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Understanding Creativity and Wellbeing in Migrant Communities by Examining the Role of Community Language Radio in Australia

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Introduction

Community language radio occupies an important place in Australia's multicultural landscape. Members of many language communities arriving in Australia have been denied important opportunities in their home countries including outlets for self-representation and public creativity in their languages. Within Australia, radio provides an accessible means of creative expression, provides vital social connection for community members of all ages and generations, and supports social cohesion on a wider scale. This research explores how community language radio in Australia can play a critical role in supporting the wellbeing of both individuals and communities by providing an accessible and adaptable outlet for creative expression.

Methodology

This case study examines the practices of presenters from Australia's largest community language radio station, 3ZZZ, which reports broadcasting in around 70 languages weekly. In particular, the research questions asked, What are the programming practices and motivations of different language groups in ethnic community radio?; How does creativity feature in the practices of different language groups in ethnic community radio?; and How do these creative practices enhance individual and community wellbeing? A sample of 16 presenters from the station completed an online, mixed-methods survey. Thematic analyses were performed to identify patterns within the qualitative data and SPSS was used to explore the quantitative data.

Findings

For the 3ZZZ radio presenters, the three elements of language, culture, and community are central to their radio program involvement as well as the program's impact on themselves, their listening audience, and their community. Indeed, it is hard to treat these themes separately given 3ZZZ is an ethnic community radio station that provides a platform for media representation for both presenters and listeners to connect to their culture, their language and their identity.

Participants' responses drew attention to acts of everyday ('little c') creativity. Thus, creativity in community language broadcasting is not simply referring to a trait a person might have, or the end products produced as new or innovative; rather, it refers to the process. Creativity in ethnic broadcasting emphasizes how the content is produced and intertwines with the fact that these radio presenters feel empowered from the level of autonomy they have in decision making.

In examining the findings concerning wellbeing, it was apparent that being involved in ethnic community broadcasting gives presenters a sense of meaning, vitality, belonging and agency. Moreover, their involvement does not only promote personal wellbeing; in addition, the presenters act as conduits, helping to promote the wellbeing of others and their communities. The presenters' focus on creating a community platform with their programming provides a way for listeners to connect, stay informed (of current affairs and local events), and actively participate in their communities. At the same time, the language programs are creating the opportunity for listeners to connect to their language, culture and heritage. This helps create a sense of belonging for those living in the community.

Discussion

There is a nice synergy in the fact that radio participation facilitates both the presenters' wellbeing and has benefits for and within the community. In this way, the benefits are not uni-directional. Indeed, it is thus clear to see how relatedness bolsters social capital, which, in turn, bolsters wellbeing. These findings are in line with Ruud's (2017) theoretical framework of music as a 'cultural immunogen'. Thus, we argue that, like music, ethnic community radio functions as a cultural immunogen.

Strengths and Limitations

While a case station was chosen for the present research, a larger sample size across multiple community radio stations around Australia would enable a broader examination of trends, particularly given the differences in concentration of community languages between states. This would also facilitate a focus on new and emerging community languages, which were not represented in this case study.

Additionally, while the findings indicate that these presenters' practices are largely driven by considerations of their communities, and that the presenters are able to influence the wellbeing of their listeners and broader communities, it is important that future research delves more closely into listeners' perspectives. For instance, further research could examine how the interaction between presenters and listeners (such as during talkback segments) enables listeners to feel a part of the creative process, and enhances their sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy—thereby promoting their wellbeing.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, we aimed to explore the programming practices of different language groups in order to consider how the medium of ethnic community radio might provide a platform for creative practice and, thus, influence wellbeing. The findings highlight how the community broadcasting context allows for autonomy, relatedness and competence; how the process of preparing and presenting community language radio programming is creative in nature; and suggest that the practices lead to wellbeing benefits not only for the presenters but also for the listeners and their communities. Importantly, these findings indicate that the ethnic community broadcasting sector appears on many levels to be a mechanism for enhancing the wellbeing of migrants.

Moreover, the results add to our understanding of creativity when considering ordinary individuals' everyday psychological experiences and behaviours. One interesting avenue for future research is to consider an emerging stream of creativity research that focuses on innovative work around solving problems that communities and societies face (Amabile, 2017, p. 336). It may indeed be fruitful to examine the types of problem-solving practices that are utilised by community language groups when broadcasting during community events and emergencies (e.g., health pandemics, bushfires, floods), and to frame this through the lens of creativity.

References

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