

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Theorizing Dependency Relations in Small Media

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The paper questions the pervasive western intellectual universalism which disregards Global South imaginations for generalized approaches. Using field data from Uganda about Community Audio Towers (CATs), the western-generated community media theory is interrogated, accentuating its failure to account for the intricate relationship between the individual, society, and small media. To cover the gap, the Small Media System Dependency theory is herein introduced as a geocultural response to lack of theory from the South.

Keywords: Community Audio Towers, Small Media, Small Media System Dependency Theory, Global South, Media System Dependency

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The acceptance of the Western academic corpus and its circulation through ever-multiplying knowledge dissemination portals indicate that the West continuously regard the non-Western interpretation of reality as “parochial wisdom” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2014, p. 1), propping up a hegemonic configuration constituted by the European/U.S. academic heritage (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Gunaratne, 2008), a phenomenon all-too evident within the field of communication. The fight back against such intellectual imperialism has raised efforts calling for de-Westernization (Gunaratne, 2010), de-colonization (Dutta, 2015; Mignolo, 2013), and rethinking researcher–community relationship (Dutta & Pal, 2010), among others. Within the area of community media from where this paper comes, as academic efforts from various Western scholars (Downing, Ford, Villarreal, Gil, & Stein, 2001; Atton, 2001; Howley, 2010) achieve a seminal status, a great deal of scholarship from the Global South has to be ignored.

In an attempt to southernize community media theories, this paper develops a theory of Small Media System Dependency (SMSD). To achieve this aim, the paper, in the first part, presents Community Audio Towers (CATs), a type of small media

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in Uganda which use horn speakers, and explains their behavior as small media. The second part interrogates the four community media theories and the Media System dependency (MSD) theory for their universalistic approach (based on Western/Euro-centric assumptions) and calls for theorizing from the South to accommodate some Small Media attributes that are unexplained by the existing framework. This creates a ground for the data and discussion parts that present the SMSD theory as a candidate to solve the theoretical imbalance. In doing so, I demonstrate how theorizing from/in the Global South offers a framework for conceptual threads that on one hand, disrupt the overarching ideologies of Western/Euro-centric knowledge production, and on the other hand, create theoretical anchors rooted in the South.

Community Audio Towers

CATs use “powerful speakers hoisted on top of 10 to 20 metre bamboo or steel poles” (Tabing, 2000, p. 84). They are used in Thailand (Gaviria, 1996; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001), Philippines (Tabing, 2000), Uganda (Semujju, 2016a), Ghana (Chapman, Blench, Kranjac-Berisavljevic, & Zakariah, 2003) and in some other countries. They narrowcast “regular programmes at specific times of the day over the loudspeakers” (Tabing, 2000, p. 84). CATs in Uganda use the following technology: horn speakers (about three or four) hoisted on top of long dry wooden poles next to a small room that has an amplifier and a microphone (Semujju, 2016b). CATs are locally-owned. They are created out of the need to relay events happening in communities (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). The owner, who usually doubles as the presenter, then receives information from the village members, some of whom pay less than \$1 for each announcement, in order to sustain the towers. CATs’ narrowcasting starts at 6:30 a.m. up to 7 a.m. and then from 9:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. (Semujju, 2017). As platforms in the Global South, CATs deviate from the Western community media logic in various ways including: nature of content, time of operation, ownership and access. Denying these differences by continuing to explain Global South community media practice using theories rooted in Western civilization is a way for the West to conquer the southern intellectual thought (Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

Within the communication and media literature, CATs can be understood as small media. Small media are “media, generally small-scale and in many different forms that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (Downing et al., 2001, p. v; Downing, 2016). Such small affordable communication innovations for example include cassette tapes and leaflets (Conway, 2008), blackboard newspapers, wall newspapers (Tabing, 2002), banners, posters, T-shirts (Hollander, 2002; Lev-On, 2012), grass-root comics, rock carving (Dicks, 2011), body mapping (Govender, 2013), community puppetry (Wanyeki, 2000), and CATs (Tabing, 2002; Semujju, 2016a). They promote “active engagement of the citizenry in the production, sharing and utilization of relevant knowledge towards improving their livelihoods” (Manyozo, 2007, p. 11). Small media pick up the community content which other media neglect mainly because such content lacks commercial

value (Tabing, 2000). By choosing content that has been leftover by big commercial media, small media inadvertently amplify the silent voices (Downing, 2016). It is little surprise that when it comes to theorizing such media, contributions from the South have become the silent voices, even though the media are located mostly in the South.

Theorizing small media

Under the community media framework, which encompasses small media, most seminal theories are Western (see for example Carpentier, Lie, & Servaes, 2003; Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008). The two volumes suggest that community media vary in behavior where some are community media, because they promote community access, participation, and are self-managed (Carpentier et al., 2003). The second kind becomes community media because of its alternative vision, attained by being the opposite of what mainstream media do (Atton, 2001; Downing et al., 2001). The third theory looks at community media as a civil society that engages government and other big players on behalf of the local person. Finally, community media can also be understood as a rhizome because they act as a root that links local areas by communicating local messages (Bailey et al., 2008).

Within the above four-tier theory, CATs, the small media understudy, can be crammed under the first theory because of their access, participation, and ownership patterns (as more details about the towers show later in the article). However, the theory may not appropriately explain the intricate relationship between the individual and small media (micro dependency relations) and the esoteric connection between small media and society (macro dependency relations). In relation to this article, the main challenge presented by community media theories is that in the Ugandan media ecology where CATs are just one player (in addition to radio, TV, newspapers, word-of-mouth, church, family and friends, etc.), the theories do not tell when and how small media attract undivided community attention, in order to accommodate the nature of “dependency” that exists in small media. In their generic nature, the community media theories instead present a community media picture that is conceptually homogeneous, disregarding years of observation that points at existing structural differences within community media in the Global South (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001).

Another Western theory able to explain the dependency relations between the individual, society and the media is the MSD theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The MSD theory notes that the macro-dependency relations (between media and society) are symmetrical whereby media provide information and a platform for those several sectors in society to survive, for example an advertiser or political entity reaching out to the masses. In return, the sectors of the social system provide the information and money through buying airtime or space, legal documents/statutes, experts for commentary, and several others, for media’s survival (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). The micro-MSD relations, on the other hand, are asymmetrical in that media do not directly depend on the individual to survive while the individual depends (connects) on media to fulfill the three goals of “understanding,” “orientation” and “play” (Lee, 2012; Li, 2014).

“Understanding” is concerned with knowing about an individual’s surrounding and about the individual him/herself, while “orientation” relates to the need to make sense of or attain guidelines about a certain situation that may have arisen; the goal of “play” is mostly recreational where people connect with media to pass time or escape a task (Ball-Rokeach & Jung, 2009; Lowrey, 2004) by, for example, watching a movie or listening to music. Within the framework of social justice, the MSD theory lays ground for the understanding of an audience that is information-privileged, able to navigate communication artifacts from across a vast range of coverage, thereby eliminating rural social groups whose basic information needs might not go beyond a single village. Therefore, there are inconsistencies in the above theories when considering both the macro and micro dependency relations in small media. To cover the gaps, a Global South theory is here presented with a reversal of how the relations are understood. The information presented later in the data section shows how individuals (and society) depend on small media. Before the data is presented however, the following section explains the methods used to collect the findings.

Methodology

The study used both quantitative (survey) and qualitative research (key informant interviews) methods.

Sampling

This study employed the sampling technique given by Bailey (1994) that the idea of choosing a sampling frame from the whole population is wise in both time and financial terms. Using Bailey’s advice above, a type of sampling (detailed below) based on the nature of communities and location of the CATs, whether rural or semi-urban, was used. Additionally, qualitative samples, which were picked purposively based on special knowledge and relationship with the subject of CATs, were used.

Sample size

Two CATs served as the sample units, one in Nyendo (rural Uganda) and another in Nassuuti (semi-urban Uganda). The choices of the locations and which CAT to use were made purposively in order to help the researcher to identify a case study that had features of interest (Silverman, 2005). The two CATs were: *Nassuuti FM*, and *Voice of Nyendo*. They are distinct from each other mainly in terms of geographical location and distance from the capital city (which is also the business city). *Voice of Nyendo* is located 120kms from the Capital on the western Uganda route while *Nassuuti FM* is located 21kms from the Capital, on the eastern route. This means that they serve communities that are economically different. Among the advantages of this kind of sampling is that the researcher, in making a choice, can use his/her experience or prior knowledge on the issue (Bailey, 1994).

The decision of how many respondents should be interviewed was based on “the nature of the population and the purpose of the study” (Bailey, 1994, pp. 96–97). But there are other criteria on which to base one’s decision for interview sample

size. For example, [Wimmer and Dominick \(2014\)](#) add time and financial constraints. Although [Bailey \(1994\)](#) identifies a number when he says that studies that intend to use statistical data analysis tend to have 30 respondents at the very least, this study's choice was informed by [Wimmer and Dominick \(2014, p. 104\)](#) who note that "research designed as a preliminary search for general indications does not usually require a large sample." This current study therefore settled for 100 respondents in total for the survey (using a questionnaire) due to the fact that the typical CAT audience is narrow in a way that it occupies just a single village. Additionally, 10 key informant interviews were conducted using an interview guide to generate information that would help to inform the survey findings.

Random and purposive sampling

The survey respondents were selected using a variation of the random sampling technique that has been applied in Africa and several other areas that do not have the requirements for pure random sampling ([Manyozo, Nassanga, & Lopes, 2012](#); [Nassanga, Manyozo, & Lopes, 2013](#)). Random walk sampling ([Nassanga et al., 2013](#); [Semujju, 2017](#)), was the most appropriate method to accommodate the challenges of lack of information about how many people live in the village and lack of formal home addresses.

Random walk sampling was done by selecting an initial starting point and walking to a house after next ([Manyozo et al., 2012](#); [Nassanga et al., 2013](#)). The selection of the initial starting point was also random, from all the houses at the center of the village. To correct for gender bias, if the first respondent was a male, the researcher looked for a female in the next house, unless where available evidence suggested that a certain area was dominated by one gender. Children below 18 years of age were also excluded from participating because the Ugandan regulations on research suggest that they have to be interviewed in the presence of an adult who doubles as a caretaker. Otherwise, any adult of a sound mind, provided he/she lived in the village and was willing to participate, was invited to participate. Those who declined (these were seven people in total) to participate gave reasons like prior arrangements and being newcomers in the area, and were not included in the study.

In studies that take long hours or days, the habit of respondents talking to the people yet to be interviewed ahead of the researcher has been reported in Uganda before ([Manyozo et al., 2012](#)). This sometimes creates bias when the researcher finds some respondents already familiar with the questions and the very answers previous respondents gave. The house-after-house walk sampling ([Manyozo, Nassanga, & Lopes, 2013](#)) therefore invited potential respondents to a venue from where they were individually interviewed, 30 meters away from the rest of the group. After answering the questionnaire, each of the 100 respondents left without talking to the next person to be interviewed. For the response rate, the seven (three in Nassuuti and four in Nyendo) people noted above, who declined to come to the interview area during the random walk sampling, were replaced by seven extra houses within the same communities. The sample for the key informants was selected purposively in order

to get information from people whose offices or jobs had a connection to CATs. The key informants therefore included: CAT presenters, the communication experts, local community leaders, and the community members. They were divided as follows:

Data were collected among 100 CAT audience members (50 from each tower) using a questionnaire, two CAT presenters (one at each tower) and six community, district and national CATs stakeholders. These were distributed as follows: two local council chairpersons (one from each village with a chosen tower), two district information/communication officers (one from each district with a chosen tower), one technical person from the Uganda Communications Commission, two district legal officers (one from each district) and the State Minister for Information and Communication Technology.

Findings

The main concern for this article is to articulate dependency relations in small media. Therefore, in relation to the MSD theory tenets and the four community media theories highlighted above, the first part of the findings deals with the individual goals that CATs fulfill in order to show how CATs relate to the individual to remain relevant. The last part focuses on the individual contribution towards CATs, and ends with a comment about the position of society (government, advertisers, etc.) in relation to CATs. Data from the field indicate that the two communities that were studied have a media ecology that includes CATs, radio, TV, newspapers, word-of-mouth (which includes church, family, and friends). Data also show that in terms of frequency of access, CATs, radio and word-of-mouth, were more pronounced sources of information in relation to within-village events, out-of-village events, and social networking information respectively. The CAT's micro dependency relations described below, therefore, are more connected to the SMSD theory suggested later in the article than the existing Western theories described above.

The goals individuals seek to fulfill from CATs

To understand the goals that CATs help the individual to fulfill, it is necessary to identify the type of information that CATs give the communities. That way, we can identify which information falls under which goal, using the gauge created by the MSD theory. This is informed by individual responses (from the survey) on what kind of information they obtain from CATs. This information is represented in the graph (Figure 1).

The above data indicate that announcements are listened to by 93 respondents, taking the biggest number of listeners. They are followed by religious programs which are listened to by 19 respondents, followed by sports with 10 respondents, business with seven respondents, music with three respondents, jobs with one respondent, while the others (greetings, discussion and education) have one respondent each. Divided between the total program time on CATs, announcements take up 68% of the time, followed by religious programs at 14%, sports at 7%, business at 5%,

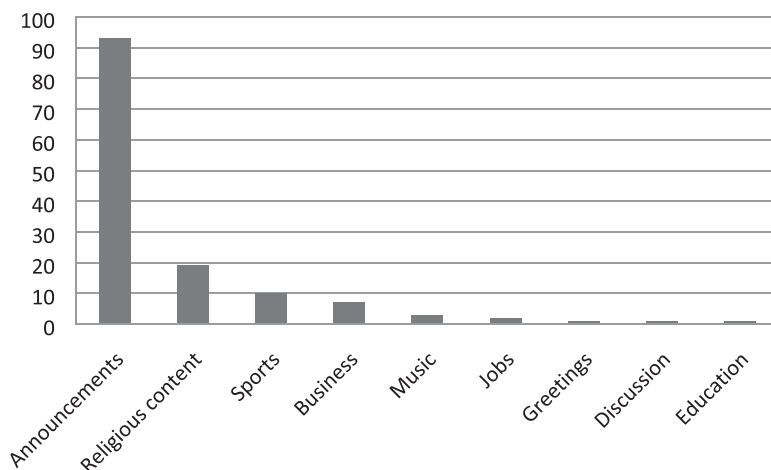


Figure 1 Program content that respondents listen to on CATs.

music at 2% and the rest at 1%. Most times, even the content that is not classified as announcements gets narrowcast as announcements.

Apart from music, religious programs and sports, the responses in the graph above can be summed up under announcements. The announcements are mostly about: the dead, lost-and-found, jobs, appreciation to the community for service rendered towards another community member's event, police notice, local council notice, and warning about thieves (M. Mulindwa, personal communication, July 22, 2014). Beyond the community-generated content, there is mobilization for government and non-government programs like immunization, farming, climate change, blood donation, national ID registration and several others (O. Nakanwagi, personal communication, July 19, 2014). The commonest goal individuals seek to fulfill under CATs therefore is information (understanding). Information includes mostly emergencies like a missing child in the market full of people, a cow that has wandered off from the kraal or one that has been found, a wallet lost in a taxi or one that has been found, thieves, etc. (J. Mugerwa, personal communication, July 9, 2014). As soon as information comes in, the presenter switches on the tower and informs the community for intervention (J. Ssendago, personal communication, July 8, 2014). This behavior was supported by data from both CATs. Without an emergency, CATs narrowcast early in the morning and late in the evening. Sports and gospel are the closest effort CATs have towards fulfilling the goal of orientation, which goes beyond mentioning what is happening in the vicinity to giving details about the situations. During the 10 days of observation, both towers did not narrowcast any sports or religious programs however, but they gave announcements about several sports and religious events. While the Western community media theories fail to accommodate dependency relations at all, the MSD theory too provides a different set of goals from what the above data describes.

Individual contribution to CATs

From the interviews with each presenter, it was clear that each of them does not have any co-workers as the CAT budget does not allow for extra workers. Besides, there is not a lot of work that requires extra workers. This kind of one-man structure informs how information that goes through the tower is gathered. The CATs have a fixed or permanent address so that everyone in the community knows their location. As soon as something happens in the village, someone takes the information to the tower willingly. If the presenter is away from the premises, since running a tower is not a full time activity, the person returns later if the information was considered important. At *Voice of Nyendo*, the wooden poles that hold the speaker high above have a mobile phone number inscribed on them. Some community members call and inform the presenter and if it is an emergency, he returns and reports it right away. If it is not an emergency, the information becomes part of the events the presenter collects to be narrowcast in the evening. “Most times the information is of a serious nature, which means i have to listen carefully and note down all the important details” (H. Lwanga, personal communication, July 21, 2014). The other way that information or news is gathered is through direct contact with the presenters away from the towers (B. Naluwoza, personal communication, August 12, 2014). After the morning session, the presenter may decide to lock the premises and go along with other businesses. Besides community members taking information to the towers, using mobile phones, and contacting the presenter away from the towers, information is also generated by the presenters themselves while going about their business in the community. “I try to keep my ear to the ground even when I am doing something unrelated to the tower” (J. Mugerwa, personal communication, July 9, 2014). Within the Western community media theories, the information gathering and dissemination role is left to a pocket of people known as volunteers, while the rest of the community listens.

CATs and society

CATs and other stakeholders relate when there is special information to deliver to the community. The information, which includes announcements from government and non-government actors on immunization, farming, climate change, blood donation, national ID registration and several others, is not generated by the community members (J. Ssendago, personal communication, July 8, 2014). Mostly though, it is information from the police which occupies the biggest space given to non-community players (M. Mulindwa, personal communication, July 22, 2014). Additionally, CATs are not regulated (J. Nsimbe, personal communication, August 12, 2014); they have no policy and do not get adverts from big corporations because they are just a one-village platform. Having a communication channel responding to the needs of just one-village is what needs to be highlighted as unique to the Global South. It is this strictly demarcated access that advertisers do not find profitable enough. From the perspective of Western community media literature, the disappearance (and sometimes appearance) of advertisers and government is a cause for concern because of issues of sustainability and autonomy. New explanations were therefore necessary

to cover the one-village scenario where community media are individually-funded, more locally accessed and communally regulated.

Discussion

The current knowledge paradigm was borne out of the friction between Western renaissance and the enlightenment period (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). Enlightenment finally offered a living space based on reason, interpreted as the Western white male logic (Mignolo, 2011). The logic in question demanded that reality be understood as an intersection between the object and the subject (Quijano, 2007). Western community media theories later questioned that epistemic demand and noted that isolating “the subject” (Quijano, 2007, p. 169) denies the rich context that comes from the unpredictability of being human. The focus in this article is that if the Western white male can be unique in various ways, the southern person must have differences too that need exploration and therefore explanation. For this to happen, the southern imagination has to be welcomed on the “domain of sustainable knowledge” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 275) not as an alternative but as an independent source of intellectual thought in its own right.

Community media theory in its current form explains an idea based on the Western logic of “community” which encompasses all people brought together by a special interest or geographical closeness (Tabing, 2002; Howley, 2010). If, for example, the community media in question is a radio, all villages that access its frequency (this could be millions of people because of “broadcasting”) become the “community” for that community radio. Community participation fulfills another level that qualifies the station as a truly “community” radio, especially if the overall running of the station is local as well (Atton & Forde, 2016).

Mama FM and Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio (KKCR) in Uganda use this approach. The generalization of the “community” presupposes that all the 1.4 million people who receive the radio’s signals at the outskirts of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have the same farming, education, and health needs (interests) and so are served uniformly (Semujju, 2014). This scenario, referred to in this article as “community-grouping” (summing up multiple villages of differing interests and serving them as one community) negates the broader objective of social justice, on which communication practice and indeed theory in the Global South is founded (Gregg, 2011). Such community-grouping, in a practice that was theorized previously as a true example of non-Western media, is a good reason for the need to southernize media theories by narrowing down the subject of interest from “community” to “village” to introduce village media as a reference to communication for development media in some Global South settings. Community-grouping, which is universalism in practice, is evidence of the existence of Western dialecticism within the practice of Uganda’s community media. The broader implications for both practice and theory are that community media still suffer from imperialistic tendencies. To reclaim true voice and contextual sensitivity in development communication

media, CATs present a different view as the previous section noted. The towers serve only a single village from the community defined above (about 500 people instead of the 1.4 million that KKCR serves). The information on the towers is village-specific, which increases individual connection that is unmatched by any other available channels within the community hence the “dependency.” By neglecting the above unique features of community media and presenting their own version, the Western scholars succeeded in displacing imagination from the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The novel explanations given in this article therefore are part of a larger effort to reverse that coloniality of knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

The goals individuals seek to fulfill from CATs

The MSD theory suggests that the individual is keen on fulfilling three goals of understanding, orientation and play (Ball-Rokeach & Jung, 2009; Lee, 2012; Li, 2014). The theory was created to explain media in the Global North (and perhaps media situations in the Global South that emulate the Western media behavior). Under CATs, individuals can seek to fulfill one goal, which is the goal of understanding. In the rural Global South, communities still face challenges created by socio-political circumstances that plague such poor countries. “Understanding” what is around oneself could be the difference between poverty and better living conditions, and so they depend on a channel, however local and rudimentary (by Global North standards) that can help bridge the local information gap. Such differences in dependency relations between mainstream media and small media are a good example of why the Southern intellectual effort must rise to the occasion within the media and communication field to avoid being submerged by Western intellectual centrality.

In addition to the above differences, various Internet studies have noted the MSD theory as wanting when it comes to explaining dependency relations online (Patwardhan & Yang, 2003; Melton & Reynolds, 2007; Sun, Rubin, & Haridakis, 2008; Jung, Lin, & Kim, 2012), because not all communication platforms obey the three MSD relations goals. For example, Internet dependency relations goals include: “communication/entertainment; expression/participation; and information/research” (Jung et al., 2012, p. 969), and “information, entertainment, and interpersonal connection” (Sun et al., 2008, p. 412). While entertainment (play) cuts across as a goal for individuals for both traditional media and the Internet, it is not reflected in this study’s findings for small media. From the above Internet goals, the studies conclude that instead of MSD theory, there should be Internet Dependency Relations theory (Melton & Reynolds, 2007). After 30 years of the existence of the MSD theory and the emergence of the Internet, “[d]ependency relationships that exist among the aggregate media system need to be refined as well as those relationships with a specific medium such as the Internet” (Melton & Reynolds, 2007, p. 127). Inspired by the above Internet studies, and based on the data presented above, this article suggests the SMSD theory to account for the dependency relations in small media and to contribute a theory of community media from the South. The first tenet therefore

of the suggested SMSD theory is that the individual depends on small media to fulfill the goal of Understanding. The discrepancies between the north and South in relation to the goals people connect to media to fulfill, point at an on-going intellectual war between modernity and decoloniality (Mignolo, 2005). In order to show that academic contributions from the South are not mere intellectual vandalism, community media theories from various corners of the world must be accommodated (as the one above) to show how rich in diversity the southern communication is.

Individual contribution to CATs

The MSD theory explains that the role of the individual in media is indirect (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Li, 2014) because he/she becomes relevant by connecting to media (Ball-Rokeach & Jung, 2009). Media then value the individual connection and maintain it in order to attract the big spenders. The assumption, as the MSD theory explains, is that the micro-MSD relations are asymmetrical (Hindman, 2004; Lowrey, 2004). In a way, the individual appears only to be used as a means to an end without the individual him/herself having a direct role to play. In small media, the behavior is different because the micro dependency relations are symmetrical. For example, the relationship between CATs and the individual is reciprocal (Semujju, 2016a). The individual provides CATs with money and information while the CATs provide the individual with a local platform on which to narrowcast information that is necessary for the stability of the community (Tabing, 2000; Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Semujju, 2016b). This reciprocal culture reinforces the idea of small media being a community media as the four community media theories reviewed above note (Atton & Forde, 2016; Bailey et al., 2008). Ownership of CATs and the participation in production and distribution of content can be understood within the existing discourse of community media (Deuze, 2006; Manyozo, 2007). To accommodate the audience side however, the second tenet of the suggested SMSD theory therefore is that the relationship between small media and the individual (their audiences) is symmetrical. Previously, the coloniality of knowledge, or the “others don’t know” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 242) mindset attempted to silence the above interpretations by fronting its own explanations of how people relate with media. The erroneous assumption that had been made, which is debunked in this paper was that dependency relations in all media are the same from the North to the South.

CATs and society

In several Global North media settings, the media-society relationship is explained by the MSD relations as symmetrical because media strengthen the connection with the audience in order to attract government and corporations (Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, & Waring, 1990; Ball-Rokeach, 1998; Cheng & Lo, 2012). The media give the big players space while the players offer money, experts for commentary, policy, legal, and several other resources. This reciprocal process is what creates the conclusion that the macro MSD relations (between media and society) are

symmetrical (Hindman, 2004). In the Global South where small media are used, this study finds such a relationship to be instead asymmetrical. The government does not provide major resources for CATs, like the legal and policy resources that it provides for example for commercial media under MSD relations. As a matter of fact, community media are known to suffer from the problem of a lack of a special license that recognizes their uniqueness (Musubika, 2008), while CATs do not have licenses. Other typical major stakeholders to media/communication houses like corporations are also very much silent under CATs (and in several other small media) because such media's content is community-specific (Meadows, Forde, Ewart, & Foxwell, 2007). On the other hand, despite having no connection to government, especially as a major society stakeholder, CATs support government programs by narrowcasting when different district activities, like mass immunization, take place, a role that can be explained when community media promote community access to information (Bailey et al., 2008). This, therefore, is the third tenet of the suggested SMSD theory; the relationship between small media and society is asymmetrical.

Although differences exist between the MSD theory and the proposed SMSD theory, some similarities exist between the two relations. For example, as more people find themselves in distress, the more dependency relations will increase (Jung et al., 2012). Individual dependency on small media increases too, especially if the media are announcing an emergence in the community.

In defense of the Small Media System Dependency theory

The need for the above theory is created mainly by two aspects: one is the overreliance of community media theories on the channel, an approach introduced to the field by Western academics. Literature that attempts to theorize community media focuses on what such channels do (see for example the four theories articulated by Carpentier et al. [2003], Bailey et al. [2008] discussed above) for the community, how different the channels are from traditional media (Atton, 2001) and the rebellion against established media relations which aids their focus (Downing et al., 2001; Downing, 2016). A southern perspective should compare relationships between the individual and the media. The SMSD theory focuses on how villages depend on small media by explaining the complex nature of the relationship between the individual and small media on one hand and small media and society on the other. This is a southern contribution to community media theory, which had previously been stifled by the Western hegemonic community media discourses (Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

The second reason for the suggestion made above is that while some literature exists on community media, it (the literature) seems “to be more about extending the coverage of academic inquiry on media and communication to countries not ordinarily included in the Western canon than about questioning the centrality of Western theory” (Willems, 2014, p. 416), and rooting for geocultural explanations of such media. The seminal works on the subject (mostly by scholars from the Global North) expose the field to Western dominance (Khiabany, 2003) through methods

(Dutta & Pal, 2010; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014) and focus. The focus for Western overreaching community media literature has tended to be on community: radio (see Cammaerts, 2009; Howley, 2010) and Internet (Carpentier, 2007). Within the spirit of theorizing from the South, the theory suggested here responds to the central concern of universality of community media literature. To achieve particularity, which is a central tenet of geocultural theorizing (Wang, 2014), the SMSD theory identifies the cultural uniqueness of a village and how such differences help people to identify a communication platform for sharing local information. By focusing on “place-based” (Escobar, 2004, p. 207) attributes of community media, the theory manages to explain community media in their “proper context” (Gunaratne, 2010, p. 474) and this helps to adequately bring non-Western community media like blackboard/wall newspapers (Tabing, 2000), body-mapping (Govender, 2013), CATs (Semujju, 2016b), among others, into the community media theory. Instead of creating alternative theories (from the Global South) where alternatives (from mainstream media) already exist, the placement of southern knowledge introduces community media “theories” as opposed to the community media “theory” trickled down by the negative side of Western modernity (Quijano, 2007). Community media theories should embrace the various explanations from across the globe with the Western perspective(s) being just one of them.

However, the SMSD theory faces the challenge of being limited only to small scale communication platforms in practice that are not mass-based, like blackboard and wall newspapers in Asia (Tabing, 2000), community theatre in Kenya (Wanyeki, 2000), audio listening groups in several parts of Africa (Manyozo, 2009), CATs in Uganda, Thailand, and the Philippines (Semujju, 2016b) and other small media elsewhere in the world. In so doing, mega cities that only use more developed forms of community media (community radio, TV, newspapers, etc.) might be excluded. Nevertheless, the SMSD theory described here is best suited to explain how communities depend on community/alternative media, and the dependency relations between government, small media, and the individual. While this study answers how people depend on CATs, another could use the SMSD framework to assess the relationship between the individual/society and audio listening groups, community theatre, cave painting, grass-root comics, body mapping and several other participatory communication initiatives that have already been identified in several parts of the world.

The theory can be used to explain and describe small media further so that development programs are implemented using such platforms. Currently, there are arguments that communication for development programs are implemented in the South using a diffusionist mindset (Waisbord, 2008) while participatory media preside over non-participating communities (Semujju, 2014). The SMSD theory on the other hand explains development anchored in the Global South. Explaining CATs or other small media can also inform government, development partners, and other stakeholders who implement planned social change (Dutta, 2015) and ease the way information is dealt with at both levels. With the ideas suggested above, the

dependency relations can now be explained in mainstream media (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), Internet (Sun et al., 2008) and community media (the current article).

Conclusion

This article makes a case for the SMSD theory in order to account for micro- and macro-dependency relations in small media. This has been done using data collected about CATs in Uganda among community members and communication stakeholders. Attempting to theorize a Southern media channel using existing community media theories and the MSD theory required suggesting radical new ways through which dependency relations in Southern media can be better explained. The above effort puts the underrepresented community media practice in the Global South up for discussion by making a non-Western contribution to the global knowledge pool. The article concluded by noting that while the suggested SMSD theory explains how dependency relations in CATs occur, more research is needed to focus on studying the theory in relation to other small media like blackboard newspapers, community puppetry, and others, in the Global South. Since the main focus of the article was theory, more work on decolonizing community media methodology is urgently needed. As long as southern intellectuals are still indoctrinated into European epistemic traditions, they are mere foot soldiers, socially commissioned to help the Western episteme to maintain its legacy status.

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