

# **Community Radio in Western Australia: Notions of value**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines what ‘value’ means in relation to community radio broadcasting, summarising the development of a theoretical framework of value for community radio from the existing literature. As well, this paper provides an outline of the findings garnered from testing that framework at three community radio stations in Perth, Western Australia, particularly the perceptions of value by the study participants. Finally, and most importantly, this paper discusses the importance of one key finding from the research: that study participants from all stations perceived the value of participation in community radio, as not necessarily an altruistic activity. This indicates that community radio’s value is significantly more about the benefits of participation for the volunteers rather than the benefits for the listening community.

## **Introduction**

Part of what I love about Community Radio is that you can't measure its value. There are so many ripples going out. The impacts of what we do are immeasurable, because they are going out so far into the community. It's a beautiful mystery, you kind of send it out and you don't know how it's going, what is the ultimate outcome of what you do (station volunteer cited in Forde et al., 2002a, 16).

The sentiments described in the above quote are almost romantic and starry-eyed at the effect of community radio. The “beautiful mystery” of “many ripples going out ... so far into the community” is a quaint and firmly positive characterisation of the sector. However, the above quote from a station volunteer demonstrates one of the sector's biggest challenges and a starting point for this paper: “you can't measure its value” (station volunteer cited in Forde et al., 2002a, 16). If, as this volunteer suggests, value cannot be measured, how then is the evidence of value demonstrated? This paper provides an outline of the development of a draft theoretical framework of value for community radio viewed through the perspective of five theoretical lenses of analysis. The research methodology was then developed to test the draft framework of value at a station level at three different community radio stations in Perth, Western Australia. This resultant data was then analysed to identify the extent to which values from the draft framework of value are evident in the sample stations. This paper has two main contributions: first, it summarises the development and testing of a theoretical framework of value for community radio as operationalised in the field, and secondly, it summarises the conclusions on the perceptions of value from the study participants.

## **The Lenses of Analysis: Finding the Value in Community Radio**

Community media research has a long theoretical and empirical tradition that has tried to capture their identity. Due to the complexity and elusiveness of this identity this project has proved a very difficult task (Carpentier et al., 2010: 65).

To explore the various theoretical approaches to community radio, the analysis found it useful to borrow from photographic terminology, focusing the sometimes contested and divergent theoretical terrain (Order, 2011), through a series of lenses. Each lens emerged as a ‘theoretical über-vehicle’ and an

umbrella chapter in a larger work (Order, 2013). The title of each lens identifies the subject area that was analysed as relevant to the overall notion of value for community radio. It was, however, not a way to corral notions of value, rather a mechanism to focus the mapping of the theoretical territory. This is an important distinction because each lens of analysis tended to produce similar ‘higher level constructs of value’ for community radio namely: *access, diversity, alternative, independence, representation and participation*; however, the interpretations or nuances of those values were different in each lens. In the final framework, these interpretations would become ‘specific values’<sup>1</sup>. Specific value refers to the way theorists, practitioners or government bodies have implemented or interpreted the higher level constructs of value.

In summary, the lenses offered structure to the mapping of the theoretical terrain and, via a subsequent meta-analysis, aided the development of a theoretical framework of value for community radio. The five lenses are the *Lens of the Public Sphere*, the *Lens of Media Ownership*, the *Lens of Contested Value*, the *Lens of Australian Community Radio Policy* and the *Lens of Financial Challenges Facing Australian Community Radio*.

*The Lens of the Public Sphere* interprets and examines community radio through the lens of Jurgen Habermas’ (1989) democratic social theory of the *bourgeois public sphere* (Calhoun, 1992: vii; Fraser, 1992). Habermas’ theory resonates strongly with the more modern theoretical values of community radio. There is an assumption by Zhao and Hackett (2005: 11) that the public sphere can be animated by ‘democratic’ mass media and that citizens can be represented in some way by the media. It suggests that media should be accessible to citizens as producers, not just as consumers. The lens introduces alternative media<sup>2</sup> (and thus community radio) as a possible way to counter the decline of

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<sup>1</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Alternative media, community media, citizens’ media, radical media and independent media* are some of the various definitions and terminology applied but their meanings are not universal (Order, 2011). This paper chooses to use *alternative media* as an umbrella term for the theoretical field. Community radio is assumed to be under that umbrella.

public discourse in the modern public sphere. Hence the values of the public sphere are important for community radio.

Because Habermas' work resonates strongly with the core values of community radio, Australian community radio theorists, such as Kitty Van Vuuren (2006: 381) and Susan Forde et al. (2002b: 56-57), have acknowledged the contribution of his work in informing community media theory. The values that emerge from this lens focus on community radio as an agent of democracy (Fraser, 1992: 123) or representation and as a medium for alternative, niche, minority or marginalised voices to be heard in the public sphere (Zhao and Hackett, 2005: 11; Hood, 1980: 25; Forde et al., 2003: 317; 2002b: 56-7; Downing, 1984: 17; Downey and Fenton, 2003: 187-9; Fraser, 1992: 124; Habermas, 1989: 171).

The act of participation in the media also brings the potential for political empowerment of participants (Rodríguez, 2001: 3), cultural citizenship and community development (AMARC, 2006; Jouet, 1977: 13; Splichal, 1993: 11-13; Van Vuuren, 2006: 381) and improved social capital (Van Vuuren, 2001: 95; Onyx and Bullen, 1997; Putnam, 2000: 19). Via the act of participation, community radio may also adopt the principles of internal democratisation, prefigurative politics and transparent governance; the attempt to practice socialist principles in the present, not merely to imagine them for the future (Calhoun, 1992: 28-31; Downing, 1984: 17, Downing et al., 2001: 71; Barlow, 1999: 93-100; Van Vuuren, 2006: 281; Hochheimer, 1993; Rothschild-Whitt, 1977; Guerin, 1970: 157). Whilst community representation is the central idea to emerge from *The Lens of the Public Sphere*, the notion of alternative voices, alternative governance and community participation also emerge as intertwined notions of value from the Habermasian context.

The second lens, *The Lens of Media Ownership*, assumes that the health of democracy is increasingly linked to the state of the media. Some theorists argue that the dynamics of democracy are intimately linked to communication practices, and societal communication increasingly takes place within the mass media (Dahlgren, 1995: 2). This lens explores the role of modern mainstream media in these processes

and contrasts it with the role of community media. The focus is on what community media is *not*, arguing that the practices of commercial mainstream media reduce content diversity and citizen participation in the public sphere. In comparison community radio is a vital and valuable space that offers democratic balance to a modern mainstream media that is in “democratic deficit” (Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 2-14).

This lens views the value of community radio in the context of today’s concentrated mainstream media. The concentration of media ownership is described as responsible for reducing the number of viewpoints available in the media (Bagdikian, 2000; Taras, 2001: 24; Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 5; Baker, 2006: 14; Jones, 2003: 1-3; Sawyer et al., 2009: 216), for the homogenisation of content (McChesney, 2004: 7) and for the reduction in community representation (Downing, 1984: 5). These factors also manifest as a reduction in content diversity (Jolly, 2007; Foyle, 2006: 19; Taras, 2001: 24; Wasko, 2004: 315; Barr, 2000: 6-7; Given, 2006; Convergence Review, 2012) and while the public service broadcasters in Australia struggle to balance this decline (Forde, 2011: x-xi; Jacka, 2006: 345-6; Miller, 2006: 53), ultimately media concentration is a threat to the public interest (Jolly, 2007).

The principal value of community radio shown by this lens is the notion of media content diversity but also emerging, intimately connected, are the values of community participation, representation, independence and the public interest but from the media ownership context. Following the discussion of community radio in *The Lens of Media Ownership*, insofar as it is ‘not mainstream’; *The Lens of Contested Value* examines the intrinsic values within the community radio sector itself. While the higher level value constructs of *representation*, *participation*, *diversity*, *independence* and *alternative* have emerged as notions of value for community radio, their exact meanings are not always clear among community radio theorists or practitioners. This third lens, *The Lens of Contested Value* is where notions of value are most divergent (Atton, 2007a: 17; Van Vuuren, 2009: 175). This lens has four foci: the focus of *definitions* of community/alternative media; the focus of *oppositional power*, the focus of *social power* and the focus of *participation*.

The first focus, the *definitions* of community/alternative media, reveals a lack of consensus around terminology. For example, John Downing believes that “to speak of *alternative* [media] is almost oxymoronic. Everything, at some point, is alternative to something else ... [And] to some extent, the extra designation *radical*<sup>3</sup> [italics inserted] helps firm up the definition of alternative media” (Downing, 2001: ix). Rodriguez’s preference is for the term *citizen’s media*. She believes that citizenship is not a passive legal right but something to be enacted on a daily basis via participation in media production (Rodríguez, 2001: 19-22). In the Australian context, Forde et al. prefer the terms *independent* or *community media*, suggesting such terms offer a clear “alternative to the mainstream” (Forde et al., 2003: 316). They draw on ideas from Nancy Fraser who uses the term “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser, 1992: 123) to describe the formation of public spheres of discourse which are alternative to the mainstream. Where theorists cannot agree on definitions, it is clear that the value of community radio is not clearly understood.

The second focus, *oppositional power*, examines community media as challenger to the mainstream media. The approach paints the mainstream media as “monolithic and unchanging” where “the power of the mass media marginalizes ordinary citizens: not only are they denied access to its production, they are marginalized by its reports”<sup>4</sup> and denied adequate representation in the public sphere (Atton, 2008: 215). A similar approach is the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky (1988), where market concentration has reduced citizens to mere consumers incapable of contributing to genuine public discourse (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 2-19). Hackett and Carroll (2006) term this a “democratic deficit”. This deficit includes a general under-representation of people based on ethnicity, indigenous descent, gender and class in the mainstream media. The hope in this “propaganda model” for media studies is that alternative media can balance this deficit (Splichal, 1993: 12-13).

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<sup>3</sup> John Downing uses the term *radical media* (Downing, 2001: ix).

<sup>4</sup> Atton gives the example of Glasgow University Media Group who analysed BBC media texts such as news and current affairs to show bias towards certain groups in the community, namely politicians, business leaders, law and order professionals while workers and trade unions are marginalised. The work challenges the impartiality of the BBC and suggests that professional journalists have a narrow view of societal groups (Atton, 2008).

The third focus of *social power* explores ideas around personal or political empowerment that may emerge from involvement with community media. Researching alternative media at the grassroots level reveals more about social power than oppositional power discussed above. Rodríguez discusses how “multiple streams of power relationships are disrupted in the everyday lives of alternative media participants” (Rodríguez, 2001: 16-17). The power of personal and community identities is constantly in flux as they move between participation in groups and their individual everyday lives. Power is not a fixed notion in any part of our lives; however, participation in alternative media can, as Rodríguez suggests:

Facilitate the fermentation of identities and power positions ... alternative media spin transformative processes that alter people’s senses of self, their subjective positioning, and therefore access to power (Rodríguez, 2001: 18).

The fourth focus, *participation*, challenges the notion that participation in community media in itself is to be celebrated, and that other factors should be considered before assigning significant value to the activity of participation. In particular, broadcaster ideology and participant production skill competency are important considerations if the act of participation is to be valued (Atton, 2008: 218-219). Atton’s arguments about the benefits of participation are shared by other researchers in the field. Sandoval et al. (2010: 142) state that alternative media should be *critical* media if it is to have maximum effect. Secondly, they are critical of participatory, not-for-profit, collectively-governed media who operate on a shoestring and tend to dispense with professional organisational practice and production values (ibid: 143). They may be more effective as alternative media organisations if they adopt the practices of the mainstream media, if their objective is to gain and maintain an audience.

In summary, of these four foci, the *Lens of Contested Value* shows that there is no unified understanding of the values of alternative media and, by extension, community radio, even though there is acknowledgement of the need to demonstrate the positive outcomes of community radio while the sector struggles to be financially sustainable in a competitive mediascape (AMARC, 2007: 50-51). Similar to

the previous lenses of analysis, the higher level constructs of value are present but remain divergent on their interpretation. Taken together the four foci of the *Lens of Contested Value* reveal how heterogeneity, a widely valued characteristic of the sector, may be hampering a clear understanding of value for community radio.

The fourth lens is *The Lens of Australian Community Radio Policy* and examines the community radio sector as the product of a muddled Federal Government communications policy that saw the establishment of the third sector of public radio<sup>5</sup> in the 1970s. David M. Barlow's *The Promise, Performance and Future of Community Broadcasting* (1998) explores the objectives and the political machinations leading to the initial legislation of the sector in 1978 and then later to the *Broadcasting Services Act* of 1992. He paints a picture of the "journey from concept to legislation [that] was somewhat haphazard", riding out changes in government and suffering from the most frustrating ad hoc policy making process (Barlow, 1998: 43). These sentiments are supported by Phoebe Thornley (1999) whose more historical work traces the political and governmental influences in the establishment of public broadcasting until 1992. She identifies a high level of malaise among law makers; the government was "confused about its own role in the endeavour" (Thornley, 1999: 96). Dr. Jeff Langdon, manager of Radio Adelaide in the late 1980s and author of *A History of Community Broadcasting*, provides a similar analysis, suggesting:

The Whitlam administration supported the introduction of public broadcasting and worked actively towards it [but] it was antagonistic to the [government] bureaucracy and so accident prone that it's a miracle that public broadcasting emerged out of the other end intact (Langdon, 1995: 5).

In summary, the early history of the "third sector" of Australian broadcasting shows that from the beginning there were an abundance of divergent ideas about sector objectives and value from both the government and public radio movement (Order, 2013: 120). This is not surprising given that the public radio movement itself was far from philosophically homogeneous. Combined with the seemingly

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<sup>5</sup> 'Public radio' was the term initially used to describe community radio during its inception in the 1970s.

receptive but disparate responses from government bodies, under governments of different parties, it is easy to see why Barlow uses the word “haphazard” to describe the development of the third sector up to its inception. What did emerge from this muddled and confused birth were wide and generic objectives for the sector; *access and participation, independence, not-for-profit, non-commercial, diversity and plurality and alternative* (Barlow, 1998), and these remain in a similar generic form today<sup>6</sup>. It would be fair to ask whether these generously wide objectives encourage a well-meaning heterogeneity in the sector but make value a difficult notion to quantify. Are the interpretations of these objectives of today’s community sector still in a state of flux, where notions of value and performance are far from being uniform and are unique to each station and its community?

*The Lens of Financial Challenges Facing Australian Community Radio* is not so much a theoretical view but a pragmatic analysis, suggesting the relationship between funding and the value of community radio is by no means a simple one. According to the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF, 2012),<sup>7</sup> the sector in Australia is largely self-funded, and subsequently “can be described as economically impoverished” (Price-Davies and Tacchi, 2001: 16). For the day-to-day operations, most community stations operate on a shoestring budget (McCarthy, 2008). Given this context, financial challenges are likely to impact notions of value for community radio.

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<sup>6</sup>Australian Community Radio Codes of Practice  
[http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/\\_assets/main/lib410018/community\\_radio\\_broadcasting-code\\_of\\_practice\\_2008.pdf](http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib410018/community_radio_broadcasting-code_of_practice_2008.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF, 2012b) affirms the principles of access, diversity, independence, innovation and localism, and the commitment to social justice that underpin the community broadcasting sector’s philosophy and operation. The CBF is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) with additional Indigenous community broadcasting funding through the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (CBF, 2012c). There are currently 25 grant categories, which include funds for the promotion of Australian music, funds to assist stations with digital or satellite technology transmission purchases, funds to develop websites, emergency grants to restore transmission in exceptional circumstances, ethnic program grants, station technology grants, Indigenous grants, radio print-handicapped support grants and training grants (CBF, 2012a). Each grant category has specific guidelines and associated funding amounts available (see [www.cbf.com.au](http://www.cbf.com.au)).

As AMARC have stated, there is a need to demonstrate community radio's "value for money" in meeting their community goals (AMARC, 2007: 50). Their argument suggests that funding should follow if there is a clearer model of value and stations can demonstrate that value. However, as Griffiths (1975a) argued from the early inception of the sector in Australia, it may be that funding is required to bring the station to a professional standard or perceived level of value. In a more modern example, referring to 4ZZZ in Brisbane, Van Vuuren (2006) supports this and suggests that professionalism was essential for the station to meet their goal of offering a viable political media alternative. In this case, it could be argued that funding would have helped to train existing volunteers to a professional level, and speaks to a larger conversation about community radio and professionalism. These kinds of 'chicken and egg' dilemmas are difficult to resolve. It adds weight to the argument that a clearer model of value is long overdue.

In conclusion, the five lenses of analysis offer a glimpse into the multi-faceted notion of value for community radio. These have been drawn from a more detailed body of work with each lens of analysis occupying a full chapter (Order, 2013). There are no rigid frameworks in the literature, other than the wide and generic values common across all lenses of analysis, which have been termed *higher level constructs* by this work. This work has taken a step further, adding a layer of *specific values* which are variances in interpretation, implementation and understanding of value at the operational level of community radio. The main themes at both levels of value from each chapter were consolidated to produce the draft theoretical framework of value for community radio.

### **A Draft Theoretical Framework for Community Radio: A Meta-Analysis**

The draft theoretical framework of value for community radio would be derived from a qualitative meta-analysis, aggregating these existing studies and distilling the results into a draft theoretical framework for community radio (Paterson et al., 2009: 23; Walsh and Downe, 2005: 204; Schreiber et al., 1997: 314). The literature on qualitative meta-analysis offered no universal guidelines for analysing the studies under scrutiny; however, as a general guiding principle, the authors agreed that the preservation of meaning from the source studies was essential (Timulak, 2009: 595; Walsh and Downe, 2005: 208; Sandelowski,

2004: 3). This study chose to follow in the footsteps of Ladislav Timulak (2009: 595) who offers a more prescriptive process, at least in its description.

First, the collected data are assigned into domains (the domains represent a conceptual framework that the researcher brings to or observes in the data); in this case, the higher level constructs of value. Secondly, meaning units are delineated (the meaning units are the smallest units of the data that can stand alone); in this case, the specific values. Thirdly, categories are generated through the comparison of meaning units among themselves and through the distilling of the essence of similar meaning units (the categories are abstracted clusters of meaning units clustered on the basis of similarities between meaning units), and they are defined on the basis of meaning units they contain and can be further categorised. Fourthly, the main findings are abstracted (often in the form of figures or narratives). The analysis also uses several safeguards (credibility checks) that ensure its validity (Timulak, 2009: 595).

The framework consolidation process aimed to remove any duplication or overlap of meaning and improve the descriptive quality of the expression of values within the final framework. The consolidation process was an iterative process to ensure nothing was ‘lost’. Where specific values were similar in meaning but with slightly different nuances, these specific values were combined into single values, and any possible loss of detail was incorporated into the descriptions of the remaining specific values. The above four stages were followed and resulted in a final framework in Table 1.

**Table 1: A Draft Theoretical Framework of Value for Community Radio**

High Level Construct	Code	Specific Value Name	Description
Access	1a	Connection between the media and local communities.	Offering community-centred/local programming. Content is drawn from, and aimed at, the community. Caters to the broadcasting needs of states, cities and/or suburbs, rather than nation-wide content. Thus, local issues, arts and culture are emphasised.
	1b	Represent communities of interest not adequately	Providing services to people from a particular niche, ethnic or cultural background, e.g.: music enthusiasts, ethnic language,

		represented by mainstream media.	Indigenous, gay, religious, trade union, educational groups.
	1c	Community information and community promotion	Broadcasting information especially relevant at the local level and also promotion of community events, etc.
	1d	Community development and social outcomes	Facilitating the promotion of positive social change via social inclusion, cultural diversity and civic participation. Creating social capital through building connections among individuals to produce social networks based on the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.
	1e	Participatory democracy in society	Promoting more active participation in public sphere discourse beyond the range and reach of increasingly concentrated mainstream media
	1f	A resource for community cultural production	Offering a forum for cultural identity formation through diverse modes of cultural production.
<b>Diversity</b>	2a	Promote harmony and diversity and contribute to an inclusive, cohesive and culturally diverse Australian community	Promoting a positive view of cultural difference in Australia via community radio presenting diverse perspectives.
	2b	Content diversity	Presenting diversity in programme formats, voices and content.
	2c	Diversity of viewpoints - ideological diversity	Presenting a plurality of ideas rather than a narrow mainstream perspective to serve the needs of diverse audiences.
	2d	Foreign language content	Including foreign language programs to appeal directly to ethnic sectors of the audience.
<b>Alternative</b>	3a	Alternative dialogues, voices and content	Featuring alternative voices and content to mainstream media, especially relevant to those groups and issues inadequately represented by the mainstream media. This involves both the selection of stories and the treatment of stories, as well as alternatives to mainstream programme formats and norms of broadcasting.
	3b	Credible source of alternative/local content	Aspiring to professional broadcasting standards to enhance appeal and credibility of the service as an authoritative alternative to mainstream media.
	3c	Political media alternative	Presenting political views alternative to the mainstream.
	3d	Internal democratisation pre-figurative politics, transparent governance	Running stations with internal governance structures in line with community radio principles of democratisation, pre-figurative politics and transparent participative governance and decision-making.
	3e	Alternative media literacy	The shared and interactive nature of community media production produces enhanced media literacy within listeners.
	3f	Oppositional power	Contributing to a counter public sphere that can potentially undermine the dominant representations of society presented by mainstream media and provides a training ground for oppositional activities towards the mainstream media.
<b>Independence</b>	4a	Independence in programming	Providing programming free from commercial or government influence. Stations should be legally constituted as owned and controlled by the community to ensure that they are accountable to and serve the community.
	4b	Not-for-profit status	Depending on a not-for-profit revenue generation model via commercial sponsorship, listener subscription, and/or sale of airtime with clear guidelines to ensure equity of access and independence from commercial interests.
	4c	Professional /amateur media production values, programming and broadcast quality	Professional programming and broadcast quality may contribute to financial independence through increased listenership and thus sponsorship. The absence of slick, dynamic professional production values can be perceived as a negative attribute to the sector but also a positive for listeners preferring a 'relaxed' style of community broadcasting.
	4d	Audience participation	Proactively fostering audience participation and avenues of listener feedback.
<b>Representation</b>	5a	Representation of the	Facilitating access to the airwaves to all segments of society to

		community	ensure that a wide range of views are represented. This includes representation of otherwise marginalised groups (e.g. based on ethnicity, gender and class) to provide a democratic balance.
	5b	Specialist Representation	Relating to stations devoted specifically to the representation of a niche or specialist community group.
	5c	Generalist Representation	Relating to stations devoted to the representation of a wide range of community groups under one station umbrella.
	5d	Audience reach	Reaching as high a percentage as is practical of the intended station audience.
<b>Participation</b>	6a	Citizen's participation	Involving community members as contributors to the selection, production and delivery of broadcast content, usually as volunteers, rather than paid employees.
	6b	Communications managed by the community	Fostering community participation in station management at all levels.
	6c	Personal development and possible political empowerment at a personal/group level	Enhancing participants' sense of identity, personal satisfaction and education through involvement in broadcasting. May also be manifested as increased sense of political empowerment or emancipation. This also may include the development of broadcast skills through training.

## Testing and Validating the Framework

In order to test the utility of the draft theoretical framework three case studies were conducted with different types of community radio stations in Perth, Western Australia. Community radio stations are generally divided into two broad groups: *generalist* or geographically defined, representing many different local niche communities under one station umbrella; and *specialist*, representing one small part of the community, such as ethnic, gay or senior citizen communities (Van Vuuren, 2003: 2). The stations selected for this study included one generalist station, one specialist station and one hybrid of the two groups (one generalist and specialist station). Radio Fremantle is the generalist station, catering to residents in the City of Fremantle; 6RPH is the specialist station, catering to the print-handicapped community in Perth; RTRFM is the hybrid station, partly a specialist station catering to the Perth alternative community and partly a generalist station catering to a mix of Perth communities of interest.

The study wanted to elicit opinions from the stakeholders of community radio, the participants and the listeners. To this purpose, interviews were held with thirty-five participants involved in running the radio

stations and three focus group meetings held with listeners.<sup>8</sup> The interviews were analysed in terms of the values from the draft theoretical framework.<sup>9</sup> Five hundred utterances were identified and summaries prepared listing the number of utterances which significantly mentioned each of the values. This allowed comparison of the frequency of occurrence for each of the values. The frequency of occurrence is shown below in Table 2.

## **Key Findings**

By testing the framework at the site of three community radio stations, it has been established that, within the scope of this study, the value framework can be successfully operationalised in the field. Most of the values from the draft framework were evident, though in varying degrees. The highest mention values were:

### **High Level Mention Specific Values**

- (6c) Personal development and empowerment at a personal/group level (67)<sup>10</sup>,
- (1a) Connection between the media and local communities (46).
- (1d) Community development and social outcomes (44),
- (4c) Professional/amateur media production values (38),
- (3d) Internal democratisation and transparent governance (36).

These five specific values were mentioned the most often *across all three stations* which justifies their inclusion in any community radio framework of value. These high-mention specific values also give a strong indication of the priorities of participants at the three metropolitan community radio stations in Perth, Western Australia. The data indicates that value is as much about participant motivations as an altruistic service catering to the wider listening community.

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<sup>8</sup> Two stations had been surveyed recently with a focus group by another researcher looking at very similar themes (Meadows et al., 2007). This data was incorporated into this work and the same method applied to a third focus group.

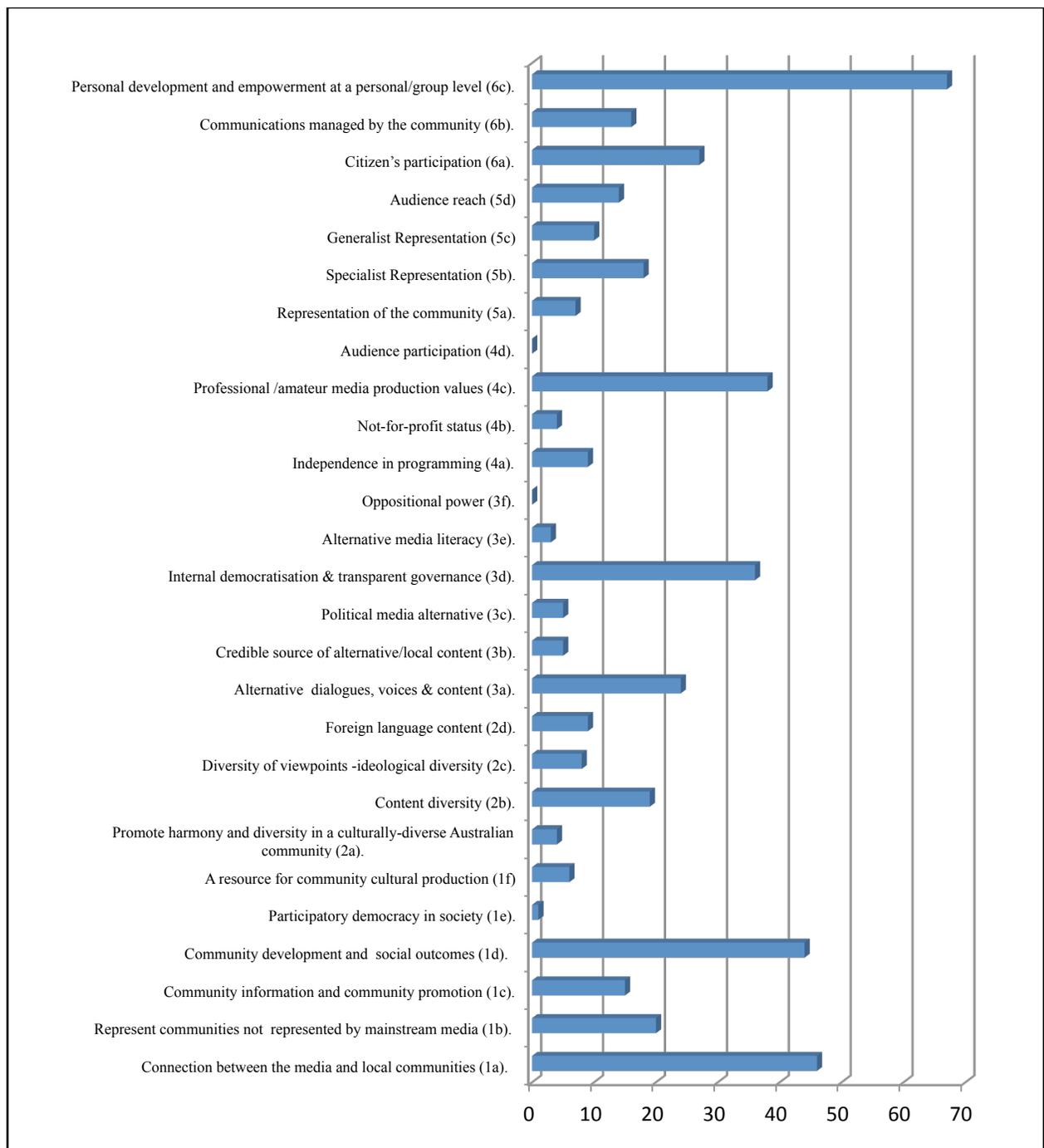
<sup>9</sup> There were approximately twelve interviews at each station and each station focus group contained approximately twelve participants. This sampling method attempted to balance the numbers of the two stakeholder groups of community radio in the study.

<sup>10</sup> The bracketed numbers indicate the occurrence of those values.

### Low level Mention Specific Values

- (3b) Credible source alternative/local content (5)
- (3c) Political media alternative (5),
- (2a) Promote harmony and diversity in a culturally diverse Australian society (4),
- (4b) Not-for-profit status (4),
- (3c) Alternative media literacy (3),
- (1e) Participatory democracy in society (1),
- (4d) Audience participation (0),
- (3f) Oppositional power (0).

These low-mention specific values are a counterpoint to the high level mention values discussed above, confirming that the personal outweighs the political as far as the community radio participants in this study are concerned. In community media theory (Atton, 2008: 215), the notion of *(3f) oppositional power* (oppositional to the mainstream) is proposed as valuable to community radio and a potential way to drive progressive social movements. This resonates with the idea of a *(3c) political media alternative* but in this study there are no mentions of *(3f) oppositional power* from participants. Progressive social movements may find *oppositional power* a useful rallying call in less fortunate locations, but in the relatively affluent location of Perth there is little need for those more political sentiments.



**Table 2: Positive mentions of specific values (summed across three stations)**

## Conclusions

Looking at evidence of values from the framework occurring across all three stations, the results show that, for stations in this study, the value of community radio lies significantly in the personal benefits or satisfaction derived from participation in community radio. The benefits for the wider listening

community are definitely apparent but less significant. The political or 'oppositional' values from the framework were virtually non-existent in this study. This is not the first time that such conclusions have been suggested. Susan Forde et al. (2002c), in their paper, *Community Radio, radicalism and the grassroots: Discussing the politics of contemporary Australian community*, state that the Australian community radio sector is "relatively conservative in its outlook, possibly caused by a significant shift to the 'right' in the past 10 years" (Forde et al., 2002c: 1). Participation and access to the airwaves have remained as valuable aspects of community broadcasting but there has been a noticeable decrease in the notion of "progressive political action, such as epitomised by 'left-wing' and student-run stations" (ibid.: 7). Participation in community radio, viewed in this light, can be considered significantly more of a personal narcissistic activity, rather than of altruistic benefit to the community. If participants in this study perceive the value of community radio from a more selfish motivational standpoint, the wider community benefits could potentially be considered as pure side effects. Any attempt to argue for the wider community benefits of community radio, and thus support and funding, become much harder to substantiate.

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