

Radio and Democracy in Lesotho: A comparative analysis of selected private and public radio stations

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS
in Communication Science (98512)**

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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MARCH 2026

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first want to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Selekan Nkosinathi, for his persistent motivation, assistance, constructive criticism, and support. I am aware that without his perseverance and assistance, this piece of work would not have been possible.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to the members of my family who always supported me throughout my challenging and traumatising condition during this studying journey. My special thanks to you for being so understanding while I put all my attention on my studies. May God bless you.

To my colleagues, I say, thank you for your support, guys. I really enjoyed working with you. Hope we meet again in future.

ABSTRACT

The media landscape in Lesotho has undergone a significant transition from a state-controlled monopoly to a pluralistic environment characterised by the proliferation of private and community radio stations. Despite this growth, the degree to which these stations contribute to democratic consolidation is a subject of intense scholarly and political debate. This study investigates the roles of public and private radio stations in Lesotho, specifically examining their contribution to the public sphere and their capacity to promote democratic discourse.

Using a comparative framework, the research analyses Radio Lesotho (a state broadcaster) and People's Choice FM (a prominent private station) to evaluate how ownership structures and government regulations influence content and audience participation. The study addressed two primary research questions: 1) How does radio content contribute to the public sphere in Lesotho? and 2) To what extent do public and private radio stations produce programmes that promote democratic discourse?

A qualitative research method was used to respond to this study's research questions.

Preliminary findings suggest that while private radio has created vital platforms for civic dialogue and criticism of government, it is vulnerable to political intolerance and state-orchestrated marginalisation. Conversely, while the state broadcaster maintains the widest geographical reach, it serves as a primary vehicle for government propaganda. The study concludes that the survival of an independent media sector is essential for empowering the Basotho populace and bridging the gap between the government and the governed.

Keywords: *Democracy; Broadcasting; Critical Discourse Analysis; Lesotho; Media, Propaganda; Public Sphere; Qualitative; Radio.*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABC	All Basotho Convention
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CPEM	Critical political economy of the media
DC	Democratic Congress
IEC	Independent Election Commission
LCD	Lesotho Congress for Democracy
NRA	National Reforms Authority
PC	People's Choice
PST	Public sphere theory
SADC	Southern African Development Community

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

There is broad scholarly agreement that mass media can exert a direct influence on the behaviour of a substantial proportion of individuals. At a global level, the media is widely recognised as the principal mechanism for disseminating information. Mass media has been able to overcome traditional constraints of time and space, and their sociocultural and behavioural effects are both profound and difficult to ignore (Fourie, 2018).

The political system in place determines and controls how the media operate and the relationships between society and the government. The political system also influences the flow of information within the country. The legislation concerning mass media reflects whether the current government is authoritarian or democratic. Mass media serve multiple functions. They inform the public about global events, educate, and entertain (Fourie, 2018).

Over the past decades, radio has been the most widely used medium in developing societies, in both urban and rural areas, providing information and education. Radio is the dominant mass media medium in Africa (Ajisafe, 2021). It is an effective instrument for fostering social change and promoting awareness, as it can transcend national borders (Fourie, 2018; Thussu, 2006).

Thussu (2006) notes that during the First World War, Western countries recognised the necessity of radio as a tool for promoting their propaganda both domestically and internationally, targeting allies as well as enemies. As a medium, radio possesses significantly greater channel capacity, thereby facilitating more extensive and diverse access. Additionally, it is more cost-effective and more flexible in its production and audience consumption (McQuail, 2010). High-quality media necessitates a certain degree of journalistic professionalism.

Limpitlaw (2021) indicates that well-trained journalists can act as detectives when investigating government wrongdoing. However, worldwide reports indicate that when the media fulfils its role as a watchdog and criticises governments, governments may not appreciate this function, perceiving criticism as disloyalty (Moehler & Singh, 2011).

This phenomenon has also been observed in Lesotho; for example, People's Choice FM (PC FM), which is a private radio station, lost government advertising revenue between 2007 and 2010 because, during its broadcasts, it permitted listeners to voice their opinions and criticise the government through telephone calls.¹ Ugangu (2012) noted that, in Kenya, private radio stations have faced criticism from both the government and the public, and that such criticism has often obscured many of the significant reasons for their existence.

1.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since gaining independence in 1966, the government of Lesotho has used the media to disseminate its viewpoints and promote propaganda associated with the ruling party (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2010). The government's oversight and authority over media content are more pronounced in broadcasting, as the industry is regulated pursuant to the Lesotho Communications Authority Act (Limpitlaw, 2012). Ugangu (2012) contends that, in Kenya, political elites have deliberately marginalised ordinary citizens' voices from national discussions, positioning themselves as the primary subjects of news coverage to bolster their chances of retaining power.

Although the Government of Lesotho has traditionally employed the media as a tool for propaganda, the advent of private radio stations such as PC FM, Harvest FM, and Mo-Africa FM has established new platforms for civic engagement and political dialogue. Nonetheless, as observed, this expansion frequently faces criticism due to allegations of political bias and marginalisation orchestrated by the state.

This intolerance has led to criticism that eclipses the positive contributions of private radio stations, causing many to overlook their essential role in fostering democratic development in the nation. Consequently, this study is driven by the necessity to examine whether these private stations serve as authentic pillars of democracy or simply as vehicles for partisan interests. By analysing the sector's development, this research will offer a comprehensive evaluation of the degree to which private and public radio genuinely empower the Basotho populace in national affairs.

¹ African Media Barometer: Lesotho 2010, <https://data.misa.org/en/entity/ynqy1tuhswm?file=1618567313894xfwo47nxin.pdf&page=13>, Retrieved 20 November 2025.

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Bourgault (1995) emphasised that over many years of media history in Lesotho, print media predominated, except for traditional media forms, which are oral traditions extensively utilised for news dissemination. Fourie (2018) asserts that the press in Anglophone Africa has roots in four different types of early newspapers, one being the missionary press.

The historical development of the press in Lesotho aligns with this perspective. The first missionaries to arrive in Lesotho were from the French Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in 1833; they introduced the country's first newspaper, which was published in French. Consequently, the earliest written materials concerning Lesotho were composed in French and published in France (Foko, 2000).

In the print media, the state operates two newspapers: *Lesotho Today*, published in English, and its Sesotho counterpart, *Lentsoe la Basotho*. These publications primarily focus on government-related events and perspectives. Additionally, the Lesotho News Agency, the sole media organisation with offices across all ten districts of the country, is state-owned and entirely under government control (Limpitlaw, 2013).

1.4 THE HISTORY OF RADIO IN LESOTHO

Radio is the main mass media in Africa, possessing the broadest geographical coverage and the highest audience engagement in comparison to television, newspapers, and other information and communication technologies (Myers, 2008). Globally, radio plays a crucial role in disseminating information from the source to audiences; in many African nations, it is the most widely accessed and popular medium (Falatsa, 2015). Ugangu (2012) further observes that, in Kenya, radio is the most significant and affordable medium for citizens to engage in discussions of national issues.

The early emergence of radio in Lesotho can be traced to 1964, prior to its independence from British rule in 1966. The first radio broadcasting station in Lesotho began operations on the 7th September 1964, with the state-owned Radio Lesotho. There was only one radio station until the government of Lesotho issued licenses to the private sector at the end of 1998. Today, Lesotho has 27 radio stations, which can

be classified into three categories.² The first category comprises state-owned radio stations, the second category privately owned radio stations, and the third category church-owned stations.

Table 1.1: List of radio stations in Lesotho

Radio stations	Ownership
1. Moafrika FM	Private
2. Harvest FM	Private
3. Lesotho Catholic Bishops Conference (Catholic FM)	Church
4. People's Choice FM	Private
5. Radio Lesotho	State
6. The Ultimate FM	State
7. National University of Lesotho (DOPE FM)	National University
8. Mafeteng Community Radio	Community
9. Ts'enolo FM	Private
10. Bokamoso FM	Private
11. Jesu ke Karabo FM	Private
12. Motjoli FM	Community
13. Lekope FM	Private
14. Mapholi FM	Private
15. Boiketlo FM	Private
16. Thato ea hau FM	Church
17. Mohale FM	Commercial
18. Tabernacle FM	Church
19. Prophetic Voice of God	Church
20. Moeling FM	Community
21. Pheshakoe Qhii FM	Community
22. Radio Souru	Community
23. Mafeteng Community Radio	Community
24. Info Hub	Private
25. People on the move	Private
26. 357	Private
27. Anglican Church of Lesotho	Church - owned

²Media Institute of Southern Africa, Media Directory, <https://lesotho.misa.org/media-directory/>, Retrieved 30 January 2026.

Lesotho is experiencing rapid growth in the media sector, particularly with the emergence of privately owned radio stations that appear to contribute significantly to the country's commercial media sector (Nkhi et al., 2025). This expansion may be attributed to the nation's growing need for information.

This study aimed to elucidate the key reasons for the existence of private radio stations and their contribution to the advancement of democracy in Lesotho, following a prolonged period characterised by state-owned radio broadcasting. Furthermore, the research examined the role of radio in fostering audience participation in national affairs. It also assessed how private and public radio connect society with parliamentarians across constituencies nationwide. Thus, this study contributes to efforts to promote understanding of journalism practice in Africa and to expedite the development of the media on the continent by providing insights into how radio operates in Lesotho.

1.4.1 People's Choice FM

PC FM is one of Lesotho's privately owned radio stations. Its management comprises a board and a management team that oversee the station's daily operations. It was established in June 1996 but began broadcasting in December 1998. According to its website³ the station presently serves the lowlands and highlands of Lesotho, as well as certain regions of the Free State in South Africa. Its coverage radius extends 230 kilometres from Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, including areas such as Maseru, Berea, Leribe, Botha-Bothe, Mokhotlong, Thaba-Tseka, Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek, Qacha's Nek, and Quthing, which constitute Lesotho's primary commercial districts.

PC FM's market share in urban areas is steadily growing at approximately 3% per month. The estimated number of PC FM listeners is approximately +/-1.3 million. The target demographic for PC FM encompasses individuals ranging from 18 to 65 years of age who possess disposable income. It serves a market segment that values quality, extending from the lower middle class to the upper class.

³ www.pcfm.co.ls, Retrieved 18 December 2025.

Their website further narrates that the programmes are specifically designed to address the preferences and needs of the audience. Typically, each session has a duration of three hours and encompasses a range of topics, including current affairs, news, social issues, education, entertainment, sports, live interviews, and talk shows. PC FM offers an alternative voice to the predominantly state-controlled radio and television stations, which have monopolised the airwaves since independence. The station has introduced various programmes that enable members of the public to express their views on topics presented by show hosts and to raise other issues of concern.

1.4.2 Radio Lesotho

Radio Lesotho was inaugurated under the auspices of the Department of Broadcasting in 1964. Two years after the nation's independence, the Lesotho government established the Lesotho National Broadcasting Service. During its initial years, Radio Lesotho operated for only two hours, which expanded to 12 hours by the 1980s. In 1997, the station commenced a 24-hour broadcasting service. By 1990, Radio Lesotho had become a fully computerised studio.

It commenced with a 660-watt transmitter, operated by the Department of Broadcasting, which is directly under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office. Since that time, the Department has been a crucial component of the government within the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Radio Lesotho began its operations in earnest in 1966, coinciding with Lesotho's independence from Britain, utilising a 10 kW medium-wave transmitter, a 10 kW short-wave transmitter, and a 1 kW FM transmitter. In that period, the department was not fully developed; consequently, Radio Lesotho did not possess its own transmitters and was compelled to pay the Roman Catholic Church for transmission services.

Staffing at the time was limited, with only three programme officers and engineers. The two-hour broadcast was split into a morning session from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. and an afternoon session from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. In the following years, Radio Lesotho acquired two 50 kW medium-wave transmitters and one 100 kW shortwave transmitter, which covered almost the entire country. The station owned an outside broadcast vehicle to broadcast remote events. Today, the station is broadcasting

across all districts of the country and, as a state-owned station, it possesses more extensive coverage than any other radio station in the nation.

The commercial department of the station was established in 1972. It derives revenue through leasing transmitters to private radio stations and companies, as well as through the sale of airtime, which is financed by various segments of the community. Radio programmes, some operated by other government ministries, are also paid for as an alternative revenue source. The government funds all activities within the Lesotho National Broadcasting Services. The target audience encompasses a broad age range, primarily the elderly and the working class, who have a significant influence on the country's economy and overall well-being. These listeners, of all ages, predominantly identify with Basotho culture across Lesotho and neighbouring areas of South Africa (Lesotho Communication Authority, 2022)⁴.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How does the content of public and private radio contribute to the public sphere in Lesotho?
- To what extent do public and private radio stations produce programmes that promote democratic discourse?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore how the content of public and private radio contributes to the public sphere in Lesotho.
- To assess the extent to which public and private radio stations produce programmes that promote democratic discourse.

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 offers an introduction along with a brief overview of the research and contextual background. Chapter 2 provides a literature review and outlines the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 offers a discussion of the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the research data along with the analysis. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the study and provides recommendations for future research.

⁴ www.lca.org.ls, Retrieved 16 January 2026.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review is to examine how existing scholarship has conceptualised and investigated the dynamic relationship between the media and democratic processes. By exploring previous research, this chapter provides a solid theoretical foundation for the study and facilitates a critical analysis of the current media landscape. Specifically, this chapter investigates the media's multifaceted role in democracy worldwide, with a specialised focus on the persistent challenges facing media freedom in African nations and in Lesotho in particular. Understanding the current media environment in Africa requires an historical overview of its evolution from colonial authoritarianism to post-colonial state control and modern-day liberalisation.

This chapter compares the role of the media in democratically advanced nations with that in nations where democracy is fragile, highlighting the media's capacity to act as a watchdog. By evaluating the extent to which this subject has been explored, the literature review aims to delimit the scope of relevant data, while the theoretical framework defines the analytical perspective adopted in this study. Ultimately, this examination identifies and analyses critical gaps in the existing literature on the media's role and status in Lesotho.

This chapter critically examines the relationship between media and democracy by reviewing international, African, and Lesotho-specific scholarship on the media's democratic functions, with a particular focus on radio broadcasting. Instead of portraying the media as an inherently democratic institution, the review demonstrates that its contribution to democratic governance depends on political, economic, and institutional conditions that influence media production and access.

To ensure a coherent and consistent analysis, the concluding sections of this chapter discuss three pivotal theories that inform the study: public sphere theory (PST), critical political economy of the media (CPEM), and participatory democracy. These theoretical lenses were used to examine the extent to which radio stations in Lesotho

stimulate public dialogue, the influence of ownership on newsroom agendas, and Basotho society's willingness to participate in democratic decision-making.

2.2 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACIES

Mason, Krutka, and Stoddard (2018) assert that international reports endorse the vital importance of mass communication media in democratic systems. Democracy necessitates an informed citizenry to facilitate effective civic participation. Mass media are essential to the dynamic relationship between governing authorities and the populace across all political regimes (Mughan & Aaldering, 2017; Curran, 2012). Most traditional models of the media-democracy nexus confirm that the media's role in disseminating information enables citizens to exercise both formal and informal oversight over the state. The media should also play a role in setting the agenda for democratic development and safeguarding moral integrity, whether in institutions or in individual misconduct. Moreover, when opposition parties fail to fulfil their responsibilities due to inexperience or internal divisions, it becomes incumbent upon the media to intervene and expose such shortcomings (Mason, Krutka & Stoddard, 2018; Ali, 2015).

In democratic societies, the media systematically serves as a watchdog by revealing governmental malpractices, including policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption within the judiciary, and corporate scandals, thereby capturing the attention of the electorate (Carpentier & Wimmer, 2023; Sánchez Medero, 2021). Opuamie-Ngoa (2010) affirms that the media “are on perpetual vigilance, monitoring the abuse of executive power and protecting individual liberties.” Furthermore, the news media should advocate for government transparency and accountability and facilitate public scrutiny of policymakers (Sánchez Medero, 2021).

Ali (2015) asserts that two primary factors underpin the health of democracy within democratic nations. Firstly, the media should facilitate responsible and well-informed decision-making rather than disseminating ignorance and confusion. Secondly, it is essential for the media to hold elected officials accountable for delivering on their promises and addressing the needs of the electorate. Thirdly, the media must endeavour to safeguard individual freedoms from the misuse of power by elites. They should also serve as a “vertical” communication conduit between the government and

the citizenry. Voltmer (2013) contends that, through the utilisation of communication technology, the media functions as the chief source of information and literacy pertaining to democracy (Opuamie-Ngoa, 2010).

Fourie (2018) highlights the widespread consensus that the media have a significant direct influence on the behaviour of numerous individuals. Mass media serve as fundamental communication instruments, employed to disseminate information even to the most isolated regions of the world. These media enable interaction, transcending the barriers of time and space. In the context of ethnic conflicts, it is crucial that mass communication assumes a mediatory role rather than intensifying tensions (Centre for Democracy and Governments, 2010; Nwogu, 2015). Idris (2020) proposes that the media can serve as a bridge builder, fostering cohesion among conflicting groups who regard themselves as distinct from one another.

Orgeret & Tayeebwa (2016) write about the introduction of numerous radio programmes in Uganda and Burundi as documented by the Centre for Governance and Human Rights, intending to utilise the prevailing climate of political violence that precipitated civil wars in both nations. In Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army has engaged in a protracted conflict with the Uganda People's Defence Forces, resulting in approximately five hundred thousand fatalities. According to Orgeret & Tayeebwa (2016), three radio programmes were produced across various Ugandan radio stations, all aimed at fostering peace among the conflicting factions. Dwog Cen Paco's Come Back Home and Discussion Under the Tree aired weekly on 102 FM as talk shows, while Radio Wa 89.8 FM broadcast a programme titled Karibu (Welcome). The government, functioning as a gatekeeper, targeted child soldiers within the Lord's Resistance Army. The Karibu programme effectively persuaded the Lord's Resistance Army rebels to disarm and return to their respective homes, supported by the government's issuance of approximately two thousand amnesty lists. Consequently, many rebels began to vanish and withdraw from armed groups. These programmes were designed to promote peacekeeping initiatives and to terminate the ongoing ethno-political violence.

The work of Studio Ijambo (meaning 'wise words'), established in August 1995 by the American non-governmental organisation Search for Common Ground and funded by the United States Agency for International Development, warrants notable mention.

The programmes of Studio Ijambo were broadcast under the slogan Dialogue for the Future by Radio Isanganiro 89.7, as well as through other broadcasts on various radio stations across Burundi, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and via the internet, reaching an estimated audience of 12 million individuals throughout the Great Lakes region. According to Gehring (2023), the programme titled Heroes was transmitted in Rwanda with the aim of healing relationships between the Tutsi and Hutu populations. The Heroes series consisted of 150 episodes highlighting the stories of individuals who risked their lives to save others during the Rwandan genocide. Following the airing of these episodes, numerous listeners phoned in to narrate their own stories of individuals who had assisted others during the genocide. In Burundi, the objectives of the Studio Ijambo programmes were to foster a culture of dialogue and reconciliation among communities. The programmes also addressed local sensitivities and sought to dismantle stereotypes through humour and satire, as noted by Tayeebwa (2014).

The mass media has significantly contributed to mediating interactions among the public, political actors, and the government by disseminating democratic information within these groups (Curran, 2023). This role is of paramount importance because, as Fawzi et al. (2021) affirm, such mediation by the mass media in contemporary societies is crucial, given that direct face-to-face exchanges of information among all societal segments have become unfeasible. Consequently, this function of the mass media constitutes one of the most vital roles within society. Nonetheless, broadcasting has engendered tensions between politicians and professional communicators, despite their common claim to serve the public (Curran, 2023). As these tensions endure, the influence of the media has become apparent in numerous ways, demonstrating that politicians rely on the media.

Idris (2020) reflects that, during the period from 2012 to 2016, BBC Media Action implemented a campaign consisting of four radio programmes broadcast across 190 local radio stations. This initiative empowered individuals to participate in societal dialogues and hold leaders accountable. The programmes reached an estimated audience of 64.5 million people. They facilitated an increased understanding among both citizens and leaders regarding their rights and responsibilities within the democratic process. Furthermore, these programmes mobilised a significant portion of the population, contributing to their participation in the 2015 elections. A similar

initiative was undertaken by BBC Media Action in Nepal, resulting in the production of the programme titled Sajha Sawal. Idris (2020) notes that 89% of the audience agreed that it assisted in mobilising the government to respond to the needs of the populace, while 90% believed it helped create opportunities for marginalised communities.

The media disseminates the political information necessary for voters to make informed decisions during elections. Additionally, the media supports political parties in mobilising the electorate to participate in voting. Even individuals who initially exhibited little interest in politics become more acquainted with political affairs through media exposure, thereby activating their political opinions. Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran, & Woollacott (1982) assert that following the firm stance taken by television in Britain, electoral competition began to occur more freely and smoothly. According to Fog (2013), the media play a role in exposing misconduct among political parties, and exposing the lies parties sometimes tell their supporters. This is achieved by clarifying facts, enabling supporters to form judgments based on information received from the media.

Norris (2023) asserts that communication channels should strengthen the public sphere by emphasising significant contemporary issues and offering a platform for public expression. During electoral periods, these channels are expected to serve as inclusive platforms for all political parties, supporters, and the general populace. The author further emphasises that this is of paramount importance during election campaigns, as it facilitates the promotion of free and fair multiparty elections. In several nations ruling parties have monopolised government broadcasting agencies, thereby depriving opposition voices of fair access. Reports from electoral observers frequently indicate that pro-government bias on state news channels hinders the establishment of an equitable environment for opposition parties. Examples include Russia, Belarus, and Mozambique. Norris (2023) contends that such biases prevent voters from making well-informed decisions, as they lack access to information regarding prospective policies, as well as the characteristics of party leadership and candidates.

Hoffman et al. (2015) concur that, similar to the role of the church in the Middle Ages, the media unifies diverse groups by providing them with experiences and values that foster social solidarity. Coronel (2022) asserts that the media should continuously

involve the public in governance issues; this can be achieved through the dissemination of adequate information, education, and public mobilisation. In many newly democratic nations, radio, owing to its lower cost and greater accessibility, has been extensively utilised to entrench democracy. Lesotho is no exception, with private radio stations serving as effective instruments in promoting fundamental democratic principles by broadcasting matters of public significance, thereby becoming the primary sources of information for the populace (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012; Coronel, 2022).

On numerous occasions, when individuals learn about the dishonesty of politicians, their trust in the government begins to decline, thereby reducing their participation in politics (Whiteley et al., 2016). Over the years, the influence of the media on society has demonstrated remarkable effects (Sari et al., 2018). The significant impact of the media is evident when it engages in what is known as 'committed journalism,' thereby prioritising values such as democracy, free choice, openness, morality, and serving the common good, in addition to functioning as a public watchdog (Quinn, 2018).

An additional important social responsibility of the media is the protection and promotion of human rights. This responsibility can be fulfilled by informing and educating the public regarding human rights violations, as well as by uncovering abuses, particularly through investigative journalism. The media is capable of seeking out and exposing the truth, a role which aligns with societal interests and further supports societal progress (Nwankwo, 2011). The media should assume a leading role in advocating for human rights; failure to do so may lead society to make uninformed, inaccurate, and inconsistent decisions (Heinze & Freedman, 2010).

When engaging in agenda-setting, the media can advance the human rights agenda by disseminating human rights programmes through publishing or broadcasting. The media can select significant issues requiring particular attention and raise awareness among both the government and the public (Fourie, 2018). McQuail (2010) concurs that when certain news coverage is prioritised by the media, it tends to influence either public or governmental responses. Through their influence, the media can mobilise human rights non-governmental organisations, promote active participation within civil society, and foster tolerance through the dissemination of human rights information

(Apodaca, 2013). Kumari (2016) states that human rights and democracy are inherently interconnected and mutually supportive.

Furthermore, the media can utilise the agenda-setting theory to advance and direct public and governmental attention towards issues requiring special consideration. Indeed, timely and accurate information regarding the severity and nature of any significant disaster is essential in assisting government officials and non-governmental organisations to respond effectively. This process is facilitated when media outlets serve as intermediaries by reporting problems; this provides the government with adequate information to formulate appropriate responses, while simultaneously informing society so that individuals can act prudently or take necessary precautions. Thus, the media can exert pressure on the government to respond promptly to local issues (Norris, 2023).

A prominent theme emerging from the scholarly literature is the widely accepted perspective that the media fulfil fundamental democratic functions, including informing citizens, facilitating public debate, promoting accountability, and serving as a watchdog over political authority (Curran, 2023; Coronel, 2022; & Medero, 2021). Academics within liberal democratic theory generally portray the media as a neutral intermediary between the state and the populace, capable of enhancing democratic participation by disseminating information and facilitating public scrutiny of government actions. However, this perspective is contested by critical scholars who argue that media institutions rarely operate independently of political and economic power structures. The literature indicates that ownership patterns, regulatory frameworks, commercial interests, and political affiliations often influence media agendas, thereby constraining the democratic potential traditionally attributed to the media (Mosco, 2015; Murdock & Golding, 2016). Golding and Murdock (2018) argue that media organisations are embedded within broader structures of power that influence what information is produced, circulated, and excluded from public discourse. Similarly, McChesney (2008) maintains that commercial pressures often compel media organisations to prioritise profitability over public service obligations, thereby limiting the diversity of viewpoints available to citizens.

2.3 THE ORIGINS OF MEDIA IN AFRICA

2.3.1 The press

Faringer (1991) emphasises that the development of journalism in Africa was shaped by colonial powers who introduced an authoritarian press and restricted the growth of indigenous media. However, this suppression did not prevent the press's expansion in West African countries. When Africans struggled for independence, their leaders utilised the press to foster nationalist sentiments. Consequently, African leaders and members of the African diaspora, such as those in the Caribbean, appropriated the press as a political instrument. Examples include newspapers published by freed slaves in the United States of America and the West Indies, in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In East African countries, the British, arriving in substantial numbers, sought to stay informed about events in Britain, prompting them to establish their newspapers. Additionally, East Indians, imported as cheap labour, also founded their own press outlets.

The newly independent African nations, formerly British colonies, experienced a press characterised by a relatively private and privately owned nature. Prominent African leaders such as Nkrumah initiated and disseminated their own newspapers, acknowledging the strategic benefits of utilising them to garner support and foster trust among the populace. Furthermore, following independence, the leaders of these emerging states endeavoured to maintain their authority; accordingly, they opted to limit criticism by imposing restrictions on the media (Garba, 2016).

Wilcox (1975:342) and Nyamnjoh (2005:40) write that the press in the former English-speaking colonial countries was introduced in four ways:

- As official government gazettes.
- By missionaries.
- As private newspapers.
- As underground political, anticolonial newssheets.

Wilcox (1975) and Faringer (1991) agree that government newspapers, which predominantly targeted the European business community and government employees, advanced journalism throughout Africa. The principal aim of these publications was to promote literacy and rural development. Nyamnjoh (2005) asserts

that, after a certain period, the content of the newspapers mainly consisted of Africans protesting colonial rule. Subsequently, colonial authorities enacted stringent laws to restrict the African-owned press. As a result, only newspapers operated by Europeans or published by government ministries were recognised.

2.3.2 Radio

According to Randall (2021), the origins of media in Africa can be traced back to colonial times. Around 1880, the media landscape was initiated by the Creoles of Freetown and the elites of Accra, who received education through missionary efforts. During this period, Catholic radio stations played a leading role, followed by the BBC World Service, which primarily operated in British colonies. Catholic Church-based radio stations have existed for a considerable period and have been influenced by liberalisation trends in numerous countries. Historically, broadcasting agencies across the African continent were regulated by public authorities and directly managed by the government through the Ministry of Information; however, there were no clear distinctions between these entities. Currently, many African countries host numerous privately owned and community radio stations.

The broadcasting media became predominantly controlled by the state, thereby serving as mouthpieces for the government. They were further utilised as tools for promoting national sovereignty and as instruments for development. Conversely, although some governments tolerated media criticism, certain newspapers and broadcasting agencies rejected the appointed leaders and their viewpoints. These outlets campaigned against such governments, prompting harsh governmental responses. Most post-colonial African states continued to employ oppressive laws inherited from colonial powers to suppress the media (Berger, 2011).

According to Mason, Krutka, and Stoddard (2018), throughout human history media channels have evolved and become intertwined over time, transitioning from pamphlets and newspapers to radio and television, and subsequently to cable news and social media. In numerous newly democratic nations, radio has been extensively utilised due to its lower cost and greater accessibility, thereby serving as a fundamental tool for anchoring democracy in these countries. In Lesotho, for instance, FM and community radio have demonstrated themselves to be effective instruments

for promoting grassroots democracy by disseminating local issues and providing an alternative source of information beyond official channels (Coronel, 2022).

Thussu (2006) asserts that during the First World War Western nations recognised the necessity of radio as a tool for propaganda dissemination both domestically and internationally, targeting allies and adversaries alike. This phenomenon persists in certain African countries to the present day. As a medium, radio offers substantially greater channel capacity, thereby enabling broader and more diverse access. Furthermore, it is more cost-effective and provides increased flexibility in both production and consumption by its audience (McQuail, 2010). Radio has established itself as an instrument for development. The emergence of community and private local radios has significantly contributed to the enhancement of the public sphere (Meyer, 2011).

Radio is the dominant mass media platform in numerous African countries, as it is the most widely accessed and popular medium, according to Falatsa (2016). Kemanzi (2020) observed that in Uganda, radio talk shows have facilitated the participation of ordinary citizens in local decision-making processes; additionally, they have challenged the monopolistic control of the elite over the public sphere. Furthermore, radio talk shows in Uganda enable direct communication between ordinary individuals and elites, and when government officials appear on these programs, they are compelled to be accountable to society. Kalyango and Onyebadi (2012) conclude that Ugandans who acquire political information through radio become more actively engaged in political matters and are better equipped to make informed decisions during elections.

Ugangu (2012) states that in Kenya radio is the most significant and cost-effective medium for assisting the public in debates regarding national issues. For example, following a radio talk show in which the community accused a member of the Kenyan parliament of embezzling funds intended for a clinic, the MP consented to enhance transparency and disclosed the financial documents to the community (Amutabi, 2013). According to Grätz (2013), one of the principal functions of radio is to ensure the dissemination of democratic information, fostering an environment conducive to informed decision-making by the electorate prior to casting their votes.

Radio is an effective means to prevent and promote social change; radio propaganda can be broadcast over vast distances to a large audience at relatively low cost. Radio is a potent propaganda instrument because it transcends national borders and makes enemy lines more accessible, as emphasised by Thussu (2006), who notes that radio waves can propagate across any location, unrestricted by political boundaries or geographic limitations. Radio has even been utilised by rebels, operating illegally from within and across borders to threaten their adversaries. This is exemplified by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, a rebel group in Angola, which used its radio station to disseminate its own propaganda (Randall, 2021).

Since the introduction of electronic media, as Nyamnjoh (2013) stated, African media have been influenced by Western cultures. This influence stems from the fact that colonial powers such as Britain and France utilised radio broadcasting to inform their colonial citizens about domestic affairs and to counteract Nazi propaganda. Nyamnjoh (2013) asserts that the British and French established radio stations in Africa to reinforce their presence in the colonies. This was undertaken to promote their languages and cultures among Africans. The indigenous populations were deprived of the opportunity to select suitable broadcasting systems and content.

According to Leyris (2022), the French utilised radio in their colonies to monitor discussions among educated Africans, with the objective of combating anti-government sentiments and potential subversive activities. During the independence movements of French colonies with established radio services, the content was markedly influenced by the French political model and culture. Leyris (2022) further asserts that the British implemented educational policies and employed indirect rule through regulations governing broadcasting. In 1951, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) initiated training programs for African broadcasting personnel, thereby embedding the BBC's organisational culture within the trainees. Ultimately, prior to the independence of most African colonies, the British established broadcasting services modelled after the BBC.

Following the model of their colonial predecessors, the post-colonial African governments have strategically utilised radio broadcasting to serve their political interests. Whitten-Woodring (2010) and Ndlovu (2016) concur that radio has been employed to defend and promote politically motivated initiatives or programmes.

Nyamnjoh (2013) makes the point that since the onset of independence most African states have used radio as an effective means to advance nation-building and development. This has, in effect, been their justification for maintaining rigorous control over broadcasting. The governments further argue that such control contains expenses, given their limited resources, and ensures political stability. They also asserted that they would relax their grip and permit liberalisation once their states achieved greater political maturity.

The African liberalisation of broadcasting commenced in the 1990s; however, in most countries, the process progressed more slowly than anticipated. For instance, in Senegal, the decision to terminate the monopoly of the state broadcaster was made in 1991; but the first television station was only introduced in 2006. The BBC African Media Development Initiative research observed that between 2000 and 2006 the number of commercial radio stations in sub-Saharan countries increased by 360%, while community radio stations saw a growth of 1,386% during the same period (Myers, Dietz & Frere, 2014).

Although the BBC AMDI research conducted in 2004/2005 indicated that state broadcasters still cover a considerably larger geographical area than private, commercial, and community radios, the intermedia survey of 2005-2007 suggests that private and commercial radio stations attract a larger audience than state broadcasting stations. Based on numerous examples from various countries, it is apparent that state broadcasting stations are increasingly under pressure through losing viewership and listenership, while local and regional commercial and private radios are gaining prominence, particularly in urban areas (Myers, 2011). For instance, according to The Balancing Act, 2008, the listenership of Zimbabwean state broadcaster, ZBC, declined during Mugabe's regime as public disinterest grew regarding its propaganda. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, RTNC lost its audience because society perceived it as a government mouthpiece. This recurring pattern of abandonment of government-broadcasting agencies across the African continent demonstrates that the populace is eager for independent and trustworthy sources of news (Myers, 2011).

Radio plays a significant role in the development of Africa, but like all forms of media it can be employed to incite atrocities and violence, potentially leading to the massacre of many lives. It has the capacity to produce and disseminate both truth and falsehood,

thereby promoting peace or inciting hatred that can lead to war. However, according to Buckley (2011), it is debatable whether radio genuinely incites individuals to acts of violence; nevertheless, it is evident that individuals are predominantly influenced by what they hear and see on a daily basis. Numerous reports substantiate the fact that radio in Africa has been utilised to incite atrocities and hatred.

The Rwandan genocide serves as a prominent example. Occurring in 1994, the genocide was carried out between the Tutsi and Hutu populations. The Hutu private radio station, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), conducted broadcasts that propagated propaganda, ultimately leading to the attempted extermination of the Tutsi. One of its founders, Jean-Bosco Barayagwisa, was the director of the Rwandan Bureau of Information and Broadcasting. The second co-founder, Professor Ferdinand Nahimana, was a lecturer at the National University of Rwanda. RTLM was permitted to utilise Radio Rwanda's equipment and broadcast on the same frequencies, indicating a connection with high-ranking government officials. The station was primarily established to counter the so-called "Tutsi media monopoly" (Orgeret & Tayeebwa, 2016). Consequently, RTLM promoted Hutu ideology centred on the extermination of the Tutsi, aiming to establish Hutu dominance and full control over Rwanda. The station convinced perpetrators that they should defend their tribe (Hutu), asserting that the Rwandan Patriotic Front sought to seize power and oppress the Hutu. These messages clearly demonstrate that the government failed to protect the Tutsi and was unwilling to punish Hutu participants involved in attacks against Tutsi populations (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2012). These circumstances underscore the peril of media influence in fragile, democratising states, highlighting the potential for media to become a powerful tool in unstable societies.

The language employed by the station significantly contributed to inciting violence and the Tutsi genocide. The Tutsi were derogatorily referred to as "inyenzi, " meaning cockroaches, and were also called snakes. RTLM facilitated the actions of militias engaged in systematic killings of thousands of Tutsis by broadcasting the names and addresses of individuals targeted for execution. The station characterised these atrocities as "self-defence" (Frère, 2017; Myer, 2011; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2012).

The proprietors of RTLM appear to promote their own agenda and propaganda by inciting violence through the station. This behaviour is predominantly characteristic of

private owners. According to Edda (2019), such owners utilise their media outlets to pursue personal interests and viewpoints. The ownership interests of media organisations vary significantly; some are traded on the stock market, while others remain privately owned (Benson, Neff & Hesserus, 2018). Edda (2019) observed that although commercial media companies are primarily motivated by profit, many private individual enterprises may also seek to fulfill their social responsibilities towards their audiences, particularly if they serve local communities. Nevertheless, in numerous cases, personal interests tend to overshadow objective judgment.

2.4 THE STATE OF MEDIA IN LESOTHO

Democracy necessitates the active engagement of citizens, and for this to occur, the media should establish platforms where candidates and political parties can reach the electorate to present their views and proposals. This enables the citizenry to make well-informed decisions. The media should involve the nation both during the preparatory phase and post-election period by providing a public sphere for discourse (Coronel, 2022; Frère, 2017). Coronel (2022) asserts that the media ought to continuously incorporate citizens into governance activities by providing adequate information, education, and mobilisation efforts. In many newly democratic nations where radio is more affordable and accessible, it has been widely utilised to foster democratic practices. This has been the case too with Lesotho, where FM and community radio have demonstrated their effectiveness in fostering grassroots democracy by highlighting local issues and providing an alternative to official information channels (Coronel, 2022).

Regrettably, in countries such as Lesotho, numerous private radio stations have contributed to public confusion, thereby eroding trust among politicians and the public. As Edda (2009 and Isike and Otomoso (2017) observed, in some instances, the media failed to present balanced facts when reporting on government affairs. This assertion is supported by Wassermann (2010), who argues that South African journalists adopted an oppositional stance towards the government in the absence of a robust political opposition following the 1994 democratic elections. They have allowed themselves to be exploited, as Coronel (2022) describes, when the media are sometimes used as proxies in conflicts between rival political groups, helping to create division rather than unity, promoting hate speech over reasoned debate, and fostering

suspicion rather than social trust. According to Randall (2021), this phenomenon may be attributable to the historical use of private media during colonial rule to campaign against the colonial government.

Selinyane (2008) asserts that in Lesotho, the introduction of radio licenses to non-state entities after the 1998 general elections marked a notable transformation in the media's overall influence on politics, particularly in relation to that election. According to Selinyane (2008), radio was considered to provide superior news coverage compared with print media, particularly in election reporting and civic education. The author further observed that numerous privately owned radio stations in Maseru presented themselves as religious while exhibiting intensely partisan political orientations. For example, Selinyane (2008) asserts that Harvest FM, Mo Africa FM, and Ts'enolo FM are Christian radio stations; however, they exhibit tendencies that favour the major political parties. Harvest FM aligns with the All-Basotho Convention (ABC), Mo-Africa FM favours the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), and Ts'enolo FM shows a tilt towards the Democratic Congress (DC).

Isike and Omotoso (2017) concur that this one-sided reportage restricts the media from fostering developmental journalism and contributes to the promotion of adversarial relations, thereby undermining democratic processes. Kalyango (2014) asserts that in 2005, when President Museveni of Uganda held a referendum aimed at returning the country to a multiparty system, opposition parties actively opposed the initiative. Uganda's independent FM stations, led by political commentators, journalists, and talk-show hosts, debated the issue publicly and supported the opposition by urging voters to reject a return to multiparty politics. Furthermore, according to Puddephatt (2006), the conflict during the Balkans crisis that ensued following the dissolution of Yugoslavia was exacerbated by various media outlets, which facilitated the escalation towards war. The media played a role in mobilising public opinion among the warring factions. Media campaigns anticipated and contributed to the onset of conflict.

According to Hajdinjak (2014), political elites and activists utilise the media to propagate propaganda, influence society, and maintain their power and dominance by fostering nationalism and advocating political change among the populace. Politicians also employed the media to disseminate their ideologies in Tanzania during the initial

years of liberalisation (1992-2000). Following the establishment of a multi-party system, numerous independent newspapers and broadcasters supported the opposition, which led the government to impose restrictions on advertising on these outlets, thereby undermining their revenue sources (Myers, 2014).

In certain instances, the media may be utilised to advance neoliberal agendas. Myers (2014) acknowledged that the World Bank encouraged its bilateral donors to channel their contributions toward countries engaged in reform programmes. Such reforms encompass fostering open public debate and safeguarding press freedom. This perspective was corroborated by the former British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, in 1990, who stated that Britain would support nations promoting free market principles, human rights, public accountability, and the rule of law (Myers, 2014). Myers (2014) notes that former French President François Mitterrand emphasised the importance of supporting the media in various developing countries to ensure the uninterrupted free flow of information and ideas. Zambia's press freedom was reinforced through assistance from the United States Agency for International Development in 1990, whereby the US-Zambia Democratic Governance initiative allocated approximately US\$15 million for media development over a five-year period.

The 2010 political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire exemplifies the vulnerability of media practitioners to potential exploitation by political figures. The tensions between Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara arose when the Constitutional Court of Côte d'Ivoire declared Gbagbo as the election winner, whereas the Electoral Commission proclaimed Ouattara as the victor and the legitimate President of Côte d'Ivoire. During this period of conflict, two broadcasting entities—Radio Télévision Ivoirienne, a state-operated station supporting Gbagbo, and Télévision Côte d'Ivoire, which aligned with Ouattara—engaged in indirect commentary and incited violence against opponents and journalists lacking their perspective (Electoral Reform International Service, 2011).

Idris (2020) reports that during the 2007 general election in Kenya, private media owners initiated a campaign titled 'Give us back our country'. The purpose of this campaign was to mobilise society to participate in the forthcoming elections. Private radio stations commenced broadcasting hate speeches, akin to those used during the Rwandan genocide. Adibayo (2015) concurs that two Kikuyu radio stations, namely

Kameme and Inooro, began to play songs that denigrated the opposition leader Railla Odinga and his supporters as “beasts from the west”, while Radio Lake Victoria aired songs that derogatorily referred to government officials as “the leadership of baboons”. These perspectives contributed to violence resulting in approximately 1,300 fatalities.

State-owned radio and television broadcasters are predominantly under government control and serve as instruments of propaganda (Moehler & Singh, 2011). According to Falatsa (2016), the Lesotho government determines the content to be broadcast and the individuals to be covered by the national media. This is evidenced by the fact that these entities fall directly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology (Saka, 2015). The Minister of Communications appears to influence the newsroom of Radio Lesotho, dictating what should and should not be aired or published. At times, the Minister halts stories that are ready for broadcast if they are perceived to expose governmental failures. Thus, issues of public concern are often diluted to preserve government support. Private radio stations that do not conform to government preferences risk losing support or advertising revenue, and journalists must exercise caution when posing questions during government press conferences, as they may be branded as troublesome (Moholi, 2015).

There are a few research projects conducted in Lesotho on this subject; therefore, this study will make a significant contribution to the limited existing body of research. Lejakane (1997) investigated the role of news agencies in Lesotho in the development of communication within the country. In this study, Lejakane recognised that in 1997, many listeners did not participate in talk shows due to a lack of telecommunication facilities. However, today, talk shows are the most listened-to programmes in the country (Seepheephe, 2025). Furthermore, private radio stations in Lesotho have introduced radio talk shows where individuals can call in and express their views on public matters. These talk shows attract audiences not only in urban areas but also in rural regions (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012). During these programmes, politicians and government ministry officials are invited to discuss issues of public importance, providing citizens with valuable opportunities to voice their opinions to the guests.

To reaffirm its intended purpose, the government established the Lesotho Telecommunication Authority (LTA) in 2001 to oversee the broadcasting sector within the country, pursuant to the LTA Act of 2001. However, the LTA, subsequently

renamed the Lesotho Communication Authority (LCA) by the Act of 2000, lacks the desired independence as it is subordinate to the Ministry of Communication, Science and Technology. This situation confers upon the Minister of Communication the authority to close media outlets whenever they are perceived as criticising the government (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015).

Since that time, it appears that the government of Lesotho has been hesitant to fulfil its commitments. This is evidenced by the continued government control over the national radio, which persists to this day. The government of Lesotho continues to utilise Radio Lesotho as a tool for disseminating propaganda and promoting its viewpoints, as well as engaging in political rivalry with the opposition (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015). Furthermore, the Lesotho Communications Authority has failed to protect Radio Lesotho from political influence exerted by the government.

In Lesotho, privately owned radio stations have emerged as platforms for public debate during election preparations and serve to encourage citizens to assess the performance of both central and local governments. This promotes active public engagement in discussions aimed at shaping such governments prior to casting their votes. Following the liberalisation of the airwaves by the government of Lesotho in 1994 the country witnessed the establishment of numerous privately-owned and community radio stations. These private radio stations contribute to enhancing communication, facilitating the exchange of ideas among citizens, and disseminating public information across the nation. Mathe (2025) examined the extent to which the liberalisation of broadcasting fosters freedom of expression and participatory democracy within the country.

According to Mathe (2025), the surplus of private radio stations is confined to a limited area of the country, particularly urban regions. Consequently, this restriction hampers the participation of numerous individuals in radio talk shows and constrains the dissemination of public information via these private radio stations. The national broadcasting service encompasses most of the country, thereby monopolising the airwaves. Mathe (2025) asserts that if the current circumstances endure, the proposed liberalisation of the airwaves will not substantially influence the public sphere, as the information and knowledge disseminated by private radio stations will chiefly reach urban populations. Consequently, many citizens will continue to rely solely on Radio

Lesotho. Nevertheless, a relevant question emerges: does Radio Lesotho promote participatory democracy or the public sphere? This query warrants further examination and investigation. Mathe (2025) concludes that conducting a comprehensive study on the quality of Radio Lesotho's programming, in comparison with private radio stations, would benefit media research in Lesotho. Such research could encourage the state-owned radio to enhance its offerings and innovate new broadcasting techniques.

Moholi (2015) examined the influence of government advertising on print media in Lesotho. Globally, government advertising constitutes a primary source of income for many media organisations (Gaynor & O'Brien, 2017). According to the African Media Barometer (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012), the government leverages advertising to exert its influence over the media in Lesotho. Moholi (2015) observed that most media outlets in Lesotho depend on government advertising for their revenue. Governmental influence is evident even among journalists at the editorial level, who may block or alter stories that portray the government negatively. The African Media Barometer (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015) reports that in 2012, the government increased taxes on the media by approximately 300% to suppress competition from emerging private radio stations. Additionally, the government employs tax policies as a means of indirectly closing private radio stations critical of the government.

The state media, which functions akin to a dormant watchdog, is experiencing a decline in audience engagement, whereas private radio stations are gaining popularity. Nevertheless, it is prudent to acknowledge that privately owned radio stations may occasionally reflect the interests or serve the agendas of their sponsors and advertisers (Golding & Murdock, 2018). This assertion is substantiated by African Media Barometer (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015), which states that politicians, who predominantly control private radio stations in Lesotho, utilise them as their mouthpieces. An additional concern regarding the ownership of private radio stations in Lesotho is that owners often serve concurrently as editors, thereby enabling them to influence editorial content and even interfere with it.

Falatsa (2016) concentrated on the contribution of radio stations to fostering free debate in Lesotho. However, her focus was primarily on the absence of a media policy within the country. Falatsa concluded that radio talk shows attracted a broad audience regardless of educational background, as participants used their native language. This

environment provided a platform where individuals could freely express their opinions and concerns (Falatsa, 2016). Falatsa (2016) examined the role of private radio stations in promoting open public discussion in Lesotho. The study specifically analysed two private radio stations: PC FM and Harvest FM. It investigated two current affairs programmes, Thahameso (Early Breakfast) on PC FM and Tsa mabatooa (Constituencies' news) on Harvest FM. To facilitate free expression of public opinion, Falatsa (2016) found that the presenters allocated equal airtime to all callers contributing via telephone. The presenters also ensured that listeners had adequate time to voice their views, sometimes by shortening the recordings played to accommodate callers. Furthermore, when the programme host identified new information during the broadcast that required clarification from an absent individual, they extended an invitation to that individual to provide their perspective.

According to Falatsa (2016), media freedom in Lesotho has been hindered by government influence and ownership. The Lesotho government has deliberately postponed the adoption and implementation of a media policy that would facilitate the development of the media sector within the country. The introduction of a comprehensive media policy is expected to significantly advance the media industry by enhancing media content, ethics, and professionalism.

Falatsa (2016) examined the content of PC FM and Harvest FM programmes to assess their extent in promoting open public debate. Furthermore, Mathe (2025) investigated how private radio stations in the country facilitate participatory democracy. The radio stations selected for this study included Moafrika FM, Catholic Radio PC FM, and Harvest FM. The content of Radio Lesotho and its sister station, Ultimate FM, has not yet been analysed to determine their role in fostering the public sphere or participatory democracy.

This study endeavours to bridge this gap through a comparative analysis of public and private radio stations in Lesotho. By integrating the Public Sphere Theory, Critical Political Economy of the Media, and Participatory Democracy, the research extends beyond debates surrounding media freedom and ownership to investigate how radio content itself fosters democratic discourse. The objective is to generate a more refined understanding of whether radio broadcasting in Lesotho functions as a legitimate

platform for public participation, accountability, and democratic deliberation, or if structural constraints persistently undermine its democratic potential.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The media landscape in Lesotho functions within a sophisticated interplay of constitutional democracy, traditional monarchical principles, and an overarching Christian moral framework. To examine how radio stations in Lesotho promote or impede national discourse, this study utilises a multidimensional theoretical framework. The research utilises the PST, the CPEM, and participatory democracy. These theories assisted the researcher in analysing and understanding the media situation in Lesotho and the extent to which the media promotes the public sphere.

The integration of these theories facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the Basotho media landscape. While Habermas's concept of the public sphere advocates for an egalitarian platform, the actual political economy of Lesotho demonstrates that transmitter fees, government tenders, and religious community standards establish a hierarchy of access. This chapter provides the analytical framework to assess whether radio in Lesotho functions as a redeemer of the nation or as an instrument of the elite.

2.5.1 The public sphere theory

The concept of the 'public sphere', initially introduced by Jürgen Habermas in 1962, delineates communication as a fundamental component of effective governance (Bello & Wilkinson, 2016). Habermas (2022) characterised the public sphere as an independent forum situated between the government and the citizenry, a space where people of goodwill congregate to exchange ideas and foster political discourse. It is utilised as a platform to critique the state and assess its performance, thereby holding the government accountable to its citizens. Through the public sphere, individuals and organisational groups gain the authority to influence and oversee political governance to address their demands and expectations.

In the contemporary Basotho context, the media, particularly radio, have emerged as the primary channel of communication serving as a substitute for the traditional physical town square (Livingstone & Lunt, 2011). This study adopts Habermas's criteria for an ideal public sphere, specifically the requirements of equal access, the suspension of hierarchy, and freedom from state or market control, to assess whether

Lesotho's radio stations genuinely empower citizens or have instead become corrupt instruments for political oppression (Chirambo, 2011).

By examining radio talk shows and audience discussion programs through this PST lens, the research investigates the extent to which the Basotho public can criticise government policy and whether these platforms offer a genuine democratic forum. McKenna (2016) asserts that the public sphere was originally a physical venue where members of the public assembled to debate societal issues. According to Habermas (2022), this indicates that individuals had the opportunity to convene in a public setting to deliberate on national matters. This implies that individuals engage in discussions related to state concerns and offer their viewpoints to support collective decision-making.

Today, the public sphere is defined as any assembly of individuals and groups convened to deliberate on issues of public significance. When the public sphere is actively engaged, citizens create a collective entity that expresses and advocates their viewpoints, thereby representing the nation's diverse political interests. For this process to function effectively, it is imperative to guarantee freedoms of assembly and association (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2012).

According to Habermas, Lennox and Lennox (1974:52-55), the public sphere has undergone three historical phases, as follows:

- During the 17th and 18th centuries, the concept of the public sphere was utilised to oppose autocratic regimes in Europe. This terminology was employed to galvanise public resistance against governmental abuses of power.
- In the 20th century, the notion of the public sphere played a crucial role in raising awareness regarding manipulation within the economic market by influential business conglomerates.
- In the subsequent phase, the public sphere was associated with public service broadcasting, which was regarded as a conduit for the public sphere.

The public sphere serves as an intermediary between citizens and the government; for this to occur, the public self-organises to articulate collective opinions that oppose oppressive policies of monarchies and dictatorships, thereby facilitating democratic oversight of state functions (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz, 2012).

Livingstone and Lunt (2013) concur that contemporary mass media function similarly to a public sphere, facilitating the dissemination of opinions and offering a platform for democratic discourse. Due to developments in media and advancements in communication, the public sphere has evolved from a physical space into channels of communication. This evolution is manifested in talk shows and audience discussion programmes that present diverse appeals to the public and involve experts participating in such programmes. Through mass media, individuals and groups can develop a cohesive public opinion, express their needs and interests, and, in turn, influence political practices (Livingstone & Lunt, 2018; Khan, Gilani, and Nawaz, 2012). Regrettably, as noted by Chirambo (2011), there are instances in which the media become corrupted, enabling politicians to manipulate them in ways that oppress society rather than serve as instruments of national redemption.

Susen (2011: 38-42) elucidates the original concept of Habermas's public sphere as follows:

- It is a platform that provides communication access to all citizens.
- In the public sphere, all participants are treated equally regardless of class, education, gender, or any form of hierarchy.
- The public sphere is unrestricted in its ability to provide freedom of expression.
- The importance of the public sphere in comparison to the private sphere resides in its emphasis on the collective welfare of the nation rather than individual interests. It is neither governed by the state nor by the market; however, it is separate from civil society. Furthermore, citizens independently generate collective decisions.
- The public sphere promotes critique of government policies, fosters dialogue, and encourages society to participate in information dissemination that contributes to informed decision-making for citizens.

There are challenges that hinder the facilitation of the public sphere in contemporary society. Firstly, the large population and the demanding schedules of individuals limit society's ability to dedicate sufficient time and focus to gathering in physical public spaces. Secondly, in certain countries, individuals require permission to assemble in large groups. Consequently, the media function as a public sphere and serve as intermediaries in public communication (McKenna, 2016).

The PST guided the study to assess whether public and selected private radio stations in Lesotho provide effective communication access to citizens and whether all participants in radio talk shows are treated equitably and fairly. Drawing on the concept of the public sphere, the study explored and described the extent to which the public is free to criticise the government's decisions and policies through the programming of all radio stations.

2.5.2 Critical political economy of the media

While the PST provided a normative ideal for the functioning of communication, the CPEM of the media supplied the analytical tools necessary to examine its actual operation. According to Levenda, Mahmoudi and Sussman (2015), CPEM aims to understand the relationships between communication, power, production, and ideology. It extends its analysis beyond content to scrutinise the ownership and control structures that determine what is broadcast and what is suppressed (Mosco, 2015).

The media sector has evolved from modest, personalised activities into a commercial industry producing symbolic commodities for financial gain (Murdock & Golding, 2016). In Lesotho, this transformation is evident in the shift from a state monopoly over broadcasting to a heterogeneous landscape of private and church-controlled stations. Nevertheless, as Murdock and Golding (2016) contend, media are not impartial; rather, they serve as platforms through which politicians and proprietors justify their authority.

The CPEM also examines the role that the media play in politics, which intricately connects political structures to collaborate closely with it. Murdock and Golding (2016) assert that the media serve as a primary source of various types of information; they facilitate social and political processes and provide platforms for politicians, individuals, groups, and social organisations to rationalise power. Through mass communication channels, politicians can persuade the electorate to support certain parties, while the electorate, in turn, can lobby politicians to consider and incorporate their views in legislative processes.

This analysis emphasises that media ownership is categorised mainly into two segments: private and public. Public media is regulated by government authorities and frequently faces criticism for being an ineffective watchdog, characterised by a lack of accountability and responsibility in disseminating information to the public, as well as

a deficiency in responsiveness to societal needs. Conversely, private media is praised for its responsiveness to societal demands and its contribution to fostering the public sphere. Nonetheless, it is also criticised for succumbing to sponsorship influence and displaying opportunistic behaviour aimed at attracting larger audiences to appeal to advertisers. For instance, in Lesotho, it is documented that major corporations have engaged in bribery of media outlets to suppress controversial stories (Mpako & Ndoma, 2024).

The issue of ownership also prompts consideration of the fact that media outlets may not consistently favour public opinions or adequately promote the public sphere. This is attributable to governments and advertisers imposing their perspectives on radio, television news, and newspaper editorials. It can be contended that, rather than fostering public participation, media ownership predominantly benefits middle- to upper-class proprietors who possess the capacity to own media outlets and articulate or advocate their own political views. Capitalists safeguard the concentration of their economic power to ensure that the flow of information is advantageous to them (Chirambo, 2011). In Lesotho, most media organisations operate as sole proprietorships rather than corporations; this structure empowers a few with decision-making on editorial content. For instance, the proprietor of Mo-Afrika FM declared it a pro-government station. Consequently, when a presenter fails to conform to the station's directives or criticises the government, they can be dismissed. Individuals opposed to the government have been prevented from calling or had their calls disconnected during radio talk shows (AMB, 2010).

Levenda, Mahmoudi and Sussman (2015) and McQuail (2010) posit that although politicians may not possess all communication media, they leverage their authority to control and oversee these channels for their own benefit. Politicians establish regulations and legal frameworks concerning private investments, ownership rights, taxation, and property ownership. For instance, AMB (2010) reports that the Lesotho government manages the transmitter network to regulate private radio stations. The government retains the authority to suspend radio stations for non-payment of transmitter rental fees, as demonstrated by the cases of Harvest FM and Mo-Africa FM (AMB, 2010). Regrettably, numerous private radio stations are overdue on transmitter payments, a situation that is often exploited by the government to penalise certain stations. Chirambo (2011) asserts that governments have the capacity to sell

state media assets to capitalist supporters who have provided financial backing, thereby ensuring continued media support for the regime.

Various proprietors, including the government, churches, and business entities, own the media landscape in Lesotho. Among these business owners, some are sponsored by international organisations. For instance, Harvest FM receives assistance from HCJB World Radio based in the United States. According to the theory of CPEM, media ownership and advertising interests may utilise media platforms to advance their respective agendas. The CPEM theory is used in this study to examine and describe the influence exerted within newsrooms and programmes of the selected radio stations.

2.5.3 Participatory democracy

Participatory democracy is the theory that evaluates the quality of citizen engagement within institutional structures. According to Vitale (2011), participatory democracy emerged as a challenge to traditional systems, aiming to allow broad participation of society in the political arena. For Lesotho, this theory is vital because it determines whether radio talk shows are merely venting sessions or genuine tools for legitimising and accepting public decisions. Efremov and Insua (2010) further confirm that participatory democracy offers a way for citizens to become more involved and contribute actively. This increased engagement helps make public decisions more legitimate and widely accepted. It also promotes transparency and efficiency in the use of public funds, ultimately enhancing citizens' overall satisfaction.

The aim of participatory democracy is to transition a nation from a 'thin democracy', characterised by citizens participating solely through voting every five years, to a 'strong democracy', where individuals actively engage in everyday political discussions (Vitale, 2011). In Lesotho, radio functions as the primary facilitator of this transformation. As Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013) indicate, for this process to be effective, citizens must be willing to share distinctive perspectives.

However, Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013) assert that for participatory democracy to yield the desired outcomes, citizens must be willing to demonstrate and share their unique perspectives on public issues and innovatively disseminate these viewpoints within society. Nair (2016) and Tusiime (2016) agree that for participatory democracy to operate effectively, there must be freedom of expression, access to information,

and open communication. If freedom of expression is restricted, either directly or indirectly, society may become reluctant to engage in the public sphere.

Carman (2010) highlights that participatory democracy can serve as a civic engagement policy aimed at bridging the gap that appears to exist between society and parliamentary structures. This approach aims to facilitate open, transparent, accountable, and accessible policymaking processes. Furthermore, it should enable the submission of petitions to Parliament, ensure the availability of information concerning parliamentary operations, provide access to chamber and committee debates, and promote public engagement with Members of Parliament in their daily activities as government representatives.

Vitale (2011:33) concurs with these ideas, and further points out that participatory democracy leads to:

- The enhancement and revitalisation of democracy as the political system extends beyond the traditional representative framework.
- The reduction and trimming of the power vested in representatives leads to a decrease in social and economic inequalities.
- To foster a more educational and enlightening participation of society in democratic and political processes, thereby enabling more informed decision-making during and after elections.
- The transformation of the model of 'thin democracy', where representatives are the principal architects of every political action – regardless of whether they are regarded as experts or professional politicians – into a 'strong democracy', which cultivates a populace actively engaged in political debate rather than merely serving as voters.

Participatory democracy enhances direct democratic processes to enable their effective operation alongside representative systems. The objective of participatory democracy is to establish moderate spheres of dialogue and political deliberation that mitigate concerns related to inadequate representation, particularly issues of accountability, transparency, and publicity (Vitale, 2011). Vitale (2011) underscores the importance of fostering dialogue and communication to cultivate a broad imagination which can be actualised through the exchange of arguments and experiences. Through effective communication, all members of society can discuss

and determine their best interests and identify individuals they wish to delegate as representatives in various institutions. Consequently, political decisions are made collectively, originating from consultative and constructive prior discussions.

Pateman in Vitale (2011) asserts that participatory democracy involves the inclusion of all individuals in matters of the public. For this inclusion to be effective, all social structures must operate democratically. The government should ensure that democracy is actively practised and exercised; social and economic inequalities should be reduced, regardless of gender, economic class, or racial discrimination.

In participatory democracy, the essential function of the media is to facilitate democratic aspirations within society and to establish a public sphere among society, the government, and political representatives (Efremov & Insua, 2010). The theory of participatory democracy is foundational to this study, as it evaluates the enthusiasm and willingness of Lesotho's society to engage in democratic debates and decision-making processes. Additionally, this theory assisted in the assessment of the extent to which radio stations in Lesotho promote dialogue among society, government, political representatives, and various organisations.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter established the theoretical framework necessary to examine the role of radio broadcasting within the democratic fabric of Lesotho. By integrating the PST, CPEM, and participatory democracy, the study offers a comprehensive perspective that considers the ideal, material, and participatory dimensions of media discourse.

The public sphere serves as the normative benchmark, prompting an assessment of whether Lesotho's radio stations operate as an "autonomous forum" (Habermas, 2022), where participants may engage as equals, free from the constraints imposed by social or religious hierarchies. Nevertheless, as revealed through CPEM analysis, this ideal is frequently undermined by the realities of ownership and authority. In Lesotho, the state's control of transmitter networks and the sole proprietorship model of stations such as Mo-Afrika FM exemplify how economic influence is utilised to suppress dissent and prioritise the "rationalisation of power" (Golding & Murdock, 2018) over the public interest.

Furthermore, the framework of participatory democracy serves as the ultimate test of media efficacy. It shifts the focus from the mere existence of a broadcast to the quality of the engagement it fosters. In a strong democracy, the media should empower the Basotho people to move beyond the voting booth and into a continuous dialogue with the state (Vitale, 2011). In summary, this theoretical framework recognises that the media in Lesotho do not operate in a vacuum. It is a site of constant tension where the secular aspiration for democratic participation collides with the structural constraints of political economy. These theories guide the findings and analysis chapter, which explores whether radio content in Lesotho promotes democratic practices.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter delineates the research methodology to be employed in this study. It encompasses the research approach and the data collection and analysis techniques that were utilised to investigate, describe, and elucidate the role of radio stations in Lesotho in fostering the public sphere. The study implemented a comparative analysis of selected public and private radio stations to achieve this objective. CDA was employed as a method for data analysis to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the meanings derived from the content. This approach aimed to deconstruct the content produced by the radio station. The subsequent sections provide an in-depth examination of how Fairclough's CDA can be applied to the dataset collected for this study.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Research paradigms play a crucial role in shaping the theoretical foundation of a study, serving as a framework of underlying assumptions and understandings that inform both the hypotheses and methodological approaches used in a research investigation (Rahi, 2017). As Rahi (2017) elaborates, a research paradigm consists of several interconnected components, notably ontology, epistemology, and research methodology. Ontology pertains to the nature of reality and what exists, while epistemology focuses on the nature and scope of knowledge, influencing how researchers perceive and interpret data. Furthermore, the methodology encompasses the strategies and techniques to gather and analyse information.

Al-Saadi (2014) emphasises that these elements not only structure the research process but also reveal various philosophical perspectives that contribute to scholarly discussions about the nature of truth and knowledge. This philosophical underpinning is vital as it guides researchers in selecting appropriate research designs and methods tailored to their specific inquiries. Therefore, it is critical for researchers to adopt diverse strategies and approaches that are well-suited to the unique context and objectives of their studies, ultimately enhancing the validity and relevance of their findings.

This study utilised a comprehensive array of research frameworks to effectively compare the operations, programming, and audience engagement strategies of privately owned radio stations with those of public radio stations in Lesotho. By employing qualitative methodologies, the research delved into several critical factors that influence listener engagement and content consumption. Specifically, the researcher explored the diversity of content presented to listeners, assessing how a varied array of topics can impact audience interest and retention. Additionally, the study examined the dynamics of presenters' interactions with both the audience and their guests, focusing on how these interactions shape the overall listening experience. Furthermore, the study analysed the extent of the guests' expertise and their ability to effectively advocate for the public sphere, considering how their knowledge and presentation style contribute to informed discourse among listeners.

3.3 EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology which is the study of knowledge explores the nature and types of knowledge as well as the methodologies used to perceive and understand the world (Scotland, 2012; Crotty, 1998). This indicates that epistemology is concerned with the processes involved in creating, acquiring, and sharing knowledge. Guba and Lincoln (2016) argue that epistemology relates to the nature of the interaction between the knower and the entities that can be known. In the field of epistemology, positivism and interpretivism emerge as two distinct paradigms. Positivism employs a quantitative research approach, whereas interpretivism advocates for a qualitative methodology. This study was based on interpretivism, as it works better with qualitative studies, and it is also a perspective that emphasises the active role individuals play in shaping their societal context. Using qualitative methods, the researcher aimed to investigate the diverse and complex experiences contributing to these social dynamics.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), research techniques represent a systematic approach to collecting, examining, and interpreting information, aimed at enhancing existing knowledge regarding a specific issue of interest to the researcher. Cibangu (2010) concurs and elaborates that research methodology encompasses a methodical approach to addressing research inquiries through the utilisation of information, statistical analysis, or sampling techniques.

To further elucidate research methodology, Rajkumar (2015) asserts that it comprises a systematic framework of principles, values, philosophies, and established protocols that direct an organised analysis aimed at enhancing and refining individuals' understanding of a specific phenomenon.

There are two primary research paradigms: the positivistic paradigm and the interpretivist paradigm (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Positivism, as a form of epistemology, asserts that reality exists independently of human perception; immutable laws govern reality and are not influenced by individual interpretations. The ontological stance of positivists is realist in nature. Positivists strive to understand the social world utilising methodologies similar to those applied in the natural sciences (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Al-Saadi (2014) contends that positivism places a significant emphasis on objectivity and empirical evidence in the pursuit of truth, operating on the premise that the researcher's influence does not shape the world. Moreover, as articulated by Crotty (1998), positivist epistemology posits that meaning is inherently embedded within objects, awaiting discovery independent of human interpretation.

In the context of interpretivist epistemology, Guba and Lincoln (2016) assert that reality is shaped by personal emotions and varies significantly among individuals. Similarly, Crotty (1998) emphasises that without individuals' awareness and responsiveness to their environment, existence would lack meaning. Crotty further argues that a meaningful understanding of reality and knowledge emerges through human interactions with the world, thereby converting this meaningful reality into a social context.

The current study was conducted within the framework of an interpretivist epistemology. The researcher investigated and delineated the programming initiatives of both private and public radio stations with the goal of constructing a meaningful understanding of their impact and conveying this reality within the broader social context. The primary aim of this investigation was to evaluate the extent to which the selected radio stations contribute to the enhancement of the public sphere.

This study's methodological framework utilised a qualitative approach. According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research primarily focuses on the description, interpretation, and understanding of human behaviour. This approach encompasses

the analysis of advertisements, broadcast media, including television and radio programs and print media texts.

3.5 QUALITATIVE METHOD

Timans, Wouters, and Heilbron (2019) assert that qualitative research does not depend on numerical data or quantifiable measures. Instead, it emphasises the exploration of contexts and phenomena that cannot be adequately interpreted through statistical analysis. According to Bryman (2012), the qualitative research paradigm primarily aims to describe, interpret, and comprehend human behaviour. This paradigm facilitates the interpretation of various forms of communication, including advertisements, broadcast media such as television and radio programs, and texts from newspapers and magazines.

Qualitative research is designed to generate insights that may enhance understanding of specific research topics. This form of inquiry encompasses methods that reach conclusions unattainable through quantitative analysis or other measurement techniques. Hopkins (2014) asserts that qualitative research methodology focuses on intricacies and processes within educational contexts, thereby offering a functional and valuable approach to educational research. It emphasises the importance of understanding how research subjects perceive the information being studied and was conceived to effectively address the questions posed by a particular investigation.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

In this study, the researcher gathered primary data from talk show recordings, namely *Seboping* (furnace) from Radio Lesotho and *Thahameso* (Early breakfast) from PC FM. The researcher utilised the Zoom H4n Pro Handy Recorder to document various episodes of the selected talk shows. After being recorded, the data was transcribed for analysis. The duration of the recording process was one month to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected.

Cela-Ranilla, Esteve-Mon and Sanchez-Caballe (2025) assert that the degree of interaction among individuals on a global scale has reached unprecedented levels, primarily attributable to the proliferation and diverse utilisation of various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Considering this landscape, the investigator conducted a comprehensive analysis of how the selected radio stations

leverage social media to foster engagement and dialogue within the public sphere, thereby enhancing their outreach and impact. Additionally, the radio stations' adoption of livestreaming for their programs underscores their strategic commitment to digital media, positioning it as an essential tool for communication and information dissemination in the contemporary era. This approach not only reflects an adaptation to changing media consumption habits but also emphasises the importance of accessibility and immediacy in engaging with their audience.

3.7 TARGET POPULATION

The target population for this study comprised the programming offered by two prominent radio stations: the private station PC FM and the public broadcaster Radio Lesotho. Specifically, the analysis focused on the programme *Thahameso*, which is broadcast on PC FM from Monday to Friday between 6:00 AM and 9:00 AM. This programme is recognised for its engaging discussions covering current affairs, local news, and relevant community issues, thereby serving as a vital source of information for listeners at the beginning of their day.

Additionally, the study focused on the talk show *Sebuping* on Radio Lesotho, which airs Monday through Friday from 5:30 to 7:30 AM. This programme is characterised by in-depth conversations with various guests, including experts, policymakers, and community leaders, addressing social and political subjects that resonate with the audience.

Both programmes significantly contribute to shaping public discourse and offer listeners a platform to engage with pertinent issues within their communities. The study analysed, described and interpreted the way the radio stations in Lesotho promoted the public sphere during the 2022 general elections. The data was collected during the month of May 2022. At this time, the country was preparing for the national elections, which were held on the 7th October 2022. As this is a prime time, this signified the importance of the information discussed in this programme. Furthermore, the audience has taken the information seriously.

3.8 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling is a strategic sampling method that allows researchers to examine specifically chosen participants or samples in-depth. In

addition, Patton (2015) emphasises that purposive sampling serves as an essential framework for selecting the target population and groups that will provide the most relevant and insightful data needed to answer the research questions adequately. By intentionally choosing participants who are likely to contribute valuable information, investigators can ensure that their findings are not only meaningful but also applicable to the contexts they are studying. Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters and Walker (2020) highlight that purposive sampling is guided by certain conceptual considerations. It deliberately avoids random selection, aiming instead to include specific types of cases in the final research sample. Consequently, in purposive sampling, researchers select locations, individuals, and situations that yield information aligned with their chosen conceptual framework.

3.9 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS STUDY

Azarian (2011) identifies comparative analysis as a methodological approach that involves the explicit contrast of two or more cases to examine both similarities and differences. A comparative study functions as a method that assesses phenomena and synthesises them to identify points of differentiation and convergence. According to Pickvance (2015), the primary objective of comparative analysis is to elucidate and enhance comprehension of the causal processes underlying the emergence of an event, characteristic, or relationship. This is typically achieved by integrating variations in the explanatory variable or variables involved.

This study employed comparative analysis to explore the distinctive contributions of privately owned radio versus public radio in fostering democratic growth in Lesotho. The research examined a range of radio programmes that tackle pressing social issues and provide thorough economic reports, as well as news broadcasts focused on hard news, accompanied by critical analysis. It investigated two radio shows that address pivotal political issues, highlighting their role in educating citizens about democratic principles and empowering them to make informed decisions during elections.

The comparative analysis extended to assessing how both public and privately owned radio stations serve their audiences by delivering essential public information. The study evaluated the effectiveness of these stations in facilitating dialogue, raising awareness among listeners, and holding governmental entities accountable to the

populace. By delving into these aspects, the research aimed to illustrate the significant impact of radio media on public discourse and democratic participation in Lesotho.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

This study employed CDA as a data analysis method and a theoretical framework to analyse language, discourse, and communication and the role of language in structuring power relations in society (Van Dijk, 1998, 2014). Cameron (2005) states that the main objective of critical discourse analysis is to discover hidden agendas in discourse to expose power.

According to Van Dijk (2014), the predominant issues addressed in CDA encompass authority, supremacy, global dominance, philosophy, sexual identity, and ethnicity. The concept of power is encapsulated by the influence that social organisations exert over the public, shaping individuals' perceptions and narratives. This dynamic contributes to the perpetuation of domination and supremacy within societal structures.

Fairclough (2012; 2013) characterises CDA as an analytical approach that examines often obscured relationships of causality and determination. The author identifies several key advantages associated with the application of CDA, which serve as fundamental justifications for employing the CDA framework in this study. The primary advantage is that CDA facilitates an exploration of how power is articulated through language, rendering it an appropriate framework for analysing the democratic discourse of government and private radio stations. Furthermore, Fairclough (2013) underscores that the model offers a framework for evaluating texts through three interrelated dimensions: linguistic features, discursive practices—encompassing both production and consumption—and social practices, which examine power relations and ideology.

CDA is fundamentally qualitative, emphasising comprehensive textual analysis rather than relying on quantitative metrics. This characteristic effectively aligns with the research design and objectives outlined in this study. The research aimed to elucidate the distinctions between private and public radio stations, focusing not on quantitative metrics but rather on the quality of discourse utilised within their programming.

3.11 UNITS OF ANALYSIS

Kurma (2014) defines the unit of analysis as the specific individual or entity that a researcher selects for data collection in a study. In this research, the units of analysis comprised the four distinct broadcast episodes of *Thahameso* aired on PC FM and the four *Seboping* episodes featured on Radio Lesotho during the month of May in 2022. Each episode served as a critical focal point for examining the content, context, and impact of these programs within the broader landscape of radio broadcasting and cultural communication.

Fairclough (2013) describes CDA as a form of discourse analysis that explores often opaque relationships of causality and determination between texts and events, discursive practices, and social and cultural structures. CDS generally explores how language is used beyond just individual sentences. (Wodak, 2015).

3.11.1 Text analysis

Fairclough (2012; 2013) examines the concept of text as encompassing both spoken and visual elements, or a combination thereof. The term 'text' extends beyond linguistic constructs such as clauses and sentences to include images, sounds, colours, songs, and other media. Text analysis addresses both the structural forms and the intended meanings. Rashid (2020) posits that analysing a text's meaning is a complex undertaking due to its ambiguous nature and susceptibility to various interpretations. Fairclough (2013) explains that text analysis constitutes a fundamental component of discourse analysis, which encompasses not only the examination of textual content but also the assessment of productive and interpretative processes. The formal attributes of a text can be understood through the lens of discourse analysis as indicative of the productive process while simultaneously serving as prompts within the interpretative process. This dual perspective is a significant characteristic of both productive and interpretative methods.

In the vibrant landscape of democratic discourse, the effectiveness of arguments is amplified through the strategic use of rhetorical devices. These powerful tools enhance communication, adding emotional depth and persuasive strength. Speakers and writers craft compelling narratives that resonate with their audiences by combining ethos, pathos, and logos (Fairclough, 2012, 2013).

Metaphors create vivid imagery, while analogies clarify complex ideas, making them relatable. Rhetorical questions provoke thought and encourage active engagement. Each device transforms arguments into compelling calls to action, illuminating the principles of democracy and inspiring meaningful participation. This study examined various aspects related to presenters, guests, and listeners who participated in radio shows, news programs, and discussions on social issues to evaluate how these interactions contributed to the public sphere through the use of rhetorical features.

3.11.2 Discursive practice

The second approach implemented in this analysis is referred to as discursive practice. According to Fairclough (2013), discursive practice encompasses the processes involved in creating and analysing a text. This aspect also emphasises the relationship between the authors of the texts and the contexts in which they were made, as well as the perceptions of the readers regarding the text. Furthermore, Rashid (2020) asserts that discursive practice can recognise the social identities of individuals or groups, emphasising that the discourse context significantly influences the interpretation of the text.

Accordingly, the researcher analysed how citizens are often depicted as empowered agents capable of influencing societal issues, which fosters a sense of agency and encourages active engagement. Within this analytical framework, the researcher assessed how current affairs were being framed within the context of Lesotho's existing situation. This examination aimed to empower the electorate to make informed decisions when selecting leaders capable of addressing the nation's challenges during the election.

3.11.3 Social practice

The third approach utilised in this analysis was the socio-cultural approach. Fairclough (2013) defines sociocultural practice as the conditions that govern sociocultural practices, which are integral to the process of socialisation. This encompasses social customs and the social and historical factors that influence both the creation and reception of discourse. Moreover, this dimension demonstrates the interplay between discourse, ideology, and power. Philosophies function as indicators of reality, intricately linked to the social sphere, interpersonal relationships, and social identities.

Consequently, they shape the construction and perception of reality while also establishing frameworks of dominance and power.

Fairclough (2013) posits that the ideas, values, and norms we accept are not just given to us; they are created through a combination of cultural, political, and social influences. By examining the institutions and practices that support these powerful processes, the text encourages us to think critically about the fundamental beliefs that shape democratic actions and what this means for how citizens engage and participate.

3.12 REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a national of Lesotho and a daily, avid listener of both *Seboping* on Radio Lesotho and *Thahameso* on PC FM, I approached this study as an insider, and reflexivity requires that I account for how this position shaped my interpretation. This familiarity carried clear analytical value, giving me direct competence in the Sesotho idiom used on air, the presenting styles of each station, and the heightened political climate surrounding the 2022 general elections. I was equally mindful that insider familiarity can naturalise meanings that ought to be interrogated, so I treated it as an interpretive resource rather than a settled conclusion, disciplining my reading through the systematic application of Fairclough's three-dimensional model and returning consistently to the recorded and transcribed data as the fixed evidentiary base.

On ethical matters, this study is a content analysis of broadcast media that did not involve human participants. The data comprised talk shows freely transmitted to the public by presenters and guests who spoke within a public forum with a reasonable expectation of wide dissemination. The recruitment of participants and securing informed consent were therefore not applicable. Notwithstanding this, I faithfully represented all quotations and interpretations in their broadcast context, maintaining accuracy, integrity, and impartiality throughout.

3.13 CONCLUSION

The analytical framework is meticulously crafted to facilitate a thorough comparison of the similarities and differences among various types of broadcasting stations. The Fairclough CDA was used to undertake an in-depth examination of the complex research methodology and design that formed the foundation for the study. This

chapter outlined the systematic approach adopted, integrating qualitative techniques to gather and analyse data with precision and depth. By clearly articulating the research framework, the researcher has established a robust basis for a thorough investigation of the topic at hand, ensuring that the findings are not only reliable but also rich in insight. This methodology functioned as a guiding compass for the inquiry, bolstering the credibility of the results the study aspires to achieve and paving the way for significant contributions to the field.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter provides an analysis of the data collected from the chosen public and private radio stations. These are recorded episodes of *Seboping* from Radio Lesotho and *Thahameso* on People's Choice FM. Fairclough's CDA was used as a method for data analysis to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the meanings derived from the content. This approach aimed to deconstruct the content produced by the radio stations.

The programming and production of the talk shows on these two radio stations seem to be informed by very similar guidelines. A crucial similarity, in the context of this study's focus, is that these stations emphasise the importance of public participation in debates about issues that affect society and the role that talk shows can play in this. The interpretation and execution of the principles of public involvement was vital in this study to determine how both radio stations utilised the platform as a public sphere (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox, 1974). When the public sphere is practised, the citizens become a body that expresses and voices their opinions constituting all political interests of the nation.

4.2 RADIO LESOTHO PROGRAMMES – *SEBOPING*

4.2.1 The dissolution of the national reform's authority

The programme presenter explained that since the government dissolved the National Reforms Authority (NRA), the radio station chose to engage various political parties to hear their views. This move was because most of the reforms planned by the NRA directly affected these parties. The goal was to find out if the parties were generally satisfied with the government's decision. Guests included spokespersons from the ruling parties: Montoeli Masoetsa of ABC, Serialong Qoo of DC, and Molefi Ntsonyana, a minor party leader involved in the NRA.

4.2.1.1 *Textual analysis (micro-level)*

Fairclough (1992) characterises textual description as the evaluation of spoken, visual, or both forms of text, recognising that 'text' extends beyond mere language constructs such as phrases and articles. The presenter commenced the programme by indicating

that the government had disbanded the NRA and that Radio Lesotho aimed “to gather the perspectives of political parties impacted by the government decision”. The use of the verb “gather” instead of “interrogate” or “question” fosters a neutral and respectful tone, positioning the presenter as a facilitator rather than an authority examiner. Furthermore, the repeated use of “Honourable Minister” is not merely courteous; it functions as a discursive positioning, placing the speaker in a subordinate role relative to the state.

According to Van Dijk (1998; 2014), lexical choice pertains to vocabulary or words that vary according to the style or form of the text, as well as the personal judgement, social, or cultural background of the writers. This choice is used to create an impression on the readers. Throughout the discussion, the presenter employed formal and technical language, referring to the reforms as “tenth amendment bills”. This lexical choice reflects governmental discourse, reinforcing bureaucratic authority and restricting accessibility for ordinary listeners. Similarly, the frequent reference to government officials as “Honourable Minister” exemplifies a discourse of respect and hierarchy, subtly distancing the presenter from adversarial questioning.

Audience interventions revealed a contrasting discourse. Callers used direct address strategies, such as “I am addressing the Honourable Minister ...” to hold him accountable, displaying a growing sense of civic empowerment. This shift from deferential to confrontational speech indicates a discursive tension between official language (representing authority) and public voice (expressing resistance).

However, when the Minister evaded questions, the presenter refrained from pressing for answers. His linguistic hesitation, marked by polite transitions such as “perhaps we can move on”, exemplifies self-censorship common in state-controlled media. This avoidance not only softened the interview’s critical potential but also signalled implicit boundaries of permissible speech. This proof illustrates what Moholi (2015) discussed, that in Lesotho even journalists must exercise caution when posing questions at government press conferences, as they risk being labelled as troublesome.

4.2.1.2 Discursive practice (meso-level)

The programme’s production and interactional patterns reveal institutional power dynamics. As a public broadcaster, Radio Lesotho operates under government oversight, which influences editorial decisions and the tone of its engagement. The

selection of guests, mainly ruling party representatives and a token opposition voice, illustrated controlled pluralism, where dissent is permitted but contained.

The presenter's role demonstrates the double consciousness of journalists within public institutions (Domínguez, Villegas, & Martínez, 2019). While he encouraged openness, he simultaneously respected implicit limits, avoiding confrontation with high-ranking officials. This aligns with the view by Fairclough (1995) that discourse practices are shaped by institutional routines that both enable and constrain communicative freedom.

Audience participation was mediated through the presenter, who relayed callers' questions to guests connected via the telephone. This indirect communication structure diluted the immediacy of public engagement and prevented genuine dialogic exchange. The audience's voice, though audible, remained filtered through institutional gatekeeping.

4.2.1.3 Social practice (macro-level)

At the societal level, this discourse reflects the contradictory role of public media in emerging democracies. While the programme ostensibly provided a space for citizens to express views on national reforms, it simultaneously reproduced state-aligned narratives that legitimised governmental authority. The presenter's reluctance to challenge the minister underscores Radio Lesotho's structural dependence on the government for funding and legitimacy. This affirms what Falatsa (2016) writes about the government of Lesotho dictating what should be broadcast and who should be covered by the state media. This is further supported by the fact that public radio in Lesotho is administered and regulated by the ministry of the minister being interviewed (Ramakhula, 2009; Limpitlaw, 2013).

This dynamic reflects wider trends of discursive authority within Lesotho's political discourse, wherein journalists function within a constrained public sphere. The utilisation of respectful language, the minimisation of confrontation, and dependence on elite sources collectively serve to reinforce hegemonic power structures rather than effect change. Nonetheless, despite the institutional rigidity, audience interventions indicate a shift in social practice, marking a transition from 'subject' to 'citizen'. Nevertheless, the callers' assertiveness signals an emergent democratic discourse. By directly confronting the minister and demanding accountability, citizens enacted

participatory democracy in practice. This tension between institutional control and public contestation illustrates the transitional nature of democratic communication in Lesotho's media landscape.

4.2.2 Workers' Day celebration discussion

The presenter's introduction articulated that Workers' Day, also recognised as International Workers' Day or May Day, is observed annually on the first of May. This significant occasion provides a platform for workers to reflect on the safeguarding of their rights by employers and to evaluate the sufficiency of labour legislation enacted by the government. During this observance, various activities such as parades, rallies, and speeches are typically conducted, with the aim of raising awareness regarding workers' rights and fostering solidarity among labourers. The presenter underscored that this day not only honours the contributions of the workforce but also advocates ongoing efforts towards fair treatment and improved working conditions across all sectors. The two distinguished guests at the event were Robert Mokhahlane, a representative of the Construction, Mining, and Quarrying sector, and Lebonejoang Molefi, who serves with the Lesotho Construction, Mining, and Allied Workers Union, representing the Basotho Labour Council.

4.2.2.1 *Textual analysis (micro-level)*

"This is the issue in which Lesotho must critically evaluate itself as a nation." The presenters' opening words demonstrate that the country is not doing well in treating its workers. To say that the government "must critically evaluate itself" shows that the presenter is concerned.

The presenter employed high-modality language, notably the phrase "must critically evaluate itself". The word "must" establishes a sense of urgent moral obligation. This shifts the discourse from a mere anniversary celebration to a narrative of a national crisis. By characterising the actions of the government as "violent tactics" the text establishes a binary opposition: the virtuous, oppressed worker, versus the negligent, aggressive state. The text indicates that the presenter fulfilled a watchdog role. In terms of textual analysis, this is accomplished by the presenter granting the floor to critics, thereby authorising their dissent through the state broadcaster.

Providing the background and rationale for the celebration demonstrates that the presenter has conducted research into its significance, thereby facilitating effective communication of the topic to the audience. The guests indicated that the minister's absence from the celebration, despite being invited, signifies a lack of commitment to addressing workers' needs. The guests' use of the phrase "lack of commitment" demonstrates their intention to hold the government accountable for the inadequate treatment that workers endure in the workplace. The use of the phrase "lack of commitment" suggests that the guests enjoy freedom of expression and a democratic obligation to address public issues without fear or favour, as they represent grassroots workers.

4.2.2.2 *Discursive practice (meso-level)*

Radio Lesotho is a public broadcaster. Usually, such institutions act as a mouthpiece for the government. However, the production choice to invite guests who criticise the minister (even highlighting his absence) suggests either a crack in state control or an exercise of editorial autonomy. The broadcast draws on International Workers' Day traditions (global discourse) and overlays them on local grievances (Lesotho's specific labour issues).

The presenter's stance was explicitly aligned with a watchdog perspective, embodying the journalistic norm of holding those in power accountable. Radio Lesotho, as a public broadcaster, demonstrates a degree of independence by engaging with the National Labour Organisation rather than the government. The presenter fulfilled a watchdog role by permitting guests to critique the minister on this government-controlled radio station. Additionally, the guests addressed public issues by highlighting problems within the Ministry of Labour, particularly its failure to resolve the challenges workers face. However, the presenter failed to give us a picture of what is happening with this issue, denying the audience the chance to hear the government's side because the government was not represented at all.

The guests demonstrated government and institutional scrutiny by observing that the relevant Ministry fails to perform its work effectively for labour organisations and employees. Additionally, the Minister himself does not provide the labour organisations with a platform to table their grievances and does not attend such international

celebrations where he can understand the problems faced by employees. This suggests that the minister and government do not take labour issues seriously.

Unlike in most cases where the government officials use phone calls for guests, today's guests were physically in the studio. This enhanced interaction among the presenter, guests, and audience. In this programme, the station established a platform for diverse voices to be heard.

4.2.2.3 *Social practice (macro-level)*

During the call, the audience demonstrated clear awareness of the dynamics of the public sphere by expressing the expectations employees hold of their government. They voiced serious concern that the government of Lesotho does not demonstrate sufficient respect for its citizens, especially the electorate. This concurs with Habermas (2022) idea that, through the public sphere, individuals and organisational groups develop power to model and monitor political governance to address their demands and expectations.

In addition to their demands for better working conditions, they emphatically stated that the government must cease its violent tactics against workers: "The government must cease to use police officers to quell peaceful protests", they claimed. The workers made it clear that they are prepared to continue their strike action whenever they feel their rights and safety are compromised. The government of Lesotho fails to embrace Habermas's (1987) position, which encompasses an ideal of public communication; if free from institutional interference, this ideal form of public discourse could cultivate the critical consensus deemed essential for public engagement in democratic political processes.

The broadcast functioned as a public sphere in which private citizens (workers) convened to hold public authority (the state) accountable. The analysis indicates that when the state fails to establish a formal platform (notably in the absence of the Minister), the media compensates for this deficiency to promote democratic participation. The government's deployment of police to quell protests exemplifies the exercise of coercive power. Conversely, the radio programme exemplifies ideological power. The workers are striving to win the war of ideas by portraying the government as disrespectful towards the electorate. The call for a review of legal and regulatory frameworks suggests that the social practices of labour in Lesotho are regarded as

outdated or colonial. The broadcast is not merely a celebration, but it also represents a societal demand for a renewed social contract between the Basotho people and their leaders.

The public broadcaster has fulfilled its role as a corporate and government watchdog by identifying ongoing issues between the ministry and labour organisations and by providing employees with a platform to exercise their democratic right to voice their opinions. The two guest representatives of the national labour organisations employed emotional appeals to the Lesotho government, explicitly highlighting the inadequate treatment of employees by their employers, who are factory owners. Moreover, the guests demonstrated civic engagement by prioritising workers' interests and urging the government to do the same.

During the call sessions, the audiences demonstrated a clear understanding of the dynamics within the public sphere by articulating the expectations that employees hold regarding their government. They expressed serious concern that the government of Lesotho does not exhibit adequate respect for its citizens, particularly the electorate. As a notable example, the callers highlighted that, unlike many other African nations where International Workers' Day is recognised as a public holiday, workers in Lesotho are expected to work on this significant day. Instead of honouring the contributions of the workforce, employees in Lesotho are compelled to observe this important occasion while still facing ongoing challenges with employers, thereby revealing a concerning neglect for their rights and well-being. Consequently, they urged policymakers to review the country's legal and regulatory frameworks concerning workers' welfare.

4.2.3 Media Day celebration discussion

On May 3, 2022, a significant media day celebration took place. To mark the day, Radio Lesotho invited media practitioners to the studio. The station brought together a diverse group of media practitioners, including prominent figures such as the Chairperson of the Media Institute of Southern Africa-Lesotho and a well-known female freelancer in the country. During the introduction, the presenter clarified that the government of Lesotho needs thorough introspection regarding the treatment of journalists.

4.2.3.1 Textual analysis (micro-level)

These words alone imply that the presenter was challenging the government and telling it that it does not treat journalists well in the country. Unlike previous years, according to Moholi (2015), when journalists were characterised as "careful" (indicating low modality or hesitance), the presenter now employed declarative sentences to criticise the government. This shift asserts a newfound authority in 'truth-telling' that dismisses the traditional label of 'troublesome'. For a radio presenter in Lesotho to fault the government in this way indicates a degree of freedom of expression. This was not happening for many years, as Moholi (2015) asserts that even the journalists were supposed to be careful about what to ask during the government press conferences because they might be labelled as troublesome.

During the interviews, they engaged in a substantive dialogue, addressing their concerns and the numerous challenges confronting the media industry in Lesotho. The presenter's introduction established a solemn tone, emphasising the "harsh realities" faced by journalists in the country, including incidents of "brutality and repression". The phrase "harsh realities," as used by the presenter of the government-controlled radio station, demonstrated the presenter's courage. The usage of "brutality and repression" underscored the presenter's intention to alert the government to the dissatisfaction among journalists regarding their treatment in the country. Furthermore, this communication conveyed to the international community that the Lesotho government is not actively engaging with the media. The presenter called for "thorough introspection" from the government. This personifies the state, implying it possesses a conscience that is presently failing. It shifts the responsibility from systemic issues to a moral failure of leadership.

4.2.3.2 Discursive practice (meso-level)

Regrettably, as is often the case, the guests called the station rather than appearing in the studio to answer the audience's questions collectively, merely listening to them on the radio. One guest informed the presenter that an audience member's question was unclear, which jeopardised the caller's chance of receiving the correct answer, as the presenter did not allow the caller to clarify the query. When the presenter did not allow a caller to clarify their question, they exercised discursive control. This phenomenon created a discursive gap. This act of protection inadvertently

disempowered the audience, thereby reinforcing a hierarchy in which the broadcaster assumed a superior position relative to the citizen.

This also provided the presenter with a competitive advantage, positioning them as superior to other participants, as they were uniquely able to establish a close connection and understand the material being conveyed. The guests clearly lacked rapport with the audience, and the audience likewise lacked a clear connection with the guests.

Furthermore, guests telephoned in rather than being physically present. This established a hierarchical discursive framework. As the sole individual present physically in the studio, the presenter functioned as the primary definer. This paradox in a government-controlled station alerts the international community to Lesotho's shortcomings. This indicates a potential fracture in the state's hegemonic control over the airwaves, in which the broadcaster appears increasingly to prioritise professional journalistic standards over allegiance to the state.

4.2.3.3 *Social practice (macro-level)*

The broadcast's conclusion, which transitioned from 'complaint' to 'demand for policy', exemplifies the media's role as a legislative catalyst. It is not merely participating in dialogue; it is actively endeavouring to model and monitor political governance (Keane, 2019). The programme functions as a public sphere where the media endeavours to hold the executive branch accountable. The invocation of "national reforms" indicates that the discourse is directed towards modifying the country's legal and regulatory frameworks.

The audience and guests brought the issue into the social discourse by emphasising the need for national reforms to enact laws and regulations that protect journalists. This acknowledgement of the difficult circumstances under which media professionals operate underscored the urgent need for reforms and greater protection for press freedom in Lesotho. The discussions emphasised the resilience of these journalists and their commitment to pursuing truth and transparency in the face of adversity.

According to PST, individuals and organisational groups have developed the capacity to influence and oversee political governance to meet their demands and expectations. Furthermore, freedom of expression has historically been regarded as essential for

safeguarding individual rights against political tyranny: a government that is legitimised through consent depends on a free press (Keane, 2019).

More importantly, a female guest reported that women working in journalism are exposed to a heightened risk of harassment and deliberate targeting by members of the community, and that they are frequently perceived and treated as inferior to their male counterparts. The testimony of the female journalist (guest) regarding "harassment" and "inferiority" demonstrates that the pursuit of media freedom in Lesotho extends beyond the conflict between the state and the press; it also encompasses internal social inequalities. This underscores a broader issue of patriarchy within the Basotho professional sector. This situation highlights the ongoing inequality within the sector in the country that requires urgent attention. The programme itself fulfils the purpose of a public sphere, which was used to criticise the state and evaluate its performance to hold the government accountable to citizens (Habermas, 1962).

Another critical challenge faced by journalists is the government's reluctance to provide access to information. By concealing essential data and details on vital national issues, it severely hampers journalists' ability to inform the public, leaving society uninformed about critical matters that affect their lives and governance. According to PST, the nation must have access to information and know what is happening in government. If the government is concealing essential information, the nation will remain uninformed, and its opinion will not be considered when impactful decisions are made in the country. A progressive media policy has the potential to resolve this issue. However, according to Falatsa (2016), the government of Lesotho has deliberately deferred the adoption and implementation of a media policy to promote the development of the media sector.

According to Tembo (2022), the connection between low salaries and unprofessionalism is a significant macro-level consideration. It indicates that the political economy of Lesotho directly influences the quality of democracy (Ramakhula, 2009; Mohili, 2015). If journalists are not financially independent, they cannot be ideologically independent. This creates a cycle in which poverty undermines the watchdog role essential for democracy. This undermines the industry's integrity and hinders its growth. However, Abrahamson (2001) asserts that, at a mature stage of

media history, normative choices determine which perspective is adopted in each locale. An informed and educated citizenry should be able to seize this opportunity and ensure that change works for civil empowerment. Media regulation must therefore be established to monitor and enforce media guidelines, ensuring that global media standards and ethics are adhered to in Lesotho.

4.2.4 Election campaigns discussion

The presenter drew attention to the political atmosphere prevailing in Lesotho. The presenter elaborated on the complexities of primary elections, noting that they often lead to division within political parties. This division occurs when certain members, feeling disenfranchised after failing to secure a nomination, choose to leave their original party to seek opportunities elsewhere. He emphasised that understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering a stable political landscape.

To delve deeper into this topic, the presenter invited the esteemed chairperson of the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (LCN) as a guest speaker. The discussion aimed to uncover the fundamental purpose of primary elections, emphasising the importance of maintaining unity and maturity among party members throughout this process.

4.2.4.1 *Textual analysis (micro-level)*

Many individuals perceive parliamentary positions not merely as opportunities to serve their communities but also as crucial sources of income to support their families. A noteworthy linguistic observation is the framing of parliamentary roles; they are not characterised in terms of "leadership" or "policy," but as "essential sources of income". This lexical shift redefines public service as a means of survival or employment opportunity rather than a civic obligation.

The tone of the speaker in this segment implies that most people are no longer happy with the failures of Lesotho politicians to fulfil their obligations as parliamentarians. A tone of frustration characterises the discourse. The speaker asserts that the "citizenry is no longer happy", signalling a breakdown in the social contract between the electorate and the elected. The language used by the presenter acts as a bridge, allowing the "citizenry to play a role" by questioning established power.

4.2.4.2 *Discursive practice (meso-level)*

Callers highlighted an essential aspect of political engagement among Basotho residing in South Africa, noting that many have established committees for their respective political parties. The presenter is depicted as a facilitator of participatory democracy. By establishing a conducive environment, the media outlet evolves from a unidirectional information disseminator into a platform for articulating grievances. This active involvement indicates a strong interest in Lesotho's ongoing political developments. At the other extreme, ordinary people participate in the political process through voting, lobbying, inquiry, membership of political parties and trade unions, and so forth. The poles of this opposition can be used to understand a transformation from an elite to a participatory democracy (Livingstone & Lunt, 2013).

The inclusion of callers from South Africa highlights a unique discursive community. Even though these citizens are physically removed from Lesotho, they maintain committees demonstrating that political discourse transcends national borders. The text highlights a transition. Although politics was traditionally an elite process, the activities of voting, lobbying, and inquiry, as demonstrated through the talk show, signify a movement toward a more inclusive and participatory model.

4.2.4.3 *Social practice (macro-level)*

The guest raised a pressing concern about the disenfranchisement of numerous citizens, particularly those residing far from their constituencies. For instance, individuals who work abroad often find it difficult to return home to vote, which raises questions about the accessibility and fairness of the electoral process. The population of Lesotho is assumed to be manageable due to its size, except for the fact that many citizens reside in neighbouring countries in search of better job opportunities, thus making it nearly impossible for them to return home either for the census or elections. The reliability of the statistics of the electorates would only be deemed fair if there are measures put in place to ensure that all the expatriates get to exercise their right to vote wherever they reside. In a broader sense, there must be reforms that reflect the country's push to better manage migration and local participation by expediting work permit processing times and enforcing regulations on local employment and ownership.

The presenter elaborated on the complexities of primary elections, noting that they often lead to division within political parties. This division occurs when certain members, feeling disenfranchised after failing to secure a nomination as candidates, choose to leave their original party to seek opportunities elsewhere. The presenter emphasised that understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering a stable political landscape. The emphasis on understanding these different dynamics indicates the urgency of the matter, failure of which would result in a destabilised political environment. The presenter's emphasis raises awareness about the importance of recognising all the dynamics within a political landscape and how they affect the electoral campaigns.

The guest noted that in Lesotho, many candidates for political office are primarily motivated by the severe scarcity of employment opportunities. Lesotho's democracy is homogeneous and yet poor; its income base is external. In a society that offers limited employment opportunities, the contestation for political position is undertaken with passion and desperation (Matlosa, 2017). Consequently, many perceive parliamentary positions not merely as opportunities to serve their communities but also as essential sources of income to support their families. The motivation behind parliamentary positions is largely influenced by personal gain, in this case, the income, rather than the initial purpose of serving the community. Lesotho's society is culturally unified but economically desperate. The passion and desperation in political contests are direct results of a lack of private-sector jobs.

The audience shed light on the political landscape in which Lesotho politics has failed the electorate by saying that despite the longstanding dominance of certain political parties, many of which have yet to fulfil their promises to the voters, there are a considerable number of citizens who engage in the electoral process. Enhancing public awareness about the importance of their vote and advocating for accountability among elected officials can lead to more meaningful electoral outcomes and reinforce the democratic framework in Lesotho. Freedom of expression has long been regarded as essential to protecting the individual's rights from political tyranny: a government legitimised through consent depends on a free press (Keane, 1991; Koss, 1984).

4.3 PEOPLE'S CHOICE PROGRAMMES – THAHAMESO

4.3.1 The dissolution of the National Reforms Authority

To ensure equitable and impartial elections, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) encouraged Lesotho to review its constitution. Subsequently, the government established the NRA to oversee the revision process. However, in 2022, the government decided to dissolve the NRA. When the programme's host introduced the guests, he stated that, following the government's disbandment of the NRA, the radio station had chosen to engage with several political parties to gather their perspectives. Most of the policies developed by the NRA aimed to influence political parties. The programme aimed to determine whether all political parties approved of the government's decision. The participants included representatives from the two major ruling parties: Montoeli Masoetsa of the ABC, Serialong Qoo of the DC, and Molefi Ntsonyana, the leader of a minor party involved in national reforms.

4.3.1.1 *Textual analysis (micro-level)*

The *Thahameso* presenter opened with a markedly informal and conversational tone, saying: "The NRA is gone. NRA has been disbanded after numerous months and significant expenditures incurred during its existence. What implications does this have for the reforms to which we were all promised? Who will benefit from this decision? Is it the nation or the politicians who have been opposing these policy changes from the outset?". The presenter expressed concern that the body, which the Basotho anticipated would develop legislation to foster peace and stability, has been dissolved, and that the government has announced that parliament will complete the work initiated by the NRA. He characterised this decision as an unfortunate and indicative reflection of democratic immaturity, which will once again place Lesotho under the scrutiny of the international community that has supported the country with funding to conclude the reforms.

This phrasing immediately diverges from the bureaucratic register employed on Radio Lesotho. The exclamatory tone "gone!" and the direct questions posed by the presenter place the presenter alongside the audience rather than as a distant observer. The use of inclusive pronouns ("we", "our") constructs a shared identity between the broadcaster and listeners, indicating solidarity and collective concern.

Linguistically, the presenter used evaluative language (“unfortunate decision,” “democratic immaturity”) that framed the government’s action as problematic. This explicit stance contrasts sharply with the cautious neutrality observed in the public broadcaster. Through rhetorical questions (“Who benefits from dissolving the reform body?”). The presenter performed a watchdog role, interrogating power rather than reproducing it.

However, the lexical choices made by the presenter at this private radio station positioned the presenter as biased rather than neutral. This is corroborated by Van Dijk (2014), who refers to this as journalist bias. Van Dijk explains that the choice of words can indicate the attitude of the writer or speaker towards the story being conveyed. The utilisation of a term bearing either positive or negative connotations instead of a more neutral synonym may create an impression of bias in the minds of the audience.

The approach of PC FM herein diverged from that of Radio Lesotho, which engaged with the political elite. Guest speakers comprised representatives from civil society. Their discourse was characterised by rational, argumentative language, emphasising evidence-based reasoning and rights-oriented terminology; expressions such as “constitutional accountability,” “citizen participation,” and “rule of law” were frequently used. These lexical selections are consistent with democratic and reformist ideologies.

The guest further highlighted the reality that when the government assigned the politician lawmakers to proceed with the NRA initiatives, these legislators would persist in debate and modify the proposals, thereby jeopardising the impartiality and independence of the reforms through the lawmakers' ability to select changes that serve their personal interests. The youth of the country anticipates that the upcoming elections will yield results like those of the previous national elections, as the proposed enhancements are unlikely to be finalised and implemented.

The various perspectives of audiences from these two radio stations explicitly underscore the importance of the public sphere, as these differing perceptions of the public can facilitate the development of regulations that address the interests of both sides of the nation. The talk show reflected the findings of Botes and Langdon (2006), who identified talk shows as platforms where social conflict, or issues related to conflict, are the primary focus. They described these programmes as town meetings

broadcast on air, in which a wide array of ideas are discussed from multiple perspectives, without inserting judgement into the discourse.

Audience participation was vivid and unfiltered. Callers expressed anger, irony, and even humour, for example: “We are reforming reforms that never get reformed!”. This discursive creativity reflects linguistic resistance by citizens appropriating the language of governance to critique state inefficiency. The presenter amplified these voices, often responding affirmatively (“Exactly, that’s the point many people are making”), thus positioning the show as an interactive public sphere rather than a top-down broadcast.

When the audience differed from the guest, the presenter refrained from exercising authority and instead permitted the audience to fully express their opinions. Often responding affirmatively, “Exactly, that’s the point many people are making”, thus positioning the show as an interactive public sphere rather than a top-down broadcast. In this manner, he echoed the sentiments of Botes and Langdon (2006), indicating that talk show hosts serve as moderators who convene disputing parties around a table, requesting each side to articulate and clarify their positions, and subsequently examine the extent to which their interests are aligned or divergent.

4.3.1.2 Discursive practice (meso-level)

At the level of production and interaction, *Thahameso* exemplifies the discursive autonomy characteristic of private radio in Lesotho. The programme’s structure allows for direct caller-to-guest interaction, eliminating the mediation filter observed at Radio Lesotho. This immediacy enhances dialogic exchange and positions listeners as active participants in meaning-making. However, the number of guests poses the challenge of bias. The presenter failed to educate the audience by bringing more knowledgeable guests on the subject who could explain the constitutional analysis.

The presenter’s stance was explicitly watchdog-oriented, embodying the journalistic norm of holding power accountable. Unlike the public broadcaster’s presenter, who often redirected difficult questions, this presenter pursued clarification and challenged evasive statements. For instance, when a government spokesperson attempted to justify the dissolution of the NRA on financial grounds, the presenter interrupted: “But isn’t this the same justification used three years ago? What changed?” This

interruption strategy signifies discursive power redistribution, it disrupts hierarchical control and repositions the journalist as a counter-hegemonic voice.

Regarding media ownership, PC FM functions on a commercial basis, primarily dependent on advertising revenue instead of government funding. This financial arrangement provides enhanced editorial independence; however, it may also present challenges, such as potential influence exerted by private sponsors or political advertisers. Despite this, the lack of direct government control allows for increased thematic diversity and opportunities for critique.

4.3.1.3 Social practice (macro-level)

At the societal level, *Thahameso* demonstrates how private radio contributes to the democratisation of discourse in Lesotho. By enabling open debate and criticism of government decisions, it functions as part of the counter-public sphere spaces where alternative discourses challenge official narratives (Fraser, 2009).

Through linguistic inclusivity (“we Basotho”), transparent critique, and dialogic participation, the programme fosters a deliberative form of democracy (Habermas, 1989). It empowers citizens to engage with political issues in an accessible language, bridging the gap between elite reform discourse and everyday experience.

However, while *Thahameso* promotes pluralism, it also reflects commercial pressures. Advert breaks sometimes disrupted heated discussions, and the host occasionally reminded listeners to “keep it brief” to accommodate sponsors. These market-driven constraints highlight the tension between economic survival and democratic mission in private broadcasting.

Despite such limitations, *Thahameso* represents a significant stride toward discursive democratisation. It amplifies marginalised voices and normalises critical engagement with political authority — practices essential to sustaining democracy in transitional societies like Lesotho.

4.3.2 The visit of the SADC mediator to Lesotho

The SADC dispatched Likgang Moseneke to evaluate the progress of the Lesotho government in regard to national reforms. However, his visit did not proceed as anticipated because the government abstained from attending the scheduled meeting

intended for all political parties and government representatives to discuss progress and areas requiring reinforcement. The presenter extended invitations to representatives from the two political parties present at the meeting. The guests included Apesi Ratsele of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and Lebohang Thotanyana of the Basotho Action Party (BAP).

4.3.2.1 Textual Analysis (micro-level)

The presenter opened the programme in an exclamatory tone, indicating that Moseneke's presence in the country had not yielded the anticipated results, as the opposition side expressed considerable dissatisfaction. The presenter's exclamatory tone emphasised strong emotions and signaled a sense of urgency regarding the issue being discussed. It conveyed heightened emotion, capturing the listeners' attention, eliciting an immediate response in the conversation.

The presenter further stated that "the SADC peace mediator in Lesotho was not warmly received by the opposition". To directly refer to Moseneke as the peace mediator emphasises the significant role that Moseneke played, thereby capturing the interest of the audience. Additionally, the phrase "was not warmly received by the opposition", also piqued the audience's curiosity about the reasons for the less-than-cordial reception of a figure who holds such an important role.

A caller expressed concern by stating, "Wow, what a country. This country is not serious at all about the nation's peace and stability. The politician benefits from the instability of the country". This response immediately followed the presenter's exclamatory tone, which, having been employed to commence the programme, established the overall mood of the discussion. The phrase "Wow, what a country!" also serves as an exclamatory statement – the caller utilised it to convey their frustration and disbelief regarding the issue of politicians allegedly benefiting from the country's instability. The presenter effectively employed an exclamatory tone to foster a cohesive connection with the audience.

The use of words like "undermined" and "broken promises" by the guests (Thotanyana and Ratsele) was emotive language to frame the government as deceptive and negligent. Furthermore, the government was portrayed as a passive or absent actor ("the government chose not to attend"). In contrast, the opposition is portrayed as active and "democratic" protectors. The caller's use of the phrase "this country is not

serious at all" functions as a metaphor for state failure, treating the entire nation as an individual lacking a moral compass.

4.3.2.2 *Discursive practice (meso-level)*

The selection of guests for this programme also garnered the attention of the audience. All the guests were representatives from opposition parties. This distinguishes the private radio station from Radio Lesotho, which consistently includes guests from the government in its programmes. However, this approach does not provide the audience with a complete perspective nor the opportunity for the government to present its side, particularly when the second guest accused the government of undermining SADC's intentions to restore peace in the country by its absence from the meeting convened by Mosenske.

A radio station exerts authority and functions as a gatekeeper by selecting which guests to invite. In this segment, two opposition secretaries were featured, while the government was absent. Whether by deliberate choice or exclusion, this resulted in a unidirectional discursive flow that favoured the opposition's narrative of governmental failure. The broadcast referenced several texts outside the studio: the SADC report, the Omnibus Bill, the Peace and Unity Bill, and legal actions against political figures. The radio station acted as a hub where these complex legal and international documents were translated into accessible language for the public. By incorporating callers/audience, the station transformed from a purely broadcast medium into a dialogic space, creating the impression of a 'people's court' in which the government was tried in absentia.

4.3.2.3 *Social practice (macro-level)*

One caller expressed concern by stating, "Wow, what a country. This country is not serious at all about the nation's peace and stability. The politician benefits from the instability of the country". The callers were dissatisfied with the behaviour of Lesotho's politicians, who were pointing fingers at each other. The opposition accused the ruling party, while the government accused the opposition of uncooperative behaviour. The fiasco and the disputes between the government and the opposition parties are a cause for concern and public frustration. The concerns expressed by the audience challenged the government to treat national issues with greater seriousness than

currently demonstrated. The government is expected to take a leading role in such matters; however, its absence from the meeting raised concerns across the nation.

Most importantly, the programme demonstrated the role of private radio stations in fostering the public sphere. The development of a platform for opposition parties and the general public encourages the participation of all citizens' perspectives on national issues. Consequently, this fosters the advancement of democracy within the country. Historically, the Lesotho government held a hegemonic (dominant) control over information. This broadcast represents a counter-hegemonic struggle. Private radio is using its platform to challenge the state's legitimacy and its commitment to the SADC-led reforms. There exists a tension between stability" and democratic rights. A caller emphasised stability, whereas the LCD guest, Ratsele, emphasises democratic rights by opposing the bill. This situation exemplifies a broader societal conflict within Lesotho: the pursuit of peace versus the quest for political accountability. The remark by the caller that "The politician benefits from the instability" underscores a persistent belief in Lesotho that the political elite, or the ruling class, sustains power through chaos rather than through dedicated service to the Basotho nation.

4.3.3 2022 National election campaigns (All Basotho Convention)

As the nation approached the 2022 general elections, all political parties were actively engaged in campaigns. The presenter extended an invitation to the political parties to participate in his programme. He commenced the show by emphasising that ABC has held power for the past five years. Consequently, if they are re-elected, they need to assure voters of a significant change in their approach. The host reiterated that internal conflicts have historically existed within ABC and that public confidence in the network has diminished. Therefore, ABC must exert considerable effort to convince the electorate of its continued competence to govern the nation. The guest was the ABC general secretary, Lebohang Hlaele.

4.3.3.1 *Textual analysis (micro-level)*

The presenter commenced the programme by emphasising that ABC has held power for the past five years. Consequently, should they be re-elected, they are expected to assure voters of a different course of action. The host's emphasis exerted pressure on the party, reminding ABC of the significance of their commitments and the necessity of fulfilling them. This declaration implies that ABC did not honour their promises

during their previous tenure and serves as a caution that re-election obliges them to honour their commitments. The host leveraged the party's five-year incumbency to establish a personal obligation: "they should promise the voters that they will act differently". This imposes a personal accountability upon a significant political institution.

By citing the issue of conflicts within the party, the presenter provided the electorate with a scenario that assisted them in determining whether they wish to continue being governed by such a divided institution. The information presented in the introduction served as the education necessary for the populace to make the most informed decision during the elections. The term "disappointments," as raised by the audience, encapsulated the grievances and injustices inflicted by the ABC upon voters who had entrusted their hope to the party.

The Secretary General employed a modality indicating high certainty ("ABC will realise", "ABC will form"). This represented a conventional political strategy aimed at projecting competence and decisiveness. Nonetheless, the callers responded with declarations in the past tense regarding failures ("neither new roads nor maintenance were carried out"), resulting in a conflict between the assured future and the factual past. The Secretary General employed language characterised as "visionary" and "utopian," including expressions such as "end famine and suffering" and "top investment". These are affirmative lexical choices intended to inspire hope and establish a connection between the present leadership and the legacy of the founder, Dr Thabane.

In contrast, the audience and host employed negative lexical items such as "internal conflict," "lost faith," "disappointed," and "underperformed". These terms anchored the discourse in a reality of failure rather than one of promise. A caller directly identified the Ministry of Public Works as one of the departments that entirely failed to deliver services to the public. The phrase "underperform completely" here signified neglect and failure by the ABC Ministers appointed to lead various departments. These departments collectively constitute the government, and the caller's assertion that they underperformed entirely implies that the government as a whole also underperformed and consequently failed to meet expectations.

One caller called the politicians of Lesotho gluttons. The utilisation of the term "gluttons" serves as a potent metaphor. In accordance with Fairclough's framework, this constitutes a lexical struggle. By referring to politicians as gluttons, the electorate reinterprets the political act from a pursuit of public service to one characterised by "consumption" and "greed." Consequently, this shifts the discourse from the party's favoured development narrative to one centred on corruption.

4.3.3.2 *Discursive practice (meso-level)*

Callers asserted without fear or favour that ABC has disappointed its fans and the country. They emphasised that the party's internal strife demonstrated that its leaders were primarily interested in their fortunes and not the nation's interests. The callers highlighted that the leaders were prioritising self-interest over public need, which had disappointed the public and led to a disconnect from the citizens' discourse. The callers' emphasis on the matter demonstrated a lack of trust in the government and a sense of withdrawal from the party's agendas. The callers' emancipation to express their concerns without fear is commendable. The audience also called the politicians "liars" because the then-Prime Minister failed to fulfil his commitment to repair flood damaged bridges and roads. Naming the Prime Minister, a "liar" is an act of challenging hegemony. Usually, the language used for high-ranking officials is formal and deferential. By using blunt, non-fearful language, the callers stripped the office of its traditional prestige.

Most callers emphasised the need for ABC to reflect, warning that failure would result in the country defecting to other parties that would carry out and fulfil their promises to voters. In the discussion the callers were narrowing down the failures of the government to keep its promises to the people, absolutely dismissing and disqualifying the mandate that the guest had come to present. For the audience to tell the ruling party that they will not elect it back to the government once again, shows that they knew their rights and the power they had with their votes.

The Secretary General relied heavily on the legacy of Dr Motsoahae Thomas Thabane. By quoting his vows to end famine, he not only made a policy statement, but he also borrowed the historical authority and charisma of the founder to stabilise a fractured party. There was a conflict between the discourse of governance (which encompasses infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and development banks) and the

discourse of crisis (characterised by internal strife, self-interest, and defection). The audience dismissed the ABC's efforts to discuss development because the perception of internal strife had become the predominant framework through which the public interpreted the party. The callers served as critical consumers, refusing to accept the Secretary General's claims uncritically. Instead, they drew on their lived experiences (regarding, for example, the Ministry of Public Works) to deconstruct the political campaign.

By featuring solely the Secretary General, the programme adopted a mono-vocal format. Fairclough would contend that this constitutes a form of gatekeeping. Nevertheless, the callers interrupted this arrangement. They declined to be passive consumers of the ABC manifesto and instead assumed the role of active producers of a counter-discourse. The lack of experts to contest the manifesto facilitated a hegemonic monologue. In an equitable discursive practice, experts serve as translators who bridge the gap between political jargon and the citizens' realities. In their absence, the responsibility for truth-checking was borne entirely by the callers.

4.3.3.3 *Social practice (macro-level)*

The presenter began the show by emphasising that ABC has been in power for the last five years. As a result, if they are returned to office, they should promise the voters that they will act differently. Having failed to deliver services in five years of governance that the ABC had led, their chances to redeem themselves and win the elections again were slim. A broad display of incompetence in their leadership was public knowledge and the scrutiny in their campaign would be intensified. They had broken their promises before, the promises they make currently would be a public controversy.

The fact that callers spoke without fear or favour indicates a substantial transformation in the social hierarchy of discourse within Lesotho. This represents a moment of emancipation and signifies that the previously held fear-based authority of the ruling party may no longer be sufficient. Voters utilised the talk show as their 'discursive weapon'. The threat of defecting to other parties constituted the paramount social practice. The callers explicitly associated discourse (the talk show) with political action (the vote). They disqualified the ABC's mandate not solely through language but by asserting their authority as the ultimate employers of the politicians. This is the real manifestation of what Robinson (cited in Gurevitch et al., 1982) said: when individuals

learn about the dishonesty of politicians, their trust in the government begins to decline, thereby reducing their participation in the national elections.

The ABC endeavoured to sustain authority by promoting an ideology that positions the party as the sole legitimate instrument for Thabane's mission. Nevertheless, analysis indicates that this ideology is declining in efficacy; the public is increasingly favouring a performance-based ideology, in which outcomes are prioritised over historical affiliations. The hegemony of the ABC is evidently under threat. The warning that the country is "defecting to other parties" reflects a shift in social practice where voters no longer feel bound to traditional congress or nationalist movements, but instead to whoever can fulfil their promises. The broadcast disclosed a rare instance of inverted power. Although the Secretary-General possessed the official title and platform, the audience/callers wielded discursive authority. Their fearless assertions signified democratic maturity, reflecting a citizenry empowered to challenge the ruling elite directly through public broadcasts.

4.3.4 Mapesela's proposal in the parliament

According to the host, Mapesela, the head of the Basotho Patriotic Party, submitted a proposal to the parliament asking it to exclude from the next national election any MPs with felony convictions. Speaking in favour of his proposal on PC FM, Mapesela said that he was driven to bring up this matter because he felt that those with criminal histories cannot support legislation against criminal offences, which compromises the dignity of the legislature. Additionally, when they are appointed as ministers by their parties, the voters will lose faith in such a government, and these individuals even penalise government officials who acted against them.

4.3.4.1 *Textual analysis (Micro-Level)*

"Driven to raise" in this context reflects Mapesela's intentions and motivations, convincing the audience that those with criminal records should be excluded from the campaign, as they may tarnish the dignity of the legislature. Mapesela applied causal reasoning in his language. He contended that offenders could not endorse anti-crime legislation. By employing the term "compromises" he depicted the involvement of certain members of parliament not merely as a moral concern but as a structural flaw within the machinery of the state.

He used these persuasive phrases to build his argument that when parties appoint people with criminal records as ministers, voters will lose faith in such a government. The guest employed a predictive modality through phrases such as "will lose faith", "will even penalise", and "will impede". He was not merely describing a legal framework; instead, he was illustrating a dystopian scenario, wherein a government is incapacitated by revenge and self-interest, to persuade the audience. The utilisation of the term "criminal records" underscored the gravity of the issue and highlighted the negligence of the Lesotho government in allowing such individuals to govern the country.

The audience congratulated the guest, noting that if Lesotho had leaders like those who do not support corruption, the country could advance further. By using the word "congratulations," the audience conveyed their approval and acknowledgement of Mapesela's proposal. They were expressive of their pleasure and support that those with criminal records should be excluded from the subsequent national election campaigns.

4.3.4.2 *Discursive practice (meso-level)*

Speaking in favour of his proposal on PC FM, Mapesela said he was driven to raise this matter because he felt that those with criminal records cannot support legislation against criminal offences, which compromises the dignity of the legislature. Mapesela strategically used persuasive language to capture the attention of his audience and convince them that his reasoning on the proposal was valid. While presenting the proposal's content Mapesela took care to describe the problem, the solution and the outcomes in a way that aligned with the values of his audience so as to win their trust and get their approval. This broadcast combined legal discussions, including felony convictions, bills, and enactments, with elements of political campaigning. Mapesela aimed to transform a legal obligation into a political brand to position itself as the clean alternative.

The presenter's approach of inviting Mapesela alone to discuss the matter did not provide the audience with a clear indication of whether the constitution supports the motion or whether Mapesela is seeking to weaken other political parties by prohibiting their powerful candidates from participating in the national elections. If other guests knowledgeable about the matter had been present, their expertise could have

enhanced the audience's understanding, thereby providing them with the information needed to support Mapesela or to make an informed decision when voting.

By this point, the audience challenged the power of the government to enforce the law as expected. This also showed the weakness of the government when it comes to the functioning of the government agencies. The audience expressed scepticism regarding the enforcement of the Act, citing that at the time, the requirement for government officers and MPs to declare their assets had not been enforced. They further pointed out that Lesotho has commendable laws; however, regrettably, the law enforcement agencies remain inactive. The audiences' ability to question the enforcement of the act indicated that they were not just passive listeners, they were involved in the conversation and sought a resolution to the problem.

The audience demonstrated an intriguing behaviour by linking this novel proposal to previously failed discourses, such as the declaration of assets. They exercised intertextuality through referencing existing laws documented on paper, but not effectively implemented in practice. The audience perceived a discrepancy between the text (the commendable laws) and the social practice (the inactivity of agencies). They interpreted the proposal not as a remedy but as merely another 'good law' that is likely to be disregarded.

4.3.4.3 Social practice (macro-level)

Speaking in favour of his proposal on PC FM, Mapesela said he was driven to raise this matter because he felt that those with criminal records cannot support legislation against criminal offences, which compromises the dignity of the legislature. Broadly, Mapesela engaged the audience and persuaded them of the need to exclude individuals with criminal records from campaigns. He used language that sought to persuade listeners that he advocated their course, and that he was driven to see the proposal through. His words also raised the question of what kind of country Lesotho is, where criminals rule.

This discourse reflects a profound structural mistrust in Lesotho's state institutions, including the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offence, Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and law enforcement agencies. The social practice described pertains to impunity, whereby holding the position of Member of Parliament is perceived as a means of evading legal accountability. Mapesela's proposal constituted

a direct challenge to the hegemony of the political class. He advocated for the imposition of entry requirements for membership in the parliamentary 'club' thereby attempting to shift the social order from one in which 'power protects' to one where 'character qualifies'. The audience's call for legislation to assist the IEC demonstrated a desire for decentralised authority. They wanted an independent body, such as the IEC, endowed with sufficient authority to circumvent political corruption—indicating a societal shift toward technocratic oversight rather than purely political governance.

4.4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO RADIO STATIONS

4.4.1 Time allocation

PC FM allocates three hours per day to the *Thahameso* programme, while Radio Lesotho allocates two hours per day to the *Seboping* programme. Each programme on the two radio stations includes news and advertisements. Radio Lesotho airs the news bulletin at 6:00 AM and 7:00 AM, while PC FM has its news bulletin at 6:15 AM and 7:15 AM. During the programmes, there are many advertisements for flights.

Radio Lesotho runs radio advertisements before and after the newscast, while PC FM runs promotions before and after the newscast. Moreover, it has more slots for individuals and companies to advertise their services and products during the *Thahameso* programme. This gives Radio Lesotho more time for talk shows to disseminate information than PC FM. This leads to the conclusion that private radio stations allocate more airtime to advertisers than Radio Lesotho, as they rely on advertising fees for their survival. Regrettably, the circumstances render journalists and news media outlets susceptible to the influence exerted by advertising corporations and governmental entities (Beder, 2010; Kilbourne, 2019; Al-Hasani, 2021). In contrast, Radio Lesotho does not rely on advertising revenue because it is funded by government sponsorship.

Given that PC FM operates as a commercial entity, its 'product' is its airtime. To maintain broadcast continuity, it is imperative to maximise the number of slots sold, particularly during high-traffic programs such as *Thahameso*. Conversely, Radio Lesotho, less constrained by the need to sell every 30-second segment to survive, can afford to extend talk show durations. This facilitates more in-depth dissemination of information, although it often emphasises government-aligned messaging. While Radio Lesotho conducts standard advertising through direct sales, PC FM engages in

promotional activities. This typically entails a more proactive, collaborative marketing approach in which the station actively promotes brands or services as an integral part of the entertainment experience. Additionally, although Radio Lesotho has a Commercial Department responsible for selling airtime and leasing transmitters to recover costs, most of its budget is allocated through the national budget, which explains its comparatively lower pressure to generate advertising revenue.

From a Critical Political Economy of the Media (CPEM) perspective, the differences in airtime allocation between Radio Lesotho and PC FM can be explained by their distinct funding structures. Although Radio Lesotho provides advertising opportunities for individuals and companies during the *Thahameso* programme, it also allocates considerable airtime to talk shows and public information programmes. In contrast, private radio stations such as PC FM are more dependent on advertising revenue for their economic survival and therefore tend to allocate a larger proportion of airtime to commercial advertisements. According to CPEM, media content is shaped by economic and political interests, with funding sources influencing programming priorities and editorial decisions. As a result, private media organisations may be more vulnerable to the influence of advertisers who provide financial support, potentially affecting the diversity and independence of content (Beder, 2010; Kilbourne, 2019; Al-Hasani, 2021). While Radio Lesotho is less reliant on commercial advertising because it is funded by the government, CPEM also suggests that state-funded media may be subject to government influence. Therefore, both commercial and state funding models can shape media content.

4.4.2 Invited guests.

As a government-funded entity, it often views its primary role as communicating government policy and progress to the citizens. By limiting opposition voices to just one guest, the station minimises dissent. This can lead to a homogenised flow of information, in which the government's mandate is presented without rigorous challenge. While PC FM also hosts members of the ruling party, its proportion is considerably more balanced. Its independence from the national budget enables PC FM to serve as a platform for alternative narratives. This station frequently functions as a conduit for grassroots individuals, whose grievances or opinions might otherwise be overlooked by state media. By providing the opposition with an opportunity to

advise the government, it effectively assumes the role of a fourth estate, thereby maintaining a check on the governing authorities. Thus, it assumes a crucial role in demonstrating the potential influence over authority by establishing a critical consensus that generates coherent public opinion and by holding the state accountable to its citizens (Habermas, 1989). Livingstone and Lunt (2013) observe that the mediated political control of the masses is more manageable within an elite democracy, where the media face pressure to critically articulate the perspectives of the political elite to the public.

This phenomenon establishes a divided public sphere in Lesotho. Citizens seeking official government information favour Radio Lesotho, whereas individuals interested in debate, critique, or alternative viewpoints often listen to private stations such as PC FM. When Radio Lesotho broadcasts invitations to nine members of the ruling party, it creates a psychological effect known as social proof, which makes the ruling party seem dominant and inevitable. Conversely, when PC FM extends invitations to more opposition members, it endorses dissenting voices, conveying that disagreement with the government is a legitimate and shared social stance. Furthermore, because Radio Lesotho offers broader national coverage, including the mountainous regions, the ruling party mandate is likely broadcast to a larger audience. However, PC FM's influence within urban centres such as Maseru can be more pronounced because it encourages debate and active listener engagement through mechanisms such as phone-ins.

4.4.3 Presenters' approach to the programmes

Contrasting Radio Lesotho's *Seboping*, where institutional allegiance resulted in cautious and deferential communication, *Thahameso* exemplifies how editorial independence fosters democratic deliberation. Linguistically, it utilises conversational, inclusive, and critical discourse that encourages listener participation and enhances public accountability. According to Fairclough (2013), this approach aids in constructing citizens as active co-participants rather than passive recipients. At the discursive practice level, it redistributes communicative power among journalists, officials, and the public. At the social practice level, it challenges hegemonic state discourse and promotes a pluralistic, participatory media culture. Therefore, private

radio, despite economic constraints, functions as a more open democratic communicative space than its public counterpart.

At Radio Lesotho, the presenter inadvertently assumes the role of a gatekeeper. When a presenter needs to paraphrase a caller, the nuance and emotion of the original inquiry are frequently lost, resulting in sterilised or inaccurate responses. As the sole individual able to hear both sides, the Radio Lesotho presenter assumes a predominant figure status. This dynamic can cause the programme to resemble a lecture more than a community forum. The PC FM model benefits from nonverbal communication; in-studio guests can discern social cues, respond immediately to callers, and engage in crosstalk, thereby fostering a more vibrant and educational debate.

The methodology employed by PC FM is markedly more conducive to fostering a vibrant public sphere. Direct interaction between the audience and in-studio guests eliminates the need to relay messages, thereby preserving the emotional tone and specific nuances of each caller's inquiry. Consequently, the presenter's role transitions from gatekeeper to facilitator, enhancing the audience's connection with the experts or officials being interviewed. Although Radio Lesotho's dependence on telephone interviews may stem from necessity or logistical limitations, it engenders a communication barrier that impairs the quality of discourse and the accuracy of information communicated to the public.

4.4.4 Audience

At Radio Lesotho, the observation that callers exhibit a consistent similarity from day to day indicates a significant level of gatekeeping or a self-selecting audience. When community counsellors and individual listeners participate, the station effectively transforms into a 'suggestion box' for governmental feedback rather than serving as a platform for open debate. This dynamic reinforces the station's function as a mechanism for social engineering and maintaining stability. Callers frequently utilise the station to advocate for infrastructure development, including roads, water supply, and educational institutions. Given that the station is funded by the state, callers often regard it as a direct hotline to authorities capable of addressing and resolving these localised issues.

There is a single caller who consistently complains that the government is not granting artisanal mining rights. The caller's complaints about mining restrictions exemplify a particular form of engagement: a plea for patronage. By expressing personal grievances regarding government policy on the state broadcaster, the caller essentially requests a policy exemption or favour from the station's owner (the state). When a small group of individuals frequently dominate the airwaves, this can result in audience fatigue among those seeking more diverse debate. This situation fosters a closed loop where only those who conform to the established state discourse feel comfortable participating. The government perceives these calls as a to-do list for service delivery; for example, if a counsellor reports a compromised bridge, the Ministry may undertake repairs. Such actions enable the government to appear responsive and benevolent without fundamentally altering the laws or policies that initially generate the issues.

Conversely, the PC FM model of diverse callers indicates that the station is effective in agenda-setting. When a station addresses national interests, it attracts individuals eager to contribute to the bigger picture. This facilitates a more dynamic public sphere in which the government is viewed not merely as a service provider (according to the Radio Lesotho perspective), but as an entity accountable for its policy decisions. Kluge & Negt (1991) assert that the public sphere can influence authority by cultivating a critical consensus that fosters coherent public opinion and by ensuring that the state is accountable to its citizens.

The inclusion of non-governmental organisations and formal entities indicates that PC FM is regarded as a legitimate platform for civil society and as a space that mediates between society and the state (Habermas, 1989). Consequently, the station assumes the role of a shadow parliament, where policies are scrutinised and debated by experts and affected citizens alike. Due to the high engagement nature of programs such as *Thahameso*, a diverse and rotating demographic is drawn, ensuring the conversation is fresh and reflective of a wider cross-section of the national interest. PC FM promotes democratic development by emphasising macro-issues (national interests) and systemic reforms. It empowers grassroots constituents by providing them with a platform that operates independently of government approval.

When non-governmental organisations or various groups of citizens criticise policies such as mining restrictions or national budgets on a private station, it results in a public crisis. The government cannot merely address a single issue, such as repairing a single bridge, to resolve the overarching problem; instead, it is compelled to elucidate or defend the entire policy framework. This type of scrutiny frequently prompts legislative reforms or policy modifications because the criticism is public, diverse, and cannot be dismissed as a mere personal grievance. Conversely, PC FM functions as the genuine fourth estate. By providing a platform for diverse voices that systematically challenge national interests, it obliges the government to advance beyond mere service delivery towards genuine political accountability.

While Radio Lesotho helps maintain the government's connection with community leaders, PC FM provides a vital watchdog function that facilitates diverse opinions. Collectively, they constitute a fragmented yet indispensable ecosystem; however, the predominant bias of the state broadcaster towards the ruling party is a considerable obstacle to achieving comprehensive electoral fairness. Although Radio Lesotho provides crucial stability and facilitates communication at the community level, its limited opposition diversity constrains its capacity to serve as a genuine public service broadcaster. In contrast, PC FM addresses the democratic deficit by promoting pluralism, although its reliance on commercial revenue necessitates that a substantial portion of airtime is made available for marketing rather than dedicated to informational purposes.

4.4.5 Use of WhatsApp

Both radio stations utilise WhatsApp daily to engage with their audience. The audience submits messages, which are then read aloud by the presenter to the guests, who subsequently comment on or respond to these messages. The incorporation of WhatsApp as an auxiliary communication channel constitutes a notable advancement. It functions as a digital equaliser, reducing barriers to access for individuals experiencing poor cellular reception for voice calls or who cannot afford the higher costs of direct telephone communication. Through the integration of this platform, both stations are broadening their public sphere.

This multi-channel approach transforms the radio station from a unidirectional broadcast tower into a multidirectional forum. Even at Radio Lesotho, where we

identified issues with telephone relaying, WhatsApp likely functions more effectively, as the guest can hear the presenter read a clear written message, thereby reducing the potential for distortion associated with paraphrasing a live caller. The integration of WhatsApp by both Radio Lesotho and PC FM serves as a crucial instrument for democratisation. It bridges the divide between the technical elite (those with studio access or advanced telephony) and the public, ensuring that the discourse more accurately reflects the broader societal voice rather than being limited to a few selected callers.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Overall, the CDA findings indicate that Radio Lesotho largely reproduces hegemonic state narratives through maintaining a consistently deferential tone, using selective, often non-confrontational questioning, and tightly regulating audience participation. By contrast, PC FM adopts a more adversarial and dialogic discursive orientation that is more conducive to fostering public accountability. Applying Fairclough's analytical framework, the study demonstrates that the discourse practices at both stations are embedded in, and constitutive of, broader socio-political power structures. This reveals a persistent tension between controlled and more democratic communicative spaces within Lesotho's contemporary media landscape.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examined the evolving role of radio in Lesotho's democratic development. Historically, the country's media landscape was predominantly controlled by state narratives; however, it is now increasingly shaped by the expanding private sector. As previously noted, mass media in Africa, particularly radio in Lesotho, are vital for bridging geographical barriers and engaging the Basotho populace. The transition from a sole state broadcaster in 1964 to the anticipated 28 stations by 2026 signifies a maturing democratic process. Nonetheless, the research seeks to evaluate whether this proliferation of stations genuinely signifies a broader extension of the public sphere.

This research primarily addressed the conflict between the Lesotho Government's conventional utilisation of media as a propaganda tool and the emergence of private radio stations such as PC FM, Harvest FM, and Mo-Africa FM. It analysed the content and programming of both governmental and private broadcasters to assess their contributions to fostering democratic dialogue and civic participation.

This concluding chapter encapsulates the findings related to the research objectives: analysing the way radio content engages the public sphere and assessing whether these programs foster active democratic participation. The chapter concludes with pragmatic recommendations for policymakers, journalists, and the Lesotho Communications Authority to cultivate a more robust and autonomous media environment.

The generality of this topic was narrowed down to the following specific research questions:

- How does the content of public and private radio contribute to the public sphere in Lesotho?
- To what extent do public and private radio stations produce programmes that promote democratic discourse?

5.2 CONCLUSIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS

The analysis of radio programming across public and private broadcasters in Lesotho using Fairclough's CDA framework clearly illustrates how discourse functions as a site where power, ideology and public participation are negotiated. By introducing telephone-based participation, private stations moved the public sphere from a lecture hall to a town square. This allowed the Basotho people to criticise the government and discuss the political and economic needs of the populace in real time. Although the Government of Lesotho has employed Radio Lesotho to disseminate its propaganda since the country's independence, private radio stations such as PC disrupt the state's monologue. By addressing the political and economic needs of the youth and disenfranchised populations, they broaden the public sphere to encompass those traditionally marginalised by the ruling elite.

According to the analysis, PC FM redefined the Basotho public from subjects who listen to politicians to citizens who articulate their opinions. This transformed listeners from passive subjects into active citizens, allowing them to debate policy, criticise corruption, demand accountability in real time, and critique government policies. Furthermore, an examination of electoral campaign programmes reveals that this domain extends beyond national borders, enabling the South African diaspora to engage in domestic political discourse. Consequently, this significantly enhances the public sphere.

Although private radio stations in Lesotho frequently encounter criticism for bias and partisanship, they fulfil a crucial role in preventing the monopolisation of the truth by any single entity. They foster a competitive public sphere in which diverse perspectives on reality are accessible to debate. This indicates that radio content in Lesotho primarily serves as a forum for renegotiating the social contract. The public broadcaster delineates the form of the public sphere, whereas the private stations contribute their substance through democratic discourse. Additionally, the direct caller-to-guest interaction model on PC FM eliminates the mediation filter present on Radio Lesotho, where the presenter occasionally transmits callers' questions to the guests. This engenders an atmosphere akin to a 'people's court', wherein the government is often tried in absentia.

Radio Lesotho significantly contributes to democratic discourse and demonstrates excellence in civic education and national outreach. Programs such as *Seboping* provide a structured platform for citizens to engage in discussions on national reforms, including the NRA and labour rights. It functions as a bridge linking the state with the 68.9% of the population residing in rural areas. Conversely, private radio stations serve as agents of public sphere. By hosting opposition voices and utilising informal, high-modality language, they normalise challenging the ruling elite. Their talk shows operate as 'people's courts', wherein the government is frequently held to account in absentia. While public radio advocates procedural democracy, aiming to inform the public about existing legislation and uphold a respectful order, private radio advocates participatory democracy, aiming to challenge power structures and provide a fearless voice for the disenfranchised.

At the textual level, Radio Lesotho frequently employed formal, deferential, and bureaucratic language, which aligned discourse with state authority, whereas PC FM adopted a more conversational, critical, and inclusive tone, positioning the presenter alongside the public. This distinction demonstrates how lexical choice, tone and modality are not neutral but ideologically loaded, affirming Fairclough's view that language is a social practice that shapes and reflects power relations (Fairclough, 2013).

Within discursive practice, the selection of guests, turn-taking protocols, and interactional patterns reveal varying institutional orientations. Radio Lesotho exemplified gatekeeping functions and mediated audience participation, thereby reflecting the institutional caution typical of state-affiliated media. Conversely, PC FM facilitated direct interactions between callers and guests and permitted sustained critique of governmental processes, embodying a more dialogic and participatory media culture. These discursive choices are consistent with Fairclough's (2013) concept that media routines can either reinforce prevailing ideologies or create opportunities for counter-discourse. They also align with Van Dijk's (2014) assertion that access to discourse constitutes a form of power.

At the level of social practice, the two broadcasting stations make a distinct contribution to Lesotho's democratic communication landscape. Radio Lesotho frequently reproduces hegemonic power structures by emphasising official narratives

and restricting confrontational questioning, illustrating how state media can serve as an ideological apparatus that sustains governmental legitimacy. Nonetheless, instances of critique, particularly concerning labour rights and media freedom, indicate that the public broadcaster is not entirely closed, but functions within negotiated spaces of permissible dissent. Conversely, PC FM operates as a counter-public sphere, amplifying marginal voices, challenging authority, and fostering contestation, a dynamic aligned with Fraser's (2024) concept of alternative publics and Habermas (2022) vision of deliberative engagement. Audience interaction at both stations demonstrates that citizens are not passive recipients but active participants in meaning-making who contest discourse and demand accountability.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Lesotho's radio landscape simultaneously advances and restricts democratic participation. Fairclough's model reveals a layered tension: while public radio maintains institutional alignment with the state, private radio expands discursive space for critique, transparency and civic voice. The coexistence of controlled and participatory communication practices suggests that democracy in Lesotho is not fixed but continuously reproduced through discourse that is contested, negotiated, and co-constructed in everyday talk. As Neff and Pickard (2023) assert, strengthening the media sector through policy reform, editorial autonomy, and professional development is therefore essential to deepen the public sphere and ensure that citizens' voices not only enter the debate but also meaningfully influence governance. Selinyane (2008) posits that the media's role in shaping public perception of democracy is as vital as citizens' liberty to articulate their perspectives and to advocate for and promote political parties.

Ultimately, this chapter establishes that discourse on Lesotho's airwaves is more than talk; it is a social force that shapes perception, distributes power, and enables (or inhibits) democratic possibility. As Habermas (2023) reminds us, a functioning public sphere relies on unrestricted dialogue, and as Fairclough illustrates, such dialogue becomes visible through language itself. The contrasting dynamics observed between Radio Lesotho and PC FM underscore this reality: where discourse is open, democracy is energised; where it is constrained, democracy is contained.

5.2.1 How does the content of public and private radio contribute to the public sphere in Lesotho?

The findings of this study suggest that both public and private radio stations play a substantial role in fostering the development of the public sphere in Lesotho. They achieve this by offering platforms for citizens to deliberate on national matters, articulate opinions, and participate in political processes. Nonetheless, the scope and manner of their contributions vary owing to differences in ownership structures, editorial independence, and programme content.

Public radio, exemplified by Radio Lesotho's *Seboping* programme, significantly contributes to the public sphere by disseminating information regarding government policies, national reforms, elections, labour issues, and other topics of public interest. The programme affords citizens the opportunity to engage through telephone calls and WhatsApp messages, allowing them to raise concerns and seek clarification from public officials. In this context, Radio Lesotho facilitates communication between the government and its citizens, thereby fostering public awareness and civic participation. Nonetheless, the study indicated that the content predominantly reflects state perspectives, with presenters generally adopting a cautious and deferential stance towards government representatives. Consequently, although public radio encourages public discourse, its capacity to promote critical debate and ensure government accountability remains somewhat limited by institutional and political influences.

Private radio, represented by PC FM's *Thahameso* programme, makes a substantial contribution to the public sphere by providing a platform for diverse perspectives and critical engagement with public issues. The programme consistently features opposition parties, civil society organisations, labour representatives, and ordinary citizens, fostering open debate on governance, democracy, corruption, elections, and national reforms. The presenters regularly challenge political actors and facilitate direct interaction between the audience and guests, thereby promoting deliberative dialogue. This methodology enhances democratic participation by enabling citizens to scrutinise public institutions and hold leaders accountable.

5.2.2. To what extent do public and private radio stations produce programmes that promote democratic discourse?

The findings of this study indicate that both public and private radio stations in Lesotho generate programmes that foster democratic discourse, albeit to varying degrees. Democratic discourse is defined as communication that facilitates public participation, freedom of expression, pluralism, accountability, transparency, and the exchange of diverse perspectives on issues of public interest.

Public radio, notably Radio Lesotho via its *Seboping* programme, fosters democratic discourse by offering citizens platforms to deliberate on national matters such as constitutional amendments, labour rights, electoral processes, governance, and media independence. The programme facilitates audience engagement through telephone calls and WhatsApp messages, thereby enabling citizens to express concerns and actively participate in public affairs.

Nevertheless, the research revealed that the scope of democratic discourse on Radio Lesotho is constrained by its institutional affiliation with the government. Presenters tend to adopt a cautious and deferential tone when interacting with government officials, and challenging questions are not consistently pursued. The selection of guests often favours representatives of the ruling party and government officials, thereby diminishing the diversity of perspectives accessible to the audience. As a result, although Radio Lesotho facilitates democratic discourse, it does so within limitations that restrict critical debate and thorough examination of political authority.

Private radio, exemplified by PC FM's *Thahameso* programme, significantly advances democratic discourse. The programme regularly offers a platform for opposition parties, civil society organisations, labour unions, political analysts, and ordinary citizens to discuss and debate issues of national significance. The presenter adopts a more critical and investigative approach, frequently challenging guests and promoting accountability.

The programme additionally advances pluralism by accommodating a variety of opinions and perspectives, including those that critique government policies and actions. Debates regarding national reforms, election campaigns, governance failures, corruption, and political accountability exemplify the station's dedication to fostering transparent and critical public discourse. This closely aligns with Habermas's concept

of the public sphere, where citizens engage in rational-critical discussion concerning societal issues.

5.2.3 Reflections on the critical political economy of the media

The findings of this study indicate that media ownership and funding structures considerably influence the nature of public discourse in Lesotho. The analysis demonstrated that Radio Lesotho, as a state-funded broadcaster, operates within a political and institutional context that promotes caution when addressing government affairs. While the station offers a platform for public discussion, its discourse often reflects official government viewpoints. Presenters generally adopt respectful and non-confrontational approaches towards government representatives, and discussions frequently reinforce existing political authority. This evidence substantiates CPEM's assertion that state ownership may restrict editorial autonomy and perpetuate dominant political ideologies.

In contrast, People's Choice FM exhibited greater editorial independence owing to its commercial ownership structure. The station allocated increased opportunities for opposition voices, civil society organisations, and ordinary citizens to scrutinise government decisions. Presenters adopted a more critical stance and regularly questioned political leaders. Nonetheless, the study also revealed that commercial pressures affected programming decisions. Frequent advertisements and promotional interruptions occasionally disrupted public discourse, thereby underscoring the impact of market forces on media content.

5.2.4 Reflection on the participatory democracy theory

The findings demonstrate that both radio stations played a role in fostering democratic participation by offering audiences various avenues to express their perspectives on national issues. Through channels such as telephone calls and WhatsApp messages, citizens actively engaged in discussions on topics including constitutional reforms, labour rights, media freedom, elections, governance, and corruption. These interactions enabled citizens to voice grievances, demand accountability, and actively contribute to public discourse.

Nevertheless, the quality of engagement exhibited notable disparities between the two stations. At Radio Lesotho, audience involvement was frequently facilitated by

presenters who relayed questions to guests. This framework restricted direct engagement between citizens and policymakers, thereby diminishing opportunities for authentic discourse. As a result, participation was observed but remained limited.

Conversely, PC FM fostered a more participatory communication model. The station regularly permitted direct interaction between callers and guests, thereby enabling citizens to challenge political figures, seek clarification, and actively contribute to discussions. The findings indicate that citizens were not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in democratic discourse. Through their engagement, they exercised their democratic rights and exhibited enhanced political awareness and confidence.

5.2.5 Reflections on the public sphere theory

The findings indicate that both Seboping and Thahameso served as public spheres, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. Radio Lesotho provided a platform for public discussion and enabled citizens to voice concerns related to governance and public policy. However, the station's institutional ties to government structures limited the scope for critical debate. The dominance of government representatives and the presenter's careful approach frequently impeded the emergence of wholly independent public discourse.

In contrast, PC FM more closely reflected Habermas's ideal public sphere. The station facilitated open discussion, encouraged diverse viewpoints, and enabled critical engagement with political authority. Opposition parties, civil society organisations, labour representatives, media practitioners, and ordinary citizens were regularly given opportunities to participate in discussions. The station created an environment in which citizens could challenge dominant narratives and contribute to shaping public opinion.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

While Radio Lesotho possesses a nationwide reach, private stations are generally confined to urban centres. This study predominantly represents the urban public sphere, which may overlook the ways in which rural listeners in the mountain districts engage with or interpret these broadcasts. CDA analyses the text and the interaction (callers), but it cannot account for the 'silent majority', those who listen but never call

in. Their level of engagement and the impact of the discourse on their democratic behaviour are outside the scope of this qualitative analysis. Thus, further research is recommended in this regard. On the other hand, although the study finds that the radio stations in Lesotho, whether public or private, promote the public sphere in various ways, it may be prudent to compare the public sphere of Lesotho's radio stations with those of other SADC nations, such as Botswana or Eswatini, to determine if the 'partisan watchdog' model is a regional trend.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is essential to pay particular attention to various contextual differences, as residents in rural districts may experience media access and participation differently from those in urban districts, such as Maseru. Furthermore, community radio stations play a vital role in disseminating information and fostering the public sphere within local communities. Thus, there must be studies within the country that quantify their contribution to democratic discourses. In addition, there must be a comparative analysis that evaluates whether community stations offer more inclusive platforms for local concerns than national broadcasters.

Given that the research primarily focused on the urban population, which has access to radios and phones for communication during programs, it is crucial for future researchers to include the rural population, who lack these communication facilities, to analyse how they can participate in and contribute to the nation's democracy. This approach will ensure a comprehensive representation of the entire Lesotho community's engagement.

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