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The role of radio in community engagement in the UAE: The case of the "Direct Line" program

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of Sharjah Radio as a medium of community engagement and development, focusing on the case of the Direct Line program. It seeks to investigate the extent to which the station and its prime show (the Direct Line program) contribute to building and enacting public opinion and awareness in the Emirates of Sharjah and UAE in general, and eventually to social and economic development. It also aims to study community participation and audience involvement in the Direct Line program. Drawing on the development communication theory, concepts of participatory communication, and community engagement, the study uses a quantitative research method, namely a survey. A sample of around 300 Emirati citizens (adult males and females) living in the city of Sharjah was selected using the convenience sampling method. The study concludes that Sharjah Radio's Direct Line program effectively contributes

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to community engagement and participation in the Emirate's efforts to produce a positive change in the local society. The findings indicate that the program is successfully involving its audiences in proposing issues for public discussion and policy decision and consideration, providing feedback and input on these issues, and in initiating and sustaining interaction and dialogue between various stakeholders in society.

Keywords: Direct Line program, Sharjah Radio, Community Engagement, Participatory Communication, Community development.

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has witnessed over the last decades rapid development in all fields, including in the media sphere, enabling it to emerge as a regional and international hub for media companies and corporations. This growth follows a clear strategy adopted by the UAE government that considers media- related industries as key tools of social and economic development and prosperity. This vision has translated into the establishment of a large number of media organizations to serve the needs of local people and the economy. One of these institutions is Sharjah Broadcasting Authority (SBA), a governmental body responsible for the development of media sector in the Emirate of Sharjah. The authority supervises various broadcasting media outlets, including Radio Sharjah.

Operating since 1972, the radio station was established with the aim to function as an outstanding media platform providing contemporary news and current affairs. "In an era in which the power of the image in all its forms is dominating, and the influence of new media is increasing, Sharjah radio maintains its power and influence despite all technical and media developments", said Sheikh Sultan bin Ahmed Al Qasimi, the member of the Sharjah Executive Council and Chairman of Sharjah Broadcasting Authority". The station offers various programs dedicated to addressing the community's issues and inspire the values of the UAE's rich history and traditions. As guided by the vision of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah, Sharjah radio seeks to foster effective communication between the government and the people in order to contribute to social development and strengthen the station's role in the progress of a cohesive society.

This research aims to examine the role of Sharjah Radio in promoting community engagement and development, focusing on the case of the Direct Line program (Al Khat Al Mubasher). Launched in 2006, the program is broadcast live simultaneously on Sharjah TV and Radio. It follows a call-in format that provides the public with a platform through which citizens and the local community, in general, are able to raise various issues and concerns related to the Emirate of Sharjah and its residents, ranging from employment to infrastructure, housing, education, and healthcare. The main objective of the program is to benefit the community in the first place, linking the public to concerned parties among decision makers to solve the issues successfully. The program is, thus, oriented towards serving the Sharjah city community and designed to provide support for it at all levels. In addition to linking citizens with decision makers, the Direct line program seeks to contribute to community engagement by actively encouraging audiences to participate through multiple interactive channels, on air, via SMS, and on social media platforms.

Numerous research studies have demonstrated that broadcasting media can be used as a highly cost-effective tool for information and knowledge transfer in underdeveloped countries. Scholars have also argued that despite the advancement of digital media, radio is still considered powerful, influential and a tool of social and economic development (Mollgaard,2016). Radio offers a platform through which ordinary people can intervene in public debates, allowing various segments of communities to express their views and opinions on issues and decision-making that concern them. This is particularly relevant to the case of the UAE where building a knowledge society and an information economy hold a special importance in the country's development strategy. Indeed, integrating the

local communities and increase their engagement is in alignment with the vision of the country that will eventually lead to sustainable development.

Despite the importance of this topic and the central role that radio still plays in various local communities in Gulf countries, there is a dearth of research on it in the context of GCC region and UAE specifically. What's more, existing studies in the context of Arab and GCC countries tend to be descriptive and rarely use a theoretical framework that can elucidate the link between communication and participation on the one hand, and audience engagement and development on the other.

Contributing to filling multiple gaps, this paper examines the extent to which the station and its prime show contribute to community participation and awareness in, and eventually to social and economic development in the Emirates of Sharjah and UAE in general. Drawing on the development theory as well as on the concepts of participatory communication and engagement, the paper aims to answer the following key research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does the Direct Line program contribute to audience and communication engagement?

RQ2: To what extent does the Direct Line program promote participatory communication?

RQ3: To what extent does Sharjah Radio contribute to social change and community development in the Emirate of Sharjah and UAE in general?

.RQ4 :How do radio audiences and people in general in Sharjah perceive the role and contribution of the Direct Line program?

Literature Review

Radio as a medium of community development and participation

Broadcasting is the most effective and cheapest way to influence mass opinion and attitudes (Smith,2014). Numerous research studies have demonstrated that broadcasting media can be used as a highly cost-effective tool for information and knowledge transfer in underdeveloped countries (Al-hassan et al., 2011). Because of their affordability and ease of use, broadcast technologies are more pervasive than any other electronic media (Kenny & Eltzroth, 2003). Scholars also highlighted the role of broadcast media in providing information and news, mobilizing citizens, and to a lesser, extent, challenging existing views and development practices. Studies have identified the main concerns set as development priorities for d broadcasting including education, poverty, economic growth, infrastructure, climate change and social development, among others (Rycker et al., 2017).

Despite the advancement of digital media, radio is still considered powerful, influential and a tool of social and economic development (Mollgaard,2016). The medium is used to improve social practices, inform people, and achieve sustainable development. The radio has been perceived as a medium that can play an influential role in development by fostering participatory and horizontal communication, a trend that was not the case with the older centralized module of communication (Myers, 2008). Scholars have stressed particularly the role of radio as a harbinger of community development that is defined as "the gradual positive change, among people within a given geographical area, towards self-determined ideals, with minimal outside interference"(Schutte,2016, p.9). Indeed,

radio is considered the most dynamic and engaging medium as it allows new ways to interact and participate to induce change in the community. It can reach the widest audience, including rural communities and vulnerable people such as the illiterate, and the poor (UNESCO, 2017)

Various scholars have studied the role of radio as a form of community participation. Radio offers a platform through which ordinary people can intervene in public debates, allowing various segments of communities to express their views and opinions on issues and decision-making that concern them (Odunlami,2016). As a matter of fact, radio is not only functioned in one-way communication, but also it has multi-directions. It is considered to be interactive, empowering public space, and participative media (Abadi et al., 2018). Hence, the radio can operate as a public sphere through which ideas can be exchanged, opinions can be expressed, issues can be raised and resolved. Placing audiences at the heart of the broadcast plays an important role in empowering communities, bringing people together and fostering positive dialogue for change (UNESCO,2017).

Community Radio as a platform for development

Community radio can be defined as 'a radio that is about, for, by and of a specific marginalized community, whose ownership and management is representative of that community, which pursues a participatory social development agenda, and which is non-profit, non-sectarian and non-partisan'(Odartey -Wellington,et al.,2020, p.258). In other words, it is radio service that is operated by the people, close to the people and for the people. It is a medium that gives a voice to the voiceless, functions as a mouthpiece of the disadvantaged and is central to communication and democratic processes within societies (Ngugi, 2014,p.1).

The notion of community radio has traditionally been linked to participation, presupposing that people in the community take a part and play a role in the radio station. The ideal community radio station would be one that reinforces participation, and facilitates community involvement at every level, from production to management (Backhaus,2019). Community radio also can be understood as a platform for people to communicate between themselves and with their governments without interference. Hence, an effective community radio should have open access and participation by the community members in the stations' affairs. Access and participation are associated principles in community-based radio. (Mhagama,2016; Mohammed,2013; Al-hassan,et al.,2011; Ngugi,2015).

Audience radio participation

Scholars have noted that radio broadcasting is a public communication space that contributes to maintaining complicity, closeness, and personal interaction with audiences. Over more than a century, radio broadcasting has been challenged by successive new communication technologies and media; however, the radio's enduring strength remains the special relationship it maintains with audiences through acting as a platform for dialogue and intimate communication (Martínez-Costa& Prata, 2017). the radio is the original "interactive" medium. the notion of "interactive," radio allows a listener to interact with the message by listening closely and giving the visual correlation themselves (Stein,2013). Over the years, the radio has been able to reinvent the ways through which it approaches its audience, finding new ways to build and consolidate communities of listeners and users (Martínez-Costa &Prata,2017).

The audience's participation in community radio has been investigated

by researchers. For instance, Guo(2015) has conducted case studies on two U.S. community radio stations. The case studies intended to explore the link between community radio and the community. The findings show that community radio continues to be relevant in this digital era and that it is the most trustworthy form of mass media. Nevertheless, the study finds that audience participation in community radio is limited, and there are challenges in adopting new technologies in this medium. Another study by Roa and Erazo (2017) has sought to measure the degree of support of the public's participation in the production, diffusion and radio management. The study found that the audience perceives the radio station as a tool to enhance socio-cultural dynamics in the region. However, the audience thinks that the directors of the radio station did not encourage active participation with communities. Hence, active and critical participation is absent in the radio. The study therefore concludes that democratic relations between communal broadcasters and their audiences are limited.

Radio broadcasting in the UAE as a tool of development

In the United Arab Emirates, media in general and broadcasting, in particular, has been perceived as an agent for social change and national development ever since the formation of the country in 1971. National broadcasting was established from the beginning as a tool to promote socio-economic change and to preserve cultural traditions (Ayish, 2013). The UAE media also function as a mirror that reflects society and the aspects of contemporary culture, economics, and politics. Since the UAE establishment, the media industry has made major progresses, especially with a successful transition into digital technologies and the incorporation of new ICTs in all aspects of media production (Khan,2014). During a meeting with media representative operating in the UAE, His Highness

Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces highlighted that '' The national media plays a key role in the development progress of the UAE through highlighting the national developmental aspirations and putting the spotlight on the constructive ideas that contribute to further advancing the country''(WAM,2016). Scholars have argued that the role of broadcasting in the country is not limited only to reinforcing national identity and fostering economic progress; it is also contributing to building bridges with regional and international audiences. While the UAE is a small nation in size and population, it has one of the most effective media infrastructures in the region for press, broadcast, and electronic media (Ayish,2013).

There are relatively few studies related to the role of broadcast media in the UAE as a tool of development. For instance, Al Ali (2017) has analysed the role of local satellite channels in the social and cultural development in the Emirati society. The study explored the perceptions of the audience in UAE towards the performance of Emirates Satellite TV Channels. It concluded that people tend to prefer watching programs that tackle social issues related to their own experience. The study also emphasises the need for new strategies for local TV Satellite channels based on Arab and local values and traditions and charting new media ethics.

In addition, Naeem (2021) highlights the role of the media in the national sustainable development in society. National media are considered as a major engine to deliver messages that support the national identity through its media content. They also keep pace with the essence of development and its process that UAE is witnessing in all fields. National media are considered the cornerstone in reinforcing the values and the culture of the UAE, while promoting cultural openness and civilized communication.

The case of the Direct Line Program

"Live communication through the Khat Al Mobashar (Direct Line) radio program will continue to keep the public informed about what the government is doing and the decisions it is taking", said His Highness Dr. Shaikh Sultan Bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah (Achkhanian,2015). The program, which is broadcast live simultaneously on Sharjah TV and Radio, was launched in 2006, and in 2011 was aired on TV as well. It is a one and half hour program broadcasted from Sunday to Thursday from 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm. It is presented alternatively by four major presenters: Mohammed Khalaf, General Manager of Sharjah Broadcasting Authority and Programs Presenter, Hassan Yagoub, Acting Secretary-General of Sharjah Media Council and Programs Presenter, Ahmed Sultan, Script Writer and Programs Presenter, and Mohammed Majid, Programs Presenter. The Direct Line program seeks, indeed, to convey the concerns of the community to officials and a bridge to communicate with them. Huge number of calls and SMSs are received every day including suggestions, concerns and demands. What adds value to the program and attracts considerable public attention is the interventions of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah in the program. He directly intervenes to respond to people's requests and concerns as announcing the minimum wage for retirees, providing job opportunities for citizens, and amending a number of laws related to the advisory council (Al Rifai,2019).

Theoretical framework

For the purpose of investigating the extent to which Sharjah Radio's Direct Line program is considered a tool of community participation and development, we draw, first, on the theory of "participatory communication"

in the context of development communication theory. Mefalopulos (2008) identifies three major theoretical concepts in the field of development of communication: modernization paradigm, the dependency theory, and the participatory paradigm. The modernization paradigm is the dominant paradigm that involves dissemination of information and persuasion of audiences to change attitudes and behaviours. The dependency theory includes the world-system theory that suggests that the world was composed of two blocs: the core, including of a few rich countries, and the periphery, including of many poor countries. On the other hand, the participatory approach or the emerging paradigm focuses on people's participation and empowerment. People are considered as active participants in the development process rather than passive ones. Hence, they are engaged and included to propose the appropriate strategy for change. This approach has gained increasing attention in the development context and its practices.

Scholars agreed that in essence development communication is the sharing of knowledge intended to achieve a consensus for action that considers the interests, needs and capacities of all concerns (Servaes, 2002). Communication for development involves sustainable change in the development operations by engaging participants. Meaningful participation depends on the application of genuine two-way communication module and practices. Therefore, participatory communication is a dialogical communication rather than linear type of communication (Mefalopulos,2008). In this sense, participatory communication refers to the communication of information between the parties engaged in the development process through dialogue to attain mutual understanding and consensus for the decision-making process (Aminah,2016).

According to Cornish and Dunn (2009), participatory communication is a process of dialogue developed through multiplicity, culture and context. The applications of participatory development communication go beyond the traditional notion of behaviour change to include, examining socioeconomic and political circumstances , recognizing priorities, evaluating risks and opportunities, empowering people, strengthening organizations, and promoting development social change within complex cultural and political environment (Mefalopulos, 2008). Undoubtedly, the participatory communication process will not be achieved without media communication that plays the major role in the process (Servaes, 2003). Tufle and Mefalopulos (2009) coin the role of media in participatory communication that allow more dialogue, such as community-based media. They emphasize that participatory communication involves visibility and voice in the mediated public sphere.

In addition to participatory communication, the notion of "community engagement" is another key concept that is guiding this study. Engagement has been introduced as a fundamental concept in the context of public relations especially when it comes to new technological and social developments and the effect this has on reshaping and reconceptualizing public relations (Jelen-Sanchez, 2017). The concept is closely linked to relationship building and dialogue where the public is involved in the activities of an organization to create a network of mutual understanding and beneficial relationships (Watkins, 2017). Engagement is associated with notions such as consultation, listening, involvement, openness, and, most importantly, dialogue. While engagement has been a buzzword in public relations practice and theory for over a decade, the concept has been applied to other forms of communicative interactions between the publics

and the organization (Dhanesh, 2017).

Scholars have noted that participatory radio programming can be utilized to engage listeners in community-generated education program that are produced through collaborative work with radio listener clubs (Muloongo, 2011). Research on three cases of community radio programming establishes that community radio facilitates community-led social learning that makes use of extending and localizing its engagement with the community in environmental learning. The study also highlights that Community radio allow active participation and engagement of the community at the level of members of radio listener clubs and in engaging learning interactions between listeners and experts (Muloongo, 2011).

Besides, Abdulai and others (2021) reflect on the community-building function of radio and how it mobilized to support climate change knowledge transfer in rural communities through engaging diverse audiences. They establish that community radio can improve place-based identities by building a distinct forum for audience engagement which is considered an effective tool for climate change knowledge transfer.

Placing the Direct Line program in the conceptual framework of participatory communication and community engagement, the current study aims to examine whether the program actively encourages audiences to participate, engage the community, and listen to them. The notion of participatory communication offers a specific perspective on how to articulate social, decision-making, and developmental processes. Examining how the program encourages people to participate and how this accounts for development and social change, participatory approach is applicable. Using participatory communication as a conceptual framework

illustrates how the program can influence broader social change processes. In other words, the program attends to function as a medium through which people can participate and communicate to induce social change and development. The perspective of participatory communication describes how the boarder community interacts through community media and takes part in public discourse. Also, the concept establishes the extent to which the program encourages two-way communication, which, in turn, encourages the diversification of opinions. Participatory communication and community engagement are assumed to highlight the role of Sharjah radio as a powerful tool contributing to development and positive social change.

Research methodology

To answer the above questions, the paper uses a quantitative method, particularly a survey to examine the extent to which the Direct Line program aired by Sharjah Radio contributes to community participation and engagement, and eventually to development in the Emirate of Sharjah.

Sampling

The population of the survey is Emirati citizens in the Emirate of Sharjah, and the targeted sample size was around 300 Emirati adult males and females living in the city of Sharjah. The sampling is motivated by the fact that citizens living in Sharjah are expected to be more familiar with Sharjah Radio and the Direct Line program. Respondents are selected using convenience nonprobability sampling where I contacted readily available people that are most likely to be listeners to Sharjah radio station. Convenience sampling is used when "members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical

proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study" (Etikan et al., 2016)

Procedure

The questionnaire used was distributed by email, WhatsApp and Instagram direct messages in both Arabic and English. Among the 354 respondents contacted for the survey, 285 completed and returned the questionnaire (81%) while 69 persons (19%) indicated they were not familiar with the Direct Line program. All valid responses received were collected and processed using SPSS while maintaining the anonymity of data since no personal information identifying respondents was collected or stored.

The questionnaire included 23 Likert scale questions covering four main sections, namely demographics, audience engagement, participatory communication, and contribution to development. The questionnaire tested the demographics of gender, age and educational level as independent variables against the independent variables of respondents' perception of the Direct Line Program and its contribution to participatory communication and development.

Findings and Analysis

Demographics

The sample of the study was composed of 61% females and 39% males from diverse social backgrounds. Trying to obtain balanced samples, I approached a nearly equal number of females and males. However, females tend to be more willing to participate in the survey. According to a Jackson and others (2001), a higher survey response rate for females than males is

expected in the online survey as females tend to engage in online activities that involve communication and exchange of information, while males tend to engage in online activities that involve seeking of information. Results indicate that the participants are evenly distributed between the age groups between 18 and 55, with the highest group belonging to those between 26 and 35. The only exception in this regard is the senior category of respondents who are 56 and above and constituting only 5% of the sample population.

Table1. Demographics.

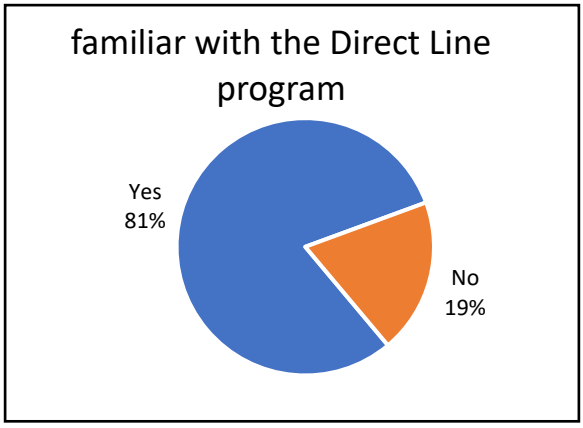
variable	sub	N	%
Gender	Male	111	39%
	Female	174	61%
Age group	18-25	64	22%
	26-35	92	32%
	36-45	60	21%
	46-55	55	19%
	Above 56	14	5%
Academic Qualification	Primary-Secondary School	4	1%
	High School	63	22%
	Diploma-higher Diploma	32	11%
	Bachelor Degree	135	47%
	Postgraduate	51	18%

Audience Engagement

As mentioned above, (81%) of the respondents are familiar with the Direct Line program, while (19%) indicated they were not familiar with it (see table 2), hence reflecting the program's popularity and reach in the local community.

Table 2 people familiarity with the Direct line Prgoram

familiar with the Direct Line program	Frequency	Percent
Yes	285	81
No	69	19
Total	**354**	**100**



Results indicate that respondents mildly agree that they listen to the Direct Line program regularly. The majority of the respondents believe that the audience are permitted to participate in proposing issues and topics discussed in the Direct Line program (see table 2). Results show also that although 81% are aware of the program, not a great number of participants are listening to the program regularly. Hence, some are loyal audiences,

while others are not encouraged to listen to the program in a regular basis which may indicate the need to build more effective relationships with audiences and to activate new ways to attract more loyal listeners. The data indicate clearly that the program is enabling the audience to participate in identifying issues and topics that can be raised in the program with a mean of 4.05. What's more, participants strongly agreed that the interaction with the audience is mostly via call-in format. On the other hand, respondents mildly agreed that the SMSs are their preferable way of communication with the program. When it comes to social media accounts, most of the participants believe that the radio's social media accounts are used effectively to encourage the audience to participate in the program and feedback is initiated through them as illustrated in table 3.

Therefore, it seems that call-ins and social media accounts are more effective means to initiate audience interaction than SMSs. This indicates that the program should consider engaging the listeners through SMS as well. The mediators, in this case, may deal with the SMSs as effective as the call-in by discussing the issue raised and seeking for potential solutions. Because most of the participants perceive social media platforms as successful in encouraging the audience to participate, they can be used to bridge the gap between the program and the public through integrating them into the flow of the program. As far as audience feedback is concerned, the data shows that the majority of participants think that the program is considering and attending to feedback. Furthermore, the data also shows that the program is usually initiating interactive dialogue with the audience with a mean of 4 (see table 3 below).

Table3.Audience Engagement

Questions	no	Mean	Stand. .Dev	result
I listen to the Direct Line program on a regular basis	285	3.45	1.076	Agree
The audience participates in proposing issues and topics discussed in the Direct Line program	285	4.05	0.812	Agree
The audience interacts through the program mostly via calls	285	4.20	0.734	Strongly agree
I prefer to send SMSs to communicate with the program	285	3.59	0.984	Agree
I believe that the radio's social media accounts are used effectively to encourage the audience to participate in the program	285	3.96	0.907	Agree
Public members' feedback is encouraged through social media accounts	285	3.93	0.951	Agree
People's feedback is taken into consideration and attended to	285	3.91	1.019	Agree
The program is usually initiating interactive dialogues with the .audience	285	4.00	0.882	Agree
Weighted Mean		3.887		Agree
Standard Deviation		0.6119		

Accordingly, the data proves that the program is supporting participatory communication and engaging audiences through various channels, while two-way communication is encouraged as well. The above results, however, show that more audience interaction can be further enhanced if the audience's interaction through SMSs is equally supported as actively as other communicative channels. Overall, it is possible to conclude that the program is including the audience through meaningful dialogue and through other interactive channels.

Direct Line Program and Participatory communication

The Majority believe that the discussions through the program are based on rational reasoning and facts. Also, people's opinions and views are respected with a mean of 4.063 as shown in table 4. Accordingly, the Direct Line program holds discussions that are based on facts and reasoning. Also, people's views are respected by the mediators. Concerning time allocated for the callers, most of the participants found that the program's moderators are allocating sufficient time for the audience members to voice their issues through call-ins. Respondents seem to agree that audience members are not interrupted or controlled by the moderators. Participants somehow perceive communication through the program as a two-way process and symmetrical with a mean of 3.7. Significantly, the majority consider the Direct Line program the voice of the people as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Participatory communication through the Direct Line

Questions	no	Mean	Stand. .Dev	result
The discussions through the program are based on rational reasoning and facts	285	4.01	0.856	Agree
I believe that the program's presenters always show respect to different opinions and audience members	285	4.063	0.917	Agree
The program's moderators are allocating sufficient time for the callers to voice their issues	285	3.83	0.957	Agree
The audience members aren't interrupted or controlled by the moderators in calls-in	285	3.60	1.049	Agree
The communication through the program is a two way in nature .((symmetrical	285	3.70	0.843	Agree
The Direct Line program can be considered as the voice of the people in the community	285	4.060	0.953	Agree
Weighted Mean		3.878		Agree
Standard Deviation		0.731		

Hence, the program seems to use a more participatory communication approach. It functions as a public sphere tin the community to some extent as the interaction is symmetrical and people discussions are enabled based in facts and rational reasoning. More importantly, the Direct Line program can be considered as the voice of the people in the community. Nevertheless, based on the data, moderators should not interrupt the callers

and allow them to fully make their points. Overall, the result indicates that through the Direct line program of Sharjah radio is moving toward a more respectful, participatory, and transformative approach as participatory communication involves visibility and voice in the mediated public sphere and this is applicable on the program.(Tufle & Mefalopulos, 2009).

Therefore, the program can be considered as a public sphere where space and tools are provided for active participants to discover, understand, and voice community needs, concerns, and aspirations.

The Program's Contribution to Social Change and Community Development

The majority of respondents think that the Direct Line program is covering the most topical and urgent issues related to the Emirate of Sharjah and the UAE in general. The data show that most participants (a mean of 4.05) agreed that the program is proposing solutions to the issues raised, and that the authorities always solve the problems addressed during the program. Still, fewer participants think that the policy decisions to solve these problems are directly influenced by the program itself (mean of 3.84) (see table 5).

The program seems to actively encourage audiences and engage them through the program. It provides them with the opportunity to bring about positive change in their lives. Covering the most topical and urgent issues in society, the program can account for positive impacts on people's lives. Also, it seems that the problems usually got solved and addressed by the authorities based on what most of the participants suggested. Therefore, the program is relevant to people's current concerns and the issues raised are attended to by the authorities. Besides, the results reveal that the program

induces changes in the decision making of different governmental entities. It is closely linked to community engagement for change where citizens are engaged in discussions and decision-making affecting them and that will eventually cause improvement in the community.

Equally important, respondents slightly agree that the welfare of the community is promoted through the program. This indicates that few people may not find the program helpful in serving the interest of the community. According to the findings, the Direct Line program would contribute to the enhancement of the quality of people's life in different spheres with a mean of 3.8. Moreover, participants agreed that the program successfully links the public to concerned / responsible parties to solve the issues with a mean of 3.98 (see table 5).

Table 5. The Direct Line's contribution to development

Questions	no	Mean	Stand. .Dev	result
The program is an excellent medium to cover the most topical and urgent issues in society	285	4.12	0.919	Agree
The program proposes solutions to issues raised by the public	285	3.92	0.920	Agree
Issues raised in the program always get solved and addressed by authorities	285	4.05	0.698	Agree
The program influences the decision making of different governmental entities	285	3.84	0.938	Agree

The program effectively promotes the welfare of the community	285	3.70	0.957	Agree
The Direct Line program contributes to the enhancement of the quality of people's life in different spheres	285	3.80	0.952	Agree
The program successfully links the public to concerned / responsible par-.ties to solve the issues	285	3.98	0.878	Agree
Weighted Mean		3.91		Agree
Standard Deviation		0.7040		

As the results show that the program promotes the well-being of the community to some extent, it may affect the decision of other authorities for the community's welfare. In other words, the program can, to some extent, trigger other government entities to adapt their strategies to satisfy people's needs. As we can notice, the program is supposed to contribute to social development in terms of working to improve the quality of people's lives through connecting with making to solve issues of the people. It is attempting to serve the community by creating a bridge between the community and the responsible parties. Overall, we can infer that the Direct Line program is initiating positive change in the community as it works for the welfare of society and communicate effectively with the responsible parties to solve the problems. For instance, the program communicates with the different responsible parties regarding housing grants, work opportunities, salaries and retirement in Sharjah to find a suitable solution for the community which will ultimately promote the wellbeing of society. In view of this, we can reflect that the Direct Line program successfully contributes to community development and social change regarding addressing and solving the issues and promoting to better standard of living

Public opinion and Awareness

Considering transparency and fairness participants suggested that Direct Line program reflects the issues of society thoroughly and fairly. So, the program is perceived as fair and transparent regarding covering public issues. The results also reveal that the program is raising awareness among the pubic in society as the majority stated.

Table 6. Public opinion and awareness

Questions	no	Mean	Stand. .Dev	result
The Direct line program reflects the issues of society thoroughly and fairly	285	3.83	0.994	Agree
The program always makes me aware of the community matters	285	3.97	0.849	Agree
Weighted Mean		3.90		Agree
Standard Deviation		0.801		

In light of this, the Direct Line program is shaping public opinion and awareness in the Emirate. It also provides the whole community with the opportunity to voice their concerns and make them all aware of the community matters. Therefore, audiences seem to hold a positive perception toward the role and contribution of the Direct Line program as a source of public opinion and awareness formation.

Demographic patterns

Gender

Results demonstrate that there is a minor difference between male and female perception toward the Direct Line program. According to the findings, male respondents tend to listen to the Direct Line program more than females since 56% of males whether strongly agree or agree that they are listening to the Direct Line program on a regular basis compared to 42% of females as shown in the following table. Based on statistics 65% of radio usage in the UAE are males, while 55% are females (Satistica,2013). Therefore, men tend to listen to the Direct Line program more then women maybe because they generally use the radio more often than women. Also, researchers suggest that men more likely than women to look for solutions to problems in order to avoid further unnecessary discussions of problems (Baslow & Rubenfield, 2003). This may explain why more men than women are interested in listening to the program.

Table 7. Gender differences

	Gender	%Male	%Female	Gap	**z**	p
I listen to the Direct Line program on a regular basis	Strongly agree	24%	16%	8%	-2.276	0.023
	Agree	32%	26%	6%		
	Neutral	27%	39%	-12%		
	Disagree	14%	14%	0%		
	Strongly disagree	2%	5%	%-3		
	Strongly disagree	4%	4%	0%		

Both males and females have almost the same perception toward audience engagement through the program in terms of proposing the issues and interacting using different channels. In addition, when it comes to audience feedback, there is almost no difference in the views of male and female respondents.

Table8 attitude toward engagement among genders

	Gender	%Male	%Female	Gap	z	p
The audience participates in proposing issues and topics discussed in the Direct Line program	Strongly agree	32%	28%	4%	-0.616	0.538
	Agree	50%	53%	%-3		
	Neutral	14%	14%	0%		
	Disagree	4%	5%	%-1		
	Strongly disagree	1%	1%	0%		
I believe that the radio 's social media ac s are used effectively to encourage the audience to participate in the program	Strongly agree	30%	31%	%-1	-0.642	0.521
	Agree	41%	44%	%-3		
	Neutral	23%	21%	2%		
	Disagree	5%	3%	2%		
	Strongly disagree	2%	2%	0%		
People's feedback is taken into consideration and attended to	Strongly agree	34%	29%	5%	-0.309	0.757
	Agree	38%	45%	%-7		
	Neutral	17%	20%	%-3		
	Disagree	5%	3%	2%		
	Strongly disagree	5%	3%	2%		

However, there is a slight difference in male and female response regarding the Direct Line's contribution to development and social change as women are inclined to have a more positive attitude than men as demonstrated in the below tables. Women in the UAE are empowered, and their issues are given special attention. They are also encouraged to raise significant topics of discussion in regard to development and society through different media platforms. So, that may justify their more positive attitude toward the program as a key contributor to development and social change.

Table.9. Attitude toward contribution to development and change among gender

	Gender	%Male	%Female	Gap	**z**	p
The program is an excellent medium to cover the most topical and urgent issues in society	Strongly agree	38%	37%	1%	-0.885	0.376
	Agree	39%	51%	-12%		
	Neutral	17%	6%	11%		
	Disagree	3%	3%	0%		
	Strongly disagree	4%	2%	2%		
Issues raised in the program always get solved and addressed by authorities	Strongly agree	28%	26%	2%	-0.333	0.739
	Agree	47%	54%	%-7		
	Neutral	25%	20%	5%		
	Disagree					
	Strongly disagree					

The program effectively promotes the welfare of the community	Strongly agree	24%	16%	8%	-0.839	0.401
	Agree	32%	53%	-21%		
	Neutral	31%	22%	9%		
	Disagree	10%	7%	3%		
	Strongly disagree	4%	2%	2%		
The Direct Line program contributes to the enhancement of the quality of people's life in different spheres	Strongly agree	25%	20%	5%	-0.014	0.989
	Agree	44%	51%	%-7		
	Neutral	16%	23%	%-7		
	Disagree	9%	5%	4%		
	Strongly disagree	5%	1%	4%		

Moreover, females seem to have a little more positive perception toward the moderators' respect for the audience and their opinions since 81% either agreed or disagreed to the statement compared to 71% of the males. In addition, females consider the Direct line program as the voice of the community more than males. Nevertheless, males tend to think that the audience members aren't interrupted or controlled by the moderators in calls-in more than females as shown in the following table. Researchers find that men tend to dominate the conversation more than women and they use speech that included facts, data and aims to solve problems. Women, on the other hand, use more of a relationship style that aims toward rapport-building. They tend to communicate more personal information and highlight inclusion of all speakers (Schueneman,2021).

Table10. Attitude toward the program as using the participatory approach

	Gender	%Male	%Female	Gap	z	p
I believe that the program's presenters always show respect to different opinions and audience members	Strongly agree	39%	36%	3%	-0.619	0.536
	Agree	32%	45%	-13%		
	Neutral	19%	16%	3%		
	Disagree	10%	2%	8%		
	Strongly disagree	0%	2%	%-2		
The audience members aren't interrupted or controlled by the moderators in calls-in	Strongly agree	28%	16%	12%	-2.068	0.039
	Agree	39%	38%	1%		
	Neutral	15%	33%	-18%		
	Disagree	14%	11%	3%		
	Strongly disagree	5%	3%	2%		
The Direct Line program can be considered as the voice of the people in the community	Strongly agree	35%	35%	0%	-0.865	0.387
	Agree	41%	50%	%-9		
	Neutral	15%	8%	7%		
	Disagree	6%	4%	2%		
	Strongly disagree	3%	3%	0%		

Regarding shaping public opinion and awareness in the Emirate, women are prone to hold a more positive attitude in this matter than males. This may indicate that the program affects women more than men regarding the raising of awareness and opinion formation.

Table11. Attitude toward shaping opinion and awareness among genders

	Gender	%Male	%Female	Gap	z	p
The Direct line program reflects the issues of society thoroughly and fairly	Strongly agree	32%	18%	14%	-0.187	0.851
	Agree	36%	60%	-24%		
	Neutral	17%	14%	3%		
	Disagree	12%	4%	8%		
	Strongly disagree	4%	4%	0%		

Accordingly, the results indicate that males tend to listen to the Direct Line program on a regular basis more than females, a difference that is statistically significant. Besides, males believe that "callers are not interrupted or controlled by program providers during calls" more than females, a difference that is statistically significant.

Age Group

Findings indicate that there are correlations between listening to the Direct Line program and age. People of older age groups tend to listen to the program more than younger participants as shown in the following table. According to statistics, people belonging to older age groups listen to the radio more than younger age groups (Nielsen,2018). Older audiences are more stable, while younger audiences tend to test new alternatives.

Table12. Listening patterns among age groups

Qu	Age	18-) %(35	%(36-above)	Gap	z	p
I listen to the Direct Line program on a regular basis	Strongly agree	56.4%	43.6%	12.7%	-1.775	0.076
	Agree	39.5%	60.5%	-21.0%		
	Neutral	63.9%	36.1%	27.8%		
	Disagree	56.1%	43.9%	12.2%		
	Strongly disagree	72.7%	27.3%	45.5%		
	Strongly disagree	5%	3%	2%		

In addition, participants aged between 18 and 35 have a slightly more positive attitude toward engaging the audience in proposing the topic discussed in the program**, us**ing social media to encourage the audience to participate in the program and considering feedback. Youth issues are discussed intensively in the program and the ruler of Sharjah has stressed on the importance of providing the youth with the opportunity to improve their quality of life. For instance, employment, housing, universities internships and others are key topics that are taken into consideration in the Direct Line program reflecting the directives of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi.

Table13. Attitude toward engagement among age groups

Qu	Age	18-) %(35	%(36-above)	Gap	z	p
The audience participates in proposing issues and topics discussed in the Direct Line program	Strongly agree	55.4%	44.6%	10.8%	-0.770	0.441
	Agree	57.0%	43.0%	14.1%		
	Neutral	48.7%	51.3%	-2.6%		
	Disagree	41.7%	58.3%	-16.7%		
	Strongly disagree	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%		
I believe that the radio 's social media ac s are used effectively to encourage the audience to participate in the program	Strongly agree	59.8%	40.2%	19.5%	-0.795	0.426
	Agree	51.2%	48.8%	2.5%		
	Neutral	56.5%	43.5%	12.9%		
	Disagree	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%		
	Strongly disagree	40.0%	60.0%	-20.0%		
People's feedback is taken into consideration and attended to	Strongly agree	54.5%	45.5%	9.1%	-0.246	0.806
	Agree	55.0%	45.0%	10.0%		
	Neutral	62.3%	37.7%	24.5%		
	Disagree	41.7%	58.3%	-16.7%		
	Strongly disagree	33.3%	66.7%	-33.3%		

Results also show a slight difference among age groups in perceiving the program as an excellent medium to cover the most topical and urgent issues in society as younger participants tend to hold a more positive attitude. However, there is no clear diffidence in believing that issues raised in the program always get solved and addressed by authorities. Besides, both age groups equally consider the program as a medium that promotes welfare of the community and contributes to the enhancement of the quality of people's life in different spheres.

Table14. Attitude toward contribution to development and change among age groups

Qu	Age	18-) %(35	%(36-above)	Gap	z	p
The program is an excellent medium to cover the most topical and urgent issues in society	Strongly agree	55.7%	44.3%	11.3%	-0.136	0.892
	Agree	53.8%	46.2%	7.6%		
	Neutral	56.7%	43.3%	13.3%		
	Disagree	33.3%	66.7%	-33.3%		
	Strongly disagree	75.0%	25.0%	50.0%		
Issues raised in the program always get solved and addressed by authorities	Strongly agree	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	-1.872	0.061
	Agree	52.1%	47.9%	4.1%		
	Neutral	66.7%	33.3%	33.3%		
	Disagree					
	Strongly disagree					

Qu	Age	18-) %(35	%(36-above)	Gap	z	p
The program effectively promotes the welfare of the community	Strongly agree	43.6%	56.4%	-12.7%	-0.378	0.706
	Agree	63.8%	36.2%	27.6%		
	Neutral	54.2%	45.8%	8.3%		
	Disagree	41.7%	58.3%	-16.7%		
	Strongly disagree	28.6%	71.4%	-42.9%		
The Direct Line program contributes to the enhancement of the quality of people's life in different spheres	Strongly agree	44.4%	55.6%	-11.1%	-0.087	0.930
	Agree	62.8%	37.2%	25.5%		
	Neutral	53.4%	46.6%	6.9%		
	Disagree	36.8%	63.2%	-26.3%		
	Strongly disagree	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%		

Participants belonging to the age group 18-35 think that the program's presenters always show respect to different opinions and audience members are not interrupted or controlled by the moderators in calls-in more than the other group. Nevertheless, both groups consider the Direct Line program as the voice of the community in almost the same extent.

Table15 Attitude toward the program as using the participatory approach by aged

Qu	Age	18-) %(35	%(36-above)	Gap	z	p
I believe that the program's presenters always show respect to different opinions and audience members	Strongly agree	59.0%	41.0%	18.1%	-0.551	0.581
	Agree	48.2%	51.8%	-3.5%		
	Neutral	66.7%	33.3%	33.3%		
	Disagree	40.0%	60.0%	-20.0%		
	Strongly disagree	33.3%	66.7%	-33.3%		
The audience members aren't interrupted or controlled by the moderators in calls-in	Strongly agree	63.8%	36.2%	27.6%	-0.717	0.473
	Agree	50.5%	49.5%	0.9%		
	Neutral	52.7%	47.3%	5.4%		
	Disagree	61.8%	38.2%	23.5%		
	Strongly disagree	5%	3%	2%		
The Direct Line program can be considered as the voice of the people in the community	Strongly agree	35%	35%	0%	-0.723	0.469
	Agree	41%	50%	%-9		
	Neutral	15%	8%	7%		
	Disagree	6%	4%	2%		
	Strongly disagree	3%	3%	0%		

Furthermore, more people from the older age group believe that the Direct line program reflects the issues of society thoroughly and fairly compared to the younger group.

Table16 Attitude toward shaping opinion and awareness among genders

Qu			Age	18-) %(35	%(36-above)	Gap	z	p
The Direct line program reflects the issues of society thoroughly and fairly	Strongly agree	32%	18%	14%	-0.147	0.883		
	Agree	36%	60%	-24%				
	Neutral	17%	14%	3%				
	Disagree	12%	4%	8%				
	Strongly disagree	4%	4%	0%				

Although older respondents tend to listen to the Direct Line program on a regular, generally, there is no significant difference between the different age groups.

Discussion

In view of the findings, we can conclude that the Sharjah Radio's Direct Line program can be an effective tool to produce positive change in society and to engage the community members. This study answered the key research questions as the following:

Q1: To what extent does the Direct Line program contribute to audience and communication engagement?

According to the findings of the conducted survey, the majority of the participants are aware of the Direct Line program, while they mildly agree that they listen to the program regularly. Hence, the program is popular, but it needs to reach more regular listeners. The results indicate that the Direct Line program is successfully engaging its public in terms of participation in proposing the issues, interaction through various traditional and new mediums, and provision of feedback. Sharjah Radio should work on attracting more loyal audience through campaign in social media as social media platforms are believed to engage the public effectively. Moreover, the Direct Line program's moderators should encourage the listeners to participate through sending SMSs by dealing with them as effective as call in. Also, audience engagement through SMSs can be increased through contests that are rarely held in some episodes. Overall, we can say that the Direct Line program is exerting considerable efforts in involving the public in the program. The audience seems to be of utmost importance to the program's success.

Q2: To what extent does the Direct Line program promote participatory communication?

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the audience of the Direct Line program can be regarded as active participants in the program. The program seems to adopt a more participatory communication approach where interactive dialogue is initiated. As it facilitates communication that is based on respect, rational reasoning, and facts, the program can be considered as a public sphere. When the moderators are showing respect to different viewpoints and audience members with different backgrounds, they feel free to express their opinions and contribute to meaningful dialogues especially when enough time is allocated for such discussions.

Perceiving the program as the voice of the community, this means that it offers the people a platform that engages multiple voices and perspectives and contributes towards progressive social change. The communication through the program is somehow symmetrical and two-way in nature. The mediators are treating the listeners with respect and accept different opinions. However, sometimes the moderators are controlling the conversations or interrupting the callers, which runs against the concept of engagement and it should be avoided to achieve its purpose of effective communication and community involvement. Generally, the program acts as the voice of the community and facilitates discussions with the public. So, the program involves effective participatory communication where people can exchange information and views on questions of common concern.

Q3 To what extent does Sharjah Radio contribute to social change and community development in the Emirate of Sharjah and UAE in general?

Answering research question (3), the results demonstrate that through the Direct Line program, Sharjah Radio is contributing to social change and community development to a great extent. The most topical and urgent issues with high community relevance are covered in the program. Therefore, the audience refers to the program to address their issues and find workable solutions proposed by the program mediators or the concerned parties. By creating a communicative channel to link the public to governmental entities, the program contributes to fulfilling the community need, promoting positive change, and enhancing the quality of people's lives in different spheres. The program also is connecting the audience to the border community by the issues raised and discussed. The program may consider putting extra effort in promoting the welfare of the community. To a great extent, the station seems to have proven itself as a powerful tool to initiate social change and community development.

Q4 How do radio audiences and people in general in Sharjah perceive the role and contribution of the Direct Line program?

In light of the findings, audiences perceive the Direct Line program as a major player in shaping the public opinion and awareness of the community through reflecting the issues thoroughly and fairly and raising awareness of the people on community matters. Being the source of awareness and opinion shaping assists members of society to participate and get actively involved in the program. Thus, Sharjah radio is a medium of communication and information for the community which eventually account for community participation and development. In addition, generally, the results do not show major significant differences among genders and different age group.

Conclusion and recommendations

To sum up, this paper examined the extent by which Sharjah Radio's Direct Line program functions as a tool for community engagement and social development. The findings suggest that the program is effectively serving its purpose of creating a platform through which citizens voice their concerns and problems, and eventually participate in the economic and social development of local communities and UAE society in general. The paper has also highlighted some limitations such as the need to adjust the program's strategy to incorporate more effectively social media with traditional media to engage its audiences. While the findings confirm that the Direct Line program contributes to public and community engagement, there is a need on the part of Sharjah Radio draw much more on diverse media and tools to enhance participation and involvement of loyal and non-regular audiences. Moreover, the program has to maintain a balance between time allocated for covering projects underway in the Emirate

of Sharjah, on the other one hand, and the issues raised by audiences, on the other, which would strengthen the role of the program as a program contributing to the development and progress of Sharjah.

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دور الإذاعة كأداة للمشاركة المجتمعية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة : برنامج الخط المباشر كدراسة حالة

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ملخص البحث:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة دور إذاعة الشارقة كأداة لإشراك المجتمع وتنميته مع التركيز على برنامج الخط المباشر. يستند هذا البحث على مفاهيم الاتصال التشاركي والمشاركة المجتمعية باستخدام طريقة البحث الكمي وهو المسح، كانت عينة الدراسة تتكون من حوالي 300 مواطن ومواطنة من سكان إمارة الشارقة، تم اختيارهم عن طريق عينة الراحة. خلصت الدراسة إلى أن برنامج الخط المباشر الذي يبث عبر إذاعة الشارقة يسهم بشكل فعال في إشراك المجتمع ودعم جهود دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة؛ لإحداث تغيير إيجابي في المجتمع على المستوى المحلي. تشير النتائج إلى أن برنامج الخط المباشر يقوم بإشراك الجمهور بشكل فعال عن طريق إتاحة الفرصة لهم للمشاركة في اقتراح القضايا ومناقشة القوانين والقرارات ولإعادة النظر فيها، وذلك عن طريق توفير التغذية الراجعة والمداخلات بهذا الخصوص. تكشف الدراسة أيضًا أن برنامج الخط المباشر يشرك أفراد المجتمع بكل فعالية في الحوار والمناقشات. كما يمكن اعتبار برنامج الخط المباشر مجالًا عامًا مصغرا؛ إذ إنّه يسهل التواصل بين الجمهور والبرنامج القائم على الاحترام والتفكير العقلاني والمشاركة. والجدير بالذكر أن برنامج الخط المباشر يعبر بشكل خاص عن صوت المجتمع وآرائه المختلفة. من ناحية أخرى ، تشيرالنتائج إلى أن مقدمي البرنامج في بعض الأحيان يتحكمون في مجرى الحوار أو يقاطعون المتصلين مما يتعارض مع مفهوم المشاركة.

الكلمات الدالة: برنامج الخط المباشر، إذاعة الشارقة، المشاركة المجتمعية، الاتصال التشاركي، التنمية المجتمعية.

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