

New Roles, Old Rituals: The Mobilization of the Listener Community Based on the Example of Radio 357¹

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Abstract: This article analyzes the community of patrons of the Internet radio station Radio 357, based on 13 in-depth interviews with the station's listeners and a former station employee. Material from the online forum of the studied community is also analyzed. The text aims to present the members of a radio community who became involved in financing a new Internet radio station through online fundraising.

An attempt is made to explain the listeners' motivations for their unique scale of involvement in this new media initiative. The research questions relate to the characteristics of the Radio 357 audience community and the role that radio plays for them. The foundations built by many years of participation around the former station and the sense of injustice intensified by its symbolic collapse became the driving forces to fight for the continuation of their previously cultivated radio practices and traditions, already incorporated within the new station.

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Introduction

It is easy to underestimate the role that radio broadcasting has played in the history of communication and media. The way people receive information or entertainment through radio has remained relatively static for many years. Despite competition from new media, the Internet, and streaming platforms, it is still many people's most important means of mass communication. This text deals with communities strongly attached to their radio identity. The inspiration to write it was a close observation of the community of the Radio 357 recipients. These are former listeners to the Third Program of the Polish Radio (hereinafter Trójka or PR3) – a radio station that, after 2015, found itself in a multidimensional crisis. Its listeners faced a challenge: from one day to the next, they were deprived of the voices of journalists and programs that had been integral to their lives. This text examines how taking advantage of a crisis situation makes it possible to mobilize community members to work toward a common goal of reviving a favorite radio station. It aims to contribute to the understanding of contemporary communities built around media and cultural projects, particularly those involving patronage crowdfunding. The research, employing the qualitative approach, allows for a deeper examination of a specific segment of the society – the participants in the world's largest radio project financed through the digital patronage model.

The analysis conducted in this paper suggests that new communities can form around shared traditions and rituals, facilitated by the favorable conditions of the virtual space. The central question addressed is: what motivated the radio listeners who participated in the study to shift the location and form of their existing practices? This research question addresses insufficient knowledge of how communities formed around the reception of a traditional medium (i.e., over-the-air radio) transit to the medium functioning entirely in online environment. Unlike the better-known cases where traditional TV audiences are shifting to watching shows online (Kuyucu, 2019), here we have a financial component embodied by digital patronage, making the whole transition unique. It can be argued that the situation in which a large group of radio listeners mobilize to support a new radio station (albeit promising continuation of the old one) through a relatively new and unfamiliar to some of them financial service requires investigation. Therefore, it is important to learn what kind of radio listening rituals (in Cohen's sense) and actions based on attachment to the community determined high levels of sacrifices (emotionally and financially) to recreate themselves in the new conditions.

The theoretical inspirations that encouraged writing this paper come from reflections on the historical evolution of forms of association, with a particular emphasis on the current stage, i.e., contemporary communities implemented via virtual networks. Of particular interest are contemporary communities, which, according to, e.g., Cohen (1985) and Rheingold (2000), are mainly based on cultural, symbolic, and ritual-discretionary foundations. The issue of the case of the radio and the community around it described in the paper is intended to show an example of the current stage of the evolution of the community as well as the elements that construct it on the example of practices related to the production and reception of radio.

The evolution of the understanding of communities – from traditional to virtual

The functioning and lives of individuals in communities have always been among the fundamental issues of sociology. The earliest historical concepts of communities can be found in traditional political ideas and the concept of the state, the prototype of which was the Greek Polis (Delanty, 2010: 1–2). Communities can often be defined by the foundations around which they are created and implemented. Historically, scholars mainly emphasized the importance of the space criterion: in the definitions of Parsons (1959), Sutton and Kolaj (1960), and Sjoberg (1965: 115), inhabiting a small, common space was a key element in constructing community action. The need to distinguish this category was also pointed out by Gregory Hillery (1955), who defined and typologized communities.

Understanding and interpreting communities raised doubts about this approach. On the one hand, the traditional approach has its place when describing the wide range of possible forms of community: the community is understood as a strong, local group that plays a key role in the survival of the individual. This type of dimension is presented, for example, by the ecological approach, in which the aspect of cooperation between individuals to pursue common interests and the requirements of everyday life is considered essential (Hawley, 1950: 180). However, one can also find a post-traditional dimension in which the community no longer plays a key role in the life and fate of individuals; this corresponds to the more dynamic nature of contemporary life. This approach is distinguished by a lack of barriers; individuals have the freedom to participate in the community or leave it. Examples include alternative communities that fit into the realities of liquid modernity described by Zygmunt Bauman (2008).

In sociological work, it is obligatory to mention the achievements of Ferdinand Tönnies, who, using the terms *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society), mapped the two poles of community organization. *Gemeinschaft* is expressed in traditional human relations in small, local social groups, the prototype of which was the family unit. The efficiency and effectiveness of a traditional community is determined by internally-imposed constraints (Tönnies, 1988). *Gesellschaft* shifts the burden of subordinating goals and means of achieving them to self-willed individuals. Legal and institutional relationships precede the kinship ties valued in *Gemeinschaft*. Individual relationships are more voluntary but, at the same time, selective and fleeting. Tönnies showed how individuals freed themselves from the implementation of previously imposed cultural obligations; the described changes and the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* illustrate the collapse of the former state of civilization.

Analogies to Tönnies' contribution can be found in other classic works by Emil Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. Durkheim defined the varieties of community life through two types of solidarity: mechanical and organic. The former one was characterized by a lack of individualism and individual wills, resulting from the superior values of the community; the latter described a state that freed the individual from previously imposed traditional constraints (Mikołajewska, 1999: 15–16). In turn, Weber understood the transformation of societies as resulting from the rationalization process. He

distinguished “community” and “associative” relationships. In the former, priority is placed on the internal sense of belonging within the existence of the entire community; in the latter, the focus is on the rational dimension of actions motivated by individual interests and calculations (Weber, Parsons, 1947: 136). Marx, one of the greatest defenders of community values, suggested the need to restore a new, egalitarian version of the community; he saw the growing capitalist system as the obstacle to implementing this scenario. In Marx’s understanding, the community was primarily a strong and solidary working class (Kamenka, 1982).

The contemporary discourse on communities has increasingly distanced itself from understanding them by the traditional categories; a redefinition was necessary. There has been an evident decline in the importance of geographical affiliation in favor of the primary role of social relations, especially symbolic and individual factors (Frazer, 1990; Etzioni, 1998). Structures of various scopes that could exist almost anywhere began to be recognized as communities.

For Anthony Cohen, community is based on the symbolic and ritual construction of boundaries and the awareness in a given group of itself as a group. The interpretation of symbols and rituals is relatively free, which is why, according to Cohen (1985: 55), “people can participate within the ‘same’ ritual yet find quite different meanings for it”. The fundamental condition for being part of a community is the individual’s awareness of themselves, their involvement, and their attachment to a common set of symbols. Cohen’s theory of the symbolic construction of community emphasizes flexibility and openness to change, clearly contradicting the treatment of social relations in traditional categories as a rule, unchangeable and mechanical. Community is ultimately what people think it is (Cohen, 1985).

The beginning of the current scientific discussion on communities came at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, by which time the world was largely globalized and based on connections mediated by virtual networks. The dynamics of the technological evolution were reflected in the changing nature of communities and the emergence of the category of “virtual communities.” With the participation of media and the Internet, the virtual world began to be treated as an alternative to the physical world; an inextricable connection between offline and online life was noted (Miller, Slater, 2000). Owing to the possibilities of new media, even a simple idea or slogan published on the Internet (spontaneous aid actions are a good example) can become a sufficient argument for joining a given community. Arjun Appaduraj called such communities “diasporas” (Bałowski et al., 2019) and pointed to media egalitarianism as an essential aspect enabling belonging to the global virtual community (Bujala, 2011: 139). The need for direct contact and prior knowledge of individuals is no longer crucial.

The perspective on the contemporary shape of the community was at least twofold. As understood by Andreas Wittel, network socialization was primarily a belief in the existence of new, unstable communities that should be assessed as imperfect (Wittel, 2001). More optimistic visions were drawn by Manuel Castells, who studied the changes in contemporary societies, seeking to strengthen and develop modern urban society in a highly technological and global form (Castells, 1989; 2008a).

Castells suggested that virtual communities should be given a more important status than what had previously been the case. This belief was not affected by transience or the often-weak bonds between individuals (Castells, 2008b: 359).

Howard Rheingold made a fundamental contribution to research on the social aspects of the Internet. The term *virtual community*, which he popularized, defined a group of people who could both maintain direct contact and exchange messages via the Internet (Rheingold, 1993: 3). Apart from the lack of physical contact, he considered virtual communities analogously to organic ones. This way of perceiving online communities, based primarily on cultural foundations and the symbolic layer, can be considered as the last stage, and an example of an extreme post-traditional form of life for individuals in society.

Crisis in PR3 and the birth of Radio 357 – digital patronage as an alternative way of financing new media projects by the “Trójka” listener community

The results of the 2015 parliamentary elections in Poland, which led to the Law and Justice party (PiS) taking power, significantly changed how public media functioned. Radical legislative and administrative changes affecting the entire media sector, especially public media, have since raised concerns among international institutions (e.g., the European Commission Recommendations on the rule of law in Poland from 2016 onwards – Komisja Europejska, 2016) and contributed to Poland’s drastic decline in the global media freedom ranking, from 18th in 2015 to 66th place in 2022 (Reporters Without Borders RSF, 2022). The changes to PR3 have become one of the symbols of the political revolution. The programming decisions, previously taken by journalists, were centralized. Significant personnel and program changes were also made, which, in the opinion of listeners and experts, pushed the station in a direction favorable to the ruling party (Wilczak, 2020). For years, PR3 had been known for its constant, faithful, and exceptionally engaged community of listeners, consisting mainly of educated, middle-class people who expected ambitious and high-quality musical and journalistic contents. Due to the interference, a significant part of the radio community stopped listening to PR3. In the fall of 2021, its listenership share reached a historic low of 1.59% (Gąbka, 2021). The reform of public media and the dismantling of Trójka took years, and individual aspects of the crisis were the subject of numerous scientific (e.g., Łysoń, 2021; Chwastyk-Kowalczyk, 2022) and journalistic (Wawrzyszkiewicz, 2020) publications. The crisis at PR3 intensified in 2020 when some former journalists from the station undertook to create two independent online radio stations: Radio Nowy Świat and Radio 357. Both stations were created and financed via a crowdfunding model named “digital patronage” (also called “patronage crowdfunding”)². The project bears the hallmarks of innovation; there are no examples of such large radio initiatives financed in the crowdfunding model. Previous research on communities involved in digital patronage had focused mainly on individual online creators (streamers, artists,

2 For further insights into the role of crowdfunding in financing online media initiatives and patron motivation, refer to Doliwa et al. (2022) and Doliwa (2022).

musicians, etc.) with a small group of donors and low incomes. Thus, this article and study also have an innovative character, as it contributes to sociological reflections on the role of virtual communities in radio projects funded by digital patronage. Crowdfunding has been successfully used to fund media projects, including film (Scott, 2015), music (D'Amato, Casella, 2020), journalism (Hunter, 2016), and video games (Planells, 2017). In the case of crowdfunding radio content, initiatives to create individual programs or podcasts are successful (Fernandez Sande, Gallego Perez, 2015), while financing an entire radio station from scratch is less common.

Modern crowdfunding involves financing small and medium-sized initiatives by collecting small contributions from a large number of individuals through dedicated platforms (Ordanini et al., 2011: 443; Brzozowska, Galuszka, 2021). Digital patronage, a recent and increasingly popular type, is distinguished by its long-term, cyclical financing of projects or individual creators (Regner, 2021: 133–142). Regular, typically monthly payments similar to a subscription model foster a stronger level of support and loyalty between the creators and the patrons³ (Wohn et al., 2019: 99). This model is particularly popular among independent creators in new media, such as podcasters and musicians (Bonifacio, Hair, Wohn, 2021: 8).

Patronage appears to be an attractive model for financing larger-scale projects, as evidenced by the successful fundraising of Radio Nowy Świat and Radio 357 (Gałuszka, Chmielewski, 2023). Creators usually use a hybrid content distribution system, where some of the content is provided free of charge. The patronage system then encourages donors with additional rewards (including the possibility of direct communication with the creator) resulting from a specific level of support. The crowdfunding model is also increasingly used as a way to sponsor journalism (Zheng et al., 2014: 6). It is an opportunity for projects that had previously been unachievable under a different financing model or for other reasons (Aitamurto, 2015: 9).

Radio 357 is an Internet station of a music and journalistic profile. The collection to finance the project through its listeners started on October 5th, 2020, via the Patronite platform; the station began permanent broadcasting precisely three months later. Access to the station is free, and its financing is based on voluntary contributions regularly received from the listeners (called “patrons”). The station’s report for 2022 showed that 76% of its budget consisted of patrons’ donations; the remainder was made up of revenues from other business collaborations (Radio 357, 2022). Radio 357 has around 50,000 patrons, which translates into monthly revenue of approximately 923,000 PLN as of November 1st, 2023 (Radio 357, 2023a).

It should be emphasized that the station was not the first of the post-PR3 initiatives financed by the community. At the beginning of 2020, three projects were created: “Report on the State of the World” by Dariusz Rosiak, “K3” by Dariusz Bugalski, and Radio Nowy Świat. The decline in PR3’s audience

3 In the context of crowdfunded radio projects, “listeners” refers to non-donating recipients of the station’s broadcast, while “patrons” denote individuals who financially support the station through regular contributions.

and these activities by its community suggest that a significant number of its listeners have abandoned the old station in favor of at least one of the newer projects. However, it is difficult to know exactly what determined their final choice. Although there are many similarities between Radio 357 and Radio Nowy Świat, what is noteworthy is the clear advantage of the Radio 357 project in terms of the number of patrons and the declared amount of support. According to Wirtualne Media (jk, 2023), on January 1st, 2023, Radio 357 became the world's largest media project financed by an online community via crowdfunding.

Listeners can tune in to Radio 357 free of charge. However, making a monthly donation enables patrons to access privileges assigned by the station to appropriate levels of support. Even the lowest tier (initially 10 PLN, now 20 PLN per month) allows one to comment on the station's posts and interact with other community members in closed groups, in which Radio 357 journalists are also active. The higher support thresholds (from 100 PLN per month) provide a more individualized form of contact; details are agreed upon during individual consultations between the station and the patron (Radio 357, 2023b). The primary means of communication with patrons is the Patronite platform, although a large part of the discussion also takes place on Facebook. The payment procedure operated by the crowdfunding platform means that all active patrons have access to it as well as the forum located there.

Methodology

This study focuses on a qualitative analysis of the community of Radio 357 patrons. This is largely made up of former PR3 listeners who usually have a strong emotional attachment to the former station, built up over many years. The primary empirical material included 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews: 13 conducted with Radio 357 patrons between October 17th and December 20th, 2022, and an interview with a Radio 357 representative conducted in August 2023.

Table 1. The characteristics of the patrons interviewed

Unique Identifier Code	Gender	Age	Education	Donation (per month)
fk9	Male	49	Secondary	10 PLN
r1c	Female	54	Higher	10 PLN
zrj	Female	30	Higher	35 PLN
dzd	Female	41	Higher	10 PLN
j7d	Male	41	Higher	20 PLN
8g7	Male	36	Secondary	20 PLN
20i	Female	44	Secondary	100 PLN
13k	Female	31	Higher	10 PLN

Unique Identifier Code	Gender	Age	Education	Donation (per month)
7gn	Female	64	Higher	10 PLN
5hf	Male	31	Higher	10 PLN
zwm	Female	61	Higher	20 PLN
8bq	Male	38	Secondary	35 PLN
y9b	Male	55	Higher	20 PLN

Source: own elaboration.

The main material was supplemented by information obtained from an analysis of broadcasts published by Radio 357 in various forms. These included 200 station posts on the Patronite platform (containing over 21,000 user comments) and 41 videos lasting a total of 1,050 minutes. The posts and videos were published between October 5th, 2020, and January 22nd, 2022. Virtual ethnography provided a valuable method for exploring and understanding the behavior of the virtual community, while in-depth interviews aimed to gather deeper insights into patrons' motivations and explore the most important threads that were not fully developed during the discussions on the platform forums.

The material was analyzed using the Atlas.ti software. This led to the creation of 50 detailed codes from the material obtained from the patrons' forum and 51 codes from the interviews. Special attention was paid to code categories relating to the following topics: the radio roots of the listeners, the motivations and involvement of the patrons, and the role of radio in their biographies. All patrons' statements have been anonymized. The collected material made it possible to select the threads mentioned above, enabling us to look closer and try to understand the characteristics of the community and its phenomenon. The community's activities built a professional radio station from scratch on a scale rarely seen on the global digital patronage market.

The case of Radio 357 are reminiscent of the features that distinguish the members of its community. They left their former radio station and helped construct a new radio "home." This text aims to present the characteristics of the community of the patrons of Radio 357 and to show the functioning of the listeners within a specific set of external circumstances – the symbolic collapse of the PR3. Under these conditions, a "new-old" community of recipients was formed, centered around the new radio station. To achieve the research goal, three questions were formulated, which the rest of the article attempts to answer:

- 1) Who makes up the Radio 357 audience community, what are its characteristics, and what were the foundations of its creation?
- 2) How do the patrons of Radio 357 perceive the circumstances that led to the transition of the community built around PR3 to Radio 357?
- 3) What role does contemporary radio as a medium play in creating and being part of the community?

The value of radio memories – the importance and status of “Trójka”

The statements of the patrons clearly showed that they found the roots of their radio histories in PR3. This illustrates the significant role that radio broadcasting and PR3 played in the biographies of the interlocutors, serving as a constant point of reference and a kind of anchor. They emphasized that both radio in general and PR3 in particular accompanied them for most of their lives, often from early youth and almost continuously throughout adulthood. In the interviews, they often recalled events from the past and their first radio experiences that stayed in their memories ever since. An example was the practice of recording Trójka programs on audio cassettes, which served to archive the programs and enable them to be played at any time:

I started with Trójka, and this Trójka has been my entire adult life. From there, around the age of 10–12, I remember that I was already recording some “Hit Lists” from Trójka to listen to on cassettes, and that’s how it all started. Well, I guess I listened to this PR3 all my life. (Patron_fk9)

Patrons also recalled attending events organized by PR3, such as concerts, which strengthened the bonds between listeners and the station. They related anecdotes, such as one about a tradition of annual meetings among the friends of one of the interviewees during 12-hour New Year’s Eve broadcasts of *Top of All Time*. It should be emphasized that the broadcast of a favorite program was an obligatory part of the day for PR3 enthusiasts and in interviews, the names and broadcast times of cult programs from many years ago were quickly recalled. PR3’s most devoted listeners admitted to listening to the station 24 hours daily, proving their exceptional engagement.

The interviewees described their relationship with the radio as something natural and inevitable in the context of their life history: “There has always been a radio at home, so it’s kind of normal for me” (Patron_dzd). This perspective dominated the conversations, suggesting that radio is an important source of information and is the main medium – often in contrast to television. The roots of the memories reached back to the practices that had shaped them in their family homes, where the recipients had “learned” and become accustomed to listening to the radio. In many cases, they had been influenced by close relatives (parents, siblings) or friends. Listening to PR3 in youth, in the presence of their parents, was often emphasized as a daily ritual that could be interpreted in terms of a tradition to be passed down from generation to generation:

The radio accompanied my home and my entire home life [...] The first radio that I remember at my parents’ house was this big box with an eye. It is known that he mainly received PR1 there. But later, I had a sister five years older than me who started listening to Trójka. And I took over because my sister went to college and moved out of home, and I continued listening to Trójka, which I liked very much. (Patron_zwm)

Hearing PR3 listeners’ memories from many years before evoked an aura of nostalgia. Particularly impressive was the precision in the reconstruction of long-gone details and events. Through listening to

the station, many participants became accustomed to its characteristic style and the voices of its presenters. Also critical were statements that journalists and PR3 programs had played a crucial role in “shaping” the interviewees’ identities. Through this slogan, they expressed their belief that the radio had impacted not only their musical taste but also their characters, beliefs, and sense of identity. Analyzing the listeners’ statements regarding the process of “forming” them, it was noticeable that, in fact, they were similar in many respects; they shared similar values and had similar ways of thinking on important issues:

The PR3 probably shaped us, the listeners, in some way. Even socially. Broadcasts or things like that – I think it happens a little bit, that we listen a lot and identify with it. Then, our thinking is somewhat similar. (Patron_fk9)

Especially for the older generation of PR3 enthusiasts, the choice of radio stations had been limited, and finding one of the Polish Radio stations was natural. Although commercial stations appeared in their radio experiences and memories, PR3 always occupied a unique, incomparable place. Commercial radio stations, such as the most frequently mentioned RMF FM and Radio ZET, were usually described in contrast to PR3. Listeners believed that these commercial stations were of lower quality, less ambitious, and did not contribute much in terms of music or journalistic aspects.

The key features that distinguished PR3 emerged clearly in the audience’s imagination, and there was a consensus on them among the participants: they shaped both the image of the station itself and that of its recipient community. Collectively, the interviewees pointed to elements such as *Hit Charts* and *All Time Tops* broadcasts and Christmas traditions: songs and charity auctions. They also referred to Trójka’s style, which – according to its listeners – was characterized by a high level of content, tactfulness, high verbal culture, and musical diversity. These traditions, often maintained for many years, played an essential role in shaping the relationship and identification of listeners with the station. An interesting thread was the observation that Trójka connected different generations of listeners who had experienced the station in different years. However, the entire community still referred to the commonly understood myth of PR3 – i.e. high standards of quality: “This is the legacy of the radio station. People with this skill run programs at the highest level” (Patron_zwm).

An essential aspect in the imagination of the audience was the political context existing around the station. During state-socialism period, the role of PR3 as a kind of safety valve, helpful in relieving political tension in the society, was repeatedly emphasized. Its presenters were known for irony and subtle opposition to the state; under the Polish People’s Republic, due to censorship and restrictions, they had to act carefully to avoid repression from the authorities. At the same time, this required the listeners to be able to read between the lines:

It used to have some style. I got used to programs such as “60 Minutes per Hour”, where any criticism of the authorities had to be smuggled in, and it was even much more interesting [...] It wasn’t forced on the listener, but if someone knew what it was about, they understood it. (Patron_y9b)

The listeners distinguished different periods in the history of the station's operation. The most challenging and critical period, according to them, was the crisis after 2015, with particular emphasis on the intensification of the station's symbolic decline in 2020. The crisis and its repercussions for the station's operation were clearly attributed to political interference, which all interlocutors agreed on regardless of their varying levels of knowledge and interest in politics. They assessed the interference with Trójka as very severe, placing it in categories such as "an attack on democracy" or "harming people."

The listeners personally experienced the problems and difficulties that the station was struggling with. They witnessed the farewells of their favorite presenters. Many listeners decided to stop listening to PR3 as a show of solidarity. They expressed pain, especially when the programs of their favorite presenters disappeared entirely from the air, resulting in a void in the schedules. It is worth noting that during the most challenging period in 2020, when the station recorded its lowest listenership figures due to the lack of employees, music blocks were presented on air without a host, emphasizing the unprecedented nature of the situation.

The listeners' sense of solidarity and empathy toward the editors encouraged them to follow their fates via social media. From then on, Trójka had only negative associations. The listeners' descriptions of the emotions they experienced were dominated by anger, disbelief, pain, despair, frustration, and experiences of emotional solid states, often crying. However, over time, there was an attempt to understand the situation and find one's way in the new reality. The listeners were open to searching for alternatives that could fill the gap left by PR3. Attempts were made to find a replacement radio station, preferably one with the participation of presenters they knew ("the voices from PR3"):

When journalists started leaving [...] I also left the radio station in solidarity, so I stopped listening to Trójka [...] It hurt that this radio station was so political and that people were wrongly harmed because all the journalists started leaving. It later turned out that these were political scandals [...] I wanted to show solidarity; it hurt me somewhere, and that's why I became more interested in this radio station and the fate of journalists who started to leave Trójka. (Patron_r1c)

Motivation and commitment to the Radio 357 project – financial, social, and media dimensions

Former PR3 listeners reported how they had learned about establishing the Radio 357 initiative. Most had done so through messages published on the Internet, mainly via the social media profiles of their favorite editors. On October 5th, 2020, members of the new editorial team of Radio 357 jointly published an invitation to participate in fundraising for the project. It was a success. It is worth emphasizing the dynamics and scale of the commitment demonstrated by donors in the first hours and days after the launch. On the first day of collection alone, over 4,000 patrons pledged a total of 105,000 PLN per month (Fijołek, 2020).

Some patrons knew about the earlier establishment of Radio Nowy Świat with the participation of several editors from PR3. From the respondents' perspective, Radio 357 seemed to be another initiative addressed to people who missed the characteristic tone of the programs from PR3. As one put it:

Journalists themselves decided to create a radio station, and since Radio Nowy Świat already existed, I didn't even think twice about it. I knew that the programs I had become accustomed to on PR3, that I would still be able to listen to them on Radio 357. (Patron_j7d)

It is worth noting that the two new post-PR3 Internet stations adopted completely different strategies, which may influence the listener's choice between them. While Radio Nowy Świat clearly distanced itself from the heritage of PR3, and this was emphasized by the station's founders when explaining its name (Stawiany, 2020), Radio 357 was based mainly on elements of nostalgia and sentiments related to PR3, which was perfectly reflected in its name – a reference to the address of the PR3 headquarters at 3/5/7 Myśliwiecka Street (Gałuszka, Chmielewski, 2023). One of the creators of Radio 357 confirmed in an interview that the idea had been based on PR3. To encourage as many patrons as possible, it was decided to publish a graphic containing a list of 24 journalists associated with PR3, who were announced as the new collaborators of Radio 357. The shape of the radio editorial office, based on the former pillars of PR3, usually significantly impacted patrons' decision to join the station. The following statements confirm the success of the strategy:

Later, I had the impression that Radio 357 was a continuation of Trójka because the programs were very similar. However, under a different name, the entire schedule was reminiscent of the best years of Trójka. (Patron_13k)

Patrons, explaining their decision to support the project and join the new radio community, emphasized the need to participate in the rituals they knew from PR3. If the project was successful, Radio 357 would be an opportunity and a promise to recreate those experiences. For them, Radio 357 naturally filled the void left by PR3 and was perceived as the heir to the achievements of the beloved Trójka, as well as its continuation: "Just as Trójka used to be my radio, now Radio 357 is my radio" (Patron_zwm).

However, one of the interviewees presented a fascinating assessment of the structure of the community of the patrons of the new radio station, confirming that its main basis was the continuation of the heritage and philosophy of PR3:

I estimate that around 80–90% of the community consists of former Trójka listeners who accustomed to familiar mode of operation of the radio's functioning at that time. They just wanted this sequel to continue. Since they said goodbye to Trójka, they had to take this tradition elsewhere. This is a group of former Trójka listeners who were associated with the programs and their hosts. (Patron_j7d)

The patrons' statements conveyed strong emotions and excitement about the progress of the collection. This was evidenced by regularly monitoring the payment rate and the number of patrons on the Patronite platform. They believed in ultimate success and felt individual responsibility for the success of the developing project. The initial stages raised concerns about whether the initiative would be successful. The community was aware of the scale of the challenge, and the vision of participating in the process was a source of motivation and pride for many of them:

I became a patron as soon as they said they would do something and started a collection. Right away. I didn't hesitate for a moment. It's just that, after such a long silence on the air, my editors couldn't be heard [...] Knowing that I could hear them again was such a joy. I waited and counted down the hours until the premiere. (Patron_20i)

People who expected only programs from the radio were happy to listen to them and emphasized that the radio once again provided them joy, company, and relaxation. They expressed pride and satisfaction in achieving a common goal, emphasizing their emotional involvement. One patron talked about the need for the "ambitious medium" that he had known and appreciated previously in the form of PR3 to continue to exist. In his statement, one can find the motif of the intergenerational tradition of listening to the radio mentioned in the previous section:

The motivation was definitely the desire to develop journalists who devoted part of their lives and also participated in my life so that it doesn't get lost. So that my son will also have a chance to listen to good radio in our country one day. (Patron_8bq)

There were also arguments explaining the need to support the station which presented exceptionally high quality, distinguishing it from other stations on the market. For one of the patrons, the purpose of supporting the Radio 357 initiative was to strengthen its brand and to promote, in her opinion, a valuable radio station among the public: "I thought it was right to support this radio so that it would have the power to penetrate and reach many listeners" (Patron_r1c).

It is worth noting that the transfer from PR3 to Radio 357 was fraught with technical obstacles: widespread ignorance of crowdfunding, the use of the Patronite platform, and the new form of receiving radio via the Internet. For the interviewees, it was often their first contact with support for a crowdfunded project. However, the collection's success proved the community's trust in the project and its managers. For some, access to radio "entertainment" that was important to them (e.g., voting on the Hits Chart or accessing a library of podcasts, only available to patrons) provided additional motivation for financial support. Otherwise, their participation in the traditions would be limited only to listening to live radio, which is available free of charge to everyone.

The analysis of the patrons' comments showed their positive assessment of Radio 357's offer compared to PR3. One of the most frequently mentioned advantages was the station's lack of traditional advertising blocks. Patrons perceived the new radio station in more marketable categories, considering

the richness of the offer (including access to a podcast library), which was generally assessed positively. However, the need to make a monthly donation had some impact on their ability to finance other paid media projects. Hence, patrons often had to carefully consider how much they would spend their money on and on which projects:

When it comes to patronage, however, there are so many expenses in my life that I decided that it was enough for me to pay for one radio station. (Patron_dzd)

Among the various service providers on the streaming media market, many patrons only funded Radio 357. Although it was a condition for obtaining the patronage status, a monthly donation was not usually considered an obstacle. The common opinion of patrons was that paying a symbolic fee for providing a valuable service was fair and constituted a kind of contract between the recipient and the creator:

On the one hand, it was motivated by curiosity and willingness to participate in the project. When these radio stations opened, it was such an event, and I wanted to be a conscious participant in it. And somehow support them. And now I think it's pure decency, just like paying a license fee or any taxes. I use it especially since they don't actually make a living from advertising, which I really appreciate because I wouldn't say I like radio advertising. That it's only fair that I pay for something I use. (Patron_dzd)

One of the fundamental aspects that build patron communities is the value resulting from the sense of belonging and identification within them. The interlocutors emphasized that being part of the radio was an important element of their current identity and improved their lives. Direct and online interactions between patrons evoked positive emotions and satisfaction:

Cool people, cool community. Even when I go to the store, and Radio 357 is on, you can recognize it by the voices and programs. "Oh, you're listening 357!" – there is immediate contact with the seller, and everything is different [...] We are now chatting so freely, even the staff is different, sometimes more friendly, as if they were familiar. (Patron_7gn)

All this strengthened the positive image of the patron community among its members. Patrons also described other community members positively, often idealizing them (and themselves) as cultured, open, educated, engaged, and demanding listeners. The patrons were asked if they could find similarities with other community members; they emphasized that although it was primarily an imaginary community (usually, they had not met anyone in person), they were also internally aware that "they had a lot in common with them." The patrons presented themselves in a positive light when describing fellow community members. Commonly shared practices became distinctive in their statements, clearly distinguishing themselves – in the opinion of one of them – from the lifestyle of the average person who would definitely like to listen to something different while making sandwiches for work in the morning (Patron_dzd).

One interviewee compared being a patron to being part of a family. He thus appreciated the interactions he took part in on the online forums: “people feel needed and useful there” (Patron_r1c). The radio itself was identified as a symbolic home, which, in the form of Radio 357, was a place to which everyone (listeners and journalists) could return again and again:

It’s great. Experiencing this contact, it seems that these people have come to the house or the place where we are staying and are with us. Only with our imagination can we imagine that either we are there in the studio or they are here with us. It’s a warm, very cool radio. (Patron_zwm)

This statement also fitted into the positive image of the atmosphere prevailing on the discussion forum on the Patronite platform and the Facebook group. Even an interviewee who described herself as withdrawn (she does not participate in forums) and skeptical about online interactions said that when she accidentally joined a group of patrons, she felt part of it from the very moment she entered:

I felt this way from the first moment I became a patron; even though I wasn’t involved in this Facebook group or anything, I felt like I was in some group. And that we are all building this radio together and that when I listen to my favorite programs, I feel like, “Yes! I paid for this program so that it could be broadcast!” (Patron_zrj)

The patrons pointed to similarities between themselves and other community members, noticing similar character traits and expectations. Being part of the Radio 357 community was a source of pride, further strengthening their commitment. The online store run by Radio 357, and the gadgets sold there bearing the station’s logos, constituted an element of external identification for the members. The vision of belonging to the community which participates in crowdfunding and the sense of direct influence on the co-creation of the station were of great importance to patrons, also motivating them to become involved:

First of all, the desire to co-create this project. The fact that all listeners can co-create this radio and finance it is a great idea. This was also the main reason I could contribute to creating something fantastic. (Patron_20i)

There were also patrons whose attitudes were more pragmatic and unsentimental. For such people, Radio 357 was primarily perceived as an alternative to Trójka; the move was a result of circumstances, not choice:

It’s not so great that I feel a bond with those who listened to PR3; it is more of a personal bond. I listened to PR3, and now I have to listen to Radio 357. What particularly binds us is that we were screwed at some point. It’s such a negative bond. It binds. But I don’t feel proud of it that I’m in a relationship where people have been swindled. (Patron_y9b)

To best understand the homogeneity that was undoubtedly the strength of the studied group, it is worth considering the station and its community's openness toward people who did not have the typical features that most patrons shared. Despite the unanimous declaration of the interlocutors that Radio 357 and its community were open to anyone willing to join the group, some reports have called this into question. One of the interviewees, a former patron of Radio 357, decided to leave the radio community. She described patrons as intolerant of people with different views. She claimed to have experienced negative comments from patrons. She also had a grudge against the group's administrators and journalists (who were forum participants) for not reacting in defense of people who were attacked because of their worldview:

When I joined a radio group, when I expressed my view or opinion or expressed something wrong, when the majority did not like something, I was hated and ridiculed there, often even with the approval of the group's administrators [...] I was often told there that I was a "PiS fanatic". Well, that's sad. People would like to listen to music, be able to talk about music, their presenters, their programs, and share their observations. And even if you don't like something, you can say without fear why you don't like it. So that the proverbial flock of crows doesn't rush out because "you're a PiS supporter, go listen to PR3". (Patron_20i)

These unpleasant experiences resulted in her resignation from patronage. The woman emotionally described her initial involvement in the collection and the disappointment she encountered. She faced financial difficulties and a dilemma regarding the possibilities and scale of radio support. Despite the lack of a permanent source of income, she declared monthly support for the station amounting to 100 PLN. Although the described case seems extreme, it illustrates the relationship mentioned by a journalist who co-created Radio 357. He emphasized the exceptional commitment of the patrons of Radio 357, who showed generosity and readiness to make financial sacrifices despite – as he claimed – often not being in the best financial situation. The diversity of the described approaches and experiences of community members opens new perspectives for explaining the phenomenon of the relations between Radio 357 and its community of patrons.

Listening to the radio as a daily practice

Radio has many advantages that attract its audience. It is a source of entertainment, provides information, fulfills an educational function, and promotes social interactions. Its accessibility and simplicity make it easy to get used to. The members of the Radio 357 community paid particular attention to the role of the radio as a source of musical inspiration. Even though they were aware of the traditional nature of this medium, it was still the most suitable for them. Compared to the younger generation, who are more likely to use music streaming platforms, for older listeners the radio is still their primary source of musical discovery. For comparison, the interlocutors often cited their children, who usually did not listen to the radio at all; it was not attractive to them, and did not play an essential role in their lives. Music streaming platforms filled the role that radio had played for the older generation:

I'm looking for inspiration somewhere on the radio, for example. If someone (presenter) gives me something cool, I like it, I'll keep listening. And the kids seem to be able to get something out of Spotify. (Patron_fk9)

Listening to the radio is a daily routine for many people: it plays an accompanying role and often serves as a background for the activities they perform, some of which are closely integrated with specific programs. For some, the radio is a companion during everyday duties such as cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks. Radio programs and journalists can allow listeners who lead lonely or withdrawn lives to find the perfect company:

I don't have so many different entertainments, trips abroad, etc., in my life. I am a minimalist and, for example, this radio relaxes me, except for going to the cinema or the theater once a year. However, I am also a homebody. This radio goes with me on my phone. I can listen to it everywhere, but mostly in peace, in the privacy of my home; it accompanies me and relaxes me. (Patron_r1c)

The patrons most commonly listened to the radio at home, where accessibility and comfortable conditions allowed for uninterrupted use. They also suggested various other situations for listening, including traveling by car, public transport, or walking. They emphasized that owing to easy access to the Internet, they could take the radio with them and listen to it anywhere. An essential feature of the radio is that it does not require the listener's full attention and allows selective, even short-term listening, without the feeling of losing the content. The participants repeatedly mentioned this advantage of the medium:

Sometimes it's like, you know, I'm going somewhere, so I listen for 15 minutes, then I'm gone, I go shopping, and it's not like I sit down and listen to the program from A to Z. (Patron_dzd)

I listen to 357 during the day. I think it's even playing in the background now [...] I often answer calls and have clients; I turn down the music, and the programs have no fluidity. (Patron_8bq)

Radio 357, operating under the patronage model, should be treated as an offer on the media services market, similar to some extent to music streaming services, podcast platforms, or video-on-demand services. For the surveyed community, radio was their medium of choice, and access to it was a priority. Other media platforms did not constitute direct competition, considering the time devoted to them and the different ways of consuming content. Radio does not require the same attention and focus that watching TV or movies does:

And when it comes to competing for time, well, no, because it's a slightly different moment of the day for me. Because Netflix is, let's say, in the evening when I watch a movie or series. And the radio is more like that; it accompanies life, when I go to work, when I get up in the morning, when something [...] so it's usually not 100% concentrated. (Patron_zrj)

The radio station was also valued as a source of reliable information and extensive knowledge; unlike television, which was often perceived as less objective. The listeners appreciated the radio for its diversity of contents and a deeper approach to topics:

For me, radio is more reliable and talks much more broadly, and I spend more time on it. Some TVN 24 and TVP info keep talking about the same topic all the time, and they keep talking about the same thing. And on the radio, this cross-section of information is large. (Patron_5hf)

Conclusions

Observing the community of patrons proved it to be an interesting phenomenon from the sociological point of view. The Radio 357's listening community derived from PR3 evolved through the interaction of four elements: human communities, radio as a medium, alternative ways of financing the media, and the crisis in PR3. This article focused on the social side, showing the sociological phenomenon. Still, attempting to understand the case without considering all the mentioned contexts could be misleading.

The collected empirical material made it possible to look deeper into the life and radio biographies of the patrons; the analysis also allowed us to present a broader picture of the community as a whole. It is reasonable to place the patrons of Radio 357 within the sociological categories of communities. A considerable role was played by symbolic factors attributed to post-traditional communities: ideas, goals, shared practices, traditions, and internal beliefs. The community members were aware of the existence of the radio community and felt part of it. The lack of direct contact and territorial dispersion were not barriers.

The birth of the Radio 357 community was, in a sense, the reincarnation of the previously existing community of the PR3 listeners in a new place. The immutability of ideas and values was clearly visible. Only the "outer casing" changed, i.e., the radio station and the method of broadcasting, although in crucial dimensions, it was almost an exact equivalent of the old station. Evolving and joining the new-old community was a demanding process from the listener's point of view. The habit of receiving Trójka over the airwaves was replaced by a crowdfunded project; an idea about which a large part of listeners had little knowledge. The role of the listener changed into that of the builder, patron, and online community member. For those who overcame technological barriers, getting involved turned out to be attractive and encouraging.

The majority of the Radio 357 community were former PR3 enthusiasts. For them, the new station was a continuation of radio traditions, habits, and practices that had carried on for many years; they were desperate to get them back. The patrons' accounts and images suggest perceiving them as a community of similar and close people: PR3 was the foundation for the new community. It is hard to imagine convincing thousands of people of an unknown idea, persuading them to try a new form

of radio reception, and proving that listener-funded radio is not only the need of the hour, but also a way to offer a better-quality service (no advertising, the promise of independence, more significant influence on the recipients). The community engagement was influenced by the political context and the repercussions of the politically-induced crisis at PR3. Political interference weakened the station and resulted in the loss of legendary journalists respected by listeners. As one of the patrons put it, the crisis became a fuel for action “against the common enemy” (Patron_zrj).

The community of Radio 357 patrons has approximately 50,000 members. This study is limited by its focus on a small segment of the community – those with a high level of commitment. Further research is needed to explore the motivations behind transitioning to a new station, especially among non-paying listeners. Additionally, due to the interview length limitations, it was impossible to delve deeper into intriguing subplots, such as the differences between the studied community and the patrons of Radio Nowy Świat, which shared similar origins and financial model. Notably, despite numerous similarities, Radio 357 surpassed its competitor in both the number of patrons and declared monthly contributions. This raises a critical question: can any radio station, including commercial stations, cultivate a similar level of dedication and loyalty among its audience, inspiring them to make comparable sacrifices?

Finally, future research should strive to broaden our understanding of the role and value of contemporary media project communities from the perspectives of both creators and managers. The case of the Radio 357 community necessitates a shift in our perception of media consumers. We must move beyond viewing them solely as passive recipients, subscribers, or customers, and instead acknowledge their immense transformative power as a group capable of intervention, rebellion, and action. The symbolic fall of PR3 proves that even such a rich and powerful medium is not indestructible, especially since its recipients are a mobile group, able to follow and search for the contents and values that are key to them.

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Cytowanie

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Nowe role, stare rytuały. Mobilizacja społeczności słuchaczy na przykładzie Radia 357

Abstrakt: Artykuł przedstawia analizę społeczności patronów internetowej stacji radiowej – Radio 357. Przeprowadzono 13 wywiadów pogłębionych ze słuchaczami stacji oraz jej byłym pracownikiem. Analizie poddano również materiał pochodzący z internetowego forum badanej społeczności. Problematykę tekstu stanowi ukazanie członków radiowej społeczności, którzy zaangażowali się w sfinansowanie nowej, internetowej rozgłośni poprzez zbórkę środków w internecie.

Podjęto próbę wyjaśnienia motywacji słuchaczy do wyjątkowej skali zaangażowania w nową inicjatywę medialną. Pytania badawcze dotyczyły charakterystyki społeczności słuchaczy Radia 357 oraz roli radia w ich życiu. Fundamenty zbudowane przez wieloletnie współuczestnictwo w życiu dawnej stacji, a jednocześnie poczucie krzywdy spotęgowane jej symbolicznym upadkiem stały się siłą napędową do walki o kontynuację dotychczas kultywowanych praktyk i tradycji radiowych – już w ramach nowej rozgłośni.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczności wirtualne, odbiorcy radia, radio internetowe, finansowanie społecznościowe, Polskie Radio