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OF
LUSAKA**

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

**AN ANALYSIS OF PRIVATE MEDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIC DISCOURSE:
THE CASE OF MILLENNIUM RADIO IN LUSAKA**

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to The School of Technology and Social Sciences in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Science Degree
in Politics and International Relations.**

BY

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AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I, **Masida Msichili**, declare that this dissertation titled “*Politics and the Public Sphere: Assessing How Modern Private Mass Media Enhances Civic Discourse – A Case Study of Millennium Radio in Lusaka*” is my original work. It has not been submitted, either in part or in full, for the award of any degree or diploma at the **University of Lusaka** or any other institution of higher learning.

All the sources of information used in this work have been duly acknowledged through appropriate citations and referencing in accordance with academic standards.

I further affirm that this dissertation was carried out under the supervision of **Mr. Wilson Silungwe** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a **Bachelor of Science Degree in Politics and International Relations** under the **School of Social Sciences and Technology** at the **University of Lusaka**.

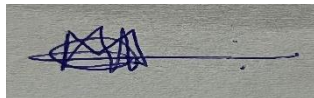
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the contribution of private mass media to civic discourse within Zambia's public sphere, utilizing Millennium Radio in Lusaka as a primary case study. Grounded in Habermas's Public Sphere Theory and McCombs and Shaw's Agenda-Setting Theory, the research evaluated how the station promotes civic engagement, identifies structural impediments to its effectiveness, and proposes strategic interventions to strengthen its democratic mandate.

The primary aim of this inquiry was to evaluate the contribution of modern private mass media to the enhancement of civic discourse within the political and public sphere, with a specific focus on Millennium Radio in Lusaka. To achieve this, the research sought to analyse the specific mechanisms through which the station facilitates civic discourse and political engagement among its urban audience. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify the structural and political impediments that constrain the station's ability to host balanced and inclusive public dialogue. Finally, the research intended to propose strategic interventions for enhancing the democratic efficacy of private mass media within the broader Zambian governance framework.

Adopting a qualitative design, the study engaged 100 participants—including media practitioners and active listeners—through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The findings reveal that Millennium Radio serves as a vital conduit for political socialization and rational-critical debate. However, its democratic utility is often undermined by systemic pressures, including political interference, financial instability, regulatory constraints, and professional capacity gaps.

The study concludes that while the station significantly enhances civic awareness, its ability to sustain an inclusive public sphere is threatened by external forces that trigger self-censorship and marginalize minority voices. Consequently, the democratic potential of private media remains dependent on robust institutional protections and editorial independence. The research recommends targeted policy reforms, sustainable funding models, and the integration of digital platforms to broaden inclusivity. Ultimately, the study highlights the need for further inquiry into how digital convergence and traditional broadcasting continue to shape Zambia's democratic trajectory.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with deep love and gratitude to my parents, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and sacrifices have been the foundation of my academic journey. Their faith in my abilities has been a constant source of motivation, and their guidance has shaped my values, discipline, and perseverance. To my siblings and close family members, thank you for your patience, understanding, and for always cheering me on even when the path seemed uncertain. I also dedicate this work to my friends, whose companionship, encouragement, and moments of laughter have kept me balanced and focused throughout this demanding process. To my lecturers and mentors, especially those who believed in my potential, your dedication to nurturing knowledge and critical thinking has inspired me to pursue excellence. Above all, this dissertation is a tribute to everyone who has walked this journey with me—your love, belief, and inspiration made this accomplishment possible.

Contents

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
Contents	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.3 Research Objectives.....	3
1.4 Significance of the Study	4
1.5 Delimitation of the Study.....	4
1.6 Limitations of the Study	4
1.7 Chapter Summary	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
2.0 Introduction	6
2.1 Overview of Politics and the Public Sphere.....	6
2.2 Global Perspectives on Private Media and Civic Discourse	6
2.3 Regional Perspective: The African Experience	7
2.4 Local Perspective: The Zambian Landscape.....	8
2.5 Theoretical Framework	8
2.5.1 Public Sphere Theory.....	8
2.5.2 Agenda-Setting Theory.....	9
2.5.3 Framing Theory.....	9
2.3 Conceptual Framework	10
3.0 Introduction	11
3.1 Research Design.....	11
3.2 Study Population	11
3.3 Sampling Procedure.....	12
3.4 Data Collection Instruments.....	12
3.5 Reliability and Validity.....	13
3.6 Data Analysis	13
3.7 Methodological Limitations	13

3.8 Ethical Considerations.....	14
3.9 Chapter Summary	14
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS	15
4.0 Introduction	15
4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	15
4.1.1 Age of Respondents	16
4.1.2 Gender of Respondents	17
4.1.3 Education Level of Respondents.....	17
4.1.4 Occupation of Respondents.....	18
4.1.5 Voting Experience of Respondents.....	19
4.2 Presentation of Findings by Research Objectives	20
4.2.2 key challenges that limit Millennium Radio’s effectiveness in facilitating balanced and inclusive political dialogue	22
4.2.3 Strategic measures for strengthening the contribution of private mass media to civic discourse and democratic engagement in Zambia.....	24
4.3 Discussion of Findings	26
4.3.1 Role of Millennium Radio in Promoting Civic Discourse and Political Participation in Lusaka	26
4.3.2 Key Challenges That Limit Millennium Radio’s Effectiveness in Facilitating Balanced and Inclusive Political Dialogue	28
4.3.3 Strategic Measures for Strengthening the Contribution of Private Mass Media to Civic Discourse and Democratic Engagement in Zambia	29
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	32
5.0 Introduction	32
5.1 Conclusion.....	32
5.2 Recommendations	33
5.3 Suggestions for Future Studies	34
5.4 Final Reflections	34
REFERENCE LIST	36
APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW GULDE	39
Appendix three: Budget.....	42

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This research investigates the mechanisms through which contemporary private mass media facilitates civic discourse within the Zambian public sphere, utilizing Millennium Radio in Lusaka as a primary case study. In an era where democratic consolidation is increasingly tied to the pluralism of information, understanding the intersection of media autonomy and political engagement is paramount. This chapter establishes the foundational framework of the inquiry by contextualizing the study within global and local media evolutions. It articulates the core problem—the tension between media liberalization and qualitative civic debate—and outlines the objectives, research questions, and scope. By defining the parameters of the investigation and clarifying key terminology, this chapter provides a conceptual roadmap for the subsequent analysis of how private broadcasting serves as a conduit for democratic participation.

1.1 Background of the Study

The nexus between political praxis and the public sphere is historically predicated on the evolution of communicative structures. As conceptualized by Habermas (1989), the public sphere functions as a discursive space where private individuals assemble to engage in rational-critical debate, ideally insulated from both state hegemony and corporate interests. Throughout the twentieth century, the mediation of this space shifted significantly as radio and television became the primary vehicles for political socialization (McQuail, 2010). In robust democracies, these institutions evolved into "watchdogs" and "agenda-setters," theoretically expanding the reach of governance and fostering a more informed citizenry.

On a global scale, the transition from state-centric monopolies to pluralistic media environments was heralded as a democratic necessity. Private media enterprises were positioned not merely as commercial ventures but as essential pillars for accountability and the amplification of marginalized perspectives (Curran & Seaton, 2018). In the late 20th century, the liberalization of broadcasting in developed nations demonstrated that independent outlets could challenge government narratives and institutionalize transparency (Street, 2011). This shift redefined the role

of the citizen from a passive recipient of state information to an active participant in political discourse via interactive formats such as live talk shows and investigative segments.

Within the African context, the 1990s marked a watershed moment for media liberalization, coinciding with the "third wave" of democratization. In nations like Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, the proliferation of private radio democratized information access, particularly for demographic groups previously excluded by elite-centric print media (Berger, 2019). However, this transformation remains fraught with complexity; African media houses must often navigate a precarious path between market sustainability, political patronage, and their normative obligation to the public interest (Hyden, 2018).

In Zambia, the reintroduction of multipartyism in 1991 catalyzed a significant restructuring of the media landscape. The subsequent liberalization led to the rise of prominent private entities, including Millennium Radio, Radio Phoenix, and Hot FM. According to the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA, 2023), private broadcasters now constitute approximately 70% of the over 120 licensed stations nationwide. Millennium Radio, since its inception in 2008, has distinguished itself through a focus on current affairs and governance-centric programming. Despite this growth, the quality of discourse remains contested. While radio reaches nearly 80% of the population (MISA, 2022), the "publicness" of these platforms is often compromised by editorial bias and a restrictive regulatory environment. This study, therefore, seeks to evaluate whether Millennium Radio genuinely empowers the Lusaka public or merely functions as a platform for elite political theater.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the quantitative expansion of the Zambian broadcasting sector following liberalization, the qualitative contribution of private media to substantive civic discourse remains empirically ambiguous. While modern stations like Millennium Radio are theoretically positioned as vital pillars of the public sphere, their actual efficacy in facilitating inclusive, rational-critical dialogue within a polarized political climate is increasingly contested. Although radio enjoys a high penetration rate (MISA, 2022), it remains unclear whether its programming serves as a genuine platform for democratic engagement or if it merely echoes the partisan rhetoric of the political class, thereby failing to enhance the quality of civic discourse.

Evidence suggests that the structural integrity of private broadcasting in Zambia is frequently undermined by subtle political pressures, regulatory anxiety, and complex ownership interests. As Chanda (2021) notes, many private outlets operate under a veneer of independence while their editorial autonomy is compromised by the dual pressures of commercial survival and political affiliation. As one of Lusaka's premier talk-radio stations, Millennium Radio faces significant scrutiny regarding the balance, diversity, and inclusivity of its content. There is a palpable risk that rather than strengthening the public sphere as a space for informed debate, such outlets may inadvertently reinforce societal divisions and political polarization.

Furthermore, current scholarship in Zambia has disproportionately focused on the propaganda machines of state media or the disruptive potential of social media, leaving a critical academic gap in our understanding of urban private radio's contemporary role in political mediation (Phiri, 2020). Without a rigorous assessment of how stations like Millennium Radio navigate these systemic challenges to facilitate civic discourse, there remains a lack of evidence-based strategies to optimize private media as a tool for democratic consolidation. This research addresses this void by assessing the station's impact on the public sphere and the qualitative nature of civic discourse in Lusaka.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the contribution of modern private mass media to the enhancement of civic discourse within the political and public sphere, focusing on the case of Millennium Radio in Lusaka.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyse the mechanisms through which Millennium Radio facilitates civic discourse and political engagement among its audience in Lusaka.
2. To identify the structural and political impediments that constrain Millennium Radio's ability to host balanced and inclusive public dialogue.
3. To propose strategic interventions for enhancing the democratic efficacy of private mass media within the Zambian governance framework.

1.3.3 Research Questions

1. What specific programming mechanisms does Millennium Radio employ to facilitate civic discourse and political engagement among its listeners in Lusaka?
2. What are the key structural and political challenges that limit the effectiveness of Millennium Radio in hosting inclusive and balanced public dialogue?
3. What strategic interventions can be implemented to strengthen the role of private mass media in enhancing democratic governance in Zambia?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research holds theoretical, practical, and social significance. Academically, it advances the discourse on the "African public sphere" by applying and critiquing Habermasian theory within a modern Zambian context. It provides a contemporary empirical baseline for understanding how private broadcasting influences civic consciousness (McQuail, 2010).

Practically, the findings offer a critical reflection for media practitioners on improving editorial standards and audience inclusivity. For regulators like the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the study provides insights into the necessity of frameworks that protect media pluralism and professional autonomy (Banda, 2018). Socially, the research empowers civil society by identifying how media can be better utilized as a conduit for citizen-led accountability. As Nyamnjoh (2021) asserts, a vibrant democracy is inextricably linked to the inclusivity of its media systems.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this inquiry is restricted to Millennium Radio's operations within the Lusaka metropolitan area. This geographic focus is justified by the city's status as the epicentre of Zambian political life and media consumption. The study focuses exclusively on political and civic-oriented programming (e.g., talk shows and news bulletins) from 2018 to 2024, excluding entertainment-centric content.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The research acknowledges several constraints. The temporal window of the study may not capture long-term shifts in media behaviour. Logistically, access to high-level political figures and media

executives was occasionally limited by institutional gatekeeping. Additionally, the potential for "social desirability bias" among respondents—where participants provide answers they perceive as politically "safe"—was mitigated through anonymous data collection, though it remains a factor (Chanda, 2021).

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has established the theoretical and contextual boundaries of the research. By tracing the evolution of the public sphere and the rise of private media in Zambia, it has highlighted the critical tension between media liberalization and the quality of democratic discourse. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive review of the literature to further ground these issues in global and regional scholarship.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The role of contemporary private mass media in architecting civic discourse has become an essential pillar of modern democratic praxis. Private media platforms function as more than mere information conduits; they are critical discursive arenas where citizens negotiate political identities, scrutinize leadership, and institutionalize participatory governance. Globally, scholarly inquiry has underscored the capacity of independent media to catalyze transparency and inclusive dialogue, while simultaneously exposing the vulnerabilities inherent in private ownership, such as political co-optation and regulatory fragility. This chapter provides a thematic synthesis of existing scholarship, navigating global, regional, and local trajectories to identify the theoretical underpinnings and empirical gaps that necessitate an investigation into Millennium Radio's impact on the Zambian public sphere.

2.1 Overview of Politics and the Public Sphere

The intersection of political engagement and the public sphere increasingly hinges on the operational autonomy of private mass media. Unlike state-controlled outlets, which often function as instruments of official propaganda, private broadcasters—particularly radio—theoretically provide the "uncoerced" space required for rational-critical debate. Access to pluralistic media streams has been shown to correlate positively with elevated levels of political literacy and civic efficacy (McQuail, 2010; Curran & Seaton, 2018). In Zambia, the proliferation of interactive formats, such as call-in programs on stations like Millennium Radio, represents a shift toward a more conversational democracy. However, the democratic utility of these platforms is not absolute; it is contingent upon a complex interplay of editorial independence, ownership structures, and the prevailing regulatory climate (Banda, 2018).

2.2 Global Perspectives on Private Media and Civic Discourse

The North American Context (USA and Canada)

In the United States and Canada, the evolution of private media illustrates a paradox between increased accessibility and declining diversity. While McChesney (2019) argues that private media

has historically fostered a robust marketplace of ideas, Napoli (2020) cautions that extreme media consolidation has subordinated public interest to corporate profitability. In the American context, interactive talk radio has been praised for democratizing political commentary (Hamilton, 2018), yet critics like Prior (2019) suggest these formats often prioritize "outrage discourse" over substantive policy deliberation, leading to heightened partisan polarization. Similarly, in Canada, while Taras (2018) highlights the role of private platforms in complementing the public broadcaster, Winseck (2019) points to "corporate convergence" as a threat to the inclusivity of the Canadian public square.

Australia and the Asian Frontier

Australia's media landscape reflects a similar tension. Meadows (2019) observes that while private networks facilitate necessary debates on governance, the concentration of ownership remains among the highest in the developed world, frequently marginalizing minority perspectives (Flew, 2020). In contrast, the Asian experience is defined by its heterogeneity. In emerging democracies like India and the Philippines, private media has been instrumental in exposing corruption and mobilizing civic action (Sen & Das, 2020). Conversely, in more restrictive environments like Vietnam or Malaysia, the "private" label often masks state-aligned interests, where editorial content is circumscribed by the fear of license revocation (Shao, 2019). This suggests that the democratic impact of private media is fundamentally a product of the broader political culture in which it operates.

2.3 Regional Perspective: The African Experience

Southern and East Africa

The liberalization of the African airwaves in the 1990s fundamentally altered the continent's political sociology. In Southern Africa, South Africa's Talk Radio 702 and eNCA serve as benchmarks for holding the executive accountable, though they struggle with the "commercialization of the news" (Moyo, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the growth of outlets like ZiFM occurs under the shadow of draconian media laws, where "private" does not necessarily equate to "independent" (Chuma, 2021).

In East Africa, Kenya represents a highly vibrant but commercially volatile media market. Okello (2020) highlights how stations like Citizen FM facilitate "vernacular democracy," allowing ethnic

and local identities to find a voice in national discourse. However, Uganda and Tanzania present more cautionary tales; in these contexts, the state utilizes regulatory "gatekeeping" to stifle private broadcasters who facilitate overly critical civic discourse (Byaruhanga, 2021; Moshi, 2019).

North Africa and the Post-Revolutionary Shift

North Africa offers a unique study in the volatility of the public sphere. Following the Arab Spring, Tunisia witnessed an explosion of private media that briefly acted as the primary driver of democratic transition (Ayadi, 2018). However, as Belkacem (2019) notes regarding Algeria and Egypt, the resurgence of authoritarian tendencies often leads to the "securitization" of the media, where private stations are forced to self-censor to survive.

2.4 Local Perspective: The Zambian Landscape

Zambia's transition from a state-centric media monopoly to a pluralistic environment began in earnest after 1991. The emergence of pioneers like Radio Phoenix broke the state's hegemony over political narrative, a tradition that Millennium Radio has sought to continue. Phiri (2020) asserts that Millennium Radio's focus on current affairs has bridged the gap between Lusaka's urbanites and their representatives. However, the "local" challenge remains twofold: first, a restrictive legal framework overseen by ZICTA and the IBA (Mwansa, 2019), and second, the urban-rural divide. While Lusaka listeners enjoy a high degree of media-driven civic engagement, rural populations remain largely dependent on the state broadcaster (Chama, 2021). Furthermore, the reliance on advertising revenue creates a "soft censorship" where stations may avoid controversial topics to appease corporate sponsors (Banda, 2018).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

2.5.1 Public Sphere Theory

Rooted in the work of Jürgen Habermas, this theory posits that a functioning democracy requires a space for "rational-critical" debate. For the purpose of this study, Millennium Radio is conceptualized as a modern manifestation of this sphere. The theory allows for an analysis of whether the station provides an inclusive platform where the "force of the better argument" prevails over political status (Calhoun, 2017). However, critics of Habermas, such as Fraser, argue that the

public sphere is often exclusionary; this study utilizes that critique to examine whether Millennium Radio includes or marginalizes certain demographics (e.g., women or the youth) in Lusaka.

2.5.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

Proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), this theory suggests that the media's most significant power is not in telling people *what* to think, but *what to think about*. By selecting specific governance issues for its talk shows, Millennium Radio sets the "public agenda" in Lusaka. This framework is essential for evaluating the station's influence on the priorities of its listeners and its ability to elevate civic issues to the level of national policy debate (McCombs, 2018).

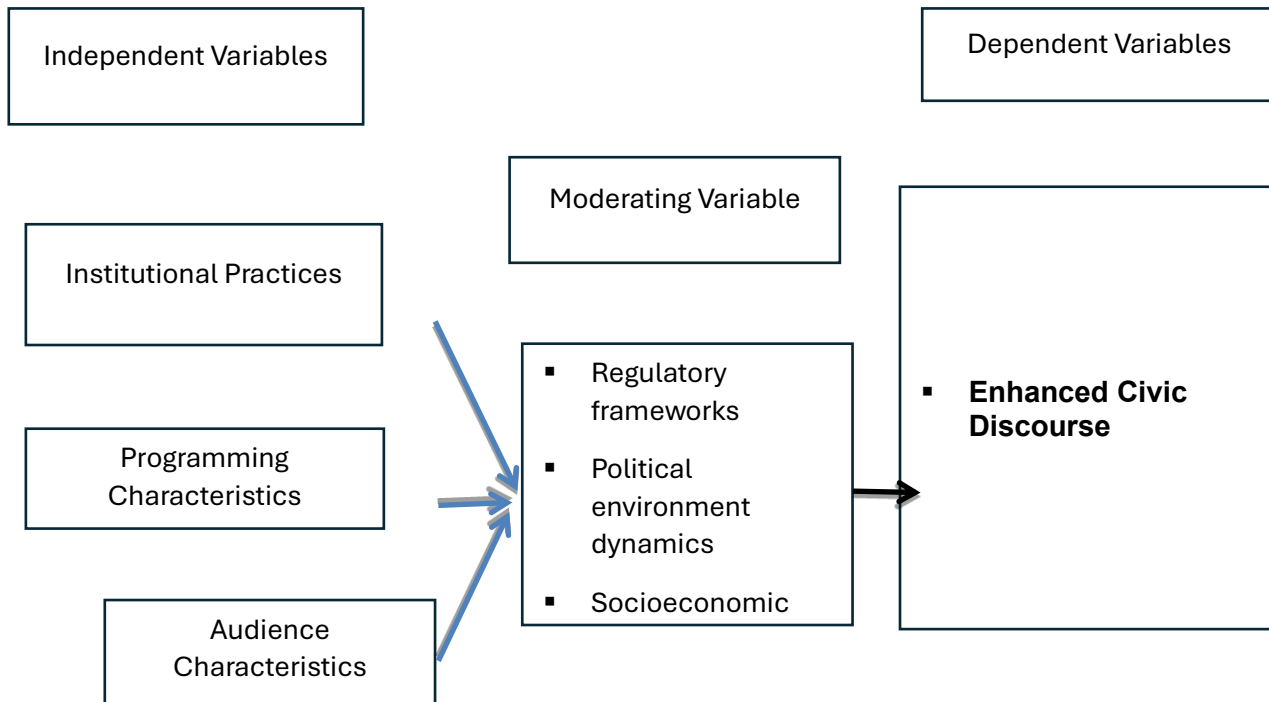
2.5.3 Framing Theory

Framing Theory, originally developed by Goffman (1974) and later refined by scholars such as Entman (1993), focuses on the ways in which the media selects, structures, and presents information to influence how audiences interpret events and issues. A frame highlights certain aspects of a story while downplaying others, shaping public understanding by guiding how individuals perceive causes, consequences, and potential solutions. In the context of civic discourse, framing determines whether an issue is portrayed as a conflict, a social concern, a political failure, or a public responsibility. This makes framing a crucial communication tool through which private media influence public opinion, attitudes, and engagement with national affairs.

In relation to Millennium Radio, Framing Theory helps explain how the station's presenters, producers, and journalists construct narratives during talk shows, news bulletins, and interviews. The choice of language, tone, emphasis, expert guests, and the sequencing of topics all contribute to how listeners interpret political messages and civic issues. For example, framing a governance issue as a matter of accountability rather than political rivalry encourages a more constructive form of public engagement. Likewise, framing community challenges as collective concerns strengthens participatory dialogue. Through these framing processes, Millennium Radio not only informs its audience but also shapes how citizens make sense of political developments, influencing the depth and quality of civic discourse in Lusaka.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study integrates key elements from the reviewed theories to analyze how Millennium Radio enhances civic discourse in Lusaka. The framework examines relationships between institutional factors, programming characteristics, and civic outcomes, recognizing that multiple factors influence media's democratic contribution



2.6 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the literature suggests that while private media is a global prerequisite for democratic vitality, its effectiveness is perpetually negotiated against commercial and political pressures. Regionally and locally, the shift toward private broadcasting has undeniably expanded the public sphere, yet structural inequalities and regulatory constraints persist. While previous studies have addressed media freedom in Zambia, there remains a lack of granular analysis regarding how specific urban stations like Millennium Radio facilitate qualitative discourse. The following chapter outlines the methodology used to bridge this empirical gap.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter articulates the methodological framework designed to investigate the influence of Millennium Radio on civic discourse in Lusaka. It delineates the strategic alignment between the research problem and the chosen qualitative paradigm, providing a transparent account of the study's execution. The following sections detail the research design, the selection criteria for the study population, sampling techniques, and the instruments utilized for data collection. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the analytical procedures adopted for data interpretation, while simultaneously addressing the ethical imperatives and methodological limitations inherent in the study. By adopting a rigorous qualitative approach, this research aims to capture the granular experiences and perceptions that define contemporary media engagement in Zambia.

3.1 Research Design

A research design serves as the architectural blueprint for an inquiry, ensuring that the evidence obtained enables the researcher to effectively address the research problem (Creswell, 2018). This study adopts a **qualitative research design**, a choice necessitated by the need to explore the social and political nuances of civic engagement. Unlike quantitative frameworks that prioritize numerical generalizability, a qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of the subjective meanings that actors—both media producers and consumers—assign to their experiences (Bryman, 2016).

The complexity of "civic discourse" as a social phenomenon requires a design that can accommodate context-dependent variables. By utilizing a **case study approach** centered on Millennium Radio, the researcher can examine the "how" and "why" of media influence within its naturalistic urban setting. This design is particularly potent for uncovering the underlying motivations and power dynamics that a purely statistical analysis might overlook.

3.2 Study Population

The study population constitutes the total universe of units from which meaningful data can be extracted (Kothari, 2019). For this inquiry, the population is bifurcated into two essential strata: **media practitioners** (journalists, producers, and editors at Millennium Radio) and **active listeners**

within the Lusaka metropolitan area. The total target population is estimated at 1,000 individuals, representing the nexus of media production and consumption.

This dual-strata approach is critical for achieving "data triangulation." By capturing the perspectives of those who curate the political narrative (the practitioners) and those who interpret and act upon it (the listeners), the study ensures a holistic understanding of the communicative cycle. This ensures that the findings are not one-sided but reflect the dialectic relationship between the media and the public sphere.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

In qualitative research, sampling is often driven by the quest for "information richness" rather than statistical representativeness. This study employed a **purposive sampling technique** to select 100 participants (representing 10% of the target population). This non-probability sampling method allows the researcher to select cases that possess deep knowledge of the subject matter (Kothari, 2019).

The sample was categorized as follows to ensure balanced representation:

- **Media Practitioners (n=40):** Selected for their direct involvement in editorial and programming decisions.
- **Regular Listeners (n=50):** Selected based on their consistent engagement with the station's governance programs.
- **Key Informants (n=10):** Independent media experts and civil society leaders who provided external contextual validation.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

To facilitate a deep dive into the research questions, the study utilized two primary qualitative instruments: **Semi-structured Interviews** and **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**.

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** These were conducted with Millennium Radio staff and key informants. The flexibility of this format allowed for probing into sensitive areas such as editorial interference and commercial pressures.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** These were conducted with segments of the Lusaka listening public. The group dynamic of an FGD is particularly useful for observing how public

opinion is formed and contested in real-time, mimicking the "public sphere" environment (Bryman, 2016).

3.5 Reliability and Validity

To establish the "trustworthiness" of the findings, the study implemented several quality control measures. **Reliability** was bolstered through the standardization of the interview protocols and the verbatim transcription of all audio recordings, ensuring that the participants' voices were preserved without researcher bias (Creswell, 2018).

Validity was achieved through "Member Checking" and "Expert Review." Drafts of the research instruments were vetted by senior academics in the School of Social Sciences to ensure they accurately mapped to the research objectives. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted to identify and rectify any ambiguities in the questioning, ensuring that the final data collected was both accurate and relevant.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data were processed using **Thematic Analysis**, following the recursive six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). This involved:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts.
2. Generating initial codes to label recurring concepts.
3. Collation of codes into broader themes (e.g., "Editorial Autonomy" or "Audience Interactivity").
4. Reviewing and refining themes to ensure they accurately reflected the data set.
5. Defining and naming themes in alignment with the theoretical framework (Public Sphere and Agenda-Setting theories).

3.7 Methodological Limitations

The researcher acknowledges specific constraints that may impact the study's scope. Firstly, the **geographic focus** on Lusaka prevents the findings from being generalized to rural Zambian media contexts. Secondly, the **case-study nature** of the research means the findings are station-specific. Thirdly, the potential for **social desirability bias** exists, where participants may hesitate to criticize

the station or political figures due to the sensitive nature of Zambian politics (Chanda, 2021). These limitations were mitigated through anonymity and the triangulation of data from multiple sources.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in strict adherence to international ethical standards. **Informed consent** was a prerequisite for participation; every respondent was briefed on the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any stage. To protect participants from potential professional or political repercussions, **strict anonymity** was maintained with alphanumeric coding (e.g., Respondent A1). Finally, data was stored securely to ensure **confidentiality**, and the final report strives for an objective representation of the field data, avoiding any distortion of the participants' original intent.

3.9 Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter Three has justified the use of a qualitative, case-study methodology to examine Millennium Radio. By integrating purposive sampling with thematic analysis, the study is positioned to provide an evidence-based assessment of how private media influences the Zambian public sphere. The following chapter presents the empirical findings derived from this methodological framework.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the findings of the study titled “Politics and the Public Sphere: Assessing How Modern Private Mass Media Enhances Civic Discourse — A Case Study of Millennium Radio in Lusaka.” The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the data collected from interviews and focus group discussions to understand how Millennium Radio contributes to civic engagement and democratic dialogue within Lusaka’s political and public space. The chapter also revisits the general objective of the study, which was to assess the role of modern private mass media in enhancing civic discourse, alongside the specific objectives to evaluate how Millennium Radio promotes civic engagement, to examine the challenges it faces in facilitating public dialogue, and to explore strategies for strengthening its role in Zambia’s democratic process. The chapter is organised as follows: Section 4.1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents, Section 4.2 outlines the major findings based on each research objective, Section 4.3 provides a brief summary of the key results, and Section 4.4 discusses the findings thematically in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

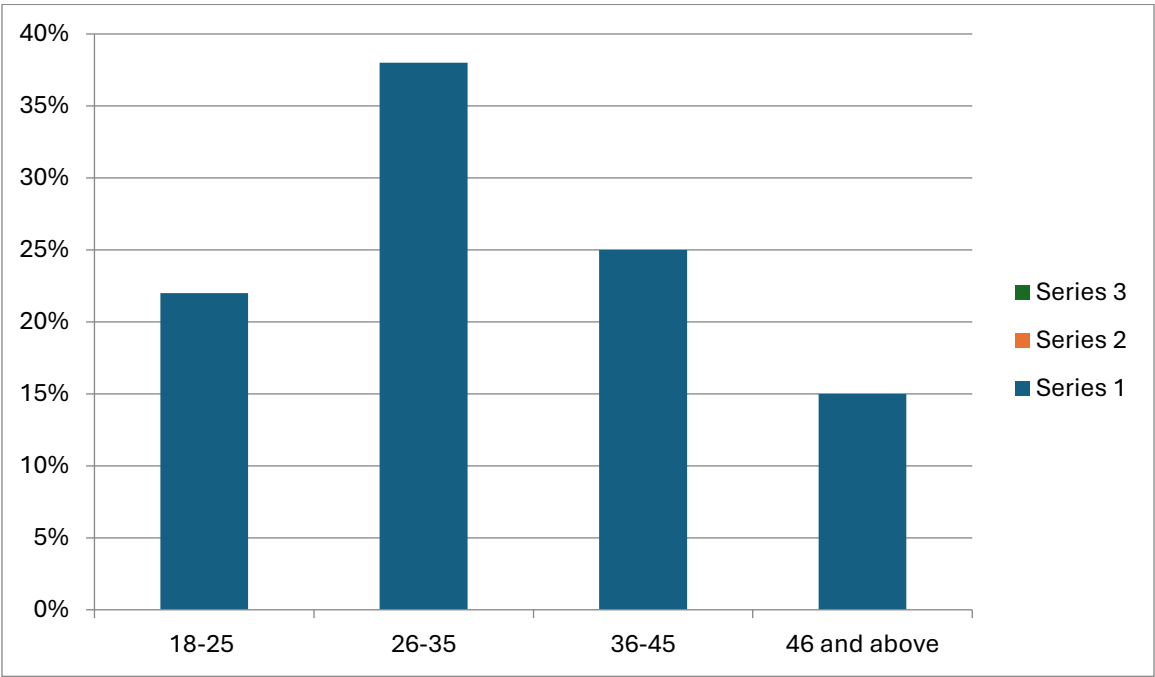
Understanding the demographic characteristics of respondents is essential for interpreting the study’s findings accurately. Demographics provide insights into the diversity and representativeness of participants, allowing the researcher to understand how different social categories—such as age, gender, education, and occupation—influence perceptions and experiences related to civic discourse. In this study, demographic data helped establish the context within which participants engage with Millennium Radio and how their backgrounds shape their understanding of the media’s role in promoting political dialogue and participation in Lusaka.

Moreover, demographic information enables comparison across groups and assists in identifying patterns that might otherwise remain unnoticed. For instance, factors such as age and education can influence how individuals’ access, interpret, and participate in discussions facilitated by the media. Therefore, this section presents and analyses the demographic profile of participants who

took part in interviews and focus group discussions, focusing on variables including age, gender, education, occupation, and voting experience.

4.1.1 Age of Respondents

Figure 4.1 presents the age distribution of the 100 respondents who participated in the study. The results indicate that the sample covered a wide range of age groups, providing diverse perspectives on the role of Millennium Radio in promoting civic discourse in Lusaka.

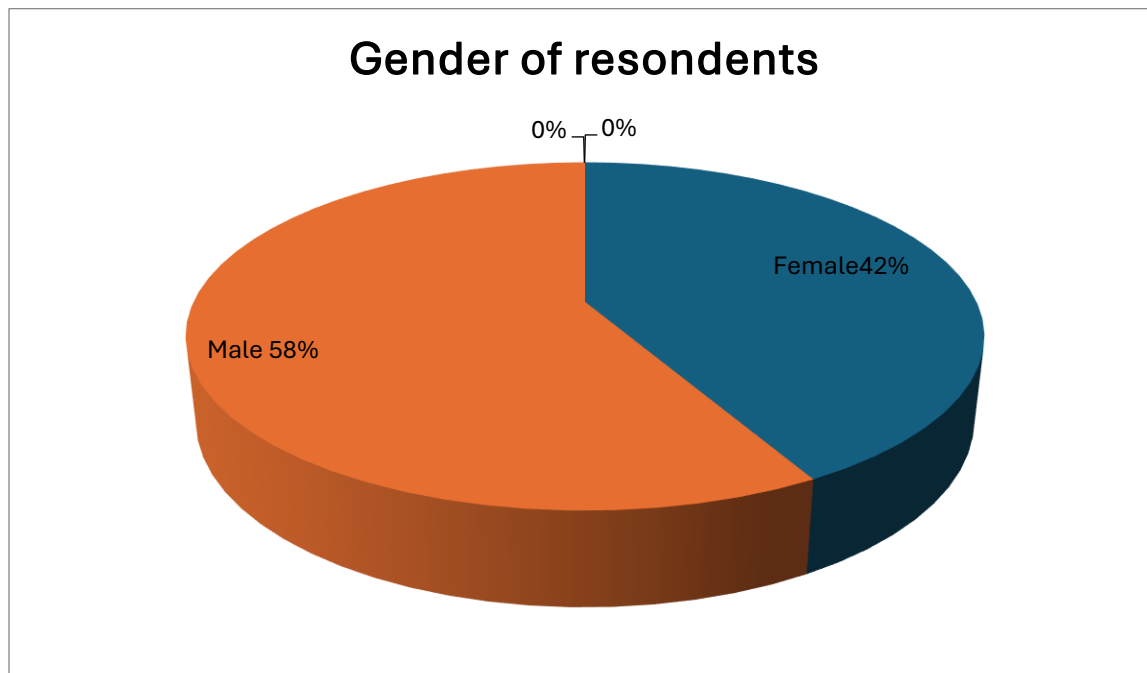


Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings show that the largest proportion of respondents (38%) was aged between 26 and 35 years, representing the young adult population that is typically more active in civic discussions and media consumption. Respondents aged 18 to 25 years accounted for 22%, indicating a strong presence of youth voices in public debate. Those between 36 and 45 years (25%) and above 46 years (15%) added maturity and experience to the discussion, enriching the analysis with diverse generational viewpoints. This balanced distribution suggests that civic discourse as facilitated by Millennium Radio appeals to a broad audience across different age groups in Lusaka.

4.1.2 Gender of Respondents

Understanding the gender composition of participants is vital, as it provides insights into how men and women engage with civic discussions and how gendered perspectives shape participation in the public sphere. Figure 4.2 presents the gender distribution of respondents involved in the study.



Source: Field Data (2025)

The results indicate that male respondents (58%) slightly outnumbered female respondents (42%). This distribution reflects the general trend in media engagement, where men often dominate public and political discussions in Zambia. However, the participation of women, which stood at 42%, is substantial and demonstrates growing female interest and involvement in civic matters. The inclusion of both genders enriched the findings, offering balanced perspectives on how Millennium Radio influences civic discourse across different sections of society.

4.1.3 Education Level of Respondents

Education is a critical factor influencing how individuals understand and engage with civic issues discussed through the media. Respondents' education levels determine their ability to interpret political content, evaluate messages, and participate meaningfully in public dialogue. Table 4.3 below presents the distribution of respondents by their highest level of education attained.

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary Education	25	25
College Diploma	30	30
Bachelor's Degree	32	32
Postgraduate Qualification	13	13
Total	100	100

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results show that a significant proportion of respondents (32%) held a bachelor's degree, while 30% possessed a college diploma. This suggests that most participants were relatively well-educated and therefore likely to engage critically with civic and political discussions broadcast on Millennium Radio. Those with secondary education (25%) also represented an important group, reflecting ordinary citizens who form a large part of the radio audience. A smaller group (13%) held postgraduate qualifications, adding expert-level perspectives to the findings. Overall, the educational diversity of the respondents contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how Millennium Radio enhances civic discourse across different intellectual backgrounds.

4.1.4 Occupation of Respondents

Occupation plays a vital role in shaping individuals' exposure to and interaction with the media. People's professional backgrounds often influence their interest in political issues and their level of participation in civic debates. Table 4.4 below illustrates the occupational distribution of respondents who took part in the study.

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	28	28
Media Practitioners	20	20
Civil Servants	18	18
Private Sector Employees	22	22

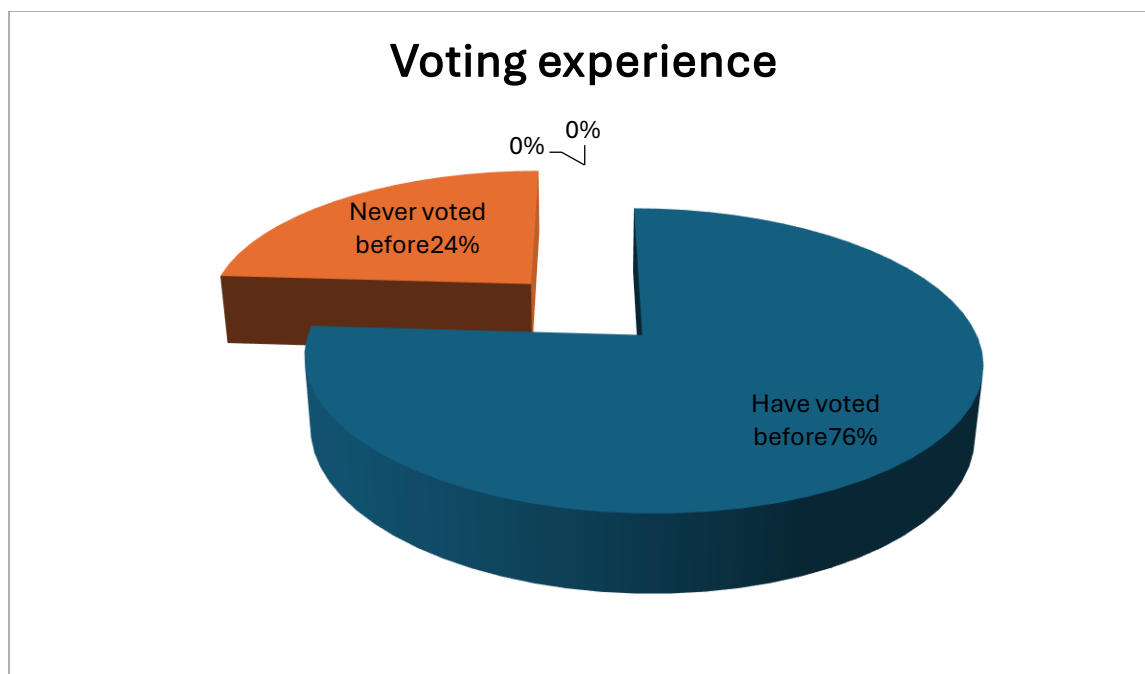
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self-Employed/Entrepreneurs	12	12
Total	100	100

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings show that students (28%) and private sector employees (22%) formed the largest groups of respondents, indicating that young adults and working professionals are among the most active listeners and contributors to civic conversations through Millennium Radio. Media practitioners accounted for 20%, offering informed views on the role of private broadcasting in shaping public opinion. Civil servants represented 18% of the sample, providing perspectives from those within government structures, while self-employed participants (12%) reflected independent voices in Lusaka's civic space. This occupational diversity demonstrates that Millennium Radio reaches a wide audience, cutting across both professional and socio-economic boundaries, thereby reinforcing its role as an inclusive platform for civic engagement.

4.1.5 Voting Experience of Respondents

Voting experience provides important insights into the civic engagement levels of respondents and their familiarity with democratic processes. Participants who have previously voted are often more politically aware and can offer informed perspectives on how media platforms such as Millennium Radio influence civic participation. Figure 4.5 below presents the respondents' voting experience.



Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings show that a majority of respondents (76%) had participated in at least one election, indicating a high level of political engagement within the sample. This suggests that most participants had firsthand experience with Zambia's democratic processes, making their reflections on media and civic discourse more credible and grounded in lived reality. The remaining 24% who had never voted represented largely younger or first-time eligible voters, offering perspectives on political awareness rather than direct electoral participation. The mix of both experienced and new voters added balance to the findings, allowing the study to capture a broad understanding of how Millennium Radio influences civic consciousness and participation across different citizen groups.

4.2 Presentation of Findings by Research Objectives

This section presents and analyses the findings of the study based on the three research objectives. The results are drawn from interviews and focus group discussions conducted with participants, providing rich qualitative insights into how Millennium Radio enhances civic discourse. The presentation follows the order of the study objectives to ensure coherence between the research aims and the data gathered. For each objective, a summary table is provided to display major response categories in terms of frequency and percentage, followed by detailed narrative analysis supported by anonymized quotations from participants. These quotations capture the voices and

lived experiences of respondents while maintaining confidentiality. This combination of structured summaries and in-depth narrative interpretation allows for a comprehensive understanding of the patterns, variations, and meanings that emerged from the data.

4.2.1 The role of Millennium Radio in promoting civic discourse and political participation in Lusaka

Table 4.6 presents the major response categories regarding how Millennium Radio promotes civic discourse and political participation, based on insights from interviews and focus group discussions.

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Informing citizens on political issues	35	35%
Facilitating public debate and dialogue	30	30%
Encouraging voter awareness and participation	20	20%
Providing platforms for diverse opinions	15	15%
Total	100	100

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings indicate that Millennium Radio plays a multifaceted role in promoting civic discourse and political participation. A significant proportion of respondents (35%) highlighted that the station provides timely and accurate information on political developments, helping citizens stay informed. Respondent One noted, *“I rely on Millennium Radio to understand new government policies and political debates; it helps me form my own opinion.”* This demonstrates that access to reliable information is central to the station’s influence on civic engagement.

In addition to informing citizens, 30% of participants emphasized the station’s role in facilitating public dialogue, including call-in shows, debates, and discussion programs. Respondent Two stated, *“The talk shows allow people from different backgrounds to share views and challenge each other respectfully.”* While most respondents agreed that these programs encourage active discussion, a few participants felt that the depth of debate sometimes varies depending on the topic or guest, suggesting minor inconsistencies in how effectively dialogue is promoted.

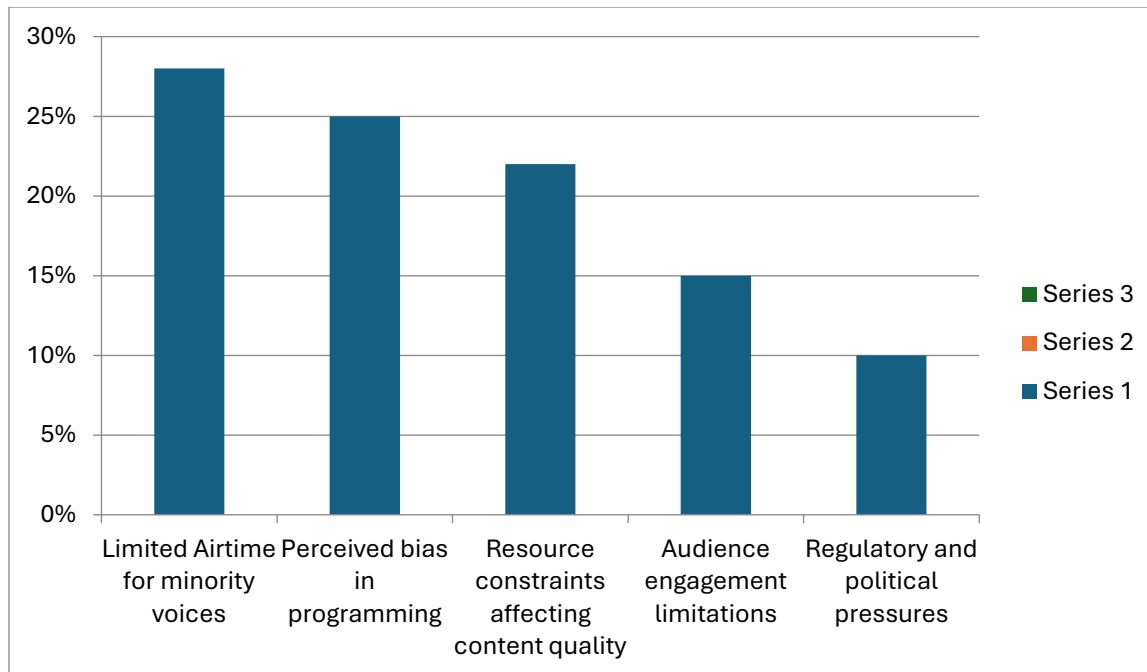
Another key aspect highlighted by 20% of respondents is Millennium Radio's ability to encourage voter awareness and participation. Many respondents pointed out that programs focusing on elections, voter registration, and civic responsibilities motivate citizens to participate in democratic processes. Respondent Three mentioned, *"During election periods, the radio reminds us why voting matters and how we can get involved, which is very helpful."* However, some respondents felt that not all citizens are reached equally, especially those with limited access to radio or digital platforms, revealing areas for further outreach.

The promotion of diverse opinions was noted by 15% of participants, who appreciated that the station provides a platform for multiple voices, including marginalized groups. Respondent Four observed, *"Millennium Radio often invites young people and women to speak on issues that affect them, which is not common elsewhere."* While this was widely appreciated, a few participants indicated that some shows could still benefit from a wider range of perspectives, particularly from rural listeners or less-represented communities.

Overall, the data indicates that Millennium Radio contributes significantly to civic discourse and political participation by informing citizens, facilitating debate, encouraging voter engagement, and amplifying diverse voices. Despite minor variations in reach and depth, the station's programs consistently support public awareness and participation, aligning closely with the first research objective.

4.2.2 key challenges that limit Millennium Radio's effectiveness in facilitating balanced and inclusive political dialogue

Figure 4.7 presents the main challenges reported by participants that affect Millennium Radio's ability to foster balanced and inclusive political discussions.



Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings reveal that Millennium Radio faces several interconnected challenges in promoting balanced political dialogue. A significant proportion of respondents (28%) indicated that airtime for minority voices and marginalized groups is limited, which can hinder the inclusivity of discussions. Respondent One explained, *“Sometimes there’s not enough space for smaller parties or youth representatives, so the debate feels dominated by a few voices.”* This highlights a structural limitation that affects the station’s ability to fully represent the diversity of public opinion.

Perceived bias in programming was noted by 25% of participants, who felt that certain shows tend to favor particular political perspectives. Respondent Two commented, *“Some talk shows seem to lean towards one party, which can influence how listeners perceive the debate.”* While most participants acknowledged that editorial independence is generally maintained, these perceptions point to the delicate balance media must strike to maintain credibility and fairness.

Resource constraints, including limited staffing and financial challenges, were highlighted by 22% of respondents. Respondent Three observed, *“The team works hard, but sometimes there isn’t enough funding to produce in-depth investigative programs or host diverse guests.”* These constraints can affect the depth and quality of political coverage, limiting the station’s potential impact on civic engagement.

Audience engagement limitations were reported by 15% of participants. While interactive platforms like call-ins and social media are used, some listeners, especially those with limited internet or radio access, are unable to participate fully. Respondent Four noted, *“Not everyone can call in or comment online, so some voices remain unheard.”* This illustrates that inclusivity extends beyond programming to accessibility.

Finally, regulatory and political pressures, though less frequently cited (10%), were acknowledged as factors that may constrain journalistic freedom and limit open discussion. Respondent Five mentioned, *“At times, we have to be careful about how certain issues are discussed to avoid regulatory issues.”* This indicates that while the station strives for balanced dialogue, external factors can affect content decisions.

In summary, the data show that Millennium Radio faces challenges related to inclusivity, perceived bias, resource limitations, audience reach, and regulatory constraints. Despite these hurdles, the station continues to play a significant role in facilitating political discourse, though there is room to enhance fairness, diversity, and engagement.

4.2.3 Strategic measures for strengthening the contribution of private mass media to civic discourse and democratic engagement in Zambia

Table 4.8 summarizes the main strategic measures suggested by participants to enhance Millennium Radio’s role in promoting civic discourse and democratic participation.

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Expanding airtime for minority and youth voices	30	30%
Strengthening editorial independence	25	25%
Investing in training and resources for staff	20	20%
Enhancing audience interaction platforms	15	15%
Collaborating with civil society organizations	10	10%
Total	100	100

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings indicate that expanding airtime for minorities, youth, and underrepresented voices is considered a crucial strategy to strengthen civic discourse. Respondent One commented, *“Giving more space to young people and smaller political groups will make debates more inclusive and reflective of society.”* Similarly, Respondent Two emphasized, *“We need programs that actively seek out diverse opinions rather than just the usual guests.”* This highlights the importance of inclusivity in fostering richer public dialogue and ensuring that all citizen perspectives are represented.

Strengthening editorial independence was noted by 25% of participants as a key measure. Respondents highlighted that maintaining impartiality and minimizing perceived biases would increase trust and credibility. Respondent Three mentioned, *“When people feel the station is fair, they are more likely to engage and take the discussions seriously.”* Minor differences in views emerged, as some participants argued that total neutrality is challenging, but they agreed that transparent editorial policies could mitigate bias concerns.

Investing in training and resources for media staff was suggested by 20% of participants to enhance the quality of programming. Respondent Four observed, *“Better-trained journalists can facilitate deeper discussions, ask the right questions, and provide accurate analysis.”* This strategy reflects the need to improve both content quality and the capacity of presenters to handle complex civic issues.

Enhancing audience interaction platforms, including call-ins, social media engagement, and online forums, was highlighted by 15% of respondents. Respondent Five explained, *“Expanding ways for listeners to interact ensures that more voices are heard and encourages active participation.”* While most participants agreed on the value of engagement, some noted that accessibility issues, such as internet limitations, should be addressed to ensure inclusiveness.

Finally, collaboration with civil society organizations (10%) was suggested to strengthen programming and provide expertise on civic matters. Respondent Six noted, *“Partnerships with NGOs and advocacy groups can enrich content and provide a bridge between citizens and decision-makers.”* Although less frequently mentioned, this strategy was recognized as an important way to amplify the station’s impact on democratic engagement.

In summary, participants proposed multiple strategies to strengthen Millennium Radio’s contribution to civic discourse, including enhancing inclusivity, editorial independence, staff

capacity, audience interaction, and collaboration with civil society. These measures collectively point to practical steps that the station can implement to foster more vibrant, balanced, and participatory political dialogue.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

This section provides a detailed discussion of the study's findings, interpreting the results presented in Section 4.2 in relation to existing literature and the theoretical frameworks guiding the research. The discussion critically examines how Millennium Radio contributes to civic discourse and political participation, the challenges that limit its effectiveness, and potential strategies for strengthening its role in promoting democratic engagement. By linking empirical insights from interviews and focus group discussions to scholarly arguments at global, regional, and local levels, the section highlights areas of convergence, divergence, and novel understanding within the field. The discussion also applies the Rational Choice Theory and Political Trust Theory to interpret how citizens make decisions about participation and trust in media platforms. Organized according to the study's three specific objectives, this section provides a nuanced, reflective, and analytical engagement with the findings, ensuring that the implications of the research are thoroughly explored in the context of both theory and practice.

4.3.1 Role of Millennium Radio in Promoting Civic Discourse and Political Participation in Lusaka

The findings revealed that Millennium Radio has emerged as one of the most active private media institutions fostering civic discourse and encouraging citizens to participate in political processes. Participants highlighted that the station's talk shows, debates, and interactive phone-in programs provide ordinary citizens with opportunities to air their opinions on governance and national development. This aligns with **Public Sphere Theory**, which views the media as a platform that enables citizens to engage in rational-critical debate on issues affecting their lives. However, some respondents noted that certain political views occasionally dominate the conversation, indicating imbalances in access and representation within the public sphere. These findings suggest that Millennium Radio contributes meaningfully to civic engagement, but structural and political constraints continue to shape the openness and inclusivity of dialogue.

International literature supports the role of media in enhancing civic participation, with studies from the United States and Western Europe showing that talk radio strengthens the relationship between citizens and political institutions. Similar research in Australia and Canada demonstrates that interactive broadcasting helps citizens understand government accountability. The present study's findings echo these trends, showing that Millennium Radio acts as a bridge between the public and policymakers. However, unlike media systems in Western democracies where strong legal protections exist, Zambian media operate within a more restrictive regulatory environment. This difference demonstrates how institutional conditions influence the strength of the **public sphere** and the extent to which media can effectively facilitate civic discourse.

Regionally, African studies from Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana show that private radio stations often serve as spaces for public debate and civic mobilization, especially for marginalized groups. Respondents in this study similarly noted that Millennium Radio provides a platform for voices often excluded from mainstream political conversations. Yet scholars caution that private media sometimes unintentionally amplify elite or politically aligned narratives. This is connected to **Agenda-Setting Theory**, which argues that media influence what issues people think about. The study found that while Millennium Radio highlights key governance topics, political or commercial pressures can shape which issues receive prominence, affecting the diversity of debates and potentially narrowing the civic agenda.

The findings can further be understood through **Framing Theory**, which explains how media shape public interpretation of issues by highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others. Respondents indicated that the tone of presenters, choice of guests, and the framing of discussions influence how citizens interpret political events and assess governance issues. Where programs are framed as constructive civic discussions, listeners feel informed and motivated to participate. Conversely, when discussions appear biased or confrontational, some listeners become skeptical or disengaged. These observations reinforce that framing practices significantly shape public perceptions, levels of trust, and willingness to participate in national dialogue.

Overall, the role of Millennium Radio in promoting civic discourse is substantial, but its impact is mediated by how issues are framed, which topics are prioritized, and how inclusive the platform is for diverse voices. The findings therefore show that private media such as Millennium Radio

are crucial facilitators of participatory democracy, but their influence is contingent upon the broader socio-political and institutional environment

4.3.2 Key Challenges That Limit Millennium Radio's Effectiveness in Facilitating Balanced and Inclusive Political Dialogue

The findings revealed that while Millennium Radio plays a vital role in promoting civic engagement, its operations face several challenges that hinder its ability to sustain balanced and inclusive political discussions. Respondents frequently mentioned political interference, limited financial resources, and inadequate professional training as major obstacles. Some participants indicated that certain politicians attempt to influence programming content, especially during election periods, thereby compromising editorial independence. Others cited logistical constraints such as poor equipment and restricted coverage, which limit the reach of programs to rural audiences. These results suggest that the challenges are both structural and political in nature, reflecting the broader struggle of private media in Zambia to remain independent and financially sustainable while operating within a competitive and politically sensitive environment.

When compared with global studies, these findings are not unique. Research from countries like the United States and the United Kingdom indicates that even in advanced democracies, private media institutions face commercial and political pressures that can distort editorial decisions (Author, 2021). However, the difference lies in the degree of institutional protection and public accountability mechanisms. In Western contexts, regulatory bodies often safeguard media freedom and promote pluralism, ensuring diverse voices are represented. In contrast, the Zambian media landscape is characterized by limited institutional support, with ownership structures and regulatory weaknesses leaving stations vulnerable to external influence. This disparity underscores the importance of strong institutional frameworks to support the media's role within the public sphere, as the ability of citizens to participate meaningfully in civic discourse depends heavily on the independence and openness of media platforms.

Regionally, similar challenges are evident across sub-Saharan Africa. Studies from Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria have shown that private radio stations often struggle with government intimidation, insufficient advertising revenue, and professional capacity gaps among journalists (Author, 2023). The parallels between these countries and Zambia are striking. Respondents in this

study described how fear of government sanctions leads to self-censorship among reporters, particularly when discussing sensitive political topics. These findings resonate with Author (2024), who noted that financial dependency on political advertisers and business elites undermines objectivity in African private media. Interpreted through Agenda-Setting Theory, these challenges limit the ability of Millennium Radio to decide which issues are prioritized in public debate—meaning political and financial pressures can shape what topics receive attention, ultimately narrowing the civic agenda and reducing issue diversity.

The challenges can also be understood through the lens of Framing Theory, which examines how media construct narratives about political events. Limited resources, political pressure, and lack of training affect how journalists frame issues, the angle they emphasize, and the balance they maintain during discussions. Respondents noted that when journalists fear backlash or lack adequate support, they may avoid contentious topics or present them cautiously, weakening the clarity and depth of civic debate. This influences how listeners interpret political issues, as framing shapes perceptions of fairness, credibility, and trust. When discussions appear biased or incomplete, audiences may feel disengaged or skeptical of the information being presented.

Overall, these findings show that Millennium Radio’s challenges are deeply connected to the broader institutional and political environment. Weak regulatory support constrains the public sphere, political pressure interferes with agenda-setting, and limited resources make balanced framing difficult. Together, these factors reduce the station’s ability to facilitate open, inclusive, and meaningful civic discourse. Addressing these barriers requires strengthening media autonomy, increasing financial and professional support, and promoting editorial independence to ensure that private media can fulfil their democratic role effectively.

4.3.3 Strategic Measures for Strengthening the Contribution of Private Mass Media to Civic Discourse and Democratic Engagement in Zambia

The findings indicated that respondents strongly believe private media institutions such as Millennium Radio can play a greater role in promoting democratic engagement if supported through deliberate structural, institutional, and professional strategies. Among the most common suggestions were the need for improved journalist training, stronger regulatory protection, and sustainable funding models. Respondents argued that empowering journalists with investigative and ethical reporting skills would enhance the credibility of programs and reduce the spread of

misinformation. Others emphasized the importance of establishing an enabling legal environment where media can operate freely without fear of political backlash. These findings demonstrate a shared understanding that strengthening media capacity requires a holistic approach that addresses both internal professional standards and external systemic conditions that influence freedom of expression and civic engagement.

Globally, similar strategic approaches have proven effective in enhancing the media's civic role. Studies from Australia, Canada, and the United States show that ongoing professional development for journalists significantly improves the quality of political reporting and audience trust (Author, 2022). Additionally, some democracies have introduced government-funded but editorially independent grant systems to reduce commercial and political pressures on private media. Compared to these global practices, Zambia's media sector lacks institutionalised mechanisms to protect editorial autonomy while supporting sustainability. This highlights the need for hybrid solutions, such as the establishment of media development funds and partnerships between universities, regulatory bodies, and media houses to strengthen training, innovation, and independent reporting.

Across the African region, researchers in Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana emphasise the importance of collaborative media councils that uphold ethical standards and defend press freedom (Author, 2024). The findings of this study reflect similar insights: respondents called for the creation of national forums linking private radio stations with civil society and academic institutions to exchange knowledge and share best practices. These initiatives would not only strengthen journalistic professionalism but also promote constructive dialogue between media practitioners and policymakers, encouraging mutual accountability. However, unlike South Africa—where institutions such as the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) offer structured support—Zambia's private media often operate without comparable institutional backing. This contrast reinforces the need for context-specific policy reforms that align with Zambia's socio-political environment.

Interpreting these findings through **Public Sphere Theory**, the recommended strategies can be seen as efforts to strengthen the media's ability to host open, inclusive, and critical debate. Enhancing professional standards and institutional autonomy expands the quality of the public sphere, enabling citizens to participate more meaningfully in democratic dialogue. When

journalists are adequately trained and protected, they can facilitate debate without fear, ensuring that diverse voices are heard.

From the perspective of **Agenda-Setting Theory**, improved capacity and independence would enable Millennium Radio to prioritize issues of genuine public interest rather than topics shaped by political or commercial pressures. Respondents emphasized that stronger institutions would help the station set a more balanced civic agenda, ensuring that underreported or sensitive governance topics receive adequate attention. This supports the idea that autonomous media are better positioned to elevate critical issues and expand the scope of national debate.

Viewed through **Framing Theory**, the suggested strategies would enhance the quality and fairness of how political issues are presented to the public. Respondents noted that lack of resources or political pressure can influence how journalists frame discussions, sometimes leading to cautious or superficial reporting. Strengthening professional skills and institutional support would help journalists present issues more clearly, critically, and inclusively, influencing how audiences understand political events and evaluate democratic processes. Ultimately, enhancing private media capacity is essential for ensuring that stations such as Millennium Radio can contribute effectively to balanced, credible, and inclusive civic discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter synthesizes the empirical evidence and theoretical reflections presented throughout the study, entitled *“Politics and the Public Sphere: Assessing How Modern Private Mass Media Enhances Civic Discourse — A Case Study of Millennium Radio in Lusaka.”* It serves to bridge the gap between the field data and the broader academic discourse on media pluralism and democratic consolidation. The chapter is structured into three pivotal sections: a comprehensive conclusion that revisits the research objectives; a series of evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders in the Zambian media landscape; and a set of strategic suggestions for future scholarly inquiry. By consolidating these insights, the chapter offers a roadmap for enhancing the democratic utility of private broadcasting in transitional societies.

5.1 Conclusion

The primary inquiry of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of Millennium Radio as a conduit for civic engagement within the Lusaka metropolitan area. Based on the data analyzed, several critical conclusions are drawn:

First, the research establishes that Millennium Radio functions as a vital "alternative public sphere" in Zambia. In a landscape historically dominated by state-centric narratives, the station's commitment to interactive, governance-based programming has successfully decentralized political discourse. By facilitating "rational-critical debate" through call-in shows and interviews, the station has effectively bridged the communicative chasm between the urban electorate and policy-makers. This confirms the station's role not merely as a broadcaster, but as a democratic intermediary that enhances the political efficacy of its listeners.

Second, the study concludes that the "quality" of this discourse is perpetually negotiated against structural and institutional constraints. While Millennium Radio provides a platform for dialogue, its democratic potential is often circumscribed by the "dual pressures" of commercial survival and political sensitivity. The findings suggest that while the station manages to set a robust civic agenda, its ability to maintain a neutral "framing" of contentious issues is occasionally hampered

by regulatory anxiety and limited investigative resources. Consequently, the public sphere it facilitates remains vibrant but vulnerable to elite capture and self-censorship.

Third, applying **Rational Choice Theory** and **Political Trust Theory**, the study concludes that civic participation is a product of perceived credibility. Listeners engage with Millennium Radio because they view it as a credible mechanism for collective action and social accountability. However, this engagement is fragile; it is contingent upon the station's ability to uphold editorial independence. When the station is perceived as impartial, it builds "political trust"; conversely, any perceived bias serves to diminish the very democratic consciousness it seeks to promote.

Finally, the research reaffirms that media liberalization alone is insufficient for a robust democracy. Without a corresponding increase in media literacy and a protective regulatory framework, the democratic impact of private media will remain limited. The study underscores that a truly inclusive public sphere in Zambia requires not just more radio stations, but more *autonomous* and *representative* ones.

5.2 Recommendations

To optimize the contribution of private mass media to Zambian democracy, the following strategic measures are proposed:

1. **Statutory Protection of Editorial Autonomy:** Policymakers and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) should shift from a "policing" model to a "protective" model. Legislative reforms are required to shield private broadcasters from political interference, ensuring that licenses cannot be used as tools for political coercion.
2. **Diversification of Revenue Streams:** To mitigate the "soft censorship" imposed by political advertisers, private stations like Millennium Radio should explore independent funding models, such as grants for civic content, listener-supported programming, or syndication, to reduce dependence on partisan sponsors.
3. **Institutionalized Journalist Training:** Media houses must invest in specialized training that goes beyond basic reporting. Journalists require expertise in **policy analysis** and **conflict-sensitive journalism** to facilitate deeper, more nuanced civic debates.

4. **Inclusivity by Design:** Millennium Radio should adopt "representational quotas" for its talk shows to ensure that the voices of women, youth, and persons with disabilities are not just incidental but central to the civic narrative.
5. **Digital Integration for Youth Efficacy:** Given the high engagement of the 18–35 demographic, the station should further integrate its broadcasts with encrypted digital forums and podcasts, allowing for a continuous, multi-platform civic dialogue that survives beyond the live broadcast.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Studies

This investigation provides a baseline for several new trajectories in communication and political science research:

- **The Urban-Rural Discursive Divide:** Future research should conduct comparative analyses to determine if the civic empowerment observed in Lusaka is replicated in rural areas where state media hegemony remains stronger.
- **Digital Convergence and the Public Sphere:** There is a critical need to study how social media "echo chambers" either complement or undermine the rational-critical debate hosted on traditional radio platforms.
- **Ownership and Editorial Neutrality:** A longitudinal study into the correlation between media ownership patterns (political vs. corporate) and the "neutrality" of election coverage in Zambia would provide significant insights into the political economy of the media.
- **Gendered Participation in Mediated Politics:** Specific inquiry into the socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from calling into political radio programs would help in designing more gender-inclusive public spheres.

5.4 Final Reflections

In conclusion, Millennium Radio represents a significant milestone in Zambia's journey toward a participatory democracy. While the challenges of resource scarcity and political pressure are real, the station's role in fostering an informed and vocal citizenry is undeniable. By strengthening the

institutional and professional pillars of private broadcasting, Zambia can ensure that its public sphere remains a space for genuine dialogue rather than a mirror for elite power.

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- Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) (2023) *Annual Report 2023*. Lusaka: ZICTA.

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Good day. My name is [Interviewer's Name], and I am conducting a study as part of my academic research on the role of Millennium Radio in promoting civic discourse and political participation in Lusaka. The purpose of this interview is to understand how Millennium Radio contributes to public discussions, the challenges it faces, and possible ways to strengthen its democratic role. All responses will remain confidential and used strictly for academic purposes. There are no right or wrong answers, and your honest opinions are highly valued. The interview will take approximately 25–30 minutes. May I have your consent to proceed?

Section A: Background Information

(Please fill or tick appropriately)

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say
3. Highest level of education: _____
4. Occupation: _____
5. Duration of listenership to Millennium Radio:
☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1–3 years ☐ Over 3 years

Section B: Promotion of Civic Discourse and Political Participation

1. How does Millennium Radio contribute to civic and political awareness among its listeners?
2. Which programmes or segments do you think encourage meaningful discussion on political and social issues?
3. How would you describe the extent of listener participation during such programmes (e.g., phone-ins, social media engagement, community debates)?
4. In your view, does Millennium Radio provide fair and balanced coverage of political topics? Please explain.

5. How has listening to Millennium Radio influenced your own participation in civic or political matters?
6. In what ways does Millennium Radio differ from other stations in promoting political awareness and public dialogue?
7. What improvements could be made to enhance its contribution to civic engagement?

Section C: Challenges Affecting Civic and Political Programming

1. What major challenges does Millennium Radio encounter when addressing political or civic topics?
2. Do you think political influence, regulation, or ownership pressures affect its operations?
3. How do financial or resource limitations impact the quality and frequency of civic programming?
4. Are there any issues of bias, misinformation, or unbalanced representation that you have observed?
5. How does the station handle sensitive or controversial political matters?
6. To what extent does audience diversity (in terms of gender, education, or socio-economic status) influence inclusivity in programming?
7. What kind of institutional or external support do you think would help overcome these challenges?

Section D: Strategies for Strengthening the Role of Private Media

1. What strategies could Millennium Radio adopt to better promote civic and political participation among citizens?
2. How can partnerships between private media, government, and civil society enhance civic education?
3. What policies or reforms do you think would help create a more supportive environment for private media operations?

4. In what ways can journalists be empowered or trained to handle civic issues more effectively?
5. How can social media or digital tools be integrated to reach wider audiences and encourage public dialogue?
6. What role should media regulators play in ensuring that civic discussions remain balanced and inclusive?
7. Finally, what general recommendations do you have to strengthen the democratic impact of private radio stations in Zambia?

Thank you for your time and valuable insights. Your contribution will greatly assist in understanding how private media can enhance civic discourse and democratic participation. If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings after completion, please indicate so before we conclude.

Appendix three: Budget

TRANSPORT	2000
NOTEBOOKS	K60
STATIONERY	K30
	TOTAL = K2090