Peridar Kaala Vaanoli: Social Utility & Linkage with Cuddalore Community

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ABSTRACT

The Tamilnadu Floods, 2015 devastated the district of Cuddalore, leaving the communities clueless of handling the situation. During such crisis situations, local community radio stations emerge as the primary source information for the affected communities (Hindman, D.B., et al 1999). The present study intends to focus on the contribution of the community radio station (CRS) *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* (Tamil words meaning "radio in times of extreme calamities")from the social utility perspective of the Cuddalore community post the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015. A survey method employing interview schedule technique was used to collect the data from the Cuddalore community. Data was gathered on socio-economic status of the respondents, their media usage patterns, ways and means in which the community radio helped the Cuddalore community radio is found to be serving both the manifest functions as well as latent functions. The manifest functions are more prominently served to the Cuddalore community.

Keywords: Disaster communication; community radio; local radio; Tamilnadu floods 2015;Peridar Kaala Vaanoli

Introduction

Disasters are grave events that simply disrupt the essential services and normal functioning of a community. The communication infrastructure of the disaster affected area also goes for a toss during such situations. The local media like community radio stations emerge as the primary source of information and communication and aide in restoring the communities back to normalcy (Hindman, D.B., et al 1999 a). The people of Tamilnadu witnessed one such instance with massive flooding in the end of 2015. The Tamilnadu Floods, 2015 was an aftermath of the unusual record-breaking very heavy rainfall generated from the North-East monsoon in the fag end of the year. The coastal regions of the state were hard hit due to the floods. Cuddalore is one such coastal town located in the South-Indian state of Tamilnadu and witnesses heavy rainfall in every North-East monsoon. The disaster was severe in nature. In Cuddalore alone, 6 lakh people and 90,000 houses were affected. Not only that the floods shook the nation's economy by causing a whopping loss of \$3 billion and thereby making it ranked as the eighth most expensive disaster of the year 2015. Throughout the post disaster phase of the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015 Peridar Kaala Vaanoli (Tamil words meaning

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"radio in times of extreme calamities")107.8MHz CRS stood as the saviour by disseminating crucial information to the affected lot.

Literature Review

Peridar Kaala Vaanoli CRS 107.8 MHz

The record breaking unusual rainfall from the North East monsoon in the fag end of 2015 instigated not only flooding in the southern state of Tamilnadu but also the establishment of a radio station for community emergency communication in the coastal town of Cuddalore. Cuddalore records heavy rainfall in every North-East monsoon. The community radio station was started with a view to disseminate pertinent information about relief and recovery in Cuddalore district one of the intensely affected areas of the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015. The major breakthrough of the radio was its backing from AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters) and the Community Radio Forum that led to emergency issue of license to setup the community radio from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Wireless (UNESCO Chair Protocol Committee on Community Media, 2015). The community radio was established in a very quick span of one week. The radio is stationed at the District Collector Office, Cuddalore and boasts of being recognised as India's first emergency radio station. The programs of the radio station included announcements, audio magazines, news bulletins, interviews, phone-in programs etc. Throughout the recovery phase of the floods the community radio stood as a primary source of information

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within a radius of 30 kilometres. The establishment of *Peridar Kaala Vaanolis*et the platform for using short-range community radio stations to handle disaster situations (Ramakrishnan, 2015). Since these stations play a more crucial role in fulfilling the emergency informational needs of the audience and people look up to themfor gratifying their needs (Bartlett, 1995).

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded on the uses and gratifications theory of media. Katz (1959) defines the uses and gratifications theory of media as to how people use the media for varying needs and gratify their needs. The theory sees the people as not mere passive rather very active and goal oriented, taking the lead in linking the need and choice of media. gratification and The gratifications sought from the media are not unified, they differ among different audiences. The needs and gratifications are categorized by the researchers as social utility of information, perception, personal identity, alternative companionship, release of emotions, diversion as a means of escape from issues and information (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). Based on such needs and gratifications the audience select their choice of media. The present study intends to apply the theoretical framework to the community radio station Peridar Kaala Vaanoliin an emergency situation like disasters under a social structure.

Uses and Gratifications of Media during Disasters

Disaster is a catastrophic event whose impact is undergone by the affected lot in phases. Media prepares the people with factual information about an approaching hazard and the ways and means to adopt,to mitigate their dire impacts during the preparedness phase (Seydlitz, Williams, Laska, and Triche 1990). When it comes to the response and recovery phase, the media provides reports based on the damage assessments, attempts to rescue the affected lot, bridge the needs and the needy and support the distressed to recover from the trauma. Mobility post a disaster is often restricted. At such instances, media serves the surveillance function and drives the people who witnessed the disaster to develop an increased dependency on them for anv momentous information (Hirschburg, Dillman, & Ball-Rokeach, 1986). Media is found to serve the manifest functions such as providing informational needs to the distressed due to disasters (Perez-Lugo, M. 2004).

Another usual and frequently noticed function performed by media during disasters is, providing a platform to reconnect displaced members of a social group due to a disaster (Barton, 1969). Some of the local media like local community radio stations announce messages that are related to the safety of missing individuals post a disaster. At such times, the media tends to back the displaced members of a community by connecting them with the outside world (Perez-Lugo, M. 2004 a). The media does have a linkage and a social utility function to perform during disasters (Dominick, 1996; Juric, 2006). Apart from mere transmission of information the media attempts to bind and link the members affected due to a disaster by creating strong ties, facilitating dialogue through their content. The media stands as a binding factor of the affected people and build strong communities (Cerulo and Ruane, 1998) by breaking the physical barriers. Media is even found to be filling the void due to the absence of human beings (Perez-Lugo, M. 2004 b).

The extended functions of media during a disaster are more. Media does not simply act as mediators instead it functions as an actor during such instances. It stands as a pillar of emotional support to the people disturbed due to a disaster (Graber, 1980) and facilitates social cohesion (Perez-Lugo, M. 2004 c). Social cohesion is a readiness of the members of a community coming together with a view to survive and come out of a collective crisis like disasters. The common is man is found to be highly involved in "volunteerism" during disasters with varying manifestations depending on the disasters right from the dawn of humanity (Simon et al, 2015). The normal citizens become the first responders of disasters. Thanks to the media that binds together audience on a universal scale during such crisis. The media empowers the common man and plays a key role to showcase their inherent altruistic nature.

The advantage of radio over other medium is that; they provide immediate and comprehensive reports that are flexible in terms of content, coverage and accessibility (UNESCO Chair on Community Media, 2015 a).Not only that the common man has been found involved in presenting communication during disasters in the community radio for ages (Colie, 1997).An effective disaster communication medium should be such that it withstands the onslaught of disasters and does not collapse (Simon et al, 2015 Radio is one such effective disaster a). medium communication and saves the communities from communication blackout.

Limitations of the Study

The current disaster communication research is restricted only to the recovery phase of the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015 since the establishment of the community radio itself happened only after the floods.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the research paper is to find out the social utility of the community radio station Peridar Kaala Vaanoli 107.8 MHz on the Cuddalore community. Firstly the study intends to study the demographic profile of the listeners of the community radio i.e. Cuddalore community. Secondly the radio usage pattern of the listeners is studied. Lastly the uses of the programs relayed in the radio and the gratification derived out of the programs is ascertained. Apart from the manifest functions of media, the study also takes into account the latent functions served by the community medium post a disaster such as providing emotional support and companionship all from the perspective of the victim.

Methodology

The survey method was found to be appropriate to measure the objectives slated for the study since it helps to collect the necessary information from the sample of the study using well defined concepts. The interview schedule technique was adopted for data collection from the listeners of the community radio station Peridar Kaala Vaanoli with the help of enumerators. The sampling technique adopted for the study is simple random sampling. The community radio station is located in the district collector office, Cuddalore. Respondents were residing in and around the district collector's office, Cuddalore. The areas were data was collected from the sample include Thayanguda, Semmandalam, Devanampattinam, Gundu Salai, Dhanalakshmi Nagar and Manjakuppam.

The questionnaire included closed-ended questions on the demographic profile of the listeners, their media usage profile and uses of the programmes broadcast on the community radio *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* and the gratification gained out of it. It was made sure that the respondents were living in the district when the floods hit as well as they listened to the community radio's programmes. The data collected from the respondents were entered in the software IBM-SPSS Statistics for data analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Data from a total of 203 respondents were considered for the study. The respondents were diverse in nature, belonging to varied: age groups, level of education, profession, income groups etc. The respondents were predominantly men. Out of the 203 respondents, 117 were men and 86 were women. There were representations from the respondents in different age groups ranging from teens to senior citizens. A meagre percentage of the respondents were not educated (10.34%) and the minimum level of education was primary. One third of the respondents (30.05%) were not employed anywhere and a majority of self-employed them were (35.96%). The respondents equally belonged to the low income (41.87%) and the middle income group (41.87%) with a minimum percentage falling under the below poverty line. Combined, more than half of the respondents were residing in huts, thatched roof and semi-pucca houses.

Media Usage Patterns of the Respondents (Prior to the Disaster)

The combined usage of traditional media i.e. newspaper, television and radio (67%) by the respondents is more when compared to electronic media. The respondents are found to be using multiple media platforms. The respondents listen to radio more at home (68.97%) than outdoor (28.08%). A few listen to radio both at home as well as outdoor. Radio is being accessed by the respondents more through transistor (53.96%) followed by mobile phone (39.11%). Majority of the respondents (65.52%) are found to be using the radio medium for a maximum two hours a day and the frequency of use is occasional (49.75%) for most of them.

Uses and Gratifications of the Peridar Kaala Vaanoli post the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015

Media has multiple social utility and linkage functions to play during an emergency situation like the recent Tamilnadu Floods, 2015. In order to assess the social utility and linkage functions of Peridar Kaala Vaanoli various aspects of the community radio station, the content of transmission and the utility & linkage thus gained were considered for the statistical testing using Pearson's Correlation. The uses of Peridar Kaala Vaanoli and the gratification gained by the listeners are evaluated using the scores and level of significance generated by performing Pearson's The null and Correlation. the alternated hypotheses are framed according to the factors taken into consideration for the statistical test and

based on the correlation scores they are accepted or rejected. Table 1 displays *Pearson's Correlation* Score "r" with the level of significance " α " value.

The greatest advantage of radio in comparison with other medium is that it is a low cost medium accessible across all societal groups. One just (see Table 1). The evidence from the scores suggests the existence of a significant correlation between affordability and community linkage. A disaster communication medium has to be such that it accessible by all sections of the society and more particularly by the weaker lot.

Variables	Variables	r value	α (2-Tailed)		
Accessibility	Informational Needs	0.539**	0.000		
Community Linkage	Accessibility	0.480**	0.000		
Interactivity	Liberation	0.289**	0.000		
Liberation	Disaster Education	0.339**	0.000		
Health Communication	Liberation	0.340**	0.000		
Specificity of Information	Informational Needs	0.318**	0.000		

***Pearson's* r value indicating a significant correlation

needs to possess a device like a transistor or a simple mobile phone to listen to radio. There is simply no subscription fee that needs to be borne by the listener to access its content. This is just one side of the coin. Another outstanding feature in terms of accessibility is that the radio medium is a sustainable medium. Meaning even when other communication infrastructure goes for a toss during a natural calamity radio will still withstand the onslaught of the calamity and remain functional. The factors of accessibility of the community radio station in terms of affordability and availability post the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015 were tested for correlation against standing as a unique information source. The correlation between accessibility and unique information source is r = 0.539 with a = 0.000 (see Table 1). The evidence thrown by the data indicates that there exists a significant correlation between the factors. Since the community radio station was a low cost medium and also sustained the onslaught of the calamity it could serve the Cuddalore community with crucial information.

Often people are displaced internally or traumatized by the occurrence of a disaster. The most affected by a disaster are the weaker sections of the society owing to their poor coping capacity. When a medium such as the community radio becomes affordable medium to the weaker sections of the society, they will be informed citizens. The information and communication transmitted through the medium helps to link the communities together during a deluge. The *Pearson Correlation* score between affordability and community linkage is r = 0.480 with $\alpha = 0.000$

A two-way communication is always considered an efficient communication approach. During a calamity the approach takes much more prominence and is also much sought after. The scope for interaction in the community radio station Peridar Kaala Vaanoli by way of call-in or phone-in programmes, helplines for the distressed due to disasters paved way for the communities to liberate from the calamitous event of the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015. This is manifested by the evidence thrown by the data, r = 0.289 and α = 0.000 (see Table 1) and in turn by a significant correlation between the scope for interaction in disaster communication medium and the liberation from deluge.

Building resilience among the communities often affected by disasters can be achieved by educating them about disasters and making them as empowered citizens. Facilitation of the much needed disaster education to the vulnerable communities does help in quick recovery from the aftermath of disasters. The same is explicitly proven in the *Pearson's Correlation* score of r =0.339 with $\alpha = 0.000$ (see Table 1). The score suggests the existence of a significant correlation between the factors. The community radio station *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* has stood as a facilitator of disaster education and in turn becoming an effective disaster recovery guide.

Health is one of the community aspects often hard hit by a disaster. Outbreak of diseases after the occurrence of a disaster is a usual affair calling for immediate attention to manage them. Dissemination of crucial health communication through a medium like the community radio *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* will go a long way in reducing the risk factors that can hamper the health of the disaster affected. Effective health communication significantly correlates with aiding quick disaster recovery of the community with *Pearson's Correlation* score of r = 0.340 and a = 0.000 (see Table 1). Effective health communication post a disaster by the community radio has aided in achieving effective health risk management post the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015.

Specificity in communication is crucial for effective community based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR). The population of the flood affected Cuddalore community is diverse so are their needs. Developing a deep understanding of the community in terms of their demographics, community networks and structures will help in catering specific information and communication to the intended audience. The statistical test of Pearson's Correlation was run to find if there existed a significant relationship between specificity in the content of transmission of the community radio station and the gratification achieved for the same in terms of reducing the impending risk instigated by the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015. The evidence thrown by the data r = 0.318 and α = 0.000 (see Table 1) confirms the fact that specificity in the content of the community radio has indeed gratified the community needs post the disaster.

In order to find if the community radio station *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* has stood as an effective community media for disaster communication for

the Cuddalore community the frequency of usage of the radio medium prior and post the emergence of the community radio Peridar Kaala Vaanoli was measured. A paired sample T-test was run with a view to find out if there is a difference in the means of frequency of usage of the radio medium prior and post the emergence of the community radio station Peridar Kaala Vaanoli. The evidence thrown by the statistical procedure indicates a mean difference of 0.236 i.e. the mean of the frequency of usage of the medium prior to the emergence of Peridar Kaala Vaanoli was 3.19 and with a value of 0.001 (see Table 2 and 3) at 95% confidence interval and post the emergence of the community radio was an increased mean of 3.42.

Discussion

The respondents represented the diverse Cuddalore community. A majority of the settlements of the respondents were in low-lying areas and close to the sea indicating a vulnerability to disasters, more specifically to hydrological disasters like floods. A majority of the respondents have been impacted due to the high levels of water stagnated outside their settlements with some of them reporting penetration of flood water inside their settlements. The poor socio-economic status of the respondents adds on to the poor coping capacity towards natural disasters. The vulnerability is high for the respondents in terms of their socioeconomic status and the geographic location of their settlements.

Table 2. Paired Sample Statistics of Frequency of Usage of the Medium

	Mean	Ν	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Frequency of Usage of Radio Medium (Pre and Pair 1 Post the Emergence of <i>Peridar Kaala Vaanoli</i>)	3.19	203	.892	.063
	3.42	203	.736	.052

Table 3. Paired Sample T-Test - Frequency of Usage of the Medium

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std.	Std.	95%			Sig (2	
			Deviation	Error	Confidence	t	Df	51g. (2-	
				Mean	Interval of the			ia	neu)
					Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Frequency of Usage of Radio Medium (Pre and Post the Emergence of <i>Peridar Kaala</i> Vaanoli)	236	.966	.068	370	103	-3.486	202	.001

Traditional media usage is predominant among the respondents in comparison to the electronic media. The respondents are found to be judicious users of media. The advantage factor when it comes to radio usage is that it is used both indoor as well as outdoor and hence the listenership gains momentum.

The biggest advantage of radio is its increased accessibility when compared to other media. Accessibility is both in terms of cost and as well as sustainability during a crisis situation like disaster. The gratification gained out of the accessibility of the community radio station during a disaster is knowledge empowerment of the affected communities. Also the medium links the people internally displaced due to the disaster. After the incidence of a disaster people are dislocated from their settlements and are forced to stay in disaster recovery and rehabilitation centres for a considerable duration. The community radio has connected such displaced people and performed the linkage function during a crisis and gratified the communities' emergency needs. The medium is also found to have established connect with the communities through its interactive features. Establishing a sense of connect with the listeners particularly during a disaster will pacify the traumatized due to disasters. Educating the communities about approaching hazards, safe guarding themselves from the impending risk factors associated with disasters are crucial for achieving disaster risk reduction. Life-saving information communicated by the community radio has fulfilled yet another social utility function to the Cuddalore community. Fulfilment of the function was also complemented by the effective health communication by the medium. The content that was broadcast was extremely tailored by developing a deep understanding of the communities and in turn has gratified the emergency community needs of the affected lot.

The effectiveness of a medium is pronounced with increased dependency developed on the medium for want of information. The community media *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* is found to be one such medium. *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* has fulfilled the manifest functions by providing crucial and momentous information, updates and educative information. The medium is attempting to serve the latent functions such as providing emotional support and bonding with the community at the budding stage. The results of the study prove the theory of Uses and Gratification that people i.e. the flood affected Cuddalore community is aware of using the community radio *Peridar Kaala Vaanoli* for fulfilling their needs of recovering from an emergency like the Tamilnadu Floods, 2015.

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