

## Opinion Piece: Why I love Radio

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I cannot imagine my life without radio – something that I was strongly reminded of by the events of the past month. July is dubbed “Radio Month” in our sector as it ‘hosts’ the annual Radio Days Africa (RDA) conference, followed by the annual South African Radio Awards.

As a young adult listener in South Africa, the issues raised at this year’s RDA conference, held from 5<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, July 2021, resonated strongly with me. Especially in this pandemic era of social distancing, radio is for me a loyal, ever-present and always accessible companion. It gives me a sense of connection - to the radio community, my neighbours, my fellow South Africans and even to the wider world out there. I

turn to it for reliable, credible information and, of course, its entertainment value - the fun and light-hearted talk shows, my favourite music shows and let’s not forget the great competitions and festivals organised by radio such as Joburg Day and Joy of Jazz.

Kelly Ramputswa, CEO of Yarona FM, Botswana and RDA speaker, noted that, “Radio is very strong; it connects in real time. It’s there during tough times and happy times”. For me radio provides companionship both in good and difficult times. Radio is there when I need a pep talk in the morning, providing emotional support and keeping me entertained, especially during those lonely evenings. I rely on the radio in the same way as I rely on my friends: it makes me happy, provides comfort and is always there for me.

As highlighted at the conference, radio’s universal appeal to cater for both young and old is its power as a broadcasting medium. I recall my visits to my late grandfather ‘on the farms’, where he was one of the few people who owned a radio. Neighbours from all over would gather at his home, excited to listen to his radio, and especially to broadcasters speaking in their languages, be it Isixhosa or IsiZulu.

And just as my late grandfather and his neighbours had their favourite programmes, I, as a young city-dweller, love radio for the versatility of music and shows popular with my age group. Hence, I applaud radio for accommodating not only our elders, but also my peers with the youth oriented cutting-edge content we want.

Lynn Joffe, CEO of Creatix and RDA speaker, mentioned that, “good radio always has a story arc”, and that the goal is for a listener to feel differently to what they felt before listening to the story told. I do love the music programmes, but it’s also the dramas that draw me to radio, stimulating my imagination and creativity. Naturally, the entertainment appeal of drama is huge for young listeners such as myself – but there’s so much more. Today’s dramas creatively deal with complex issues, such as domestic violence, crime, HIV and Covid-19, helping me understand them in an easily ‘digestible’ way. They make me consider important messages conveyed and how they could play out in my life - building the courage and commitment in me to make a change.

“We see radio having a glorious future, we don’t see it going anywhere anytime soon”, was the view of Muhammad Cajee, Chief Digital Officer of Primedia, speaking at the RDA conference. So true in my view as, just as television did not destroy the power of radio, neither will the advent of the new digital platforms. In fact, it will give radio the opportunity to reach out to even wider audiences and to be even more accessible. Even when I am out of the geographical range of my favourite radio station, visiting my aunt in Gqeberha for example, the advent of streaming radio means that I won’t miss out on my daily programmes.

Though still early days, traditional radio is also embracing the digital revolution through podcasting, providing an intimate, personal and convenient listening experience.

As a young adult listener, I cannot deny the attractions of music streaming platforms - being able to choose your own playlist and your own music genre, as well as easy and fast access to the very latest music.

But while streaming music is cool, it is also costly. When I run out of data, I know my radio is always there – and it’s free. Digital music streaming is awesome but we cannot rely on it full time, which is why there will always be a space for radio.

Looking to the future, I’m yet to see what could replace radio. When it comes to credible current affairs and connecting with the community, radio is irreplaceable. But this is not to say that new digital platforms do not have a role to play, be they as an alternative to radio for music streaming, for example, or to enhance the power of radio itself. For us, the younger generation, the appeal of new technologies is not to replace radio but to give us a wider choice across various platforms.