Chapter 9
Handling of Sexually Offensive Expressions on Zimbabwe’s Selected Radio Stations

Phillip Mpofu
North-West University, South Africa & Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

Abiodun Salawu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1687-4621
North-West University, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Sexual and reproductive health-related communication in Africa is culturally regulated. This chapter analyses the handling of sexually offensive expressions on Zimbabwe’s African language radio stations. The conceptual lens for this study is grounded in the indigenous knowledge systems perspective, which underscores indigenous communication systems as indispensable assets for African cultural communities. The chapter shows that African language radio stations are expedient channels for sexual and reproductive health-related communication in the contemporary society. However, this study shows the widespread use of inconceivable sexually explicit language and ineffective euphemisms in a manner that diminishes the relevance of the radio programmes. Therefore, the chapter maintains that it is imperative to remodel African language radio’s language use conventions in programmes that relate to sexual and reproductive health issues in ways that match the cultural traditions of the respective audience.

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INTRODUCTION

Present studies underscore sexual and reproductive health related communication as a human right and an enormously important public health issue (see Iliyasu et al., 2012; De Jesus, 2013; Melaku et al, 2014; Ngwenya, 2016; Rodrigues da Silva, 2018). For that reason, it is vital for members of any given community to be availed with sexual and reproductive health information at all stages of social progression. De Jesus (2013) maintains that mass media are vital channels of health communication in a polity.

Indigenous language print or broadcast media are expedient channels for disseminating development communication to African communities (Mpofu and Salawu, 2018). However, before considering the modern forms of communication, it is worth noting that traditional African communities have organised and dynamic social structures that comprise channels and institutions that disseminate developmental information (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005; Salawu, 2004). In particular there are specific settings and timing were specific sexual and reproductive health related communication is disseminated by designated individuals to community members of all age groups (see Ndlovu & Hove, 2015; Mumvana, 2018).

With specific reference to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, sexual and reproductive health training was characteristically a private, gendered and compartmentalised activity (Mano, 2004). This indicates that sexual and reproductive communication was not a public pursuit, rather it occurred in private settings of women, or of men, or people of the same social category using appropriate language. In these restricted settings, perspicuous language that is viewed as obscene, indecent, X-rated or simply sexually offensive in the public domain is admissible. This form of communication equips members of the Shona cultural community with important and necessary sexual and reproductive health knowledge and abilities (Gwandure & Mayekiso, 2012; Ndlovu & Hove, 2015). This also shows that though sexual and reproductive health related communication looks like a contemporary concept which is a creation or preserve of modern institutions, this study demystifies that perspective, and shows that it is not a novel practice in the Shona tradition.

In spite of the facts stated in the preceding paragraph, the modern world exposes members of the Shona cultural community, and other African cultural communities with a plethora of channels and spaces through which sexual and reproductive information is disseminated and can be accessed. Such channels of sexual and reproductive health-related communication include among others, fliers, workshops, peer education, the Internet, social media, as well as print and broadcast media. Generally, due to factors such as urbanisation, education, globalisation and other technological advancements, the modern society is also epitomised by the demise and diminished importance of the traditional social structures and institutions that
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