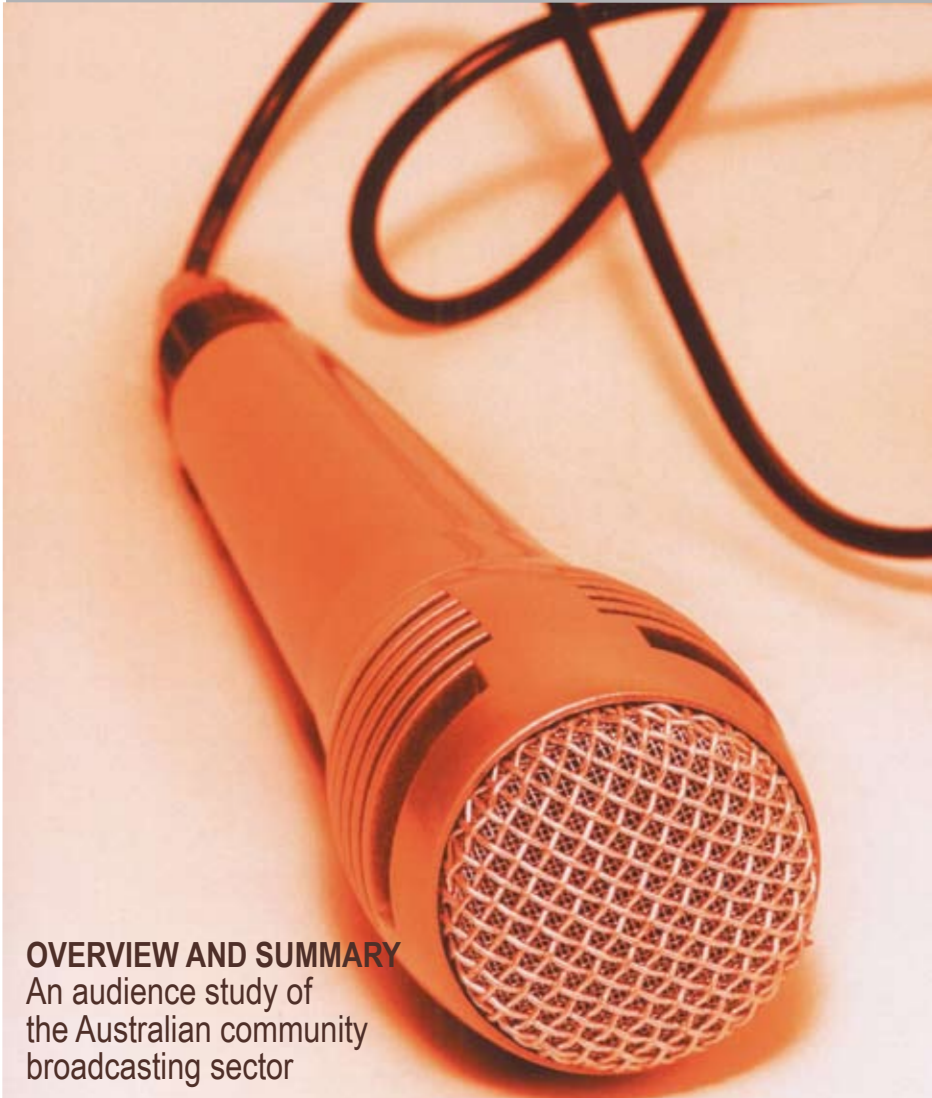


Community Media Matters



OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY
An audience study of
the Australian community
broadcasting sector

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For copies of the full report or the community broadcasting audience kit visit <http://www.cbonline.org.au/>. If you would like to contact the research team please email Associate Professor Michael Meadows, M.Meadows@griffith.edu.au.

The study

This is a summary of the main findings of the first national qualitative research study into Australian community broadcasting audiences conducted between 2004-2006 by researchers from Griffith University in Brisbane. The data was gathered using a range of approaches — a series of almost 50 audience focus groups, around 80 face-to-face interviews with Indigenous listeners/viewers, and a further 90 one-on-one interviews with station managers, and representatives of community groups accessing community radio and television stations across Australia. Stations were chosen so as to reflect sector diversity through the voices and opinions of generalist, Indigenous, ethnic, senior, youth, religious, vision-impaired, and fine music audiences, amongst others.

The broad functions of community broadcasting in Australia

The analysis of audience responses in this study has identified four key roles being fulfilled by community radio and television:

- ▼ **A need and desire for local news and information.** Audiences feel they cannot receive localised or community-specific information from any other media sources, although they often access public broadcasters like the ABC and SBS — and occasionally, commercial media — for state or national news. Community broadcasting is the only place where particular communities of interest, either geographically or socially defined, can access information specifically relevant to their lives. This includes information — sometimes in languages other than English — relevant to particular cultures, or audiences with an interest in local community news, sport, social and cultural events;
- **A desire to access and hear diverse music formats.** Audiences regularly express either boredom or general dissatisfaction with the narrow range of popular and, usually, international (US and UK) music broadcast particularly on commercial radio and turn to community radio and television for an alternative. Community radio, in particular, is the only place where audiences can hear specialist and niche music programming (whether Indigenous, Australian, jazz, Italian, classical etc) which supports cultures and/or languages, or enables audiences to simply feel 'happy' or 'joyous' at hearing music which 'lifts their spirits' and brings back memories (e.g. Golden Days' radio);
- **Provision of an important 'community connection' role.** Community radio and television provide an important community connection function - they help to create and maintain communities both around a station and in the broader community through the use of 'ordinary people' as presenters, and by being openly accessible to local organisations and individuals. The study shows clearly that successful community radio and television stations are tapping into their local community's desire to communicate; and
- **Ability to present social and cultural diversity in programming.** For many of the participants in this study, this is an important social responsibility function performed by their local community radio stations, in particular, with which they identify and support. It is clear from audience responses in this study that community radio and television produce programming that reflects the diversity of Australian culture and may be the only media where this is possible because of their close connection with their audiences.

How does this research fit with the McNair Ingenuity findings?

Qualitative research — exploring the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions — and quantitative research — essentially, counting — work best together because they complement each other. This is why it is important to consider our qualitative audience study in light of the 2004 and 2006 McNair Ingenuity quantitative audience studies of the sector. Generally, our analysis of audience comments support the McNair Ingenuity findings with a few small variations, explained, in part, by the broader scope of our project. For example, the McNair research did not include either Indigenous or ethnic community broadcasting. Ours is the first comprehensive study to do so.

The McNair research concludes that the main reason why Australians listen to community radio is because of the provision of local news and information — confirmed strongly by our analysis of audience comments from around the country. Our study also confirms a McNair Ingenuity finding that in metropolitan areas, ‘specialist music or information programs’ is the most-often cited reason for listening. Audiences in our study highly valued the broadcast of local and Australian music, suggesting a significant cultural role is being performed by those community radio stations that maintain high levels of local music content. Metropolitan audiences, in particular, identified this as a major drawcard. This is significant, given the level of competition in urban markets from commercial radio stations, suggesting that community radio has taken the initiative on the airwaves in terms of Australian content in music.

A majority of people in our focus groups were either listeners or viewers who prefer community and national broadcasters over commercial broadcasting. This contrasts with McNair Ingenuity’s 2006 finding that 66 percent of those surveyed listened to both community and commercial radio while only 54 percent listened to both community and ABC/SBS radio. Overall, a majority of our focus group participants reported tuning in to ABC or SBS (primarily for ethnic community audiences) when they were not listening to their local community radio station. They are more likely to turn to the national broadcasters — particularly ABC Radio — for hourly news bulletins. This departure from the McNair study is reflective of the ‘committed’ nature of our focus group members who volunteered to participate. It is also indicative of the fact that we included Indigenous and ethnic community audiences which were not part of the McNair Ingenuity research.

Our data suggests that community television audiences are a little more likely to tune in to commercial television than their community radio counterparts. This is because community television viewers tend to be ‘channel surfers’ who are regularly amused by, or interested in, community TV programming while scanning to see what is on. This also means that they are regularly tuning in to either commercial or national broadcasters as well.

The 2006 McNair Ingenuity research concludes that community broadcasting audiences are increasingly accessing station websites and ‘live streaming’ station programming via the Internet. Analysis of our focus group cohort reveals that although this activity is prevalent amongst audiences for youth stations, it is generally not common across the

remainder of the sector. Audience focus groups for youth stations such as EDGE Radio in Hobart, SYN-FM in Melbourne, and FBI in Sydney confirmed their regular use of these stations’ innovative and extensive online resources. The primary reason audiences say they access station websites is for programming information.

Another key reason for listening revealed by the 2004 and 2006 McNair Ingenuity research was audience support for ‘local voices and local personalities’ — in other words, for announcers who sound like ‘one of us’. This emerged as one of the main reasons why our focus group participants say they enjoy listening to their particular stations. Similarly, ‘diversity in programming’ was nominated by 28 percent of McNair Ingenuity’s sample as the reason for tuning in (McNair Ingenuity, 2006:32). Analysis of comments made by audiences across Australia in our study supports this strongly as a primary reason for accessing community radio and television.

Specific sector findings

1. Metropolitan and regional community radio audiences

Data on this sector was gathered from 25 focus groups and more than 60 community group interviews at stations in metropolitan, suburban and regional Australia. Audience members primarily ‘tune in’ for these principal reasons:

- They perceive community radio to be accessible and approachable;
- They like the laid back, ‘ordinary person’ station presentation style;
- They want to access local news and information;
- They want access to specialist and diverse music formats; and
- They appreciate the diversity represented in station programming.

2. Indigenous community radio and television audiences

This was the most varied and demanding element of our project. Researchers visited 20 different locations around Australia seeking responses from metropolitan, regional and remote Indigenous audiences. This included conducting eight focus groups in Cairns, Brisbane, Melbourne, Port Augusta, Alice Springs, Darwin and Broome. In addition, members of the research team — which always included Senior Indigenous researcher Derek Flucker — travelled to cultural events to conduct around 80 face-to-face interviews with audiences for Indigenous radio and television on Cape York, the Top End, the Kimberleys, Central Australia and the Torres Strait. At these locations, local Indigenous people were employed to perform the crucial community liaison work needed to gain access to these audiences. In some cases, a lead time of 18 months was needed for communities to authorise access for the research team. Wherever possible, the researchers negotiated some kind of reciprocity arrangement or exchange with communities who participated. We offer more detail on this in the full Final Report, Community Media Matters.

A wide range of audiences access Indigenous radio and television across Australia with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners and viewers identifying the following as key attractions:

- They feel Indigenous media offer an essential service to communities and play a central organising role in community life;
- Indigenous media help people to maintain social networks;
- Indigenous media are playing a strong educative role in communities, particularly for young people;
- They offer an alternative source of news and information about the community which avoids stereotyping of Indigenous people and issues;
- They are helping to break down stereotypes about Indigenous people for the non-Indigenous community, thus playing an important role in cross-cultural dialogue; and
- The stations offer a crucial medium for specialist music and dance.

3. Ethnic community radio audiences

Data for this element of our study came from 10 audience focus groups and face-to-face interviews with presenters of language programs on community radio in selected locations around the country. The focus groups and interviews were conducted using translators (although half of the focus groups decided to use English) and were drawn from the following communities: Macedonian, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Turkish, Tongan, Serbian, Filipino/Tagalog, Indonesian, Chinese youth, and Greek seniors. We concluded that audiences listening to specialist ethnic programming on generalist community radio stations or full-time ethnic community radio stations are tuning in because:

- Station programming plays a central role in maintaining culture and language;
- Programs help them to maintain community connections and networks;
- Stations enable them to hear specialist ethnic music unavailable through other media;
- They want to hear local community news and gossip; and
- They want to hear news and information relevant to their lives in Australia, from their home countries, and from neighbouring countries/regions.

4. Community television audiences

Focus groups were held with audiences from the following five of the six community television stations — Channel 31, Melbourne; TVS, Sydney; Channel 31 (formerly Briz 31), Brisbane; Channel 31, Adelaide; and Access-31, Perth. We interviewed station managers and 15 representatives of community groups who access community television. Our analysis shows that audiences tune in because:

- They want to access alternative programming than that offered by commercial and national public television stations (ABC and SBS);
- They want to access information that they feel is unavailable anywhere else;
- They want to receive this information in non-traditional formats;
- They like the diversity of programming, particularly from niche interest groups; and
- A significant number of viewers of community television are frustrated by poor or unreliable broadcast signal reception.

Project Research Methods

Key people interviews (station coordinators, sector representatives, language group representatives) were conducted to identify key themes emerging from the quantitative research which needed to be explored in greater depth; to identify data collected by previous audience studies; to note perceived attitudes towards audiences and audience research; and to put in place strategies to identify focus group participants.

Key group interviews with community groups, sponsors, local musicians, artists etc who have regular interaction with community broadcasting enabled us to identify the nature and extent of local access; to define the ‘community value’ of local broadcasting for such groups; and to determine the educational value of community broadcasting to local communities. This component of the methodology recognised that in order to evaluate Australian community broadcasting, the sector needed to be examined from the perspectives of those who work or volunteer (our previous study), and those who access and utilise the sector but who may not necessarily be part of the audience.

Focus group discussions formed the core of the study. We conducted 48 focus groups: 25 for metropolitan and regional audiences; 10 for ethnic language groups; eight for Indigenous audiences; and five for viewers of community television. The vast majority of the focus groups contained between 6-10 audience members representative of the sector’s geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity (market research recommends focus group sizes of 8-12; sociological research recommends 5-6).

One-on-one audience interviews (around 80) were coupled with focus group discussions for our analysis of the Indigenous broadcasting audiences. This entailed attending cultural events around Australia over a two-year period to talk to Indigenous people where they gathered.

Radio talkback: listeners were invited to call in to the national Indigenous-produced talkback program, TalkBlack, with comments and 19 responded over a five day period.

