

PRFM Radio: dynamism in mainstream media and public engagement

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Abstract

PRFM is a local radio in Bandung area owned by Pikiran Rakyat Group, a respected leading media group in West Java, Indonesia. Despite its long history, PRFM started to use the name and rebrand itself in 2009 using the tagline “Inspiring News and Music”. Within less than a decade, PRFM become one of the leading local radios in Bandung. This paper argues that one of the most important contributing factors to the success of PRFM is in its public engagement strategies and implementation. PRFM compensates the lack of crew, vast area of coverage i.e. Bandung city and Kabupaten Bandung, as well as high operational cost by intensifying its strengths. PRFM emphasizes proximity and hyper-locality aspects in its contents and encourages real conversation with its audience. The personal characteristics of radio are optimized and become best friends with the people of Bandung. It successfully recognizes and optimizes the role of their stakeholders, strategically using social media together with other channel of communications to accommodate their audience’s preferences, thus creating a space for the public to actively congregate. PRFM consciously the role of mediator in times of conflict, advocator in times of hardships and provides assistance in public related issues. In so doing, PRFM is effectively building its brand image as a trustworthy media while at the same time re-strengthening the functions of many organizations both governmental and non-governmental entities in the public spheres.

Keywords: public engagement; public sphere; local radio; PRFM

1. Introduction

PRFM is a local radio part of Pikiran Rakyat group, a respected leading media group in West Java. It airs in 107.5 FM and covers greater Bandung area, as well as in some cities in West Java province such as Padalarang, Cianjur, Bogor, Sumedang, Jatinangor, Garut, Tasikmalaya and Ciamis and was originally named Parahyangan Radio and then changed into Mustika Parahyangan in 1981. In order to win the radio industry competition in Bandung, on 8 November 2009, Mustika Parahyangan Radio started to rebrand itself as a news radio and assume the name PR FM. Using the tagline “Andalah Reporter Kami” (You are Our Reporter), PRFM seriously developed its program around the idea of news radio and utilize the concept of citizen journalism as the backbone of their journalism activities. Data and information gathered from the citizen journalists are then

featured in various programs such as Citizen Report, Citizen Opinion, Expert Voice, Comprehensive News, Celebrity on Channel, Patroli 86, Sport News, Weather Info, Traffic Report, Rupiah Market and News Flash. PRFM also has weekly programs such as Ridwan Kamil ngaBANDUNGAN, Bincang Malam (Evening Talk), Gebyar Marketing (Marketing Events), Tanya Dokter (Ask the Doctor), Muda Bandung (Bandung Youth), Ngaguar Waris, Sampurasun PKK (Halo PKK), Inspirasi Rohani (Spirituali Inspiration), Inspirasi Pagi (Morning Inspiration) and Kisah Persib (Persib Story). As a result, in less than a decade, PRFM become one of the leading local radios in Bandung.

In the age of the ever-changing media and technology convergence, one of the challenges faced by mainstream media is a highly competitive media market and share. Thus, to become a market leader each media needs to turn to its competitive advantage, create and establish value unique to its

stakeholders. Such matter is also relevant to PRFM not in spite of the fact that PRFM already has the reputation as one of the leading local radios in Bandung, but because of it. In this regard, the objective of this paper is to examine factors contributing to the success of PRFM, describe its engagement strategies as well as to identify the roles it assume in its relationship with its stakeholders.

2. Method

This is a qualitative study that is designed to seek a deeper understanding on the phenomenon in order to explain the structure, systems and pattern available that is ingrained in the phenomenon and its participants. According to Robert E. Stake (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), a case study provides the tools to better understand a unique phenomenon with special characteristics. Furthermore, a case study is able to provides insights and enrich understanding in examining the strength and weaknesses of PRFM as a local radio, describing PRFM's engagement strategies, identifying the roles that PRFM assumes in its relationship with its stakeholders that contributes to the success of PRFM. Primary data are gathered through structured interview and observation, while

secondary data are collected from literary review and document study, as well as digital interaction tracking and documentation.

3. Result and discussion

PRFM: background, strengths and weaknesses

Since 8 November 2009, PRFM has seriously developed and incorporate the concept of citizen journalism. It was the current Director of PRFM, Mr. Wan Abbas who decided to change PRFM previous music and entertainment format into a news channel. This is not surprising considering Mr. Abbas' background as former journalist and had the experience as an advertising manager of Pikiran Rakyat newspaper. Using citizen journalism concept, PRFM has unlimited resources for newsworthy information and at the same time help PRFM to expand its network and building a meaningful relationship with its audience. According to the data published on PRFMnews website (PRFM online platforms), the characteristics of its audience are as follows:

Table 1. PRFM Audience Profile

SEX	Male	Female	ACCORDING to Mgmt Est.			
	65%	35%				
AGE	0-14	15-20	20-29	30-39	40 >>	ACCORDING to Mgmt Est.
	0%	5%	10%	40%	45%	
SES (in thousand)	<< 500	500 - 700	700 - 1000	1000- 1500	ACCORDING to Mgmt Est.	
	0%	25%	25%	40%		
	1500 - 2000	2000 - 3000	3000>>			
	0%	30%	0%			
BROADCASTING FORMAT	News					
MUSIC FORMAT	IND POP	WESTERN	DANGDUT	ETHNIC	KERONCONG	OTHERS
	30%	70%	0%	%	0%	0%
MATERIAL	LOCAL	INTERNATIONAL				
	100%	0%				
SOURCE OF MATERIAL	IN HOUSE	ACUISION	COLLABORATION			
	90%	0%	10%			
BROADCASTING TIME	WORKDAY	WEEKDAY				
	05.00-24.00	05.00-24.00				

Source: (PRFMnews, 2016)

Referring to the characteristic of its audience, we can infer the potential that PRFM can benefit from. However, it is worth noting that the decision to change music and entertainment format to the news format is also driven by the spirit of journalism and empowerment. PRFM, according to Tia Santika, deputy editor in chief PRFM, decided to put citizen journalism into practice because PRFM wants to take active part in driving the social change and lead to the betterment of the quality of life of its audience as well as the region that it covers. The audience who consciously decided to take part and be citizen journalists, proactively supplying information to PRFM are people who share the same spirit. Thus, it is in line with PRFM vision to become the sphere upon which its audience can express and actualize their concerns and interests of their social surroundings.

However, in running their daily activities, PRFM also faces some serious challenges to manifest its ideals and goals. In general, the challenges can be divided in two themes: technical challenges as well as organizational challenges, in terms of technical challenges, problems are ranging from the asynchronous audio input when having a live telephone conversation with expert sources or with their citizen journalist/ in house journalist reporting from the field and/or technical noise in the feedback that needs to instantaneously solved. Such technical challenges present a specific technical requirement to its editors: they must possess technical understanding of all audio equipment in the studio due to the fact that PRFM does not have a technical operator. Another example of technical challenge is when a news source suddenly unreachable at the agreed on- air time that forces PRFM to improvise while sorting out the technicalities.

On organizational context, problems are present in many aspects and levels. In human resources aspect, PRFM is still in the process of transformation from a female-focused music and entertainment radio into a news radio. Many staffs were not comfortable with the change due to its unfamiliarity. Such drastic change obviously demands a change of mindset and work culture. Thus, during the transformation, the staff turnover rate was high. Taking *Pikiran Rakyat* advice into account, PRFM currently is supported by new generation of staffs. The newly recruited staffs must then participate in an intensive weekly journalism training that is in line with PRFM positioning at that time, "Inspiring news and music."

The fact that PRFM covers a vast area i.e. Bandung city and Kabupaten Bandung and also relayed its program to various cities in West Java province, also presented PRFM with a challenge to bring and provide information relevant to its audience in the area. PRFM compensates the lack of crew and the vast area of coverage as well as high operational cost by optimizing the role of its audience in becoming their citizen journalists. This is why, in terms of content, PRFM relies 80% of its information and news content from its audience. PRFM gathers massive amount of information using various communication channels such as SMS, social media (Facebook, Twitter), and telephone line. In average, PRFM receive and respond thousands of SMS and their telephone lines are always busy, particularly at rush hours. Such practices then allow PRFM to have a competitive advantage over promptness. It is worth noting that PRFM has the policy that each and every information coming in to the newsroom has to be responded. Thus, responding and following up information from the audience is quite a big task that PRFM has to face in their daily activities.

According to PRFM, the involvement of PRFM audience in terms of content, gives way to build and strengthen its audience loyalty. Further, such practice also helps establish the image of PRFM as a media that contributes positively in a civil society; connecting the government, the NGOs and the people. In this regard, PRFM is assuming the role of intermediaries in the civil society, becoming the embodiment of the concept of public sphere. According to Neidhardt, public sphere appears as an open forum for communication for those who express ideas and those who want to hear what others have to say. It is a dynamic process, and started from the gathering of issues and opinions, processing in the public space that help forward the public opinion that leads to actions and changes in the society. Further, Gerhards and Neidhardt (Gerhards & Schafer, 2009) argue that in order a public sphere to manifest, we need to examine 3 aspects: (1) elaboration of the organizational structure; (2) openness; and (3) societal impact.

Involving audience is a typical practice in any broadcasting radio. Traditional radio audience or listeners have been actively participating in various ways such as requesting certain music, or sending an on air greetings (*kirim salam*) to their friends and relatives. Since the early 90s, some radio stations in Indonesia began to invite their listeners to speak up about public issues in talk show program. There are several stations that successfully attracted listeners in such program e.g.

Radio Maraghita, Radio Ganesha and Radio Mora in Bandung and Radio Suara Surabaya in The Capital City of East Java.

In order to invite the active participatory or engagement of the listeners, a conducive atmosphere needs to be created. Jenkins (2006) states some prerequisite conditions to build and maintain a participatory, i.e (1) relatively low barriers for artistic expression, (2) strong support for creating and expressing opinions as well as enabling the sharing of user's creations, (3) some type of informal mentorship where the experts can model appropriate content and behavior and pass this knowledge on to the novices, (4) users believe that their contributions and opinions are valued, (5) users feel some degree of social connection with the rest of the community of listeners (or at the very least care what other people think about what they have created). There must be an atmosphere of equality and believe that their input will be respected and valued.

In terms of organizational structure, PRFM receives information ranging from traffic information (approx. 60% of total daily information), missing person announcement, reporting social offenses or law violations, even simple information regarding administration procedures. The proximity and locality aspect is central in the overall information exchange. The information gathered and reported by their audience/citizen journalists is then expanded into a comprehensive, accurate and balanced news radio by PRFM team of editors and announcers. In the process, the news editors assume the role of gatekeepers; categorizing which information should be responded off air, on-air and/or online. Editors must respond to all information received, follow it up and further the information to relevant and competent news sources. By so doing, PRFM has encouraged real and meaningful conversations in their programs that hopefully benefit the audience it serves.

PRFM engagement strategies

According to the Indonesian 2002 Broadcasting Act (Undang-Undang No. 32 Tahun 2002 Tentang Penyiaran) explicitly states that all broadcasting media must be local and/or networked media. The main idea of this act is to share economic potentials equally, reducing Jakarta or Java-centricness, supporting culture diversity and indigenous knowledge. The idea is in line with the provincial otonomy spirit upoh which local broadcasting media, including radio, must play an active role in terms of building mental and cultural

identity. To manifest the role, local radio must take part in the dynamism in the community it serves. It must provide equal opportunity to various groups to express, articulate and being listened to in their respective program and content.

Ideally, local media, including broadcasting radio, has important economical, social, political and cultural role and functions to the society it serves. As an economy entity, a broadcasting media can contribute positively to local economy. As a social and cultural entity, a broadcasting radio must be able to contribute to the development of local values and potentials that is reflected in its content. As a social political entity, a local broadcasting radio provides entertainment, information and serve as a democratic channel. Through its programs, broadcasting radio should be able to connect various community groups in the society and become the information and communication mediating entity. For example, collaborate with the government to socialize their programs, identify and voice grassroots interests and concerns and serve as the agent of control as the manifestation of a civil society. Such examples are the manifestation of local radio function in terms of promoting development and the betterment of the society it serves. In this regard, PRFM has take and active role and function in bridging information and communication.

In terms of media bussiness, the concept is illustrated as a triangle. Two senior journalists from the United States of America, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2009) states that the triangle is actually a representation of trust. First side of the triangle represents the audience, second is the advertisers and the third side represents the citizens. Unlike print media or paid television business, the viewers, listeners or readers are not customers. Most media, including television, radio or even an online media, provide news for free. People are not paying to watch television, reading or surfing on the internet or listening to the radio. Even in a print business, most readers only pay a fraction of the production cost. The print media business give a subsidy to its readers.

Such public trust, thus, 'lent' to the media business to attract advertisers, in this regard, advertisers are actually the customers. Such relationship, therefore, should not interfere or even tarnish, the unique relationship between the media with its readers, viewers and listeners. This is the biggest challenge that any media management are too familiar with, including the local broadcasting media management: to create a broadcasting program that sells to its customers/advertisers without tarnishing the public trust.

On operational level, a broadcasting radio creates a unique self identity by defining their audience segmentation and its broadcasting format. Some radio also utilize the positioning strategy as an effort to differentiate and separate themselves from the competitors. Simply put, an audience segmentation is a specific targeted/intended audience. The segment is build upon three main criteria known to the mass media business, i.e. 1) Demography: audience groupings based on age, sex, education and socio-economic status; 2) Psychography: audience groupings based on their psychological condition such as interests, hobby or lifestyle; 3) Geography: audience groupings based on their location or area coverage. A broadcasting format is the overall radio image. This image is a combination of all broadcasting elements such as music, information, communication style, sounds, etc. Broadcasting image can be materialized using various approach such as: 1) music genre (pop, dangdut, jazz, etc.); 2) journalism approach (information or news radio); 3) communication pattern (relax, serious, humour); 4) culture or ethic radio; 5) religion; 6) lifestyle. Positioning is the image created from the combination of the selected format and segment. The term positioning is first coined by Al Ries and Jack Trout in their classic book published in early 1908s, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. According to Ries and Trout, positioning is the perception of brand in their consumers' mind. Positioning is not always manifested as a product, but also related to people. Hermawan Kertajaya defines positioning as a strategy to "lead your costumer credibly." Positioning is not only about persuading and creating image in the mind of their consumers; it is also about customers' trust based on credibility.

In a broadcasting radio, the effort to accomplish their positioning in the mind of the listeners are built through the overall look presented on air and off. On air, positioning is manifested in the speech style and language of the announcer, station call or jingle, advertisment, choice of songs, etc. Off air, positiong is manifested in terms of company profile content and design, crew uniform/fashion style, studio design, work space, Outdoor Broadcasting Van (OB Van), and the overall performance of radio that can be perceived by others to reinforce the intended positioning.

From self identity perspective, Radio PRFM utilizes the journalism broadcasting format and focusing the concept of citizen journalism, which in turn encourage listeners to take an active part, not only listening and consume information broadcasted by PRFM. To support it, PRFM initiate group interest such as creating a PRFM netizen group. It is a group based on PRFM online

media, facilitated by various social media such as Facebook and Twitter, that allow the listeners to share and exchange information. Most netizens then share and exchange the latest information about Bandung or unique information in the form of text and pictures related to public concerns such as the wear and tear of public facilities that need to be replaced/fixed, or other factual phenomenon in Bandung and greater area.

PRFM: to Inform, to Mediate and to Advocate

Radio with journalism program format typically assumes the role as information provider, mediator and advocate. The role as information provider is apparent in their content that focuses on variety of information that is in line with its intended positioning format. Themes of information disseminated are variety information of the latest event, or information in various issues such as politics, law, environment, etc. Types of interaction through which information is disseminated can take form in one way information (announced by the announcer) or two ways (dialogue between announcer and listeners). Dialogue can be facilitated by various information and communication channels such as telephone, social media, instant messaging (Line, WhatsApp, BBM, etc.).

The role of mediator is manifested when a broadcasting radio connect the party in need of information with other party who can provide such information. For example, when a listener asking for information regarding certain public service, radio management then directly able to connect the listener to public officials or institution in charge of the matter. Questions from the listeners regarding public information are usually caused by they are unformed and unaware of who to ask or where to get the information from. Some of their motives are: 1) trust that a credible local radio will help them to find the answers they are looking for; 2) previous negative experience in benefiting from public services available thus turn their questions to a credible local radio instead, and 3) to get more exposure. Mediation usually related to the interest of the public, however, it is noteworthy that some personal matters can also be mediated should the media see it fit (usually because of humanity consideration). For example, a media may not mediate matters such as family inheritance dispute, but choose to mediate a medical patient from poor family to get better healthcare. Simply put, mediation took place when a broadcasting radio linked two parties to start a meaningful communication.

Practicing the role of mediator does not necessarily mean that a broadcasting radio is also practicing the role of an advocate due to the fact that the scope of an advocator is larger in terms of breadth and depth thus require an advance and comprehensive approach. The pivotal difference between mainstream media journalism with advocacy journalism is not only that advocacy journalism require a journalist to choose certain position in its reports (taking sides), but it is about defining what should be address in reporting an event or facts. Deciding what actually constitutes news and how it should be reported (Charles, 2013). According to Morris Janowitz in Waisbord (2009), advocacy journalism assigns journalists the role of active interpreters and participants who “speak on behalf” of certain groups, typically those groups who are denied “powerful spokesmen” in the media. Advocacy journalism requires journalists to interpret events or facts and voicing the otherwise marginalized ideas/community by dominant and powerful parties through media. In short, advocay journalism must stand on the side of those who are marginalized and muted.

The concept of advocacy journalism is often combined with the concept of civic journalism. Waisbord (2009) argues that civic advocacy journalism is associated with the recent professionalization of media tactics of social movements and interest groups. The combination of both thus resulted in journalism activities with the purpose to increase public awareness through public debates, to influence public opinion and opinion leaders in the society to give more attention on certain issue related to public interests.

Not all broadcasting radios utilizing journalism approach as their format are able to play all three roles silmutaneously. Most radio only choose to: 1) inform the public; 2) inform the public and become a mediator; 3) inform the public, become a mediator and utilizing advocacy journalism. The third model is usually able to practice all three roles and functions. This is due to the fact that advocacy journalism is based on informing and mediating functions. Advocacy serves the purpose to create a better macro condition. Advocacy will not stopped even though mediation has been done and help many. It will only stopped when the macro condition has changed to the better.

In regard to PRFM, the radio is actually practice the third model. In its daily practice, most of the time PRFM highlight the issue of public services or other topics that is in the interest of the public and has major significance to the public it serves. Issues related to the interests of the public

are: public and social facilities such as public road and traffic jam, medical services, education and other public services. PRFM also dedicate some air time for political, law, sports or other related theme that is relevant with their public. However, as our interview and observation suggests, public services themes are timeless and attract public enthusiasm.

A well-recognized pressure group: PRFM's strategies

The decision to utilize a journalism broadcasting format has its own consequences. PRFM has to have strategies in terms of broadcasting aspect and other related aspects. Journalism broadcasting format is a broadcasting format that is expensive, higher operational costs, require more staffs to seek and process information. If the music format sufficiently executed by one person in the studio, on contrary, PRFM requires more than one person to oversee each program. There are about three editors and one announcer on duty in each program and supported by one or two reporters assigned to the field.

Other consequences arise due to the citizen journalism positioning that requires PRFM to build a social force and become a pressure group that is respected in the community, the government of Bandung city, the government of greater Bandung and West java province. The ability to become a respected group pressure comes from PRFM's years of experience in carrying out journalism activities, practicing the function of public moderation and assumes the position as the watchdog of the current local government. In this regard, PRFM role as a watch dog actually is the basic function of a media, which should be linked to the context of the times.

In the days before the Internet era, the control functions implemented by the media are significant in a civil society because the public does not have direct access to monitor the activity of the government. Now, advances in information technology and communication make the government to be more transparent and accountable to the public, therefore it is mandatory for the government to report all activities and the use of the state budget to the public. For example, the electronic auction process or an electronic procurement, or new student enrollment in public schools announced in real time is a form of government responsibility on the use of state money. Such condition, if not addressed properly, can narrow the role of moderation of the mass media because the audience has been able to deal

with the government directly. For this reason the mass media such as PRFM must always be able to adapt to developments

To date, the moderation function run by PRFM is considered as a success. PRFM still is one of the few radios in Indonesia which survive well with the journalism format positioning. Besides PRFM, the first radio and remain successful in running this concept is Radio Suara Surabaya FM. PRFM does a horizontal moderation (among the public), vertically from top to bottom (from the government to the public), as well as bottom-up (from the public or the public to the government). Horizontally, PRFM moderate the desires and public concern to share information. Issues that the public interested in are always consistent from time to time: humanity matters, unique event/facts that especially have impact on people's lives. Public participatory rate is actually quite vibrant. For example, the current PRFM netizens group on Facebook has more than 14.000 active members and they contribute information and updates to the group. In addition to the horizontal, to date, the public still need some degree of help to be moderated and connected to the city administration. Although the mayor of Bandung is a person who has always been active in social media and is open to be contacted at any time by the citizens of Bandung through various channels including social media channels, it does not mean citizens can get what they need smoothly. The era of technology and information creates a wealth of information that is often chaotic. This condition causes the function of moderation, to select and process critical information is still needed. Thus PRFM's decision to play the moderation function still holds

a special place in the dynamics of the people of Bandung.

4. Conclusion

PRFM is one of the leading local radios in Bandung and is part of the respected Pikiran Rakyat media group. Finding shows that one of the most important contributing factors to the success of PRFM is in its positioning and its public engagement strategies and implementation. PRFM compensates the lack of crew, vast area of coverage i.e. Bandung city and Kabupaten Bandung, as well as high operational cost by intensifying its strengths. PRFM emphasizes proximity and hyper-locality aspects in its contents and encourages real conversation with its listeners. The personal characteristics of radio are optimized, strengthening the role of their stakeholders, strategically using social media together with other channel of communications to adjust to the dynamics of the society as well as to accommodate their listeners' preferences. PRFM consciously to not only assume the role of information provider, but it also actively assumes the role of mediator and advocate to encourage the betterment of the living conditions of the people of Bandung and its neighboring areas. Thus, PRFM has created a space for the public to actively congregate and exchange meaningful interaction. In order to encourage such a conducive atmosphere, PRFM needs to actively maintain the prerequisite conditions to further engage the public. In so doing, PRFM is effectively build its brand image as a trustworthy media while at the same time re-strengthening the functions of many organizations both governmental and non-governmental entities in civil society.

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