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OPEN ACCESS



INSIDE AN OUTSIDE BROADCAST WITH GOFFMAN: EXPLORING RADIO PERSONALITIES' PERFORMANCE AND INTERACTION IN ENGAGING RADIO BROADCASTING

ABSTRACT

Radio stations conduct outside broadcasts to create awareness of their brands, promote their business clients' interests, invest in their communities, and interact with their listeners. The outside broadcast is considered the most difficult form of radio broadcasting, yet the experiences radio personalities have during outside broadcasts are under-explored in academic literature. This study explored the factors that impact positively and negatively on outside broadcast *performance* and *interaction*; and established the interplay between these two concepts. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 radio personalities at a Central South African community radio station. The data analysis was driven by theory (Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction) and a thematic content analysis. The findings suggest that outside broadcasts involve four finely tuned components that work together to enable radio personalities to perform and interact in meaningful ways with their audiences. These are control of the setting, accessibility to performing zones, teamwork, and creative script. The recommendations for best practice may assist radio stations in connecting more meaningfully with their clients and listeners.

Keywords: media studies, radio studies, community radio, radio personalities, outside broadcasts, performance, interaction, Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, qualitative research

OPENING ACT

Radio broadcasting has always been a social act, with radio personalities performing in the theatre of the mind. Radio "acts as a megaphone to connect one to many" (Ashbrook, 2022) and continues "to engage" (DeMars, 2023). Radio

broadcasting requires personal and social interaction in fulfilling its mandate to inform, educate, entertain, and engage. In a world of increasingly competitive and digitally advanced radio formats and audio offerings, individuals working in the broadcasting industry will concur that they need to interact more meaningfully with their audiences in creating engaging radio.

Local focus and localness are attributes that differentiate community radio from its commercial and national counterparts. Backhaus (2022) emphasises how the local performance component of community radio strengthens a station's function as a rhizome in the community. Kocic (2023) goes on to say that local radio fosters a sense of community, which is also underscored in the work of Oliviera (2013) and Mann (2019). This sense of community, or what Moylan (2023: 253) coined "community belongingness", is promoted through, among others, outside broadcasts, informally referred to as OBs by the broadcasting community. In the context of this study, outside broadcasts refer to broadcasts that are conducted outside of the studio at places such as shopping centres, schools, sports fields, community centres, and listeners' homes. Broadcasting equipment is set up in a remote location, outside of a studio.

Outside broadcasts resonate well with the local performance component and community building ethos of community radio. They form an integral part of a radio station's marketing strategies, community outreach programmes, and branding initiatives. According to McLeish and Link (2016: 245), broadcasters are required to escape from the safe zone surrounding them and enter into the communities they serve in order to enhance their credibility, while the outside broadcast is regarded as being "essential to broadcasting's health". Remote or outside broadcasts are entertaining ways to add excitement to radio shows, as well as valuable sources of advertising revenue (Comrex Corporation, 2021). Yet it is a challenging undertaking for all role players involved. It requires thorough planning on the part of the marketing and sales departments, and excellent execution from a programming and technical point of view.

More than 80 years ago, Pocock (1940: 496) wrote that outside broadcasts are regarded as the "most difficult" form of radio broadcasting, and little has changed. Outside broadcasts differ significantly from broadcasts from a controlled, isolated, and secluded setting – not only in terms of setting or location and technical setup, but also as far as execution and interactive performance are concerned. Outside broadcasts offer the listeners direct access to the presenter(s) (as opposed to a broadcast studio setting). As such, the outside broadcast performance becomes two concurrent performances: the face-to-face interpersonal performance for the on-site audience, and the mediated broadcast performance for the listeners who are not bound by physical location (Crider, 2016). Inasmuch as an outside broadcast presents elements of localness and engagement to the communities it serves, it also poses many challenges and requires expertise from the team involved. Outside broadcasts require hours of continuous high-quality audio with low latency from the sidelines (Comrex Corporation, 2021). Many situational and environmental factors also need to be considered during the setup in order to secure a safe, smooth, and radio-friendly on-air offering. These factors include electricity supply, sufficient power sockets, and dedicated internet (Comrex Corporation, 2021; McLeish & Link, 2016).

Community radio stations, in particular, are prone to face many challenges during outside broadcasts because these stations do not always have the financial resources needed to conduct broadcasts from a dedicated outside broadcast vehicle or unit. Radio professionals working at community radio stations need to have direct contact with their audiences, which requires them to engage regularly in outside broadcasts. Failure to be actively engaged in community events may cause the community radio station to appear “detached, sectional, elitist or out of touch” (McLeish & Link, 2016: 245).

The experiences radio professionals have during outside broadcasts are under-explored in academic literature. It is important to study their performances at outside broadcasts as well as their interactions with their audiences for what it could reveal about ‘engaging’ radio. The exploratory study reported on in this article was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that impact positively and negatively on a) performance and b) interaction during outside broadcasts?
2. What is the interplay between radio professionals’ performances and interactions during outside broadcasts?

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE FEATURED ACT WITH GOFFMAN

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model of social interaction (theatre metaphor) is used as a theoretical framework in which radio presenters are conceptualised as performers who are acting on a stage in front of an audience. His theatre metaphor frames this study well as outside broadcasts involve face-to-face interaction.

Goffman (1959) considers five key elements that are important in his theatre metaphor: actors, teams and roles; stages; scripts and props; costumes and masks; and audience and outsiders (Masquillier, 2016). By virtue of their profession, radio personalities are performers, and outside broadcasts offer a stage for them to perform their programmes. They do not perform in isolation but are dependent on an entire outside broadcast team in executing a performance. They fulfil various roles during outside broadcasts, such as presenting a programme, doing a ‘roaming mic’, handling technical equipment, or engaging with the public through on-site activities and promotions. The setting (the stage) refers to the physical location where the outside broadcast takes place – for example, in front of a retail store in a shopping centre, or on a sports field, or at a community centre. Radio presenters rely on scripted dialogues, such as the preparation they do before the time, or the live-reads and promotions they have to handle during the show. Props are objects that the performers use to express their roles better (Schulz, 2012). The props that are considered important during outside broadcasts are technical equipment such as microphones, cables, audio mixers, a computer kit and software, amplifiers, speakers, and headphones. Tone of voice and gestures (manner) and dress (costumes) also form an important part of the performer’s persona. In some instances, the entire outside broadcast team

will wear corporate clothing to reflect their station's brand and to display a sense of unity. The audience consists of people visiting the setting where the outside broadcast takes place, as well as those who are listening from elsewhere.

Over and above the five key elements that Goffman (1959) highlights, he also identified six dramaturgical principles of human interaction: the performance, the team, the region, discrepant (supporting) roles, communication out of character, and impression management. This study focused primarily on the elements of performance (and interaction), the team, the region, and impression management due to their frequent appearance in outside broadcasts.

Goffman (1959) explains that performance refers to individuals' activities that are witnessed by spectators and have an influence on them. The performance is the core phenomenon driving the success or failure of radio personalities in their interactions with their audiences (Crider, 2016). The "front" of a person's performance is the area that consistently serves as a fixed descriptor of the environment for individuals watching the performance (Goffman, 1959). Presenting fronts does not only involve the scenic parts of expressive equipment, such as décor, props, physical layout and furniture, but also elements of personal fronts, including appearance and manner (*ibid.*).

The team, according to Goffman (1959: 85), constitutes "any set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine". Performances may be delivered individually or collectively by teams of actors. When engaging in outside broadcasts, radio personalities are dependent on a team to make the broadcast work. The team may include a technical operator, sales representatives, the programming coordinator or manager, the general manager, and other radio presenters.

Goffman (1959) describes regions of interaction as those areas that provide a platform for people to perform. He uses the term "frontstage" to describe the area where the primary performance is taking place. In a radio station setting, the frontstage refers to "any place where sound can be picked up by a live microphone" (Crider, 2016: 29). Goffman (1959) postulates that when people are aware that others are observing, they act in a frontstage manner. The environment (the setting), the specific functions that each performer executes within this setting, and the physical appearance and manner all have an impact on frontstage behaviour (Bearnès, Andkjaer & Radmann, 2021).

The actors decide what information to act out on stage and prepare or rehearse their frontstage performance in the backstage area (Cho *et al.*, 2018; Goffman, 1959; Joshi, 2022). Performers generally drop their guard in the backstage area and are authentic in this performing space (Goffman 1959). Radio personalities engage in backstage behaviour when they prepare for their shows or interact privately (off-air) with listeners (Bonini, 2012). Meyrowitz (1985: 47) proposed a third region, which he called the "middle region" or "side stage view". It allows the audience to see the performer moving from the frontstage to the backstage area. In a radio context, the frontstage region could become a middle region if the on-air performance is more relaxed or less formal – for instance, during outside broadcasts when the frontstage and backstage regions merge. For example, when a radio presenter is on-air, the performance can be regarded as a frontstage act. However, when the microphone

is off, the performance becomes less restricted and more informal, such as when presenters greet their audience(s), quickly take a break, or have something to eat or drink. While the audience who are listening remotely only hear the frontstage performance, those audience members present at the outside broadcast see the radio professionals moving between stages.

Impression management refers to the actions taken by performers to manage the impression that is created during the interaction (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015) to avoid humiliating situations or eventual breakdowns (Goffman, 1959). When radio professionals interact with their listeners, they aim to present an image of themselves that the listening community will find acceptable. The chances are high that the audience members could disturb an actor's performance (Joshi, 2022). Hence, performers may employ techniques such as dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline, and dramaturgical circumspection to sustain particular impressions despite potential difficulties (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015).

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH THE CAST

The station under study was one of the first community radio stations to have been granted a licence by the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA) almost 30 years ago, broadcasting to an Afrikaans-speaking Christian community in a 120-kilometre radius in the central region of South Africa. The station engages in many outside broadcasts, most of which are client-based (paid) in nature. The station also holds outside broadcasts to uphold its community ethos by broadcasting from community events, such as blood donation campaigns and blanket drives. The presenter who would normally be on-air, is also the one presenting the programme live from the outside broadcast setting, while one or two other presenters are present to do 'roaming mic' from the event.

Purposive sampling of radio professionals was employed as a strategy to select small groups of individuals likely to be knowledgeable and informative about outside broadcasts. The participants were selected based on the criterion that they had to have been involved in at least ten outside broadcasts. Participation was voluntary. A total of 11 radio professionals participated in the study. The sample included six presenters and five staff members representing the sales, marketing, technical, events and programming departments.

A qualitative inquiry methodology was used. Given the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to allow for a detailed exploration of the participants' experiences. Questions centred on the challenges, issues and concerns radio personalities encounter during outside broadcasts; the factors impacting outside broadcasts in a positive and negative way; and suggestions to improve outside broadcasts. While the interviews formed part of a larger study on outside broadcasts, the present study employed the data specifically in relation to performance and interaction-related issues. The interviews were conducted individually with each participant at the station's premises. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes each and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The data was approached with pre-determined etic themes (concepts relating to Goffman's theatre metaphor). The analysis of the data led to the construction of emic themes. The six-step methodology of Braun and Clarke (2013) guided the multiple rounds of data analysis.

The study received ethical approval from the Humanities Research Ethics and Innovation Committee (HREIC SF 26/06/2023), as all principles of ethical research were acknowledged and adhered to. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the management team of the radio station, and informed consent was obtained from all the participants. The participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent.

THE MAIN ACT

The empirical phase of the research yielded the following results presented as seven themes (scenes), the first being 'the setting'.

Scene 1: The setting

Outside broadcasts allow the audience to get a glimpse into the world of the presenter but it also poses risks in terms of the comfort and control presenters have in securing a smooth on-air offering. A manager mentioned, "We don't have the comfort of the studio". Four participants were of the view that the "uncomfortable setting" greatly contributes to preparing presenters to perform under pressure. One remarked, "It teaches a person to work under pressure; to think on your feet." Another said, "OBs are just more difficult. You should be able to swim well."

The interviews revealed that the radio professionals are flexible in terms of their performances and that it varied according to the setting. Most of the outside broadcasts take place in settings such as shopping centres or sports fields where many aspects cannot be controlled by the outside broadcast team. Others, such as in listeners' homes, are more private and can be better controlled. According to Goffman (1956: 59) "control of the setting may give the controlling team a sense of security". Four of the presenters considered outside broadcasts a challenge in the sense that during outside broadcasts they were out of their comfort zone, and they did not have control over the setting and space around them, especially as far as performance and interaction were concerned. As one participant mentioned, "You can't control an OB setting [...] you are out of your safe zone". This holds true, not only in terms of the setting, but also regarding how audience members behave in a setting where a performance takes place. As such, the language usage (swearing and shouting) of audience members (the spectators) was mentioned by two participants as a concern. "That is why we brief the audience members before the time," said one.

As the radio station that served as the case study does not do outside broadcasts in a mobile unit, the presenters are subject to spectators and audience members entering their personal space. A presenter said, "You must focus on your programme, but also interact with the audience. People stare at us. They don't understand radio." Another

said, “It is difficult when people start talking to you when you have to do your job. We have more control in the studio [...] sometimes an OB can be overwhelming.” Unlike a theatrical setting where there is a clear demarcation between the stage and the area where the audience is located, an outside broadcast allows audience members to enter the performance space. Additionally, the frontstage and backstage exist in tandem, allowing the performers to move back and forth between these areas; subsequently offering audience members a side stage view of their on-air and off-air acts. A presenter said, “There is no curtain surrounding me to protect me. I can hide away in the studio, but not at an OB. I would like the setting to be more secluded. I want boundaries between me and the audience. The listeners don’t have boundaries. They enter your space.” This remark aligns with Goffman’s (1956: 142) notion that “we may expect performers to tighten their front when among persons who are new to them”. Crider (2016) notes that the middle region contracts or expands according to the performer’s need for privacy. One of the strategies mentioned to address the challenge of audience members entering a performer’s space, is to put up a fence wrap around the outside broadcast setting: “It should still be accessible, but like a little camp. You don’t want to have too much distance between the presenter and the listener.” In some instances, however, these spaces can be controlled, as was evident from the interviews. A presenter mentioned an outside broadcast from a listener’s house where there was a clear division between the performing region (a veranda) and the audience’s space (a semi-open entertainment area where the spectators were located).

Setting seems to have an impact not only on the outside broadcast performance and interaction, but also on other performances taking place in the surrounding area, such as those of neighbouring businesses in, for example, a shopping centre. Although an outside broadcast is set up to benefit the client, it can have a negative impact on adjacent businesses. As one participant mentioned, “You do an OB at a place, and it bothers the neighbouring companies.”

Scene 2: Scenic parts of expressive equipment

In an outside broadcast setting the props are the technical equipment. Technical excellence is paramount when conducting outside broadcasts (McLeish & Link, 2016). While two participants indicated that technical quality contributes to the success of an outside broadcast, all the participants mentioned technical issues as a concern. The interviews revealed that technology fails pose a challenge during outside broadcasts. The station does not broadcast with a satellite at their disposal but makes use of an internet connection instead. “You can’t determine packet drops. But with a live broadcast and live stream, packet drops may result in buffering, and, unfortunately, it’s not something we can determine beforehand,” said one of the participants.

Three of the presenters referred to challenges with computer screens and roaming mics:

The computer screen has a glare to it and it’s difficult to read from, especially when we are sitting outside in the sun. The roaming mic picks up sounds caused by wind.

The glare of the computer [...] the lighting is not the same at an OB as in the studio.

The findings revealed that there is a significant interplay between external environmental factors and broadcast performance. Environmental factors (such as weather conditions and connectivity issues) have an impact on the presenters' performances. Unlike a theatrical performance, which takes place inside a building, outside broadcasts are often conducted outdoors, and these environmental and situational factors can impact performances positively, but mostly negatively.

Scene 3: Presenting personal fronts

During outside broadcasts radio professionals present personal fronts through the way they appear and behave. The radio personalities reflect a sense of unity (their appearance) by wearing the same corporate clothing. Their attire reflects the station's corporate identity and core business values. Outside broadcasts offer performers a wardrobe of personal characteristics to incorporate into their on-stage acts. These include creativity, enjoyment, expertise and experience, and they are linked to manner (decorum).

Three of the participants commented that outside broadcasts offer the presenters an opportunity to create theatre of the mind – more so than what a normal studio does. One of the managers suggested that the radio personalities should interact with the client in more creative ways. The other two commented as follows:

OBs let radio presenters create theatre of the mind, which a studio doesn't always offer. They can sketch a picture.

Keep it fresh. An OB is not limited by a studio. It's limited by the presenter's imagination.

Any theatrical performance should invoke a sense of enjoyment. Radio, as the theatre of the mind, should do the same, according to four of the participants. As one manager stated, "Let the audience know 'We're fun'. Chat. Smile and wave. Look like you're enjoying it." This remark is closely tied to Goffman's (1956: 135) assertion that actors "must perform enthusiastically".

Expertise surfaced as a recurring theme during the interviews. The participants mentioned that the performers should be knowledgeable about the subject area or product. As one participant stated, "Presenters should be skilled performers. They should have the know-how, while experience is also important. They should understand the psychology of radio." In this instance, dramaturgical discipline is underscored. As Goffman pointed out, performers must "offer a show of emotional and intellectual involvement" in the acts they play.

Masks are used to make performance roles clearer to an audience. To look as though they are adhering to the affective line, performers may choose to repress their uncontrollable emotions (Goffman, 1956). In this regard one of the managers said, "Even if you are feeling bad or hurt, you have to put on a fake face. Mingle afterwards. Don't just get up and go." A presenter stated, "With an OB you have to perform, even if you don't feel well." This is an important comment, as the audience expects politeness and decorum, pertaining to both social interaction and performance, according to Goffman (1956).

Additionally, audiences expect a “confirming consistency” between a performance appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959: 24). Impression management becomes interesting when there are inconsistencies between an actor’s appearance (what they look like) and manner (what they do). Goffman (1959: 254) argues that individuals are constantly managing “potential disruptions” to the impressions given to others, and that they employ protective and defensive measures to “safeguard” against threats to the image of themselves they are projecting to others (Goffman, 1959: 14). Three participants appeared to experience challenges with impression management:

The audience don't realise you're on-air [...] people walking straight up to you, greet you, but they don't realise you have to do a live read in five seconds. They think you are rude.

The audience expects you to be 'on' the whole time. You can come across as being rude, but you're actually just tired. I'm an introvert. 'Small talk' is not my thing. But it's your job. I put on different shoes.

The interaction is a challenge for me [...] when the listeners approach me. I just feel like saying: 'I don't want to see you'. A lot of people have an idea about us. They feel they know you, but it is not who you really are. I have to talk about topics that I know nothing about or have no interest in.

These comments underscore the notion of Kivisto and Pittman (2013) that performers attempt to portray an impression which is not real, but still try to remain faithful to their supposed selves. They further give credence to Goffman’s (1956: 135) notion that “those who work in the field of radio broadcasting [...] keenly appreciate that the momentary impression they give will have a lasting effect on the view that the audience takes of them”. Dramaturgical loyalty seems to be of great importance in impression management, as was also evident from this study.

Scene 4: Actors, teams, and audiences

Goffman (1956: 62) asserts that during performances “one member of the team is made the star or centre of attention and is given dramatic dominance”. During outside broadcasts radio presenters take centre stage. They have a significant impact on whether and how listeners engage with the radio station (Spangardt, Ruth & Schramm, 2016). During the interviews, five participants mentioned that it is important to select specific presenters (performers) for an outside broadcast. These presenters should possess attributes such as good interaction skills, spontaneity, and the ability to handle pressure well. Some of the comments were:

I will send people who can interact; it's about the brand.

Interaction is important – with both the listener and the client. Not everyone feels at ease to mingle with the public.

Besides personality creation, a performance is put together through performance preparation (Crider, 2016). As one of the presenters stated, “I want to be briefed properly before the OB commences [...] if I'm told, 'We are going to talk about this;

here are the people you are going to interview'. I would like to be informed before the time where I am going to sit. I don't like surprises. I like structure and script because it gives me more control." This notion ties up closely with dramaturgical circumspection – the ability to plan in advance for contingencies and the execution of a show (Goffman, 1956).

Some radio professionals who engage in outside broadcasts fulfil what Goffman (1956: 64) refers to as “ceremonial roles” or “window-dressing”. They engage in some activity but are not really performing. In an outside broadcast context these roles are fulfilled by sales representatives and other administrative staff. The findings of this study suggest that the roles of these team members should be better defined. One of the managers suggested that there should be fewer staff, but more engagement. According to Goffman (1956), each performer works with the members of their team to maintain the appropriate ratio of formality and informality, distance and intimacy, toward the members of the opposing team. During the interviews two of the participants underscored teamwork as being a contributing factor to the success of an outside broadcast. Two presenters stated:

It is one of the few opportunities where the team is involved. The sales representatives can see what we do. Teamwork is very positive during outside broadcasts.

In the studio we are isolated, but at an OB I get to see the sales reps. I see my colleagues. We mingle.

The interviews further revealed that although outside broadcasts offer a chance for team members to interact, the irritability factor also comes into play. One presenter mentioned an outside broadcast that was “... overkill. We were in each other's faces and started to irritate each other. We should not do OBs for long periods running.” It appears that irritability does not only affect members of the performing team, but also the audience listening from home. Three of the participants said that too many outside broadcasts can result in listeners losing interest and that it requires a balancing act to keep both the client and the audience happy, while still entertaining the audience listening remotely to the station.

Scene 5: Blurring frontstage and backstage

Moreover, the findings indicated that the boundary between frontstage and backstage is blurred. Goffman (1959) states that audience members only have access to the frontstage. In this study, however, the findings contradict Goffman's assertion that the backstage is the area where the performer may trust that no audience member will intrude. In outside broadcast settings, radio personalities constantly move between frontstage and backstage. This allows audience members a side stage view of their performances – those that are meant for the audience and those that are private. According to Stiernstedt (2014: 297), “The shift from frontstage to backstage styles constantly threatens to unravel the persona being performed on the air”. The audience's side stage view allows them to notice changes and breakdowns much more often. While the audience listening remotely only hear the frontstage act, those audience members who are physically present can also observe and watch

the presenters when they are off-air, and, subsequently, observe their backstage behaviour. According to Aspling (2011: 13), challenges may arise if outsiders attend a performance that was not intended for them: “A glimpse of the back region can destroy the whole performance.” In this regard, two of the managers recalled incidents where they had to remind presenters to continue acting in a frontstage manner, although they were relaxing backstage (a few metres from the outside broadcast setting). One of them mentioned telling presenters to “stop eating and/or smoking here; stop looking like you’re bored”. This view underscores Goffman’s (1956) notion that any team member whose performance deviates from what is acceptable can be brought back into line by the director (in this instance, managers), who may be assigned the unique responsibility (Goffman, 1956).

From the findings of this study, it appears that what might be considered the ‘middle region’ is really just an extension of the frontstage during an outside broadcast – it is a performed middle region in that the actors must be ‘on’ even when the microphones are off.

The regulation of access between the different regions seems to be of great importance in outside broadcasts. This is a challenging undertaking for radio professionals, as they are not always in control of establishing the frontstage and backstage areas where the performances take place.

Scene 6: Managing disturbances and distractions

Many of the participants identified disturbances as a major issue during outside broadcasts. “There are a lot more distractions during OBs. You must concentrate twice as much,” said one of the presenters. This is an important notion as performers who are acting on a stage normally have some distance between their performing space and the area where the audience is located. The interviews revealed that distractions were caused by audience members as well as members of the broadcast team. A manager commented, “Support staff must keep the audience busy, so that they don’t disturb the presenter.” However, it seems as if the opposite is true. A presenter stated:

Support staff should shout less and make less noise. They should have more respect for the presenter’s space. I prefer that the news be read from the studio and not live at an OB. It sounds unprofessional when you read that someone has died, whilst someone laughs at the background during an OB.

Besides audiences and cast members causing distractions, external noise was mentioned as a concern by some participants. For example, one of the managers stated that an outside broadcast cannot be conducted in a parking lot where there is too much external noise.

Scene 7: Interaction amplified

The interviews further indicated that interaction is a major plus during outside broadcasts. An aspect that links closely with interaction is accessibility. In this regard three participants remarked:

The studio can be lonely life. With an OB you're out there [...] and more accessible to the public.

The presenters are accessible to the public. They can shake their hands and take a photo with them. They are not sitting in an OB unit; then they are inaccessible.

We cannot be hidden from the public and where the client cannot easily reach us.

The fact that radio presenters are accessible to the public during outside broadcasts offers both parties the opportunity to connect and interact. Radio presenters are considered key resources for creating connections with audiences (Ashbrook, 2022; Bosch, 2022; Crider, 2016; Fleming, 2006; Meadows & Foxwell, 2011; Oliviera, 2013; Stierstedt, 2014) and this study indicated that outside broadcasts provide a platform to forge meaningful connections.

Three participants said that outside broadcasts offer the listener a first-hand glimpse of the world of the presenter and listeners could put a face to a voice. For one presenter, the games being played at outside broadcasts serve as a great tool for interaction, while for a manager a keen interest in expressive equipment makes the audience members want to interact with the team to find out more: "Some listeners are very interested in the technology and how radio is being created." According to Goffman (1956: 150), "Incidents do occur where audience members are given glimpses behind the scenes of a performance". In this study it was shown that if audience members are engaged in this act, they gain more knowledge and learn more about the practice of radio broadcasting.

The radio station in this study was the first in South Africa to conduct an outside broadcast from a listener's home. One of the managers said, "It was a great opportunity to make an ordinary member of the public an integral part of the show." This comment echoes Moylan's (2023) notion that the power of community radio stations is largely attributed to its on-air intimacy.

While interaction with the listeners was deemed important, one of the managers emphasised that the client and their customers should not be neglected:

We want as much interaction as possible with the client and their customers. In the past we have taken a lot of photos of the radio personalities, as well as the branding, but not of the client. We have started to change this now.

This notion is important, as the team performing at an outside broadcast consists of not only the radio professionals, but also of those team members (the clients) who perform on another stage (setting), adjacent to where the main act is taking place.

Participation forms a key concept in community radio as it determines the success of the station in fulfilling its mandate (Mhlanga, in Moffat *et al.*, 2023). Outside broadcasts offer a great opportunity for radio stations to participate in their communities. The station in this study conducted 51 outside broadcasts in 2022 and exceeded that number in 2023. These figures demonstrate the station's engagement with the community it serves.

CLOSING ACT

This study explored the factors that impact *performance* and *interaction* – both positively and negatively – during outside broadcasts and established the interplay between these two concepts. Although there is no such thing as “the perfect outside broadcast”, there are certain factors to consider when engaging in outside broadcasts. An important starting point for radio stations is to consider the factors that impact both positively and negatively on outside broadcast performance and interaction (RQ1).

Expressive equipment, coupled with environmental and situational factors, can impact performance and interaction both positively and negatively. This study revealed that distractions and external noise have a negative impact on performance and interaction. The findings also indicated that the size of the crowd and the nature of the event are more predictive of interaction and performance than the performance of the radio presenter(s), and that situational factors, such as the setting and access to performing zones, inform the radio personalities’ performances and interactions during outside broadcasts.

Controlled settings (such as listeners’ homes) evoke a sense of security among radio personalities and lead to better performance and interaction, while those settings that cannot be controlled impact performance and interaction negatively. In addition, accessibility of the setting is considered as having a positive impact on interaction with business clients and audience members. Radio stations should take note that, besides determining a setting that promotes technical excellence, accessibility for both the client and listeners is important to foster the all-important “engagement” aspect of radio.

It was further found that the presenters regard impression management as challenging, but this can be attributed to the fact that they do not always have control over the setting or the access that audience members have to the space. Dramaturgical loyalty, dramaturgical discipline, and dramaturgical circumspection should form part of a presenter’s outside broadcast repertoire.

In linking this study to the ethos of community radio, one could argue that outside broadcasts are a highly visible approach to community engagement, yet the presenters appear to have some trepidation over the work needed both technically and in terms of interacting with the audience. This is particularly evident in instances where some of the presenters seek physical separation from the community during outside broadcasts.

The findings further suggest that teamwork (implying collective control) plays an important role during outside broadcasts and that it contributes to better performance and interaction. However, roles should be better defined, team members should have respect for colleagues who are performing, and planning should be improved. The important element of script comes into play during these preparation phases, not only to secure a smooth on-air performance, but also to interact with clients and audience members in more creative ways.

It was evident that although performance and interaction pose many challenges to radio personalities, these aspects simultaneously present as many opportunities in expanding radio's mandate from broadcasting only to both broadcasting and engaging. As performances, and subsequently outside broadcasts, are expressive acts, it becomes imperative for radio professionals to employ a certain set of attributes and qualities in connecting with their audiences. These include good interaction skills, creativity, enjoyment, expertise, experience, politeness, spontaneity, the ability to handle pressure well, an instinct for radio and preparation skills. They should also have the ability to move back and forth between the frontstage and backstage areas with ease and professionalism. Although not explicitly mentioned in the findings, presenters should have great observation skills and pay attention to detail to create pictures with words – thereby expanding radio's characteristic of being the "theatre of the mind" to "theatre of the imagination".

When considering the themes collectively, it becomes apparent that outside broadcasts, depicted as a 'grand play', involve four finely tuned components that work together to enable radio personalities to perform and interact in meaningful ways with their audiences. These are control of the setting, accessibility to performing zones, teamwork, and creative script. This study revealed that there is a deeply productive interplay between performance and interaction and that these two concepts work side-by-side in creating and co-creating "engaging" radio (RQ2). Additionally, interactions during outside broadcasts are performative in nature as these are being witnessed by outsiders and people in neighbouring businesses. The findings suggest that outside broadcasts are considered a good platform for radio personalities to build relationships with co-team members, clients and listeners, and to form connections with them. The following (guide)lines are proposed for radio professionals when engaging in outside broadcasts and can be regarded as recommendations for best practice:

Lines to presenters:

- ◆ Mingle with the public when the show ends. Do not just leave the setting.
- ◆ Prepare well in advance (rehearse) for an outside broadcast by doing proper research about the business client where the outside broadcast is going to take place.
- ◆ Act professionally – not only on-air, but also off-air.

Lines to managers:

- ◆ Take environmental and weather conditions into consideration during the rigging phase.
- ◆ Establish settings that are accessible to both the business client and listeners in creating 'engaging' radio.
- ◆ Consider selecting presenters with excellent interaction skills for outside broadcasts.

- ◆ Brief staff properly and in advance as to what is expected of them.
- ◆ Define roles better so that the 'engagement' element is amplified.
- ◆ Outside broadcasts should not be too long as it could cause irritability among staff and could also alienate listeners who are not physically present at the outside broadcast.
- ◆ Make outside broadcasts part of the induction protocol. The more experienced presenters could mentor the novices by letting them co-present shows or doing a roaming mic.
- ◆ Facilitate workshops to improve face-to-face interaction, and train presenters to develop research skills to assist with preparation and planning.
- ◆ Allow presenters to have a choice regarding the type of outside broadcasts they would like to engage in. Presenters' hobbies and interests should be taken into consideration as this would allow them to talk about topics that they are passionate about.

Lines to teams:

- ◆ Show respect for presenters who are performing and do not distract them.
- ◆ Keep audience members occupied so that they do not disturb presenters.
- ◆ Mingle and interact with clients and listeners in more creative ways. Design promotions, competitions, and interactive games in such a fashion that it benefits the client, the visiting audience, and those audience members listening remotely to the station.

A limitation of this study was that it was focused on radio professionals of only one community radio station in South Africa. In addition, the sample only focused on radio professionals' experiences of outside broadcasts and did not include the perspectives of business clients and/or listeners.

ENCORE

Future studies could focus on a comparative analysis of the challenges experienced by community stations, commercial stations, and public broadcasters. In addition, more research on the experiences of other role-players in outside broadcasts, such as advertisers and listeners, is suggested. A future stream of research could investigate the link between radio personalities' self-efficacy beliefs and their performance at outside broadcasts as this form of broadcasting differs considerably from conventional broadcasting. Radio studies scholars could also investigate how face-to-face interaction through outside broadcasts impact para-social relationships. Lastly, more research is needed about the impact of outside broadcasts on funding models.

The study makes a theoretical contribution by highlighting the factors that impact outside broadcast performance and interaction both positively and negatively, and by exploring the interplay between outside broadcast performance and interaction. It is hoped that the findings in this study will prompt a more detailed understanding and appreciation of outside broadcasting, and lead radio stations to conduct successful outside broadcasts – not only for the betterment of their own practices, but also for better interaction with visiting and listening audiences. Additionally, the suggestions could benefit radio stations that do not have the option of conducting outside broadcasts from a mobile OB unit. In an increasingly digital world of audio offerings and radio programming, an outside broadcast offers face-to-face interaction which, if executed effectively, could make it the epitome of engaging radio. And that's a wrap!

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