

# Inclusive Broadcasting for Vulnerable Groups

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**Abstract**—Media inclusion is essential for ensuring equitable access, representation, and participation of marginalized and vulnerable communities within the communication ecosystem. This study examines the role of inclusive and participatory broadcasting in addressing the information divide and promoting social inclusion in rural India. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines a review of policy and academic literature with primary data collected through a structured survey of 700 respondents in the broadcast regions of Community Radio Connect 107.8 FM across the states of Rajasthan and Haryana in India.

Findings indicate exceptionally high engagement with community radio, with 98.7% of respondents reporting regular listenership, highlighting its accessibility and credibility among underserved populations. The results demonstrate that participatory, community-driven media practices significantly improve access to information, enhance social participation, and contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable groups, particularly farmers, women, and members of self-help groups.

The study argues that inclusive broadcasting, when rooted in local contexts and supported by enabling policy frameworks and technological advancements, can effectively reduce communication inequalities and amplify marginalized voices. By offering empirical evidence from grassroots media practice, this research contributes to the discourse on media inclusion as a critical pathway to social equity and sustainable development.

**Index Terms**—Accessibility, Aspirational areas, Community radio, Inclusive broadcasting, Marginalised, Media inclusion, Technology, Vulnerable groups

## I. INTRODUCTION

Media systems structure access to information, public discourse, and the distribution of voice. In unequal societies such as India, communication inequalities are embedded within intersecting hierarchies of caste, class, gender, literacy, and geography, constraining both representation and participation in knowledge production.

This study examines these dynamics through the lens of aspirational and non-aspirational regions, focusing on areas reached by Community Radio Connect 107.8 FM: Rajasthan (non-aspirational) and Haryana's Nuh district (aspirational), where socio-cultural contexts differ significantly. This comparison enables an analysis of how communities engage with media and negotiate everyday inequalities.

Mainstream media often reproduces hegemonic power structures through centralised narratives. In contrast, inclusive broadcasting, grounded in participatory communication, emphasises dialogue, co-creation, and community agency, aligning with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which underscores equitable access to information and inclusion in social, economic, and political processes.

However, structural constraints such as low literacy, gender disparities, digital exclusion, and socio-economic precarity continue to restrict equitable access, particularly in rural contexts, with limited empirical evidence on how inclusive media functions across diverse regions.

Community radio offers a critical alternative through its decentralised, participatory model, enabling locally grounded content and communicative agency. This study explores how Community Radio Connect operates across contrasting regional contexts to mediate communication inequalities, foster participation, and enable communities to respond to structural disparities.

### 1.1 Research Questions

To guide the analysis, the study is structured around the following research questions:

1. How does community radio facilitate inclusive broadcasting by improving access to information among vulnerable groups?
2. In what ways does participatory engagement influence trust, social participation, and behavioural outcomes?

3. What are the broader implications of community-driven media for addressing communication inequality and redistributing media power?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Media Access and Inequality

Media systems have long been critiqued for reinforcing structural inequalities through uneven access and representation. Scholars have argued that access to communication technologies is closely tied to broader socioeconomic and political conditions. Vulnerable groups often face barriers such as a lack of infrastructure, limited affordability, low digital literacy, and exclusion from dominant linguistic and cultural narratives.

The concept of communication inequality extends beyond physical access to include disparities in the ability to interpret, use, and act upon information. These inequalities have significant implications for participation in democratic processes, access to services, and social mobility.

### 2. Participatory Communication

Participatory communication frameworks emphasise the importance of involving communities in content creation, decision-making, and knowledge sharing. Rather than treating audiences as passive recipients, participatory approaches recognise them as active agents capable of shaping media narratives.

Community radio is widely regarded as a key instrument of participatory communication. It operates on principles of local ownership, inclusivity, and relevance. By enabling community members to produce and disseminate content, it fosters a sense of ownership and accountability that is often absent in mainstream media.

### 3. Communication for Social Change

Communication for social change approaches highlight the role of dialogue, collective reflection, and locally grounded knowledge in driving behavioural and social transformation. These approaches move away from top-down information dissemination models and instead emphasize horizontal communication processes that are rooted in community realities.

In this context, community radio serves as a platform for dialogue and collective learning. It facilitates the exchange of ideas, experiences, and solutions, thereby contributing to more sustainable and contextually appropriate development outcomes.

### 4. Representation and Voice

Representation in media is closely linked to issues of power and identity. Vulnerable groups are often underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media, leading to distorted narratives and limited visibility of their concerns. Inclusive broadcasting seeks to address this gap by ensuring that marginalized voices are not only heard but also shape the narratives that affect their lives. This shift from representation to voice is critical for fostering agency and empowerment.

### 5. Problem Statement:

Despite advances in media technologies and policy frameworks, large sections of the population remain excluded from meaningful communication processes. In India, such inequalities are shaped by intersecting structures of caste, class, gender, literacy, and geography, limiting access, representation, and participation. Vulnerable groups including older adults, children, persons with disabilities, migrants, minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and those in rural or precarious conditions experience compounded exclusion. These dynamics vary across aspirational and non-aspirational regions. Aspirational areas, identified for targeted development due to socio-economic deficits, receive focused policy attention, while non-aspirational regions often remain outside such prioritisation despite persistent challenges. In this context, Rajasthan (non-aspirational) and Haryana's Nuh district (aspirational) reflect differing development trajectories and socio-cultural conditions that shape how communities engage with media and navigate inequality. However, interventions often address vulnerability in fragmented ways, overlooking its intersecting nature. In line with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), there is a need for inclusive, context-sensitive, and participatory communication approaches that enable equitable access, representation, and agency across diverse regional settings.

## III. CONCEPTUAL LINKAGES AND OPERATIONALISATION

This study draws on participatory communication theory (Paulo Freire), the public sphere (Jürgen Habermas), and development communication models (Wilbur Schramm) to examine how community radio mediates communication inequalities.

- From Freire, the study adopts the concept of dialogic communication, where communities are active agents rather than passive recipients.

- From Habermas, it engages with the idea of inclusive public spheres, assessing whether marginalised voices gain space in discourse.
- From Schramm, it draws on communication as a driver of social development, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

#### IV. DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL LINKAGES

##### a) Vulnerability

Vulnerability refers to the susceptibility of individuals or groups to harm, exclusion, or disadvantage due to a combination of socio economic, political, environmental, and cultural factors. It is not merely an inherent condition but is produced and reproduced through structural inequalities that restrict access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes. In communication contexts, vulnerability is closely linked to information asymmetry, limited media access, and the absence of representation in dominant media narratives. As a result, vulnerable populations often remain excluded from both the production and consumption of relevant and empowering information.

From a communication perspective, vulnerability can also be understood as a condition shaped by a lack of voice. When individuals or groups are unable to articulate their needs, share their experiences, or influence public discourse, their vulnerability is reinforced. This makes communication access and participation central to reducing vulnerability.

##### b) Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable groups are populations that face a heightened risk of marginalization due to intersecting social, economic, and institutional disadvantages. These may include rural populations, women, informal sector workers, persons with disabilities, elderly populations, and socially marginalized communities. Importantly, vulnerability is often layered and intersectional, meaning that individuals may experience multiple forms of disadvantage simultaneously.

In media and communication studies, vulnerable groups are frequently characterized by their limited visibility and representation in mainstream media. Their concerns are often underreported, misrepresented, or entirely excluded. This lack of representation contributes to a cycle of marginalisation, in which absence from media discourse leads to reduced policy attention and continued exclusion. Within the context of this study, vulnerable groups are not

viewed solely as passive recipients of information but as potential agents of communication who can actively participate in content creation and knowledge sharing when provided with appropriate platforms such as community radio.

##### c) Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the process of ensuring equitable access, participation, and representation within social, economic, political, and cultural systems. It moves beyond mere access to emphasize meaningful participation and the recognition of diverse identities and experiences. In the context of media, inclusion implies that all groups, particularly those historically marginalized, have the opportunity to both access media content and contribute to its creation.

Inclusive broadcasting, therefore, is not limited to disseminating information to diverse audiences. It involves designing content that is contextually relevant, linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the needs of different communities. It also requires institutional mechanisms that enable participation, feedback, and co-creation.

##### d) Media Inclusion

Media inclusion extends the concept of inclusion specifically to communication systems. It encompasses three interrelated dimensions: access, representation, and participation. Access refers to the availability of media platforms and technologies. Representation involves the portrayal of diverse groups in media content in ways that are accurate and respectful. Participation emphasizes the active involvement of communities in content production and decision-making processes.

Media inclusion also addresses structural barriers such as language dominance, technological divides, and centralized media ownership that often limit the participation of marginalized groups. By challenging these barriers, inclusive media practices aim to democratize communication and create more equitable media environments.

##### e) Participatory Communication

Participatory communication is a foundational concept within this framework. It emphasizes dialogue, local knowledge, and horizontal communication processes. Unlike top-down models of communication, participatory approaches recognise communities as active contributors rather than passive recipients. This approach is particularly

relevant for vulnerable groups, as it creates opportunities for them to articulate their needs, share experiences, and influence content.

f) Communication for Social Change

Communication for social change builds on participatory principles by focusing on the transformative potential of communication. It views communication as a process that can enable communities to address inequalities, mobilize collective action, and improve their socioeconomic conditions. In this context, media platforms are not just channels of information but tools for empowerment and development.

g) Community Radio as a Conceptual Anchor

Community radio integrates all the above concepts into practice. It provides localised, accessible, and participatory communication spaces where vulnerable groups can engage with media on their own terms. By facilitating dialogue, sharing context-specific information, and enabling community participation, it addresses key dimensions of vulnerability and exclusion.

As a counter-public space, community radio allows marginalized voices to be heard outside dominant media structures. It enables the creation of alternative narratives that reflect lived realities and local knowledge. This makes it a critical medium for advancing inclusive broadcasting and strengthening communication equity.

h) Linking Conceptual Framework to the Study

The conceptual framework informs the analysis of this study by positioning community radio as an inclusive communication platform that addresses vulnerability through participation and representation. It guides the interpretation of findings by emphasising how access, engagement, and localised content contribute to reducing communication inequalities among vulnerable groups.

## V. TYPES OF VULNERABILITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Vulnerability is a multidimensional and dynamic condition shaped by structural inequalities, institutional gaps, and socio-cultural contexts. It rarely stems from a single factor; rather, it emerges from overlapping disadvantages that limit individuals' ability to cope with risks and access opportunities. Understanding these dimensions is essential for designing inclusive communication systems, particularly in community media, which seeks to engage

marginalised populations. An intersectional lens further highlights how different forms of vulnerability interact, intensify, and create complex lived realities.

Economic vulnerability remains one of the most visible forms of disadvantage. It is closely linked to poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and unstable income sources. Individuals facing such conditions often struggle to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare. Limited financial resources also restrict access to communication technologies, widening the information divide (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). In rural and semi-urban areas, this vulnerability is often tied to agriculture and informal labour markets, both highly susceptible to climate variability, market fluctuations, and policy shifts. For instance, smallholder farmers frequently face income instability due to erratic weather or fluctuating crop prices, affecting both their economic security and access to timely information. In this context, accessible platforms such as community radio become critical, offering localised, livelihood-oriented content that supports informed decision-making.

Health vulnerability includes both physical and mental health conditions that affect well-being and productivity. Chronic illnesses, disabilities, malnutrition, and mental health challenges are often compounded by weak healthcare infrastructure, low awareness, and financial barriers (World Health Organization, 2020). In underserved regions, delayed diagnosis and treatment worsen outcomes and reinforce economic and social vulnerability. Communication plays a vital role here. Access to accurate, culturally relevant health information can improve preventive behaviours and encourage timely care-seeking. Community radio has proven effective in disseminating information on sanitation, maternal health, and disease prevention in simple, relatable formats, enhancing both understanding and trust.

Social vulnerability arises from systemic exclusion, discrimination, and weak support systems. It disproportionately affects individuals marginalized by caste, gender, age, disability, or minority status, limiting access to education, employment, and public services (Susan L. Cutter et al., 2003). A key dimension of social vulnerability is the lack of representation. When voices are excluded from mainstream narratives, their concerns remain invisible, perpetuating cycles of inequality. For example, rural women may face mobility restrictions, while elderly individuals or persons with disabilities may experience isolation. Inclusive communication platforms can help address this by creating spaces for dialogue and

representation. Community radio, in particular, amplifies marginalized voices and fosters collective identity, enabling communities to share experiences and co-create solutions.

Environmental vulnerability refers to the susceptibility to natural disasters, climate change, and resource degradation. It is especially pronounced among communities dependent on natural resources, such as farmers and fisherfolk (W. Neil Adger, 2006). Increasing climate risks, including floods, droughts, and heatwaves, disproportionately impact those with limited resources to adapt. Poor housing, sanitation, and water access further compound these risks. Effective communication is central to building resilience. Early warnings, climate advisories, and awareness campaigns enable preparedness and response. Community radio plays a vital role by delivering timely, location-specific information and integrating scientific insights with local knowledge, making adaptation strategies more relevant and actionable.

Together, these dimensions illustrate that vulnerability is not isolated but interconnected. Addressing it requires inclusive, participatory communication approaches that recognize and respond to these layered realities.

## VI. INTERSECTIONALITY

While each type of vulnerability can be examined individually, it is important to recognise that in reality, these vulnerabilities often overlap and interact. The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a critical framework for understanding how multiple forms of disadvantage intersect to shape individual experiences.

Intersectionality highlights that vulnerability is not uniform and cannot be fully understood through a single lens. Instead, it is shaped by the interplay of various identities and structural factors, such as gender, class, caste, ethnicity, age, and disability. These intersecting identities create unique and often compounded forms of disadvantage. For example, a woman from a low-income rural background may face gender-based discrimination, economic hardship, and limited access to education simultaneously. If she also belongs to a marginalized caste or has a disability, her challenges become even more complex. Such layered vulnerabilities require nuanced and context-sensitive interventions. In the context of media and communication, intersectionality underscores the importance of inclusive content that reflects diverse experiences and addresses multiple dimensions of

disadvantage. It also emphasizes the need for participatory approaches that allow individuals to articulate their own realities rather than being represented through generalised narratives.

Community radio, with its localised and participatory nature, is particularly well-suited to address intersectional vulnerabilities. By engaging directly with communities, it can capture diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring that communication is not only inclusive but also representative of lived experiences.

## VII. MEDIA INCLUSION CONCEPTS

### a) Linking Vulnerability to Inclusive Broadcasting

Understanding the different types of vulnerability and their intersections is essential for designing effective, inclusive broadcasting strategies. It enables media practitioners to identify specific barriers faced by different groups and tailor content accordingly. More importantly, it shifts the focus from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more nuanced and responsive communication model.

Inclusive broadcasting, therefore, is not merely about expanding reach but about ensuring relevance, representation, and participation. By addressing economic, health, social, and environmental vulnerabilities in an integrated manner, and by recognising the role of intersectionality, community media can contribute significantly to reducing inequalities and empowering marginalised populations.

### b) Media Inclusion Concepts and Empirical Linkages

Media inclusion refers to the equitable representation, access, and participation of diverse social groups within media systems. It extends beyond visibility to encompass meaningful engagement in content production, distribution, and consumption. As scholars argue, inclusive media challenges structural inequalities, reduces bias, and enables pluralistic public discourse, making it central to democratic communication (Couldry, 2010; Servaes, 2008). In this study, these principles are empirically examined through CR Connect 107.8 FM, a community radio initiative serving vulnerable and underserved populations. The station provides a grounded example of how inclusive media practices can translate into tangible outcomes in rural and semi-urban contexts (Tacchi, 2012; UNESCO, 2018).

Media inclusion is operationalised through five interrelated principles, each reflected in the practices and findings from CR Connect:

**Diverse representation.:** Inclusive media requires the fair and accurate portrayal of marginalized groups, moving beyond tokenism to authentic representation (GLAAD, 2020; Ofcom, 2019). At CR Connect, programming foregrounds the voices of women, farmers, and rural youth, with a substantial proportion of content generated locally. This ensures that narratives are rooted in lived experiences rather than external interpretations (Murada & Manchanda, 2014; Sreedharan & Murada, 2019). Notably, women participate not only as subjects but also as producers and broadcasters, challenging gendered exclusions from public discourse. Such shifts align with the concept of participatory parity in the public sphere (Fraser, 1990).

**Participatory media.:** Participation transforms audiences from passive recipients into active contributors (Carpentier, 2011). CR Connect adopts a community-driven programming model, incorporating listener feedback, call-ins, and local consultations into content design. This enhances both relevance and trust. Empirical findings further indicate that involvement in media production contributes to increased confidence, communication skills, and awareness among participants, reinforcing the developmental role of participatory communication (Tacchi, 2012; Servaes, 2008).

**Equitable access.:** Access remains a critical barrier in media inclusion, particularly in contexts marked by digital divides (Broadband Commission, 2019; ITU, 2018). CR Connect addresses these gaps through the accessibility of radio, broadcasting in local languages and reaching populations excluded from digital media ecosystems. High listenership among women, elderly populations, and low-income households underscores the continued relevance of radio as an inclusive medium (Pew Research Centre, 2014). Complementary outreach activities, including community listening groups, further extend access and engagement (UNESCO, 2015).

**Bias-free communication.:** Inclusive media must actively counter stereotypes and discriminatory narratives (Crenshaw, 1989; Carbado et al., 2013). Content analysis of CR Connect programming reveals deliberate efforts to frame issues such as gender, health, and livelihoods in ways that promote agency and dialogue rather than reinforce stigma (Murada, 2016). Listener responses indicate shifts in attitudes, particularly regarding women's roles and social participation, suggesting that inclusive communication can influence normative change (Couldry, 2010).

**Community engagement.:** Beyond participation, sustained engagement fosters dialogue, accountability, and collective problem-solving (Servaes, 2008; Tacchi, 2012). CR Connect functions as a community platform where local issues are discussed and negotiated. Evidence suggests that such engagement has led to mobilization around development concerns, including sanitation and local governance (Murada & Khanna, 2014). This highlights the capacity of inclusive media to catalyze action, not merely awareness.

**Media inclusion as empowerment.:** The CR Connect case demonstrates that media inclusion is not only normative but operational. By integrating representation, participation, access, and engagement, the station enables marginalized communities to exercise voice and agency. Listeners emerge as active participants in a localized communication ecosystem, contributing to both individual empowerment and collective outcomes (Sreedharan & Murada, 2019; Couldry, 2010).

In sum, the findings affirm that inclusive media practices can address structural inequities while fostering social cohesion and participatory development. Community radio, as evidenced by CR Connect, remains a critical medium for advancing equity and social justice in contexts where access to mainstream and digital media is uneven. This reinforces the argument that media inclusion is both a theoretical imperative and a practical pathway for communication-led development (United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

## VIII. CASE OF COMMUNITY RADIO CONNECT

### A. Voices of Change in Nuh

In Nuh, Haryana, where poverty and isolation have often kept people unheard, Community Radio Connect (earlier Alfaz-e-Mewat) has become a trusted companion. Broadcasting in the local dialect, it brings news, health tips, and stories that matter most to the community, while inviting people themselves to shape the programs.

- **A Platform for All**

For many families, the station is more than radio; it is a lifeline. From spreading word about government schemes and farming advice to guiding people during emergencies, Connect has built trust as the voice of the community.

- **Empowering Women**

In a place where women's voices are rarely heard, Connect has created safe spaces through programs like Women Speak. Here, women share their experiences, talk about

health and rights, and even learn to become presenters. Many have found confidence and leadership through the microphone.

- Reaching the Marginalized

The station shines a light on the struggles of the poorest through shows like Mewat Ki Awaaz, connecting them to welfare schemes, livelihood opportunities, and a sense of belonging.

- Impact

For the people of Nuh, Connect is more than a broadcaster. It is a symbol of hope and resilience, proving how community-led media can give people their voice and bring lasting change.

An example of the Ministry for Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in India is relevant to quote here where significant steps were taken to promote accessibility and inclusivity in television programming. In September 2019, the MIB notified a policy titled 'Accessibility Standards for Persons with Disabilities in Television Programmes.' This policy aims to enhance access for individuals with hearing impairment. It underwent extensive consultation with various stakeholders, including disability rights organizations, technology experts, broadcasters, and government agencies. The policy mandates accessibility features on televisions, set-top boxes, and remote controls. It also provides guidelines for sign language and captioning. Additionally, it covers accessibility features for television programs delivered over the internet platform.

## IX. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & HYPOTHESIS

To examine the role of inclusive broadcasting in shaping communication outcomes among vulnerable populations, this study adopts an empirical framework that links access, participation, and empowerment as interconnected dimensions of media inclusion. The analysis is based on survey data collected from 700 respondents across community radio listenership groups, supplemented by qualitative insights.

### A. Conceptual and Analytical Approach

The study conceptualizes inclusive broadcasting as a multidimensional process involving:

- Access to information
  - Participation in communication processes
  - Empowerment through awareness and decision-making
- These dimensions are operationalised into measurable variables and examined using descriptive and associative

statistical techniques. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the characteristics of the dataset, the analysis emphasizes patterns, distributions, and observed relationships, rather than causal inference.

### B. Operationalization of Key Variables

To ensure alignment between research objectives and empirical analysis, key constructs were translated into measurable indicators derived from the survey instrument.

- Information Access: Information access was measured through frequency of community radio listenership and reported exposure to development-related content, including agriculture, health, and livelihoods. These variables were captured using ordinal categories (e.g., frequent, occasional, rare) and nominal responses.
- Social Participation: Social participation was assessed through indicators of listener engagement, including reported interaction with radio programmes (e.g., feedback, participation in discussions) and perceived trust in broadcast content. These variables were measured using binary responses and a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).
- Empowerment: Empowerment was conceptualized as a perceived outcome variable, measured through respondents' reported usefulness of radio content, increased awareness, and its influence on everyday decision-making. These indicators were captured using Likert-scale and categorical responses.
- Socio-demographic Variables- such as occupation and community affiliation were included to examine variation in access, participation, and perceived impact across different social groups.

### C. Alignment with Research Objectives

The study's objectives are analytically linked to the operationalised variables:

- Objective 1: To examine the extent to which inclusive broadcasting enhances information access among vulnerable groups → Assessed through descriptive analysis of listenership frequency and content exposure
- Objective 2: To assess patterns of participation and engagement in community radio → Examined through reported interaction, engagement behaviour, and trust indicators
- Objective 3: To evaluate the perceived impact of community radio on awareness and decision-making (empowerment) → Analyzed through perceived usefulness and self-reported behavioural relevance

- Objective 4: To contextualize findings within broader policy and institutional frameworks → Addressed through secondary data analysis
- Objective 5: To identify key challenges and opportunities for inclusive broadcasting → Informed by qualitative thematic analysis

#### D. Hypotheses and Analytical Orientation

Based on the above objectives and the theoretical foundations of participatory communication and media inclusion, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Inclusive and participatory media practices reduce the information divide and enhance social inclusion among vulnerable and marginalized communities.
- H1a: Communities involved in participatory media practices will report greater access to information and higher social participation than those with limited exposure.
- H1b: Diverse representation and participatory media production empower vulnerable groups by improving access to information, strengthening agency, and amplifying marginalized voices.

These hypotheses are tested through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of both measurable outcomes and experiential dimensions of media inclusion.

### X. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive broadcasting practices. The design combines a literature-based review of technological advancements, policy frameworks, and theoretical perspectives with a field-based empirical investigation.

The mixed-methods approach is particularly appropriate for this study, as it allows for triangulation of data and enhances the validity of findings. Quantitative data provides measurable insights into patterns of media access and engagement, while qualitative data captures the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with media use among vulnerable populations.

#### B. Study Area

The empirical component of the study was conducted in the broadcast regions of Community Radio Connect 107.8 FM, which operates across parts of Rajasthan and Haryana. Specifically, the study covers:

- Ramgarh and Deeg blocks in Alwar district, Rajasthan
- Mewat (Nuh) district, Haryana

These regions are classified as aspirational districts/blocks, characterized by socio-economic challenges such as lower literacy rates, limited access to digital infrastructure, and higher levels of poverty and marginalization. The choice of these regions is significant, as they provide a relevant context for examining the role of community radio in addressing information and communication gaps.

#### C. Population and Sampling

The target population for the study consists of vulnerable and marginalized groups residing within the broadcast coverage area of CR Connect 107.8 FM. These include farmers, women, labourers, youth, and members of self-help groups, among others.

A total sample of 700 respondents was selected using purposive sampling techniques. This approach was chosen to ensure representation across diverse socio-economic and occupational categories that are central to the study's focus on vulnerability and inclusion. The sampling strategy prioritizes inclusivity and relevance over statistical generalizability, aligning with the exploratory and context-specific nature of the research.

### XI. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

#### 1. Primary Data

Primary data was collected through a structured survey administered to 700 respondents. The survey instrument was designed to capture multiple dimensions of media engagement and inclusion, including:

- Demographic characteristics (age, gender, occupation, etc.)
- Radio listenership patterns (frequency, duration, and purpose)
- Access to other forms of media
- Perceived usefulness and relevance of community radio content
- Levels of participation in media-related activities

In addition to closed-ended questions, the survey included open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights. These responses provided valuable perspectives on issues such as accessibility, inclusivity, content relevance, and the perceived impact of community radio on daily life.

## 2. Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected through an extensive review of:

- Government policies and guidelines on media accessibility and broadcasting
- Academic literature on media inclusion, participatory communication, and vulnerability
- Reports and case studies on community radio initiatives in India and globally

This secondary data provided the conceptual and contextual foundation for the study, enabling a robust interpretation of empirical findings.

## XII. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques, ensuring a holistic understanding of the research questions.

### A. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, including:

- Frequency distributions
- Percentages
- Cross-tabulations

These methods were used to examine patterns of radio listenership, occupational distribution, and levels of engagement across different groups. Visual representations, including charts and graphs, were developed to illustrate key trends.

### B. Demographic Breakdown of Participants:

Out of the 700 individuals surveyed, who are from the broadcast areas, the distribution of listeners across various occupations is as follows:

- Farmers: 334 (47.7%)
- Housewives: 87 (12.4%)
- Entrepreneurs: 61 (8.7%)
- Salaried job holders: 23 (3.3%)
- Laborers: 69 (9.9%)
- Drivers: 13 (1.9%)
- Government program participants: 18 (2.6%)
- Students: 17 (2.4%)
- Self-help group members: 69 (9.9%)
- Others: 9 (1.3%)

This distribution highlights the predominance of agrarian and informal sector participants, reflecting the socio-economic profile of the study area.

Chart 1 shows the work engagement of different listeners of community radio Connect 107.8 FM, across villages in the three districts and two states- Rajasthan and Haryana, India.

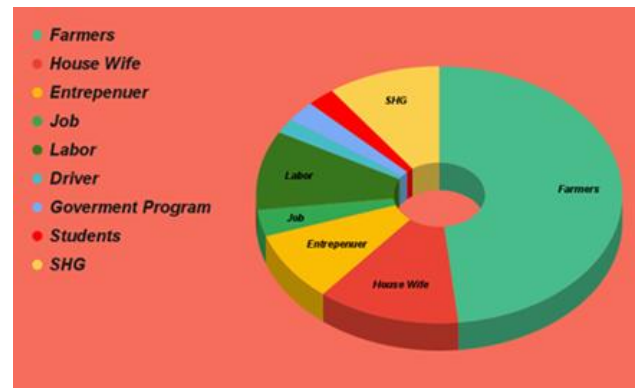


Chart 1

Chart 2, shares the percentage of each occupation that listeners are into.

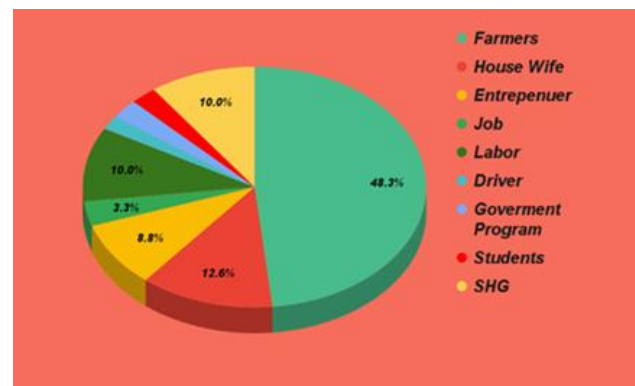


Chart 2

### C. Radio Listenership Patterns

The findings indicate exceptionally high levels of engagement with community radio. Out of 700 respondents, 691 participants (98.7%) reported frequent listenership, underscoring the centrality of radio as a communication medium in these regions.

- Farmers (100% listenership): Farmers exhibited the highest engagement, relying on radio for agricultural advisories, weather updates, and information on government schemes.
- Housewives, laborers, and SHG members: These groups demonstrated strong listenership, using radio as a source of both information and entertainment, particularly in areas such as health, education, and livelihoods.

- Students and salaried workers: Although smaller in proportion, these groups reported consistent engagement, often for educational content and local news.

These patterns suggest that community radio effectively reaches diverse segments of the population, particularly those with limited access to alternative media platforms.

### XIII. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative data from open-ended responses was analysed using thematic analysis. Responses were coded and categorized to identify recurring themes, including:

- Accessibility and ease of use
- Relevance of content to daily life
- Perceived inclusivity of programming
- Trust and credibility of the medium
- Impact on awareness and behaviour

The analysis revealed that respondents perceive community radio as a trusted, accessible, and relevant source of information, particularly in comparison to mainstream media. Many participants highlighted the importance of local language programming and community-driven content in enhancing understanding and engagement.

### XIV. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were integral to the research process. All participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study, and verbal consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any stage.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personal identifiers were recorded. Data was used solely for research purposes, and care was taken to represent participants' views accurately and respectfully.

### XV. FINDINGS

#### A. Implications for Inclusive Broadcasting

The findings of the study underscore the pervasive reach, relevance, and acceptance of community radio among marginalized and vulnerable populations in the study area. The exceptionally high listenership rate (98.7%) indicates that radio continues to function as a primary and trusted medium of communication, particularly in regions where

access to digital technologies remains limited. These findings provide strong empirical support for the argument that inclusive broadcasting can effectively bridge the information divide.

Accessibility emerges as one of the most significant strengths of community radio. Unlike digital platforms that require smartphones, internet connectivity, and digital literacy, radio operates with minimal infrastructure and cost. This makes it particularly accessible to low-income households, women with restricted mobility, and elderly populations. The widespread listenership across occupational categories, especially among farmers and laborers, highlights radio's ability to penetrate socio-economic barriers and reach audiences that are often excluded from mainstream media ecosystems.

Relevance of content is another key factor driving engagement. Respondents consistently reported that programming related to agriculture, health, education, and government schemes directly aligns with their daily needs and challenges. Farmers, who constitute nearly half of the sample, rely heavily on radio for agricultural advisories, weather updates, and market information. Similarly, women, including housewives and members of self-help groups (SHGs), engage with content on health, nutrition, and livelihood opportunities. This alignment between content and lived realities enhances both listenership and impact, demonstrating that contextualised and localised content is central to effective inclusive broadcasting.

The findings also highlight the role of community radio in fostering community empowerment. The significant participation and listenership among women and SHG members indicate that radio serves as a platform for awareness, dialogue, and collective action. Exposure to information on rights, entitlements, and social issues contributes to increased confidence and participation in community processes. In several instances, respondents indicated that radio programs encouraged discussions within households and communities, suggesting a broader ripple effect on social norms and behaviors.

### XVI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, the survey confirms that community radio is an effective and impactful medium for inclusive broadcasting, particularly in aspirational and underserved regions. The high levels of engagement across diverse occupational and social groups demonstrate its capacity to reduce informational inequalities and promote social inclusion.

The findings provide empirical support for the study's hypotheses. The widespread listenership and reported benefits validate H1, indicating that inclusive and participatory media practices can reduce the information divide. Similarly, the active engagement of listeners, particularly through feedback and participation in programming, supports H1a, which posits that participatory media engagement enhances access to information and social participation. Furthermore, the visible involvement of marginalized groups, especially women, in both content consumption and creation aligns with H1b, highlighting the link between representation and empowerment.

## XVII. IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE BROADCASTING

The study reveals that inclusive broadcasting has a multi-dimensional impact on vulnerable communities, extending beyond information dissemination to broader social and developmental outcomes. Respondents reported increased awareness of government schemes, improved knowledge of health and agricultural practices, and greater engagement in community activities. These outcomes suggest that inclusive media contributes not only to knowledge enhancement but also to behavioural change and social participation.

Community radio, in particular, plays a critical role in bridging the information divide by providing accessible, relevant, and timely content. Its emphasis on local languages and community-driven programming ensures that information is both understandable and actionable. This is especially important in contexts where literacy levels may be low and where mainstream media fails to address localized concerns.

Moreover, the participatory nature of community radio strengthens its impact by fostering a sense of ownership among listeners. When individuals see their experiences and voices reflected in media content, it enhances trust and engagement, thereby amplifying the effectiveness of communication.

## XVIII. TECHNOLOGICAL IMPACT

While traditional radio remains central to inclusive broadcasting in the study area, the findings also point to the growing role of technological innovations in enhancing accessibility and inclusivity. Emerging tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and automatic speech recognition (ASR) have the potential to expand the reach

of broadcasting by enabling real-time captioning and translation. These technologies can make content more accessible to persons with hearing impairments and to audiences speaking different languages.

Similarly, audio description technologies can improve access for visually impaired individuals, while features such as subtitles and sign language interpretation can enhance inclusivity across multiple platforms. The integration of radio with digital platforms, including mobile applications and online streaming, further extends its reach, particularly among younger audiences.

However, the findings also suggest that technology alone is not sufficient. The effectiveness of inclusive broadcasting depends equally on community engagement, local relevance, and participatory practices. Technology should therefore be viewed as an enabler that complements, rather than replaces, the core principles of community-driven media.

## XIX. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the central argument that inclusive and participatory broadcasting can play a transformative role in reducing the information divide and fostering social inclusion among marginalized communities. By situating the empirical evidence from CR Connect 107.8 FM within broader theoretical and policy frameworks, this discussion highlights both the progress made and the structural constraints that continue to shape inclusive media ecosystems.

### A. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of community radio as an inclusive medium, several structural and systemic challenges persist. One of the most significant barriers is the issue of infrastructure gaps. While radio remains widely accessible, the broader media ecosystem is increasingly shifting toward digital platforms. In rural and aspirational regions such as those studied, limited internet connectivity, low digital literacy, and lack of access to affordable devices continue to restrict engagement with digital media. This creates a dual-layered information divide, where communities are not only excluded from mainstream media but also from emerging digital communication channels. Although community radio partially mitigates this gap, the absence of integrated multi-platform strategies limits the scalability of inclusive broadcasting. A second challenge relates to content diversity and representation. While community radio

demonstrates strong localized inclusivity, mainstream media continues to underrepresent marginalized groups, particularly women, migrants, ethnic minorities, and informal sector workers. Even within community media, ensuring sustained diversity in voices and perspectives requires continuous effort. There is a risk that without deliberate editorial strategies, certain dominant voices within communities may overshadow others, thereby reproducing internal hierarchies.

Regulatory enforcement presents another critical constraint. Although India has made notable progress in establishing accessibility guidelines for broadcasting, including provisions for subtitles, sign language interpretation, and disability-inclusive content, implementation remains uneven. Monitoring mechanisms are often weak, and many broadcasters lack the technical and financial capacity to comply with these standards. As a result, policy intentions do not always translate into practice, limiting the overall impact of inclusive broadcasting initiatives.

At the same time, the study identifies several emerging opportunities that can significantly strengthen inclusive media ecosystems. The expansion of community radio across rural India provides a strong institutional foundation for participatory communication. These platforms are uniquely positioned to address local needs, amplify marginalized voices, and foster community engagement.

In parallel, digital inclusion initiatives led by government and private sector actors are gradually improving connectivity and access. As internet penetration increases, there is potential to integrate traditional and digital media, creating hybrid models that combine the accessibility of radio with the interactivity of digital platforms.

Technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, also offer promising avenues for enhancing inclusivity. Tools such as automatic speech recognition (ASR), real-time translation, and voice-based interfaces can make media content more accessible to diverse audiences, including persons with disabilities and non-literate populations. However, the adoption of these technologies must be accompanied by efforts to ensure affordability, contextual relevance, and linguistic diversity.

## XX. ROLE OF POLICY AND REGULATION

Policy frameworks play a crucial role in institutionalizing inclusive broadcasting practices. In India, regulatory guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting have established important benchmarks for accessibility, including mandates for subtitles, sign language interpretation, and disability-friendly content. These measures reflect a growing recognition of media as a public good that must be accessible to all segments of society.

However, the findings suggest that policy effectiveness depends not only on formulation but also on implementation and enforcement. Strengthening regulatory oversight, providing financial and technical support to broadcasters, and developing clear accountability mechanisms are essential for translating policy into practice. Capacity-building initiatives, particularly for community media organizations, can further enhance compliance and innovation in inclusive content production.

There is also a need for greater policy convergence across sectors, including telecommunications, digital governance, and rural development. Integrating inclusive broadcasting within broader development agendas can enhance its impact and ensure that media inclusion is recognized as a key driver of social equity.

## XXI. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Building on the findings and discussion, several strategic directions emerge for advancing inclusive broadcasting:

**Enhanced Technological Solutions:** Continued investment in AI, ASR, and machine learning technologies can significantly improve the accessibility and scalability of inclusive broadcasting. Developing low-cost, multilingual solutions tailored to local contexts will be critical for ensuring widespread adoption. Additionally, integrating these technologies with community media platforms can create more interactive and inclusive communication environments.

**Collaborative and Multi-Stakeholder Approaches:** Strengthening partnerships between governments, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and media organizations can facilitate the co-creation of inclusive content and strategies. Such collaborations can leverage diverse expertise, resources, and networks, enabling more effective and sustainable interventions.

**Capacity Building and Training:** Enhancing the skills and awareness of media practitioners is essential for embedding inclusivity within production processes. Training programs should focus on inclusive storytelling, bias-free communication, accessibility standards, and participatory methods. Empowering community members with media

production skills can further democratize content creation and strengthen local ownership.

**Expansion of Community-Led Models:** The success of CR Connect underscores the importance of community-led and participatory media models. Expanding such platforms across underserved regions can ensure that media systems remain grounded in local realities and responsive to community needs. Supporting these initiatives through policy, funding, and institutional recognition will be key to their sustainability and impact.

**Integration of Traditional and Digital Media:** Future strategies should focus on creating hybrid communication models that combine the strengths of traditional media, such as radio, with digital platforms. This integration can enhance reach, interactivity, and inclusivity, particularly among younger and more digitally connected audiences.

## XXII. CONCLUSION

Inclusive broadcasting must be understood not merely as an expansion of media access, but as a critical socio-cultural process that enables dignity, representation, and participatory citizenship. This study contributes to ongoing debates in media and communication scholarship by demonstrating how community-based broadcasting models can address structural inequalities in access, voice, and visibility.

Drawing on empirical evidence from CR Connect 107.8 FM, the study highlights the distinctive capacity of community radio to function as an inclusive communicative space. The findings show that high levels of listenership among farmers, women, and self-help groups are not incidental, but are closely linked to the localized, participatory, and context-sensitive nature of programming. Unlike mainstream media, which often reproduces dominant narratives, community radio facilitates bottom-up knowledge exchange, enabling marginalized communities to act not only as audiences but also as content creators and knowledge holders.

At a theoretical level, these findings reinforce perspectives from participatory communication and development communication, which emphasize the importance of dialogic, community-driven media systems in fostering empowerment and social change. The CR Connect model illustrates how inclusive broadcasting can strengthen informational agency, enhance local problem-solving capacities, and contribute to more equitable media ecologies.

However, the study also underscores that inclusivity in broadcasting remains structurally uneven and contingent. Persistent infrastructural gaps, especially in digital connectivity, limit the integration of traditional and emerging media platforms. Furthermore, challenges related to content diversity and representation continue to shape both mainstream and alternative media spaces. While regulatory frameworks for accessibility exist, their implementation remains inconsistent, pointing to a gap between policy intent and practice.

Importantly, the findings suggest that technological innovation, while necessary, is not sufficient. Tools such as artificial intelligence, automatic speech recognition, and digital distribution platforms can enhance accessibility, but their impact depends on how effectively they are embedded within community-centered and participatory frameworks. Looking ahead, the study points toward the need for a multi-scalar and integrated approach to inclusive broadcasting. This includes strengthening regulatory enforcement, investing in digital and broadcast infrastructure, building capacities among media practitioners, and fostering cross-sector collaborations. Expanding and sustaining community-led media models will be particularly critical in ensuring that inclusivity is not merely an aspirational goal but an operational reality. In conclusion, inclusive broadcasting represents both a normative imperative and a practical mechanism for advancing media justice. By centering marginalized voices and enabling participatory communication, it has the potential to reshape media systems in more equitable and democratic ways. Ensuring that these gains are sustained and scaled will require continued engagement across policy, technology, and community domains so that media spaces evolve into genuinely inclusive platforms where diverse voices are heard, valued, and empowered. Any errors or omissions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

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