profit

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activity. Second, it is owned by society. Third, it provides community engagement. It is a station owned and run by a non-profit organization that provides a chance in the first place for the communities it serves to join and participate in the management of its programs. It relies on community engagement and offers myriad training opportunities for volunteers”(Blondin, 2024).

The impact is “what is produced according to a certain practice by a specific person and authority”(Thaddée, 2008-2009). According to the French Encyclopedia of Media Terms and Vocabulary, La rousse, impact is the influence and reaction of something such as the influence any advertisement(LAROUSSE, n.d.).Based on this, impact means changing the behavior of the target audience by conveying a certain message. This is the difference that the organization makes through the procedures it conducts that have long or short-term influence either positive or negative, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally(Fortin, 2018).

The Canadian Community is a mixture of native Indigenous people that includes native Americans, Eskimos, Inuit, and Métis. The Canadians are those who come from the First Migrants arrived in Canada after the discovery of North America continent most of whom were British, Irish, French, and the rest came from countries of Western Europe. The rest of the citizens are migrants from diverse origins all over the world, and their official languages are English and French reflecting the Anglo-Saxon and Francophone blend. As such, the Canadian community is a blend of these two sources, along with culture and heritage of Indigenous people, and the newly immigrants who are allowed to retain their cultural identity, heritage, and language according to the law(Embassy of the State of Qatar, n.d.).

3. Radio Centre-Ville Montreal, Canada

Local radio is a specific sector of communication besides the public and commercial broadcast. This sector is present all over the world and its

importance is well known to the local population, despite the difference in the challenges encountered. In fact, tracing back the history of this sector reveals its complexity and the mysterious paths it sometimes takes. This can be achieved by linking the local aspect that is exemplified in Radio Centre-Ville Montreal and the international aspect that springs from the accumulation of many local experiences.

Radio Centre-Ville Montreal started as an initiative by a group of French, English, Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish activists as one of the social movements in the seventies in Quebec. The original name was CINQ FM to refer to the five languages introduced to people. Later, Creole and Chinese were added for the linguistic representation of the multi-cultural Montreal. The professionals in Radio Centre-Ville Montreal have expressed their desire to work together to reach out to the communities they serve. This is one of the principal features of the local radio stations in Québec and all over the world. This is like what took place in the 50s in Bolivia when the Bolivian mine workers launched the first public local radio in Latin-America. Despite its unique local essence, Radio Centre-Ville is part of the local radio movement on a global level.

After 30 years of its emergence, Radio Centre-Ville has become, over the years, a well-established institution that does not depend on either its founders or certain people. Instead, it depends on the support given by its members. Its mission lies in giving a voice to those who cannot express their opinions through the public and private traditional media outlets. In addition to its communication project that depends on applying objectivity and accepting any differences presented in any of the seven languages. The sustainability of the radio is closely related to the interest that people show as individuals or various group members of the local community; the English and French speakers, as well as the linguistic communities the station serves. This interest is exemplified in the voluntary participation in the production of programs and radio management that has been in place since 1975 (Solervicens & Marcello, 2006).

3.1. Radio Centre-Ville Programming

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According to the license terms of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the official language of Radio Centre-Ville is French, however, the programs broadcasted are in seven languages: French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Chinese (Mandarin), Cantonese and Creole. More specifically:

- The programs broadcasted in French reach 60% of the live streaming or 79 hours of the weekly streaming (6 am-12 am, or 126 hours); target audience: Québec Residents.
- English, 17.5 hours of the weekly streaming.
- Spanish, 12.5 hours per week, target audience: Latin America and Spain.
- Portuguese, 13 hours per week, target audience: Portuguese, and Brazilians.
- Greek, 12.5 hours per week.
- Creole, 12 hours per week.
- Chinese, 5 hours per week.

The programs are based on self-management principles. The seven teams are independent and can manage their time and their programs. Each team has its own way, and the manager sets everything including the programs committee. All the seven teams respect the declaration of the principles and the information policy of Radio Centre-Ville.

The annual program consists of two terms: Fall and winter, as well as spring and summer. Each term, the programs' committees affiliated to the seven branches of languages, receive program projects that have experimental part and evaluate them. When the programs are selected, they are submitted to the station's board of directors to approve the committee's resolutions or amend them if required. Finally, the programs of Radio Centre-Ville reflect the content required by CRTC. They include:

- News (information about the current regional, national, and international events) and all other speeches. The station is not obliged to abide by any broadcast shares after changing the local

radio policy by CRTC in the year 2000. However, the radio is considered a talk radio.

- Public music: which refers to folk and Rock music, dance, national music, world music, folklore, all over the globe and sometimes classical music. Up till the year 2022, Radio Centre-Ville was still a platform for emerging artists and music genres that have often been ignored in other FM stations (commercial or public), such as hip-hop, experimental jazz, and electronic music.

Radio Centre-Ville programs respect:

- The principles of sex-role portrayal stipulated in the Canadian Association of Private Broadcasters (CAB) Equitable Portrayal Code of *Radio and Television Enforcement Law*.
- Provisions of the Broadcast Code for Advertising to children published by (ACR).
- Public Notice CRTC 1992-59 under the title of Implementing the policy on Employment Equity.

3.2. Radio Centre-Ville Administration

Radio Centre-Ville is a non-profit organization that is democratically run by its diverse volunteer members from the various communities that are presented on air. The Radio General Assembly is held annually, and it elects a new board of directors to conduct its recommendations. CA is the only authorized body to appoint employees to help achieve the required tasks. The General Administration is part of the board of directors which is part of the General Assembly. The board of directors includes a chairperson, a treasurer, a secretary, and four managers. During the term of the council, it runs three committees.

As its name suggests, the “Selection and Membership” committee welcomes new members who have participated in the radio stations’ activities (either management or programs) for at least three months and have adhered to the main goals of the station.

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“Employment” committee is responsible for appointing and evaluating the employees. Also, this committee intervenes if any employee breached his/her employment contract. One of the members of this committee is responsible for the general management of the station.

Finally, the “inter-teams” committee consists of a representative from the seven language teams in the station as well as a member of the board of directors. An example of the issues discussed by this committee are the programs, private offers, and self-financing issues.

The fund of the radio station is distributed annually according to the following percentages:

- Commercial marketing accounts for 25% of the station's revenue.
- Operational subsidies represent 25% of the station's revenue. The centeraid of Greater Montreal and the Ministry of Culture and Communications in Québec provide these subsidies.
- Service contract projects represent 40% of revenue with different ministries' contributions. For instance, the Ministry of Education in Québec financially supports *the Radio Enfants program*.
- Self-financing activities represent 10% of the revenues. Examples of this type include the annual lottery and Friends of Radio Centre-Ville campaign.

According to a study by START RADIO with ECHOSONDAGE, more than 750000 people listen weekly to the station. START RADIO and ECHOSONDAGE advertise and entertain citizens who listen to such stations to understand local issues and the impacts of national and international events on their community. The station's content is 35.5% more important, and 26.3% more authentic than other multimedia outlets. Moreover, more than 57% of the participants said that it is considered the best source of information when it comes to any specific events like electricity outages, snowstorms, road closures.... etc.

The station is considered a local development drive because, every year, 6200 local organizations benefit from streaming time, a matter that

increases the revenues to reach two million dollars because of advertisements. The local radio provides local commercial offers to more than 5000 local companies, to reinvest the community's surpluses. It also provides essential services for public communications. Local media plays a critical role for democracy and citizens' security, especially in times of natural disasters and health crises. The percentage of listeners increased during COVID-19 from 10% to 15%(La Radio Communautaire, n.d.).

3.3. The Roles of Radio Centre-Ville, Montereal

- Giving access to local information: Outside urban areas, regional radio stations' signals are always weak, a matter which inequality in access to the information. As such, local radio stations can compensate for this lack of local information to boost urban life, democracy, and contribute to local development.
- Creating Community Engagement: Citizen's engagement has been an important element in radio stations of Québec from the very beginning. This sector has become more professional over the years, as more than 2000 volunteers have participated in various activities of Québec radio stations in 2018.
- Providing an Informative role: Local radio stations create an effective channel for delivering information as they inform the audience through talk shows, newscasts, flashes, and other means. Radio has become an expression of life as well as national, regional, and local policies.
- Providing an Educational and cultural role: This is achieved through educational programs in various fields such as medical, academic, and the objective social ones. These programs guarantee the development of the entire nation and affect the behavior of the audience.
- Providing Entertainment: Everyone needs a moment of relaxation after a day of challenging work. So, local radio plays this significant role through presenting various kinds of shows such as musicals and theater shows. This is why the radio presents music programs for a

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long time during the day (Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2016-224, 2016).

- Performing an Economic role: local media contributes to the economic vitality of communities, as the value of local products has increased more than ever. That is because listening to local news for an extended period of time inevitably leads to increasing the value of local products.
- Performing a political role: The status of the media in national, local and even international markets is the backbone of democracy. Local media is an important tool that provides an authentic source of information; therefore, it grants the audience an opportunity to think about current events. As such, it is the core of having a firm community, as it spreads facts and avoids rumors. Therefore, it represents a source of strength and solidarity that leads to democracy (Wikipedia, 2023).

3.4. Effect of Radio Centre-Ville on Community Development of the target audience

Community radio programs all over the world, such as Radio Centre-Ville, seek to achieve social change. This shows the power of local radio as a significant factor for social change. It includes specific targets in its programs to meet the needs of the different communities it serves.

To begin with, its programs fill the gap created by other traditional ways of communication. Local radio is a tool for developing cultural modernism as it reveals sources of cultural and social changes and addresses those who are excluded from public speech such as the poor and the marginalized groups. Furthermore, it gives space for cultural diversity, and local intellectual property (i.e. traditional products), and spreads women-oriented knowledge about prohibited issues and practices such as genital mutilation. Moreover, it encourages the community to shoulder the responsibility by raising awareness about issues related to health, poverty, education, and democracy. Thus, local radio is a tool for social

transformation as it destroys the hierarchy of power relations through offering alternatives that would establish a new social order.

Regarding its content, local radio works under the slogan of democracy and is independent from the policies applied in public radio. This paves the way for the radio to deal with community issues and find solutions. In order to keep a good balance between trends and principles of local radio, let's take a look at Radio Centre-Ville's mission.

In 2005, Radio Centre-Ville's mission become related to the key issues in Québec and the communities the radio reaches out to. A distinctive feature about Radio Centre-Ville is that it has seven languages to achieve:

- Harmonious integration of immigrants and members of cultural communities in Québec.
- Openness of the host community to the diversity of dialects, and other facts. Radio Centre-Ville won multiple awards, including two awards for cultural communities given by Québec government, to highlight the station's contribution to the harmonious integration of the French-speaking host community and ethnic groups it serves throughout broadcasting programs in their languages.
- Integration of the poor and those who suffer from discrimination.
- Development of citizenship, public and community movement, as well as global solidarity.
- Citizen's participation, to enhance the quality of life and engage the served communities (patrimoine, n.d.).

4. Challenges encountered by Local Media

Nowadays, economic globalization leads to the internationalization of all economic processes (commercial, financial, and productivity) and creates space for economic activities that are not controlled by national countries. In the last decades, globalization took a neoliberal turn. This leads to the concentration of ownership in the hands of a handful of global conglomerates that control not only media institutions but also media content propagated all over the world. These conglomerates have real

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power that exceeds governments' powers in some cases. In the United States, the most powerful five conglomerates dominate most of radio and TV networks. In other countries, deregulation and dismantling of state monopolies lead to private media monopolies. Even in Nordic countries, the right of media sources diversity is at stake.

Moreover, globalization and communication revolution are also reflected in the emergence of a local media sector in every country in the world. The emergence of local radio devices redraws the global communication picture, while new information and communication technologies development boost communication democracy through personalizing the tools and granting access to them. At the same time, interaction between more diverse interlocutors became possible and easier thanks to modern technologies.

In the context of economic globalization, local radio stations meet the needs of local communities to enhance local awareness (information and culture), and to build an arsenal that confronts cultural homogenization that big media conglomerates prefer. This arsenal acts as a defense tool for preserving cultural diversity. Nonetheless, the application and respect of the right to communicate, to access information, and to be able to listen to others is restricted because it is related to accessing modern technologies dominated by these major powers (conglomerates). Thus, building a real democratic "information community" relies on recognizing the right to communicate as a fundamental human right. This right should not be left to the media to defend it as Mass Media works according to the market rules only.

For more than 20 years, the emergence and promotion of local radio stations and local media on a wider scale, all over the world, have contributed to forming the broadlines of the important aspects of a new communication sector to counteract media content homogenization in the field of media and culture. Local radio stations create alternative communication practices that ensure citizens' right to

communicate, guarantee access to information and express their own points of view as a fundamental human right.

Local Centre-Ville Radio stations participate in creating enabling conditions for the development of civil society (citizens groups, non-governmental organizations, and public groups), and encouraging citizen monitoring of political authorities, and social participation. These radio stations help in shaping local communities as active factors for their own development and they make it possible to share diverse information. It is now clear that local media is the main supporter of global social movements as it shows their reality and highlights their significant role in building and developing citizens at all levels.

Sustainability and effectiveness of local radio stations, on both local and global levels, are key points for the establishment of local radio stations in the communities they serve.

To guarantee media sector development, it is necessary to enhance on-air media content through promoting radio files that tackle issues related to women, immigrants, radio role at times of conflict, cultural diversity, economic issues, fair trade experiences and other issues that are of interest to the target communities. This is considered one of the main challenges of local radio all over the world. Consequently, it is vital to encourage radio stations all over the globe to exchange experience (twinning, campaigns, music exchange, broadcasting, producers). Furthermore, continuous training on radiotechnologies programs and radio stations management should be encouraged and calls advocating human rights issues should be supported.

It is worth mentioning that the Radio Centre-Ville experience is one of its kind as it represents the community of the producers who established it and facilitates the connection with the linguistic communities it serves. In doing so, the station also participates in the broader movement of local media, which is a global movement that shares with the station the same aims to enhance residents' life quality and to democratize communications and civil development (Falkoni & François-Xavier, 2009).

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5. Impacts of Downsizing Role of Local Media

Downsizing local media role has a direct impact on citizens participation that contributes to political vitality of the environment. In fact, having access to local information increases participation in the elections and brings more voters. The more people are aware of what happens around them and the community issues, the more they feel challenged, and they tend to express their opinions in all fields of life.

On the other hand, local media participates in building the local identity, helps in forming social cohesion, and provides a public space to exchange ideas through local initiatives. It opens discussions, reminds the audience of the important moments and figures of local history. Moreover, it uses references related to this local area to set the standards of the community's cultural identity. As a result, local media stands as a witness to the history that is made by local journalists and kept in local historical communities' archives. As such, local media produces content that is in favor of public benefit in a lawful way. Therefore, it is vital to support local media collectively and ensure its sustainability(Wikipedia, 2023).

6. Conclusion

Despite the various roles and functions of local media, it has never violated its roles specified by media and communication standards. Regardless of the nature of work and execution method in different media establishments both classic and modern, it finds its way to grow and develop its community. Local radio in Montreal, Canada is considered one of the oldest and most reputable local radio stations in Québec and this is what contributes to its stability and effectiveness in the social participation and in producing its programs. This is one of distinctive features that makes it a true embodiment of the true meaning of the expression “from you and to you”.

A speech that is delivered at the same cultural level, social class, and language is a call that reaches the heart before the ears. This is why Radio Centre-Ville contributed to pushing the community forward towards the development of every field, not only as a local news reporter. It managed to achieve many vital and valuable tasks through the services it offers to the community up till today.

Just like many media channels, local radio stations in Montreal faces challenges in management because of fragile democratic structures, issues related to the board of directors, weakness in assigning specific roles such as defining tasks and policies, as well as authority management. Experience shows that democratic management is a complex and risky practice.

To counter the challenges, Radio Centre-Ville adopts modern technologies, rearranges its strategies, looks for solutions to make the station more efficient socially and economically. However, the changes may lead to deviations in the application of the adopted principles. The complexity and rapid evolution of the media, demographic, and economic environments necessitate new skills and the ability to make quick and informed decisions. Local radio stations are facing challenges, and therefore, strengthening their management will enhance its survival, continuity, and success.

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