

**Digital media technologies and the contributions they make to the
sustainability of community radio stations – The example of Izwi
LoMzansi FM**

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DECLARATION

I solemnly confirm that the research report submitted for the Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies Degree at the University of Witwatersrand has not been presented for any degree at another institution. I also assert that, unless otherwise cited, this work is solely my own. Any sources drawn upon or quoted have been duly recognised in the research report as well as in the reference list.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of digital media technologies, specifically mobile applications, and social media, on the sustainability of community radio stations. It places particular emphasis on three facets of sustainability: social, institutional, and financial, using Izwi LoMzansi FM as the case of the study. Community radio stations encounter significant sustainability hurdles, such as suboptimal programming and financial constraints, which hinder their ability to fulfil their democratic roles. While digital media technologies are revolutionising the community broadcasting scene in South Africa, local radio stations have been slow to adjust. This highlights the pressing need for these stations to attain economic self-reliance to maintain autonomy and interact effectively with advertising sectors. The research findings reveal that digital media technologies have the potential to contribute to the sustainability of Izwi LoMzansi FM, albeit with modest impacts in terms of social and institutional sustainability, and relatively limited effects on financial sustainability. Despite progress in leveraging digital media tools to enhance sustainability, the station faces persistent challenges, including high personnel turnover, a lack of specialised expertise in digital media technologies, the necessity for dedicated leadership to drive digital revenue, and the imperative to address the digital divide in terms of access and usage.

Keywords: digital media technologies, community radio stations, social media, sustainability, mobile application.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

For over 25 years, community radio has remained a highly relevant sector in South Africa. It promotes media diversity, pluralism, and freedom of speech, especially for marginalised communities, introducing a broader range of voices to conventional media that might have been overlooked before (Kupe, 2014; Olorunnisola, 2002). Community radio stations play an important role in fostering democracy and enabling communities to participate in their socio-political-economic growth and empowerment (Megwa, 2007). Government agencies and civil society organisations are at the forefront of creating an enabling environment for community media through, *inter alia*, legislation, funding, development tools and guidelines. As highlighted by the Independent Communications Authority of South (ICASA), community radio still operates in a relatively hostile environment and also encounters sustainability challenges (ICASA, 2017).

The lack of sustainability is a serious challenge that incorporates other shortcomings such as poor programming, lack of economic interests, accountability issues, and the absence of professional journalism. These challenges diminish the role of community radio in promoting democracy and addressing local community concerns. As a result, it becomes necessary for community radio stations to secure their financial autonomy in the prevailing market environment. Economic viability allows radio stations to achieve their aim of promoting democracy, ensuring their independence, and establishing sound relations within advertising markets (Spurk & Dingerkus, 2017).

The rise of digital media technologies has contributed to a different broadcasting landscape in South Africa. These technologies have introduced new production tools and faster dissemination of information, causing pressure in the media markets. These digital innovations have also brought

opportunities and disruptions that some media providers have already taken advantage of, but community radio is lagging behind (National Association of Broadcasters, 2018).

This study seeks to explore the opportunities presented by diverse digital media technologies, notably digital platforms, mobile apps, and social media, and their role in enhancing the long-term viability of community radio stations. Utilising the sustainability framework, the research predominantly emphasises audience engagement, community involvement, and financial stability, with reference to the practices of Izwi LoMzansi FM, a radio station already integrating digital technologies.

1.2 Problem Statement

With the digital changes in place, community radio stations in South Africa and beyond often face challenges in applying and adapting to the digital era. Limited research exists on how community radio stations can leverage digital opportunities and identify possibilities for their sustainability. This study delves into the intricate connection between digital media technologies and sustainability, an area that has not been extensively explored, particularly concerning community radio. It investigates how community radio stations currently utilise digital tools, explores successes and obstacles they encounter, and analyses the role of digital content and programming strategies in audience interaction. A deeper understanding of how digital media technologies can be harnessed for sustainability is vital for the future of community radio.

1.3 Research Topic

This study examines “Digital media technologies and the contributions they make to the sustainability of community radio stations – The example of Izwi LoMzansi FM”.

1.4 Research Question

The following are the research questions of the study:

- I. How do community radio stations effectively integrate and utilise digital media technologies to improve their social, institution and financial sustainability?

1.5 Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives of the study:

- I. Examine digital media technology tools that Izwi LoMzansi FM uses.
- II. Establish the perspectives of various decision-makers on what they expect technology to deliver.
- III. Establish how these digital media technologies are changing community radio programming, audiences and revenue.

1.6 Research Significance

The primary goal of a community radio station is to consistently broadcast content and information that is pertinent to its target community. This is driven by affordability and accessibility to low levels of literacy populations (especially the older generation), particularly in rural areas. Print media have low distribution numbers and are mostly limited to major cities. Social media platforms are usually considered a pastime for younger people with a limited percentage of the older generation who have active accounts.

Community radio plays a critical social role in reaching audiences that are disadvantaged and underserved by mainstream media outlets. To fulfil the development purpose, community radio stations must be sustainable enough to remain on-air and continue to provide knowledge and information to their communities (Van Zyl, 2003). To be more sustainable, community radio stations must achieve financial stability and have access to pertinent digital and communication technologies.

The lack of donor funding in South African community radio has led stations to seek government funding and rely on commercial advertising which, when relied upon excessively, can result in operational inefficiency and limited innovation, posing a threat to the stations' sustainability. With the evolving media landscape driven by economic instability, competition and digital transformation, this research study is significant in the sense that it will yield valuable information about the role that digital media technology plays concerning creating opportunities for community radio.

1.7 Brief Background of Digital Media Technologies Used by Izwi LoMzansi

1.7.1 Izwi LoMzansi Profile

Izwi LoMzansi (Izwi98FM), is a community radio station based in eThekweni, KwaZulu-Natal Province. The station airs around the clock primarily in isiZulu, with some segments in English. Izwi LoMzansi was established in 1998 and started airing in 1999 using a short-term broadcasting licence. The station's programmes focus mostly on talk shows at 60% talk and 40% music targeting audiences aged between 16 and 35 years (Izwi LoMzansi FM, 2020). Rams Amplify for the first quarter of 2023 showed that Izwi LoMzansi had 316,000 listeners, with the majority of people still listening through the terrestrial sources (BRCSA, 2023).

Izwi LoMzansi FM uses various digital media technologies for programming, audience reach and engagement. The station's website is linked to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages. In addition to social media pages, the station uses YouTube and WhatsApp messenger. Izwi LoMzansi FM is linked to a live radio streaming platform called Streema which allows listeners to have access to various radio stations around the world and another option called Radio with access to South African radio stations. Radio tuners are useful to market the station and create a community with the same interests.

Izwi LoMzansi radio station was part of a pilot project to use the Fabrik platform, which is a product of Immedia, a company that provides digital transformation services. The Fabrik platform has a suite of digital tools which includes:

- **Mobile application:** messaging with the studio, multiple live streams, and real-time podcasts.
- **Smash board:** inbound and outbound messaging, social media integration and managing campaigns.
- **Audio:** Realtime podcasting, website embeds, and audio archival.
- **Reporting:** rich data analytics, engagement metrics, trends, and insights.
- **Revenue generation:** smart app billboards, audio pre-rolls and on-air campaign integration (*Digitise Radio / Fabrik / South Africa*, 2020).

While all these digital tools might be necessary to grow an audience, increase audience engagement, monetise the station and gain valuable audience insights and statistics to assist with content optimisation, this research discusses the mobile application and social media.

1.7.2 Mobile Application

The Izwi98FM mobile application combines broadcasting, conversations, and service features in one cohesive digital setting (refer to the appendix for screen grabs). This enables the radio station to engage with their audience through private social platforms. And on the other hand, listeners can utilise the app to send messages, voice notes, and images to the studio, to facilitate real-time engagement. Additionally, the application allows users to rewind and listen to missed programmes, and stay informed about current affairs, sports, and news. To date, the Izwi98FM App has been downloaded by over 20,000 listeners. However, more than 26.4 million people in South Africa listen to the radio several times a week, with 80% using traditional radio (BRCSA, 2023).

1.7.3 Social Media

With the rapid growth of internet use, Izwi LoMzansi has been slowly incorporating social media into radio operations and functions. Social media offer new ways for radio stations to create networks, gather information, establish what other community radio stations are doing, gain exposure in other parts of the world and potentially monetise audiences (Castells, 2009, p. 1978). Izwi LoMzansi's social media pages are mostly used to share updates and reminders on upcoming events, pressing issues in the community and provide interesting shows with guest speakers; highlight various talents; and promote advertising. The research therefore explores the perceptions of the Station Managers on what they intend to gain using the mobile app and platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

1.8 Concepts in Brief

This research draws on a combination of concepts in relation to community media, digital media, media economics as well as the sustainability concept. These concepts are relevant to the study in that they allow the researcher to critically explore various role players and interests including community radio organisers and funders, digital media technology planners and designers, as well as advertisers in supporting locally oriented and participatory models relevant for community radio stations.

1.9 Research Method

This study utilises a qualitative methodology, leveraging a case study approach and incorporating diverse data collection techniques. Information is sourced from chosen participants via face-to-face interviews and by analysing pertinent documents.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter set the backdrop, outlined the central concern, and emphasised the research's significance and objectives. It explored the rationale behind

examining digital media technologies and their effectiveness in the context of community radio stations. The research approach was articulated, and the chapter presented a brief outline of the subjects that will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the literature review explores the landscape of community radio in South Africa. It illuminates the topics of licensing, regulatory measures, and diverse sustainability factors related to community radio. Furthermore, the chapter delves deeply into the evolution of community radio in the digital era, employing a suitable conceptual framework to critically assess the ongoing transformations and progressions within the field.

The literature addresses the feasibility, advantages, and challenges tied to the adoption of digital media technologies, while also exploring potential frameworks tailored for community radio. Through this literature review, the researcher discerns the array of sustainability models that community radio stations might consider. This chapter holds notable importance as it elucidates the nexus between digital media technologies and sustainability. This research augments the prevailing literature, pinpointing sustainability challenges faced by numerous community radio stations.

2.2 Community Radio in South Africa

2.2.1 A Brief Background

As part of the strategy in the repositioning of previously apartheid-manipulated media prior to 1994, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 153 of 1993 moved to discontinue the state-owned broadcasting system and allowed for media diversity through a three-layered framework encompassing community, public, and commercial broadcasting (Olorunnisola, 2002, p. 130). In examining the history of exclusion and discrimination of the majority in the country, community radio was a natural way to give voice to the underrepresented communities (W. Siemering, 2000, p. 373). Community radio developed as a result of severe socio-political

conditions similar to processes in other African countries, as well as in Europe, Australia and North and Latin America (Wabwire, 2013, p. 41).

Following the shift to a democratic government in 1994, the community radio sector experienced significant expansion, witnessing a swift growth. Within a span of five years, the number of community radio stations broadcasting nationwide reached approximately 65 by the end of 1999 (Olorunnisola, 2002, p. 126). Within a few years, about 100 community radio stations had received operating licences (Sparks, 2009; Tacchi, 2003). By 2007, out of 191 licensed radio stations, 152 were categorised as community services, reaching an approximate 6.5 million listeners nationwide (Costa, 2012, p. 139).

Community radio stations have increased significantly in South Africa. A survey, “The SA Community Radio Landscape” conducted by Wits Radio Academy identified 270 licensed community radio stations, and approximately 200 radio stations are on air (Wits Radio Academy, 2019). All of them broadcast a variety of programmes in the numerous languages spoken, and they serve geographical areas as well as religious and ethnic groupings (Gondwe & Mavindidze, 2014, p. 18).

While language and ethnic differences were often utilised by the then-government to divide people, these differences were over time recognised in a variety of ways. And the majority of community radio stations have played a central role in helping listeners in urban and rural areas to negotiate their post-apartheid identities (Mmusi, 2002).

Following the IBA Act that emphasised the importance of community radio funding, many of these community radio stations received support from international donors and the government during the early stages. with the intention of allowing them to become professional and independent, like processes that had evolved in other African countries. In general, such kind of

support was intended to build the foundation of these radio stations; Following initial funding and sustained assistance, community radio stations were anticipated to develop robust organisational frameworks, programmes, and routines (ICASA, 2017, p. 9). At a later stage, donor support was reduced and finally terminated. These high expectations within the sector have not been fulfilled, at least not on a significant scale (ICASA, 2017).

2.2.2 Community Radio Regulation and Licensing

ICASA regulates and issues licences to community radio stations in South Africa. Founded in 2000, it resulted from the union of the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA) and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) (Tacchi, 2002, p. 70). ICASA oversees the regulation of “telecommunications, broadcasting and postal industries in the public interest and ensures affordable services of a high quality for all South Africans” (ICASA, 2017). In addition, the Regulator fulfils different functions including receiving and resolving complaints while ensuring quality of programming.

ICASA has a track record of postponing the issuance of licences, not renewing licences on time, and closing down certain radio stations, among other factors (Megwa, 2007; Tacchi, 2002). In 2018, fifteen community radio stations had their broadcasts suspended due to unresolved signal distribution costs of over R33 million owed to Sentech (Hedley, 2018). Despite the resolution achieved through the cooperation of significant organisations such as the Department of Communications, the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF), the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), it prompts us to consider who holds the principal obligation for supporting community radio in such situations.

In 2019, the NCRF showed its concern about ICASA threatening to shut down over forty community radio stations. ICASA refuted these claims, noting that

they had identified twenty-nine radio stations operating without the necessary licences to function as community stations. The Regulator stated that it had “no plans, neither has it embarked on any mission, to shut down any validly operating community broadcasting service licensees” (ICASA, 2019). In accordance with its mandate, ICASA ensures that community radio stations comply with all applicable laws, regulations and licence terms and conditions.

ICASA (2019) noted that the stations that were shut down had been afforded the opportunity to regularise their affairs but had failed to do so. It is the responsibility of the regulator to enforce legislation and regulations and it would be their responsibility to close radio stations operating without licences as it would be unlawful should they permit them to continue to operate. The NCFR argued that ICASA had to consider the merits of each station that submitted their licence renewal late, and to work closely with the stations to ensure better understanding of the new Community Broadcasting regulations gazetted in the first quarter of 2019 (Nevill, 2019).

Community radio remains a reliable platform to disseminate information through programmes that appeal to local communities and deliver critical audiences to advertisers. The comment from Media Connection in Nevill (2019) states that “the closure of these radio stations will not only result in the loss of valuable communication platforms for communities and advertisers alike but will also result in major job losses of 700 mainly young people employed across the 29 stations”.

While ICASA has made efforts to address these challenges, the Regulator continues to encounter difficulties to influence policy and legislation to support local radio stations. The fundamental concern of numerous radio stations revolves around efficient daily management, aspects like compliance, policy lobbying, and advocacy often take a backseat (Muswede, 2009). These

undertakings, while influencing a radio station's longevity, do not necessarily resolve the sustainability problems prevalent in the sector.

Despite many community radio stations, they struggle to follow the regulatory obligations and licence conditions. It is ICASA's role to question such causes and find strategies to deal with them effectively. There is a view that ICASA has experienced significant challenges in dealing with issues surrounding community radio stations. The Executive Director of Media Monitoring Africa, William Bird (qtd. in Nevill, 2019), observed that, "Like most things in our country, the mess we find ourselves in has many root causes, and many responsible entities".

It is crucial to address such identified challenges including calling for all stakeholders to collaborate in seeking to assist with compliance issues in the sector. Such collaborations have the potential to promote the sustainability of the stations and thereby assist them to fulfil their critical mandate in communities they serve.

2.2.3 The Sustainability of Community Radio

The influence and reach of community radio stations vary considerably depending on their geographical positioning and target listeners (Muswede, 2009). While community radio offers the benefits of addressing community needs and being a cost-effective, accessible communication medium with a role in driving social change, it still faces various challenges, including those related to sustainability (Sparks, 2009, p. 207). Some radio stations, particularly those deeply rooted in rural areas operate in extremely impoverished circumstances (B. Siemering & Fairbairn, 2007). As noted by Mafani (2015, p. 16), limited resources and a scarcity of big businesses in the area makes it difficult for rural community radio stations to attract advertising and generate income for their sustainability. Stations further face challenges in attracting funding due to weak governance structures and a shortage of skilled personnel (Mafani, 2015). The lack of suitable

infrastructure to support digital media technologies exacerbates the situation. These elements significantly influence every aspect of community radio's long-term viability, including social, financial, and institutional facets. Subsequently, these stations will inevitably be heavily reliant on funding from the government, civic society, and other international organisations. Donor-driven assistance can often be detrimental to the quality of programming, independence and community participation (Castells, 2009; Kivikuru, 2006; Manyozo, 2009). Following this, the question of how the community radio industry will continue to develop high quality programmes, expand its audiences, and secure revenue while serving local needs remains a challenge (Mtimde, 2000, p. 3).

With difficult economic considerations and changing media markets, the status of funding radio programmes is uncertain and the potential interest is likely to reduce. Costa (2012, p. 143) cautions that many community radio stations will erode as funding sources and models change. Observing the international trends, developments and digital transformation, some community radio stations will mature during challenges, and some will face closure.

The economic viability of community radio has become more of a focus in recent years (Alexander, 2004; Spurr & Shashi, 2014). There is a case to be made for community radio stations to diversify their revenue streams (ICASA, 2017, p. 92). This is to ensure their independence. Community radio stations continue to encounter challenges that relate to control of buying airtime, whether by the government or corporates. With these factors in place, community stations are now forced to innovate and develop sustainability models and strategies to stay relevant. This comes in a package with continuous learning, which plays a critical role in creative broadcasting techniques (Mofokeng, 2018). This involves acquiring new skills, staying abreast of latest technological trends, and adapting accordingly. Additionally, community radio stations need to consistently find unique and engaging

broadcasting methods to differentiate themselves, compete for attention, and build loyal audiences, hence adoption of digital media technologies is paramount (Mofokeng, 2018).

2.2.4 The Principles of Community Radio

In this study, it is crucial to understand the principles of community media as they show the various factors that affect community radio stations. These principles assist community radio stations in their daily operations and offer avenues for their long-term sustainability.

2.2.4.1 *Community Ownership and Control*

With the ongoing sustainability challenges experienced in many community radio stations, it is necessary to examine who controls and manages all aspects of the station (Van Zyl, 2003). Lush & Urgoiti (2012, p. 15) emphasise the significance of local radio stations to operate based on democratic principles that include community members in the station's governance. The democratically elected representatives need to have the ability to develop and implement mechanisms beyond the daily operations of a radio station. This includes making decisions about the long-term sustainability of the station and considering digital transformation. Embracing digital technologies is still a long way for many community radio stations nationwide. The digital environment is intricate and varied. It requires station managers to first have a clear understanding of what they hope to accomplish with different digital media technology tools and then to have the desire to use those technologies if provided with the opportunity.

2.2.4.2 *Community Participation*

Encouraging community involvement in the station's administrative frameworks, strategic planning, management, content creation, financial choices, and daily operations is pivotal for ensuring the station's long-term viability (Tabing, 2002, pp. 11–14). To establish a station that consistently attracts daily listeners, there are two kinds of participation that are located

within a community. The primary engagement should revolve around content, prioritising media content creation. On the other hand, the next level of engagement is about structural participation, which offers broader opportunities for community members to connect with and endorse, like taking up board positions or roles (Bailey et al., 2008; Lush & Urgoiti, 2012).

Understanding the programs that community members need depends on community participation (Costa, 2012, p. 140). To expound on involvement in terms of content, community radio differs from public and commercial radio in that individuals of the locality both create and consume the media. Earnshaw (2018, p. 1), notes digital media technologies have changed the overall media landscape with audiences who are now the primary forces behind interactions and the processes of creating information. These shifts are perceived as enduring, and community radio stations need to find a harmonious balance between catering to both digital and traditional listeners while promoting proactive community participation.

As digital media technology advances, community radio stations are increasingly considering offering their programming to populations outside of their immediate geographic area (S. Chiumbu, 2014, p. 150). This allows them to reach a larger audience and offer diverse programming. As the digital community is virtual, it is crucial to reconsider what community radio means in terms of audience reach and programme production when taking technological changes in the digital sphere into account.

Numerous scholars stress the continued significance of community engagement in community radio (Atton, 2004; Bailey et al., 2008; Lush & Urgoiti, 2012). This implies that the creation, production, and dissemination of information should not be exclusive to media professionals but should also incorporate input from the public.

For community radio to remain relevant, a new concept on community participation is needed which considers available resources to produce quality content, and programming. Part of this research seeks to contextualise Izwi LoMzansi's efforts to strike a balance between the issues of sustainability and participation in practice.

Community participation is not limited to content only, but also stretches to creating strong and long-term partnerships, innovation and testing technologies that can enhance the station's operations and ensure its long-term viability. Community participation contributes to deliberations with two-way communication where both ordinary community members and community radio stakeholders exchange ideas, aspirations, concerns and stories that are untold, or those not captured accurately (Howley, 2010, p. 224). In seeking to embrace digital changes to move innovation from abstract level to practical level is always part of the deliberations. The issue of creating content or programmes that can address the community's needs is an important component of the study as it not only increases audiences but also strengthens the audience reach where like-minded people connect with each other as well as with the station.

2.2.4.3 Community Radio Audiences

Community radio is still a vital and influential media component. The development of digital media technologies enable community radio to transcend "geographical and community of interest categories to embrace translocal and diasporic communities" (S. Chiumbu, 2014, p. 250). Given the existing migration patterns, although removed from their spatial geographical communities, through digital media technologies radio listeners can still connect with their communities (Bailey et al., 2008; S. Chiumbu, 2014). In this case, with the use of digital media technologies, Izwi LoMzansi FM provides services to both local communities with a long history and an imagined global society.

The potential of digital media technologies cannot be underestimated in terms of enhancing listener participation. While phone-ins have long been a popular way for listeners to participate in community radio, digital media technologies expand the opportunities for more active engagement. The accessibility of various digital platforms can be used differently to enable audiences to interact with community radio stations conveniently in both time and space (Moyo, 2013, p. 212).

2.2.4.4 *Non-Profit Making Entity*

A community radio station, operating as a non-profit, primarily serves its community rather than prioritising the interests of sponsors or individual entities like commercial radio stations. Scholars of community radio argue that even in today's globalised economy, being non-profit doesn't necessarily equate to financial struggles (Mhagama, 2015, p. 1303). A non-profit orientation doesn't exclude the potential for financial stability, which can be achieved through diverse revenue streams such as sponsorships, advertisements, listener subscriptions, community donations, and external donor support (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012, p. 9).

2.2.4.5 *Independence*

Irrespective of who founded or owns a particular community media organisation, independence is crucial even while working in partnership with the government, funders, marketers, and other institutions (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012, p. 8). make it clear that the station's independence cannot be jeopardised by this partnership and that it must be transparent. Funding is necessary for community radio to operate, but when it depends too heavily on funds, it becomes vulnerable to outside influence. Consequently, it is crucial that financial relationships adhere to legal frameworks, constitutions, guiding norms, and explicit contracts are essential to ensure the impartiality of community radio stations and their relationship with their communities (Girard, 2007; Lush & Urgoiti, 2012).

2.3 Community radio in the age of digital technology

2.3.1 Defining Community Radio

Understanding community radio in the digital age heavily relies on how 'community' is defined. Many definitions of "community" highlight geographical closeness, shared attributes, and unified community interests (S. Chiumbu, 2014; Jankowski, 2006). The aspect of a community based on location “recognises the need to be grounded in a place defined by intimacy in face-to-face social contact and associated with shared (and disputed) social/cultural memory, both of which ultimately connect to common concerns that directly impact peoples’ daily lives” Himmelstein & Aslama, (2003, p. 270). According to these studies, community radio is restricted to the area it serves.

The meaning of community radio is undergoing a notable transformation due to its perception in the digital era. New opportunities are being created by digital media technologies that extend further than the local and targeted audience to include translocal and diasporic audiences as stated by (S. Chiumbu, 2014, p. 254). Translocal audiences refer to viewers or listeners who span various regions beyond the geographic areas where community radio broadcasts (Carpentier, 2007, p. 6). Diasporic audiences encompass individuals or communities who have relocated or been uprooted from their native lands and currently reside in diverse countries with different cultural environments (S. Chiumbu, 2014, p. 254). These audiences often maintain a strong connection to their cultural roots . They may consume media content from their home country or engage with media that reflects their cultural identity yet maintain connections and interactions through various means, particularly mediated communication technologies.

They enable listeners outside the community to engage with the station's content from afar using mobile devices and social media. Moyo (2013, p. 214) notes that, “radio is now a virtual space, network space, mobile space while at

the same time remaining a physical space when conceptualised in its studio format where citizens can participate in public debate". Bailey et al., (2008, p. 74) argues that the conventional idealist approach of situating community radio as being rooted in a place is inadequate in the digital era. This provides a chance to revisit the definition of "community radio" in the digital era and to evolve the conceptual frameworks surrounding community radio.

2.3.2 Digital Media Technologies

Digital technologies are integrated into a variety of production processes and are not only new media technologies (Castells, 2010). Because of this process, the development of digital media technologies has led to new forms and modes of production outside of the traditional media industry (Benkler, 2006; Sussman & Estes, 2005). The competition from digital natives, regulatory changes, investor pressure, and uncertainty such as the Covid-19 outbreak, are among the factors driving today's ongoing demand for digital transformation. With these developments in place, the global media industry is already seeing disruptions in both established modes of operation and conventional management practices. For example, Australia's community radio sector has emerged as a global leader in leveraging digital media technologies to ensure long-term viability (Anderson, 2019). Radio stations utilise digital tools such as podcast platforms, streaming services, and social media to enhance audience participation, expand content reach, and extend listenership beyond traditional limitations, leading to heightened sponsorship and fundraising success for financial sustainability (Anderson, 2019).

The main concerns with digital media technology, particularly in South Africa's community radio landscape is accessibility in terms of its potentials, such usability, affordability, and their capability of maximise capacity, as well as its advantages for community radio stations and their audience. Digital media technologies provide community radio stations with a variety of, often competing, alternatives for the dissemination of important information and

the development of revenue models (Sussman & Estes, 2005, p. 227). It is crucial that this study examine the possibilities, difficulties, and constraints.

2.3.2.1 Digital Convergence

Several definitions of "digital convergence" overlap the merging of new and traditional media. Convergence involves the integration of various media forms to reshape the media landscape, and it should be seen as an ongoing process rather than a 'magic solution', (Jenkins, 2007, p. 24). Despite the arguments on what digital convergence really means, the concept has become more practically significant in developing innovative ideas that fuel the digital economic landscape (Latzer, 2013; Pavlik & McIntosh, 2018).

This research employs the digital convergence concept to explore the ways in which community radio integrates diverse digital media instruments for content creation, show broadcasting, and nurturing audience interaction, with an emphasis on community involvement. This perspective further elucidates how community radio stations enhance their digital footprint and harness the myriad of opportunities presented by various technologies to bolster their sustainability.

For community radio stations, it is no longer business as usual for as some are already embracing the digital transformation by becoming more accessible on a variety of platforms and devices, while also getting feedback for improvement from the audience, "The convergence of digital media technologies allows for a scale to be created and this allows extra advertising, sponsorship or donor funding across different platforms and stations", (Berger, 2010, p. 90).

Community radio can take advantage of these advantages provided by digital media technology, but having the right tools and personnel is a challenge that most community radio stations face. While having digital tools may seem lucrative, community radio needs to ensure that these tools meet their

objectives to foster sustainability (Berger, 2010, p. 26). Digital convergence in community radio can only occur when both the station and its listeners possess the essential technologies for communication.

2.3.2.2 Digital Divide

Digital divide can also be defined as the gap or inequality in access to the use of , and proficiency in utilising digital tools like mobile devices and the internet (Castells, 2010, p. 254). Wilson (2004, p. 300) argues that digital divide is the disparity between two or more populations in terms of access to, distribution of, and utilisation of information and communication technology.

The disparity in access to computers and the internet for community radio stations in South Africa is expanding and they are now gaining access to technologies such as computers and the internet (Megwa, 2007, p. 55). However, little research has been done on how and whether these radio stations use these technologies to create their sustainability models (Megwa, 2007, pp. 50–51). Servon (2002, pp. 1–4) contends that this situation is worsened by policy gaps and the limited definition of access, acknowledged as a "physical phenomenon". Defining access in the context of community radio includes the conceptual access to take part in the formation of their technology strategy and creation and dissemination of their media materials.

Communities most affected by the digital divide in South Africa are predominantly community radio listeners, experiencing weak signal quality in broadcasts. Internet access is notably costly for groups such as the unemployed, individuals with disabilities, the illiterate, the elderly - especially those above 45, and those who are not proficient in reading or writing English (de Lanerolle, 2012, p. 10). According to a 2018 Pew Research Center study, 95% of South Africans had mobile access in 2018. Breaking it down, 8% did not own a smartphone but shared it with someone, whereas only 5% of adults did not possess any mobile phone (Pew Research Center, 2018). With these statistics, it is without a doubt that the digital divide of

having is closing rapidly, however the inequality of how to use these digital technologies remains a challenge. Another concern is data related costs. Simply owning a phone does not ensure access to digital resources, audiences also need to purchase data. This underscores the evident need for digital media technology to be a reciprocal process, where both community radio stations and their audiences should possess and utilise them equivalently.

2.3.4 Media Economics

According to Doyle (2022, pp. 12 & 60) commercial media companies rely on double-sided revenue where advertisers and consumers are bringing in that revenue. Most community radio stations rely on advertising to guarantee revenue and keep the station afloat. Advertising is generating income through selling audiences. Regarding community radio advertising, the question is whether the sector involves itself in the process of commercialisation?

With the influence of media forces, information is becoming a “private good” with the use of digital media technologies; information is produced, processed, and distributed more efficiently. Schiller (1983, p. 253) claims that one of the primary factors challenging the notion that knowledge is a communal resource, available for the collective good, is the fresh opportunities presented by digital media technology.

Commercial broadcasters frequently employ tactics to monetise their offerings, content, and listeners (Doyle, 2022, p. 12). These stations ensure their ongoing viability and revenue growth by catering to advertisers. Upon deeper analysis of this stance, community radio stations cannot overlook the challenges posed by commercialisation. They are obligated to prioritise their audience's interests and quality programming over self-gain, distinguishing them from commercial entities. However, this perspective does not shield community radio from the implications of adopting commercial practices, as financial stability remains a necessity for the station.

2.4.1 Advertising

Based on information from the All Media and Products Survey (AMPS), community broadcasting services collectively attract an audience of over six million people. But this listenership does not guarantee substantial amounts of advertising revenue. For instance, community radio only earns 2% of the revenue spent on advertising despite reaching 25% of the population (ICASA, 2017, p. 8). This highlights how intensely competitive the media sector is, forcing community radio to fight for its limited share of the pie, which is a huge challenge. In contrast to commercial and public radio stations, community radio stations attract a narrower audience, which in turn draws fewer advertisers and results in limited revenue growth (ICASA, 2017). Community media are said to be vulnerable to direct and indirect influence from advertisers in terms of media form and content if they rely largely on large-scale advertising, much like commercial broadcasters do (Hanusch et al., 2020; Mhagama, 2015).

2.4.2 Funding

According to the IBA Act No. 153 of 1993 and the Broadcasting Act No. 4 of 1999, a community media entity should operate as a non-profit and prioritise the community's best interests over advertising, individual, or group agendas (ICASA, 1999). Community radio researchers argue that being non-profit should not inherently mean operating at a disadvantage, particularly in today's digital era (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012; Mhagama, 2015). Contrary to commercial media, community radio can generate profits to meet operational expenses while also contributing to the community.

It is recommended for community radio stations to diversify their revenue sources in a way that is possible for them to guarantee their independence (ICASA, 2017). This may be considered, but to remain financially viable, community radio frequently deals with the direct and indirect challenges that

all these revenue sources have. Stations that rely significantly on advertising experience control pressures from corporations or the government.

While most community radio stations struggle with sustainability, scholars question the sustainability of donor-driven assistance. Drawing from their personal observations, these scholars show that community radio driven by donors did not enhance autonomy or local community engagement (Castells, 2009; Kivikuru, 2006; Manyozo, 2009). In developing democracies, international donor organisations have taken the place of repressive political systems in ensuring media accessibility and securing areas for local communities (Makuwira, 2017).

2.5 The Sustainability Concept

Sustainability has become a primary focus across all industries, including community media. While the concept often seems vast and intricate, it should be contextualised as a consistent and collective endeavour to ensure the viability and effectiveness of community media initiatives (Muswede, 2009). Understanding the sustainability of community radio calls for an in-depth examination of its precise definition.

Sustainability is viewed as the ability to maintain something either indefinitely or over a prolonged period (Mensah, 2019). Historically, "sustainability was primarily understood in financial contexts"(Fairbairn, 2009, p. 12);(Lush & Urgoiti, 2012, p. 10). Gumucio & Dlamini (2005) highlight that sustainability encompasses diverse aspects, including social, institutional, and financial dimensions. While their discussion is contextually grounded in Community Media Centres, the principles and insights drawn can be universally applied across various forms of community media. For community radio stations to thrive, it is essential to holistically address these interconnected components.

All social processes, including community involvement in matters like governing, managing, operating, creating content, generating revenue, and the overall communication process, are part of the social aspect of sustainability. The core of this component is the community's ownership and involvement in the process of communication and development of local material (Gumucio & Dlamini, 2005, p. 103).

Institutional sustainability encompasses the legal guidelines, governance, management infrastructures, and affiliations with other entities (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012). This research will emphasise partnerships with outside organisations, particularly considering Izwi LoMzansi's alliance with Fabrik, a technology company that assists community radio stations in enhancing their digital media proficiency.

The financial component of sustainability examines the community radio stations' capability to continue generating revenue, monetisation models, funding schemes, contributions, and services that can bring in money for running the station daily. The radio station needs to disregard any governmental authority, political influence, commercial or religious aims to ensure that income-generating activities are in line with what the station stands for (Gumucio & Dlamini, 2005).

According to Fairbairn (2009) in order for community media to remain viable, it is important to not only generate income, but also to mobilise the appropriate resources at the appropriate times to meet shifting demands and conditions. Amidst the digital transition, this study identifies a necessity to refine sustainability models to discern what is effective and what is not.

This research looks at the concept of sustainability, emphasising the interconnection between social and institutional sustainability, as these form a solid foundation for financial sustainability, as outlined by Gumucio & Dlamini (2005) and Lush & Urgoiti (2012). Sustainability empowers

community radio stations to generate and deliver value to all stakeholders without depleting the natural, economic, and social resources they depend on (Muswede, 2009). This notion is pivotal as it serves as a strategic tool, allowing community radio stations to uncover opportunities, innovate, and evolve with a socially driven purpose in the media landscape.

According to Gumucio & Dlamini (2005, p. 103), the aspects of social and institutional sustainability serve as the cornerstone on which financial sustainability is built. The challenge of sustainability frequently diverts community radio professionals from focusing on enhancing radio production, increasing community involvement, and tailoring more pertinent programming (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012; Muswede, 2009).

2.5.1 The Link Between Digital Media Technologies and Sustainability

The struggle for autonomy poses lasting sustainability issues for many community radio stations. This research addresses the intricate connection between digital media technologies and sustainability, an area not yet extensively explored, especially concerning community radio. It aims to understand how various decision-makers in radio stations – from managers and marketers to community representatives and stakeholders – react to these challenges.

With the digital evolution permeating all industries, community media is also evolving. This ongoing transformation reshapes the media environment, necessitating continual updates to sustainability models. The shift towards sustainable practices in community radio must align with the opportunities, challenges, and fluidity presented by digital media technologies. These technologies not only offer solutions to sustainability issues faced by community radio but also catalyse significant paradigm shifts.

Despite challenges, particularly for those who face technology access, notably the less privileged in South Africa, there has been a significant increase in the

adoption of digital media technologies, such as mobile phones and social media. According to the #Digital2021 report from DataReportal, the amount of people using social media in South Africa grew by 14% or three million between 2020 and 2021. The report further states that, in January 2021 alone, twenty-five million people used social media, comprising 41.9% of a total population of 59.67 million people. There were 100.6 million mobile connections by January 2021, translating to 168.5% of the total population. Given these figures, digital media technologies stand poised to significantly influence the future direction of community radio stations, and at the same time, they potentially carry a strong disruptive power for both the radio station and community if there is innovation for sustainability models.

Community radio stations often view technology as a barrier instead of a potential advantage due to people's limited understanding of how it works (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012, p. 21). Moreover, community broadcasters frequently do not possess the internal technical expertise to upkeep and fix equipment, leading them to depend significantly on costly outside service providers. There is a strong need for relevant training on basic technical skills and a need for innovative leaders. With such technical challenges in place, community radio stations can collaborate with technical service providers who can offer necessary training, and this is crucial to make technology more understandable and increase community radio's independence (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012).

Digital technologies can enable a disruptive transformation towards sustainable community radio stations (S. Chiumbu, 2014). However, this is not an automatic process and will not happen by itself. For many community radio stations, digital media technologies have not been mobilised towards sustainability (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012). Consequently, it is essential to merge the transformative power of digital media technologies with strategies for enduring sustainability. If not channelled effectively towards sustainable goals, these technologies could exacerbate existing challenges within

community radio stations and the communities they serve. Issues may encompass limited digital proficiency, disparities in access to information and economic opportunities, concerns about data sovereignty, monitoring of citizens and audience demographics for advertisers, and ambiguity surrounding digital technologies. To navigate these obstacles, stakeholders in community radio must deepen their understanding of digital shifts and foresee broad structural evolutions, laying the groundwork to guide the digital transition with sustainability at its core.

PwC estimated that the money radio stations in South Africa make from advertising would increase by about 3.9% each year. By 2022, it was expected to be just over R5 billion. They also thought that online ads in South Africa would go up to R9.4 billion in 2022 because of digital technology, (PwC, 2018). Considering these numbers, the digital media technologies have a possibility to facilitate the enduring viability of community radio stations by persistently ensuring internet connectivity, which allows both stations and their audiences to utilise social media and use their smartphones for apps and livestreaming.

Additionally, radio stations can create a business plan using these digital technologies to generate revenue, expand their reach, and encourage community involvement. In his interview with Business Day, Gordon Muller, the founder of GSM Quadrant argued that many marketers are less convinced about the contribution of radio to the advertising mix as it is not a good media buy (Maggs, 2021). This research is premised on the view that with the rise of localisation and podcasting across South Africa, thus far radio is leading, and many advertisers are slowly turning to this option. This opens more opportunities to drive sustainability in community radio. The radio stations can have a mix of digital and traditional advertising. The latest advertising trends show that about 40% of the advertising budget of some of the "digital natives," like Amazon, is spent on traditional media, like radio (Maggs, 2021). The relationship between digital media technologies and

sustainability still requires further conceptual and theoretical work especially in alignment with community radio.

2.6 Conclusion

Considering the ongoing sustainability issues faced by community radio in South Africa, this chapter provided a brief overview of community radio, along with discussions on associated licensing and regulatory challenges. The chapter interrogated the key principles of community media as they reflect the variables that define community radio stations. These principles not only help community radio stations manage their daily operations, but they also have the potential to ensure community radio's long-term survival. The chapter further defined community radio in the digital era. The discussed literature underscores the evolving perceptions of 'community' and 'radio' in the digital age, leading to a profound redefinition of community radio. Through digital technologies, community radio finds avenues extending beyond geographical boundaries and specific community interests. This chapter delved into digital media concepts, emphasising notions like convergence and the digital divide.

Additionally, the chapter explored media economics, illuminating how community media leverages resources to cater to the diverse informational and entertainment needs of listeners, advertisers, and the broader society, with a particular emphasis on advertising and funding dynamics. The multi-dimensional nature of sustainability, encompassing social, institutional, and financial facets, was outlined, asserting that comprehensive attention to these elements is crucial for the longevity of community radio stations. The chapter concluded by drawing connections between digital technologies and the overarching theme of sustainability.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted that community radio relies on external factors like social, institutional, and financial support for sustainability. It emphasised the significance of community media principles, which can secure long-term viability when applied effectively. Additionally, it discussed the connection between digital media technology and sustainability. This chapter discusses the research approach and design. As explained by Leedy & Ormrod (2010), a research design defines the extent to which the research questions have evolved from exploratory to more formal. The chapter also explains the participants, sampling procedure and data collection and analysis methods used.

3.2 Research Approach

This research adopts an exploratory approach which focuses on uncovering new insights. And offers a broader perspective into the role digital media technologies play in enhancing the sustainability of community radio stations. The exploratory design allows the researcher to gather information and connect ideas to understand the groundwork of the research question as well as trends and developments. The findings for exploratory research lay the groundwork for more structured investigations. Exploratory research allows for flexible exploration of different technological innovations and helps in understanding the complex dynamics of digital platforms in community broadcasting. It also promotes innovation to find new ways to support station sustainability, and is suitable for navigating the challenges of technology, community involvement, and financial stability in community radio operations (Saunders et al., 2009). It is undeniable that exploratory research has its drawbacks. It often lacks statistical generalisability due to its focus on insights and smaller sample sizes, potentially containing subjective elements due to qualitative data interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Exploratory research also tends to raise more questions than they answer;

and demand significant time and specialised skills for data collection and analysis.

To navigate through such challenges, this research required the articulation of individual experiences and views, hence a qualitative research approach was used. The qualitative emphasis allows for a nuanced understanding of complex issues and the diverse perspectives surrounding them (Saunders et al., 2009). Leedy & Ormrod (2010, p. 136), articulates that qualitative research often helps in revealing the nature of events, particularly complicated ones, and can be used to determine the validity of specific assumptions. Leedy (1993) observes that the foundation of qualitative research is the idea that the most valuable and high-quality data comes from first-hand experience. Creswell & Creswell (2017, p. 173) state that a qualitative approach is the holistic process of enquiry that seeks to comprehend a social or human problem rather than being founded on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with statistics, and evaluated with statistical processes. Therefore, a quantitative evaluation of this study may not have been possible because it is dependent on people's perceptions and cannot be scientifically measured.

3.3 Research Design

A case study approach was deemed suitable for this study given its attainable data collection procedures and the capacity for an in-depth investigation of the subject. As a prominent advocate of case study research, (Yin, 2009, p. 14), defines it as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. This definition captures the purpose of a case study as one that provides a level of knowledge and understanding that allows for a thorough analysis of the complex and specific nature of diverse events. Heale & Twycross (2015) agree that a case study is a rigorous study of an individual, an organisation, a group of people or a selected group of organisations to establish

generalisations. In general, there is a high degree of concurrence amongst scholars that a case study should focus on individuals or groups representing or involved in a phenomenon being researched in its natural setting within a specific area and time.

The use of a case study method in research is guided by various factors, including the nature of the problem (Noor, 2008, p. 1602). As previously mentioned, this study examines the impact of digital media technologies on community radio station sustainability. Therefore, the researcher focused on a community radio station already involved in digital initiatives. Following this, an exploratory case study design was found to be best suited because it allowed the researcher to investigate new ideas, trends and developments since digital media technologies are rapidly evolving. The type of research being conducted and the number of cases employed in a study influence the decision of which case study or cases to use (Yin, 2003).

The study saw fit to use a case study design as a lens through which the role of digital media technologies can be examined in relation to their ability/challenge in assisting community radio stations to become more sustainable. A single case provided a feasible data gathering effort. Considering voices and perspectives of those interviewed in relation to their organisation. Using a single case, this study aimed to discover the real-life digital usage experiences of the selected community radio and to show how this community radio station was exploiting digital media opportunities and how it is responding to the dynamics engendered by these tools. A single case study also allowed for the investigation strategies, and techniques that the station uses to drive sustainability.

3.3.1 Participants and Sampling

This study used certain inclusion criteria to streamline the sample size and increase the likelihood of obtaining information-rich responses from participants of the selected radio station. Nearly 250 community radio

stations exist in South Africa. While several of them employ information communication technologies such as the internet, websites, and social media pages, it was impractical to include all in this research. Following this, the inclusion criteria was based on the tenets of a purposive part of non-probability sampling method. The criteria for the sampling selection used was the:

- Location: The community radio stations had to be in the Eastern Cape or KwaZulu-Natal.
- Digital media utilisation: These stations should be employing digital media technologies.

The researcher had to identify community radio stations that were doing something digital in the Eastern Cape and in KwaZulu-Natal provinces where she had previously worked with community radio stations. Five radio stations were selected in the Eastern Cape and five in KwaZulu Natal. After careful consideration, one station, Izwi LoMzansi, was selected from a group of ten community radio stations. While other community radio stations utilised digital media technologies, Izwi LoMzansi was selected because it was part of the pilot project which aimed to assist the station in the adoption of a hybrid digital model that allowed the station to mix the geographical and community-of-interest philosophy while contributing to its sustainability.

The purpose of qualitative research is to focus more on the ability of the selected participants to elaborate and comprehend the topic at hand (Neuman, 2006). A qualitative research methodology aids the researcher in locating situations that can improve the process of learning about a certain social setting. Neuman (2006) notes that since the objective of non-probability sampling is to get a more in-depth insight rather than broad generalisations, participants are selected based on their pertinence to the research matter. By using purposive sampling, the researcher is able to select meaningful cases by interacting with experts who can help in answering the research question (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This

approach is ideal for group research that is exploratory that may be difficult to reach, because the researcher used the locations she was familiar with to identify appropriate cases (Neuman, 2006). Given this context, the researcher purposely chose participants playing critical roles in the selected stations coupled with the ability to provide rich information because of their experience in the sector and digital transformation in the media sector.

All respondents were selected because they are knowledgeable, understand the broadcast sector and their community radio station's operations and digital transformation in the broadcast environment. To acquire information, a broad range of questions that relate to the usage of digital media technologies and how these contribute towards the sustainability of the radio station were asked. The questions also included challenges that these community radio stations encountered in relation to digital media technology use, and their achievements.

3.3.2 Data Collection Method and Instruments

Data collection is a critical component of the study, as Fink (2019, p. 109) describes it as the "soul of the study". This means data collection is an integral part of research that should be treated with accuracy. To gain insight into the research objectives, the researcher personally collected data on cross-sectional site visits. In the first instance, interviews were used which allowed the researcher to derive deeper meaning from respondents' reasoning. Dikko (2016, p. 526) described interviews as a way of obtaining relevant information regarding the participants' experiences or how they understand a particular subject. Interviews were a preferred choice to collect non-numerical data and helped the researcher to explore the views, insights, experiences and motivations of selected participants regarding the contribution that digital media technologies make to the sustainability of community radio (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 40; Gill et al., 2008, p. 292).

Since this was an exploratory study, semi-structured interviews were utilised. By employing semi-structured interviews, the researcher had more latitude

to choose how to present questions to participants. It also offered a considerable amount of leeway to the researcher to probe for more information and clarification while maintaining basic interview structure (Adams, 2015). Open-ended questions were used to directly engage with interviewees during semi-structured in-depth interviews. Here the researcher used a written list of questions but maintained a conversational and spontaneous casual quality to explore experiences, practices, and values at the radio stations.

It is vital to recognise that a radio station operates as a multifaceted entity, and its success hinges on the collective efforts of key individuals and stakeholders. Consequently, this research involved the participation of five key informants, each occupying a critical role within Izwi LoMzansi. This diverse group encompassed the station manager, programme manager, sales, and marketing manager, as well as external stakeholders, including a board member, and a community member.

More information was collected through a careful analysis of a range of documents including operational policies, financial strategies, programme schedules, annual progress reports, and business and marketing strategy, and digital strategy. More data was further collected through desktop research using the internet to assess Izwi LoMzansi's social media and mobile application usage and the digital media usage metrics. These were reliable forms of data collection to give voice and meaning to the topic researched and to promote a better understanding and derive learnings from the community radio station's connection between sustainability and digital utilisation.

3.3.3 Procedure for interviews

Before the commencement of the interviews, an interview guide (Appendix I) detailing the objectives of the study and the procedure of the interview was shared with the participants. The interviews were then conducted in-person following an agreed time. Interviews lasted on average an hour and were

recorded using the application's recording function. The first part covered the overall operational process of the radio station to understand its work, where it comes from and where it is going. The second section explored the sustainability situation of the station with a focus on social, institutional, and financial elements of sustainability. This included challenges, highlights, advertising, and funding. The last section explored the role of digital media technology use and the contributions to the station.

3.3.4 Data Analysis Methods and Techniques

The process of qualitative data analysis entails interpreting and comprehending the world from the perspective of the subjects as they perceive it (Hooper, 1992, p. 29). This is achieved by analysing documents to enable the researcher to categorise, assess, contemplate, grasp, and more effectively showcase the results (Harding, 2018). The analytical framework used in processing data for this study sought to assess three major aspects of sustainability: social, institutional, and financial, against the themes that emerged from the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then read several times and, in the process, themes that emerged grouped into components for better analysis and interpretation. In qualitative research, Neuman (2006) emphasises the value of repetitively reviewing data allowing the researcher to reflect on the themes and patterns that emerge. Following this, the themes were carefully grouped according to their similarities and then analysed against in three main areas of sustainability mentioned above.

3.3.5 Limitations of the Study

Many factors influence the viability of community radio stations and their use of digital media technologies, and hurdles are often unique to specific stations and settings. While KwaZulu-Natal is home to ten community radio stations, this research specifically focuses on a single station, Izwi LoMzansi FM. Furthermore, Izwi LoMzansi was selected because it was already using digital

media technologies which started as a pilot programme. Looking only at one station means that caution is required when assuming the findings apply to others but can assist in theory building. It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study as the focus on radio stations may limit the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the research outcomes are based on a specific point in time, and the dynamic nature of digital media means that the landscape is continuously evolving. Future research should consider a broader sample of community radio stations and engage in ongoing monitoring to capture the evolving trends. Another aspect to consider is that case studies, while valuable for their depth, may involve subjectivity and potential bias inherent in the researcher's interpretation of the data. The researcher in this study was mindful of unintentionally imposing her own expectations or beliefs on the analysis to ensure the validity of the results.

3.3.6 Ethical Considerations

Firstly, a letter was sent to the station manager of Izwi LoMzansi requesting the organisation and team to be used as a case in this study. The participants were given a thorough explanation of the study's objectives both verbally and on a subject form sheet. Participants could withdraw from the study at any moment without incurring any negative effects because participation in the study was completely voluntary. After a full explanation of their involvement in the study, forms requesting consent were provided for participants to complete and sign. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and the participants' names were not given to people outside the study and not identified in the study. Instead, they were identified as participants one to five in place of their real names and professional titles. Participants were also informed that the data collected was only for the purpose of the study and would be kept private and safe. Both the soft and hard copies of stored data will be deleted after five years. The study's findings will be retained at the library, and if published, participants' names will remain confidential. The researcher also abided by the University of Witwatersrand's ethical

guidelines and institutional review process of ethical clearance (Ethic clearance number – JOMS2019/12).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter covered the research design, including the fundamental ideas that guided the study and the actual processes followed to collect data, such as sample selection, sample size, and sampling techniques. The following chapter is concerned with the presentation and interpretation of the data obtained, and the discussion of the results.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and justified the research methodology and the research design employed in this study. As highlighted, the analytical framework used in processing data for this study sought to assess three

major aspects of sustainability: social, institutional, and financial against the themes that emerged from the interviews.

This chapter analyses and interprets the data collected using semi-structured interviews. This method enables a thorough examination of the results, ensuring a deep understanding of the subject matter. The researcher delves into the pinpointed themes in relation to the three facets of sustainability: social, institutional, and financial. Each theme is examined in relation to the specific dimension of sustainability it pertains to, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these aspects intersect with the research topic. By aligning the analysis with the three major aspects of sustainability, the study aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

Moreover, the findings are critically analysed and contextualised within the existing literature, enabling the researcher to draw insightful conclusions. The analysis delves into the implications and significance of the identified themes, shedding light on their broader implications for the subject matter and contributing to the existing body of knowledge, offering valuable insights for future research and practical applications.

4.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.2.1 Social Sustainability

As highlighted in the previous chapter, social sustainability entails all social processes incorporating community participation in areas like governance, administration, content creation, revenue generation, and the entire communication procedure (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012). Community ownership of the station and the capacity to take part in the development and broadcasting of programmes at both the operational and decision-making levels are at the heart of social sustainability (Gumucio & Dlamini, 2005). Three main themes that fall under the sustainability aspect emerged from the interviews. And these themes were assessed against the contribution of digital media

technologies that the radio station uses, which are part of the Fabrik platform and particular attention was paid to the mobile application and social media.



4.2.1.1 Audience Reach

As highlighted in the first chapter, Izwi LoMzansi had 316,000 listeners in the first quarter of 2023 with the majority of people still listening through the terrestrial sources (BRCSA, 2023).

This session analyses the audience reached between 2019 and 2022 using Izwi LoMzansi's mobile app streaming.

4.2.1.1.1 Translocal audiences

The mobile application has allowed Izwi LoMzansi to gain audience reach in other cities across South Africa (Appendix II). As highlighted earlier, translocal audiences are listeners who are located in different geographic locations and cultural contexts within the same country but share interests in a particular radio station or programme and listen through a digital platform (S. Chiumbu, 2014). The data presented above shows that there is a sizable number of listeners outside Durban who use the mobile application to listen to Izwi LoMzansi, and the increase varies from year to year. These are

translocal audiences that (S. Chiumbu, 2014) notes in her arguments and with proper usage of these tools the number could increase (S. Chiumbu, 2014; S. H. Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2013).

4.2.1.1.2 Diasporic Audiences in Different Countries

Izwi LoMzansi's mobile application metrics show that 18.2% of diasporic listeners who tuned into Izwi LoMzansi FM were from Amsterdam, Netherlands in 2020.



Source: Izwi LoMzansi mobile app metrics, 2019/2020

The data from Statistics Netherlands (Central Bureau of Statistics) reveal a growing trend of South Africans migrating to Amsterdam. This could be one of the drivers of listenership (Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2021).

In 2020, streaming metrics from the Izwi LoMzansi mobile app reveal a significant increase in global reach, with users streaming from 138 unique countries, nearly doubling the seventy-five countries recorded in 2019. This

surge in international listenership can be attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and heightened awareness of the mobile app.

Participant One: Covid-19 pandemic is the leading factor to the increase of the number of countries that tuned into the station, doubling the number as compared to 2019. Given the high rate of cases in South Africa, higher than any other African country, people wanted to know what was happening in their communities. The community radio station provided local news and information about the state of the pandemic that was not available in the mainstream media. The radio station provided localised up-to-date information about Covid-19 cases, health, food parcels and the impact of Covid-19 in businesses, (Appendix III).

Listening to a local community radio station provided a sense of connection to the diasporic communities during the time of social distancing and isolation (Laskar & Bhattacharyya, 2021). Izwi LoMzansi station also played a crucial role in providing cultural programming such as music, interviews and other programmes that celebrated culture which helped diasporic and translocal audiences to relate and gain a sense of belonging as highlighted by (Georgiou, 2010).

Beyond the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the station also intensified its efforts to promote the mobile app and enhance its digital adoption, in line with the broader industry trend towards digital transformation.

Participant One: 2020 presented us with the chance to enhance our digital engagement, and we dedicated efforts to promote our mobile app extensively. This initiative likely contributed to the growth in the diversity of countries using our streaming service.

4.2.1.1.3 Average Growth of Listeners Through the Mobile Application

During 2021, mobile app utilisation reached 21%, and it is important to note that this figure excludes downloads. This is five years of growth since the pilot project in 2017. In other words, most audiences still come from terrestrial radio, and it will take some time to have huge listenership through

the mobile application unless there is some sort of comprehensive digital usage of the tool.

4.2.1.2 Community Participation and Engagement

Through an observation of Izwi LoMzansi's mobile application, interactive features such as live streaming, private chat room, and podcasts were noted. These features are intended to improve the listening experience and increase participation and engagement (Munyarukumbuzi, 2020). Through a private chat room, community members participate by directly sending suggestions for programming and content improvement (Appendix IV). The private messages cannot be provided for privacy and confidentiality purposes.

Participant Three – since the adoption of the mobile application, over 20 000 people downloaded the app in 2020 and only about 30% use our app's private chat room monthly. Its main objective is to reach out to many community members to gather feedback, opinions, and ideas on how to improve the radio station. We have seen greater participation from community members bringing diverse programming ideas. For example, there is a current affair podcast "Iksasa Lethu" (Our future was developed through the suggestions of our community (Appendix V).

Participation is not just confined to phone calls, SMS lines, and interviews at community stations anymore, expanding the range of interactive opportunities in radio. The Community Connect forum of Izwi LoMzansi's app creates a supportive and inclusive environment for all community members to advertise their businesses, look for opportunities, share ideas and ask questions on certain topics (Appendix V).

Participant Two – The Community Connect forum has about three thousand members and the majority often use the platform to advertise their products and services. The app allows people to highlight their work and talents, talk about pressing issues and look for opportunities to grow their business and find new customers. The app connects people from different backgrounds, and we have seen architects, those selling perfumes, clothes, and service providers.

Through this app, we want to see continued success and positive impact of the station on the community.

The Community Connect forum allows the listeners to participate in debates and share information with others in real-time, and more immersive experiences that bring people together in virtual environments. Through tracking how many users are actively participating in debates and sharing information, the app page shows very low engagement. The forum is not actively moderated to maintain content quality and there are no clear guidelines to prevent inappropriate content. This results in the forum covering other things that are not business related (Appendix VI). This makes it challenging to identify target audiences and understand their preferences. Understanding audiences has the potential to help create relevant and engaging content that resonates with every individual's business perspective.

4.2.1.3 Community Ownership and Control

While Izwi LoMzansi has board members and conducts annual general meetings, the advertisement for expression of interest is often done through traditional methods such as placing the post on the physical notice boards and the announcement through traditional radio. There is no evidence of placing these opportunities on any digital media platforms, like annual general meetings.

Participant One - We have been using the traditional ways of calling community members to join our board and to attend the annual general meeting. Without a doubt, digital media technologies such as social media and mobile apps have the power to make things work easier for us, particularly in the selection of board members. However, we are somehow still stuck in the old way of doing things.

Sharing opportunities through digital channels would raise awareness and motivate more people to get involved. There are many ways in which digital technologies can be used to enable community participation in the

democratic selection process of their board members. This may include using the mobile app and social media to nominate, vote, provide feedback, and facilitate the overall selection process. Hence allowing the community members to take ownership and control of their station.

As highlighted earlier in the literature, to use digital media technologies, community radio stations must first have a clear idea of what they want to achieve with those tools and then have the motivation to do so if given the chance. Izwi LoMzansi's digital strategy highlights employing digital media technologies to facilitate community ownership and control and enable greater participation, engagement, and collaboration from the local community. Now with digital tools that allow them to do so, there is still a digital gap of usage and benefit as noted by (Fuchs, 2006).

Participant One – Although we have these tools at our disposal, there are certain missed opportunities that we frequently overlook. To realise what we are not doing with the technologies we have; I believe it is necessary to review our digital strategy and see how we can integrate it with our traditional methods of doing things.

Community members view digital media technologies as powerful enough to provide transparent and accessible communication between the station and community members, including having a voice in the station's governance and whistleblowing.

Participant Two - While every community member might not have the relevant criteria to be in the board and participate in annual general meetings, it is still vital that these opportunities are populated in digital media platforms to allow individuals with a vested interest such as young people (who have access to these platforms) to take part and promote democracy. And digital media technologies have the power to contribute to station buy-in.

Access is a key factor in enabling community ownership and control through digital media platforms. It must be a two-way communication — community radio needs them just as much as audiences do (Nxusani, 2012). In a nutshell,

the contribution of digital media technologies to community ownership and control is very limited since the radio station is still stuck in doing things the traditional way.

4.2.2 Institutional Sustainability

Institutional sustainability encompasses governance, management frameworks, and collaborations with external entities, and the prevailing legal and regulatory landscape (Lush & Urgoiti, 2012). The endurance of community media isn't solely about revenue generation and its efficient management; it is about allocating the appropriate resources timely, tailored to evolving requirements and situations (Fairbairn, 2009). Given the ongoing digital shift, this study identifies a need to refine sustainability models to discern effectiveness from ineffective strategies. Within the realm of institutional sustainability, two primary themes emerge: optimising processes and fostering partnerships.



4.2.2.1 Streamlining Operations

Digital media technologies can help community radio stations operate more efficiently. Izwi LoMzansi's mobile app allows programme managers and producers to automate tasks such as scheduling, programme line-up, playlist management and remote content management (Appendix VI).

Participant Three – this platform makes our work easier by allowing us to schedule and plan radio programmes. When planning to add a new programme, we can easily ask the listeners what they want to hear and ask for improvements in current programmes, and then we tailor make our content. To enhance our current affairs segments, like the Iksasa Lethu show, we reach out to our audience for their preferred subjects and what specific aspects they wish to learn about those subjects. This enables us to invite pertinent specialists to the show, tailoring our content to meet the interests and needs of our community.

The platform also allows the programme managers to monitor and track the performance of programmes and campaigns in real time. And, to store and archive audio content, making it easier for the production personnel to manage and access their content. The mobile app and smash board provide new ways for listeners to interact with the station vice versa.

4.2.2.2 Partnerships

With the advent of the mobile application, Izwi LoMzansi has been able to collaborate with local businesses, the government, and corporate companies to promote their services and products on the radio's digital platforms. The station has also built relationships with other non-profit organisations by collaborating on joint projects to support communities and promote their work and visibility in the community. For example, Izwi LoMzansi recently partnered with Aware.org to create awareness on the safety of pedestrians during the festive season which was sponsored by Drip Shoes (Appendix VII).

Participant Four - Since the launch of the digital transformation pilot project in 2017, we have partnered with various stakeholders who are into supporting our work through campaigns, and business initiatives. This has been made possible by the app's ability to enhance community engagement. Through the app, we have been able to reach out to listeners and gather information to understand our audience and tailor make our content to their needs and interests.

The radio station has partnered with the government, corporate and non-governmental organisations to run campaigns of different nature (Appendix VII). Improved interactivity through the mobile app continues to help the radio station in fostering partnerships with stakeholders that are looking to engage with audiences in new and innovative ways particularly the corporate space.

4.2.3 Financial Sustainability

The financial aspect of sustainability explores the consistent revenue-generating potential of community radio stations. This includes models, funding strategies, contributions, and services that drive daily functions. To ensure that revenue-generating activities align with the station's mission and goals, the radio stations should be independent of state, political, commercial, and religious influences (Gumucio & Dlamini, 2005). This aspect of sustainability will emphasise contributions, endorsed collaborations, initiatives, and advertising.



4.2.3.1 Donations

The mobile application and social media platforms for Izwi LoMzansi do not have donations option, so this means that there are no donations that are made through digital media technologies. For further funding, the radio

station applies directly to the available opportunities. The station requested for government support through MDDA, a few years ago (the respondent could not recall the precise year), but no response was received. In October 2019, the station submitted a new funding request, however it was not successful. The station sustains itself and does not receive funding from the government or international donors. Adding donations feature on radio mobile applications can provide a way for listeners to support the radio station, increase engagement while generating revenue.

Participant One - While donations can be an important source of revenue, they are very unpredictable and planning and budgeting for ongoing operations and growth becomes challenging for a radio station such as ours. Looking at the number of community radio stations across the country, obviously, the donors are very limited, and we do not want to miss out on the opportunity on other revenue streams.

4.2.3.2 Paid Partnerships

On an ongoing basis, Izwi LoMzansi runs paid partnerships on the mobile app and social media platforms particularly on Facebook (Appendix VIII). Paid partnership typically refers to an agreement between a brand and an individual or another brand where the partner is compensated for promoting the brand's products or services (Kim et al., 2021). In paid partnerships, the station receives compensation in exchange for promoting the business or brand's product or service. Compensation usually takes the form of a flat fee. Paid partnerships are typically short-term relationships focused on a specific campaign or product launch and they do not generate much income.

Participant Four - The income generated through paid partnerships basically covers the operational costs.

The station also runs some sponsored programmes that take place on a timely basis including working with corporates such as Vodacom, and Sanlam. By the time of data collection, the station was running a competition sponsored by Vodacom where members of the community had to participate

to empower themselves. These are added value from including an online element.

4.2.3.3 Campaigns

Izwi LoMzansi runs campaigns for the government and corporates on a timely basis through social media and the mobile app (Appendix VIII). A campaign is different from a paid partnership in that it is a planned series of activities or events designed to achieve a particular marketing goal, such as increasing brand awareness or driving sales (Kelly et al., 2015).

Participant Four – Some of the income generated through these campaigns is converted into community development to uplifting communities. This includes small businesses through creating competitions, and community initiatives. In 2020, Izwi LoMzansi ran a call-to-action campaign, #IDoItForIzwi that allowed communities to go and help each other and then shared their experiences with the station. These campaigns allowed the station to increase app users by 20% and this case was presented to the advertisers to demonstrate the effectiveness of advertising on the platform.

4.2.3.4 Advertising

Izwi LoMzansi's mobile app monitors user engagement which includes tracking app downloads, session lengths, demographics, and other metrics that indicate user engagement. This kind of data presents an opportunity to demonstrate the value of advertising on the platform and justify advertising rates. Although with this data privilege, the station only generates about 3% of advertising revenue from the mobile app annually, which mainly comes from big corporates like Nedbank, Standard Bank, among others.

Participant Four – we do not really make much from the mobile application, we generated 3% for the period of 2022.

The actual revenue could not be disclosed for confidential purposes, but some anecdotal evidence of community radio annual figures generated will be used to see what the 3% really means. An owner of a community radio station and a member of the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF)

mentioned that the yearly revenue for a typical local radio station in a local town range from around R840,000 to a million. A community radio station covering big cities can generate about R960 000 to 3 million. Izwi LoMzansi is based in the city, and it could generate about two million annually. And this means that digital media technologies would be generating about R60 000 per year.

Participant Four - while we aim to integrate advertising on terrestrial and digital media platforms to attract advertisers, the cost of doing so is more than it is for only advertising on terrestrial radio. This presents a challenge with advertisers and advertising agents who often demand an integrated package for the price of a single platform. This also includes small businesses who are the soul of community radio advertising but often have limited advertising budgets.

Participant Four - This makes it challenging to sell integrated advertising space to allow ads to run both in terrestrial and digital media platforms. And since the terrestrial has more audiences, the advertisers often prefer to use that and only a few use the integrated strategy.

4.3 The Challenges of Making Better Use of The Digital Media Tools

The mobile application has the capacity to help advertisers understand who they are reaching with their ads and tailor their messaging accordingly. But the station faces various challenges in making this happen. Since 2019, the radio station has changed the sales and marketing personnel various times, with some, who were well versed in understanding audience engagement and monetisation, while some require training.

Participant Four - I must admit that there are some digital media tools such as online polls, surveys, that we do not utilise even though they are very useful in gathering feedback. The challenge is that we do not have the right personnel who focus on digital media technologies daily. As for sales and marketing, we tend to just focus on generating revenue through terrestrial radio. The radio station suffers marketing skills with people who are well-versed in attracting

advertisers and for revenue generation. This has had a huge impact in effectively utilising the mobile application in a way that generates more revenue.

Izwi LoMzansi also faces leadership that is dedicated to generating revenue through digital media technologies. These technologies are complicated, particularly in advertising while ensuring that revenue is generated through these tools.

Participant Five: it is important to have leadership that is dedicated to generating revenue through digital media technologies. Then they bring a particular approach and think about the sustainability of the station as it relates to a broader community and not in a narrow way. That kind of leadership helps to unpack some of the models that can help us transform the sector, as part of the interventions, harnessing digital transformation has possibilities of making a change.

The other challenge is the concern about maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the station's programming in the face of pressure to conform to more commercialised or mainstream media norms.

Understanding proper boundaries for a community radio station can be a challenge. With all these data sets on our palms, then how do we monetise in a way that will not jeopardise what we stand for.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive examination of Izwi LoMzansi radio station's journey toward sustainability through the adoption of digital media technologies. The findings offer valuable insights for the station's future strategies, emphasising the importance of leveraging these tools while staying true to its community-driven mission. The findings of this study highlight the importance of ongoing investigation and adaptation to guarantee the sustained viability and expansion of community media in the digital era.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and serves as the conclusion of the research, with its primary objective being to address the representation concerns identified throughout the study and conduct a comprehensive assessment of the research findings. Within this section, emphasis will be placed on presenting recommendations and identifying directions for future research.

5.2 Findings

This study explored the potential of diverse digital media technologies, including mobile apps, and social media, to evaluate their impact on the sustainability of community radio stations. It specifically examined three dimensions of sustainability: social, institutional, and financial. The research was further enhanced by practical insights from the experiences of Izwi LoMzansi FM.

5.2.1 Social Sustainability

Through examining digital media technologies, this study found that they have contributed moderately to Izwi LoMzansi's social sustainability. Notably, a significant diasporic audience engaged with the station through its mobile application, largely driven by the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This phenomenon showcases the pivotal role that community radio stations play in disseminating crucial localised information, especially during times of crisis. It becomes evident that the station has adeptly cultivated a sense of connection among diasporic communities, even amid

social distancing measures, aligning itself seamlessly with the vital function of community radio in preserving information and culture during turbulent periods.

Notably, the research sheds light on a concentration of diasporic listeners hailing from Amsterdam, Netherlands, shedding light on how migration patterns wield considerable influence over listenership trends. Furthermore, the study observes a consistent increase in the number of translocal audiences, effectively demonstrating the mobile application's efficacy in reaching culturally affiliated listeners across diverse South African urban centres.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that terrestrial radio continues to have influence over the majority of the listener base, with the mobile application making gradual advancements. This highlights the need for a comprehensive digital strategy to realise significant mobile app listenership.

The mobile app, with its features such as the Community Connect forum, has broadened the range of interactive options, becoming a versatile community hub for engagement. Interestingly, the level of participation in chat rooms is somewhat limited, suggesting that not all users fully exploit the interactive features at their disposal. Integrating community input into broadcasts remains a crucial aspiration, albeit one fraught with its own set of challenges.

Despite these challenges, the participation of the community through the mobile app has led to a variety of creative programming ideas, showcasing the station's innovative content development.

5.2.2 Institutional Sustainability

Digital media technologies have made moderate contributions to the enduring stability of community radio stations at an institutional level. The research findings highlight the transformative potential of incorporating digital media technologies, as exemplified by Izwi LoMzansi's mobile app, into the operational framework of community radio stations. This technological infusion empowers programme managers and producers with

the ability to streamline a myriad of tasks, ranging from programme scheduling and lineup management to the curation of playlists and the remote handling of content. This streamlined approach not only amplifies operational efficiency but also equips stations with the agility needed to swiftly respond to the ever-evolving preferences and demands of their audience.

A significant finding is how listeners actively contribute to creating and improving content. This interaction not only strengthens the community but also keeps the station's content relevant and appealing over time. Monitoring programme performance in real-time enhances this process, allowing stations to make decisions based on audience data.

Furthermore, the mobile app serves as an effective repository and management tool for audio content. This capability simplifies content accessibility for production personnel, instilling a greater sense of organisation and efficacy in content management. Beyond this, the app ushers in fresh avenues for listener interaction, fostering a reciprocal relationship between the station and its audience.

The research findings highlight the crucial role of partnerships in enhancing the long-term sustainability of community radio stations. The advent of the mobile application has facilitated collaborative ventures with a diverse array of entities, spanning local businesses, governmental bodies, corporate giants, and nonprofit organisations. These partnerships extend a helping hand to communities and elevate the station's visibility within its locality. The participant perspective unveils the mobile app's capacity for fostering community engagement, a catalyst for the establishment and nurturing of these strategic partnerships.

By harnessing the app's potential, stations can reach out to their audience, glean invaluable insights, and tailor their content to cater to specific needs and interests. Consequently, community radio stations emerge as platforms

for stakeholders seeking innovative means of connecting with their target demographics, especially within the corporate landscape.

In essence, the findings advocate that the process of streamlining operations through digital tools not only liberates precious time but also lays a fertile foundation for the cultivation of partnerships. This symbiotic relationship, where operational efficiency harmonises with strategic collaborations, stands at the epicentre of institutional sustainability for community media.

5.2.3 Financial Sustainability

Digital media technologies offer community radio stations a pathway to financial sustainability through income diversification, short-term income generation, community-centric campaigns, and the exploration of integrated advertising approaches. Relying solely on a single source, like donations, can be unpredictable and challenging for community radio stations. The constrained pool of potential donors within the community radio sphere highlights the importance of exploring alternative avenues for income generation, including harnessing the potential of digital media technologies.

Paid partnerships and sponsored programmes play a pivotal role in covering operational costs. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that these partnerships usually offer only temporary financial relief. Thus, there arises the need for a delicate balance between the pursuit of short-term income generation and the cultivation of more enduring, sustainable revenue sources.

Izwi LoMzansi's efforts to organise community-benefiting campaigns demonstrate a smart strategy. These initiatives not only generate income but also align well with the station's broader goal of community development. This dual impact provides an effective approach for community radio stations to engage with their audience and showcase their worth to potential advertisers.

Despite the wealth of data and potential that the mobile app offers to advertisers, the actual revenue generated is very low. This challenge often lies in the struggle to convince advertisers to always integrate both traditional and digital platforms in advertising. However, they tend to prefer traditional radio as it has wider listenership as compared to digital media technologies. Clearly explaining pricing structures and the benefits of this integrated strategy is crucial to overcoming this challenge.

Understanding the unique revenue potential of various platforms is crucial. For Izwi LoMzansi, the mobile app and social media currently account for a relatively small part of their total revenue. Having a clear understanding of how each platform contributes to revenue generation helps community radio stations make informed decisions about their financial sustainability strategies based on data.

5.2.4 Key Challenges

This research has shed light on the challenges faced by Izwi LoMzansi radio station in making better use of digital media tools as a potential to contribute to its sustainability. The station also grapples with issues related to personnel turnover, a lack of dedicated expertise in digital media technologies, the need for committed leadership to drive revenue through digital channels, and also the need to close the digital divide gap.

The challenges faced by Izwi LoMzansi radio station in harnessing digital media tools for sustainability can be dissected to better understand why these tools are not working more effectively for them, and to propose solutions on how they could make better use of these tools.

Frequent staff changes often lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and a lack of continuity in digital strategy. New personnel may need time to adapt to the station's culture and digital tools, which can lead to inconsistent digital

media use. To address this challenge, the station could reduce personnel turnover by creating a stable work environment and investing in ongoing training and development for existing staff. Upskilling current employees to use digital tools effectively can foster a more knowledgeable and engaged team. Organisations advocating for media development have a role to play in ensuring access to these opportunities for community radio stations.

Without dedicated experts in digital media technologies, the radio station falls short of utilising the latest tools and trends to their fullest potential. This can lead to a poor digital presence and engagement strategy. Investing in leaders dedicated to the use of digital media technologies or training someone internally can provide the station with the necessary expertise to leverage digital tools efficiently.

The absence of a strategic direction from committed leadership results in a lack of cohesive planning and investment in digital channels. Leadership must be proactive in understanding the potential of digital transformation and its importance in revenue generation and audience growth. The leadership team needs to prioritise digital media as a key component of the station's business model. This could involve setting clear digital goals, allocating budget for digital initiatives, and tracking the return on investment from these channels.

The radio station needs to focus more on developing a content strategy that is tailored to digital media platforms. This includes creating engaging, shareable content that is optimised for each platform and designed to encourage listener interaction. Also, by understanding data analytics tools, the station can gain insights into audience preferences and behaviours, allowing for more targeted and effective digital campaigns. The station also needs to foster a culture of innovation on how to use digital media technologies effectively following the trends to ensure that the station remains competitive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

The increasing dependence on digital media technologies raises the issue of accessibility. A substantial portion of marginalised communities often lacks access particularly to the internet, and the digital literacy necessary to engage with digital platforms. If a significant portion of the station's target audience lacks access to digital technologies, then it excludes the communities it was meant to give a voice to. Efforts to bridge this gap are essential for the success of any digital strategy. To address the digital divide, the station could engage in community outreach programmes aimed at increasing digital literacy among its audience. Additionally, making digital content more accessible through multiple platforms could help reach a wider audience.

While digital tools present opportunities for growth, they also present the pressures of monetization which introduces the risk of commodification. As community radio stations strive for financial sustainability, their focus may shift from serving the specific needs of marginalised communities to catering to broader audiences and attracting advertisers. This shift has the potential to dilute the voices of those who are traditionally represented by the community medium. The pressures of commercialisation can lead to the standardisation of content. As stations move towards more mainstream and advertiser-friendly programming, they often neglect locally relevant issues, cultural diversity, and alternative perspectives that are the heart of community radio. Efforts to expand the reach of community radio through digital platforms often compromise content authenticity and localised focus. This struggle to find the right balance remains a significant concern for community radio stations like Izwi LoMzansi. Finding innovative ways to monetise through digital media technologies while staying true to the station's core values is essential for long-term success.

Mitigating the threat of commodification while harnessing digital opportunities requires a nuanced approach. Izwi LoMzansi and other similar

stations could consider developing a content strategy that balances the use of digital tools with a steadfast commitment to community-centric programming. This ensures that marginalised communities remain the primary focus. They could explore a mix of funding models that includes elements of listener donations, grants, and ethical advertising that aligns with the station's values. This approach lessens reliance on commercialisation. The stations could increase partnering with organisations to promote digital literacy and accessibility within marginalised communities. This ensures the benefits of digital expansion reach the most vulnerable. Collaborating with other community radio stations and community-based organisations to develop a powerful collective voice for marginalised communities in the digital sphere.

Overall, this research highlights the importance of adapting to the digital age while preserving the unique character of community radio. Hopefully, the insights presented in this report will serve as a valuable resource for Izwi LoMzansi and other similar organisations seeking to navigate the complex landscape of digital media tools in the pursuit of sustainability and community engagement.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Looking ahead, the landscape of community radio in the era of digital technology continues to evolve, presenting both opportunities and challenges. As we chart a course for future research in this domain, several avenues beckon exploration:

Longitudinal Studies: To truly grasp the enduring impact of digital media technologies, longitudinal studies tracking community radio stations' evolution over time can provide invaluable insights into the sustainability models they adopt and refine.

Digital Training and Leadership: Investigating strategies to equip community radio stations with the digital expertise they need and cultivating leadership that understands the potential of digital transformation for revenue generation is a pressing concern.

Integrated Advertising Approaches: Further research into the feasibility and effectiveness of integrated advertising approaches that harmoniously blend terrestrial and digital platforms can potentially revolutionise revenue streams for community radio stations.

Monetisation of Digital Assets: Finding innovative ways to monetise digital assets while preserving the unique character and mission of community radio stations is a frontier ripe for exploration.

Audience Engagement: Understanding how community input shapes station content and identity in the digital era and fostering greater user participation in interactive features remain important areas of study.

Crisis Resilience: Given the pivotal role of community radio in disseminating localised information during crises, future research can explore how these stations can fortify their crisis resilience through digital means.

5.4 Conclusion

The digital age has ushered in a new era for community radio, and while challenges abound, so do opportunities for growth, relevance, and sustainability. By building on the insights presented here and addressing the limitations through comprehensive and forward-looking research, we can empower community radio stations to thrive as vital pillars of information, culture, and community engagement in our ever-changing world.

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a%20Mobile%20Apps.pdf](https://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/3CMedia_Issue_10_Low-data%20Mobile%20Apps.pdf)
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APPENDICES

I. Interview Guide

Participant Information Sheet – Izwi LoMzansi FM

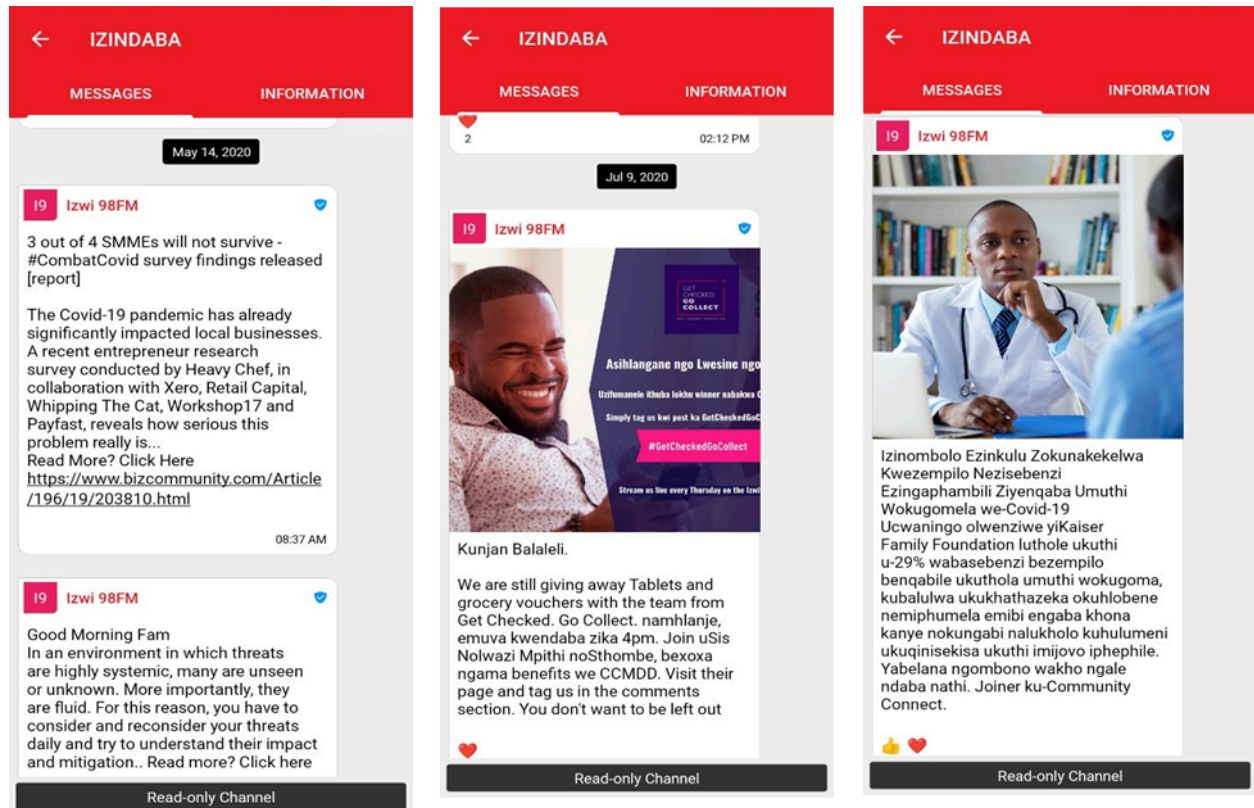
1. Research Project Title	7. What do I have to do?
Digital media technologies and the contributions they make to the sustainability of community radio stations - A case for Izwi LoMzansi FM	Please ensure that you are available for the interview and just answer the questions asked. If you feel like not answering a certain question, please feel free to withhold. There are no other commitments or lifestyle restrictions associated with participating.
2. Invitation	8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.	Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life.
3. What is the project's purpose?	9. What potential benefits can be expected from participating?
This Research aim to examine how varied and ingenious digital technologies – internet, mobile phones, social media and audio streaming (through the web) – present opportunities for community radio stations to develop models for their sustainability	Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a beneficial impact on how digital technology do/does not present opportunities for community radio stations to develop their own sustainability models/approaches on which the know-how is the crucial part. Participants will receive the results to enhance their professional endeavours.
4. Why was I selected?	10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?
You have been chosen because as Executive Team, Station Managers, or person in a similar role, you have the knowledge of the overall operations and management of Izwi LoMzansi FM. As Programme Producers, you know about the programme structure, distribution and anything related to content production. As Digital Engineers, you run all things related to digital which and this will help the researcher to gather any data related to digital technology. Informal conversations will be held with community members and these will be selected randomly – at the moment I do not have anyone specific.	Should the research stop earlier than planned and you are not affected in any way I will communicate with you and explain why.
5. Is participation mandatory?	11. What if something goes wrong?
It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement to the hard copy consent form provided. You can still withdraw at any time, and you do not have to give a reason.	Should you have concerns about the project, you can initially reach the School of Journalism and my Research Supervisor. If you believe your concerns haven't been adequately addressed, you may contact the University of Witwatersrand School of Journalism and request to speak with the course coordinator or a member of the ethics team.
6. What will happen to me if I take part?	12. Will my participation in this project remain confidential?
You will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting between 15 to 30 minutes. The discussion will focus on the station's digital, program, and audience outreach strategies that contribute to its sustainability. Additionally, there will be questions pertaining to social responsibility.	All the information that we collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications. Any data collected about you in the semi-structured interview will be stored online in a form protected by passwords and other relevant security processes and technologies. Data collected may be shared in an anonymised form to allow reuse by the research team and other third parties. These anonymised data will not allow any participants to be identified or identifiable.
	13. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

14. What kind of information will you be asking from me, and how is it pertinent to the goals of the research project?	You will not be recorded in any manner except during the semi-structured interviews, and we'll seek your consent before recording. The aim of the recording is to ensure data accuracy.
15. What will happen to the results of the research project?	The semi-structured interviews will ask you about your opinions and current practices in relation to digital technology, production process, audience reach, financial sustainability, sustainability models/approaches and social responsibilities. Your perspectives and experiences are precisely what the project seeks to investigate.
16. Who is organizing and funding the research?	The research findings will serve academic interests and may be published. Your identity will remain confidential in all reports or publications. If you'd like a copy of any resulting reports, please request to be added to our distribution list.
17. Who conducted the ethical review of the project?	The project is for academic purposes – for a master's student. The student is the one who handles the overall communication with the guidance of the Supervisor. There is not any kind of funding for this research.
18. Contacts for further information	This project has received ethical clearance from the Journalism Department Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical) at the University of Witwatersrand. Following this, it was further endorsed by the university's overall ethics procedures. The University of Witwatersrand's Journalism Department Research Ethics Committee oversees the adherence to and implementation of the University's Ethics Review Procedure within the School of Journalism.
	- Student – Sakhile Dube - Supervisor – Ruth Becker (by the time of conducting interviews) - Course Coordinator – Lesley Cowling - Contact details can be requested from the Department of Journalism School of Literature, Language and Media – University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg.

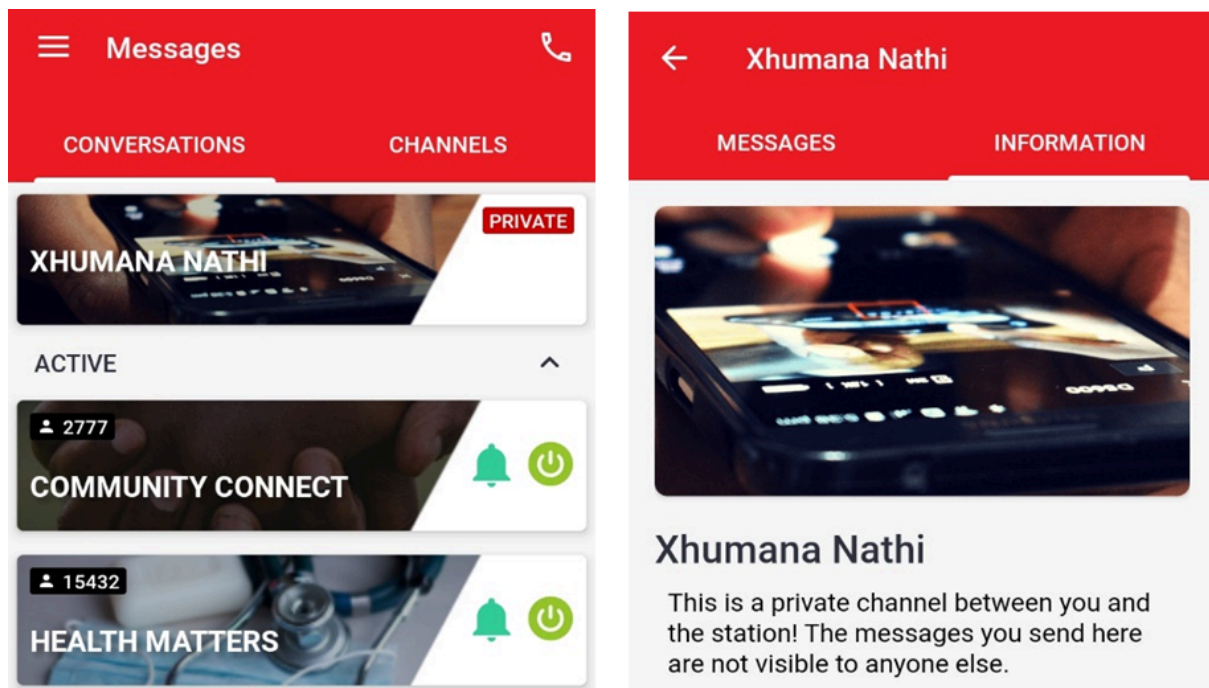
II. II. App audience reaches in other South African cities between 2019 and 2022.

Year	City	Percentage
2019	Durban	59,15%
	Johannesburg	8,33%
	Pretoria	3,88%
	Cape Town	2,94%
	Pietermaritzburg	0,46%
	Unknown, Gauteng	0,25
2020	Durban	41,91%
	Johannesburg	26,62%
	Midrand	6,62%
	Pretoria	5,37%
	Cape Town	3,33%
	Germiston	0,65%
	Pietermaritzburg	0,65%
	Sasolburg	0,56%
	Durban	31,42%
	Johannesburg	40,32%
2021	Midrand	6,33%
	Pretoria	4,19%
	Cape Town	3,20%
	Germiston	0,87%
	Boksburg	0,61%
	Sasolburg	0,52%
2022	Durban	30,29%
	Johannesburg	39,55%
	Midrand	5,63%
	Pretoria	3,55%
	Cape Town	3,58%
	Pietermaritzburg	0,62%
	Sasolburg	0,69%

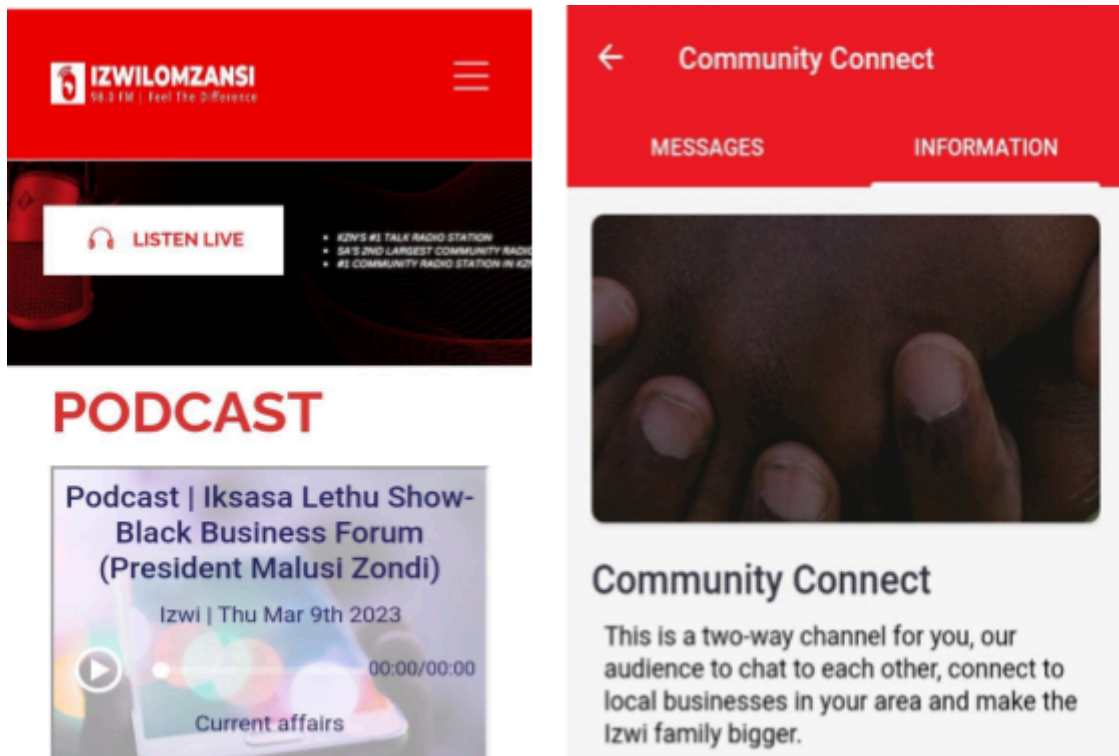
III. Local information about Covid-19



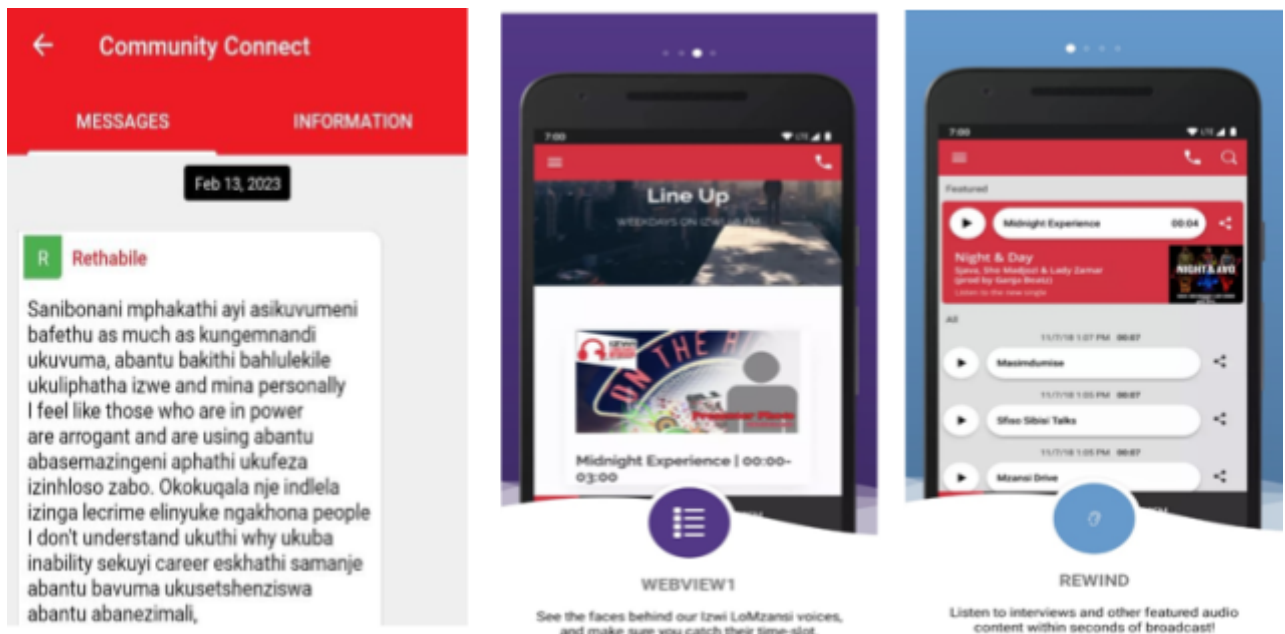
IV. Private chat room



V. Iksasa Lethu (Our future) podcast and Community Connect



VI. Out of topic Content and streamlining processes.



VII. Partnerships



VIII. Paid partnership

