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‘I HEARD IT ON THE RADIO’

*Giving Voice To Audiences Through
Radio Talk Shows In Liberia*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of radio talk show participants in Liberia, using the Okay Morning Rush of Okay FM as a case study. The thesis probes the Liberian perspective of how talk shows give voice to citizens in public discourses and the resulting experiences for both the participants and the society. It considers the theoretical and analytical scope of Habermas public sphere and Goffman's framing theory to understand the values and impacts of talk shows in the people's everyday lives. The thesis construes talk show as a public sphere based on the definition of the terms as a democratic instrument, and not its limitations like those of the bourgeoisie public sphere.

Using Braun & Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis, 13 semi-structured interviews are explored. Data analysis finds Okay Morning Rush to be a modern public sphere that transcends the boundaries of elites and laypeople and brings anyone available in society to the public glare to get heard. This feat is the kind of inclusiveness that remains a deficit and limiting feature of the Habermas-inspired public sphere. The thesis can claim and generalize that talk shows do not only give voice to audiences (including marginalized citizens) in Liberia but also offer them a genuine sense of multiple subjective identities as influencers and interlocutors in the country's democratic and civic spaces. It is a finding of this thesis that political efficacy is intensified in Liberia among talk show callers. Political efficacy subsequently reinforces their political and civic engagements as active participants in the democratic processes, such as exercising their voices to call for change, question, or hold public officials accountable for their (in)actions. It concludes that the media needs to get those missing voices into the public sphere by being diversified with the framing of topics to evoke inclusive participation if they should not reintroduce the exclusionary practices of the bourgeoisie public sphere in a modern way. As a pioneer in audience research in Liberia (the first-ever study on talk shows and audience experience), the thesis contributes new knowledge about media and audiences in Liberia. Equally, it lays the foundation for more future audience studies by the researcher and others.

Keywords: Bourgeoisie, Citizen Participation, Civic Culture, Civic Talk, Democracy, Democratic Participation, Habermas, Maximalist, Meaningful Participation, Minimalist, Okay FM, Okay Morning Rush, Public Opinion, Public Sphere, Radio Talk Shows, Voice

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	6
I Heard It On The Radio	6
Studying Okay Morning Rush	7
Objectives and Research Questions	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Introduction.....	9
Understanding Talk Shows	9
Historicizing Talk Shows	11
Peeping Into Broadcast Media In Liberia	6
Historicizing Talk Shows In Liberia	13
Studying Talk Show Experiences In Liberia	13
What Has Been Said About Talk Shows?.....	16
Theorizing Talk Shows.....	18
<i>Talk Show Framing</i>	18
<i>Public Sphering Talk Shows</i>	19
Conceiving Radio Talk Show As Public Sphere	22
A Platform for Many Voices	23
Talk Show And Democratic Participation	23
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	28
Qualitative Research.....	28
Selecting The Case	28
Sampling The Informants	30
Research Ethics.....	32
Conducting The Interviews.....	32
Analyzing The Data.....	33
Reflection on Method.....	35
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	37
Description of Findings	37
Audience Experiences With Talk Shows In Liberia.....	37
Pathway To Valuable and Pluralistic Voices	43
Forming Identities Through Talk Shows	49
Impacts And Values of Talk Shows on Governance	52

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	61
Summing It UP	61
Okay FM Giving Voice To Audiences	61
Audience’s Motivation To Participate In Okay Morning Rush	63
Impacting Audience and Democratic Culture.....	64
A Point To Point Out.....	65
A Point To Punch In.....	66
 REFERENCES	 68
 APPENDICES (App).....	 79
App-1: List of Informants.....	79
App-2: Consent Form	80
App-3: Online Recruitment Form	81
App-4: Interview Guide (Audience).....	82
App-5: Interview Guide (Host Talk Show).....	84
App-6: Interview Transcript (one full interview).....	86
App-7: Sampling Coding (host)	94
App-8: Sampling Coding (audience).....	95
App-9: Codebook (excerpt)	96
App-10: Okay FM Manager’s Authorization to Reveal Identity.....	98
App-11: Survey Online survey for a case	99
App-12: Survey Result To Select Okay FM for Case Study	100
App-13: Familiarization with research data (interviews)	101
App-14: Excerpt of nodes from coding in Nvivo	102
App-15: Initial Theme Formation	103
App-16: Refining The Themes.....	104
App-17: Refined and Final Themes	105

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

'I Heard It On The Radio'

The late former President of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), K. Abdullai Kamara¹, never ceased to illustrate the media's power, influence, and importance, particularly radio, among audiences in Liberia. During media discussions and events, Kamara would usually tell a story about his grandmother's intractable trust in the radio – whether or not what she heard on the airwaves was factual. According to Kamara, his illiterate grandmother was an avid listener of radio and would always confirm and argue the validity of public information by saying, *'I Heard It On The Radio'*. He often used the maxim to caution broadcast journalists to be accurate with what they broadcast because people believe so in the radio.

This scenario could be arguable elsewhere, but in the context of Liberia, Kamara's grandmother's faith in the radio interplays in many lives, especially in a society where radio is the most significant medium for news and public information dissemination and consumption (Spurk et al., 2010; Media Sector Mapping, 2007). *'I Heard It On The Radio'* resonates among laypeople at *hataye* (bitter herbal tea) shops across Monrovia, where they listen to radio talk shows and form unstructured debates around trending topics. This everyday reality signifies the power of radio. This power lies in its ability to reach an enormous audience, regardless of status, ubiquitously and empower them to take action on the topics covered (Scannell, 2007).

Kamara's grandmother lived in an era (or a part of the world, to say) when the radio was less participatory, and, without choice, she could only *hear* what was broadcast as a 'passive audience' (Couldry et al., 2010; Coleman and Ross, 2010; Rosen, 2006). However, time and trend have changed, with new forms of mass communication transforming audiences into 'active participants'

¹ Kamara Abdullai Kamara was a Liberian journalist and staunch advocate of press freedom, free speech and social justice. He served as President of the Press Union of Liberia from 2013 to 2016, during which period I served as Secretary General. He passed off in 2018, and the Liberian leader President George Weah later signed into law the Kamara Abdullah Kamara Act of Press Freedom in his honor. The law decriminalizes free speech to create a more democratic environment for the media. Kamara was one of the brains in drafting the Bill. The President named the Act in Kamara's honor for his work in "strengthening and actualizing Liberia's commitment to several international legal instruments such as passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 2010 and the Table Mountain Declaration in 2012. The TMD calls on African governments to abolish criminal defamation laws – a major threat to press freedom on the continent.

(Scannell, 2007, p. 5). Audiences have transformed into ‘citizen reporters’ and co-producers of radio programs (Bonini, 2020, p. 14). Radio rules the world as an ideal platform for democratic discourses, and Backhaus (2022) argues that ‘radio creates alternative spaces of opportunity, representation, and voice (p. 2). Radio accompanies people's lives as a daily companion, and the UN reports that 44,000 radio stations broadcast to five billion people - about 70 percent of the world. Conflated with online media, today's radio audiences constitute both traditional listeners and those who follow online (Bonini, *ibid*). This convergence and digitalization of the radio expand its global reach and soothe the relationship between producers and audiences and give listeners voices (Kuyucu, 2019; Bonini, 2020). With this, Bonini claimed that radio audiences are not just listening but are louder than ever before. Unfortunately, this development could not and did not happen in Kamara’s grandmother’s life.

If Kamara's grandmother were still alive today, she would have the opportunity to call on one of the multiple radio programs in Liberia and participate in their discourses, rather than just *hearing* and *listening*. Today, it is quite easier than ever to hear non-media people talking on the radio across Liberia. This thesis, *I Heard It On The Radio*, focuses on the experiences of what audiences make of their voices on the radio, particularly the *Okay Morning Rush* talk show, in Liberia.

Studying The *Okay Morning Rush*

Okay FM is one of Liberia’s postwar independent media entities established in 2015, adding up the new communicative space for the public to participate in media. It is admired for professionalism and was selected through online surveys² that rated it high. In 2018, the Press Union of Liberia declared Okay FM as the Best Radio Station of the Year³. Its flagship talk show, *Okay Morning Rush*, which runs 7-10 a.m., attracts huge followings both home and in the diaspora. The station manager, Clarence Jackson, a distinguished journalist with more than two decades of media experience, hosts the show. The show treats various topics, but most are framed around topical

² Two surveys via google forms were done. The first asked for the best three talk shows in Liberia and the station that hosted them. The second survey asked for the best among the three, and OK FM emerged in the lead for the two surveys. See appendix App – 11&12 on pages 99 & 100 for survey question and result.

³ Only in three years after hitting the airwaves, Okay FM won the Press Union of Liberia’s prestigious Radio Station of the Year Award. See a report here: <https://okfm.com.lr/2018/06/11/ok-fm-wins-puls-prestigious-radio-station-of-the-year-award/>

issues in the circles of politics and governance. It has become the go-to site for the latest debates, where listeners call and put through their points in a mixture of heated, mild, or cool civic discourses dictated by the topics under discussion.

Objectives of Study and Research Question

Dahngren (2012) has underscored how participation is central to understanding media audiences and the practices of civic agency. He advised that as media and societal circumstances evolve, as in the case of talk shows in Liberia, so must understanding around participation be updated (p. 28). John Corner (2011) added his voice that researchers ‘need to assume less and investigate more’ in better understanding a human phenomenon.

This thesis considers Dahngren and Corner’s advice as it embarks on exploring the experiences of audience participation in talk shows in Liberia through the *OK Morning Rush* as a case study. The research seeks to understand Liberian audience experiences with talk shows, explicitly accentuating the impacts, values, and democratic tenets that these shows promote from participants' perspectives. It analyzes what these audience members make of their experiences, such as, for example, being heard on the airwaves and addressing comments directly to the President and other public officials. What does it mean for a layman selling in the street corner of Monrovia to be heard on the radio thousands of miles away talking about national issues? What does this mean for a society where press freedom and free speech have often been truncated – pronounced in principle and denounced in practice? The following three research questions will serve as a guide in exploring these experiences:

1. *In What Ways Do Okay FM Talk Shows Give A Voice To Audiences In Liberia?*
2. *What Motivates Audiences To Participate In Okay FM Talk Shows?*
3. *How Can We Understand The Democratic Role of Okay FM?*

In answering, this thesis aims to contribute to actual knowledge and scholarship on audience studies with a new perspective – the Liberian experience, which has never been explored in academia.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Radio talk shows have existed for decades, taking different forms and impacting public discourses in multiple ways across cultures. It has predominantly survived as a vehicle for mass public discourses. Over the past decades, volumes of research have been done on talk shows because it is a human activity that attracts and warrants investigation. Meanwhile, talk shows are relatively new in Liberia, as there seems to exist no known academic studies on how they affect the everyday lives of audiences and the democratic process in general. This phenomenon warrants an investigation, and this thesis picks it up. To do that, this section reviews relevant literature on radio talk shows applicable to this thesis. It provides the working definition and nature of talk shows, including arguments about them. It discusses how talk shows can be a tool for democratic participation in public discourses. Conceptualizing Habermas' bourgeoisie public sphere, it situates talk shows as mediated public spheres, serving as platforms for many voices. Goffman's framing and Habermas' public sphere theories are presented as the applicable framework of the study.

Understanding Talk Shows

A talk show is a spontaneous radio or television program where the host invites audience members to participate (Ilie, 2006; Magda & Lordan, 2021; Loeb, 2015; Gamson, 2002; Hungbo, 2017; Srinivasan & Diepeveen, 2018). For some, it is a special type of debate involving 'a confrontation or exchange of opinions' (Magda & Lordan, 2021, p. 242), while others have equaled it to 'a modern-day public forum...in which people express their voices' (Gamson, 2002, p. 192). Whichever way it is discussed, the outstanding features of talk shows are that they are host-oriented and mediated shared discussions that facilitate the exchange of views.

Whether or not it is called Talk Radio, Radio Talk or Talk Show (for this thesis), its stand-up attribute is *talking*. When viewing it from a medium perspective, it can be either *Radio* or

Television talk shows. In contrast, from the program and content angles, talk shows are named based on the *theme* of discussion such as, News Talk, Entertaining Talk, Social Talk or Tax Talk (see Ilie, 2006). In this thesis, the term *talk show* is designated to represent *radio talk show* and may constitute any of the above themes.

Talk shows are further gated from other media genres like news programs as being, for example, highly discursive, controversial, and contentious. They can be equated to a modern-day public forum representative of the ‘Habermas-inspired public sphere’ since they provide a forum for people to air their voices (Gamson, 2002). While Gamson moved further to portray ‘conflict and contestation’ as staple elements of talk shows, Ilie (2006) placed her lenses on boundaries of participation such as ‘public and private’, ‘collective and personal experience’, and ‘expertise and experience’ (p. 489). Dahlgren (1995, p. 62) saw two categories: elite and vox pop - where the elite represents experts and professionals invited to studios for deliberations, while the vox pops are talks with ordinary people in public places.

These attributes suggest that talk shows are not fixed, take many formats, and can be designed to either include or exclude others. Understanding these dynamics and contexts is pivotal to the aims of this research. The way these attributes apply to talk shows in Liberia, and the subsequent effect on audience participation and experiences matter.

Historicizing Talk Shows

Phil Donahue launched the first audience participation talk show in the United States in 1967. However, radio historians have traced the origin of phone-in talk show to the 1930s via John J. Anthony who invited listeners to call on his radio program to explain their problems (Ilie, 2006; Loyaltublist, 2008). Talk shows have since spread worldwide, becoming one of the most essential and debatable media genres.

Meanwhile, even before John J. Anthony and Phil Donahue hatched their mediated phone-in and audience-participation talk shows, non-mediated types had originated in the 18th century. In England, people assembled in the 'coffee shops' to talk about 'entertainment politics, where the

early talk show was born. Ilie (2006, p. 489) linked the historicity of talk shows to certain pre-modern socio-cultural practices of 'purposeful conversation'. Citing Burke (1993, p. 114–115), Ilie (ibid) relates that these practices began in a 16th-century Italian academy where intellectual groups met for discussions. This signifies that people's desire to assemble for 'purposeful conversation' has long existed and underscores the significance of voice. However, the means and opportunities of expanding to allow mass participation were lacking until radio emerged. Since Donahue launched the first show, the practice has gone global with varying modifications but maintains an egalitarian characteristic. The Phil Donahue Show stands as the pioneer for globally recognized talk shows such as US's Oprah Winfrey and Britain's Kilroy. These shows have received global fame and attracted studies on their impacts on societies. In Liberia, the talk show culture is developing, and studying how they impact society through audience participation lies at the center of this study.

Peeping Into Broadcast Media In Liberia

Liberia's radio broadcasting started in 1949 with amateur broadcasting set up through a private initiative (LBS, 2007). In 1950, a Christian shortwave radio station, ELWA, was established. By 1960, the Government had negotiated the acquisition of the amateur radio station, upgraded the same, and launched it as the state radio as it is today. The advent of the Catholic-run station in the 1980s, Radio Veritas (now Radio Maria), brought the number of broadcast media to three. These two private radio stations, as alternative voices, occasionally clashed with the Government on editorial differences (Innes, 2002).

These sorts of official efforts to censure the media peaked during the administrations of William Tubman (1947-1971) and William Tolbert (1971-1980) (Innes, 2002/2003). During the 1980s decade-long military regime of Samuel K. Doe, the trend continued. He criminalized free speech, but President George Weah repealed the same in 2018 with the Kamara A. Kamara Press Freedom Act. For Doe, dissent and negative media reports were invasive to the 'aims of the government, disloyal and seditious' (Innes, 2002, p. 41). Media lived in self-censorship, facing physical harassment and detention, which 'shape[d the] government-press relations'(ibid).

The media's plight was exacerbated during the 14-year (1989-2003) Charles Taylor-initiated civil war. Journalists were targeted, media houses destroyed, and media freedom abstracted. Taylor understood the power of the media, owned a TV, shortwave, and FM station, and sought to gain a media monopoly to counter dissent (Spurk et al. 2010, p. 176; Innez, 2002).

However, the deployment of UN Peacekeepers in 2003 paved the way for postwar democratic elections and introduced media pluralism and a semblance of press freedom. The new dawn of the media was boosted when President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed the Freedom of Information Act in 2010⁴ and the Table Mountain Declaration⁵ in 2012. By 2015, at least 71 radio and seven television stations, and 35 newspapers were in Liberia⁶. The latest statistics⁷ show 163 mainstream and community radios across the 15 counties of Liberia, including Okay FM, featured in this study.

However, the plurality of media institutions does not portend that the Liberian media is free, though better than in prewar days. Liberia ranked 98 among 180 countries with a score of 33.36% in the World Press Freedom Index of 2021 (RSF, 2021). In its 2021 State Of Media Safety In Liberia report, the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding in Liberia (CEMSP⁸) claimed that journalists are exposed to continuous threats, including 'beating' and other forms of violence (CEMSP, 2021, n. p.). The media seems *freer* in Liberia but has a long way to go to true freedom if it ever comes. This spasmodic press freedom has subsequently impacted public mediated discourses through talk shows.

⁴ President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed the FOI Law in 2010: <http://www.freedominfo.org/2010/10/liberian-president-sirleaf-signs-foi-law-regional-first/>. The researcher was a practicing journalist and Assistant Secretary General of the Press Union of Liberia who was involved with the passage of the Act.

⁵ The Table Mountain Declaration seeks to abolish "Insult Laws" and Criminal Defamation in Africa and Setting a Free Press Higher on the Agenda. Read here: <http://www.doxafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/dmt-eng.pdf>

⁶ This stats is from the Press Union of Liberia's Media Directory - a compilation of journalists and media workers, press attachés, media NGOs & public relations officers compiled when I served the Secretariat of the Union for between late 2009 and 2015 both as Assistant Secretary General and Secretary General. The project was funded by the World Bank. The Press Union of Liberia (PUL) is the umbrella body of all journalists and media houses in Liberia, founded in 1964. It defends press freedom, free speech and stands for social justice and democratic participation.

⁷ The Press Union of Liberia Secretary General, Akoi Baysah, provided this stat via Facebook messenger on April 13, 2022, following a request by the researcher.

⁸ CEMESP has stood as a strong pillar for media development in Liberia. It is one of Liberia's leading media development organizations. The Center was legally established on October 24, 2003, in response to the challenges confronting professional media practice and free speech due to years of conflict in Liberia. See more here: <https://cemespliberia.org/cemesp/about-us/>

Historicizing Talk Shows In Liberia

The broadcast media has become more democratized in Liberia, accommodating diverse views and presenting more participatory programs like talk shows. Talks shows have become popular in Liberia after the country's civil war ended in 2003. The first interactive radio talk, *DC Talk*, was aired five years earlier in 1997 on a private commercial station. It faced several political harassments, including being ordered shut down by former President Charles Taylor for its critical voice on government. Though it ceased to exist in 2006 when the station closed, *DC Talk* pioneered a new era in the Liberian media and public discourse history, similar to what the Phil Donahue show had done in the US in 1967.

In today's Liberia, the majority of the radio stations have morning and evening talk shows. Many community radios relay or simulcast popular radio programs, allowing audiences not just to get informed but to also participate in these mediated discourses. This burgeoning connection between audiences and media in Liberia seems to put life in the former sleeping audiences (see Rosen, 2006) to contribute to the national discourses. The experiences of these talk show participants are the center of this study. They never had direct access to the media; now they do; these audiences never used to talk on air, but now they do. So, what does that mean for them, and the society in general – for democracy. The next segment puts this question in context towards the answer.

Studying Talk Show Experiences

This thesis explores the experiences of audience participation in public discourses through radio talk shows in Liberia. It investigates how audiences are given a *voice* (speaking in public on national issues) through radio talk shows and the resulting values and democratic tenets. The argument that this thesis presents is about the *platform* and *opportunities* that talk shows offer to facilitate public discourses. The research is motivated by the following propositions - which underline the values of talk shows:

First, talk radio has far-reaching implications for the nature of the public sphere in modern societies as it creates forums for participatory democracy and the development of public opinion. Second, talk radio influences both everyday discourse and political discourse by providing models of talk and by setting agendas through talk. And third, talk radio has become a major part of everyday life for countless people around the globe as they structure their days around favorite programs and as they develop affective ties to radio personalities (IESS, 2021, n. p.)

Such a statement gives a weighty reason why talk show, as a global social phenomenon, is worthy of research from different perspectives – including the Liberian perspective. Is the above quote accurate for Liberia? How is it real? These are probing questions to the research. Studies and findings on talk shows are innumerable and span many topics and fields, but there appears limited research on the *experiences* of talk show participants. For example, the following previous studies are constructed around cultural and social differences, mode of engagement, presentation, and participation.

Magda & Lordan (2021) employed discourse analysis to study the cultural specificities of Romanian political talk shows. They found that televised confrontations of political talk show broadcast on Romanian TV channels take the form of polemic interaction based on a ‘play with words’ (p. 241). When they conducted a comparative study of the different features of talk shows between China and the US, Wu & Lu (2018), among their findings, saw that in the US, talk shows are hosted in a relaxed way, bringing the host closer to audiences which achieve a degree of harmony. On the contrary, in China, ‘the audiences at the show site are more elegant, and passive as spectators to watch the shows on the stage’ (p. 46). In a study on the difference between celebrity interviews on talk shows versus news interviews, Loeb (2015), applying the conversational analysis method, found celebrity talk show interviews to be ‘congenial’ and cooperative. News interviewing was characterized by norms of ‘adversarialness, where the interviewer disagrees with, criticizes, or otherwise challenges their interviewees’ (p. 29). Their study focused on talk host-studio guests’ relations.

Gamson (2002) investigated challenges associated with talk shows involving emotions, the public sphere, and debates. He concluded that talk shows are ‘emotionally driven and lacking critical rationality in discourses’ and therefore do not make conclusive impacts (p. 195). Using two radio talk shows in South Africa as a case study, Hungbo (2017) explored the role of silences during talk shows and how they may impact participants' identities. He concluded that silences are critical communicative practices that are just as significant as the verbalized utterances people encounter in the performance of self-identity, which characterize the transmission of radio talk shows. (p. 49).

Similarly, Botes & Langdon (2006) launched a qualitative research investigation into how public radio talk show hosts perceive their tasks and actions with conflict-related topics. They found that though talk show hosts can never become conflict resolvers in any formal sense of the term, they can provoke and provide an alternative vision of what is desirable and possible (p. 283). Gamson, Hungbo, and Botes & Langdon focused on the attributes and management of talk shows and the personalities of those who run them.

When Srinivasan & Diepeveen (2018) interrogated the political relevance of audience participation in an interactive radio show, they learned that the indeterminate audience was the center for competing ideas about power, authority, and citizenship among the different participants, including politicians. Turow et al. (1996) employed a survey and content analysis method to study radio talks and their audiences' behaviors and emotions in the US. They discovered that talk show 'callers and listeners are motivated to participate in political activities and other civic engagements', becoming 'political activists' (pp. 11-16).

As vital as they are about talk shows, all these studies are distant from what this thesis explores. Although studies by Turow et al. (1996) and Srinivasan & Diepeveen (2018) focus on audiences, they seek paths other than understanding the experiences of audience members who participate in these talk shows. Studying the *political relevance of audience participation* as Srinivasan & Diepeveen (2018) did does not equate to exploring the experiences of exercising their voices. Similarly, the study of *behaviors and emotions* by Turow et al. (1996) seems more psychological than a media experience resulting from participation. This gap, using semi-structured qualitative research methods rather than survey or media content analysis, is what this study opts to fill, through a case study. This research gap is even pronounced in the context of Liberia, where no such audience study had ever been conducted.

Accordingly, the *Okay Morning Rush* of Okay FM 99.5 will be studied as a case to bridge this scholastic and knowledge gap. The talk show attracts a vast following at home and abroad as it provides unhindered and unique opportunities for citizens to speak, for example, directly to the President of Liberia. They fearlessly express their anger or disdain about the country's governance and suggest what they think needs to be done to reverse what is not working well. Such

development is unprecedented in Liberia's history, where press freedom and free speech have always been professed but highly muzzled (Momo, 1992; Deddeh, 2000; Innes, 2003/2005; Media Sector Mapping, 2007; Spurk et al., 2010). It is these experiences, a research gap, that this thesis stands to fill.

What Has Been Said About Talk Shows?

The dynamics and nature of talk show well connect with Habermas' (1962) label of the public sphere as bringing together 'private people' to deliberate the 'needs of society with the state' (p. 176). When audience members call on a talk show, they are coming out of their private lives into the *public sphere* to discuss issues that affect society. The way these *public* discussions are done has generated debates. Some scholars (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Loeb, 2015) think talk shows are citizen-empowering and democratic. Yet, others (for example, Nelson & Robinson, 1994; Abt & Seesholtz, 1994) have equated talk shows as sites of noise and emotional outbursts with minimal impacts.

Those on the bright side of talk shows describe it as a democratic platform, allowing audiences, regardless of their statuses, to express themselves and get heard on issues of the wellbeing of societies (Gamson, 2002, Williams and Delli Carpini, 2011; Loeb, 2015; Mwesige, 2004). Specifically, Gamson's (ibid, p. 194) described talk shows as 'strikingly democratic' since their nature facilitates the mediated convergence of 'people from any background onto a public stage' to speak out. By such a claim, Gamson means that talk shows make everyone *equal*, especially at the point of the discourse. It is the point at which anyone in public can have the *moment of power* to address a studio guest, be it a government or public official. Here, talk show blurs, if not breaks, the boundary between the experienced and the expert or the public figure and the layman (Illie, 2006). Talk shows, in this way, become unstructured outlets for public discourses that do not need bureaucratic formalities for one to participate. They provide sites for laypeople to question leaders and voice for change, as a study by Turow et al. (1996, p. 45) found in the U.S. It revealed that callers and listeners engaged political figures, asked them for progress, and used their voices as instruments for 'blocking or overturning' legislative actions (ibid). In Uganda, Mwesige (2004) realized that talk shows provided a space for contestation by organized citizen groups against

government's actions. It would be interesting to understand how the *Okay Morning Rush* blurs the boundary in Liberia between the experienced and the expert - in a society where *big names* understandably make the news.

On the other side of the debate, it is disputed talk shows do not produce tangible democratic effects. Some critics argue that talk shows are flippant talks and mere entertainment. They take any form and are usually an extemporary discourse that sometimes end anarchically. Concurring with Allan (1999) and Langer (1998), Loeb (2015) claimed that talk shows are a 'symptom of the corruption of the media landscape' (p. 24). By corruption, Loeb proffers that talk shows break away from the regular rigid news presentations (like accuracy, balance, and clarity) towards a contested and opinion-based media presentation (of emotions, claims, and arguments). For this reason, it has been disapproved as being trash and dangerous talks characterized by discordant and opinion-driven arguments (Myers, 2001; Thornborrow, 2007). An example of this portrayal is demonstrated in a study of political talk shows in the U.S. by Turow et al. (1996). They found a 'perception' in the wider population that political talk shows were 'dishonest, emotional, unfair, one-sided, and cynical' (p. 32). From a study of Israeli talk shows, Liebes (1999) understands 'argument, conflict, and sense of chaos' as characteristics (p. 113) of talk shows.

In these debates, the influence of talk shows is visible on either side of the divide – democratic or chaotic, positive or negative. Whichever way the dice fall, the role of audiences, through the exercise of their voices (irrationally or rationally), stands out. It is through their roles and modes of participation that determine the substances of these debates.

While talk shows might have some general characteristics, as earlier discussed, the above debates can be judged as being subjective or context-dependent. The studies mentioned were conducted in different societies. One argues that people in other cultures act differently and respond to issues culturally. Therefore, their media and talk show experiences would be reflective of their cultures. The point here is not to discard these findings and descriptions about talk shows. The argument, however, is that these realities from other jurisdictions cannot be generalized. Could talk shows be democratic in Liberia as Gamson has described it? Or are they sites of mere arguments, conflict,

and sense of chaos as Liebes portrayed it? Answering these questions is among the motivations for this study. Thus, a Liberian perspective.

THEORIZING TALK SHOWS

Talk Shows Framing

Talk shows are ‘host-centered’ and organized behind the scenes (Schultz & Wessler, 2007: p. 23). This involves setting the tones, the directions, and the limits of the discourse (Timberg, 2002). This deliberate process of deciding what should be discussed and how discussion flows is what researchers (Goffman, 1974; Tannen, 1979; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; Davie, 2011; Arowolo, 2017) have called framing. This reality signals that for a talk show to be more participatory, the host must *construct* the reality to interest audience participation. In media, studies framing represents how the media focuses attention on a particular phenomenon and makes sense of it by placing it within a web of meaning (Davie, 2011). Goffman (1974), a progenitor of the theory, described frame as a cultural definition and meaning that people attribute to their realities to make meaning.

The most common use of frames in the media rests on the *agenda* the media place on the information they convey to the public. It can be understood as a form of second-level agenda-setting (see McComb, 2011). That is, the information or stories presented by the media do not only tell the audience ‘what to think about’ (McComb’s agenda-setting theory) but also ‘how to think about that issue’ (second-level agenda-setting or framing theory) (Davie, 2011, n. p.). Here, one understands that framing is not just a presentation of information; instead, it elicits the audience’s actions and participation in specific frameworks. Goffman (1974) assumed that whether they are aware or not, people use these frameworks in their everyday life to construct and make meaning of the reality around them. Talk show hosts are no exceptions.

The concept of framing or frame analysis has been widely discussed in the social sciences, including, for example, in anthropology (Bateson, 1972), Sociology (Goffman, 1974), linguistics (Tannen, 1979) in the organizational sciences (Weick, 1979; Bartunek, 1988). Tversky & Kahneman (1981) focused on problem framing, while Entman’s (1993) view of framing bordered

on the definition of a ‘particular problem’ as well as its ‘causal interpretation and moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation (p. 5). The nexus on which framing research across disciplines rests is the presentation of framing as ‘both a cognitive device and a communicative activity defined by the selection, emphasis, interpretations, and exclusion’ (Fairhurst, 2005, p. 167). Through this, people see and interpret situations or events based on their understanding of such reality built through the cultural lenses. It suggests, according to Fairhurst, that what people feel and determine as ‘real and important is [what they] say is real and important’ and want people to hold such beliefs as them (p. 168). This thought can best describe how discussions on talk shows are framed for audience participation. Consequently, this study adopts media framing in understanding how the host of Okay FM’s *Morning Rush* selects and presents topics for discussions.

Public Sphering Talk Show

In the work of Jurgen Habermas (1962), the public sphere represents an arena that brings together people from private lives to freely discuss societal issues to influence public or political actions. The concept of the public sphere stands supreme in media studies, especially in the context of democratic values, where the media serve as arteries for the exchange of public opinions. It is a sphere where citizens’ participation in democracy is ‘enacted through the medium of talk’ (Fraser, 1990, p. 6).

As a ‘realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed’ (Asen, 1999, p.117), the public sphere becomes appropriate as a theoretical concept in studying radio talk like the *Okay Morning Rush*, which possesses a similar attribute. The essence of the *Okay Morning Rush* is nothing more than enacting the performance talk – people speak their minds on how the affairs of the society should be.

Of course, one is not negligent of the extant debate around the concept of the public sphere, which this thesis does not have the luxury of space and time to discuss. However, a synopsis is necessary for conceptual understanding in helping to position the study and inform the analysis.

Critical analysis sees Habermas presenting a public sphere that bordered on the life and dealings of a clique - the bourgeois - to constitute the public. This seems unearthly as societies have never comprised just one type of people, as his presentation may suggest. Habermas paints a one-sided society, breeding more questions about inclusion, exclusion, or equality (Fraser, 1990; Susen, 2011). Such nature of the public sphere compelled Fraser (ibid) to argue against it as being an 'unrealized utopian ideal'. The exclusion of some members of society as deemed not fit to participate in the critical rational discourse is reminiscent of the 'police order' in Rancière's (2013) *Distribution Of The Sensible*. He referenced the distribution of the sensible to 'what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime' (p. xi). Here, an invisibly perceptive marker, which he called the 'police order', defines who is qualified to speak or 'make a public appearance' (see Arendt, 2013). The inclusion and exclusion of who takes part in the Habermas' public sphere discourses manifest a 'prior aesthetic division' of who can appear in public to speak or not and what is 'the sayable and the unsayable' (Rancière, ibid). Excluding others from speaking could be equivalent to taking away their lives, as Arendt (2013) has argued: 'a life without speech...is literally dead to the world [and] has ceased to be a human life' (p.176).

With such inclusion and exclusion posture, the original structure of the public sphere altered as the bourgeois turned into 'a minority of specialists' versus the 'less-informed mass' (Doria, 2020). Discourses sought to protect their interests instead of the masses, leading to 'tension' around group versus collective interest (Susen, 2011, p. 48). The tension and perceived deception that Susen bespeaks is also visible in many modern societies, primarily resulting from politicians. They come in the people's name but with hidden political agendas often perpetuated through 'deception, whether by lying, omission, distortion, or misdirection' (Robinson et al. 2018, n. p.). This can assume to have been the case of the bourgeois – where political interest overshadowed and denied voices to the people.

Furthermore, the Habermas-depicted homogenous public sphere questions the appropriateness of the concept to democratic ideologies. Societies have many voices, and these voices need spaces to be heard. How come they are absent in the bourgeois public sphere? Where are the alternative views that are required to make democracy healthy? Such one-sidedness of the bourgeois public sphere draws on its weakness and questions its applicability to democratic tenets

Conceiving the media as a public sphere, as I argue soon, they are accused of denying many voices by giving preferences to political leaders and other societal elites (see Jempson, 2019, Graber, 2003 Whitten-Woodring, 2009; Bühlmann et al., 2008). Often, politicians' views make the news; they are the ones invited on talk shows, and their voices are synched with media programs. Such amounts to introducing the 'police order' when the 'opinions of elites are featured while the views of mainstream public are slighted; the views of ideological dissenters are largely ignored' (Graber 2003: p. 145). In his argument of 'so many voices being missing,' Jempson (2019) claimed that production routines play a significant role in these omissions. These routines (he did not name) involve framing media programs – who to be interviewed, who should be allowed to talk, and how long. How do these realities apply to the *Okay Morning Rush*? Is it a program for the Liberian bourgeoisies, or does it care to give voice to everyone?

The point of departure is that in democratic settings, the public is diverse and inclusive of ordinary people who (should) participate in discourses. And Fraser could argue that ‘a plurality of competing publics better promotes the ideal of participatory parity than a single comprehensive, overarching public’ of Habermas' public sphere (ibid, 66). Equality and inclusiveness were far-fetched since it was mainly for educated propertied men (Grbeša, 2003). It was a public sphere that Calhoun (1992: p. 3) termed ‘exclusionary’. If one would consider the public sphere only at the level of the bourgeois, then the concept would be unqualified in the sense of participatory democracy. From that perspective, the idea would not be suitable as a theoretical tool to study the *Okay Morning Rush*.

However, despite these shortcomings, the concept of the public sphere remains valid and suitable for studying audience experiences with the *Okay Morning Rush*. There is a democratic ideal in it, and because the bourgeoisie did not conform to these tenets does not insinuate that the idea of the public sphere should be rejected. The public sphere draws its strength from emerging against the monarchical powers of the 18th century. It had attributes that knot with modern-day democratic values: assembling people to speak their minds openly. It upheld freedom of speech and expression, which are vital for democratic societies (Loewy, 1993; Massaro & Norton, 2021). As Massaro & Norton (2021, p 1632) put it, the more people have the opportunity to speak, the more

information will be ‘available to listeners.’ They furthered that the cheaper [access and opportunity to talk] speech becomes, the more speakers will engage in public discourses and contribute to the marketplace of ideas (ibid). The ‘marketplace of ideas’ references a metaphorical conglomeration of people expressing themselves and collective thoughts.

The bourgeois public sphere possessed that credential of the ‘marketplace of ideas’ but, unfortunately, was corrupted. At the gatherings in the coffee shops and salons, discussants were at liberty to deliberate issues of the states that directly or indirectly affected their lives and everydayness. As Koo (2006) put it, these discussions extended from ‘simply complaining...to criticizing governmental affairs, such as taxations, state budget, and other public policies’ (p. 3-4). Regardless of who was included or excluded, the meetings provided an opportunity for attendees to find out what was happening in their communities. Such participation in the exchange of views on public issues is a crucial concept of democracy, which advocates ‘the right of all citizens to participate in political life’ as a sense of ‘civic culture’ (Dahlgren, 2012, p. 27ff, 2009). This kind of feat constitutes positive attributes of the bourgeois public sphere, applicable to modern democratic tenets and the studying of the *Okay Morning Rush*.

Most criticisms and debates around Habermas’s inspired public sphere do not discard the original concept. Its relevance to participatory democracy through unhindered public discourses on public matters remains essential. Even its most staunch critics, Fraser, underscored the indispensability of the concept and termed it as being ‘critical [to] democratic political practice’ (p. 57).

Conceiving Radio Talk Show As Public Sphere

The definition and nature of talk show are synonymous with the public sphere. As already known from Habermas’ description, the public sphere is a ‘domain of social life where public opinions can be formed’ (p. 398). And to further modify this description, Susen (2011) stated that it provides a forum for deliberative processes aimed at the democratic construction of society. In the public sphere, access is guaranteed to all citizens to debate openly and fearlessly on matters of general interest to them and the state (see Loewy, 1993; Massaro & Norton, 2021; Asen, 1999). One sees

a strong correlation between the public sphere and radio talk shows. Both are deliberative platforms, serving as vehicles for public engagements and participation through the act of talking.

Scannell (1991) in Livingstone and Lunt (1994, p. 6) seems to agree that there exist considerable similarities between broadcast (talk shows) and face-to-face talk (like those of the bourgeoisie debates) as both are ‘communicative interactions intended to be heard by their audiences’(ibid). They argued that the *media* is a public sphere where the relations between established power and the citizenry through political communication happen. These points of similarity are the core that drives this study to adopt the concept of the public sphere as a theoretical pillar in exploring audiences' experience with radio talk shows.

However, if talk shows can be equated to the public sphere, then inquiries may erupt around how it applies to the *Okay Morning Rush*. Is it a public sphere of elitism that excludes some voices like women and ordinary citizens, as did the bourgeoisie’s? Or is it a democratic one that treats everyone as equal and allows them to participate in public discourses and be heard? The answer to these questions might emerge when analyzing the experiences of talk show callers in Liberia.

A Platform for Many Voices

Despite its democratic potential to open up spaces and create alternative voices in societies, Habermas (1989) accused the media of being one of the culprits responsible for the demise of the bourgeoisie public sphere. The media, he argued, reenforced the ‘mass consumption and commodification of culture’ (Grbeša, 2003, p. 115). They facilitated the ‘feudalization’ of public discussion into the mere ‘publicity’ of a ‘pseudo-public’ sphere’ (Couldry et al., 2010; p. 26; Calhoun, 1992). As it appeared to him, ‘the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere by appearance only’ (Habermas, 1989, p. 171).

Habermas’ argument, one rationalizes, can be viewed from what looked like the homogenous and exclusionary characteristics of the bourgeoisie public sphere, which the media and other societal forces were impacting through economic and structural changes when he wrote. His claims seem not to have valued the power of the media in the context of making the public sphere discourse

more expansive, participatory, or democratic by bringing on more voices and creating alternative views (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). Habermas' contestation, however, ironically appears to recognize the influence of the very media on people's lives and preferences. Nevertheless, his view tended to 'overlook [its] potential...to contribute to the public debate by providing a platform for [said debate]' in different forms for different audiences (Grbessa, *ibid*, 115). In Habermas' world, homogeneity is the key to decision-making. If one agrees with Habermas, which this thesis does not do, then media programs like talk shows with huge democratic potentials that attract many voices would be irrelevant. That is why Fraser (1990) would disagree with him, insisting on the importance of 'a plurality of competing publics' that gives room for alternative views and voices (p. 66). Similarly, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) term this plurality of competing publics as a 'powerful legitimization' of the everyday experiences and opinions of the people in a participatory democratic setting (p. 5).

In contrast to Habermas' claim, Scannell (1989) postulated that the public sphere has been mediated. The media has played its role as an independent public sphere, removing restrictions on public events and making them available to everyone. Hence, the media, Scannell argued, has contributed to the 'democratization of everyday life', bringing more equality than ever before (p. 36). One tells Habermas that his thought of a homogenous public sphere cannot hold in a modern pluralistic dispensation where the diverse masses look up to the media like the *Okay Morning Rush* for information consumption and conduit for participation in public debates. This thesis draws on these arguments to explore how the *Okay Morning Rush*, as a public sphere, constitutes a platform for many voices to be heard in Liberia.

Talk Show and Democratic Participation

Though democracy, a contested phenomenon, cannot be described as a universal and static reality (Dahlgren, 2012; Tangian, 2020), one thing that seems unanimous about it is the *popular will of the people*. This popular will involves people being aware and part of the governing processes, such as electing their leaders and being represented. Dahlgren (2009, p.1) understood this when he argued that 'without a minimum level of involvement from its citizens, democracy loses legitimacy and may cease to function' genuinely. He took his argument further that 'the health of democracy' is not just, as many see it, 'restricted to elections and people's participation in them' (p. 2). Instead,

it is via ‘deliberation’, which he described as a ‘fundamental way for citizens to participate in democracy (ibid). Contributing to this position, Eliasoph (1998, p. 8) claimed that ‘regular political conversation is a defining feature of a healthy democracy. For her, in a democracy, ‘the substance of political life is public discussion’ (ibid), what Dahlgren called ‘deliberation’. By deliberation, Dahlgren portrays people’s involvement with public talks, not just talking, but ‘civic talk’ – the discussion of politics and current events in one’s social network in everyday life (ibid, p. 8, Klofstad, 2009, p. 856). The best vehicle through which civic talks can be amplified to engender mass participation in the media – is through conversational programs like talk shows. Such is why Dahlgren believed that in the current highly mediated world, the media are a prerequisite for shaping the democratic character of a society and fostering peoples’ participation since ‘much of our civic knowledge derives from the media’ (p. 81). This claim by Dahlgren triggered Klofstad (2009) to hypothesize that information provided by media [genre like talk shows] motivates audiences’ participation because it increases civic competence (the ability to participate) and civic engagement (having an interest in participating in the first place)’ (p. 858). As I argued earlier, the role of talk shows as a *public sphere* and *platform for many voices* suggests their influence and potential contribution to democracy as sources of information foci for democratic participation.

Carpentier (2012/2016) took the matter further and argued that for the media to foster such democratic participation, they must give access to audiences to participate at the ‘minimalist’ or ‘maximalist’ level. First, access becomes the preamble to participation as it does not constitute participation. Access can be considered the ability to use available media texts and technologies to participate in debates happening in the public spheres. It involves being in the *presence* of media technology and contents, and the means that facilitate participation (Backhaus, 2019, Carpentier, 2012/2016). At the minimalist level of participation, citizens are at the receiving end, where the media practitioner are ‘retaining strong control over the process and outcome’ (2016, p. 84). Here, the decision-making process about the production is ‘centralized’ and in the purview of the media. Meanwhile, Carpentier sees decision-making as decentralized in the maximalist model, where participation balances the power relations between ‘media professionals and non-privileged groups’ (ibid). This thesis can argue that the maximalist level of participation seems more abstract among most mainstream media. However, to some extent, it could make a broader sense in the context of community radio (see Backhaus, 2021).

In her study of community radios in India, Backhaus (2021) claimed that there are ‘structures [that]determine how listeners are able to participate and dictate what community radio stations should be doing and saying’ (p. 2). Though ‘community members can actively take part in the processes of media production’ (ibid, p. 10), Backhaus did not describe such as being a maximalist form of participation. In fact, she noted that ‘[w]hat emerges is a form of participation that is best described as ‘limited’. So, Charpentier’s idea of maximalist participation could be considered theoretical construction. And he seems to understand the reality and puts up what could equate to a disclaimer:

Participation, even at the maximalist level, is not about audience members going into the studios to take over the show and become the producers, it is rather an attempt ‘to diversify and open up this societal identity so that the processes and outcomes of media production do not remain the privileged territory of media professionals and media industries (Carpentier, 2012, p. 172).

Tacchi (2006 in Backhaus, 2021, p. 83) argued that audiences are usually positioned as recipients of media messages. Their capacities to participate in self-representation in the media through content production are entirely overlooked. This kind of scenario presents the media as ‘monopolists’ rather than ‘facilitators’, and Carpentier thinks his likely implausible maximalist participation model can reverse and ensure parity in the slanted media-audience power relation.

However, in between the minimalist and maximalist modes of participation, Backhaus (2019/2021) proposed *meaningful participation*. Meaningful participation, as she presented it, is not about the measure (say quantity or frequency) of participation in media; instead, it is ‘the intangible benefits of participation’ in the media and how audiences ‘value their participation (2021, pp. 5 & 135). It is about the importance of exercising their voices and the identities they construct while participating in media.

These discussions about democratic participation through the media are the centrality of this study. Said repeatedly, these arguments and presentations underscore the media's vital role in strengthening democracy by giving the masses space to discuss what affects their lives openly. As Klofstad (2009) and Dahlgren (2009) suggest, there is a meaningful relationship between civic talk and civic participation. But where does the *Okay Morning Rush* stand in all this? To what extent do audiences have access to this shows? Does it employ Charpentier’s minimalist or maximalist

level of audience participation? Where does Backhaus' meaningful form of participation fit in the experiences of talk show audiences of Okay FM? This thesis investigates.

The debate around the concept of the public sphere is winding, as I have tried to present in this review. Can talk shows, in any way, represent a public sphere in the real sense of the term as used by Habermas? This thesis can argue that the literature review demonstrates that talk shows and the concept of the public sphere synch as a 'domain of social life where public opinions can be formed' (Habermas, 1962, p. 398). Although Habermas' public sphere has limitations like marginalization, as expounded above, the democratic proclivity of open and free expression it constitutes attracts this thesis. Even one of the most renowned critics has agreed that 'Habermas' idea of the public sphere is indispensable to...democratic political practice (Fraser, *ibid*, p 57). Scholars, including this same Fraser, have argued that Habermas' public sphere proposition 'is no longer feasible' in current reality (p. 57). However, others like Scannell (2007) would insist that the concept has 'not lost its relevance' (p. 233). Habermas pushes one to rethink the possibility of acting in public and its structural limitations in contexts. This thesis considers the structural context of Habermas public sphere to understand audiences' experience in getting a voice to participate in the *Okay Morning Rush* talk show in Liberia.

CHAPTER 3

Methodological Approach

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research method, through a case study, was adopted for this thesis ‘to throw light upon human experience and social life’ (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 21). The method was chosen because it allows researchers to employ organized measures to gather and analyze raw data about the research subjects to uncover findings that had not been considered when the research was designed. The intent was about ‘observing, describing, interpreting and analyzing how people experience and act’ in their talk show participation (Bazeley, 2013, p. 4). This prospect required conducting several in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews to hear the raw voices of the participants and analyze their experiences to answer the research question.

Selecting The Case

Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 71) advocated using a case study to produce context-dependent knowledge for qualitative research of this kind. That is what precisely this thesis does. A case study is a 'detailed examination of a single example' (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 220). It is an empirical inquiry that ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon’ like talk show within its ‘real-life context’ and produces knowledge (Yin, 1994, p. 13 in Rowley, 2002, p. 17). These descriptions accentuate that a case study involves selecting one (example) out of several phenomena (cases) for exploration in a particular context to produce new knowledge.

Case study methods have come under stern criticism. Critics question their rigorousness, generalization, subjectiveness, and validity (Diamond, 1996; Hamel, 1993; Campbell & Stanley, 1966). Hamel (1993) has cited 'lack of representativeness' and 'lack of rigor' in them. He entwined these with 'the problem of bias' which arise from the researcher's inherent subjectivity' as damning weaknesses of case studies (p. 23). However, proponents of the case study method (Flyvbjerg, 2001/2006/2011; Yin, 1994, Stake, 1995; Rowley, 2002) argue that the lack of

knowledge of the method leads to such claims. While Flyvbjerg (2011, p. 220) addressed the criticism as 'grossly misleading', Rowley (2002, p.16) thought of it as a 'narrow conception of the application of case study research.' Rowley argued that cases are 'useful in providing answers to 'How?' and 'Why?' questions, and in this role can be used for exploring people's talk show experiences. This thesis is short of space to delve into the case study debate⁹, but sides with the proponents of the case study method as it produces content-dependent knowledge through exemplars. The misunderstandings of the study method have been sufficiently addressed by Flyvbjerg (2006, 2001, Chap 2&3), and they underscore why it was suitable for this study.

As this thesis explores *how* (see Rowley's explanation above) talk shows give voice to audiences in Liberia, it is impossible to study all the talk shows at once or in this research. Selecting one of them (a case - an example) becomes the most prudent path to 'organizing social data to [view] social reality' (Best & Kahn, 2004, p.193).

Consequently, the research focused on audience participation experiences in the *Okay Morning Rush*, as discussed earlier in this thesis. It probed the experiences of 13 informants¹⁰ to reveal how talk shows give voice to audiences in Liberia. Talking with people involved with the situation being studied gives life to the research compared to, say, quantitative research that deals with variables. Exploring how talk shows give voice to audiences through participants of the *Okay Morning Rush* as a case enabled me to 'close in' on real-life situations and test views directly concerning the phenomena as they unfold in practice (Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 235).

The *Okay Morning Rush* was selected as a 'critical case' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 231). It is a critical case with a proposition that if the *Okay Morning Rush* gives voice to audiences in Liberia, it means talk shows do give voice to audiences in Liberia. If it does otherwise, talk shows do not give a

⁹ The debate on case study and cases is extensive than this thesis has space and time to discuss. Of course, the thesis, as noted, is on the side of the debate favoring case study as a good method for qualitative research. Several scholars have written extensively to address the misconceptions about the case study method. For example: Flyvbjerg (2006), in particular, examines five common misunderstandings about case-study research including that: (1) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; (2) one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; (3) the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; (4) the case study contains a bias toward verification; and (5) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies. Eno and Dammak (2014) have written well about 'the case study dilemma: controversies and considerations. Meanwhile, Rowley (2002) has argued for Using Case Studies in Research. These scholars see case study as appropriate research design in gaining concrete, contextual, in-depth knowledge about a specific real-world subject.

¹⁰ See *App-1 on page 79* for list of participants. It includes 12 talk show callers and host of the *Okay Morning Rush*, Clarence Jackson.

voice to the Liberian audience. This case choice is essential from the perspective that survey¹¹ I conducted put the *Okay Morning Rush* ahead of talk shows in Liberia. This account provides room to 'achieve information that permits logical deductions' for the 'generalizability of the case study' (pp. 226-230) since, in fact, talk shows, whatever form they take, have the same characteristics as a host-oriented-audience-participation mediated discourse. There exists no one-fit-it-all principle for selecting a critical case. I was however guided by Flyvbjerg's (2006, p. 231) advice that researchers should 'look for either "most likely" or "least likely" cases. [T]hat is, cases likely to either clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify proposition. The research finding can be the judge as to whether or not talk show gives voice to audiences in Liberia. The strength of my case lies in its ability to produce a context-dependent knowledge, whether or not it backs the proposition. While the limitation (see reflection on methods below) of my case could lie in my subjectiveness as a case study researcher (Hamel, 1993), Bumbuc (2016) has argued that subjectivity is inescapable in the research process.

Sampling The Informants

Unable to travel to the site of the research (Liberia) due to Covid-19 constraints, I adopted the virtual sampling method (Baltar & Brunet, 2012) for this research. In the internet age, social networking sites like Facebook have been effective in studying hard-to-reach populations (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Brickman-Bhutta, 2009; Duncan et al., 2003). They offer opportunities for researchers to run surveys quickly, cheaply, and single-handedly to samples of small subsets of the general population, as in the case of this study (Brickman-Bhutta, 2009, p. 1).

Thus, this research used Facebook, especially Messenger, to sample informants. A message seeking volunteers to participate in the study was circulated on Okay FM's Facebook page and major Liberian social networking platforms, including the *Darius Dillon Center for Intellectual Exchange*, *Alternative National Congress Chatroom*, the *Liberian Exchange*, and the *Fans of Okay FM 99.5* chatroom. I asked individuals coming across the message to 'kindly' share it with

¹¹ See *App -11 & App-12* on pages 99 & 100 on case survey and result. The result showed Okay FM's Morning Rush as the most popular, making it an important case to study.

others they knew could potentially participate in or contribute to the study, constituting a sense of virtual snowballing (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

Meanwhile, this method did not seem effective for the study, with just four responses received in three weeks, despite multiple reminders. A virtual purposive sampling (Barratt et Al., 2015) was then initiated, with time running against me. Changing or combining recruitment methods for data collection in qualitative research, which is ‘an iterative process’, is ‘permissible’ [...] ‘when the recruitment strategy is not working as anticipated’ (Mack, 2005, p. 6). Purposive sampling thus allows qualitative researchers to identify and select samples that possess sufficient information related to the case and phenomenon of interest (Suri, 2011). I, therefore, through Facebook messenger, contacted 26 regular callers¹² of the *Okay Morning Rush*, sharing the research aims and objectives and inviting them to participate.

Seventeen of the 26 on the list were found on Facebook and in the *Fans of Okay FM 99.5* chatroom, and their identities were confirmed. Since the research was about audience experiences from their participation in a talk show, the parameter for the recruitment was strictly about *regular callers* on the *Okay Morning Rush*. Initially, 23 of the targeted informants responded to participate. However, 14 of them virtually signed the consent form through a Google form. The 14 confirmed informants (two for pilot interviews) and the host of the *Okay Morning Rush*, Clarence¹³, were sufficient to provide the data saturation for the research.

Although scholars (including Evans and Mathur, 2005) have criticized virtual sampling studies, despite initial hitches, I found the method workable, flexible, reliable, and productive in my research.

¹² I had followed and monitored the *Okay Morning Rush* online from October 2021 (when I conceived the research idea) to January 2022, during which regular callers were monitored and listed. I searched and found that several of them were on Facebook. I noticed that finding one of them on Facebook also led me to others as most callers appear to be friends to each other. I even got to know this when I was added to the Fan of Okay FM chatroom, after unknowingly reaching out to the group’s mobilization chair. He advised that adding me to the chat would enable me to get more participants.

¹³ The host of *Okay Morning Rush* and Manager of Okay FM, Clarence P. Jackson, was officially written in December 2021 and informed about his station’s selection for the research and the desire to interview him as host of the show. He responded affirmatively and later authorized that his identity be revealed in the research. *See App-10 on page 98* for note of authorization and Clarence picture. This gives more authenticity to the case selection.

Research Ethics

Each of the informants in this research was told the research's aims, objectives, purpose, and scope. I assured participants that their identities, except the ages, would be concealed and that those interested in the research could follow the link to a google form to sign up. The google form contained more details, informing participants that filing the form and submitting the same constituted their informed consent¹⁴. Before each interview, I read the statement of consent to the informants and sought a verbal consent and requested it be recorded. A pseudonym was assigned to each informant to guarantee anonymity as promised (Markham & Buchanan 2012). However, the identity of the host of the *Okay Morning Rush*, Clarence Jackson (or just Clarence), was not censored since the research was a case study on a popular talk show, which could not be concealed to ensure the authenticity of the case. I, however, sought and got consent¹⁵ to use his identity in the research.

Conducting The Interviews

The semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed me to get first-hand accounts of the informant's experiences. I was able to access their 'values, attitudes, and feelings towards a thematical depth of understanding' their experiences (Byrne, 2012, p. 211). I did two pilot interviews to test the interview guide's validity, which helped, along with the advice of supervisor, in eliminating redundant and overlapping questions from the two interview guides¹⁶. The pilot also signaled possible challenges of conducting online video interviews, such as poor internet connectivity and expensive data in Liberia. These were compounded by limited technological experiences of using zoom or google meet for interview purposes among informants.

With these lessons, I engaged an intermediary on the ground (workmate) to facilitate the conduct of the interviews in a mini production studio at my home office, which has better internet connectivity. The location of the interview is not a primary objective in qualitative research.

¹⁴ See App-3 on page 81 for partial view of online consent form, and during the interview, a more standardized version (see App-2 on page 75) was read and the consents recorded.

¹⁵ See App-10 on page 98 for note of authorization.

¹⁶ See App – 4&5 on 82 & 84 for interview guides for talk show participants and talk shows host respectively. They are nearly the same, but some questions are changed for the host to investigate how framing of talk show topics are done.

However, it can have a profound impact on the data collection process when the interviewee is not comfortable with the environment or when there are distractions (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Employing 'pragmatic consideration', especially after two failed interviews due to poor internet connectivity, I suggested the studio as the best option to the interviewees. This change of location to a studio might have affected the informants' postures, feelings, and thoughts in responding to questions. Further, it did not allow me to observe the natural everyday environment of the informants, which might have added to the data corpus since qualitative interviews are not restricted to just questions and answers. This did not however affect the research process in any way.

The in-depth one-on-one online interviews were held conversationally. Lasting between 38 and 70 minutes, I listened attentively and asked follow-up questions as the interviewees gained the confidence to entrust me – a stranger – with a glimpse of their personal histories, perspectives, and experiences about their everyday engagement with talks show (Mack, 2005). Before each interview, I provided details of the study and sought authorization to record including the informed consent. The interviews were conducted on Google Meet between February 16 and March 10, 2022¹⁷.

Analyzing the Data

The interviews were transcribed manually and verbatim. I avoided 'editing interview transcripts to improve upon a respondent's language or grammar' (Bonnie, 2017, p. 39). Doing so, I could be, altering the tone and meaning of the interview which would amount to 'taking away their lives, their experiences, and their selves,' subsequently undermining the nitty-gritty of the research (ibid). I listened carefully to the recordings to ensure that nothing had been omitted in the transcript¹⁸.

I applied Braun & Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis (TA) and used a computer-assisted program, Nvivo, for coding the data. The TA was preferred because of its flexibility and excellent approach

¹⁷ See *App-1 on page 79* for list of interviewees and interview dates and time. These were dates and time the interviewees proposed they would be available.

¹⁸ See *App – 6 on page 86* for one full interview transcript.

to qualitative data analysis. It is not bounded or restricted to ‘a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective’ and therefore suits this qualitative research in media and communication studies (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Considering the deductive-semantic approach, the TA allowed me to give voice to experiences and meanings in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Fereday, 2006). With this method, I immersively entered the data, made sense of it, and constructed relevant themes for answering the research questions. Rigorously following the six steps in TA (see Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3354) resulted in finding out *something* about the informants’ views, opinions, knowledge, and experiences by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Familiarization with the data (the first of the six steps of TA) involved reading each of the transcripts thrice and making notes¹⁹ of initial impressions. Just before the coding process (the second step), the familiarization produced dozens of these initial codes that were later uploaded to Nvivo to create a codebook²⁰ as a guide for the coding exercise. For example, patterns and labels like ‘*opportunity to speak*’, ‘*my voice is heard*’, ‘*I speak for others*’, and ‘*my views get across*’ were initial ideas appearing across the data. These labels, which classified information pertinent to the study, represented the ‘codes’ otherwise known as ‘nodes’ in Nvivo. As I proceeded with the coding process, more nodes were generated from the empirical data and added to the codebook until saturation was achieved – when I could no longer find repeated patterns of meaning. Though the transcripts were read line-by-line to comprehend their contents, I coded only the part of the data²¹ that was ‘relevant’ or captured ‘something interesting’ about the research (Braun & Clarke, *ibid*, p. 86).

Following the initial coding exercise, I transferred the nodes from Nvivo to Microsoft Excel²² for the analytical coding. This action facilitated visibility and in formation of initial themes – the third phase of the TA. Each of the five Excel pages (titled *Nodes and References*, *Initial Themes*,

¹⁹ See App – 13 on page 101 for a sample representation of notes and points jotted down during the familiarization process. There is an extensive information including a memo and annotations in Nvivo and another file in word document named initial impressions from data. These notes were extremely helpful in creating the nodes for the coding process, formation of themes and discussion. They were a reference points and fresh memories of engaging data.

²⁰ See App – 9 on page 96 for excerpt of Codebook. It sets boundaries and delimits each of the nodes to create a clear understanding of what constitutes them and how information from the data corpus have been analyzed and linked to each node. In this research, coding the data produced 289 nodes and 1028 references (the number of times a node appears) across the 13 files (transcripts)

²¹ See App – 7 & 8 on pages 94 &95 for screenshots of Nvivo coding scheme.

²² See App – 14 on page 102 for excerpt for nodes exported to excel for analysis. From these nodes, the themes were generated.

Refining Themes and *Refined Themes*) give illustrations with notes on what I did with the data. This stage involved critically observing, analyzing, and sorting the same patterns and ideas into themes. For example, while *Platform for Education* and *Enhancing Democracy* nodes were placed under the theme of *Impact and Values Of Talk Shows*, those of *Talking to The President* and *Exchange of Views* were categorized under *Experiences In Calling And Participating In Shows*. Five initial themes²³ were generated at this stage of the analysis. They were further reviewed (the fourth step) to ensure their synchronization with the data and their accuracy and usefulness in answering the research questions. Here, themes were strengthened by movements, synching, and deletion of nodes, which resulted in the thesis having four defined themes²⁴. The last two steps of the TA involved defining/naming the themes and writing up the analysis, which comes after the critical reflection.

Reflections On Methods

First, I must state that I am a Liberian media practitioner, spanning nearly two decades of experience. I am advantaged to have served the secretariat of the Press Union of Liberia for five years (2010-2015), giving me a deeper understanding of the Liberian media and its long struggle for free press and speech. Qualitative research like a case study does not escape from the tentacles of subjectivity Bumbuc (2016). Therefore, this study is of no exception. The reality described, the argument proffered, the analysis made, narrativization of the finding including the method chosen were not free of subjective decisions. Such subjectivities, which are 'not necessary[ily] bad things' were employed, following established research procedures, 'to fulfill the research objective' (ibid, p. 419) of producing a content-dependent knowledge. It should be stated clearly that my media experiences did not impact the study and its outcome. John Corner's (2011, p. 78) advice for assuming less and investigating more served as my motivation while Braun & Clarke's (2012/2006) 6-step TA approach were my guide in exploring and understanding the informants' experiences in answering the research questions to produce knowledge.

²³ See App – 15 on page 103. Initial themes were formed out of the combination or categorization of nodes that shared similar or near-similar ideas.

²⁴ See App – 16 & 17 on pages 104 & 105 for visualization and explanatory notes about how the final teams were produced from the data.

Meanwhile, while online sampling and interviews can save researchers time and cost (Baltar & Brunet, 2012), it can be challenging in regions where internet connectivity and technological awareness remain poor, as I experienced in this research. Sampling online had a lopsided effect as only those talk show callers active on the internet were included, while those who are 'invisible' online were automatically excluded from the sample (Seale 2018:167). Still, such phenomenon left no adverse effect on the outcome of the research as it was about experiences of talk show callers in Liberia – online or offline.

Conducting the interviews via Google Meet experienced several breakdowns and pauses in communication. Interviewees had to be moved from their natural habitats to a studio arranged by the researcher to have the interviews done. These might have arguably influenced the data collection process, but not the data and the outcome. Howbeit these challenges, I did not allow emotion or illusion any space in the research process. He employed the selected methods that aimed to 'give voice to [a] group of audience members' (Hammersley, 2012, p. 15 ff) through a 'thick description' of the reality which now unfolds in the following two chapters (Hermes 2012:198).

CHAPTER FOUR

Finding and Analysis

Description of Findings

The findings from the data present four themes: 1) the *experiences of talk show callers*, 2) the *creation of valuable and pluralistic voices* in the public sphere, 3) the *formation of identities*, and 4) the felt *impact and values of talk shows* in democratic governance in Liberia. The first theme is built on audience experiences in calling and participating in talk shows and addresses the everyday experiences of Liberian talk show participants. The second revealed talk shows as a pathway to creating valuable and pluralistic voices for national discourses. It encapsulates how the *Okay Morning Rush* empowers citizens by giving them voices to speak out on national issues. The third theme focuses on identities deriving from participation in talk show – the personalities callers ascribe to themselves. Impacts and Values of Talk Shows in Governance make up the fourth theme, outlining documented practical effects of talk shows in Liberia.

1. Audience Experiences With Talk Shows In Liberia

The informants in this study spoke of the euphoria they experienced when they got the opportunities to be heard on the radio for the first time as exciting. It brings them extraordinary experiences and sensations of being essential parts of a society where they, too, can speak on the radio like political leaders.

...It feels like you have gotten everything in world... You know, fighting to get online among men, among so many persons, and then luckily for you, you got through, and then your voice is heard, it makes you to feel like, maybe, you're President or you something. (Maima, 32)

There is genuine enthusiasm in Miama's experience. Through the magic of talk show, she has been brought out of her private sphere to the public sphere and 'offered' for a moment 'the microphone' to address the nation (Gamson, 2002). With a broad smile, Miama notes that calling and speaking on a talk show is an achievement for ordinary citizens like her. She comes from a patriarchal society where the voices of females are almost always absent in public discourses like talk shows. Navigating her way to reach the top makes her proud, especially when told by acquaintances that she was heard on the radio:

Everybody will be like 'oh, I heard you talking on radio', 'I heard you', they will be saying when you're passing, and that makes you more proud, hahaha. (Maima, 32)

Experiences such as Miama's form the basis on which most informants call to participate in the *Okay Morning Rush*. They draw their motivations to keep participating in talk shows due to the positive feedback and public visibility they get from the show's listeners. These listeners include the general public, comprising their family members, friends, and other talk show participants who either endorse, reference, reinforce or reject their points of concern. One of the informants, Amos, 42, puts his experience this way:

Getting the feedback...elevated my anxiety to keep calling. It brought some admiration to myself, and I felt so good, and I felt that it should continue.(Amos, 42)

The data showed that the ecstasy from participating in talk shows does not just rest on calling and being heard. Multiple callers dial the same line on popular talk shows like *Okay Morning Rush* to participate. It requires persistence and sustained 'engagement' on the line to succeed (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 80). Thus, it appears more heroic for callers who succeed, as there seems to be a "contest" for the microphone to address an audience. For Amos, it feels like getting an 'employment' when he gets through:

You feel like it is your birthday, because the line is jammed; it's difficult to go through. You have to keep repeating the number. It's like you are in the midst of hundred persons and then the employer selected you like, 'the man in the green T-shirt, come.' [...] I see that...like an opportunity, like getting an employment for a company. (Amos, 42)

Amos experiences ‘subjective emotions and private feelings’ for making a ‘public appearance’ (Arendt, 2013; p. 50). By appearing on the talk show, Amos has come out of his private realm to be seen and heard by everybody as he enjoys the widest possible publicity. He is no longer alone with his thoughts and ideas, at least at that moment. He has been ‘transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized’ in his public appearance (ibid). This public appearance is an actual space of politics which Arendt described as ‘the space where I appear to others as others appear to me...’ (ibid, p. 198–9). Callers’ struggles to make such public appearances to join talk show programs presents an image of democracy where interests, preferences, and values appear openly for all to see and deliberate. It is part of what (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 80) saw as citizens’ democratic responsibility to become engaged and participate in ‘civic talk’ as noted in the review of literature.

Many of the informants participate in these shows to feel a part of the society they call their own. There, they discuss the national budget, road projects, rape cases, and the 2023 general elections. They feel buoyant and passionate in their media experiences in various ways.

When the topic is so much interesting to me, when they are talking on a topic that I really want to make an input in and, then, I luckily get through the line. After addressing the issue, I feel so free and relaxed. Yes, I feel that I have made some inputs on that particular topic. So, I feel... happy for that whole day. (Pauline, 29).

However, on the flip side of the coin, the experiences become negative when callers cannot get connected to speak. Here, they feel disappointed, frustrated, and temporarily disengaged with the show.

It makes me feel bad if I don’t communicate on the radio, because I am used to doing it, and people follow me.... So, if I don’t do that, it makes me feel bad because my opinion will remain in me.... If I can’t communicate my ideas through the topics they bring, it breaks me down. (Nyan, 28)

Pauline, like Nyan, feels ‘discouraged...frustrated, and...devastated when I don’t call in a day time’. These avid desires to call on radio talk shows do not just account for how the media has become attached to people’s daily life (Dahlgren 2009). It also presents how talk shows have become everyday sites of the public sphere, where citizens make public appearances to make their thoughts known, confirming the quote in the Literature Review that motivate this thesis.

As the findings revealed, callers' intense participation in talk shows was not just about the emotional experiences. They wanted to stay on top of trending national and political issues. Politics accounted for a good reason why most informants participated in talk shows.

By nature I am a political animal. So, when it comes to information, I want to be on top of information... I mostly take up my time and follow most of the talk shows, particularly the Okay FM shows, to get myself involved with the issues of the day, to know where the country is heading (Elvis, 31).

Elvis's comment denotes how he is an 'engaged' and 'invested audience [member] who regularly and meaningfully participates' in media to enhance the democratic process and national debates (Backhaus, 2019; p. 1). He does not just listen and participate via calling to express his political thoughts; his engagement extends to 'involvement'. He actively participates in politics, since he already describes himself as a '*political animal [who wants]... to get myself involved....*' This scenario confirms what scholars (Klofstad, 2009, p. 856-7; Dahlgren, 2009) have posited that 'engaging in civic talk causes civic participation', as 'there is a meaningful causal relationship between civic talk and civic participation'.

Melvin is also pulled in by interest in politics. For him, everything about talk show is interest – political or not. So, he comes to protect his. It is an 'onus to protect and defend [his] political leaders' and ideologies. 'As long as [his] political...and national leaders...are under attack, it is incumbent upon [him] as media engager to... provide clarifications. Nyan (28) buttresses Melvin's point that he looks for where the talk show host or guest will misinterpret his side, which gives him the clout to call.

I will [call and] let him know that 'you have fundamentally, you have misstated my side. I think this should have been this and then like this' ... [and] I will speak for the people who are for my side. That's how it works. Nyan (28)

Melvin, Nyan, and the bulk of the informants show strong political affinity. They exhibit a sense of 'political self-efficacy' - the degree to which they feel able to perform a series of political behaviors to effect change (Caprara et al., 2009; Madsen, 1987). Here, they use their voices to

defend their political agenda, contributing to strengthening democratic practices. However, the concept of voice and participation cannot be restricted to politics. This claim is visible in the experience of 61-year-old Siah, who is contrastingly disinterested in politics unlike Melvin and Nyan. Politics, she claims, kills her spirit as ‘politicians cannot be trusted’.

I can only participate in a talk show when I am interested in the topic... especially issues concerning women, issues concerning sexual general based violence, sexual exploitation, abuse [and] harassment – these are my interest. But, other than that, political talk shows. No! I don't go there, because the politicians these days, they are looking for the majority. And after that, they're finished with you. They go their way; they don't have time.... That's why I am not interested in political talk shows. (Siah, 61)

Siah’s claim about politicians is noted in the literature review (Susan, 2011, p. 48; Robinson et al., 2018) in the context of how the bourgeois public sphere became manipulated to the interest of the influential few, as the public no longer became the interlocutor. Claiming to be in the interest of the public, these political actors rather have selfish motives. Hay (2007) could further argue that politics is tantamount to sleaze, corruption, duplicity, greed, self-interest and self-importance. Such depictions could justify why Siah, does not hold the slightest political efficacy - a “feeling that political and social change is possible and that individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change’ (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954, p. 187). In Liberia, ‘76 percent of politicians and 74 percent of government officials are most widely seen as knowingly spreading false information’ (Twum, 2021, p. 2). Listening to such politicians, for her, is a ‘waste of precious time’.

Another string of experiences from the data bordered on information dissemination. It underscored the desire of the informants to provide knowledge to the public by giving their perspectives. Nyan (28) sees as a ‘way of life’ that enables him to infuse his knowledge and experiences into topics under discussion.

It is just my way of life... I can have absolute authority over the topics that are brought forward to the public. [I participate because] I can want to squeeze in my experience. I can want to chip in what I understand about the topic. And the only way or one of the ways I feel I can express my opinion or what I understand or what I know, is to use the waves of the radio. (Nyan, 28).

Of course, in a mediatized world, it is normal for Nyan to say *'It is just my way of life...to use the waves of the radio*. The permeative presence of the media in everyday life creates flourishing opportunities for audiences to express their thoughts, emotions, and actions (Bailey et al., 2008). The way Nyan expresses his media use signifies that '[o]ur life is lived *in*, rather than *with*, media [and that] we are living a *media life*' (Deuze, 2007: 242).

Some informants like Nico, in such media life, see it as an 'obligation' to call in and contribute to the deliberations since he has control over what is being discussed. This kind of *obligation* could synch with what Bennett, Wells & Freelon (2011, p. 838) described as 'dutiful citizenship'. Here, he is 'becoming informed via the [talk show] and generally engaging in public life out of a sense of personal duty' (ibid). He possesses a feeling of responsiveness, an external efficacy, and he steps up to the call of duty.

"I feel like I'm obligated to participate on a talk show most especially when the discussion that is ongoing is interesting. I call in and have a say [...]. When I really put my points through, I feel good and accomplished... I know people will [consider them]...and see how best they can work on some of those that I have said. (Nico, 35).

Nyan and Nico describe their terms of participation differently, they are however knowledge providers – with a sense of civic duty. The more people learn from such media programs, the more they become better citizens in a democratic society (Dahlgren, 2019). Here, a better a citizen means having knowledge of civic culture. This thesis argues that such knowledge translates into power (capability) – the power to make a choice, the power to participate, the power to inform and be informed in their mediated discourses.

Engaging, calling, and participating in talk shows, as the data showed, vary in purpose among informants, but the outcomes collectively boil down to 'affective experiences' (Smithies & Weiss, 2019; p. 28) and "affective investment" (Dahlgren, 2009; p. 84). By 'affective experiences' Smithies & Weiss connote an attraction or 'feeling of desire' (in other words, passion) that entices people to engage into an action, say, a talk show discourse (ibid). This idea clicks well with 'affective investment' which Dahlgren construed as a 'passion' that people develop in their political engagements. As he put it, 'to be passionate about something means one is devoted to it,

enthusiastic about it, [and]... ‘invests time and energy’ to it (p. 85). Said another way, there is an internal desire that pushes audiences to the talk shows – from the way they are framed and the topic presented. This is how, one argues, the *Okay Morning Rush* offers a ‘fundamental way’ for citizens ‘to participate in democracy’ through deliberation, (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 8). It does so by ‘creating visibility for politics and society through information dissemination, analysis, and forum for debate which engender a shared democratic culture’ (ibid, pp. 2-3).

This thesis can argue that audience participation in talk shows allows them to move their personal and emotional thoughts about national issues into the public sphere. Their participation activates their civic responsibilities, triggering them to become dutiful citizens via their involvement in civic activities such as providing knowledge for others through talk shows. They live with these experiences, celebrating that they have contributed their lonely voices to the many others as valuable contributions to the national discourse through their voices.

2. Pathway To Valuable And Pluralistic Voices

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, talk shows are products of democracy that give ‘voices’ to people. However, there are arguments that ‘so many voices are missing’ from the media (Jempson, 2019). These missing voices include, for example, immigrants, people with disabilities and women – as was in the bourgeoisie public sphere. Giving a space to these people to speak like others is the first step towards media inclusivity (ibid).

The data analysis revealed how the *Okay Morning Rush* provides a communicative space for listeners like Miama (32) to get heard. In her opinion, talk shows facilitate the creation of ‘voices of the ordinary people’ to express themselves about burning issues of national concern. Every time Miama participates in the *Okay Morning Rush*, she feels her ‘voice has been heard’ as the platform, she says, ‘creates spaces for [everyone’s] voices to be heard’ in as equal timeframe. In her view, talk shows are democratic. They do not set boundaries around who should participate or not.

*“Everyone has the right to participate in [the] talk show; so, everyone’s voice can be heard no matter what; no matter what you say. No matter what, they have the right to partake in the talk show.
(Miama, 32)*

With this, Miama assumes that some level of equality exists, and the door of inequality closes. She is aware that not everyone can or wants to call on a talk show, ‘but it [talk show] is there for everyone. One can however argue that availability (access, as discussed in the literature review) is not enough to engender participation. Some more action is needed. And, Jempson (ibid), in consonant with Dahlgren (ibid, p. 89), demands the media’s responsibility to ‘encourage’ and ‘challenge’ listeners/viewers to participate. Perhaps, this could account for why Okay FM established a special line for females – their voices had been largely missing from the Liberian media. Miama and other female informants are excited about it: giving voice to women to talk. ‘One of the biggest things a station can do’, she points out, ‘is to allow female voices to be heard on the radio and not only men’. This ‘gesture’, according to Miama, is why her voice has become, valuable and attracts her involvement in civic activities.

[They can reach out to me; those that try to get me involved in almost everything that they do or want to do; because, they’re always telling me... ‘look, we heard you calling this morning’ or ‘they read your text message on radio’. So, I know that people are following me on a daily basis. [...] Every time we talk about issues on talk shows, people listen; people in higher positions listen and hear our cries.... If you look, after some time, the President will fire this person for corruption or fraud. So, I think our voices are making impact, when I see the needed things that are needed to be done. (Miama, 32)

Miama has become a voice in society, a reference person, because she had been ‘let in’ to ‘the media space’, which activates her democratic citizenship and ‘civic participation’ (Coleman & Ross, 2010; Dahlgren, 2009). *Civic participation* here as a *democratic citizen* means Miama’s involvement in the democratic processes, advocating changes, and promoting good governance. This reality of her civic participation is manifested with results when she sees ‘the needed things’ being done.

The female line on the *Okay Morning Rush* means a lot to women’s participation and demonstrates of how ‘radio creates alternative spaces of opportunity, representation, and voice (Backhaus, 2019, p. 2). According to Clarence (45), host of the *Okay Morning Rush*, ‘male voices have always dominated the Liberian media and he wanted to give voices to women on his show’.

I opened an exclusive line for the females, not to stereotype them, not to disadvantage them, but to encourage them to be a part.... [I] opened the exclusive line for the women on the show...to give them voice.... (Clarence, 45, host of Okay Morning Rush)

Clarence is an adherent to Jempson's (2019) call that the missing voices should be encouraged to speak. Women's participation in the body polity of Liberia has always been historically low. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's unbelievably historic election as the country and Africa's female President in 2006 triggered women's participation in politics in Liberia and Africa in general. To give such participation a boost in Liberia, Sirleaf introduced the Gender Equity in Politics Act in 2010, and 12 years later, the bill, which seeks 30:70 percent representations of females and males in public offices, seems dead. Clarence argues that if the debates around such bill should resurrect and gain steam, 'the media has to play a social responsibility and public service roles' by creating a 'talking space' for women who have been backbenchers in politics.

Pauline is convinced that women's voices are attention-grabbing since they are not accustomed to being heard on talk shows in Liberia. In this way, she feels her voice is valuable among the dominant male voices in the mediated space

Everyone who follows the talk show do listen to me... I mean everyone, because, as long as they hear that voice, a female's voice, everyone will focus on what you want to say. [...] I speak for women, on women issues. When they see me some day, they appreciate me. Sometimes people say 'oh, this Pauline'; they say 'oh, yeah I listened to you the other day and you were talking gender equality, I mean it was good, keep it up'. So, I feel proud of myself, I mean it's good. (Pauline, 29)

One sees Miama and Pauline's involvement with talk shows in the term of what Backhaus (2019, p. 15), as discussed in the review, called 'meaningful participation' while the stations' allocation of a particular female line emancipates them from 'voice poverty' (Tacchi and Kiran, 2008). Here, it is not the debate about minimalist or maximalist participation (Carpentier 2016: p. 84) that matters in Miama and Pauline's lives. It is about the quality and effects of their participation – the turnabout against 'voice poverty' - a situation that denies groups access to mass media opportunities for participation and self-expression (Tacchi and Kiran, 2008; p. 31; Milak, 2012).

Okay FM, though a private entity, is aware that not giving people spaces to get heard undermines democratic participation to which 'the media are a prerequisite' (Dahlgren 2009; Coleman & Ross

2010). To engender inclusive and pluralistic participation, it does not only invite guests to discuss mixture of issues - though he admits that politics dominates talk shows in Liberia because that's what the people want. Clarence confirms the act of framing in his work as discussed in the literature review (McComb, 2011; Davie, 2011). He focuses on a particular phenomenon and makes sense of it by placing it within a web of meaning. In producing cultural texts (here, talk shows), producers do not work in isolation of the audience in mind (Hill, 2017; Davis, 2020). Clarence is aware that audiences can resist topics for discussions for not meeting their tastes, or reflecting the 'cultural resonance' within the context of their everyday lives (Hill, 2015; p. 757). In Liberia, politics is what grabs and drives all the people's opinions. And as 'a good talk show host [he has been] able to determine what the people want, and he frames the show to that.

So you're talking about...capacity building...? You're talking about pipe borne water? Your listenership will drop, but just bring in a representative, bring in a senator, or bring in a minister. Your listenership will go up because politics is what a lot of people like to listen to here. Politics is what grabs and driving all the opinions of the people. And because we know that in Liberia, most of the people love to listen to politics, most of our discussions daily are politically driven. However...there is evidence of instances where the Okay Morning Rush sometimes brings people from the private sector [and other backgrounds] to talk about different things in the government. (Clarence, 45, host of Okay Morning Rush)

It is such compulsion for inclusivity that drives Clarence to take the show out of the studio in the streets – a replica of the vox – to understand 'the storied life' of the ordinary people who would never easily come to the radio station or call the telephone lines (Gloria-Jean Masciarotte, 1991 in Gamson [2002, p. 195]).

Everybody is not able to come to Okay FM studio to sit there and talk. Everybody, however, may have very important issues to talk about. But, because, they do not have the opportunity, they are not coming; we're not hearing from them. So, we have to take the show to them to give them voice, too. (Clarence, 45, host of Okay Morning Rush)

What Clarence does here is vox pops - 'talks with ordinary people in public places' - one of the most prevalent representations of public opinion (Dahlgren, 1995, p. 62). They are about the audience and instill elements of democratic role in the media. Vox pops not just give audience access to the news, but give them opportunities to voice their opinions in their own words (Beckers,

2019). Though they are ‘more influential than other displays of public opinion’, they are neither ‘representative of the population’ nor do they account for inclusiveness in the actual term of the word (ibid, pp. 1-2). There would still be people excluded from talking in the street. However, one can argue that in the context of Liberia, where access to and participation in media is a challenge, taking the *Okay Morning Rush* out of the studio to those sellers and laypeople in the streets to talk on national issues can conceivably embody inclusion of the public and letting of the silent voices into the media discourse. This aspect of taking the talk shows to the people and letting their raw voices, and excited opinions into the media pulls admiration for Okay Morning Rush. Most informants claimed that Okay FM’s platform is ‘attractive’ to callers. They attribute this to the professional manner in which the host addresses callers with utmost respect and fairness, creating an ambiance of ‘harmony’ representative of ‘bringing the host closer to audiences’ as Wu & Lu (2018, p. 46) saw with talk shows in the US while making a comparison with China. It is this kind of atmosphere that magnetizes many people including Pauline and David and Elvis to the show:

What I admire a lot about them (Okay FM) is that they don’t cut you off. They will give you the time you will say whatever you want to say and, then, you will exhaust your time before they can take you off the line. So, I mean, they just allow people to speak their minds. (Pauline, 29)

When you call... to... give your point, whether dissenting opinion or not, you will be given the opportunity to do so. For me, when it comes to the grading of these talk shows...I give them a high scoring mark - the way they conduct the show and the way they handle callers through a merit system. (David, 34)

[Clarence] Jackson? He’s a great guy on the radio. I give it up to him; I give it up to him. Like quite recently, he has been taking the media to the people. He has been reaching out to the market sellers, yana boys, shoe shine boys and all these people to know how they see the problem of the country, how do they think that the government is working. (Elvin, 31)

Clarence indicated that creating an enabling environment for the people to get heard is fundamental to the show, whether they differ with him and the guests or not. ‘You have to provide the opportunity for people to even differ with you on your own show, because it strengthens our democracy’. Dahlgren (2009) has posited that in the current mediated world, much of people’s civic knowledge derives from the media and that ‘the media bear some responsibilities’ for

people's participation. He argues that 'good journalism must...engage us in the world it presents to us' (p. 82). Okay FM can seem to be involved with such call by Dahlgren, as Clarence implied during an interview:

That is the reason why you need to provide people the opportunity. [...] that is the reason why you want to bring different persons on the show at different times to talk about different issues but are of interest to the country. [...] We talk to everybody. We gave voice to everybody (Clarence, 45, host of Okay Morning Rush)

This thesis argues that *Okay Morning Rush* represents an embodiment of how the media create pathways to multiple and valuable voices in democratic societies – a feat of inclusivity that the bourgeois public sphere did not consider. It is not just about making the platform available that matters; it is making extra efforts to give access (Carpentier, 2016) for participation to everyone, including the most marginalized voices like the Yana Boys²⁵ in Liberia.

Involving marginalized voices like the Yana Boys and other street sellers to speak their perspectives on national politics seems to counter the 'police order' discussed in the literature review. The 'police order' imposes a frame around 'who can speak about what, the proper place of passion in public expression, and the extent to which topics are appropriate or out of bounds for common discourse' (Tolia-Kelly, 2019; Coleman 2012, p. 210). This scenario could mean that Yana Boys and cold-water sellers should not be speaking about national politics as they are outsiders, outcasts, and nominal when it comes to discourses on national politics.

This thesis strongly argues that when the *Okay Morning Rush* makes such class of people competent to speak on national issues, the show becomes a distinguished modern public sphere that addresses the deficit of inclusion in the bourgeoisie public sphere, and can be found to have created a pathway to pluralistic voices in public discourses. The thesis argues further that giving people space to speak their minds on public issues fosters their ability to think critically and intervene in the activities and occurrences that most affect their lives, communities, and country.

²⁵ Yana Boys are an embodiment of street peddlers in Liberia. Unemployed, they are a mixture of literate and illiterate young people who survive by trading petit pieces of stuff on the sidewalks of major streets in their everyday lives. Many often run after moving vehicles to serve passengers who call them over. In political and electoral seasons, they become essential targets of politicians and political parties and are often mentioned in political statements as a class of citizens.

This reality becomes an ‘implicit affirmation’ of people’s capacities for voice (Couldry, 2010, p. 103). Here, they don’t just have a voice, but as narrative beings, they have the chance of narrativizing that voice which features in the decisions they make in their everyday lives.

Dahlgren’s postulation of people becoming potential citizens via following the media serves as a pivot to the next theme. It discusses how people’s participation in talk shows constructs a feeling of identity.

3. Forming Identities Through Through Talk Shows

Arendt (2013) wrote that in ‘acting and speaking’, people show ‘who they are’ by actively revealing their ‘unique personal identities’ in their appearance to others (p. 179). Informants in this study are no exception to her deposition. Identity takes many forms and is not static, suggesting that it can be seen from contextual and situational perspective (Dahlgren, 2009; Anthias, 2013). Consequently, identity, as used here, is more *personal*. It derives from experiences of the informant’s participation in media discourses. As talk show participants, the informants’ identities were constructed around their participation in talk shows. It represents the informants’ subjective views and thoughts about ‘who they are’ or ‘who they think they are’ consequent of their *sayings* and *doings* when they participate in the *Okay Morning Rush* (Anthias, 2013, p. 6).

Identity in this sense matters as it goes beyond the inherited identities of citizenship or one’s sex or race to exemplifying how media users form identities out of what they consume from media texts in everyday life. Engaging in talk show discourses is a form of civic culture. Dahlgren (2009, p. 119) has argued that ‘identities can be seen as a centerpiece of civic culture’ and are ‘built on knowledge and values’, and ‘reinforced by trust’. These important ingredients underpin people’s participation in democratic discourses. Via this, they feel empowered as ‘political agent[s]... impacting their societies and forming memberships with others ‘to achieve a particular goal’ together (ibid, pp. 112-22).

As the data revealed, Informants tagged themselves with specific terms of identities based on their respective participatory experiences with the *Okay Morning Rush*. For example, terms like ‘moral

voices’, ‘coach’ ‘influencers’, and ‘stakeholders’ were among the identifiers most informants ascribed to themselves.

We see ourselves as that stakeholder in the various communitie... in Liberia as a whole ... People in the community...come to us and say, ‘my man I listened to you today; I think you talked about our road, can you talk about security tomorrow, can you talk about electricity, can you talk about water?’ So, they see you now as a face and voice to espouse those issues that affect the community. (Melvin, 35)

Melvin has taken on an identity of a ‘stakeholder’ based on the kind of essential interests of the community he pushes when he appears on talk shows. On these talk shows, he calls the government’s attention to pressing issues affecting the well-being of the community. As a stakeholder, he becomes an influential member of ‘groups without whose support the [community] would cease to exist’ (Freeman & Reed, 1983, p. 89). Melvin recalled how his sustained talk show and Facebook activism resulted in the government’s funding the completion of an abandoned high school construction project.

I was always on...the various talk shows engaging [the Finance Minister]. I was very persistent and I will go and [also] tag him in my [Facebook] posts.... I can tell you for free that the current national budget that has been passed by both houses of the National Legislature, ...the school has 100,000 United States Dollars to start the [completion of] the school. That alone brings so much pride, it brings dignity...and sense of belonging to me, that I that am a critical voice; that am speaking on critical issues that my community has benefited. (Melvin, 35)

Through his advocacies, Melvin’s identity becomes a ‘genuine stakeholder’, ‘critical voice’, and ‘face’ of his community. Now, people look up to him to speak on other issues affecting the community. When Melvin says, “*We see ourselves as that stakeholder*”, he is reflexively refereeing to himself and the collectiveness of talk show callers as a community of likeminded people’(like the Okay FM Fanclub). Most of those in the fan club are regular callers and texters on the *Okay Morning Rush*, and they see themselves as families with a sense of belongingness to the station and talk show culture. Here, the show has built an ‘explicitly community-minded group’ of the public sphere (Eliasoph, 1998, p.12). Thus, Elvis, sees it prestigious and feels like a ‘commander’ and a ‘great guy’:

It puts me in a commendable position; am a commander, it makes me feel like am a great guy. These are some of the ingredients and boost this participation has brought to us. (Elvis,31)

This kind of experience is ‘meaningful participation’ (Backhaus, 2019). Couldry (2010; p. 1) would add that ‘having a voice is never enough’ until a citizen like Elvis knows ‘that [his] voice matters’, which then makes it, an ‘effective voice [that] is crucial to the legitimacy of modern democracies’. While Elvis feels like a ‘commander’ as his identity, Pauline (29) sounds more heroic and confident when she describes herself ‘as one of the strongest females right now in Liberia, when it comes to mediated public discourses. ‘I consider myself as an experienced and strong female’. Her participation in talk shows has enabled her to possess a sense of self-confidence. In her ‘perceived self’, Pauline is ‘socially competent, emotionally mature [and] intellectually adequate...’ in her engagement with talk shows (Goel & Aggarwal, 2012, p. 89).

Pauline’s claim of being a ‘strong woman’ who does not ‘relent’ in letting her voice out on national issues is rooted in the fact that women’s participation in media conversations is wanting. Seeing herself recognized in the public sphere because of her voice among the dominant male voices is certainly heroic - an identity of a ‘strong woman’.

Talk show callers also get resisted by some segments of the listening public who impute on them condescending identities like ‘noisemakers’ and ‘unserious people’ as Miama (32) and Cheeseman (45) narrated. Informant Amos (42) is more tolerant of these descriptions and feels that it is the listeners’ democratic right to think the way they think and that it is part of democracy. However, Miama feels demeaned when they are branded as ‘less busy people’ rather than ‘advocates for justice’.

We are not less busy people: we are advocates; we are there to advocate for people who do not have the words to talk. We can’t give up...because the people we expect to be talking, they are not talking.... It’s very wrong or its very bad for somebody to say such.... We are not less busy people. (Miama, 32)

This argument confirms the contesting, controversial and emotional nature of talk show discussed elsewhere in the review of literature. Scholars like Liebes (1999) claimed talk show are sites of

(mere) arguments, conflict, and sense of chaos. However, Miama sees these criticisms as a distraction to deter talk show callers from playing the ‘valuable role we are playing in the country’. She agrees with Pauline to not ‘relent, no matter what happens’, in remaining vocal on issues of public concerns. Cheeseman (42) has similarly resolve of ‘not giving up because this is our country’.

One sees a trend of perseverance in the tones of Miama, Pauline, and Cheeseman of ‘not giving up’ in their participation in talk shows until, perhaps, they see change. They have developed willful political efficacies: they feel that their stance of talking on political issues do have/can have, an impact upon the political process (Campbell, Gurin & Miller, 1954, p. 187). As citizens, they believe that their ‘personal political advocacies can ‘influence public policy’, and they now feel more motivated to keep pushing until something desirable, a change happens (Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013, p. 295).

This thesis, thus, can argue that the *Okay Morning Rush* does not only create plurality of voices in Liberia, but also facilitates the construction of civic identities among audiences and give them a sense of civic obligation. They believe that they have a democratic obligation as ‘advocates of justice’, ‘stakeholders’, ‘voices of the people’ not just to exercise their rights to free speech, but their civic responsibilities to make their societies better. In their talk show-formed civic identities (‘advocates of justice’, ‘stakeholders’, ‘voices of the people’) it is found that audiences garner senses of unyielding political efficacies to stand for a purpose: to either maintain change, advocate for change, to support a change or demand a change.

Changes? The next theme explores the power in the voices of talk show audiences and how those voices effect *changes* thru public discourses.

4. Impacts and Values of Talk Shows On Governance in Liberia

Impacts and values, as used here, designate the outcomes derived from talk show conversations, such as the manifestations of participants’ desires and calls for change. It is about how people’s voices on talk show *pressure* public officials and the Government to make the right decisions for

the general good; how citizens, to some extent, are part and parcels of the decision-making processes in governance through their political efficacies. This value and impact confirm the *meaningful participation* that Backhaus (2019/2021) discusses.

Data analysis exhibited that most talk shows in Liberia are not flippant conversations and emotional noise-making sites. Of course, these *universal* attributes (Ilie, 2006; Gamson, 2002) undeniably exist, but in Liberia, talk shows are public sphere fora often branded by the public and media as ‘serious talk for serious people’ to accentuate their meaningfulness discourses about governance.

Informants were unanimous that talk shows have practical problem-solving effects despite the debates and contestations that erupt around some political topics. They contended, however, that these debates are democratically healthy, often compelling public officials to change courses of action.

For example, the US\$30,000²⁶ the Lawmakers were taking. Talk shows got that in the public sphere. The Lawmakers felt ashamed, and they were forced to cut it off from the budget.... It was discussed on Okay FM. The people were angry on the radio. The lawmakers... reversed it. So, for anyone to think that talk show is just noise-making, then you have to rethink. (Gaya, 50).

Gaya believes that the public would not have widely known about the ‘unacceptable corrupt practice’ had there not been talk shows to amplify it. Even if it had been commonly reported in the news, Gaya argues that only reporting the story would still have no impact in the absence of talk shows that facilitate public voices and reactions on such matters. He thinks that the environment has improved, and free press and speech have been enacted, giving citizens a ‘chance to talk in matters of governance’. He recalled that in pre-war Liberia (before the 1990s), such ‘unwholesome’ legislative action would not have been reversed. There was neither freedom of speech nor platforms like talk shows for people to let their views out on such critical topics. Then, ‘[the media knew they could] be subject to closure without due process of law for provoking the

²⁶ Members of the Liberian House of Representatives allotted US\$30, 000 to themselves, totaling US\$4m, while the country’s 5 million population live in adject poverty. When the information was busted by the media and became the hottest discussion on radio talk shows, the decision was reversed. More on their action can be read in an editorial published by FrontPage Africa, the country’s leading newspaper: *A Display of Arrogance, Greed, and Reckless Insensitivity*: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202107200217.html>

wrath of some authorities’ (Allen, 1990, p. 79) by reporting or discussing such issue. Today’s improved media environment, Gaya claimed, is ‘helping the people to help the government with the governance of the country’ through ‘their participation in talk shows’. Gaya’s analysis is embedded in Altschul’s (1984, p. 12) postulation that ‘[f]reedom of the government and freedom of the press prosper together or die together’. Altschul’s position is explained further by Dahlgren (2009), who has suggested that without the ‘involvement from its citizens’, democratic governance ‘may cease to function in a genuine way’ (p. 1). These positions encapsulate the relevance of freedom of the press – a fundamental cradle of democracy. This thesis can argue that the relative press freedom in Liberia has enabled Okay FM to play its Fourth Estate role in sustaining democracy by letting the people hold their government accountable.

Gaya thinks that ‘talk show will never lose its aspect in moving the nation forward’ in the new Liberian dispensation. Most informants believe in Gaya’s judgment about the impacts of talk shows in Liberia, ‘even if the impact...is difficult to quantify or make a conclusive impact’ (Ross, 2004, p. 798). In most instances, as Nyan (28) said, talk shows like *Okay Morning Rush* are public sites for citizens to announce protest actions against unfavored government policies, the rejection of ‘unqualified appointees’, and faulty political appointments.’ Often, talk show hosts and their callers question the Government’s decisions and pile pressure on reversing certain decisions.

There are many times the President takes decisions that are outside the tenets of democracy, that are outside the tenets of the rule of law, that are outside the tenets of good governance, but the media says, ‘hey, Mr. President, this is not the right way to go...[what you are] doing is wrong’. The President recalled an ambassador that he commissioned to [the United States]. It was because of the pressure from talks show and callers in the country. (Nyan, 32)

Several of the informants cited the recalling incident of Ambassador George Pattern²⁷ as one of the notable instances of talk show impacts that made the Government reverse a constitutionally

²⁷ In 2018, President George Manneh Weah appointed Mr. George Pattern as Ambassador of the Republic of Liberia to the United States of America while the Senate was on recess. Pattern did not face Senate scrutiny, but the President still commissioned and sent him to the US. The media, mainly Okay FM, picked the situation and made it a central talking point, inviting experts, including lawyers and former lawmakers, to speak on the matter. It received mass public condemnation, and the Senate had to recall the Ambassador after his letter of accreditation had already been accepted by US President Donald Trump. Talk show callers feel their voices contributed to pressuring the Senate, which they claim often bow to the Presidency. See a media publication here: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/i-was-implementing-the-presidents-mandate-controversial-liberia-envoy-to-us-tells-senate/>

flawed decision. Not only that. Amos, David, and Kollie reminisced how the ‘the court of public opinion’ went against Mr. Ndubuisi Nwabudike²⁸, a former chairperson at Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, who the President appointed to head the country’s election commission ahead of the 2023 general elections. In their respective accounts, the informants said the President’s close ties with Nwabudike and his nationality (Nigerian-Liberian) pushed the public to dig deeper into his personality and naturalization claims. He was discovered to be possessing fake naturalization documents, ending his public service life in the country.

Amos, Pauline, and Miama recalled when Cllr. Charles Gibson²⁹ faced mass public rejection after the President appointed him chairperson of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission. The Senate rejected his appointment after citizens (including victims) used talk shows to expose his reported ‘dark deeds’ and ‘excesses’ as a lawyer, which were not compactable with the ‘integrity position’ he had been appointed to.

Amos sees ‘power’ and value in the ‘court of public opinion, which is always good’ for fledgling democracies; it allows people to contribute to governance through their collective voices, aside from voting in elections.

The power of public opinion is very important. When people, when the citizens, after listening to both sides [of a situation presented by the talk show hosts], come up with a verdict. You know, public court; the court of public opinions is bad. It can even lead the Government, or the leader to do something (Amos, 42).

²⁸ Cllr. Nwabudike is a Nigerian who claimed to have naturalized himself as Liberian and served as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission chairperson. He is touted as a trusted friend of the President and practiced law in Liberia as a member of the National Bar Association. His reported fraudulent naturalization was discovered when President George Weah appointed him to Chair the country’s National Election ahead of the 2023 Presidential and Legislative elections. It was discovered that he was carrying fake naturalization documents, including passports with different birthdates. He was expelled from the Bar Association, and the public, through talk shows, pressured the President to prioritize national interest over friendship by dismissing Nwabudike from the LACC and recalling his nomination to the National Election Commission. That’s what happened. See the link to one of the many publications: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-embattled-liberia-anti-corruption-commission-chairman-cllr-nwabudike-reportedly-asked-to-resign/>

²⁹ The Senate rejected Cllr Gibson twice (two different positions) after information about his alleged corrupt practices surfaced in the media and became talking points on talk shows, following his appointments by the President. However, he was confirmed for the position of Labor Ministry in 2020 on “compromise” after appearing before the Senate for the third time, despite public outcries. See detail in the following publication: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-charles-gibson-breaks-confirmation-barrier-sails-through-as-minister-of-labor/>

Amos' use of *bad* to reference the *court of public opinion* is an irony of an exaggeration to describe the significance of the voices of the masses. The court of public opinion has been touted as the 'most important informal court' that constitutes opinions 'compatible' with the 'position of the people' and can be 'translated directly into decision' (Bryson & Crosby, 1993, pp. 186-187). This thesis can argue that if democratic governance is *for and about the people* and that the court of public opinion is *the voice of the people*; then, the court of public opinion can assume to have a (thin) link with *the Government's decision* – regardless of how weak said link maybe.

The scenarios of public rejection and the Government's reversal actions noted above confirm similar scenarios, as discussed in the literature review, in the U.S. (Turow et al., 1996) and Uganda (Mwesige, 2004), where citizens, through talk shows, used their voices to question their political leaders, staging actions to produce changes or reversed decisions. These scenarios suggest that talk shows are democratic in Liberia, as Gamson (2002, p. 194) has described. Here, the people's voice stands supreme, and the Government must listen; otherwise, democracy is threatened.

Informant Pauline (29) is convinced that this is the case, at some point in Liberia, because: *'Whenever the citizens speak, maybe criticize certain decisions [by] the executive, sometimes, they can just cancel it. Yeah, so it has been happening.* Concurring with Pauline, David (34) contributes:

The decisions that they [Government] take may not be the rightful decision. But, through talk show hosts, or through talk show flows and the court of public opinion... at the end of the day, Government will reverse and come up with new decisions based on the expressed opinions of the people.... So, yes, that has been happening.

Informants related many instances where they felt it was the voices of the masses, through talk shows, that prompted the Government to take immediate corrective actions or intervene in quick impact projects following appeals. Here, one confirms that radio talk shows in Liberia, while bringing confrontational forces and thoughts together, provide a participatory arena – the public sphere - via which 'the status quo is questioned and provided alternative approaches to ways in which public affairs are organized' (Hungbo, 2012, p. 46).

Meanwhile, the data showed that responses to the voices of the people were not always provoked by contestations. They can also result from appeals for intervention, such as the new road construction in Clara Town³⁰ and the construction of 10 housing units for victims of a fire disaster on Bushrod Island³¹. In these two instances, Nyan (28) and others used talk shows to remind the Government of its responsibility to construct a road in their community and respond to a disaster that claimed a life and left many homeless. The Government's responses to these appeals validate Nyan's claims about the impact of his voice and how talk shows amplify that voice.

My voice, when heard on talk shows, is important, especially on behalf of society and marginalized people who don't have the voice to speak for themselves. [...] talk shows take the information of the people and carry them to the higher ups and take the decisions the higher ups make and bring them down to the people. (Nyan, 28)

Melvin joins Nyan to see it as a 'pride' and 'honor' whenever responses come out of their calls on Government for actions.

We feel very proud; we feel honored, whenever we expound on a critical issue affecting our country and communities, and we see national Government coming in to engage those projects. (Melvin, 35)

Though Nyan and Melvin are elated about talk shows in this manner, it should be known that the court of public opinion does not always make the desired impacts. In most cases, these voices and views of callers do not have binding powers. It becomes the will and pleasure of the authorities to make the final decision either wholly or partly, now or later, or never. This is where, as discussed

³⁰ Nyan explained that in 2018, when the people in his community never had road, he advised that they take the situation to talk show platform. When they did, the Minister of Public Works *heard* their concerns and invited them for details. The minister communicated the situation to the President, who later visited the community and ordered the construction of a paved road. "So the [President] said that on Monday he would be in the community to do the mobilization. So, our voices are important; talk show is powerful. The radio is actually powerful to the extent that it goes across the length and breadth of our country. So, the President came to the community and made a proclamation that the road will be paved, and said if there is no money, those officials responsible will find the money and the road should be paved in 90 days. And in fact, what we were crying for, it went beyond what we wanted. And that what happened".

³¹ Nyan recollected how he attracted the attention of the Government, through the Minister of Finance, to the victims of a fire disaster that left them homeless. Being a popular and regular talk show caller, he phoned in during a talk show and talked about the fire disaster in his community, which claimed one life, and how the Government should come to the people's aid in Doe Community – a densely populated suburb of Monrovia. "The Minister of Finance stepped in and promised to build the burnt homes. *So, we are people of importance; when we get online, what we say on the radio, it goes across, it impacts society.* And today, the houses that were gutted by fire were replaced by 12 units. The houses gutted by fire were zinc shacks, but when they were building them, they were built with concrete. Even though somebody died there, but the people are happy that the Government built concrete houses for them. This would not have happened if we had not talked on Okay FM and other talk shows. Talk shows help us amplify things and for Government to act."

above, the *thinness* of the connection between the court of public opinion and the Government's decision thrives.

All of the informants in this research affirmed that they get responses and feedback on issues they raise about governance on talk shows, but in different ways. Some, including Melvin, Kollie, and Nyan, get private calls from public officials who make clarifications and give assurances to address issues they had raised. Nyan and others see immediate actions that push them to conclude that their advocacies have gone fruitful and their voices are being listened to, including by the President.

I can tell you for free, President [George Manneh] Weah...listens to that program; he hears our views, he acts on our views, he sees our views as an integral part of his [decision-making]. But, yet, at times, he doesn't listen to these views, at times he listens, at times he acts on our views; at times he listens, but doesn't act. (Melvin, 35)

Clarence, host of *Okay Morning Rush*, 'intentionally' introduced the *Talk To The President* segment to establish a direct link between the people and their leaders and pull the Government's attention to every citizen's voice. Clarence and all the informants believe that 'the President and kitchen cabinet listen to the show' as some call in to give updates or clarify some information.

I'm also convinced that the President listens to the segment.... By those calls [from government officials], I assume that the President even follow the show; by those calls, I assume that people in the Government, in the highest of power... follow the show.... These are people who take phones and call my personal number and say they want to [participate] on the show. (Clarence, 45, Host of Okay Morning Rush).

That particular show is not just ordinary show; the President can listen. That show, the Minister of State can follow that show, that I know for sure. So, making my inputs on that show makes me to feel so, so good. I feel good because I know the President can listen and can take some decisions on issues we are asking him to do, even when he can't take it now. (Miama, 32)

Here, talk show bridges the wide gap between the governors and the governed and brings them to a mediated discursive table to dialogue issues affecting governance and the country. One is tempted to connect this reality with Habermas' (1962) thesis of how the public sphere is a public forum where private citizens deliberate 'the needs of society with the state' (p. 176). In this way,

talk shows like *Okay Morning Rush* give a more prominent voice to ordinary people in the democratic space and ‘influence public discourse’ (Loeb, 2015).

While informants pointed out the optimistic role of talk shows in solving problems in Liberia, they remained wary of their potential to cause chaos, destabilize peace, and undermine democracy. Such concerns are underpinned by what the informants referenced as professional and ethical deficits among talk show hosts, compounded by political influences and ownership of media entities by politicians. Several of the informants, including Gaya, Elvis, and Pauline, felt that talk show hosts might harm the country unless standards are put in place. They often referenced the scenario of the Rwandan Genocide³².

When we go back in history, [we take note of] the Rwandan situation, the Rwandan genocide, where the radio influenced the people in a negative way, and we all... know the story. Most talk show hosts need training not to cause problem here... the radio have a greater impact on Liberian society. (Elvis, 31)

Elvis and other argued that talk shows hosts should promote healthy dialogues that strengthen unity and mutual coexistence among the 16 tribes of the country and the multiple political parties. ‘The way some of the talk show hosts introduce their topics’, according to Pauline (29), ‘brings tension, [when] they are the ones who supposed to provide the accurate news that citizens will rely on and remain stable or remain at peace.’

Informants are aware that divisiveness and misinformation that could cause chaos might not derive only from talk show hosts but also from callers on these shows. Here, as Clarence posited, the hosts' responsibility is to erect a checkpoint that prevents negative consequences. Clarence contends that the media in Rwanda (see *Sandström et al., 2015*) did not do well in 1994 and that history should teach every journalist how to avoid instigating violent conflicts through the media. At Okay FM, callers are brought to ‘check, in an event they take a chaotic route. ‘We can’t allow that here at Okay FM. If you sit there and allow it, you will get to instigating violence in the

³² The danger of radio broadcasts, especially in Africa, is often tied to the Rwanda Genocide of 1994, in which over 800 000 people were killed in one hundred days. A radio station, Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), is said to have broadcasted hate messages against the ethnic Hutus, preparing its listeners for the violence. Back then, the media in Rwanda was filled with hatred; RTLM aired propaganda and encouraged the killing by revealing where victims were hiding and giving reasons why they deserved to die. *See: Sandström, S., Looyenga, E. and Åslund, A., (2015) From hate media to great media?: Rwandan radio journalist’s view of the media climate in their country.*

Liberian society.’ Bringing callers to a ‘check’ suggests that the station has brought itself to check in the first place to protect democracy. Such an act confirms the concept of social responsibility of the media that Haladzhun (2017 in Romanyuk & Kovalenko [2019]) discusses. This would mean that the *contents* of talk shows ‘must fulfill certain obligations to the society’, which entails providing credible information ‘that meet high professional standards of...accuracy...and balance” (p. 70).

As mentioned in the literature review, open public discussions like talk shows which attract mass listening and participation, have helped societies solve critical national problems such as reducing ‘high fertility rate’ in India (Sen,1999, p. 11. These shows empower citizens, giving them a ‘sense of efficacy that they can intervene’ in governance in a ‘meaningful way and makes a difference’ (Dahlgren 2009, p. 94). From the above analysis, the Okay Morning Rush can be touted as a modern public sphere and a vehicle suited for reaching a compromise in public discourses and moving towards public consensus on general issues. In this way, governance, democracy, and society get better because a media institution like Okay FM has given a voice to the people to talk the talks of their thoughts – to let them out.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusion

Summing It Up

This thesis considered Corner's (2011, p. 87) advice of *assuming less and investigating more* to **explore** the experiences of radio talk show participants in Liberia, using the *Okay Morning Rush* of Okay FM as a case. It considered the theoretical and analytical scope of Habermas public sphere to understand the values and impacts of talk shows in the people's everyday lives tied around their participation in public discourses in Liberia. The Thesis construed talk show as a public sphere based on the definition of the terms as a democratic instrument and not the faulty practices that occasioned the original bourgeoisie public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Data analysis found and confirmed the show to be a modern public sphere that transcends the boundaries of elites and laypeople and brings anyone available in society to the public glare to get heard – a feat of inclusiveness that remains a deficit and limiting feature of the Habermas inspired public sphere. The four themes that evolved from the data analysis: experiences of talk show callers, creation of valuable and pluralistic voices, formation of identities, and felt impact and values of talk shows revealed how Okay FM gives voice to audiences in Liberia, why audiences participate in the show, and what experiences and democratic culture their participation produce.

Okay FM Giving Voice To Audiences

Participants in talk shows in Liberia are left with the enthusiasm that they have been given a chance to express themselves on issues of public concern in a way that those before them never had the

opportunity to do. While it is not safe to say that the media is free in Liberia³³, all informants claimed that they enjoy free speech, which formed the basis for their participation in the *Okay Morning Rush*. In Liberia, until the post-civil war era of the mid to late 2000s, the history of the media had never been kind to the audiences in terms of having their voices heard as it is today. This has been due to an unfriendly media environment that did not allow the media itself to speak freely (Spurk et al., 2010; Innez, 2002). Therefore, it has been implausible to think of this same threatened and asphyxiated media to open up the airwaves to citizens to speak their minds on national issues or criticize those in power – albeit their democratic rights. Thus, the press had always been a closed and micromanaged public sphere, characterized by censorship that gave voices only to the few political elites, leaving audiences starved of their democratic rights of free expression via radio.

The thesis found that several media attacks³⁴ still exist (CEMSP, 2021), even with the Kamara A. Kamara Press Freedom Act³⁵. However, it can be claimed that the public sphere enjoys considerable freedom from the draconian press laws that had long undermined press freedom and free speech. With such a veneer of freedom, radio stations like Okay FM can play a democratic role in giving voice to audiences, as the findings have shown. For a talk show to be participatory, the host must frame the reality of the discourse to interest audience participation. Framing the discussions to the interests that resonate with the audience is also not enough until an enabling environment (media freedom) provides access and motivates participation (Dahlgren 2009/2012; Jempson, 2019). The existing media environment allows Okay FM to draw audiences (inviting or going after them) to participate in the show, thereby giving them a voice to be heard – to be a part

³³ The US State Department's 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Liberia stated that individuals could generally criticize the government publicly or privately, but government officials used civil libel and slander laws to place limits on freedom of expression, and self-censorship was widespread. Although generally able to express a wide variety of views, some journalists practiced self-censorship to avoid harassment. Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views. According to the Press Union of Liberia, civil suits, or the threats thereof, relating to libel, slander, and defamation were sometimes used to curtail freedom of expression and intimidate the press. See Section 2: Respect for Civil Liberties: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/liberia>.

³⁴ The operating license of a new station, *Punch FM*, belonging to a critical Liberian journalist Patrick Honnah remained suspended by the Government since 2019. Patrick claims he met all the requirements under the law to operate and was poised to launch the station's operations when its license was reportedly seized. He has sought the intervention of the US Embassy near Monrovia, but that did not help. The Civil law court ruled for the station's license to be restored in 2020, but the Government filed an appeal to the Supreme Court: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/frontslider/punch-root-seek-united-states-governments-intervention-for-free-operation-of-their-radio-stations-in-liberia/>. Similarly, Roots FM of famous political commentator Henry P. Costa was shut down by the Government. Its equipment was seized for reported dissent and what some call his mass criticism of the Liberian Government. <https://www.africanstar.org/liberian-government-shuts-down-critical-voice-roots-fm-radio/>

³⁵ Kamara Abdullia Kamara was a Liberian journalist and staunch advocate of press freedom, free speech and social justice. President George Weah in 2018 signed into law the Kamara Abdullah Kamara Act of Press Freedom in his honor. The law decriminalizes free speech to create a more democratic environment for the media. Kamara was one of the brains in drafting the Act. The President named the Act in Kamara's honor for his work in "strengthening and actualizing Liberia's commitment to several international legal instruments such as passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 2010 and the Table Mountain Declaration in 2012. The TMD calls on African governments to abolish criminal defamation laws – a major threat to press freedom on the continent.

of the national discourse. This thesis can adjudge such feat as a deliberate effort in giving life to the dead voices, presence to absent voices, and dignity to marginalized voices in mediated discourses. It is a democratic media, bringing the absent or missing voices *to democratic participation*. *This thesis argues that* the media needs an enabling democratic environment to give citizens that golden opportunity to voice what affects them – to effectively participate in democratic exercises through exchanging views on national issues that appear in the public sphere.

Audience's Motivation To Participate In Okay Morning Rush

If the Habermas-inspired public sphere is espoused as that imaginary space between the government and the people for the sharing of information, exchanging of views, and agreeing to disagree on common national concerns, then a radio talk show like the *Okay Morning Rush* is a motivation in itself to engender audiences' participation in public deliberations. This thesis argues that audiences participate in the *Okay Morning Rush* because they believe that the platform elevates their voices, they will be heard, and actions will be taken about what they say. Some scholars (see Delli Carpini, 2000; Putnam, 2000) have alarmed elsewhere that audiences' interest in traditional news media and public political discourses (Eliasoph, 1998) was dwindling. However, informants in this research showed that it was otherwise for Liberia, where the thesis found people seem aflame to talk to get their voices heard. They see their participation as coming out in the public sphere where they and their voices can be seen and heard by everybody - a feat of publicity (Arendt, 1958).

Habermas would want to argue that the media getting everyone to come with their emotions and irrational talks to the national discourse contributed to undermining the rational critical debates of the bourgeoisie public sphere. However, agreeing with Fraser (1990), this thesis differs with Habermas, insisting that this plurality of competing voices created by the *Okay Morning Rush*, which gives room for different and thoughts, is a solid participatory democratic credential in modern societies. One would further argue of what essence is Habermas's rational critical discourse in the public sphere if discourses were restricted to a class of people – an influential group of middle-class and propertied men – whose function could amount to forming of class rule (Calhoun, 1992; Susen, 2011; Calhoun, 1992). This reality illustrates that only the ‘haves’ and

influential individuals, considered as the dominant publics in society, can form part of public sphere discourses, with no voice for the laypeople and have-nots. This thesis argues that such social structuring that erects barriers to equal participation undermines the meaning democracy in terms of inclusion and equality.

The *Okay Morning Rush* breaks the barrier of the theoretical 'police order' as in Rancière's *'Distribution of the Sensible'* by removing the frame around who can speak about what and inviting everyone to the public sphere to exchange ideas. This is an act of 'giving a voice to those excluded from the hierarchies of knowledge' (Ibid, p. xiii). In this way, Okay FM makes everyone, including the marginalized, *visible, audible*, and their views *sayable*. Informants said they were motivated to participate in public discussions because Okay FM breaks barriers, creates access, and invites everyone to the 'marketplace for exchange of ideas' (Graber, 2003) and gives them a chance to be heard.

Impacting Audiences And Democratic Culture

Bringing citizens to the mediated public sphere to speak, whether rationally or irrationally, gives them not only a voice but identities and power: a civic power to demand change in government with their voices (Eliasoph, 1998, p. 12; Dahlgren, 2009). It is a cultural kind of power that enables them to question, challenge, and debate the shared issues - the ability to become a different kind of person, create new meanings, and ask new questions' about the state of national affairs. It is, for example, that confidence and audacity that makes a talk show caller (like many in this research did) criticize less budgetary allocations for health and education and question a huge allotment for domestic travels. Such civic power is what Dahlgren nudges citizens to exercise as their 'democratic responsibility to become engaged and participate' (ibid, p. 81).

In their media participation, informants of this research shared their experiences of how such civic or cultural power has impacted their daily lives and the country. They are familiar voices of society, and the impact of their voices serves as the sources of their identities and strength to keep engaging. Based on media participation, they now have 'subjective perceptions of personal effectiveness' in politics - political efficaciousness, one of the fundamental building blocks of any democratic environment (Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013). Here, they have become 'democratic citizens'

by coming to ‘public life’ through their participation in media debates on collective national issues in the public sphere (Eliasoph, 1998). When the *Okay Morning Rush* gives voice to citizens to engage and participate in public talks, it impacts the democratic culture by boosting the democratic theme of participatory engagement. This thesis can argue that there seems no productive way that the media can tangibly impact democratic culture if it fails to let the people in to debate the shared issues. Okay FM provides that space for people to agree and disagree, make meaning, and construct individual and collective identities in Liberia.

A Point To Point Out

This thesis is limited in scope and breadth. Only 13 informants from one out of 163 radio stations in Liberia participated. The findings cannot represent the absolute reality in Liberia relative to audiences’ participation in and experiences with talk shows. Therefore, this thesis proposes a further comprehensive study with more participants and radio stations (commercial, public and religious) involved, preferably with the researcher on the ground, to consider the political, social, and cultural dynamics that underpin people’s media participation. Such research with diverse media and audience flavors would produce a more profound knowledge about the undercurrents of talk shows and audience participation in Liberia and the resulting impact on democracy. However, the findings are valid and contribute meaningfully ‘to our understanding of the world’ (Hart, 1998; p. 12), especially from the Liberian perspective. The findings add the *missing* Liberian context to extant global research on talk shows and audience participation. As the first of such audience research on Liberia, this thesis certainly fills a knowledge gap by bringing the Liberian talk show experience into the academic public sphere. These findings are promising, especially for Liberia, as they inform media and communication practitioners and democratic campaigners of the significance of giving the press an unhindered space to work, which provides citizens with a voice to contribute to the democratization of their society through talks that evoke civic actions. It is hoped the findings will be helpful to communicators and communication and journalism students in Liberia and elsewhere as a reference point for similar future research.

A Point To Punch In

As found in the analysis, the *Okay Morning Rush* host frames most of its topics around trending political issues because 'politics is what grabs and drives all the opinions of the people'. Besides one, all the 12 informants in this research are attracted to politics. While surveying which station has the most popular talk show in Liberia to be used as a case for this study, asked respondents 'what can you say about talk shows in Liberia?' at least 95% of them claimed that talk shows were all about politics. Informants later confirmed the reality. Clarence, therefore, uses his framing power within the scope of the audience's desire to talk politics. He dares not employ the *that's-what-we-have-for-you-take-it-or-leave-it* scenario wherein the media once served as a 'sphere of tutelage', that fed the inactive audience with whatever information it adjudged they needed and should want (Coleman & Ross, 2010, p. 32). He would lose his audience and, subsequently, the show's popularity. One sees the *soft power* of the audience, often the perceived majority, infiltrating the framing of the discussion points: '*politics is what' grabs and drives all the opinions of the people.'*

While prioritizing what the *majority* of the audience prefer is a semblance of 'democratic media' (see, for example, Gurevitch and Blumler, 1990), it also presents a potential threat of *exclusion* of the views and wishes of other members of the society who might not want politics, as Siah (61) noted in the analysis. Many people like Siah have something valuable to say in the democratic space, yet they never get the chance to express these desires and concerns in the public sphere. Eliasoph (1998) raised the problem that people do not get involved with 'spirited conversations' and consequently neglect the 'opportunity for free speech' to be heard (p. 22). If the public-spirited conversations are almost always about politics, apolitical like Siah would not be heard. When Dahlgren said the concept of 'voice' operates both within and beyond politics (ibid, p. 5), he referred to informants like Miama who would want gender-based violence and rape incidents discussed to attract her voice. One argues that many voices are *missing in the public sphere due to the way media frame discussions to suit the majority. And so what?*

An unfettered media environment and more accessible, friendly, and inclusive paths for audience participation in the mediated public sphere are suggested. This would require the media

deliberately encourage and invite (not passively) audiences through diversified programming)not just politics) to participate in media discourses. Only then could there exist a more democratic mediated public sphere where the media can give more inclusive voices to the masses, as Okay FM tries to minimally do in Liberia by encouraging women to speak and getting in the streets and communities to give voices for the marginalized. This thesis can conclude that million more people would never be heard beyond their earshot until the media like Okay FM invite, encourage and give them the microphone. Like that, the world could hear many people saying, '*I Said It On The Radio,*' rather than '*I Heard It On The Radio*' like Kamara's late grandmother.

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APPENDICES

App-1

DATABASE OF CONFIRMED INTERVIEWEES*

*Note: All the names in this research, except Clarence, are censored to protect identities of informants

SN	NAME	AGE	SEX	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	INTERVIEW DATE/TIME
1	Amos	42	M	MA	Administrator	02-18-22 @ 11a.m.
2	Elvis	31	M	BA	Sociology	02-19-22 @ 4 p.m.
3	Melvin	35	M	BSc	Economist	02-19-22 @ 12 p.m.
4	Pauline	29	F	BA	Procurement	02-25-22 @ 5 p.m.
5	Kollie	42	M	BA	Educator	02-19-22 @ 2:30 p.m.
6	David	34	M	BA	Paralegal Practitioner	02-20-22 @ 6 p.m.
7	Nyan	28	M	BA	Public Administrator	02-25-22 @ 3 p.m.
8	Miama	32	F	BA	Human Rights Officer	02-25-22 @ 1 p.m.
9	Siah	61	F	BA	Law Enforcer	02-24-22 @3 p.m.
10	Gaya	50	M	PhD	Professor/Author	02-25-22 @ 7 p.m.
11	Nico	35	M	BA	Media Practitioner	02-19- 22 @ 11a.m.
12	Cheeseman	45	M	BA	Political Activist	02-18-22 @ 1 p.m.
13	Clarence	45	M		Station Manager, Okay FM, Host, Okay Morning Rush	03-10-22 @ 2 p.m.

App-2

Consent Form

Dear Friend/ (Sir/Madam),

My name is Danicius Kaihenneh Sengbeh, a Liberian media practitioner studying Media and Communication at Lund University in Sweden.

I wish to invite you to voluntarily participate in my research on *Media Audiences and Participation* in Liberia, focusing on radio talk shows. My research is in fulfillment of a Master's degree in Media and Communication Studies at Lund University in Sweden. The study intends to analyze the experiences of Liberian audience members (like you) in terms of the impacts and values of radio talk shows in their everyday lives. I have chosen Okay FM (Okay Morning Rush) for the project, and by signing up, you agree that you follow Okay FM and participate in the *Okay Morning Rush* Talk shows.

Meanwhile, you are not obligated to participate in the research by signing up. You have the right to withdraw at any time before or during the interview. You can refuse to answer any question during the interview or call the entire interview to a halt. The interview will be conducted online (preferably via Zoom, Google Meet, or WhatsApp) and will last at least 30 minutes (details and help using the online platforms will be provided). Your participation will be entirely anonymous; all information, including your names and locations, will be ethically doctored to avoid any trace of your identity. Information about your age, occupation, and education will be used for statistical purposes, but they won't identify you either. The information you provide will be used exclusively for my thesis at Lund University. Only my Supervisor and examiners will have access to the data for verification and evaluation purposes. So, feel free to participate and express yourself heartedly during the interview.

Kindly fill out the following google form for documentation and planning purposes. Filling it out represents your informed consent to participate in the research and all that applies as stated above.

Name _____

Date _____

(See below for the structure of google form)

App-3

Online Consent Form

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Questions Responses 16 Settings

Interviewee Consent Form

Dear Friend/ (Sir/Madam),

I am researching Media and Audience participation in Liberia, focusing on radio talk shows. As my Master's Thesis at Lund University in Sweden, the research intends to analyze the experiences of Liberian audience members (like you) in terms of the impacts and values of radio talk shows in their everyday life.

I have chosen Okay FM (Okay Morning Rush) for the project. By signing up, you AGREE to VOLUNTARILY PARTICIPATE and CONFIRM that you follow Okay FM and participate in Okay Morning Rush Talk shows. I will interview you to understand your participation in the talk show and what it means for you as an individual. The interview will be conducted online (preferably by Zoom, via Google Meet, or WhatsApp) and will last at least 30 minutes (details will be provided). Your participation will be entirely anonymous. All information, including your names and locations, will not be identified to avoid any trace of you. So, feel free to participate and express yourself heartedly during the interview. Kindly fill out the form below to confirm your CONSENT and for documentation and planning purposes.

Filling out the form, providing your telephone number, and writing your name at the end is sufficient to constitute your INFORMED CONSENT to take part in the research. This means you agree that every piece of information (aside from your identity) you provide to the researcher should be used for the research purpose and shared with thesis supervisors and professors of the Media and Communication Department of Lund University. The outcome will also be published on the university's website. You can withdraw from the exercise anytime and refuse to answer any questions during the interview without prior notice.

Thanks for your participation.

1. Name *

Short answer text

2. Age *

Short answer text

3. Sex *

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Other...

4. Profession *

App-4

Interview Guide 1 Audience Version

SN	FOCUS AREA	QUESTION	Time Frame
1.	<p>Introduction</p> <p><i>This segment is about knowing the interviewee and their general knowledge about talk shows</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could you kindly introduce yourself, that is, who are you? 2. What knowledge do you have about radio talk shows in Liberia? 3. What do you think about the many talk shows in Liberia today? 	3 min
2.	<p>PARTICIPATION</p> <p><i>This segment explores the interviewee's participation in (engagement with) talk shows. It probes the motivating factors and the mode of participation – maximal, Minimal, Meaningful</i></p>	<p>(Participation) Habits</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your participation habits with talk shows? 2. What do you look for when you listen/participate in a talk show? 3. What do you most like about participating in Okay FM Talk Shows? 4. What kind of topics/issues are presented/discussed most on Okay FM? 5. How do these topics affect your participation in the talk show? 6. Explain how you think the host handles the show. 	10 min
3	<p>Experience</p> <p><i>This segment excavates the interviewees' experiences with talk shows. It explores how they are given voices – the feeling and emotions that come from/along with using those voices in the public sphere from their private spheres</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe for me your personal experience with Radio Talk shows? 2. Tell me about your first experience calling and talking on a talk show? 3. What has been your best experience since your first talk show call? 4. How does it feel to call and get that opportunity to speak on the radio? 	25 min

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. When you call on talk shows, for whom do you speak? 6. How do you think your voice is valuable to be heard? 7. Who do you think is listening to your voice when you speak on talk shows? 8. What do you think people make of what you say each time you call and speak? 9. Do you think your voice makes any impact? Tell me something about this. 10. Tell me about the level of freedom you experience when you express yourself during a radio talk show? 11. What has been your worst experience? 	
4	<p>IMPACT</p> <p><i>This segment focuses on the impacts and values of talk shows in the general context of enabling democratic participation - a potential attribute of discourses in the public sphere. It looks at the necessity of talks shows and their relevance to the societies - democracy.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about talk shows and democracy? 2. Is there any role of talk shows in solving problems in Liberia? 3. Kindly explain or state a moment where discussions on Okay FM or other stations led to changes/reversal of specific public policy, pronouncements, or government decisions? 4. What do you think is the overall importance of talk shows in Liberia? 5. Finally, how can you summarize everything we have discussed around talk shows? 	12 min

App-5

Interview Guide - 2 Host Version

SN	FOCUS AREA	QUESTION	Time Frame
1.	<p>Introduction</p> <p><i>This segment is about knowing the interviewee and their general knowledge about talk shows</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could you kindly introduce yourself, that is, who are you? 2. As a popular talk show host, What can you say a talk show is in simple terms? 3. What do you think about the many talk shows in Liberia today? 4. What led you to hosting talk show? 5. How do you see yourself as a talk show host? – a mediator? 6. How do you think people/the public consider you? 	3 min
2.	<p>Framing The Show</p> <p><i>This segment explores the host frames the topics and talk show's discussions. Researchers claim that talk show hosts drive their discussions and the public to proceed with their framed cases.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain to me the reason Okay FM runs the Okay Morning Rush 2. Explain to me step-by-step how you decide your topics for the talk shows? 3. What are the main topics your talk shows cover at Okay FM? 4. What informs your decision to treat these topics? 5. There are always some interests behind talk shows like yours. Which interest(s) do you push? 6. How does it affect the commercial agenda of your station – a commercial entity 	20 min
3	<p>Audience Participation (voice)</p> <p><i>This segment unmasks how the host encourages participants of the show and how callers and guests are treated during the show.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You want people to call and participate on your shows. Explain more to me. 2. Who do you choose to give more voice to on your talk show? 3. You have a particular line for female callers. Tell me how this came about? 4. How do you treat the comments/questions from your callers? 5. You seem sometimes to cut off some callers on your show. What justifies that? 	20 min

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. You could be controlling them in expressing themselves freely. What do you think? 7. What motivates the segment Talk To The President every Thursday on your show? 8. How do you know that the people's voices are reaching the President? 	
4	<p>IMPACT</p> <p><i>This segment focuses on the impacts and values of talk shows in the general context of enabling democratic participation – a potential attribute of discourses in the public sphere. It looks at the necessity of talks shows and their relevance to the state.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about talk shows and democracy? 2. What role can talk shows play in solving problems in Liberia? 3. Kindly explain or state a moment where discussions on Okay FM led to changes/reversal of specific public policy, pronouncements, or government decisions? 4. What do you think is the overall importance of talk shows in Liberia? 5. Finally, as a talk show host, how can you summarize all of what we have discussed about talk show? 	10 min

App-6

Sample Interviewee Transcript

Interviewee: Melvin (Censored)
Age: 35
Date: February 19, 2022
Profession: Economist
Status: Employed
Education: BA
Medium: Google Meet
Time: 40:37 minutes
Interviewer : Danicius Kaihenneh Sengbeh

Researcher in Bold) and Interviewee I light text

Thank you so much for showing up for this interview. I know you already read and signed the consent form, when you fill in the google form to participate in this research. You are aware about everything related to this interview and my thesis project. However, because there is no hard copy to show that you signed the form of consent, which a mandated in our university's research process. So, I would like to get a verbal response from you and I need your authorization to begin recording.

Yes, you can go ahead to record, I thought that is why I am here. I already read that thing; I don't think you need to read it again. I already agreed.

Okay, thanks. Yes, I agree, but I will just summarize it for the record. I have started the recording. With all the others being said, your participation in this research about my Master's Thesis at Lund University will be entirely anonymous. That is to say that all information, including your names and locations, will not be disclosed to revealed any trace of your identity. Information about your age, occupation, and education that you have already provided will be used for information purposes, but in a way that nobody will know it is you. The information you provide will be used exclusively for my thesis at Lund University. Only my Supervisor and examiners will have access to the data for verification and evaluation purposes. So, feel free to participate and express yourself heartedly during the interview. So, if you have understood everything about the thesis and ready to participate just say 'yes'.

Yes, Mr. Sengbeh, I am ready to participate I have a clear cut understanding of what we are doing here about your thesis. I am ready.

Without much I do, could you kindly introduce yourself?

Well I'm Melvin [real identity censored], a resident of [censored] and a former student, University of Liberia where I graduated with Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics, a teacher, a philanthropist, an academician, a talkshow participator, and a family man. So that's just about me and am delighted being in this studio.

So, what is your knowledge about talk show in Liberia?

Well, I have been engaged into talkshow since 2008, actively participating in the various talk shows in the country, we have had our imprints, our marks on the media landscape in Liberia for participating on the various talk shows; so, we have a clear cut understanding when it comes to talk shows in our country, because we have participated fully, our marks are written all over this place.

And what do you think about the many talk shows in Liberia today, unlike the past?

Well, like I always told people, and many of my colleagues, that talk shows now and then, they are encouraging, they provide the platform which we express our views as it relates to critical national issues; it provides the space where in we call from our various communities, various districts and townships, telling national government how we feel about issues unfolding in our country; but yet, we at times perceive it the other way, but I think it provides us the space that our views can be aired.

Tell me about your participation habit in talk shows.

Well, like we have always said, this is a frank discussion; we should express ourselves the way and fashion which we see it. We as participants on the various talkshows, we have always had this kind of perception that talk show hosts are, many at times, engaged into what we called, favoritism. That is, they provide topics, they provide views, they provide us what we call, how do I term it, how we call, I mean as it relates to the land scape, they provide us that space, because they must have some vested interest we perceive it that way, and have some interest in topic that they provide for us. So, many at times we call and go contrary to their views and aspirations. At times we go the other way around, that's how we see it; because, we don't care about the talk show host's feelings, we don't care about how he feels about us, but yes we were to provide our views as it relates to the topic provided, whether it is in their interests or not, our views should be aired.

Your views should be aired, how often do you get involved with it?

We do it almost often, because we see it as a way of life, we see it as a national endeavor, because we believe it strongly that the national government listens; we believe that national leaders listen. We believed that everyone in this country listens, so we see it as a medium in which our views are aired that in which our people listen to us - our views are well taken into consideration when it comes to national priority and national development.

What do you look for when you participate in talk show - what do you look out for?

Precisely, we participate in talkshows whenever we see our national interest at stake, our national leaders are under attack; so, we go for talk shows with the intent that have an interest in those topics that are being discussed. We go there to provide the necessary redress, the necessary clarity as it relates to our interest. Talkshow is about interest whether its national or personal. But, it's about interest; the larger state is our interest, is well on course. As long as we tune into the various radio talk show, if I don't have any interest, I will obviously tune out and tune into another radio station where I believe my interests are safe whether national or personal.

Interest? I don't know what you mean by interest.

Well, we are political beings, we are politicians, emerging politicians; while it is true we are all academicians, but we have our leaders, we have our communities that are faced with difficulties, our national interest is also faced with difficulties; we see that as a medium through which our views can be aired so that the national government gives us the needed attention, needed priority in making sure that our national needs are taken care of. When it comes to our political interest, we have our political leaders, we are under obligation to protect our leaders; so, as long as our political leaders, national leaders from our political parties are under attack, its incumbent upon us, you know, as media engagers, to go through in providing necessary clarification to those various talk shows that have been aired.

What do you like about participating in Okay FM Talk Show – The *Okay Morning Rush*?

Well, it provides for us a medium through which our views are aired, it creates a space where our family members, well-wishers, friends and sympathizers, whether local or internationally, listen to us and appreciate our engagements, and look on to us. Our various communities - to be able to raised critical issues that affecting the community, our brothers in the diaspora, our sisters in the diaspora, those who are very busy look up to us.

At times, they give us critical views for us to be able to be heard. So, we see ourselves as that stakeholder in the various communities, in our various districts, in Liberia as a whole in making sure that national government listens to us, when it comes to our wellbeing, when it comes to peace and development, when it comes to security and what have you.

What is it about Okay FM?

Well, Okay FM is a unique platform, Okay FM offers the space for us to be able to air our views. Okay FM provides a perfect platform, regardless of our status in society, regardless of political affiliations, regardless of religious affiliation; it gives us a clear cut space in expatiating on critical national issues. So for us, we see the presenters on Okay FM as national leaders; for them, they discuss critical national issues void of interest. While it is true we perceive them to have interest, that is a national thing, that is a humanistic feeling that we always have as long as it comes to this kind of endeavors. So, at times we see them that way, but by and large, we see them as clear cut guys who are willing to provide the national platform in making sure that our views are heard, regardless of their own political interests, regardless of our own views, the way we treat them, but yet, they still provide us the platform in making sure our views are espoused.

What kind of topic or issue are presented and discussed most on Okay FM?

Well, it is mostly political, because we are usually engaged into political activities; Okay FM knows that whenever you want to have political views, you must go political. As long as the talk show or topic is political, you will have all of the critical voices calling in providing all of the necessary information as it relates to our community and districts. We believe in national discussion, political discussion, developmental discussion, national security issues that are brought to us and our heads is raising for us in making sure that we provide our views to national government.

How these topics do attract your participation?

Well, it is it is so hitched on the presenter. As long as I perceive on the presenter's presentation void of biases, it encourages me to go through and participate, but as long as I see the presenter's presentation to be somehow lopsided, it doesn't encourage me to go and participate. So, I love a level playing field, I love a talk show that is void of biases, I love a talk show that's provides everyone the interest to express our views. We look up to the presenter; as long as the presenter is seen as someone who is balanced, it encourages us to go through and provide our views on critical national issues.

So, how do you think Okay FM handles these issues you're talking about?

Well because it provides us the platform, regardless of our utterances, just that we shouldn't be abusive, we should speak to national leaders, we shouldn't just, we should be very decorous in expressing our views. As long as you are very respectful, Okay FM gives you the platform to express your views - do it in the terms and conditions that conforms to the platform of Okay FM. So, usually, we are given the time, given the space to express our views, but we should be very respectful in expressing our views to national stakeholders and national leaders.

Kindly describe for me your personal experience with talk shows.

Well, like I've always told many of my colleagues, well-wishers, sympathizers, I have always told them, my personal experience when it comes to talk shows engagement. For us, as regular participants, we have always seen our presenters as though as they are not in our interests, or always seen them to be at the other level. That is, as long as the topic is not in my interest, I perceive you to, like, you're on the other side. But, as long as the topic is in my interest, I will call and say, 'oh, my man, today you have done well, *kpakuu* you are strong; *kpakuu*,

you hit the topic; kpakuu, this is what I expected you to have done'. But when I know it's not in my interest, I will call you after the show. I'll say 'my man you have done this, you have crossed on the other side; my man you have done that, you are no more independent', because that day, the show was not presented in my interest. As long as it is not presented in my interest, I will always see you as on the other side. But, by and large, I think those guys are doing well, but yet we have those kinds of perceptual issue about them, because that humanistic interest, that's how we feel okay; so, we will always have those views and perceptions about them.

Can you tell me about your first experience participating in talk show?

That was an awesome moment, a moment that still brings a lot of memory to me, a moment that I will never forget about, because it brought me to the lamb light, it brought me to prominence: that is, after I left calling on that show that fateful day, I remembered, it was on Fabric Radio. I received barrage of calls from family members and from friends. 'Oh, my man Melvin, we listened to you; we listened to your views; I think you were more responsive'. They really appreciated me, the way in which I presented on the show. I think it is a national platform to even expose ourselves; it is a national pride when family members, by and near, those who are in the diaspora, to listen to us and appreciate us. So, I think it is unique platform, people in the community people come to us and say my man I listened to you today, I think you talked about our road. Can you talk about security tomorrow? Can you talk about electricity, can you talk about water? So, they see you now as a face to expose those issues that affect the community. So my first experience brought lot of good memories to me and today I can still feel very good and that's what encouraged me and today am still engaged into radio talk show in expounding my views for national interest and the community.

What has been your best experience on talk show?

Well, like I always told people, we will continue to engage national stakeholders and national leaders, we feel very proud, we feel honored, whenever we expound on a critical issue affecting our country and community and we see national government coming in to engage those projects. Like I always told people, it is a regular routine for us to as talk show callers, we always go for our interests, all of us talk show callers, we always go for our interests. As long as something affects our community, as along as something affect my country, I will always go and bring out those issues. As long as national government listens to me, and national government comes in and makes sure that those issues are taken care of, it brings proud, it brings honor, it brings so much dignity to me as a talk show caller.

So, when you call on a talk show, for whom do you talk?

I talk for my country, most especially, Liberia, which is our common denominator; Liberia surpasses each and every one of us, regardless of political views, regardless of our political leaders; Liberia should be our paramount concern, regardless of where we stand. So, whenever we call, while it is true, we always go through to protect our national leaders, our stakeholders, but Liberia should be paramount. My interventions on various radio talk shows, precisely Okay FM, I think it should be about my country Liberia. I think Liberia deserves better: 170 plus years, Liberia deserves better. So, all of our participation is been wholly and surely in making sure that our country should transcend from where it is currently to a higher height, because Liberia has come a long way and Liberia should be among the comity of nations in the world.

How do you feel that your voice is valuable to be heard?

Well, it brings a common sense of belonging, it brings those special feelings because, normally, radio talk show presenters look out to you, like I have always said, they want you to be very respectful, very decorous; they don't want you to use profanity, profane languages, on their various platform. As long as you are doing that, as long as you create the space for, because you might create the space for yourself. Because radio talk show presenters,

they can read our minds. As long as you call, they already know where you are going. But, let's do it responsibly, let's do it in the faction and matter they themselves their platforms will be sanitized. Because as long you will start to used profane language on their platform, they will cut you off. Because the platform, you have people, national and internationally listening to these platforms. So I think the platform should be sanitized by us as talkshow callers; so, they're always looking up to us in making sure that we provide our views void of profanity.

And how does that determine the value of your voice?

My voice has always been valued. Whenever we called on radio talkshow, we have our family members, we have our friends, we have our community dwellers; they all listen to us and they appreciate our participation, because it pays, okay, as a young man coming up, whenever I take on national platform expressing my views and then when people see development, when people say, oh yes, Melvin talked about the road today, and we see the road fixed; so, it brings a special pride to me, it makes my voice valuable, I believe strongly that national leaders are listening to me, national leaders are giving us the deserved attention you know that we can go and freely in making sure that the national development comes to us, so that is the clear cut understanding that when we call, we believe that national leaders are listening to us. After the show, even some of them, will even call and say oh my man, we listening to you, we listened to your view, we think national government is working, national government is taking that as a priority, but in the soonest possible time, you will get redress. So that alone, we believe that they are listening to us and our voices are being aired in the manner and fashion that brings pride and dignity.

Talk about the freedom, you experience when you appeared on talk show.

For that, I will always like to tell people it is a very difficult thing, most especially in our current establishment, a very difficult thing to call on national platform and express your view freely. Many at times, we have zealot people who believe that we have a popular regime, we have a popular establishment; so, you cannot just express yourself anyhow. We are at high risk, we many at times, we received anonymous calls from some people; the way you express yourself today, we will come after you; we will do this to you, we will do that to you. I mean, we have been threatened, but regardless of that, we believe that we have a national stake in our country. We have a national stake in our communities, we have a national stake to our districts. Regardless of that, we see it as a way of life, regardless of all of the threats, all of the utterances, anonymous people, we still see that as a way in expressing ourselves, regardless of everything we go through on a daily basis; but, I can tell you, it is a risky task and a risky venture; we are committed in doing it because we believe that our country needs us.

What you think about talk show and democracy?

Talk show coincides with democracy because talkshow provides for us a clear cut platform wherein we can express ourselves democratically. Because without talk show, now and then, our views will not be heard, national government wouldn't listen to us. Its democratic or political platform provided for us; so, talk show is a medium through which, we express ourselves because talk show is hinged on democracy, because without talk show, we will not be able to speak to national government, we will not be able to express our views to the various communities, to our various a-tayee shops, the various intellectual forums, those are medium through which our views are aired. Talk shows and democracy, they are inter-linked; the two must go together, because without talk shows, your views will not be heard for national government to listen to you. Because we believe strongly that national government listens to us, they have people who are listening to us, we have stakeholders and national leaders who listen to us. So, we believe through the talk shows they listened to us, it provides clear cut pathway for democracy.

So, what kind of role do you think specifically talk show can play in solving problems in Liberia?

Talk show serves as the fulcrum, talk show serve as a break and makes situation - that is, talk show can plunge this entire country into chaos; talkshows can make this country to be a better country; because, it depends on the presenters. As long as our various talk shows, those presenters, are presenting in the faction and manner, that calls for national security, it calls for peace and development, things will be okay. But I can tell you that talk show has the ability to destabilized this country. Because as long as the presenter sits on his platform to instigate riot, decide to instigate unwarranted national security issues, I can tell you for sure, most especially when that talk show has a well listened to platform, it can cause serious national instability in our country. That can create a serious instability where in the country will go halter-scattered.

Would you like to explain to me a situation wherein a talk show discussion in Liberia led to government changing a decision or a policy?

Well, that is a clear cut thing. We have experienced that whether locally or, you know, to national government level. When I say locally, I mean our representatives or our national government. We have always had those experiences; so, we believe strongly that those things work. I have had lot of experiences from talk shows, when it comes to impacting my communities, when it comes to impacting my country. Like I always told people, we our former representative initiated several projects in [address censored to protect identity] Public School. Since this government took over, national government did not see that as a priority, but we as residents of District #2, precisely [address censored to protect identity], we saw that as a national priority. Because our district does not have a high school, a government high school, unless in Johnsonville, where you have a junior high school. So, some of us believe that this is a district priority, a national interest, so should take on national government in making sure that this national interest is prioritized. So, I took on the current finance minister. I was always on Facebook, the various talk shows engaging him, you know, that I think that the public school should be elevated, the Jacob's Town public school four years now, this school is still lying to roof level. The school has been built, but then for you guys to zinc it and take it to another level, you guys cannot do anything. I took him on and I was very persistent and I will go and tagged him in my post; I will engage him, I can tell you for free that the current national budget that has been passed by both houses of the National Legislature, the [address censored to protect identity], public school has 100,000 United States dollars to start the project of the [address censored to protect identity], public school. That alone brings so much pride, it brings dignity, it brings that sense of belonging to me that I believe that am a critical voice that am speaking on critical issues that my community, you know have benefited. Also on the issue of electricity. We spoke on the issue of electricity and I can tell you today our Lawmaker listened to us, my community has electricity. While it is true for now, it is not very proactive like it used to be, but I think we have done that. Even our roads, we talk to national government, national government will come that's why last year I singlehandedly took the mantle of authority in my community and I singlehandedly brought national government attention in making sure that my road was done. So those are key areas, those are key issues that we always aired and we believe national government will listen to us in making sure that those projects are done. As long as it is done, our local leaders in our communities will come to us and appreciate us and tell us thank you for the role that we have played in making sure that those projects are done.

One would want to understand how sure are you it is because people talked on talk shows that is the reason why these things are done. What makes you to believe that it is the results of the shows.

Well, it is obvious. Many at time in these talk shows we are called by national leaders, we are called by opinion leaders, whenever we drop the lines on various talk shows. Many at times they try to sway you even to join them, but, again, you have national interest okay!. So, it is regular thing; that's not hidden facts that national leaders will always call you, even if you go you write on facebook, there are some national leaders who know you personally and will go in to your inbox and say, 'my man, you have to slow down. This is national government, we are working, we are doing this'. So, we believe that they listen to us. As a matter of fact, they will call me

and tell me that they listen to me, listen to what I expressed; they believe strongly that at this time they, will be able to undertake this project; so, that is a clear cut understanding that we are listened to whenever we call on various radio talk show.

So, what do you think is the overall importance of talkshow in our democracy of Liberia?

Well, talk show and democracy as it related to Liberia, they are very unique to us, most especially we as talkshow callers. Talk shows provide for us the platform where in our views are expressed, it provides for us a medium where in national leaders listened to us, national leaders come in and provide for us those necessary things that we think our district and our communities need; it also provides for us a clear cut understanding and democracy. Our constitution, Article 15, talks about freedom of speech, but should be fully responsible for the abuse there of. This is why some of us understand the terrain whenever we go on national platform, we are aware, that we have freedom of speech, but we should also be aware that what we say democratically, we should be responsible for it. Whenever we go on these various platforms, we have a clearer understanding that, this is it. This is democracy, this is talkshow, whatever you say, you will be held responsible. I can tell you I have been threatened on many times to be taken to court because of my view been expressed, that's democracy, that's legal. I mean those are some of the things I will even screenshot and sent it to you because we have been trying but yet we believe that it is normal. You want carry me to court, carry me to court; but as long as it comes to national interest, as it comes to my community interest, as long it comes to my district interest, go carry me to court, but my view should be expressed regardless of threats, regardless of every other thing.

Talk to the President is a segment on Okay Morning Rush that comes on Thursday. What is your experience with that?

I can tell you for free, President Weah, the current president of the Republic of Liberia, he listens to that program; he hears our views, he acts on our views, he sees our views, as an integral part of his daily routine. While it is true at times he gets very stubborn because there are lots of time on that show we will raise issues that are affecting our country, we will express ourselves on national leaders wherein we believe those national leaders are not complementing his efforts in making sure that national development, national priorities are met. But, yet, at times, he doesn't listen to these views; at times he listens, at times he acts on our views; at times he listens ,but doesn't. But, regardless of that, we still believe that we have a national agenda for our country and that we keep exposing ourselves in making our views are heard.

How do you know that the President has acted on your views just by calling on talk show?

As long as I raised a critical issue affecting my community, affecting my country, you know, and those issues are acted upon. It brings a sense of belonging that, yes, national government is listening okay! Because, at times, when you express yourself continuously and those things are not happening and, then, you continue to engage national government, and those things are happening, you know that, yes, people are listening to you. People will even call you and say 'my man we're listening to you, but government is faced with lot of challenges, we have this in our national plan, we believe that this time it will be implemented', and when that time comes and you see those things being implemented, that alone, it brings pride, it brings, so much honor to you as a talk show caller.

What has been your worst experience participating in talk show, or as a talk show participant?

Well for that, I will express myself here void of biases. To call on talk show it is a very risky venture, it puts your life into harms ways, it threatens your stability, it threatens your livelihood; because, I mean it is just a difficult thing to do. Let me tell you this, whenever you leave talk shows, people feel obligated to national government, people feel obligated to national leaders, people feel that you are against national leader, people

feel that you have step on their toes; people will come after you, people will chase after you, people will even go to the extent of knowing your house; you will even come to your own house and people will tell you say ‘oh my man, certain people came here, they asked for you’. So, there are threats upon our lives, there people scouting after us on a daily basis, but, again, we must go ahead with our national engagements.

Finally, how can you summarize everything we’ve discussed - I mean, your experience with talk shows, having an opportunity to call on the talk show – about talk shows in Liberia, generally?

Well it is unique experience for regardless of the threats, regardless of the humiliation, regardless of the ups and downs. Talk shows in democracy provide for us a clear cut understanding of our country, because whenever you listen to talk shows you get firsthand information, you get acquainted with things that are unfolding in the country. It provides for us the space wherein our views are heard, it provides for us the space wherein national issues are raised, it provides for us the space wherein we talk about national development, peace and security; it provides for us a clear cut environment wherein our views are really heard on all of the issues that are affecting our country. So, talk shows, I mean, had it not been for talk shows, I can tell you, I don’t know how our existence was going to be, because it is a medium through which we believe stakeholders and national leaders listen to us. So, without talk shows I don’t believe that our existence for us as regular participants, I don’t believe our existence was going to be very unique to us. So, talk show is unique way; I really appreciate it and I believe I will always participate, once am always breathing .

Thank you ever so much! Except if you have any other thing to say.

I appreciate you; I tell you thank you for your national endeavor, I tell you thank you for your national engagement to our country. It is unique thing for all of us to put our ideas together in making sure that we transform our country. So we see people like you, who have been through it all making sure that you bring nation platform to us in expressing in our views, it brings a clear cut sense of belonging to us. Thank you, may God bless you and continue to guide you in making sure that your works are done in promoting our beloved country, Liberia.

THANK YOU, for the invaluable time and rich information.

App -7

Screenshot of Coding Scheme – for host

MASTER'S THESIS - 2022

Home Create Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View Search

MASTER'S THESIS - 2022

DATA

- Files
- File Classifications
- Externals

CODES

- Nodes

CASES

NOTES

SEARCH

- Queries
- Query Results
- Node Matrices
- Sets

MAPS

CLARENCE

THEME 1 - AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES IN CALLING AND PARTICIPATING IN TALK SHOWS

THEME 2 - CREATING VALUABLE & PLURALISTIC VOICES

THEME 3 - FORMING IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY THROUGH OKAY MORNING RUSH

THEME 4 - IMPACTS AND VALUES OF TALK SHOW TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN LIBERIA

THEME 5 - OTHERS

Journalists & Journalism Challenged

Motivation for Participation

Coding Density

Framing The Show

You want people to call in the morning to participate on your show. Explain that to me.

Well, you know, we are in a democracy. So, you come on the show in the morning for three hours and you sit with your guest and you talk and talk and talk. And you do not provide other Liberians the opportunity to talk? Mind you, on some occasions, some of the callers are experts. And they come in with an expert perspective, and that is the reason why you need to provide people the opportunity. And that is the reason why when we're discussing particular expert issues, say, for example, when we discussing legal matters, you hear me say I open one specific line for lawyers; because, those are the issues, those are the people who are the experts in the law, who will talk about all the legal issues and give the legal analysis. So, it's a good thing to also, hear from the people, how they feel about the country, how they feel about the issues we are discussing. Because, as a journalist, providing public service, you don't want to create the impression that everything you say is right and everything you say is law and gospel. No. You have to provide the opportunity for people to even differ with you on your own show. That strengthen our democracy.

Who do you choose to give voice to on your show?

Well, we talk to everybody. We gave voice to everybody but, you know, in Liberia, Liberia is is a kind of different country, and I'm not gonna pretend, I'm not gonna pretend on this one. I'm not gonna pretend on this one because this is an interview and I like to be, I like to be truthful to myself. You know, most of the talk shows in Liberia are politically driven. What do I mean by that? People, the listeners prefer politics and political topics. The issues about the number of rice farms, the weather, and the agriculture farms people are making all around the place, and the NGOs that are coming, nobody wants to listen to that as compared to when you have a Senator Dillon on the radio, for example. So you're talking about, you're talking about capacity building training, you're talking about pipe borne water, your listenership will drop, but just bring in a representative, bring in a senator, or bring in a minister; your listenership will go up because politics is what a lot of people like to listen to here. Politics is what grabs and driving all the opinions of the people. And as a good talk show host, you should be able to determine what the people want to listen to most and what they want to listen to

DATA > Files > INTERVIEWS > CLARENCE

1 item selected

App-8

Screenshot of Coding Scheme – Callers

The screenshot displays the NVivo 12 software interface. The top menu bar includes 'NVivo 12', 'File', 'Edit', 'Create', 'Data', 'Analyze', 'Query', 'Explore', 'Layout', 'View', 'Window', and 'Help'. The main window title is 'MASTER'S THESIS - 2022'. The left sidebar contains a navigation pane with categories: DATA (Files, File Classifications, Externals), CODES (Nodes), CASES, NOTES, SEARCH (Queries, Query Results, Node Matrices, Sets), and MAPS. The 'Nodes' category is selected, showing a list of themes: THEME 1 - AUDIENCE E..., THEME 2 - CREATING V..., THEME 3 - FORMING ID..., THEME 4 - IMPACTS A..., and THEME 5 - OTHERS. The main content area displays a text document titled 'MIAMA' with several paragraphs of text. The text is highlighted in yellow, indicating it has been coded. The highlighted text includes the following sections:

OK FM has a special line dedicated for female callers? What does it mean to you? How important is it to you?

It means a lot, so much to me, because we are talking about woman's participation; whether in the house or anywhere, we want gender equality. For a station to have special line for female callers is something that we can't describe; I don't know how to put it, but I think they did their best; because one of the biggest things a station can do is to allow female voices to be heard on the radio and not only men.

Tell me about your first experience calling and talking on a radio talk show

So, I think my first experience was on POWER FM. And so I fought hard to get through and made my points and when I got through, to be frank, everything I wanted to say, I lost all and when I dropped the line I was just blaming myself like 'what have you done, what a disgrace', but I motivated myself to keep trying. I said 'I know I can make it; I can't be perfect, but at least my point must be heard; my voice will be heard'.

How does it feel to call and get that opportunity on the radio to talk?

It feels good; it feels like you have gotten everything in world; it feels like you have been released from your stress. You know, fighting to get online among men, among so many persons and then luckily for you, you got through, and then your voice is heard, it makes you to feel like, maybe, you're President or you something. And everybody will be like 'oh, I heard you talking on radio'; 'I heard you', they will be saying when you're passing, and that makes you more proud [laughs]; it is useful.

So what has been your best experience really calling on the radio?

I think my best experience calling on the radio, it makes me popular, right? And so that name Miama is the name people know, and will be calling you when you walk on Broad Street because they are hearing your voice on the radio; it just makes you popular; makes your name to a household name that everywhere you go people know you.

How do you fell about that; that you are popular?

I fell so good; people try to get you involved with everything, when it comes to politics here; they try to get you involved. You know it's hard to be a female among them; people always reaching out to you, to get your views on things; yes, it makes you feel good.

When you call on the talk show and speak, for whom are you speaking?

Am speaking for so many people; one is the public, I speak for the public; I speak for my family, I speak for where I work, I speak for my friends and so I speak for the public.

The bottom status bar shows '1 item selected' and the breadcrumb path: 'DATA > Files > INTERVIEWS > MIAMA'.

App-9

Excerpt of CODEBOOK

Themes/Nodes

Name	Description	Files	References
THEME 1 - <i>AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES IN CALLING AND PARTICIPATING IN TALK SHOWS</i>	This theme focuses on the unique experiences of Liberian talk show participants, which underscores the importance of talk shows in their daily lives and how they cope with the challenge of being connected to speak their minds, and what they make of the feeling accrued from calling and expressing themselves on national issues. It outlines the various reasons why audience members are engaged with talk shows in the Liberian context and how the regular callers are 'addicted' to calling, making them moral voices.	13	356
Challenges & Disappointments of Callers	This node references how talk show callers often experience challenges connecting to make their points. This is based on technological issues, including the number of other callers on the line and how some of them know that some talk show hosts deliberately reject their calls because of their controversial views. They feel emotionally disappointed for not being able to get through to make their points.	8	31
Connected to Talk Show	This references interviewees' intense engagement with and participation in talk shows. It defines their emotional attachments to the genre and how they are always involved with it on many stations day after day.	8	26
Experiencing Freedom of speech & expression	This references all comments and admissions that address and relate to Freedom of speech and expression - where the media is free to operate, and citizens are freely expressing their views without fear and favor – whether against the government or oppositions leaders	11	32
Feelings and emotions of calling	References all emotional experiences and feelings of calling on a talk show, especially having the opportunity to speak for the first time, and what happens after that.	12	51
Motivation for Participation	References all comments of identity traced only to politics, where interviewees refer to themselves, for example, 'political animals,' 'political activists,' or 'partisans' of a particular political party.	13	192
Contestation & Contrasting Views	This references where the interviewees speak of clashing and contrasting views and opinions related to talking shows - which support Freedom of speech and democratic tenets.	5	16
Defending Interests	References all comments that border on talk show callers defending their parties or political interests	6	34

Name	Description	Files	References
National & Public Interest	References all comments that border on the country's interest - comments in which interviewees directly or indirectly mention the country's interest. Besides politics, it further borders on the interest of the communities and districts	6	24
Exchange of Views	This is about how talk shows enable exchanging views on national concerns among callers and the public	13	40
Questioning & Criticizing Govt	This references all comments or statements that criticize and or question the government's action, bordering on negative impacts on the public	11	25
Talking To The President	This borders on callers' experience with Okay FM's Talk Show's segment named "Talk To The President" during which citizens have the exclusive opportunity to express their views about and to the presidency. During this segment, everything thing said is strictly for the presidency.	9	22
Tactics of calling & Participating	This node addresses techniques talk show callers employ to get connected and succeed in expressing their views and getting to be admired, known, and becoming influencers. It represents how talk show calling/participation is more than ordinary; it is an art.	5	24
THEME <i>CREATING VALUABLE PLURALISTIC VOICES</i>	2- This theme encapsulates how the Okay Morning Rush empowers citizens by giving them a voice to speak out their minds on national issues and how their voices become valuable assets in society when they (talk show callers) become voices of the voiceless, activists/advocates, and moral voices for change in their communities and country at large. Here their voices are valuable because they get responses to their calls and criticism from the government and contribute to change	13	166
Giving Voice to People	This node references how talk show, Okay FM in particular, gives VOICE to audiences to contribute to national discourses to contribute to national discourses	13	53
Inclusion and Diversity	This represents how Okay FM strives to give voices to everyone by introducing programs and initiatives that alps to speak	1	10
Proffering Recommendation	This node represents how callers on talk shows make recommendations towards solving national problems, regardless of whether these proffered suggestions are considered.	4	7
Speaking and voicing for OTHERS	This is a collection of comments of who talk show callers feel they speak for when they call on shows. It includes how they speak for themselves, societies and other interests.	9	13

App-10

Consent and Authorization by Okay FM Station Manager

Note of Authorization

Yahoo/Inbox



Latifah Kpah <latifahkpah172@gmail.com>

To: D. Kaihenneh Sengbeh

Tue, May 10 at 7:57 PM

Danicius Sengbeh,
Greetings and hope all is well.

Thanks ever so much for reaching out to us as part of efforts to enable us participate in your research work. I am officially giving you the go ahead, to use the Interview you did with us to justify your work.

I am also authorizing you to use both my name and identity in your research.

Congratulations in advance, and we look forward to seeing you return home anytime soon.

With compliments of our highest esteem, we remain.

P. Clarence Jackson
Station Manager
OK FM 99.5 MHZ
Monrovia, Liberia
--
null



App-11

Online Survey for selection of Okay FM as a case to study

Talkshow Survey

Dear Friend (Sir/Madam),

I am trying to do a small study on the impact of Radio Talk Shows on the Liberian media. I want to investigate the experiences of audience members in terms of the effects and values on national and democratic discourses in the Liberian context. I will narrow it down to one or two as a case study. Therefore, I plea with you to kindly use a minute of your precious time to answer the below survey question to help me decide how to start the process. If a particular station has more than one talk show that you consider best, you are welcome to list them. It is totally anonymous and for study purposes only!

Thanks so very kindly for your valuable time.

What are the three best talkshows currently in Liberia, and which stations host them? *

Long answer text



Talk show Survey 2

Dear Sir/Madam:

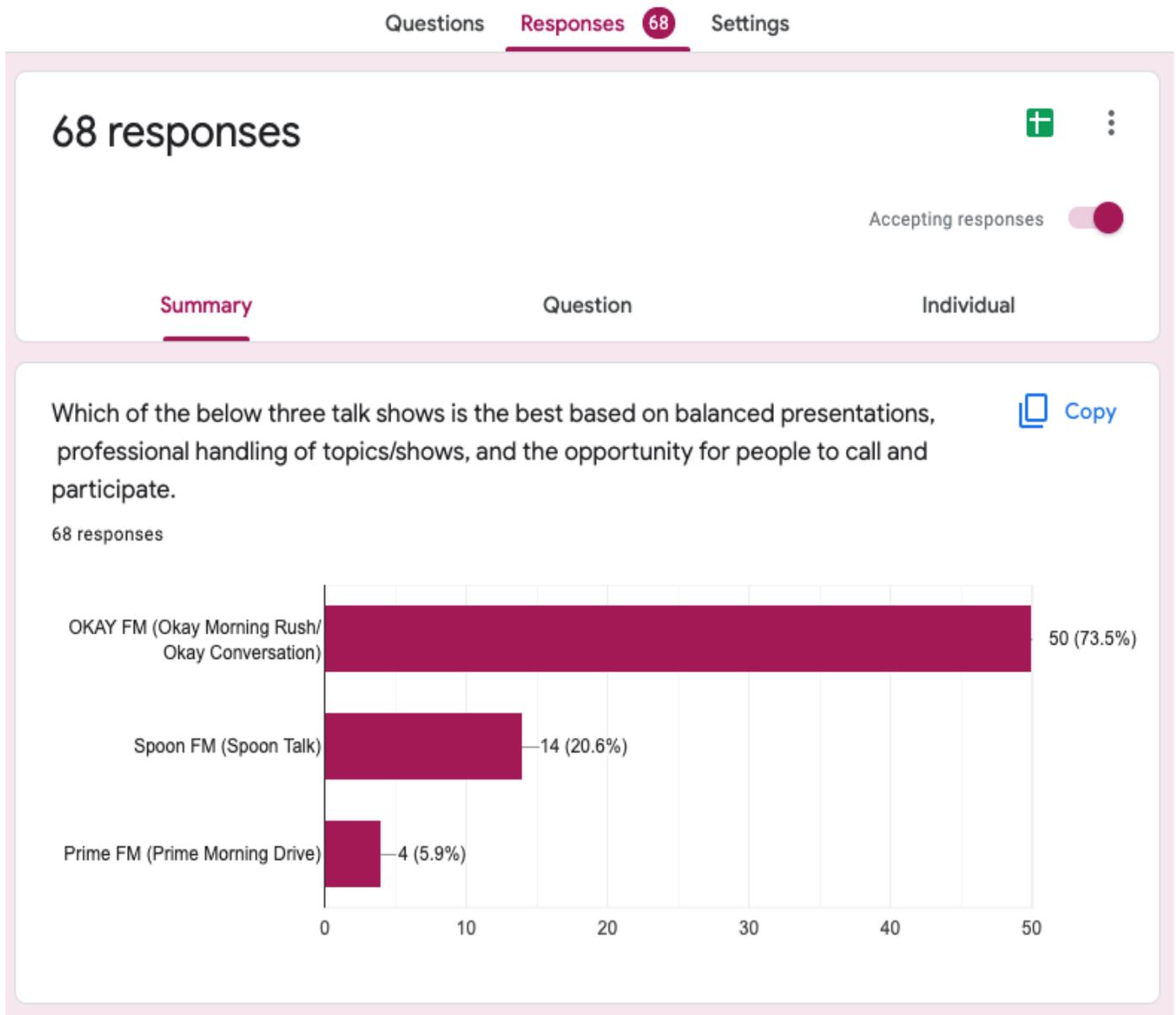
In November, I conducted an online survey (using this same method) to identify Monrovia's most popular talk shows. Three stations listed below were identified. This second survey narrows down to just one. Kindly select one of the three based on balanced presentations, professional handling of topics/shows, and the opportunity for people to call and participate in these talk shows. All information about you will be strictly confidential. However, you can also decide not to write your name in the below form, but other information is required for statistical purposes. I vow that the information you provide is exclusively for my academic work, and nobody else, and for nothing else. Thanks a million for your valuable help!

Which of the below three talk shows is the best based on balanced presentations, professional handling of topics/shows, and the opportunity for people to call and participate. *

- OKAY FM (Okay Morning Rush/Okay Conversation)
- Spoon FM (Spoon Talk)
- Prime FM (Prime Morning Drive)

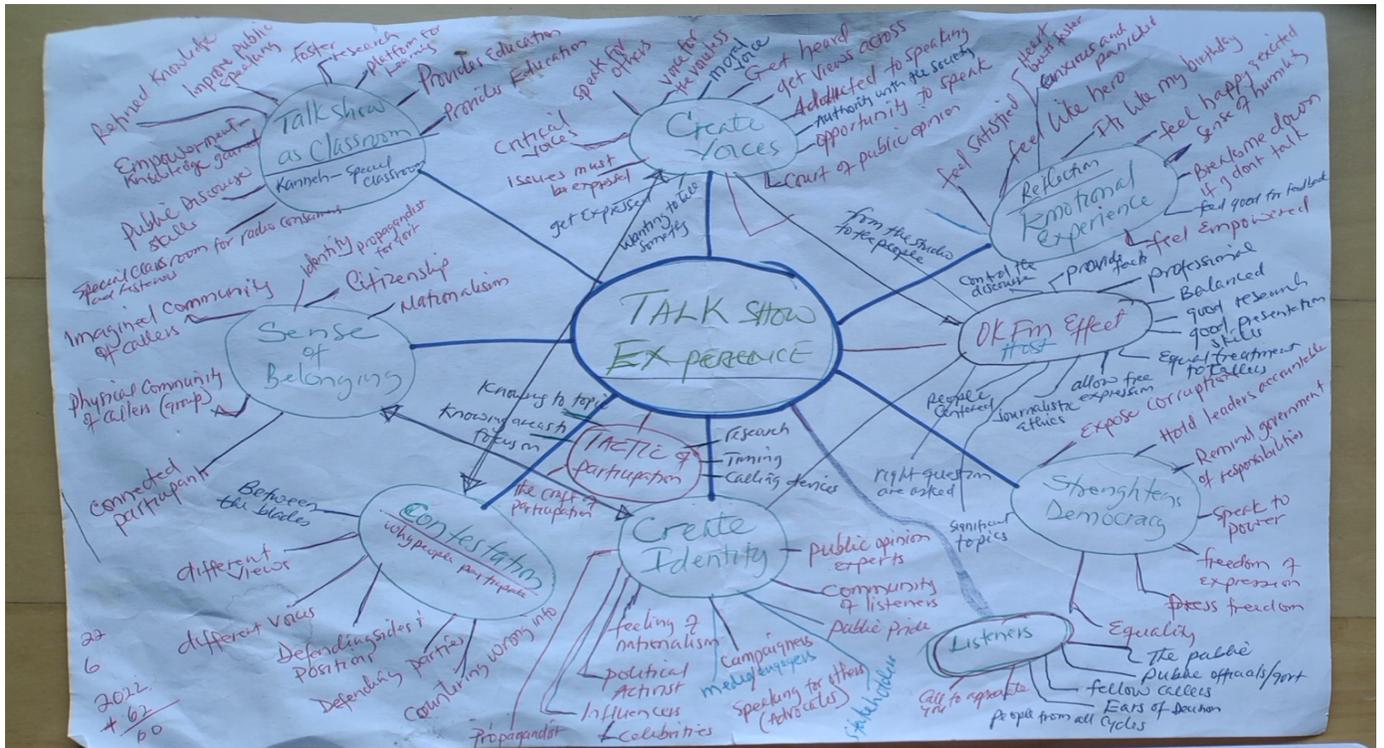
App-12

Responses justifying the selection of Okay FM as a case for the study



App-13

Familiarization with data –from interviews and transcription



- Spends on the public
- Codes** 12:12 U.S.J.V.O.M
1. Feel part of the Society
 2. I get a voice, make my point
 3. Working for others - ^{positive impact} _{positive impact}
 4. Feel accomplished
 5. Talkshow solves problem (not empty talk)
 6. Make the leaders know the wrong doing (exposing ill)
 7. Like talkshow, like Democracy
 8. Protesting interest - ^{particular} _{personal}
 9. Critical voices - pure critical issues/needs
 10. Praising show in this interest
 11. Face of community
 12. Sense of belonging
 13. Feel threatened - Zeelants - army mas calls
 14. Employ tactics to survive - it'sh locals, que
 15. Talkshow time - (scanned) - Regulate the
 16. Get educated / Follow the news / Classroom
 17. Talkshow participating
 18. We are Secondary Voice in Society
 19. Strategy to doing a debate
 20. Calling experience
 - AN Enabler of Public Development
 21. Help me educate myself - ^{Research} _{Technical skills} ^{Public speaking} _{listen to expert}
 22. Speak for Liberty
 23. Public Trust in Talkshow Callers
 24. Political Activist -
 25. Talkshow calling a career.
 26. It's a writer - Pan club (P.M.) Peace
 27. Makes me feel like an a commander a big guy
 28. Meaningful participation
 29. Solving problem
 30. Integrity matters -
 31. Rescue the parody (talkshow)
 32. Medium of Animation / contestation
 33. Host Respectful / Professional than other
 34. Building community - Virtual
 35. Build a community
 36. Tactic of calling
 - critique against themselves - a teacher
 32. Moral Voice - as authority in society
 34. We are Active participants
 35. Talkshow Premier for getting info in Liberty
 36. Contestation - different views - Abol

App-14

*Nodes and references**

NODES	FILES	REFERENCES
Adicted to Talk show	9	28
Belongingness	8	21
Building Community	4	11
Callers Challenge and Disappointment	8	15
Contestation and contrasting Views	6	18
Court of Public Opinions	4	8
Defending Part's Interests	5	11
Enhancing Democracy	11	39
Exchange of Views	12	38
Feelings and Emotion of Calling	12	52
Framing And Hosting The Show	1	16
Freedom of Speech and Expression/Press	11	29
Giving Voice to People	12	39
Identity formation	10	40
Impact and Values of Talk Shows	12	59
Inclusiveness ans Diversity	1	10
Information Dessimation	12	54
Journalist/Host (Limitations)	10	50
Multiple Topics treated	12	39
National And Public Interests	6	20
Okay FM Engagement	12	58

This is an excerpt of the nodes from the coding. **Files accounts for the number of interviewees connected to a particular node, and **References** represents the numbers of time across the entire data.*

The nodes from above are analytically color coded, with nodes of similar ideas structured under one umbrella (Themes) to facilitate further understanding and analysis of the data as done on the next page which constitutes refinement of the themes.

NODES

- Adicted to Talk show
 - Attacks and Threats on Callers
 - Callers Challenge and Disappointment
 - Contestation and contrasting Views
 - Defending Part's Interests
 - Exchange of Views
 - Feelings and Emotion of Calling
 - Freedom of Speech and Expression/Press
 - Journalist/Host (Limitations)
 - Reason for Participating in talk show
 - Political Inteference and Manipulation
 - Politics Dominates The Talk Shows
 - Tactic for Calling and Participating
 - Talking to The President
-
- Framing And Hosting The Show
 - Multiple Topics treated
 - Okay FM Engagement
 - Okay FM Disengagement
-
- Court of Public Opinions
 - Enhancing Democracy
 - Impact and Values of Talk Shows
 - Information Dessimination
 - National And Public Interests
 - Platform for Education
 - Prominent and Powerful Medium
 - Questioning and Criticizing Government
-
- Belongingness
 - Building Community
 - Identy formation
 - Political Identity and Being
-
- Giving Voice to People
 - Inclusiveness ans Diversity
 - Proffering Recommendations
 - Speaking and Voicing for Others
 - The Value of Voices

THEMES

Audience Experiences In Calling And Participating In Talk Shows

Callers's Engagement with Okay FM's Okay Morning Rush

Impacts and Values of Talkshows

Establishment of Identities and Belongingness

Creating Valuable Voices for National Discourses

Refining The Themes

THEMES



Several modifications are made from the previous page/stage in refining the themes on this page.

For example, in the first theme, the node *Reason For Calling* is now represented as **Motivation for Participation** which incorporates several other nodes including: *Exchange of Views*, *Defending Interests* (National & Party), *Questioning and Criticizing Government* (merged with *Contestation and Contrasting Views*), and *Talking To The President*. *Callers' Challenge and Disappointments*, and *Attacks and Threats on Callers* are merged to form a new node: **Challenges and Disappointment of Callers** as an "experience". Other nodes such as *Political Interference & Manipulation* and *Journalists/Host Limitation* are removed from this theme. In the second theme, two nodes - *Inclusiveness and Diversity* and *Proffering Recommendations* - initially part of this theme were deleted as they did not seem fit to stand for discussion. *Inclusiveness and Diversity* node is embedded in **Giving Voice To People**. In the third theme, the node of *Freedom of Speech* is merged with *Enhancing Democracy* to form **Fostering Democratic Practices**. The nodes of *Information Dissemination*, *Platform for Education* and *Prominent & Powerful Medium* are combined to form **Platform for Information and Education**. Meanwhile, *Impacts and Values of Talk Show* is merged with *Court of Public Opinions* to form the **Power of Court of Public Opinions**. In the Forth Theme, *Okay FM Engagement* is renamed as **Engagement with Okay FM Morning Rush**, while *Building Community* is revised as **Building Caller's Community**. *Forming Identities* brings together all the other forms of identities including *Political Identities and Being*. So, the themes of Caller's engagements with Okay Morning Rush and Establishment of Identities and

Refined and Final Themes

<p>Feelings and Emotion of Calling Motivation for Participation Adiction to Talk show Challenges and Disappointments</p>	<p>Audience Experiences In Calling And Participating In Talk Shows In Liberia</p>
<p>Giving Voice to People Speaking and Voicing for Others The Value of Voices</p>	<p>Talk Show As Pathway To Creating Valuable And Pluralistic Voices for National Discourses</p>
<p>Fostering Democratic Practices Power of The Court of Public Opinions Platform for Information and Education</p>	<p>Impacts and Values of Talkshows In Democratic Governance</p>
<p>Forming Identities & Belongingness Building Callers' Community Engagement with Okay Morning Rush</p>	<p>Forming Identities Through Okay Morning Rush</p>

Audience Experiences In Calling And Participating In Talk Shows In Liberia: *This theme focuses on the unique experiences of Liberian talk show participants, which underscores the importance of talk shows in their daily lives and how they cope with the challenge of being connected to speak their minds*

Talk Show As Pathway To Creating Valuable And Pluralistic Voices for National Discourses: *This theme encapsulates how the Okay Morning Rush empowers citizens by giving them voice to speak out their minds on national issues, and how their voices become valuable assets in society.*

Impacts and Values of Talk shows In Democratic Governance: *This theme underscores the value and practical impacts of talk show discourses in Liberia. Besides being a platform for information disseminations and educations, it provides opportunities for citizens to question and criticize government, reject political appointees, call attention to issues and proffer recommendations for progress.*

Forming Identities Through Okay Morning Rush: *This theme describes how talk shows callers and participants form a sense identity of who they are based on their participation in talk shows.*