

Ethnic journalism, audiences and community development: An analysis of audience perceptions of fafaa FM's journalistic activities

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Abstract

This study broaches a conversation on ethnic media and journalism in Ghana by asking whether Fafaa Radio, a private commercial FM station in Dzodze, practices ethnic journalism based on audience perception of the station's functions and responsibilities. Using mixed methods of survey distributed to 500 participants, in-depth interviews with four purposively selected media practitioners of the station, and document analysis, the study addresses issues relating to Fafaa as an ethnic media outlet. The study occurs within an interpretative analytical approach underpinned by sociological imagination and normative considerations about professionalism in local and national contexts. The findings suggest that Fafaa FM's audiences believe that the station is an ethnic media organisation because it fulfils the characteristics and tenets of ethnic media. This is evident in the station's intervention journalism, which seeks to promote the cultural values and interests of its host communities and the station's revolutionary bottom-up approach to news production. However, Fafaa FM's ethnic media tendencies raise serious regulatory and conceptualisation issues as the regulatory bodies in Ghana, the National Communication Authority (NCA) and National Media Commission (NMC), do not recognise ethnic media in their classification of types of radio, thereby posing an identity crisis for Fafaa FM.

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Keywords

Ethnic media, audience perception, journalism practice, radio, development, Ghana

Introduction

While much research exists on ethnic journalism or media from the Global North (see [Deuze, 2006](#); [Ross 2017](#); [Yu, 2022](#)), the subject has received negligible attention from the Global South, especially in Africa. Studies such as [Cohen and McIntyre \(2019\)](#), [Ugangu \(2022\)](#), among others, have inquired into vernacular and indigenous language journalism from the perspective of Kenya and Uganda, highlighting their contribution to the socio-political, economic and cultural discourses of these countries. These concepts – vernacular, indigenous language, and ethnic journalism – differ, and this conceptual difference presents ethnic journalism as a distinct field that manifests a knowledge gap, especially within West African countries like Ghana, where ethnic journalism has seldom been studied. Scholars have attributed this to the continent's historical, social and political circumstances ([Fosu and Akpojivi 2021](#); [Robinson, 2016](#)). A notable exception is a recent study ([Fosu and Akpojivi 2021](#)) that examined policy documents and interviews with media practitioners from Fafaa FM, which revealed some traces of ethnic journalism in the news practices of the station based on characteristics of ethnic media as outlined by [Lazarte-Morales \(2008\)](#) and [Sahin \(2017\)](#). The authors conceptualised ethnic media and journalism as journalism that emphasises the 'cultural and social traits that distinguish minority groups from mainstream culture, reinforcing construction of these groups as different, exotic, and creates a representation that they want to buttress' ([Lazarte-Morales \(2012 p. 1\)](#)). [Fosu and Akpojivi \(2021\)](#) argue that Fafaa FM exhibits inclinations toward ethnic journalism based on the station's editorial policy and views expressed by journalists and media practitioners working with Fafaa FM. The authors indicated that the lack of an audience voice in their study makes the findings inconclusive and does not reveal the true positionality of ethnic journalism in Ghana and its role in societal development ([Fosu and Akpojivi, 2021](#)). Therefore, it is crucial to include audience perspectives in a study on the subject towards a more holistic appreciation of the phenomenon. As [Madianou \(2011\)](#) noted, using this bottom-up approach involving audience observations could produce a better illumination on the matter than depending just on media practitioners' activities and perspectives.

Therefore, this study follows up on that study, intending to investigate audience perspectives on the issue relative to the radio station's journalistic activities, positioning and impact. The idea is to discover, among others, if ethnic journalism is really being practised in Ghana despite the strict categorisation and conceptualisation of media types into public, commercial, community, campus and public-foreign by the regulator, Ghana's National Media Commission (NMC). This classification does not allow for ethnic journalism and its broader implications (as practised by Fafaa FM) on the media landscape and regulatory framework in the country. Three research questions are addressed: Is ethnic journalism practised by Fafaa FM? What is the perception of audiences about Fafaa FM and its journalistic practices? What are the functions and responsibilities of Fafaa FM to

its served community? To address these questions, the study is underpinned by the social responsibility model (McQuail, 2010) and the model of indigenous language for development communication (Salawu, 2001) within a mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2009).

News media and ethnic journalism in Africa

The diverse media landscape in Africa includes vernacular, ghetto, indigenous language, and mainstream English journalism, which serve to meet public needs (Cohen and McIntyre, 2019; Ugangu 2022). This diversity offers a rich research site to understand the media's broader socio-economic, political, and cultural impacts (Salawu and Chibita, 2016). While vernacular journalism has been well-studied, especially in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, this has not been the case for ethnic journalism. This type of journalism, seen from the perspective of cultural and social attributes that differentiate minority groups from mainstream culture and create a representation to be highlighted (Lazarte-Morales's (2008 p. 1), has not been explored extensively, especially from the Ghanaian perspective.

Research on ethnic journalism in the Global North suggests that this type of media practice or journalism is facilitating socio-economic, political and cultural development of ethnic minorities and their circumstances (Ross, 2017). This is because the practice is largely specific, people-oriented and participatory. According to Deuze (2006), the growth of ethnic journalism can be attributed to its targeted 'niche audience' and its centrality to development, thus, making the audience a germane factor in discourses on ethnic journalism. Recent studies on ethnic journalism elsewhere have even gone beyond the normative ideas of audience participation to focus on audience assessment of the ethnic journalism practice regarding orientation to the news, news values, and the role of ethnic journalism in community building (see Hanusch, 2014; Madianou, 2011; Ross 2017). This accentuates a significant gap in research on the topic in Africa and, for that matter, Ghana.

This current study is anchored on the belief that the news media could enhance social development and inclusion by presenting news about all social groups fairly and in an unbiased and non-stereotypical manner. This is because the way the news media, as an institution with signifying power, represents social groups could influence how such groups are regarded. As Pietikainen (2017, p. 17) argued: "news is one of the most influential public spaces of contemporary society, perceived as offering trustworthy and accurate stories about the world, its events and people." Thus, how the news media presents ethnic minorities in any society could go a long way to determining the extent to which such groups' interests are integrated into the interests of the larger society.

The above observation is very important within the African and Ghanaian contexts, where ethnicity plays a pivotal role in all spheres of life. In Africa, 'ethnicity' is intricately linked to language, and there are over 3000 ethnic groups and over 2000 living language groups scattered in the 54 countries in Africa¹ through which people gain indigenous knowledge about themselves. Certainly, some of these language-driven ethnic groups constitute ethnic and socio-political majorities regarding the number of speakers, social status, and so on, with others making up minorities. Language is a potent indicator of

differentiation based on the number of speakers and the role of the language in society. This discounts the colonial languages (English, French and Portuguese), which remain established as the continent's prestigious, official, and business languages. The numerous ethnic groups and languages in Africa make the continent a fertile ground for ethnic differentiation, which may find expression in everyday conversations and public spaces such as the media.

Scholars such as [Ansah \(2008\)](#) and [Fosu and Akpojivi \(2021\)](#) have extensively discussed Ghana's linguistic situation. Because ethnic journalism, as a concept and practice, has received little research attention in Africa, the literature has often represented the concept as local language journalism or sometimes community media, implying media established and operated to serve the immediate interests of a particular community. [Matsaganis et al. \(2011\)](#) describe ethnic media as media produced to serve the interests and needs of a particular ethnic community. [Lecheler et al. \(2019, p.691\)](#) add that "ethnic journalism is the practice of journalism by, for, and about ethnic groups." Thus, it could be argued that ethnic media practise ethnic journalism.

One of the significant identification criteria for ethnic media has been media produced by and for racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities ([Matsaganis et al., 2011](#)). This means ethnic media may be established and produced by and for an ethnic group and seek that group's immediate interests and wellbeing through (ethnic) journalism ([Lecheler et al., 2019](#)). [Royal \(n.d, p.5\)](#) distinguishes between ethnic media and community media, arguing that not all ethnic media are 'produced by the ethnic community they serve'. This means not all community media serve specific ethnic purposes. Therefore, ethnic journalism serves linguistic minorities within a local community whose views and ideas are not reflected in mainstream media or community media ([Sahin 2017](#)). Thus, ethnic journalism essentially targets ethnic minorities. This mandate or orientation will influence journalistic practices, which usually recognise the historical and reconstructed socio-political, economic and cultural realities of that ethnic community (see [Lazarte-Morales, 2008](#)).

Importantly, the contexts that produce ethnic media and ethnic journalism in the Global North are radically different from the African situation, and this accounts for new trends in America in which ethnic media ownership is not tied to ethnicity alone (see [Yu and Daniels 2022](#)). In the Global North, citizens are identified by some criteria as 'belonging' to the society, such as Blacks, Indians, etc., or as 'aliens', and everyday private and public discourses reflect this differentiation which finds expression in the media. That Western media are popular for overtly and covertly expressing tendencies for racism, and ethnic bias in their gatekeeping practices has been established in research. In Africa, such discrimination is more subtle and nuanced, occurring among people who believe they belong but are differentiated based on tribe, politics, religion, etc. African societies are fragmented, ethnically diverse, and confronted with challenges associated with ethnic bias, social inequalities, and socio-political exclusion. These are expressed, represented and constructed in the media. For the media in Ghana, like other African societies, ownership and language of the media may constitute avenues that construct this majority and minority differentiation that may be discerned in journalistic activities and productions. This is because the centralised nature of news content favours information from

the metropolises, elites and mainstream culture and interests over the needs and interests of communities removed from the centres (Fosu and Akpojivi, 2021).

From the above understanding, this study approaches ethnic media and journalism as practices that emphasise the unique “cultural and social traits that distinguish minority groups from mainstream culture, reinforcing construction of these groups as different, exotic, and creates a representation that they want to buttress” (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995 cited in Lazarte-Morales 2008 p. 1). This operationalisation is appropriate in this study on two fronts. First, Fafaa FM broadcasts predominantly in Ewe, a minority language of about 12% of the country’s language ecology. It must be emphasised that within the politics of language in Ghana, Ewe cannot compare with Akan regarding speakers, political, economic, ideological, social power, and use in broadcasting and popular culture (Fosu and Akpojivi, 2021). Second, the communities of the station’s catchment area and primary target were relatively small with limited opportunities. Being removed from the economic and political cities of Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi and Tamale, the station and its unique socio-political, economic and cultural realities may not feature regularly in the mainstream media such as GBC radio, Joy FM, Peace FM and other ‘national’ radio stations. This marks the station as a potential ethnic radio station that seeks to address the needs of its community.

Contemporary radio broadcasting scene in Ghana

The broadcasting industry in Ghana has transformed significantly from state-owned to a diverse and complex media landscape since deregulation in the 1990s. This shift allowed private participation, leading to a proliferation of media organisations and local language broadcasting outlets across Ghana (Ahmed 2012). Before deregulation, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) monopolised radio broadcasting, predominantly in English. Deregulation led to the establishment of bodies like the National Media Commission (NMC) and National Communication Authority (NCA), which implemented policies to ensure media accountability, professionalism, and broader access to broadcasting frequencies.

Despite deregulation, initial private participation did not significantly increase linguistic and cultural diversity and inclusion. Established private stations, such as Joy FM, continued to broadcast mainly in English until the mid-2000s (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2007; Blankson, 2005). However, the launch of Peace FM in 1999, a private commercial station broadcasting in Akan, marked a fundamental change. This centralisation prompted GBC to establish subsidiary stations in various regions, producing local content in local languages and encouraging the creation of community radio stations to address specific community information needs.

The Guidelines for Local Language Broadcasting Policy (2009) significantly realigned the industry, increasing the number of stations broadcasting in indigenous languages (Akpojivi and Fosu 2016). Today, every Ghanaian community receives at least one radio transmission, and many communities have local radio stations. As of the fourth quarter of 2023, the NCA had authorised 747 FM radio stations, with 550 operational. These stations are categorised as follows:

- 31 Public Radio Stations
- 5 Public (Foreign) Radio Stations
- 137 Community Radio Stations
- 25 Campus Radio Stations
- 549 Commercial Radio Stations

Public stations are operated by GBC or established by the Government of Ghana. Public foreign stations are set up by foreign governments to rebroadcast content from their countries. Commercial stations are privately owned and profit-driven. Community stations serve specific marginalised communities, while campus stations operate within educational institutions (See the NCA website, <https://nca.org.gh/authorised-radio/>).

This diversity raises questions about the ethnic implications of Ghana's media landscape. The various Ghanaian languages are spoken by distinct ethnic groups, and many radio stations are located within these ethnic communities. This scenario prompts further research into whether Ghana's diverse broadcasting trends signify new developments in journalism practices and whether there is a case for ethnic media and journalism in Ghana.

Two main positions inform these questions. First, some argue that the ethical norms of English-language media differ from those of indigenous-language media (Akpojivi and Fosu 2020; Gadzekpo et al., 2020). Second, professional norms may vary among indigenous-language media concerning journalists' responsibilities to their communities and society. However, there is limited knowledge on these issues, particularly regarding journalists' professional responsibilities in Ghana's contested linguistic, economic, political, and ideological media sphere.

Radio is being referenced in this study due to its continuous dominance as the most accessed and influential medium in Ghana and Africa (Myers, 2008). While many Ghanaian radio stations, such as Lateny FM, Obonu FM, and other GBC regional sub-stations, broadcast in local languages, their setup, ownership, practices, targeted audience, and ideology may not reflect ethnic media/journalism as previously characterized in this paper. Thus, Fafaa FM, a commercial FM station in Dzodze, approximately 168 km southeast of Accra, serves as an initial data source. Its location, ownership, practices, programming, and target audience suggest a potential case for ethnic media/journalism.

Contextual background: An overview of Fafaa FM and its served community

Fafaa FM, and known as Crystal Lens Radio, is a small radio station located in Dzodze, the district capital of the Ketu North District, whose inhabitants are mostly farmers and fisher folks. Fafaa FM is a licensed commercial radio station that began operation in 2013 on 100.3 MHz. The owner, Emmanuel Vortepé Ketaman, is a media practitioner with over 13 years of working experience and currently works as a journalist/presenter at the station. The primary targeted audience of the station is the Ewe ethnic group of the Dzodze community and the station's coverage areas. However, the station is received by audiences in towns such as Aflao, Denu, Keta, Angloga, Dzelukope Akatsi, Abor, Afife,

Afiadenyigba, Tadzevu, Ziope, etc. and their environs. The natives in these areas are mostly Anlos, a sub-group of Ewes distinguishable from the Ewes in other parts of the region, such as Peki, Kpeve, Kpando, Hohoe, and so on.

In terms of programming, the station broadcasts various shows such as *Morning show*, *Afternoon Drive Show* (where salient socio-economic, political and cultural issues are discussed), *Music and variety show* and *Duamenefa*. The *Duamenefa* programme is a social intervention show supported by the station's foundation, the 'Duamenefa Foundation', whose general motive is to provide social intervention to the people of the area. Thus, the radio station is well known throughout the Volta Region of Ghana as a proven development-oriented broadcasting outlet. Also, as part of the station's News programme, it carries local and national news bulletins. The station carries news bulletins in English from Joy FM (an English language commercial station based in Accra) at 6 a.m., 12 p.m., and 6 p.m. to provide national and international news to its audiences. Apart from these news sessions, whenever any language apart from Ewe occurs on the station, it is translated into Ewe.

Theoretical framework

Proceeding from the normative perspective of what is expected of the news media (Siebert et al., 1956), this study adopts two theoretical models to guide the analysis: the social responsibility (McQuail, 2010), and the model of indigenous language for development communication (Salawu, 2001). These models provided a framework for analysing Fafaa FM as a potential ethnic media and discovering the audiences' perception of the station's journalistic activities in the Ewe communities served by the station. McQuail (2010, p. 185) explained that the social responsibility model (SRM) goes beyond the freedom to publish news to include an obligation to society that transcend self-interest. This moral obligation implies that the needs of the community that the press serves must be met since this would consequently lead to liberated and empowered citizens and engender development. For this to happen, such communication has to be in the indigenous language of the people. According to Salawu (2001) in his indigenous language model, people understand media messages better when the messages are broadcast or communicated using indigenous languages. As such, broadcasting and understanding media messages will lead to the community's and its members' development. Salawu (2001) argues that such indigenous language broadcasting recognises the cultural reality and experiences of the people; thus, it is able to effectively convey information and meanings to all stakeholders and advance their development. According to the researcher, 'without using the indigenous language of the people in broadcasting, development will only be communicated at the people, not to the people and not with the people' (2021, p. 24). This implies that ethnic media and broadcasting connect media content to the target audience through their indigenous language, the language they understand and to which they share emotional attachment. These models provide critical analytical signposts for an understanding of the relationship between the media and audiences of the research area, which may have analytical implications for the topic in other ethnic groups in the country and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods research approach using a case study design (Creswell, 2009; Guetterman and Fetters, 2018; Yin, 2006). Research that concerns the existence of ethnic media in society and audiences' perspectives of journalism practices requires sophistication and robustness, which a mixed methods approach provides. As Guetterman and Fetters (2018) argued, case study research works well with mixed methods to provide a more complete understanding of issues through the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods. As such, this study employed a survey (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Wimmer and Dominick, 2011) and document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to achieve the study's set objectives. Quantitative data was sourced through a face-to-face survey of 500 audiences of the station's catchment areas of North Ketu District (Dzodze and its environs), South Ketu District (Akatsi and its environs), Keta Municipality (Keta and its environs) and Ho Municipality (Ho and its environs) in December 2021. 125 questionnaires were administered by each of four research assistants specifically trained for this research. The exercise occurred in each of the 4 districts serving as the core catchment area of the station, estimated to be just over 18,500², with a 100% response rate, which was achieved because the research assistants instantly collected each questionnaire form after administering it. Each of the four districts was zoned into 4 parts, north, south, east, and west, and data were collected for 2 weeks with the research assistants based in Dzodze. The research assistants travelled daily to the various zones of the districts and conveniently included adult participants in homes and other convenient locations. With guidance from the authors, the four research assistants identified key locations in the core catchment area, such as markets, healthcare centers, and community centers and stationed themselves at these locations during peak hours to maximise participant engagement. They also entered homes that are accessible and welcoming within the 4 districts to collect data, using a stratified method of every 4th or 5th house in their path. These sampled participants met the prerequisite of living in the station's orbit and regularly listening to Fafaa FM, especially news, morning shows, and the Duamenefa programme.³ The participants include ages from 16 to above 60 years, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed. All the research assistants were Ewe university graduates who could speak and write the indigenous language. As such, they recorded and wrote the responses of the uneducated participants in the questionnaire form, which was later checked with the audio to ensure accuracy. Using margin error at a 95% confidence level, the 500 sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, e , the level of precision. For the qualitative component, document analysis and in-depth interviews of 4 of the media workers of the station were thematically analysed to strengthen the findings and conclusions. Going by Bowen (2009 p. 27-28), the documents analysed included the station's

editorial policy, programme guide, website (<https://fafaafmonline.com/>), and social media handle, particularly Facebook (<https://web.facebook.com/Fafaa100.3fm/>). The documents were evaluated and meanings were derived to produce empirical knowledge (Bowen 2009; Corbin and Strauss, 2008) to complement the survey data (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the station, the Station Manager and two reporters were also interviewed during the data period. The data were transcribed and thematically analysed to complement the quantitative findings. In all these processes, ethical considerations and decisions were stringently applied, particularly the enforcement of informed consent and the desire of the journalists to remain anonymous in the report.

The survey data were statistically coded separately and analysed to lead the analytical process (Creswell, 2009), with the document analysis and interview data supporting both the analysis and reporting. Thus, the document analysis and interviews complemented the survey data and strengthened the study through triangulation (Heale and Forbes, 2017), which also served to authenticate the overall analysis and impose credibility on the study (Creswell, 2009). The sociological imagination embedded in a critical interpretative approach provided insights into the significant media and journalism realities of the local society.

Findings and discussion

This study sought to investigate whether a case could be made for ethnic journalism in Ghana and to discover the audience's perception of Fafaa FM based on the station's functions and responsibilities to its host communities. The audience of Fafaa FM served as a data source in this preliminary study to set the tone for further discussions on the topic. The findings relating to the research questions are presented and discussed subsequently.

Rq1: Is ethnic journalism practised by Fafaa FM?

Ross (2017) argues that the audience's perception is central to understanding and conceptualising ethnic media and journalism. According to Ross (2017 p.1559), scholars have to identify and understand what ethnic media audiences consider important and "pay closer attention to ethnic audiences' orientation to news media." This means that the cultural, political and economic needs and representation of ethnic minorities should be the driving force or mandate of any ethnic media (see Husband, 1994).

The survey data indicate that the audiences of Fafaa FM believe the station was practising ethnic journalism by championing the people's cultural, economic and political developments (See Table 1 for Chi Square result).

From Table 1, the χ^2 test of goodness of fit for participants' responses on the items revealed that the observed data did significantly depart from the expected frequency of no difference across the response category; Fafaa FM provides information and educates listeners about local issues and policies $\chi^2(3, N = 492) = 502.976, p < .0001$; Fafaa FM makes the Ewe culture known $\chi^2(4, N = 492) = 687.329, p < .0001$; Fafaa FM

Table I. Results of the chi-square test for ethnic journalism practices.

Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	χ^2 chi-square	df	p	Total
Fafaa FM provides information and educate listeners about local issues and policies	2		3	200	287	502.976	3	.0001	492
Fafaa FM makes the Ewe culture known	1	4	6	228	253	687.329	4	.0001	492
Fafaa FM deliberately projects the culture and tradition of Ewes in its news and other programmes?	2		7	228	254	458.515	3	.0001	491
Fafaa FM protects the language and culture of Ewes	3		7	251	232	455.341	3	.0001	493
Fafaa FM champions and advocate development projects in the area	2	4	17	201	269	653.765	4	.0001	493
Fafaa FM demands accountability and serve as check on community and national leaders	2	4	15	122	352	909.374	4	.0001	495
Fafaa FM mobilizes community members for a particular cause	4	7	53	233	198	478.404	4	.0001	495

deliberately projects the culture and tradition of Ewes in its news and other programmes $\chi^2(3, N = 491) = 458.515, p < .0001$; Fafaa FM protects and projects the language and culture of Ewes $\chi^2(3, N = 493) = 455.341, p < .0001$; Fafaa FM Champions and advocate development projects in the area $\chi^2(4, N = 493) = 653.765, p < .0001$; Fafaa FM demands accountability and serves as a check on community and national leaders $\chi^2(4, N = 495) = 909.374, p < .0001$; and Fafaa FM mobilises community members for a particular cause $\chi^2(4, N = 495) = 478.404, p < .0001$. The distribution for each variable showed that the

participants tend to see Fafaa FM to significantly provide information and educate listeners about local issues and policies, make the Ewe culture known, deliberately project the culture and tradition of Ewes in its news and other programmes, protect the language and culture of Ewes, champions and advocate development projects in the area, demand accountability and serve as a check on community and national leaders, and mobilises community members for a particular cause. This is in line with the station’s position, as one of the interviewed participants stated that their primary focus is to serve the Ewe people and promote the culture, and this entails broadcasting programs that highlight the socio-political, economic, cultural and religious development of the people and the area (Personal Communication, 2020).

The last question on the survey form asked respondents their opinion on the purpose for which Fafaa FM was established, and the responses were analysed qualitatively. Most respondents mentioned the need to uphold the Ewe culture and tradition, which came up strongly, as captured below in the following examples:

- to safeguard the Ewe tradition and positively project the culture of the Anlos.
- to save the poor and the minority groups
- to protect our culture as Ewes.
- to promote the Ewe culture and promote peace.

A word cloud analysis of this finding is presented below in Figure 1.

The finding shows audiences’ reciprocal view that the station existed to promote the Ewe culture, community, tradition, language, and so on. These ideas imply what the audiences experienced with the station’s activities, which goes to portray the station as potentially practising ethnic journalism. This is in line with Hanusch’s (2014) argument that ethnic journalism should be culturally oriented and reflect the history and needs of ethnic minorities. Similarly, the model of indigenous language for development communication (Salawu, 2001) indicates that people are best placed to access information and be part of the communication process in their own language and culture. In this case, the

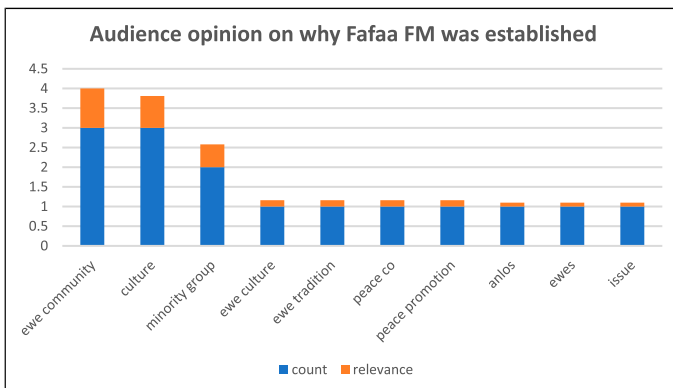


Figure 1. Audience opinion on what Fafaa FM was established.

predominantly Ewe audience identified with Fafaa FM, because it is seen as serving their interest by upholding the Ewe culture and heritage.

Rq2: What is the perception of audiences about Fafaa FM and its journalistic practices?

To understand the audience's perception of Fafaa FM and their journalistic practices regarding ethnic journalism, participants were asked questions about their reasons for listening to Fafaa FM, the programme listened to and the type of content, and if it reflects Ewe culture (See [Tables 2–4](#) for statistical breakdown).

From [Table 2](#), 62.6% of the participants listened to Fafaa FM because the news stories and programmes were relevant to their needs. 53% of participants said because the stories and programmes reflected the needs of the community, 44.8% of participants, because it projected and highlighted the culture of the Ewe language, 39% of participants, because it broadcast in the Ewe language, and 29.6% of participants, because the station was located within the community. The broader objective of the station, as stated in the editorial policy, was to be the 'Voice of Ewes', and the station sought to achieve this by tailoring its programmes to be relevant to the audiences. Therefore, the finding shows that the immediate needs, community and cultural values of the audience are important duties that ethnic media must fulfil. Fafaa FM believed that it existed to serve the immediate needs of its host communities. This aligns with [Sahin's \(2017\)](#) argument that the purpose of any ethnic media is to serve the minorities within a community whose views are not reflected in the community or mainstream media.

From [Table 3](#) above, the local programme *Duamenefa*, was the most listened to with 94%, *news*, the second highest with 16.4%, and the *morning show* was 13.4%. *Afternoon drive show* was 8.6%, and *music and variety show* was 6%. Unsurprisingly, the *Duamenefa* programme aims to foster social intervention and promote 'oneness' and 'peaceful co-existence amongst community members.' The station's Editorial Policy states that "the purpose for establishing Fafaa FM is to create and assist humanity... Fafaa Radio is to help people in terms of agricultural and developmental issues in the community." The need to help and serve humanity is reflected in the station's mandate and objectives as, according to Fafaa FM, the station seeks to bring socio-political and cultural

Table 2. Respondents' Reasons for listening in to Fafaa FM.

Reasons for listening in to fafaa FM	N out 500	Out of 100%
News and programmes are relevant to your personal needs and aspirations	313	62.6
News and programmes reflect the needs and aspirations of your community	266	53.2
It highlights and projects the culture and language of Ewes	224	44.8
It broadcasts in Ewe language	195	39.0
It is located in, or close to, your community	148	29.6

Table 3. Respondents' Reasons for listening in to Fafaa FM.

Programme listened to fafaa FM	N out 500	%
News	82	16.4
Morning show	67	13.4
Afternoon drive show	43	8.6
Music and variety show	30	6.0
Duamenefa	470	94.0

Table 4. Content or programme on Fafaa FM depicts the culture of Ewes

Content or programme on fafaa FM depicts the culture of ewes	N out 500	%
News	33	6.6
Morning show	15	3.0
Afternoon drive show	13	2.6
Music and variety show	12	2.4
Duamenefa	452	90.4

empowerment to their audience (Ewe people), ensure their well-being, and safeguard their culture (<https://www.fafaafm.com>). This idea of serving humanity and facilitating audience empowerment defines the approach to the journalism practised by the station as one of the interviewed participants stated that:

For me as a journalist, sometimes, when I do my news and those things, I get out into the streets, I move into the communities and say to people, what would you want me to do for you concerning the situation? So what they tell me, I draft into news, I pass it on. So from there we bring it under control (Personal Communication, 2020).

The above shows how the station's journalists and audience collaborate in producing news, which also highlights the audience's perception of the station as existing to help them solve their everyday challenges. This reflects what ethnic media stands for, to foster and promote humanity and cultural values of minorities, which should shape programming or content. As reflected in Table 4, programming content that promotes the cultural values of the audiences and host community comes up strongly as the most preferred and listened to by the audience. 90% listened to *Duamenefa*, which provided content about the Ewe culture and social issues (political, economic and cultural) confronting the listening communities. News was the second highest most listened to programme with 6.6%. According to Fosu and Akpojivi (2021) and as discerned from the station's Programme Guide, Fafaa FM does not only report on events happening within their host communities but also carries bulletins from Joy FM at 6 a.m., Noon and 6 p.m., which provide both national and international news to their audiences. Ross (2017) argued that ethnic minorities feel alienated by the mainstream media as they believe their content

or news about them is not reported. To this end, Fafaa FM provides adequate cover for local, national and international news. While the station reports actively on activities occurring within their host communities, it provides a platform for audiences to be aware of national and international news by broadcasting a commercial radio station based in Accra (Joy FM) news at selected times.

Rq3: What are the functions and responsibilities of Fafaa FM to its served community?

Respondents in this study stated the functions and responsibilities of Fafaa FM to its served communities. According to Ross (2017) and Hanusch (2014), the audience of ethnic media believe that ethnic media should project the cultural values of their host communities and provide news that reflects their social, economic and political values and needs. This study's findings support Ross's (2017) and Hanusch (2014) arguments. According to the participants, Fafaa FM plays a salient role in promoting the cultural values of the host communities through history and cultural programmes. From Table 5, most of the participants 85.6% believe that Fafaa FM interviews traditional leaders on the history and culture of the Ewe people. Likewise 62.4% argue that the station interviews historians and scholars on issues concerning the Ewe culture. Table 6

In addition, 98% of participants posit that Fafaa FM promotes Ewe culture through its programming, particularly in its news programmes. Furthermore, 98% of participants stated that the station provides relevant information about its host communities and educates them on relevant issues of their communities. Similarly, Fafaa FM is said to advocate for the developmental strides of its host communities by championing developmental projects (98.6% participants), holding local and national leaders accountable (99% participants), and mobilising community members to take action on social causes (98.8% participants).

From Table 7, 98% of participants state that Fafaa FM achieves this by reporting on local businesses, economic activities like farming, fishing, and trading (98% participants), and providing a platform for rational educational debates (98% participants) that facilitate

Table 5. How Fafaa FM station promotes Ewe language and culture.

	Frequency	N out of 500	Percent
Interview with traditional leaders on history and culture of Ewe/ Anlo people	428		85.6
Interview with historians and scholars on history and culture of Ewe/ Anlo people	312		62.4
Playing traditional Ewe music and dance	290		58.0
Constant use of Ewe proverbs, idioms and expressions by presenters	305		61.0
Promoting traditional festivities and rites	306		61.2

Table 6. Functions served by fafaa FM.

Functions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	χ^2 chi-square	df	p
Fafaa FM provides information and educate listeners about local issues and policies	2		3	200	287	492	502.976	3	.0001
Fafaa FM makes the Ewe culture known	1	4	6	228	253	492	687.329	4	.0001
Fafaa FM deliberately projects the culture and tradition of Ewes in its news and other programmes?	2		7	228	254	491	458.515	3	.0001
Fafaa FM protects the language and culture of Ewes	3		7	251	232	493	455.341	3	.0001
Fafaa FM champions and advocate for development projects in the area	2	4	17	201	269	493	653.765	4	.0001
Fafaa FM demands accountability and serve as check on community and national leaders	2	4	15	122	352	495	909.374	4	.0001
Fafaa FM mobilizes community members for a particular cause	4	7	53	232	198	494	667.461	5	.0001

The X^2 goodness of fit test for the item Fafaa FM provides information and educates listeners about local issues and policies, showed a significant departure from the expected frequency, $X^2(3, n = 492) = 502.976, p = 0.0001$. A majority of participants agreed ($n = 200$) or strongly agreed ($n = 287$) with the statement. A P value of ≤ 0.05 was considered as statistically significant between responses.

development. This finding is crucial to the well-being of the station's community. As previously stated, the inhabitants of Dzodze and surrounding towns and villages are farmers and fishermen. Therefore, Fafaa FM not only provides information about such

Table 7. Reported activities.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	χ^2 chi-square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Report social and cultural activities (such as festivals, funerals, weddings)	7	6	85	196	198	492	371.110	4	.000
Report local businesses	2	6	26	146	311	491	718.297	4	.000
Report cultural events (festivals, puberty rites, etc.)	6	5	102	167	200	480	336.188	4	.000
Report economic activities (farming, trading, fishing, etc.)	6	2	104	149	229	490	382.429	4	.000
Report education (such as debates, sports)	4	7	46	148	287	492	589.850	4	.000

The table shows significant chi-square results ($p = 0.000$) for various Fafaa FM activities, indicating that participant responses strongly deviate from expected frequencies. This suggests strong agreement that Fafaa FM actively reports on social, cultural, economic, and educational activities. A P value of ≤ 0.05 was considered as statistically significant between responses.

career practices but educates the inhabitants on farming and fishing by bringing experts to shed light on various aspects of their occupation.

This finding is strongly expressed in Fafaa FM's Editorial Policy Document and on its social media handles. For example, the Editorial Policy Document states (under the Mission Statement) that the station was established to “deliver fresh and compelling content for investigation and intervention with special focus on the seven pillars of the society: Religion, Family, Governance, Education, Media, Arts, and Business...” (No Pagination). While Ross (2017), in her study, discovered that audiences of Pacific ethnic media in New Zealand felt their media failed to meet their desire for high-quality journalism, within the context of this study, Fafaa FM is believed to carry out high-quality journalism that is audience-driven and reflects the everyday needs of the audience.

The audiences' perceived functions and responsibilities of Fafaa FM align with its mandate. According to its editorial policy, the station seeks to provide “authentic information for intervention... (see also the Facebook page). It also aims to collaborate with relevant stakeholders to save the vulnerable in various communities whose rights and

privileges are being trampled upon religiously, socially, and economically” (Fafaa FM, N.d).

Conclusion: Ethnic media and audience perception of journalistic practices in Ghana: implications for research

This study acknowledges the limitation of using a single radio station, Fafaa FM, as a case study in Ghana. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, further comparative studies on perceived ethnic radio stations in Ghana are recommended. The issue of ethnic media in Ghana lacks extensive literature (Fosu and Akpojivi, 2021), yet this study provides a framework for conceptualising ethnic media in Ghana. It discusses whether ethnic media practices are associated with Fafaa FM from the audience’s perspective. The study reveals that audiences perceive Fafaa FM as promoting and protecting its host community’s culture, values, and rights, indicating potential ethnic journalism practices. However, due to the negative connotations associated with *ethnicity* in Africa, Fafaa FM and its audience may not readily acknowledge it as an ethnic media organisation.

Fafaa FM promotes cultural values through a bottom-up journalistic approach, reflecting the needs of its audience, distinguishing it from mainstream or community media (Sahin, 2017). Sahin (2017) noted that audience perception of ethnic media functions offers insights into ethnic media conceptualisation. 98 % of the participants believe Fafaa FM promotes Ewe cultural values, showing a positive audience disposition towards it as ethnic media.

Fafaa FM’s ideological background, mandate, and editorial policy further align it with ethnic media tendencies. The Ewe language’s relative lack of power compared to Akan or English in Ghanaian broadcasting highlights Fafaa FM’s role in addressing linguistic and political exclusions (Fosu and Akpojivi, 2021). However, the station’s exhibition of ethnic media characteristics raises regulatory framework questions. As indicated earlier, Ghana classifies media into public, community, commercial, foreign, and campus categories, excluding ethnic media due to potential political divisiveness (Fosu and Akpojivi 2021). While ethnic media has been linked to political tension in countries like Kenya and Rwanda, Samatar (1997) argued that ethnic strife results from broader social upheavals, not solely from media influence (Cohen and McIntyre, 2019).

The broader implications of ethnic media, as evident in Fafaa FM’s case, is that it can impact socio-political, economic, and cultural development in Ghana. Fafaa FM meets its host communities’ needs by championing cultural and material development for the Ewe people, providing a platform for their participation in media and local/national development. This role is crucial for the socio-cultural, political, and economic growth of its host communities. Nyamnjoh (2005) argued that Africans often identify more with ethnic groups than national consciousness, thereby ingraining this into African journalism could benefit the country. Thus, fostering a sense of belonging for all citizens, especially in postcolonial contexts where ethnicity and language politics are intertwined, is essential. This approach would enhance democratic processes by promoting cultural values and diversity.

The study calls for more local and national conversations about ethnic media classification and recognition in Ghana. The NMC and NCA could consider ethnic media as a distinct category. This necessitates audience research to evaluate the functional radio stations' journalism practices and align findings with their licensed mandates. By addressing these issues, Ghana can provide platforms for all citizens to promote their cultural values, enhancing national development and democratic processes.

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Notes

1. See Statista Research Department (2021). <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1280625/number-of-living-languages-in-africa-by-country/>
2. According to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Republic of Ghana, Dzodze has a population of 18597 (<https://mofa.gov.gh/site/sports/district-directorates/volta-region/287-ketu-north>).
3. This is a live social intervention programme that settles conflicts among the people of the area.

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