

INTRODUCTION

Having discussed some theories of audience with the emphasis on the interpretive community model, as well as a sociological understanding of religion and Radio Maryja's position in Polish society, the following section will outline a conduct of primary research considering audience of Radio Maryja in contemporary Poland.

First of all, this chapter will present and discuss the methodology that used in order to obtain the data. More importantly, it will account for the chosen approach and discuss any restrictions or issues in terms of qualitative work. Then, the blueprint of the study will be illustrated. In the conclusion author adds reflections on the fieldwork and exposes limitations of the research.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY AND METHODS

Considering the inquiry's interest was to discover the very nature of Radio Maryja's appeal and the way the listeners experience this medium, choice of qualitative techniques was the most appropriate in the light of existing research. Such methods helped in obtaining more information in relation to social phenomena of Radio Maryja since focus groups are,

providing concentrated and detailed information on an area of group life which is only occasionally, briefly and allusively available to the ethnographer over months and years of fieldwork (Bloor, M. Frankland, J. Thomas, M. Hobson, K. 2001: 6).

In contrast to quantitative techniques, quality in focus groups comes from the fact that they are able to provide more than fragmented depictions of issues, show less statistics and more humane angle at one's media consumption. In order to learn in-depth how audience involves with media and in what context these media are consumed, it was necessary to turn to the ways uncovering personal perceptions, rather unpredictable as

focus group...can provide the occasion and the stimulus for collectivity members to articulate those normally unarticulated assumptions. The group is socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in 'retrospective introspection', to attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions. (Bloor, M. Frankland, J. Thomas, M. Hobson, K. 2001: 5-6).

Another method that could have been considered for the study was the participant observation, because most often listeners belong to other Radio Maryja related organisations that create wider sense of belonging. Lindlof (2002) encouraged expanding the established ways of enquiry into the topics like religion. Although, he did not discredit qualitative methods, he contended that not all might have been designed for studying a community and its dynamics. He suggested a long-term participant observation to be more adequate. However, as he pointed out:

The effort of doing ethnography is always large, and entry into these communities can test the ability of ethnographers (especially those who do not personally accept the beliefs of the host group) to create an effective role in the research scene, and to do so in an authentic, ethical relation with the membership (ibid: 71).

The research would have benefited from a pursuit of ethnographical work, still as Lindlof stated participant observation posed a challenge, especially in terms of winning group members' trust. The difficulty in this case owned to the fact that Radio Maryja listeners perceived themselves as religious community of close spiritual involvement. Which in turn led to a moral dilemma for the researcher whose personal beliefs may not correspond with the community's beliefs. Consequently, due to both time limitations and moral issues at stake, it was decided not to embrace this method but to keep it as a further recommendation.

Additionally to methods chosen for investigation of the research questions, an analysis of Radio Maryja's programme 'Unfinished Conversations' was conducted (see the appendix B) in order to reveal the ideology radio promotes in connection to religion, community and patriotism.

SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

The goal in focus groups is to gain insight and understanding by hearing from people in depth, and this requires selecting *purposive sample* [my italics] that will generate the most productive discussions (Morgan, D. 1998: 56).

It was decided the focus groups would have a double-layer design, which took two categories into account during the recruitment process, and thus ‘purposive sampling’ was used for the selection of suitable participants. The first segmentation for the designed focus group was done in relation to age due to the fact that age played key role to the audience’s composition. Potential focus group interviewees have been arranged according to age groups starting from 20-30, finishing at range of 80-90. A second criterion of recruitment was the stance towards the station. Having people who do not listen to Radio Maryja was also advantageous since they represented the voice of public opinions. However, the main focus stayed on the listeners with four sessions conducted opposed to two non-listeners focus groups.

A consecutive step from establishing the design of the research was the recruitment of the focus groups’ participants. There were no drawbacks arising from groups of mix gender or social background. If only, they could enrich the discussion and maintain the conversation in the areas beyond the differences, like Radio Maryja. There was also no restriction towards members who considered themselves as believers or non-believers, because they still could stimulate interesting discussion, even if some would touch on the religion differences.

Having considered all the options of recruitment, referrals and snowball sampling deemed to be most efficient and trustworthy techniques (ibid). The reason why it was not opted for the services of marketing companies was the fact that there would be a little chance of getting hold details of people who would admit to being a listener of Radio Maryja. Furthermore, open solicitation did not promise gaining valuable participants for the researcher would not have much of influence on who becomes a group member. In order to avoid the self-selection, it has been decided to employ rather informal methods using author’s own contacts in Poland as well as seeking help from already recruited individuals. On one hand, the advantages of the method included an effort reduction, and an entry to a close-knit

community. Through the head of Radio Maryja's Family in the author's hometown of Stargard Szczecinski, numerous members of the organisation and respectively listeners of Radio Maryja have been approached for the research's purpose. Such circumstances enabled the researcher an admission amid people reserved to the outsiders and proved to be fruitful for further research. In perspective, progress of the research relied on the contacts made through the process and would never been possible without the efforts of the organisation leader, who was an intermediary between the researcher and the members of Radio Maryja's Family. Broadly speaking, Radio Maryja's Family and the listeners not belonging to the organisation showed reluctance to the outsiders in fear of media spoofs they could be potentially talked into. Further to snowball technique, having known a parish shop owner was also a great advantage to the study, as the owner then referred the researcher to particular people, worshippers, often his regular customers who were suitable focus group participants.

On the other hand, researcher must ensure to hold the control over the recruitment and if using one's help, it should be secured that agent gives relevant information, and requirements about the study to the potential focus group members (Bloor, M; Frankland, J; Thomas, M; Robson, K; 2001). As an example, it will be referred to one of the situations author have dealt with during the inquiry. During the arrangement of one of the focus groups, the author turned to a relative that claimed to have acquaintances fitting into the age category (50-60) and were listeners of Radio Maryja. As it had turned out, all of the participants were religious and involved in several Church organisations, but not all listened to Radio Maryja. This matter positioned a great problem in conducting session, since the dynamics would not provide with insights but rather intimidate the participants or lead to heated argument. Despite the delay in the process, there was no other option but to cancel the session and reschedule it for following days.

Recruitment through this method gave the way to already existing social circles, which were favoured over the mix of unknown individuals. Opposed to strangers, acquaintances were more useful to the study of listenership for they were

the networks, in which people might normally discuss or evade sort of issues likely to be raised in the research sessions (Kitzinger, J. Barbour, R. 1999:8).

Regarding the listeners of this specific station, many felt more comfortable around friends or family that were also involved with the station. Thus, snowball and referral technique turned to be most fruitful as it overcame mentioned previously hesitant attitudes towards participation in Radio Maryja research.

FOCUS GROUPS

There were 36 people participating in the group interviews; 6 male and 30 female. There were six focus group interviews in total: two groups of non-listeners and four with listeners. Every group had minimum of 4 participants, and maximum of 5. All were interviewed from mid February to mid March 2007. The reason for small group sizes was due to the intention of giving the group members opportunity to describe their experiences, likes and dislikes, and further suggestions. As David Morgan (1997) contends:

small groups thus work best when the participants are likely to be both interested in the topic and respectful of each other (ibid: 42).

Furthermore, larger groups would be more challenging for a person with little or no experience, and

‘it takes an experienced moderator to control them without engaging them in continual efforts at discipline’ (ibid: 42).

In order to avoid any confusion, groups have been marked according the age criteria i.e. group 40-50 (age 40-50), and in such manner they will be referred to in the further analysis (see appendix C for a list of listeners and appendix E for the group structure). The majority of members were invited to participate in the sessions via a gatekeeper, person who was already a member of the social group and in some cases was the best point of reference for the

researcher. All the focus group interviews took place at the location in the near vicinity for the participants, in most cases it was arranged to meet in the local parish rooms¹ since its neutrality and location known to most participants. Instead of payment, participants were provided with drinks and refreshments while discussion took place. Discussions lasted between 50 and 90 minutes, depending on the group size and were audio recorded². The initial thought was to have the discussions filmed, as video materials could provide the information about the discussion dynamics i.e. body language or group interaction. Nevertheless, considering distrust participants showed towards the idea of being recorded, and that some of the interviewees saw the audio recorder as intrusive, it was decided to omit this option.

Group dynamics was overlooked by the bullet-point question plan, which broadly speaking was formed on the basis of general ideas, thus letting participants a wider field of interpretation. In addition, the flow of discussion was not kept rigorously to the plan since the spontaneity has led participants to reveal topics or elements not premeditated but useful for further research process. The bullet points were structured both in accordance to the literature about Radio Maryja, above all points in regards to religion and politics (see the interview guide in the appendix D), and researcher's listening experiences that facilitated identifying the sense of community between listeners, devotion to the religion and the country.

The introductory questions had a purpose to make listeners comfortable and establish them in the context of the group. Only then discussion moved towards the key issues of religion, patriotism and community. However, one should not discredit the importance of the initial questions. Even if their aim was unwinding the group members, they revealed something about themselves and their relationship with Radio Maryja (see next chapter).

Following that questions required more concentration for they inquired about matters specific

¹ Every Catholic parish has a parish house used for religion teachings and other activities for worshippers. Rooms are available there upon further booking, or informal arrangement with the priest who looks after the parish house.

² Audio files available upon request.

and peculiar to each individual. The core section of a focus group interview was part on programming, which asked participants to identify programmes of various content so as to stimulate conversations about the station's ideology. First of all, the questions touched on religion and role of Radio Maryja in ordinary life in terms of spiritual guidance. Second group of questions examined radio's reinforcement of community and promotion of patriotism.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Every session have been scheduled so as to have one or two day gaps to revise the previous focus group, prepare first draft of transcript³ and plan the following sessions. Since the discussions were conducted in Polish, full-length transcripts have been only made in Polish. Translation of the documents that include use of colloquialisms, slang or indicate pause, laughter etc, could modify the meanings and alter final results of the study. Therefore the author felt using unabridged transcripts was to gain objective data. Also, full-length transcripts revealed information about the participants, their language and certain emotional and psychological reactions to questions. Any figure of speech, volume of the voice, laughter or even pause had significance on the actual response and were taken into serious consideration before reaching conclusion.

In spite of the available software like NVivo or NUDI*ST, for the analysis of the data a long-table technique was used. The decision was made mainly due to the lack of experience on how to use these programmes, and the fact that both do not work on operational system researcher used⁴.

REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS

The greatest complication to the successful study was the appropriate recruitment. It was for the leaders in the Radio Maryja's Family that the author has accomplished successful data collection. Religious communities distrusted anyone from the outside of their social

³ Some drafted transcripts have been included with this thesis but must be available upon request.

⁴ The software is only available on Windows or Windows Vista operational systems and not for Mac OS system.

circles, and people rarely admitted to being a listener of Radio Maryja since the negative associations with extreme bigotry. Many people that have been known for listening to Radio Maryja denied the fact when asked to participate in the discussion. There were few that behaved upset or irritated by such questions. Therefore, along with the recruitment from already existing networks, Internet Catholic portals and various on-line forums were also used in order to approach higher number of people. However, Internet search turned out to be difficult. Instead of help or suggestions for further work, there was sceptic, sarcastic or ironic comments like ones below:

Michube (michu666@tlen.pl):

For listeners of RM Father Director is simply God and I doubt they [listeners of Radio Maryja – M.P.] would like to talk about it with whoever that does not wear a mohair beret :/ (http://forum.o2.pl/temat.php?id_p=5103646).

babajaga666:

talk with my granny (http://forum.o2.pl/temat.php?id_p=5103654).

Ojciec R:

I am happy to help you and I'll even wear for this occasion my new mohair beret, straight from the market (http://forum.o2.pl/temat.php?id_p=5103654).

Another obstacle, was certainly being an ‘outsider’ to the social network of Radio Maryja’s listeners as a result of studying abroad and of not being involved in the organizations existing around Radio Maryja. Therefore, while the discussion it was intended to create relaxed atmosphere in which the respondents would not feel inferior or insecure about what they are saying. At the begging of every session, it was made clear that there were no right or wrong answers, participants were also assured that the data was going to be used for the educational purposes only. On the whole, discussions required from the researcher moderation skills to keep balance within the group, aiming at members’ confessions about Radio Maryja. A quote below outlines the guidelines that were followed in regards to moderation:

the facilitator of the focus group does not need, and should not seek, to control the group: sometimes the facilitator may emerge from a most successful group feeling

that she has been holding a tiger by the tail...A facilitator should *facilitate* the group, not control it (Bloor, M; Frankland, J; Thomas, M; Robson, K. 2001: 48).

The facilitations were understood by giving the group members more freedom and time to express their views on particular topic. It was learned that letting the conversation flow spontaneously was actually beneficial to the study, revealing extra information. In one of the groups, the introductory questions have led to discussing the issues of donation to Radio Maryja. As a result, participants have presented their benefactor's ids⁵ and explained the whole donation process.

On the whole, focus group interviews satisfactorily well in terms of maintenance of the right atmosphere and encouraging people to the open conversation on topics that somewhat belonged to taboo sphere of social life, as well as intimate and personal. Most of all, there were no signs of nervousness or awkwardness amongst the group members, which indicates that people did enjoy and feel comfortable during the sessions.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The study's intention was to explore numerous reasons people might be listening to Radio Maryja. Thus, the final conclusion cannot be referred to wider spectrum of population. Even if it was attempted to design the research so as it would represent different age groups, it certainly did not cover other demographic criteria; this delimitation posed on the study, moved the research's attention to the actual experiences of listenership and personal choices of media consumption rather than fragmenting the data on the basis of class or gender differences. It seemed that the study would benefit from an angle that would look at the audience as a one entity; certain demographic factors were of the lesser importance, since the fieldwork was concerned with the primary ideas of community and listening to religious broadcaster. However, this does not reject the idea of audience segmentation and the researcher is aware that these differences have immense impact on one's media reading.

⁵ Anyone who wishes to donate regularly on Radio Maryja's bank accounts is issued with Radio Maryja benefactor id. Every payment is clearly marked on the id and kept record of.

The most significant limitation to the study was lack of funds and time. The financial problems related to inability to expand the audience research further than the group sessions. If it comes to time limitations, the research lacked in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, which required months or even years of observation the studied groups.

Having chosen qualitative methods, researcher was aware of the criticism and thus whether the method is objective and useful for broader generalizations. Hence, the study is only concerning the people listening to Radio Maryja and there is no guarantee that the findings will comply with other broadcaster.

SUMMARY

On the basis of research questions, choice of qualitative method seemed the most suitable for it wished to explore one's choices and day-to-day experiences. Qualitative approach allowed interpretation and involvement with individuals in question opposed to organised into structured questions techniques searching for statistical data.

As a consequence, the research design fitted around the requirements of quantitative methods and study's aims, which were set upon individual's conceptions and experiences of religious broadcasting. Focus groups and the interview questions gave much of space for open discussion and did not impose any particular hypothesis on the participants. Such design ensured that the final results would not be altered by researchers preconceptions about the issue.

Limitations were caused by lack of funds and time. This only gave ideas for further work that could be done in regards to Radio Maryja's listeners. Due to the time restrictions of the field research, following analysis should be just considered as a point of reference on people who listen to Radio Maryja.

