


## Chapter 8

# Public Health Communication and the Exclusion of Minority Languages in Zimbabwe: Analysis of Community Radio Awareness Campaigns in Facebook Posts

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Public health communication is imperative to every livelihood including minorities. Language, however, remains one of the fundamentals of communication that can make the message reach the people. This chapter focuses on health awareness campaigns on Facebook community radio to analyse public health communication in Zimbabwe's minority languages. The authors used community radio platforms on the assumption that local languages such as minority languages can at least find space on community radio. However, a qualitative content analysis on radio content on Facebook reveals the dominance of Shona (major indigenous language) and English in public health communication by health authorities and representatives of the ruling party. There were a few exceptions of minority languages used in code-switch with English. Theorising effective communication to minorities, this chapter notes that governments should prioritise public health communication in minority languages through open collaborative networks by making use of language translation and community leadership in health awareness campaigns.*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-0624-6.ch008

## **INTRODUCTION**

The internet and digital forums have become platforms for local cultures and interactions in indigenous languages (Mathe, 2023; Lister et al., 2003). Although largely dominated by the English language in former British colonies, local people can localise digital platforms to reflect their own culture on matters of local interest (Mpofu & Salawu, 2020; Arora, 2019; Mignolo, 2007; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Willems & Mano, 2016). Literature reflects language mix and switching in contemporary media space and in indigenous language media such as *Kwayedza* and *Mthunywa* newspapers and radio public sphere in Zimbabwe with Shona and Ndebele as dominant languages (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023a; Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023b; Mpofu, 2023). In a critical analysis of minority language representation on talk radio programmes in Zimbabwe, Mathe and Motsaathebe (2023a) report language hybridisation with evident code-switching to major indigenous languages at the disadvantage of minorities. This chapter focuses on public health communication to minorities in minority languages on community radio platforms. Given the dominance of Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe's indigenous language media, the chapter specifically focuses specifically on community radio that broadcasts and disseminates local content through audio-visual formats and textual versions on Facebook.

Minority languages had no exclusive media coverage of their own in Zimbabwe until the licensing of community radio stations between 2021 and 2022. There are 14 community radio stations in Zimbabwe and all have digital Facebook communication platforms (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2023c). The dominant and widely spoken languages in the country are English, Shona and Ndebele and have had dominance in Zimbabwe's media landscape since 1980. In 2013, the Constitution of Zimbabwe officialised 16 languages namely English, Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga, Nambya, Venda, Shangani, Tonga, Xhosa, Sotho, Tshwawo, Tswana, Barwe, Doma, Chikunda, Chewa, and Sena. This chapter defines non-dominant indigenous languages such as Kalanga, Nambya, Venda, Shangani, Tonga, Xhosa, Sotho, Tshwawo, Tswana, Barwe, Doma, Chikunda, Chewa, and Sena as minority languages. We thus apply a qualitative content analysis on health awareness campaigns to answer questions: did community radio platforms communicate public health in minority languages, what were the health awareness campaigns in minority languages and how was the audience reception to health awareness campaigns in local languages?

Public health communication has no fixed definition. It might mean the dissemination and evaluation of accurate information on health for the protection of the public (WRHA Professionals, 2023). Healthy People (2010) defines health communication as "the art and technique of informing, influencing, and motivating individual, institutional, and public audiences about important health issues". Public health communication normally intervenes by seeking to promote public health (Healthy People 2010). The agreement among scholars is that public health communication should be relevant or accurate, accessible and understandable in various languages (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2020; Citron, Michaelis & Goldberg, 2020; Piller, Zhang & Li, 2020). This chapter, therefore, analyses public health communication in various minority languages in Zimbabwe.

## **MINORITY LANGUAGES AND THE MEDIA IN ZIMBABWE**

In 2021 and 2022, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) licensed 14 community radio stations. These community radio stations broadcast in indigenous languages as shown in table 1 below. The recognition of the minority languages in the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe paved ways for their

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