

COMMUNITY RADIO: SCRUTINISING SPACE FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

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Abstract: Constrained participation and under-representation of women in community radio (CR) discourse has generated considerable controversy and rival contestation by notable feminist scholars and advocates. They argue as untenable the notion that women cannot participate in the airwaves, engage in self-representation, articulate marginalised perspectives, or exercise agency, structurally and symbolically. Rather, women use community radio as a space to contest identity and engender new media narratives for themselves and others, beyond male discourses. This research focuses on the intersectionality of community radio regarding women's participation and representation, analysing how gendered broadcasting practices reflect women's roles and leadership in programming and content production in South African community radios. The study followed a case study research design that, through qualitative critical analysis of existing scholarly research published between 1994 (onset of democracy) and 2025, evidences nuanced insights and understanding of two community radio stations in Gqeberha, South Africa. A qualitative meta-synthesis was utilised: a systematic review method for integrating and interpreting findings from a collection of qualitative studies to generate a more comprehensive and insightful understanding of a phenomenon. The research conclusion is evident: community radio thrives, transforms, and progresses when it embraces balanced female participation. This involvement secures organisational longevity, provides an essential platform for marginalised voices, and actively deconstructs limiting gender stereotypes. The overarching implications confirm that such inclusive models are fundamental catalysts for achieving true media democratisation, leading to substantive social transformation and enduring empowerment in the communities that these stations serve. For this tier of broadcasting, to fulfil its potential as a tool for progressive change, gender equity in its structure and content must remain a central, non-negotiable operational principle.

Keywords: community radio, participation, representation, feminism, qualitative meta-synthesis, women

Introduction

Radio, known historically as the 'Cinderella medium', has been recognised as a tool and key platform to amplify disenfranchised voices; promote social justice, activism, and advocacy; and mobilise communities for justice, accountability, empowerment, and alternative discourse, especially around gender equality (Copeland, 2018; Osunkunle, 2021; Solomon, 2025). Importantly, in South Africa, community radio (CR) is a crucial component of democratisation in the media that has evolved since the demise of apartheid (Adebayo *et al.*, 2022; Jjuuko *et al.*, 2025; Osunkunle, 2021). Although Dralega (2016) posits that African media in general and feminist discourse in the media in Africa have, over the past two decades, undergone considerable positive changes, a lot remains the same. Moreover, compared to other sources of mass media including television and newspapers, (community) radio despite its affordability, portability, accessibility and pervasiveness, is under-researched (Agaba &

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Isabyire, 2024; Mitchell, 1998, O'Brien, 2017). In the historical analysis by Naughton (1996, p.12) of the medium in South Africa, "women's participation in community radio is a subject of debate among few people ... [but] men have very quickly and easily colonised the sector". Therefore, the mechanisms through which the radio outlet delivers its responsibilities are of paramount significance.

While community radio is integrated with community life, its distinctiveness is separate from the other two models of broadcasting, namely, the public broadcaster e.g., South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC) is known for serving the government, and commercial radio stations are integrated with business and profit. By virtue of the geographic location and/or communities of interest, CR is acknowledged as the radio of the people, by the people and for the people (Agaba & Isabirye, 2024; Njuguna, 2025; Oduaran & Nelson. 2019; Osunkunle, 2021; Osunkunle & Wozniak, 2015). Pavarala (2015, p. 14) in Rimmer (2021, p. 5) underscores ownership and control as: "community radio produced, controlled and owned by the people can empower marginalised and address voice poverty" in society. Thus, its programming and content becomes distinguished by the community where it is domiciled and its services (Sewlal & Ntshangase, 2022).

Therefore, the notion the presence of CR represents empowerment of the disadvantaged voices, including those of women. This underpins the justification of the present study to instigate or contribute to existing discourse about justice in community-owned and -led media. In South Africa, most CR outlets foreground local-centric issues that affect women disproportionately and adversely (Oduaran & Nelson. 2019), while distinguished scholars agree that CR in most African societies performs a major role for creating awareness of the basic rights and duties of women (Oduaran & Nelson, 2019; Rimmer, 2021). Further to Crenshaw's (2021) theory of CR, the argument of Rimmer (2021) highlights CR as a site of intersectionality, where diverse identities, laughter, and dialogue raise consciousness and conflict. Furthermore, the space is a powerful platform whence women can disseminate their ideas among community members in the best possible manner (Rimmer, 2021). Thus, CR can become an important instrument for strengthening a democratic nation and offers opportunities for "mobilisation to protect the position of previously disfranchised against further loss of power" (Naughton, 1996, p. 12).

However, despite a large body of research on CR (Bosch, 2022; Molefe & Molefe, 2007; Patel, 2018; Tyali & Tomaselli, 2015), scholarship in this area has focused predominantly on men's participation and representation than on comparatively fewer studies with limited attention on women; thus, rendering women's experiences and contributions under-researched. Over many years there is not much synthesised evidence based on the role of women on CR in the African context. This further propagates the narrative of the misrepresentation of women in the industry. Likewise, in contemporary scholarship, a growing trend exists towards the re-orientation of scholarly inquiry on participatory communication in the community media field. This is focused on accessibility to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) adoption, adaptation and integration of digital technologies and/or appropriation of social media (Bosch, 2014; Matsilele *et al.*, 2023; Olorunnisola, 2009; Sharma, 2023; Radelius, 2014; Tyali, 2021). Gatua *et al.* (2010, p. 165) support the notion that "research on the use of community radio and radio airwaves in general has focused on men and only rarely have researchers attempted to study women and their use of radio". This stems from, "men have more say, and they get more money, more attention, more interesting work, more status, and more leisure because, masculine pursuits are given greater value" (Deutsch, 2007, p. 117).

According to Njuguna (2025, p. 207), "communication scholars from the Global South ... have called for studies that problematise the community radio phenomenon from an African context to explore its enduring value for emancipating the underprivileged from information poverty." Furthermore, Njuguna

(2025) observed that more than two decades later, convincing synthesised evidence is still inadequate on how the emergence of community radio stations has affected the lives of women in African contexts. For Naughton (1996), the trend has been traditionally that women would be present at the developmental stage of a project but, after gestation, the operations become more male in representation, organisational structure, and dynamics. Thus, the gap for proactive and creative support, especially in disenfranchised and peripheral communities needs to be addressed to create spaces for representation and the meaningful participation of women in CR stations.

Against this backdrop, the current study is specifically situated in the context of women's presence and role in CR in South Africa through exploring the two CR stations, namely Kingfisher FM and Nkqubela FM. These two stations demonstrate active CRs as they exert unique and considerable influence as agents of socio-cultural transformation in the grassroots communities. These are two of the four CR stations in the city of Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) and of over 282 CR stations that have been licensed by the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (IBA) in the country. Moreover, these CR stations provide a favourable and enabling context for research about gender and media representation and participation to contribute ultimately to the broader scholarship on such issues.

Therefore, this paper sought to answer the following research question: How have the two community radio stations, Kingfisher FM and Nkqubela FM, evidenced intersectionality on women's participation and representation in the programming and content production during their broadcasts? The dis(empowering) nature of community radio is evident in the choice of content, the framing of content, and the voices that publish that content (Njuguna, 2025); therefore, portraying women in non-stereotypical and unbiased roles is associated with their empowerment and positive perceptions (Njuguna, 2025).

The study is important because scholars, advocates and those interested in issues of feminism should sustain commitment to advocate gender justice and equity and to fight for it.

Context: Community Radio in South Africa

Kingfisher FM or Kingfisher Radio (103.8 and 107.5 FM) and Nkqubela Community Radio (KQ FM or NCR) (97.0 FM) broadcast from Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) and surrounding areas; Uitenhage (Kariega), Jeffreys Bay, Despatch and Grahamstown (Makhanda). Radio Kingfisher, established in 1994, operates under a Christian-centred philosophy, consequently it is aligned as a Christian community radio station broadcasting evangelism targeting listeners between the ages of 25 years of age and older. While KQ FM was granted a licence in 2003 and began broadcasting in 2004, the station is guided by a dual focus, i.e., to promote local development, education and information through local businesses that affect the broadcast and development of marginalised communities positively, including the surrounding townships where it operates. Both stations operate as non-profit organisations (NPOs).

Radio Kingfisher's faith-based content incorporates multicultural religious and secular programming, while also partnering with other local churches. This comprises 60 per cent talk and 40 per cent music, broadcast predominantly in English as well as in Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Nkqubela FM, known as a voice for the community, targets black and coloured (mixed coloured descent) listeners over 18 years of age. Community radio programming in South Africa is produced in local indigenous languages to create ease of understanding regarding issues affecting communities. The use of multiple languages reinforces the importance of CR since it encourages marginalised women to become visible and to gain some power of expression in the language with which they are conversant (Gatua *et al*, 2010). At KQ

FM, programming involves labour and social issues, including the cultural and religious ethos where content is broadcast in isiXhosa (60 per cent), English (30 per cent), and Afrikaans (10 per cent). For Nkqubela Community Radio, programming encompasses a mix of 70 per cent talk and 30 per cent music. Both radio stations operate 24 hours per day with audiences of 114 000 for Kingfisher FM and 271 000 for KQ FM. Notably, both stations stream live via websites (Kingfisherfm.co.za), Digital Satellite Television (DSTV), and TuneIn and social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. (Kingfisher FM background, 2026 & Nkqubela FM, 2026).

Literature Review

In sub-Saharan Africa, as in many other parts of the world, many obstacles, including media, hinder women's empowerment, and spaces for growth. Several scholars (Fombad & Jiyane, 2023; Gatua *et al.*, 2010; Sharma, 2023) observe trends where women in developing countries, especially those residing in marginalised, peripheral spaces, including rural areas, remain voiceless and lagging in their use of media technologies, including community radio. According to Gatua *et al.* (2010), countries such as Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, and Equatorial Guinea have no independent radio stations and, where such is the case, women's movements have sought to influence the use of media such that women have access to alternative media. As alluded to by Dralega (2016), strides have been made; however, critical gaps are evident, and the paucity of research remains conspicuous, particularly regarding gender (im)balance in the community radio sphere. Jjuuko *et al.* (2025) amplify and elucidate the under-representation of disfranchised voices, including Black, Asian and minority ethnic voices.

Agaba and Isabirye (2024) mention several conventions and declarations that enable the empowerment of women, which were preceded by one of the Millennium Development Goals, namely the Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. These include:

- The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),
- The 1985 Nairobi Forward looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women; the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,
- The 1995 Fourth United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing; the 1995 Platform for Action; and
- The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development.

These have called for the redefining of existing approaches and making them gender inclusive and gender responsive (Agaba & Isabirye, 2024, p. 2). This study supports the interpretation that "disadvantageous status for women in comparison to men prevailing structures, limit women's ability to participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives" (Agaba & Isabirye, 2024, p. 2).

South African Community Radio: A Brief History

This study is concerned with the gendered dynamics in relation to women in CR in the past 30-plus years of its existence, following the emergence of radio just 100 years ago in South Africa. Despite some contestations, since 1994, South Africa has enjoyed a liberalised, diverse, and dynamic media landscape (Jones & Hadland, 2024). Historically, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (IBA), promulgated in 1993, drafted policies on broadcasting, issued broadcasting licences, and regulated and monitored broadcasting and radio industry activities in South Africa (IBA, 1995; Olorunnisola, 2009; Sewlal & Ntshangase, 2022). This body was a precursor of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and, according to the Broadcasting Act of 1997; and the ICASA notice of

2017, a framework was first completed in 1996, then reviewed in 2006; whence the class licensing process for CR was introduced (Sewlal & Ntshangase, 2022; Tyali, 2014). ICASA is a body that is concerned with aspects of compliance of (community) media in South Africa and thus measures, regulates and monitors aspects, including geographic coverage, language/s, community participation, news and information, format, local content obligations, programming, music regulation and regulations of terms and conditions (Ishengoma, 2025). Then, implementation was facilitated by the authority that developed various regulations, including The Process and Procedures Regulations for Class Licences which were amended in 2010 and 2015, respectively (Government Gazette, 2017). ICASA acknowledged that community stations should be poised to mask deep inequalities, power CR stations to emphasise that all, including farm workers, sex workers, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) community, people with disabilities, women and children, should play a role in the governance of these stations (National Association of Broadcasters [NAB], 2022, pp. 23-24).

Recently, the pervasiveness of social media and its role in democracy has become a disruptor to the traditional mainstream media, including the commercial radio and public broadcaster, through shifting revenues and taking away the power of the consumer (Sewlal & Ntshangase, 2022). Similarly, over the past three decades, CR has demanded transformation of broadcasting in South Africa from a top-down approach to a participatory and community-driven platform that is pertinent to democratic communication (Finlay, 2022). In South Africa, CR as an alternative media is determined as a non-profit(able) entity, civic-led, participatory broadcasting and service-oriented radio that is owned and operated solely by the community, with no government interference (Agaba & Isabirye, 2024; Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Sewlal & Ntshangase, 2022). Radio remains the country's most widespread and popular medium in the broadcast landscape and includes public radio (18 SABC stations) as well as several commercial stations. Between 2012 and 2013, there were approximately 165 community radio stations on air in the country (Daniels, 2014). Scholarship demonstrates that a healthy radio (public, commercial and community) sector has the widest audience reach, notwithstanding that CR is caught constantly between the conflicting demands of public service and commercialism (Daniels, 2014).

Women's Representation and Participation in Community Radio Spaces

Broadly speaking, various scholars have criticised the media for its unbalanced representation of women's participation (Molefe & Molefe, 2007; Njuguna, 2025; O'Brien, 2017; Rimmer, 2021; Steiner, 2012, 2014). They argue that, globally, media corporations including community radio are predisposed to under- or misrepresent women and fail to engage with marginalised groups. The media plays an integral role in shaping society's perception of gender, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where conservative gender roles and socio-cultural norms are embedded structurally and firmly (Macharia, 2025, p. xviii). The media is not merely a powerful tool for communication but rather an institution that constructs, deconstructs and reconstruct social realities (Jjuuko *et al*, 2025). Therefore, promotion of equal representation and participation of women is of the utmost importance.

Mitchell (2016) declares that women on CR in the United Kingdom (UK), were either absent or pigeonholed in gendered radio presenter roles. This is supported by the study of Rimmer (2021, p. 2), which concludes that "whilst radio is not a panacea for gender oppression rather it offers an intersectional community development (participation) and representation." Likewise, it is recognised that gender dynamics in CR in South African remain a male-dominated context. Often, women's programming is relegated to a narrow interpretation of gender issues that perceive women's roles merely as traditional, predominantly domestic and marital in nature, thus ignoring women as inherently

independent social, political and economic actors (Fortune & Chungong, 2013; Gatua *et al.*, 2010; Gqibitole, 2020; Molefe & Molefe, 2007; O'Brien, 2019). Likewise, Fortune and Chungong (2013, p. 71) argue that such perceptions perpetuate gender subordination and stereotypes when, in practice, women contribute no less than men in their CR stations. This culminates in the content of the mass media being fraught with stereotypes where women are portrayed either in stereotypical roles of victimhood or as a passive consumer audience of the media; consequently, symbolically annihilating women (Tuchman 1978 in Crothers & Lockhart, 2016; Minic, 2007; Steiner, 2014). The framework of Tuchman (1978) deconstructs three ways in which women are rendered invisible or devalued in their cultural representation, as through: omission (women are absent or under-represented in media), trivialisation (women's roles are diminished or portrayed as insignificant), and condemnation roles (outside the traditional are portrayed negatively).

Theoretical Underpinnings and Brief Review of Literature

Feminist Media Theory

This paper is anchored in feminist media theory to conceptualise the sonic space of women in the media, specifically in community radio. That is, because, feminist media theory takes gender issues seriously, it offers a lens for evaluating significant changes and experiences in media representation of women (Steiner, 2014). In addition, the theory typically provides a systemic analysis by advocating the inclusion of traditionally oppressed and marginalised individuals and communities of women (Steiner, 2014). The theory emerged in response to male-dominated narratives in media and diverse representation of women (Krijnen, 2017). Importantly, the theory questions the influence exerted by the media in creating gendered stereotypes and maintaining patriarchal values that create a distorted and biased view in the world (Krijnen, 2017).

This theory reinforces critical challenge of gender injustice and dismantling of harmful gender through content and representation in the community media. Given that feminist media theory is grounded on pure feminist theory from which it derives its core theoretical assumptions and analytic principles (van Zoonen 1994; Krijnen, 2017). Importantly, it applies philosophies, concepts, and logics that articulate feminist principles and concepts to media processes namely, hiring, production, content and distribution to patterns of representation in news and entertainment across platforms, and to reception including radio (Steiner, 2014; Kalavathy, 2024). Unlike other approaches that hide their politics, feminist theorising is explicitly political because it addresses issues related and dealing with issues of power, inequality and social justice (Steiner, 2014; 2014; Naples, 2024). Furthermore, the theory draws from feminist principles by addressing contemporary challenges women face namely, gender stereotypes, social injustices, biases and Gender Based Violence (GBV) (Solomon, 2025). The strength about the feminist theory established as relevant to this study, as articulated in Solomon (2025), it suggests that not only the theory facilitates a better understanding of gender issues to solve the oppressive gender relations, but it also explores the interaction between oppression and power structures to create space for open discussion in overcoming oppression.

Therefore, the feminist media theory that this study adopts, differs from other perspectives such as postmodernism, pluralism and Marxism, is attributable to its unconditional focus on analysing holistic gender aspects as a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences that distinguish it from other theoretical frameworks which explore media (Van Zoonen, 1992, 1994). However, some key criticisms directed at this theory are essentialism and universalising women; hence, the homogenising and standardisation of women's experiences despite divergences thus over-emphasised the commonalities of women's oppression, while neglecting the profound differences between them (Van Zoonen 1992, 1994; Watkins & Emerson, 2000). Some scholars even argue that the

theory is Euro-American-centric; thus privileging and putting overemphasis on Global North cultures (Van Zoonen 1992, 1994; Watkins & Emerson, 2000). Moreover, there is a lack of audience agency because it fails to perceive viewers as (pro)active and fully engaged audiences rather than mere passive recipients of information, although Dralega (2016) underscores how the media in Africa is referred to as misogynistic and deeply entrenched in hegemonic patriarchal norms. And, since gender inequality persists, especially in the under-representation and misrepresentation of gender issues and employment; the presence of women in positions of leadership, management and ownership in media needs to be addressed (Dralega, 2016). Therefore, feminism was chosen as a theoretical tool because this study is underpinned by an assumption that supports feminist media theory, which postulates: if women-controlled media production, content would be different and better (Kalavathy, 2024, p. 4).

Analytic Framework and Methodological Justification: Meta-synthesis

This paper has implemented a rigorous analytic approach in the form of meta-synthesis adapted from McLeod (2024). In the field of communication, meta-synthesis is a relatively new method that can be employed to examine qualitative research to generate new insights in a specific study on sifting and synthesising such relevant studies (Jensen & Allen, 1996). Despite this, qualitative meta-synthesis is warranted for this study because it is a systematic review method for integrating and interpreting findings from an amalgamation of qualitative studies to gain deeper understanding specific to this study, about the intersectionality between CR in areas of programming and content production and the role of women (Jensen & Allen, 1996; McLeod, 2024; Thorne, 2022). In employing case study design, a central objective is to produce a new, more comprehensive and insightful understanding based on two CR stations of Kingfisher FM and Nkqubela FM community radio station. Accordingly, this approach aims to develop a deeper, more nuanced interpretation by identifying common themes, patterns, and relationships across different and previously produced qualitative research studies (McLeod, 2024). Compared to quantitative meta-analysis, that is, statistical, positivist, deductive and ideally raw data, meta-analysis is post-positivist inductive and involved during the synthesis of existing data derived from key research findings to develop scientific knowledge and generate theoretical frameworks (Leary & Walker, 2018). However, scholarly critiques raised against this approach articulate that, as qualitative meta-synthesis becomes more popular, it is susceptible to being reduced to a technical exercise, with little relevance to meaningful knowledge-building (Thorne, 2022, p. 18). Furthermore, it is susceptible to oversimplification, decontextualisation and the misrepresentation as a repercussion of (over)synthesised findings of the original studies (McLeod, 2024).

The study draws on the findings of scholarly literature and reviews. In the screening of citations to identify relevant literature, data were gathered from keyword searches, using inclusion and exclusion of more eligible citations to determine studies relevant for this research. Furthermore, to identify relevant literature, data were gathered from keyword searches in databases and digital services, including Elton B. Stephen's Company (EBSCO), Google Scholar, Internet, Research Gate, Open Athens and Inter Library Loans (ILL). In keeping with the methods as well as coding structure suggested by McLeod (2024), the initial coding was shaped by the qualitative content strategies of Mitchell's (1998) broad process categories (i.e., participation and representation) to identify themes or patterns further.

In addition, the terminology used was: community radio, feminism, media and gender and women in respect to communication.

To conduct a qualitative meta-synthesis, contingent upon the inclusion of synthesis driven by quality, a more inclusive approach provides opportunities not to overlook important findings or introduce unnecessary bias (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003 in Leary & Walker, 2018). What follows are the inclusion criteria for this study, which will respond to the research questions considering the two case studies:

- Scholarly documents, reputable sources and peer-reviewed articles on CR in English or isiXhosa language
- Studies on Kingfisher Community Radio and Nkqubela FM both from Gqeberha/Port Elizabeth, South Africa
- Involvement of women, their role: on air, volunteer, journalists, technical staff, production and/or content making in the two CR stations
- Broadcast languages: isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans
- Timeframe; between 1994 and 2025
- Focus on qualitative studies, South African context, women's participation/representation
- Studies that examine women's participation and representation on CR
- Technology and new media

Exclusion criteria from this study are quantitative or data from mixed-methods results or any studies which are unavailable in full text.

Findings and Discussion

Findings were derived from reviewed qualitative meta-syntheses from previous studies, where the process produced themes and insights that were subsequently employed to examine and respond to the research question of this paper. The central objective of the study was to explore how Kingfisher FM and Nkqubela FM evidenced intersectionality on women's participation and representation in the programming and content production during their broadcasts. Therefore, the overarching findings underpin the two community radio stations pertaining to women's various roles in relation to this research question and objective are outlined in the following subsections.

Gendered Participation and Representation in CR: Women's Role in Programming

Findings show that, at Radio Kingfisher, the station features a mix of Christian-focused and lifestyle content, with female presence often driving prime-time programming as hosted and/or co-hosted shows. This finding is demonstrated in two of the most popular shows: The Hope Show (9:00 to 12:00) and PM Cruise (15:00 to 18:00). These air respectively during mid-morning and afternoon drive time on premium and prominent programming spots of the radio station on weekdays. The Hope Show, known as an anchor for the soul, is a conversational show focused on amplifying community voices, featuring charities, churches, NPOs and Community Champions through a Biblical lens; and the drive time, the PM Cruise, is a show that broadcasts Good News, God News, local community stories, business innovation, current affairs and apologetics with humour and faith are examples, respectively hosted and co-hosted by women. This proves Mitchell's (2016) stance about breakfast shows and the drive-time programme slots: that these provide both practical and symbolic opportunities for women's programmes on community radio to amplify women's voices, enhance participation, and challenge gendered hierarchies in broadcasting. Therefore, the two programmes, among many from Kingfisher FM community radio station, characterise this assertion. For example.

The female hosting Hope Show describes the radio programme:

Where truth and life collide... This isn't just another radio programme. The Hope Show is a place where tough questions meet bold answers, where broken stories are met with healing and where the heartbeat of our community is amplified. We don't shy away from the big conversations... If it matters for your faith, we're tackling it head-on. We open the mic to the heartbeat of our city – charities, churches, NPOs and Community Champions. This is your space, voice and story ...” (<https://www.kingfisherfm.co.za/>).

According to the (female) co-host on the website PM Cruise show offers:

“Good news, God news! Great music, smart people, significant conversations! Meet those who make a difference in Nelson Mandela Bay and our nation by means of charitable projects, business innovation and significant events. Current affairs, inventions, weird news, politics, hot topics with a liberal helping of humour, opinion and Jesus. Apologetics, discipleship, worship, evangelism, and faith issues get relevant on this show.” (<https://www.kingfisherfm.co.za/>).

Similarly, findings revealed that KQ FM programmes, such as a popular weekday show called, The Brunch (9:00 to 12:00), broadcast weekdays, features segments with expert women on various social and personal development topics.

The Brunch with *Ms Zee Manyawo kwi Nkqubela FM from 09h00 until 12h00 weekdays

WhatsApp: 0623588001

09h40: *Lonwabo Matshona: Ex educator/ facilitator/ public speaker, emcee for Journey to Forgiveness programme

10h40: *Luyanda Lwandle: HR specialist: What people need to know about AWOL

11h10: *Phumla Mapetla: Unsung heroes/ Untold Stories: Love for autistic kids

Happy new month, let's welcome Autism Awareness Month

Umsasazi akahlali yedwa (The presenter does not broadcast in isolation)

(<https://www.facebook.com/p/Nkqubela-FM>)

* Not their real names

The finding about KQ FM demonstrates that the mid-morning show and Talk Radio show are hosted by a woman in collaboration with various other women. However, unlike Radio Kingfisher, PM Cruise, which is driven by a male and a female, KQ FM's drive programme, also known as #97 Drive Show, is driven autonomously by a young woman. According to the station's website (<https://nkqubela.fm.co.za/shows>), the programme features beat from a variety of genres, local community issues, interviews, providing on-the-ground updates from the townships of the Eastern Cape province and other local events. This indicates that the show is transcending embedded boundaries as the afternoon drive shows are normally and traditionally slots presented by male figures. In relation to Radio Kingfisher, the woman is only co-hosting rather than unconventionally driving the show.

These findings resonate with Adjinn-Tettey, *et al.* (2025, p. 72) who posit that “media organisations establish a culture that guarantees gender-transformative, gender-sensitive programming and

representation to increase women's participation and engagement in media projects." Therefore, programmes such as Kingfisher FM's Hope Show and PM Cruise, Nkqubela FM's The Brunch and KQ FM's Drive Show, and other prime-time programmes indicated on these community radio websites and across digital platforms, including social media, highlight that the stations have tackled issues of regressive cultural practices and norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

As indicated in, community media like Kingfisher Radio and KQ FM are integral examples of women participating meaningfully in advancing the success of programming by addressing issues that strengthen the operations of their respective community radio stations. These findings resonate with the research findings and assertion of Agaba and Isabirye (2024) that community radio constitutes a participatory broadcasting model in which ownership and control reside in the community, and that programming is produced to address the community's specific interests, concerns, and panacea for developmental needs.

Gendered Participation and Representation in CR: Women's Role in Content Production

Findings reveal that, at Kingfisher FM, when it comes to content production, the responsibility for producing content and programmes is carried by collaborations between various content teams. The radio station is guided by the mission which states that they "... share relevant, authentic content that uplifts, equips, and encourages ... we are a voice of hope to everyone tuning in..." Likewise, the vision promises that "our content is designed for both believers and those still exploring faith" and this is also described as the "beacon of Christ truth". The study uncovered that the content teams ensure that the content aligns with these mission and vision statements. Findings indicate that that women are highly involved in the station's leadership, including the female programme manager, while digital radio content interns, team members and stakeholders are females.

One example of content produced and presented by *Mama* (mother) for other female listeners who include pastors and worshippers is MG Connection, which is "not afraid to discuss hard topics".

"Usapho olufuna uThixo luyaphumelela! Hlala uhlale nathi! NguMama Ningi ebukhoma ku Intlalo Yosapho! Amen! A family who seeks God thrives! Tune in! Its Mama Ningi live on Intlalo Yosapho! Amen!" (<https://www.kingfisherfm.co.za/>)

This corresponds with KQ FM leadership teams of women, which include producers, journalists, and presenters, albeit on a smaller scale because KQ FM operates its functions with only 26 personnel compared to that of Radio Kingfisher, which has between 11 and 50 staff. Both websites suggest stronger representation of women in operational leadership and in the presentation of programmes.

Findings reinforce the observation that, at Nkqubela FM, women are heavily involved in the development and broadcasting of the station's key content pillars:

- Community development and issues
- Educational and informative content
- Music-heavy programming: a diverse blend of music genres throughout the day to entertain listeners
- Community business promotion: promoting local businesses and supporting economic growth in the area

These are demonstrated in the following examples of programme engagements of Nkqubela FM's presenters interviewing guests while simultaneously engaging listeners on Live Talk shows on social media.

stoedoSnrp52cg42d3449a1a6tifast6te3y569e8Y ffigrc0ggt 4451u: ·



Studio Line: +27 6012355678

Send your VN

Text Message

You can call

Your host is P. Mlamli

Figure 1: Nkqubela FM Talk Show

Despite being presented by male figure, it is single-handedly produced by a female. This multi-lingual show is broadcast in collaboration with a community television known as *MpumaKapa* (Eastern Cape) TV.



Figure 2: Nkqubela FM LiveWire

LiveWire is a dynamic youth project that is aimed at youth between 15 and 18 years of age. This show is presented by other youth, including a local award-winning presenter to mentor and train youth in radio presenting, youth reporting and producing. With the Radio Workshop programme, this project

covers impactful topics like mental health and social media while fostering *The Best Youth Show in The Bay*.

In these prime-time programmes engagements between female presenters and audiences influence gender sensitivity in content programming and representation to increase women's participation, not only in radio projects but rather in a broader societal context (Adjin-Tettey *et al.*, 2025). Importantly, findings demonstrated in the study by Njuguna (2025) underscore the opportunity to contribute to content on radio through, for instance, listeners' feedback as being game-changing in women's struggles for equal and equitable participation in decisions affecting them. O'Brien (2019) verifies that gendered radio production and feminist radio practice enable the representation of diverse content to diverse audiences through diverse practices. Njuguna (2025) further endorses these findings through what he observed as 90 per cent of radio content carrying community aspirations, most of which are women's realities, including raising awareness, knowledge and capacity about the understanding of health issues and the realisation of their businesses.

CR Intersectionality: Patterns of Gender Inclusion, Gender Sensitisation and Gender Equality

Drawing on the recommendations on gender and community radio by SMART NGO (2023, p.7), the study posits that, to create a gender balance and equity, gender inclusion and sensitisation, there is a need to ensure that 50 per cent of the staff at CR are women; of the 50 per cent of content developed by the community, 25 per cent is by and for women; and all content adopts a gendered lens, bringing equality at every level. This observation is supported by Oduaran and Okorie (2019), who also found that 50 per cent of female radio listeners in South Africa appreciate how community radio stations highlight the problem of women's rights in South Africa.

Therefore, findings in the context of this study reveal that Kingfisher FM features a daily line-up of roughly six to eight programmes per day and, of this, women present half of these programmes. Moreover, the use of other languages in inviting families to join in the show and contributions on the station's Facebook page demonstrate an inclusion and sensitivity beyond just women but also to communities who may have been voiceless. For example, the MG Connection programme on Saturdays 19:00 to 22:00, led by *Mama* (Mother).

Why you should not miss it!

"Expect a strong, authentic, Xhosa Christian programme; that unapologetically shares the gospel to the local community. Experience the views, challenges and upliftment of women and its listeners and enjoy as local pastors share relatable topics and their views. Not afraid to delve into hard topics, the strength of this show is the joy and trusted knowledge of the Lord!"

According to the Kingfisher FM website (<https://www.kingfisherfm.co.za/>), about 90 per cent to 95 per cent of the team reflects representation and participation in the driving of the station's operations, such as sound production, news reader, music (the compiler, scheduler and compliance coordinator, receptionist, hospitality donations and accounts executive are women). Thus, this shared responsibility contributes effectively to the success of a meaningful participatory representation of the radio station.

Consistently, Nkqubela FM, despite portraying fewer women than men – three women and six men on the website – the station's social media platforms, especially the Facebook page, evidenced more pronounced engagements between women and audiences. Similarly, women engaged more in local languages; thus, demonstrating inclusion and sensitivity towards other ethnic groups.

Figure 3 underscores this finding:



Figure 3: Nkqubela FM – Quartet to Weekend on Facebook

Social media including Facebook demonstrate that more women than men are more adept to freely engage audiences in local language.

Consistent with this context, the adoption of “[social media] serve fundamental and strategic roles for interactions on social network forums between journalists and audiences, programming and content generation, promotion of content to audiences” (Adebayo *et al.*, 2022). Findings reveal that both stations have anchored themselves on modern technology appropriation and synchronising digital social media platforms actively, specifically the Facebook platform, which is most popular, and with the radio shows. Women are the most interactive on social media, from covering local events to national and global current affairs and issues. Similarly, both stations are connected to streaming links that are shared on these social media pages, including WhatsApp, when prompting, and encouraging listeners to engage in conversations via such platforms. Therefore, these findings underline that the use of diversified methodologies, such as social media, by women has become a strategic tool for shaping programming and content.

In agreement with this, several patterns were observed while the shows were being presented: the presenter/s would interact simultaneously with the audiences who comment, like and follow these presenters and shows synchronously on social media. For example, Kingfisher FM’s Pilot My Future programme comments:

“April is recognised as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. We just had two days of great and meaningful conversations this week with Leanne at Kingfisher FM. Awareness in regard to Child Protection, abuse, online safety and AI is a critical first step. Once we are aware of these things and understand some of what is going on in our world, it helps us to form plans of prevention and protection ...” (Kingfisher FM Facebook, 2026)

Figure 4 shows some comments by the audience:

James Cameroon*

Great opportunity for awareness 🙌.

Author

Pilot My Future

John Bateman* 🙌 yes absolutely. Now for some action steps next. 🙌

*Not their real names

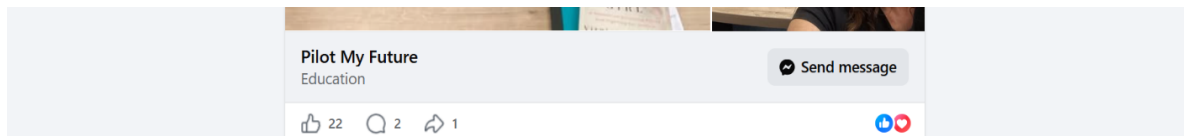


Figure 4: Pilot My Future

Both women and men presenters engage with audiences on real issues like GBV campaigns in real time. This example demonstrates appropriation of social media with male audiences commenting during on Facebook Awareness Month.

The stations' social media platforms are mostly reflective of inclusivity rather than accentuating a gender focus, although these programmes are produced and presented by women. For example, the Hope Show is presented by a woman; however, its attributes speak to broader families and communities more than just a singular gender to demonstrate equality and balance.

Like Kingfisher FM, Nkqubela FM is applying similar patterns, including multi-lingual interactions with audience members, showing similar methodologies of social media appropriation. Figure 5 below shows an example of an anticipated radio interview announced on the TikTok page for listeners to comment, follow and share.



Figure 5: Radio Interview

Source: Nkqubela FM – TikTok page

A woman presenter, through social media invites youth audiences and listeners to engage in the award-winning show called Youth Paradise. The show is multi-lingual and aimed to empower youth through engaging with professional guests.

Correlation: CR and Women's Voices and/or Empowerment

The study found that the two case studies created an enabling environment for women to amplify the voices and affect the communities that CR serves. Findings suggest that some of the key roles are occupied largely by female staff at Kingfisher FM, including the following positions: sales and marketing manager, programme manager, station manager, production manager, and news editor. Furthermore, there is an executive representation of three women out of five board members. This finding indicates a strong female representation and participation across the operations of the station. Despite not being conspicuously articulate about gender roles, the station had created spaces for the empowerment and agency of women through training and volunteering; thus, making the station formidable and the leader of its pack. In the empowering of women, both stations are implementing training, internships, and

volunteer opportunities, including the 12-month YES (Youth Employment Services) programme focused on developing young talent in community media.

One such case study is a female employee who, in 2025, celebrated 25 years with the station ...

“*Thulani’s radio story began 25 years ago in an unexpected way. At the time, she was 25 years old and working as an assistant in her father’s gift shop. During a chance encounter with a woman who had applied to be the music compiler at Kingfisher FM, it quickly became clear that Thulani’s knowledge of music far surpassed that of the applicant. Thulani applied and was called in for an interview on the very same day ... According to those conducting the interviews, Thulani outperformed every other candidate and was invited back for a second interview. Soon after, she was offered the job... With just ten days to learn the role from the outgoing music compiler, Thulani stepped into a position she had never even known existed. Looking back, she acknowledges that while she didn’t see the path at the time, God clearly did ... Thulani says her time at Kingfisher FM has taught her that it is okay to have an opinion and to speak up and she reflects on the truth that God can use anyone. “I load the songs,” she says ...” (Kingfisher FM Facebook, 2026).

**Not her real name*

Further at KQ FM: Youth Empowerment and Journalism

The station partnered with the Radio Workshop and UNICEF to train young reporters in projects such as LiveWire and the Vuka Vuma Vax campaign. With Live Wire Youth: It can be said that the normative function of the programme is to empower youth through youth development, training and storytelling in the Nelson Mandela Bay (Nkqubela FM shows, 2026).

Example from Live Wire Youth.

“It has been an absolute pleasure for me to represent Nkqubela FM, a community radio station in Gqeberha, for the Vuka Vuma Vax campaign. Through this campaign I had the opportunity to tell the vaccination stories of the people in my community. I learnt about all the different radio formats such as interviews, report, montage, and many more that fall under the singles and wrapper format categories. During the training, I was also taught how to approach important sources – such as nurses and doctors – to receive accurate information regarding vaccinations ...” (Rollom, 2024).

The Youth Development programmes, facilitated by the initiatives of female presenters, such as Live Wire Youth, produced and broadcast by women, where young women are trained in broadcasting, reporting, and production, cover local stories and elections by other women. This is in partnership with the Radio Workshop programme, which covers topics including mental health, social media impact and community issues.

When it comes to transformation towards restrictive socio-cultural norms that limit women’s participation, the two radio stations, notwithstanding their dissimilar trajectories in respect to philosophies, share common values in terms of gendered participation and representation in their broadcasts. Similarly, findings of this study have demonstrated that the case study community radio stations, Kingfisher FM and Nkqubela FM, despite not being too explicit about gender-related issues it can be perceived as paragons of conscious gender and feminism discourse. This is in sync with the framework of gendered participation by O’Brien (2019): “the presence of women as role models,

sponsors, leaders and managers, who were relational in their approach, was key gendered benefits that women derived from their participation in community radio.”

The analysis of this study fundamentally exposed that women are able and can self-represent and participate in media in a manner that Sakr (2004) in Marachto and Omland (2025, p. 16) observed from the studies in the Middle East that “provide rich examples of how women have used media to reconstruct feminism and gender issues and foster change”. This is consistent with the findings of the SMART NGO (2023) study, which reveals that “the content development section of community radio which shows a huge impact on the programmes broadcasted by the community radio, production and marketing are other major things covered by women only”. Hence, it is evident that CR contributes to society in many ways; consequently, women in the media are professionals who contribute to media production and presentation in various ways (Marachto & Omland, 2025)

Conclusion

Community radio can play a significant role in promoting a participative, inclusive decision-making process, provided that they themselves are sensitised to the concepts of gender sensitisation, gender inclusion and gender equality. This study concludes that community radio plays an essential role in making large numbers of people aware of their basic rights and duties, including those from marginalised communities (Oduaran & Nelson, 2019). Not only limited to solving problems which women face in their day-to-day lives, community radio provides women with a strong platform from which they can disseminate their ideas freely among community members in the best possible manner. (Oduaran & Nelson, 2019). Furthermore, drawing from these case studies, a conclusion is that, as community media, community radio has a place for women to balance symbolic structures of genders in sonic spaces through bringing diverse technological reconfiguration for progressive change (Mitchell, 2016).

This research identified the following limitations:

- Indexed peer-reviewed academic scholarship exclusively on the two CR stations is scant, almost unavailable. Rather, these are referenced in the academic studies regarding CR in SA. For that reason, the study relied heavily on secondary research, particularly on the websites of the CRs and online sources.
- There is a serious gap and a pressing and imperative need for further research in this domain to foreground the intersection of gender studies and community radio stations, particularly in Gqeberha and in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

Recommendations

Further study should be undertaken with the staff of both stations on a similar topic pursuing the methodology of interview/questionnaires.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

For the reasons of compliance in accordance with University Research Ethics Committee (REC) and Department of Higher Education and training (DHET) in South Africa, the study employed pseudonyms to adhere to ethical research standards because the participants had not consented explicitly to being identified.

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