

Radio Udaan: Empowering India's Visually Challenged through Sound

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Abstract

Community radio provides a non-commercial forum for local communities to exchange ideas and express themselves. It has the potential to be a strong tool for social growth and empowerment, particularly for groups that are already at a disadvantage, such as people who are physically disabled. Particularly beneficial for marginalised groups, like the physically disabled, it promotes social empowerment and growth. People who are physically challenged have the opportunity to express their stories, experiences, and points of view through the use of this platform. In addition to this, it can be utilized to increase awareness of topics that are relevant to people who are physically challenged, such as accessibility, employment, and educational opportunities. This paper investigates how community radio may empower people with physical disabilities, as well as the obstacles and possibilities that these stations confront. Through a case study of Radio Udaan, founded by Danish Mahajan, we delve into how community radio supports human rights, facilitates expression, and disseminates information globally via www.radioudaan.com. Using a qualitative approach, primary data was gathered via interviews with radio founders and physically disabled participants. Secondary data was collected with the help of existing literature available through websites, research papers and documentaries. The findings highlight benefits such as information access, an expressive platform, social connection, and skill development for those with disabilities. However, obstacles exist, including accessibility concerns. Addressing these obstacles is critical for community radio to empower the physically disadvantaged and promote their social involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Community radio refers to a type of radio transmission that is owned and operated by a non-profit organization or group of individuals. Community radio stations typically cater to the needs of a specific community or geographic area and are an important asset to each community, primarily by providing programming that differs from that typically found on commercial radio stations.

It is also a valuable way to disseminate information and facilitate educational opportunities, as well as foster a sense of community involvement. Community radio stations were often involved in broadcasting a variety of issues in 1999, including news, music, talk shows, and educational programs. In addition

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to their primary language, local radio stations can broadcast programs in multiple languages.

"A radio Service by the People,

Close to the People, and for the People."

The aforementioned phrase encapsulates the fundamental characteristics of the radio, emphasising its focus on the public, its proximity to the public, and its purpose of serving the public. This implies that community radio should not only be operated but also cater to the interests of the community. According to UNESCO, community radio is regarded as a platform that empowers those who lack representation, acts as an interface for marginalised groups, and plays a key role in facilitating communication and democratic mechanisms within societies.

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It is also a valuable way to disseminate information and facilitate educational opportunities, as well as foster a sense of community involvement. Community radio stations were often involved in broadcasting a variety of issues in 1999, including news, music, talk shows, and educational programs. In addition to their primary language, local radio stations can broadcast programs in multiple languages.

Community radio is an important channel for communities because it gives individuals the opportunity to talk about their lives and the events that have shaped them. It also affects underrepresented groups, such as people who cannot fully participate in traditional media due to physical limitations. These technologies enable individuals to overcome barriers that prevent them from interacting with traditional media and provide a platform for self-expression and community engagement.

"Community radio has become a guiding force in raising awareness among citizens about various

aspects of one's own community and empowering other communities as well." SP (city) Pramod Kumar said on the occasion of World Radio Day celebrated at the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disability (NIEPVD).

The facilitator provides individuals with physical disabilities with important opportunities to share personal stories, advocate for their rights, and connect with others facing similar challenges to increase awareness of these individuals' challenges, to include both reason and mankind, and to break down prejudices.

It has the potential to facilitate relationships between the physically challenged through the use of support groups and online forums, allowing these people to find friendship and support. Educational programs and public service advertisements can also be used to raise awareness of the issues these people have faced, for understanding and inclusion. This enables people struggling with physical disabilities to be part of a welcoming community half the size.

Benefits of Community Radio for Physically Challenged Individuals

Community radio has significant potential for individuals with physical disabilities. This platform enables individuals to disseminate their narratives, encounters, and viewpoints. Community radio can additionally contribute to the dissemination of knowledge on the obstacles encountered by those with physical disabilities, fostering inclusivity and diversity.

There are several possibilities through which community radio might serve as a platform for those with physical disabilities to engage in meaningful opportunities:

Physically challenged people and media accessibility

Individuals with physical disabilities often have restricted access to mainstream media. The utilisation of conventional broadcasting techniques, mostly dependent on visual and physical engagement, may result in the exclusion of individuals with disabilities. Community radio can act as a bridge, which can

increase accessibility by emphasising local issues, community participation, and diverse content.

Inclusivity and representation

Community radio provides a platform for people with physical disabilities through which they can effectively articulate their singular views and find solutions to the challenges they face in their daily lives. The process of addressing stereotypes and correcting misconceptions about disability is helped by sharing real stories and personal experiences of people with disabilities

Skill development and empowerment

Participation in community radio can help people with physical disabilities improve their communication and reporting skills. The aforementioned process can increase a person's self-worth and self-confidence and empower that person.

Increased awareness and advocacy

Individuals with physical disabilities can use community radio as a way to promote awareness of issues such as accessibility, opportunities, and availability of support services. It is a way to promote and influence policy change and advocacy efforts at the local and national levels.

Fighting stigma and discrimination

Community radio has the potential to successfully combat stigma and discrimination against individuals with physical disabilities. Community radio stations can produce programs that actively challenge harmful stereotypes and promote positive attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Building community

Community radio stations provide a platform where people with physical disabilities can interact and discuss with each other the impact of their unique life experiences.

Promoting employment opportunities

Community radio stations can produce programs that highlight the abilities and skills of people with physical disabilities. Consequently, individuals with physical disabilities should be supported to improve their employment opportunities.

Community Radio that Benefitted Physically Challenged People

Community radio can give people with physical disabilities more power by giving them a way to talk about their feelings and experiences. Furthermore, it can help the public learn more about and comprehend the unique problems this group of people faces. Additionally, community radio can help people feel more welcome and appreciate the differences in society. The following examples show how community radio can be used to improve the well-being of people with physical disabilities in different parts of India:

Radio Surabhi

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Radio Surabhi initiated the establishment of a community radio program specifically designed for visually impaired students in the context of inclusive education. Sikshya Surabhi's initiatives are designed to meet the educational requirements of elementary school children in grades I to V, with a particular emphasis on visually impaired students. Despite typically being sent and received within a restricted geographical range, the initiative was successfully disseminated across The program's inputs were meticulously produced and reviewed by a panel of experts, and the technical accuracy of radio programs was assessed through meetings and workshops. Courses like Mathematics, English language, and social sciences were transformed into auditory images for improved student comprehension. Odisha, through community radios and the government mechanism of OSEPA, reached all 314 blocks of the state. It also indirectly assists around 20,000 students across 101 schools by improving their auditory skills and proficiency in both spoken and written language.

Hamara MSPICM Community Radio

Hamara MSPICM Community Radio has launched a program called Mud Mud Kee Naa Dhakh, which focuses on individuals with disabilities. The program, in collaboration with Mumbai-based NGO Trinani, provides comprehensive information on various types of disabilities and works with people



with varying abilities. The program has raised community members' awareness about disability issues and has been aired in various languages. The radio correspondents conduct interviews with community members with disabilities and highlight their achievements. They also receive community feedback on the programs and numerous helpful suggestions from participants. The initiative aims to provide exclusive information and supplementary information on disability-related topics.

Radio Udaan

Radio Udaan (Pathankot, Punjab) is a community-based radio station founded by Danish Mahajan. It actively supports and works for the protection and advancement of human rights, particularly as they pertain to individuals with disabilities. Individuals are able to more easily communicate their unique experiences and views with the help of this platform. The program is disseminated on a global scale through the website www.radioudaan.com and serves a variety of purposes, including the incorporation of disability studies into curricula, the facilitation of peer support training, the contribution to research and policy development, and assistance for community organising endeavours.

Radio Madhuban

Radio Madhuban is a popular community radio station situated in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has granted Radio Madhuban a licence to the Brahma Kumari group. The radio station was able to emphasise concerns affecting diverse segments of society, including women, children, youth, older residents, and others. Eventually, the radio station opted to concentrate on disabled people. They began focusing on disability problems in 2014. In 2019, they created 'Man Ki Aankhon Se', followed by 'Humrahi' in July 2020. The goal is to reach as many people as possible and raise awareness of topics that are not commonly discussed. The response to these performances was favourable, and now the community radio station Vasundhara Vahini in Maharashtra has requested them to broadcast the 'Humrahi' program in their region.

Challenges and Barriers

Awareness and Attitude

Addressing misconceptions and preconceived notions in the community and among radio station staff is critical to creating an inclusive environment. Despite progress, widely held negative beliefs and attitudes about people with physical disabilities may persist, encouraging discrimination and exclusion. Awareness campaigns aimed at challenging stereotypes and building empathy and understanding are important for changing social attitudes. This campaign can use various mediums, such as radio broadcasts, social media, and community events, to educate the public about the unique capabilities and achievements of people with physical disabilities, coupled with sensitivity training for radio office staff to help create an inclusive and courteous work environment.

Accessibility and technology

In general, people with physical disabilities have great difficulty accessing and using radio equipment due to accessibility problems. Individuals with limited mobility find it difficult or impossible to obtain and use adequate radio equipment because many devices have not been designed with their needs in mind. To overcome these problems, radio offices should incorporate accessible building materials and adaptive technologies. Accessible studio layouts can include accessible walkways, adjustable desk accessories, and tactile features for individuals with visual impairments.

Funding and resources

Economic constraints are a major obstacle for many community radio stations, especially when it comes to allocating funds for acquisition efforts. Implementing measures to increase accessibility, such as installing customised equipment or upgrading studio spaces, may require investments that are not always easy, and on the other hand, cooperation with disability groups can provide critical support and resources to overcome these barriers. By working with disability advocacy groups, radio stations can identify accessibility issues and

offer cost-effective options. These relationships can also enhance the exchange of knowledge and best practices, enabling radio stations to develop long-term projects that benefit both individuals with disabilities and the community, as well as providing additional financial support for access to resources provided by government agencies, foundations, or individuals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Chapman et al. (2003), the expansion of rural radio stations can be attributed to advancements in information technologies and a shift in the development paradigm towards a more participatory approach to information and knowledge dissemination.

A study by Chapman et al. (2003) found that using rural radio has been an effective way to improve the sharing of agricultural information in rural farming communities that are far away from each other. Through the use of local languages to talk directly with farmers and listeners' groups, radio can be used as a platform for participatory communication methods that help agricultural extension programs.

Genilo et al. (2016) argued that community radio ownership is a deciding factor in the community's representation in management and how much a radio station gives voice to the voiceless. This is one of the reasons community radio ownership in India is restricted to NGOs, educational institutions, and agricultural science centres.

In his study, Kumar (2004) recognized radio as a means of participatory communication that holds significance in both economic and social development.

Sterling et al. (2007) conducted research that shows female community radio listeners are given the chance to actively interact with programming by giving feedback and helping to create programming material. The researchers estimated how much money women weren't using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for growth. Furthermore, they looked into the possibility of inclusion through the use of community radio sites.

Objectives

- To investigate the advantages that community

radio can offer to individuals with physical impairments.

- To gain an understanding of the obstacles that community radio stations face as well as the opportunities that exist to serve people who are physically challenged.
- To examine the programming content of Radio Udaan and its focus on issues relevant to physically challenged individuals.
- To assess the impact of Radio Udaan on the lives of physically challenged individuals in terms of empowerment, social inclusion, and community engagement.
- To identify the challenges faced by physically challenged individuals in accessing and participating in community radio initiatives like Radio Udaan.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach was qualitative, with an emphasis on in-depth insights gained from interviews with key stakeholders. Primary data were obtained through interviews with Danish Mahajan, founder of the community radio station, and physically challenged community members who actively participate in the station's activities. These interviews were an excellent source of first-hand knowledge, providing nuanced insights into the operation and impact of the radio station. In addition to the primary data, secondary data were rigorously obtained from the existing literature to expand the depth and breadth of the study. This multidisciplinary approach sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role and value of community radio in integrating and empowering communities.

Radio Udaan A Case Study

Radio Udaan is an online radio station that specializes in disability-friendly programming. As a community-oriented platform, its main objective is to advocate for the human rights of persons with disabilities. An important aspect of this process is to provide a space for people with disabilities to voice their opinions, exchange experiences and express their views. This reach is global, with listeners in more than 100 countries accessing the station's programming



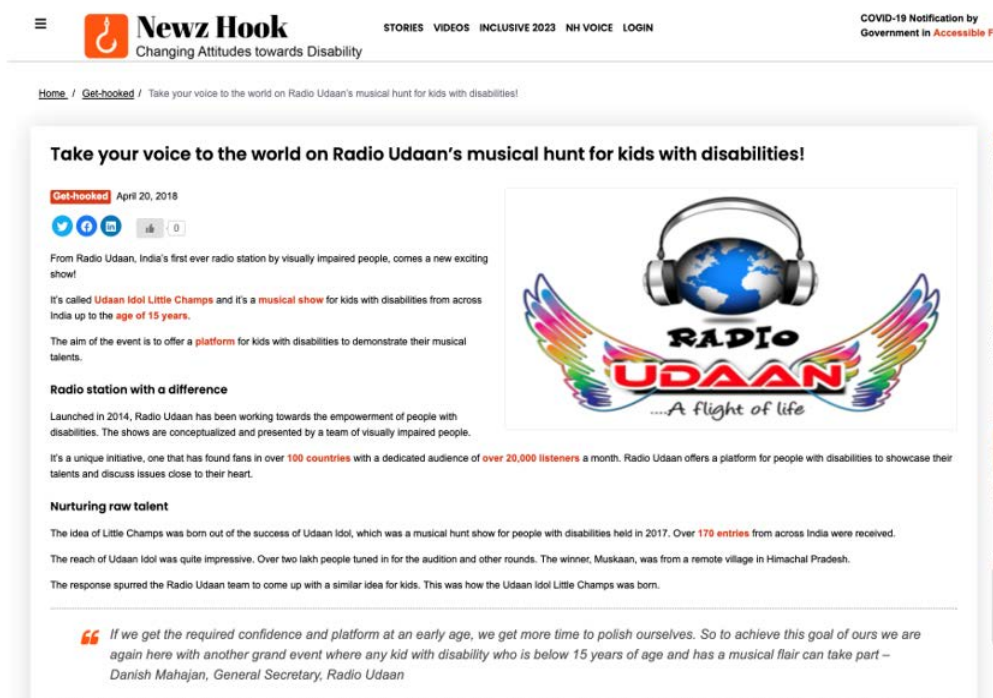


Figure 1: Newz Hook published on India's first disability radio station, Radio Udaan

through its website, www.radioudaan.com. The value of Radio Udaan extends beyond entertainment; It is a resource that can be used in a variety of contexts, including conference proceedings, disability studies courses, peer-sponsored training, research projects, policy development, and community mobilization efforts. As well as interesting, it provides many services and information tailored to the specific needs of people with disabilities and their families. Central to its culture is the desire to promote inclusion and hospitality, making it accessible to people from all walks of life. Notably, throughout the past year, Radio Udaan has undertaken numerous projects and launched numerous programs, demonstrating its continued commitment to the changing needs of the communities it serves (Figure 1).

Programmes and Events

As part of its mission to meet the needs of the community, Radio Udaan has started a number of shows and projects over the past year, which include:

- **Techcity:** Techcity is a program conducted by RJ Meenal Singhvi that caters to technology enthusiasts. The program provides an overview of the latest advancements in technology. The

program airs exclusively on Radio Udaan from 9 to 10 p.m. on Thursdays and repeats from 4 to 5 p.m. on Fridays.

- **Bookworld:** Hosted by RJ Rajeshwari, the Book World program features English novels translated into Hindi. English literature can be listened to in Hindi. The program is exclusively transmitted on Radio Udaan from 8 to 9 p.m. on Wednesdays and repeats every Thursday from 3 to 4 p.m.
- **Vocabulary Dose:** Vocabulary Dose is a weekly program on Radio Udaan hosted by RJ Logophile Divya Sharma. By increasing one's vocabulary, the program has the potential to improve linguistic proficiency and foster speakers' self-assurance. Each episode provides sixteen additional words to supplement one's vocabulary.
- **Community Colours:** The Community Colours program, hosted by RJ Gauri, serves as a comprehensive news source for the disability sector. An hour of the program consists of information on all aspects of the world that constitute essential knowledge. This program airs exclusively on Radio Udaan and is broadcast every Friday from 9 to 10 p.m. and repeats Saturday from 4 to 5 p.m.



Figure 2: News published by India News 24 x 7

- *Udaan Idol*: This is a singing competition in which individuals with disabilities compete. The competition has generated considerable interest and provided an opportunity for talented musicians to exhibit their skills.
- *Badalta Daur*: RJ Danish Mahajan (founder of Radio Udaan) hosts the program Badalta Daur, which features discussions and debates on a variety of timely, significant, and consequential topics, including those pertaining to the disability community.
- *Coverage of Disability Events*: Radio Udaan also provides coverage of events and addresses concerns pertaining to disability within the community. The platform has showcased narratives and conducted interviews with persons who possess disabilities, in addition to providing coverage of events such as rallies and conferences centred around disability rights (Figure 2).

Achievements and Awards

Radio Udaan has achieved the distinction of being officially recorded in the esteemed 'India

Book of Records as the pioneering online radio station operated exclusively by those with vision impairments. The recognition is bestowed upon this radio station for its distinctive characteristics and unwavering commitment since its inception on February 2nd, 2014. In addition, the radio station has received additional awards, such as the All India Yuva Ratna Award and the Dignity Samaan Award presented by the Narayan Sanstha Seva Samithi in Udaipur. Furthermore, the station's radio jockeys have also been recognized with numerous other prizes.

Analysis of the Study

To collect comprehensive data, interviews were held with Danish Mahajan, the creator of Radio Udaan, and his mother. This interview aims to go into several facets of Radio Udaan's journey, including the hurdles experienced along the road and the ambitions that drive the project ahead. Danish Mahajan and his mother asked several questions concerning Radio Udaan's inception, the motivation for its development, initial issues during development, and the strategies utilized to solve these challenges.

Question 1: could you please provide an overview of radio udaan?

Danish Mahajan, the founder of Radio Udan, gave insights into the organization's inspiration and path. Mahajan stated that Radio Udan, India's only disabled internet radio station, began operations on February 2, 2014, and occupies a distinct position in India's record books. Mahajan also informed that Radio Udan had 5000 listeners per month of the initial edition, with estimations disseminated internationally. It had around 30,000 listeners. Notably, Radio Udana's reach extends to more than 120 nations, proving its broad influence and appeal to a wide audience.

Question 2: "would you kindly provide a detailed account of your personal life, including your early education and formative experiences?"

Danish claimed to be from Shahpur Kandy, a remote area of Pathankot. When he was eighteen years old, he lost his eyesight permanently and was forced to live in anonymity, where the absence of things and objects in his environment worsened, driving him to isolate and isolate from the world around him. But, after four years of struggle in a new life, Danish's luck changed when he discovered a vocational *rehabilitation training facility in Ludhiana, where he began his transformative journey of self-discovery and skill development. Danish learned*



Figure 3: Danish Mahajan

to use computers, English, and Braille owing to the centre's education and assistance, and obtained crucial information and insights that helped him navigate the world and make sense despite his bad eyesight, may embrace a far brighter future (Figure 3).

Question 3: What forms of personal support have you received throughout your journey?

Danish's mother responded, recounting the difficulties her son encountered as a blind child in their village. She stated that Danish was the only visually handicapped person in their village, making his position extremely isolated and difficult. Despite the distrust and doubts of others, the Danish showed tremendous determination and initiative. As he matured, he took it upon himself to interact with others and independently investigate options for education and advancement. Despite the challenges he faced, Danish sought out information and resources, eventually taking the daring move of visiting a school in Ludhiana on his initiative.

Question 4: What encouraged you to take on the massive undertaking of founding Radio udaan, and what drives you to do so?

Danish Mahajan stated that the absence of media coverage and knowledge of the challenges confronting the blind was the impetus for the establishment of Radio Udana. Realizing radio's potential as a powerful medium for addressing a wide range of issues, Mahajan saw it as a perfect platform for visually impaired people to share their problems and experiences around the clock. Mahajan hopes to bridge the gap in media representation and provide a platform for ongoing discourse and empowerment of visually impaired people, fostering better knowledge, understanding, and public inclusion and self-encouragement.

Question 5: Could you describe Radio Udaan's unique contributions and influence within its field of operation, as well as the qualities and characteristics that set it different from other initiatives?

Danish emphasized that Radio Udan is unique in

that visually impaired people, including himself, are responsible for planning, producing and broadcasting independently Unlike traditional radio stations, where the programs are hardworking and frequent, Radio Udan works on understanding. Not only enhances the authenticity and usefulness of the content but also builds empowerment and employment for the visually impaired by emphasizing the organization. Danish said all Radio Jockeys (RJ's), including himself, balance their association with Radio Udan with their regular work, emphasizing their dedication and commitment to the profession. In addition, the RJ's, reflecting their self-reliance and ability to maintain Radio Udan operations, bear the internet and software costs themselves. Despite these limitations, the collective efforts of the group reflect their undying commitment to remove barriers and create real change through Radio Udan.

Question 6: What types of programming does Radio Udaan offer specifically tailored to the needs and interests of physically challenged listeners?

The founder of Radio Udan stressed that the main objective of the community radio station is to

promote social cohesion and empowerment in the community through the dissemination of news, entertainment and educational programmes. Radio Udan's programs are known to focus on disability issues, with around 5-6 broadcasts devoted to the cause. Through these outreach events, the department hopes to raise awareness among people with disabilities, provide support and promote inclusion. The creator emphasized the importance of the station in connecting thousands of individuals with technology, thereby empowering them with technical skills and knowledge Radio Udan became a valuable resource for teaching its listeners how to use technology effectively to improve their lives It helps bridge the digital divide by providing essential skills and knowledge. This promotes greater independence and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Question 7: How does radio udaan benefit visually challenged persons in terms of opportunities and benefits?

Discussing the benefits offered by Radio Udaan to visually impaired people, Danish emphasised that Radio Udaan gives visually impaired people a chance to share their views, become part of reality

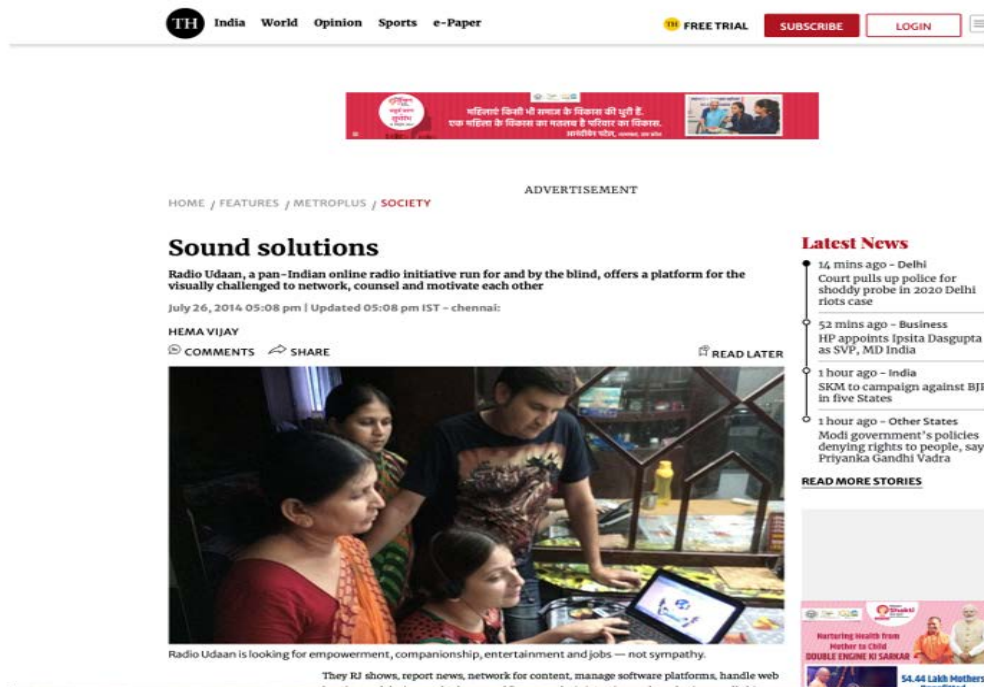


Figure 4: A news covered by The Hindu



Figure 5: News covered by Times of India

shows, and showcase their talent. They also offer employment opportunities for visually impaired people. Along with that, they organise a variety of activities and events for the welfare of the community. Through Radio Udaan, they served the community with information, skills, and awareness and raised issues that were ignored by society (Figures 4 and 5).

Question 8: What are the principal obstacles that radio udaan faces during its operations?

Highlighting the challenges facing Radio Udan, Danish said the main issue they face is a lack of support and media attention. This prevents other people in their neighbourhood from reaching it. He also revealed funding. Due to budget constraints, local radio stations are sometimes forced to scrap quality programming. It can be difficult for community radio stations to maintain the same diversity of production and programming as for-profit FM stations, which typically have more resources and, consequently, listeners can find a distinct gap in the content provided by communities

between radio stations and enrichment content. This quality gap can reduce listener engagement and support for community radio programs.

Question 9: “Is there any additional information or insights you would like to share regarding radio udaan?”

Through community radio, Radio Udan has significantly impacted the lives of about 50,000 individuals since January 2, the interview date of January 2020. Notably, Radio Udan facilitated about 8 successful marriages of blind people -10, the importance of building connections and lasting relationships reveals that. This excellent work has resulted in various state and national awards for several Radio Jockeys (RJs), including Danish, highlighting the importance and effectiveness of Radio Udan’s efforts to promote inclusion of people with disabilities and encourage their power

A phonetic interview was conducted with two esteemed members of Radio Udaan, namely Jyoti Malik, who serves as both a Radio Jockey (RJ) and Programme Manager, and Ashish Sharma, also an RJ. During the interview, a straightforward inquiry

was posed to them regarding the personal benefits they have derived from their involvement with Radio Udaan.

Jyoti Malik (RJ and Programme Manager): Radio Udaan has given me valuable possibilities for personal and professional development. I took the initiative to construct the Radio Udaan website on my own and managed all of the station's technical components. In addition to technical responsibilities, I also host Radio Udaan programs. These different experiences have aided me in learning and growth, providing me with useful skills and expertise in website administration, technical operations, and radio broadcasting.

Ashish Sharma (RJ): The major recognition came primarily from Radio Udaan. The platform helps in promoting visibility and opportunity for those with impairments. Radio Udaan is the best forum for handicapped people to demonstrate their talents and abilities, recognizing its critical role in amplifying their voices and promoting inclusion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of community radio has great potential to promote empowerment by providing a dedicated space for people with physical disabilities to express themselves in their communities. In addition to special events, community radio acts as a catalyst for skills development and knowledge sharing, increasing awareness and understanding of disability-related problems. However, in order to fully realize this potential, it is important to overcome access barriers and create an inclusive environment. This requires enacting supportive legislation, building collaborative networks, and developing initiatives aimed at building skills and capacity development. By implementing these steps, community radio can be a powerful tool if it will unite people with social disabilities, enabling them to actively participate and contribute to their communities. The use of community radio has great potential to promote empowerment by providing a dedicated space for people with physical disabilities to express themselves in their communities. In addition to special events, community radio acts as a catalyst for skills development and knowledge

sharing, increasing awareness and understanding of disability-related problems. However, in order to fully realize this potential, it is important to overcome access barriers and create an inclusive environment. This requires enacting supportive legislation, building collaborative networks, and developing initiatives aimed at building skills and capacity development. By implementing these steps, community radio can be a powerful tool if it will unite people with social disabilities, enabling them to actively participate and contribute to their communities.

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