

**COMMUNICATION
AND SOCIALCHANGE
IN AFRICA:
SELECTED CASE STUDIES**

Theory on Demand #55

Communication and Social Change in Africa: Selected Case Studies

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Design and EPUB development: Maja Korczyńska

Published by the Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam 2025.

ISBN: 9789083412542

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been the result of multiple months of collaborations, meetings, and emails. So many individuals and institutions made it possible and to them, we owe our thanks. When we conceptualized this project, we wanted to have a book that captured the multifaceted nature of communication, mass media and social change in the African context, and it has been a reality through the collaboration and understanding of our editors, reviewers, chapter contributors and publishers.

We specifically want to thank all our contributors, for submitting case studies and chapters, we appreciate them for working with us through the editorial process. We also want to express our appreciation to all our reviewers; this book has been possible because of your knowledgeable opinions and expert guidance.

Finally, we would like to thank the Institute of Network Cultures for working with us to publish this manuscript. Especially, to Geert Lovink for having the patience to work with us to make this monograph a reality.

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6. HARNESSING THE POWER OF LISTENING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN A DISRUPTED MEDIA ECOLOGY

THEODORA DAME ADJIN-TETTEY AND ANTHEA GARMAN

Introduction

One of the key attributes of democracy is freedom of speech and expression.¹ Hence, in many democratic dispensations, it is expected that there are no restrictions on what the media report on and how media practitioners do their work, albeit professionally (i.e., in compliance with the regulatory and professional framework that guides their practice). The public also has the right to speak out on matters of public interest and to demand accountability from those in positions of authority, both political, public, and corporate, to effect social change. This, we believe, is how freedom of speech and expression is extended to the public. The media, in keeping with their democratic duty, set the agenda and provide public interest issues the time and space they need to be expressed, which plays a critical role in promoting freedom of expression and social change.²

However, over time, the relationship between the ‘traditional’ notion of audience and the media has evolved. This is because there is an apparent blurring of the lines between the media content creator, disseminator, and consumer of media content. Thanks to the development of Computer-Mediated Communications (CMC), nearly any media user can now produce media content, provided they have access to the necessary tools. Further accentuating this ‘new’ norm are the social media platforms and other participatory media that allow for the easy dissemination of content. The content that we view online, including those that are posted on social media platforms, comes from a variety of sources, including bloggers, professional journalists, amateur ‘journalists,’ people with a range of interests and goals, corporations and business organizations, politicians, and governmental organizations. One disadvantage of this trend is the spread of false information and fake news, which undermines the ability of media professionals and/or organizations to act as gatekeepers to ensure that only verified and trustworthy content is made available to the public.

However, the uniqueness of the present times is that even though legacy media may be carrying out their functions dutifully, individuals do not necessarily have to rely on them for space and airtime to put words to their thoughts and communicate to whomever they want to address issues to in any form, be it text, audio, visuals or a mix of formats. As alluded to

1 Van Vollenhoven, Willem Johannes. ‘The right to freedom of expression: The mother of our democracy.’ *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal/Potchefstroomse Elektroniese Regsblad* 18.6 (2015): 2299-2327.

2 Thomas, Ryan J. ‘Book Review: Jeffrey C Alexander, Elizabeth Butler Breese and María Luengo (eds) *The crisis of journalism reconsidered: Democratic culture, professional codes, digital future.*’ *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*. 18. 7 (2017): 927-929.

earlier, the digitized public sphere has become an enabler of speaking truth to power, thereby amplifying citizens' agency.³ With the rapid generation and sharing of content on various platforms available on the internet, almost everyone who has access to the internet and has signed up to any social media network is exposed to tons of information. This potentially leads to internet users being inundated with a host of information which can result in information overload, a term associated with the excessive quantity of daily information consumed.⁴ In a world where nearly everyone with internet access has some form of control over media content production and dissemination and is also a member of the media audience, the question that begs for an answer is: who is listening to whom?

Listening here is used to represent giving attention to any kind of information or speaker, including online content of various formats, messages or content for meaning, soundness, or substance. Husband⁵ defines listening as 'an act of attention, a willingness to focus on the other, to heed both their presence and their communication.' The listening theory provides very insightful perspectives and offers some important reflections about how people [can] engage meaningfully in various contexts to arrive at useful decisions to harness positive social change, which we, borrowing from Simandan,⁶ define as the modification of social structural mechanisms, as evidenced by shifts in social structures, cultural symbols, norms of behavior, or value systems. In this particular context, the focus of our attention is social change that reflects positively on society.

With earlier conceptualizations by Susan Bickford, other scholars have also contributed meaningfully to conceptualizations of the listening theory in various communicative contexts. In this chapter, we go into some detail regarding the many submissions made about the listening theory in the following contexts: journalism, online media interactions, and public discourse. We use those arguments to make the case for how listening can be effectively used to bring about social change. We also attempt to put forward other dynamics of listening among individuals and corporations and suggest another mode of listening that occurs in participatory media, which we believe when utilized consciously can bring about positive social change.

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- 3 Geise, Stephanie, Axel Heck, and Diana Panke. 'The effects of digital media images on political participation online: Results of an eye-tracking experiment integrating individual perceptions of "photo news factors":' *Policy & Internet* 13.1 (2021): 54-85.
 - 4 Roetzel, Peter Gordon. 'Information overload in the information age: a review of the literature from business administration, business psychology, and related disciplines with a bibliometric approach and framework development.' *Business research* 12.2 (2019): 479-522.
 - 5 Husband, Charles. 'Between listening and understanding.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 441-443.
 - 6 Simandan, Dragos. 'Being surprised and surprising ourselves: A geography of personal and social change.' *Progress in Human Geography* 44.1 (2020): 99-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132518810431>

What the Listening Theory says about Public Discourse

It is no doubt that there will be no communication if there are only voices and no listeners who will have to pay attention to and possibly act on the information. Most scholars agree that it is essential to understand the relationship between listening and speaking, and how interdependent and dynamic they are.⁷ Consequently, 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?'.⁸ Intrinsicly woven in the quoted statement is the fact that communication achieves its purpose when there is someone to receive it (the listener) and possibly act on it. Consequently, value should not be placed on listening at the expense of speaking.⁹ Likewise, Bickford¹⁰ fundamentally argues that to achieve results with communication, there should be a party that is ready to listen. Conceptualizing listening as an act of concentration, Merleau-Ponty¹¹ suggests that the listener fades into the background throughout the communication interaction and makes the speaker or the bearer of the message the center of attention.

Susan Bickford, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's submission, suggests that listening is an attempt to provide for a range of expressions that could be unexpected and thought-provoking.¹² This means that no matter one's stance on an issue, a good listener should be open to any view held in any interaction or discourse. We believe that this is one of the surest ways that duty-bearers can be responsive to societal needs.

Bickford offers that listening and speaking are interdependent, in that both are active responses to each other. She, further, likens listening to speaking and suggests that both are creative acts. As a creative act, demanding a certain level of attention to others, listening requires a conscious resolve which is equally essential for speaking. Bickford, exploring what listening demands in a democratic and diverse unequal social order, proposes that to listen effectively, value must be placed on the distinctiveness of the speaker as a whole and refers to Simone Weil's¹³ proposition of placing value on a speaker - '... the whole of him. The arms, the eyes, the thoughts, everything'. This kind of listening sets aside personal biases, judgment, and passiveness and demands 'self-annihilation' and genuine openness to the speaker [or the message].¹⁴

7 Bickford, Susan. *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

8 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (1990). *The postcolonial critic*. Routledge, 1990.

9 Couldry, Nick. 'Rethinking the politics of voice: Commentary.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 579-582.

10 Bickford, Susan. *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

11 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 'Phenomenology of perception.' *Translated by Colin Smith* (1965).

12 Bickford, Susan. *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

13 Weil, Simone. *Selected Essays, 1934-1943: Historical, Political, and Moral Writings*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015.

14 _____

On the question of openness and self-annihilation in listening, Gemma Corradi Fiumara suggests fundamental openness which lets the listener be ‘overwhelmed by the message.’¹⁵ She argues that genuine listening leaves the listener experiencing differences, ‘anomalies’ and contradictions that challenge what they believe in, which could make them make better judgments. It can be assumed that once the judgment is suspended and a conscious effort is made to listen attentively for the substance of a message, the listener will be able to decipher the rationality of the argument or message being put across and make a better judgment. Fiumara, therefore, challenges the human tendency to always stick to their individual views and resist any views that oppose theirs:

It almost seems that ‘culture’ requires aspirants to participate according to their specific qualifications, to become adherents to an immense task of justifying a ‘logic’ that knows very well how to say practically everything and hardly knows how to listen.¹⁶

She advocates objectivity in listening, postulating that it is an ‘intrinsic quality of philosophical rigor’. When there is judgment during or before listening, personal biases will likely interfere in the assessment of the content of the message or information. Sharing a similar view, Levin¹⁷ proposes that the listener must yield to the speaker and neutralize attractions and aversions.

Susan Bickford refers to Levin’s position as courageous listening, where people courageously and consciously put away their fears and predispositions and listen actively. She submits that silence is one of the often-cited conditions for achieving this kind of listening and offers that silence is not the mere lack of sound but the absence of sound. Just like speaking and listening, silence and speech are mutually reliant on each other, and silence as a condition of listening is also an intentional act.¹⁸ This means that silence must be consciously created to give space to the speaker. However, Bickford was quick to add that silence has several interpretations and, thus, can be misleading, if it is the only marker for listening. She, thus, recommended additional conditions for listening such as the listener asking questions, which signifies the readiness to listen and helps direct the terms of discussion in a specific manner.

Listening, however, does not mean the listener cannot be critical of what is being spoken about. Levin¹⁹ reasons that the kind of listening suggested in the listening theory does not prevent one from making critical judgments, but those judgments must come from the ‘neutral space’ of genuine listening in which judgment has been suspended. Susan Bickford equally recommends avoiding two extremes when listening: simply exchanging one’s ideas with the speaker or simply defensively deciding not to listen. These conditions are suggested because one should be able to listen to understand or make meaning of what the other party is saying

15 Fiumara, Gemma Corradi. *The other side of language: A philosophy of listening*. Routledge, 2013.

16

17 Levin, David Michael. *The listening self: Personal growth, social change and the closure of metaphysics*. Routledge, 2019.

18 Bickford, Susan. *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

19 Levin, David Michael. *The listening self: Personal growth, social change and the closure of metaphysics*. Routledge, 2019.

to offer an alternative position, even in the context where one does not share the views of the other party.

Another inference that may be made is that individuals who lend a listening ear in public are more likely to receive it back when they present their arguments or opinions. The central point here is that for good public discourse to yield fruitful results, such as leading to social change, listening becomes a path-building activity that requires those in the communicative interaction to engage one another's perspectives. Understanding the various viewpoints on a subject is crucial for both fitting in and, more significantly, for coming to sound judgments or decisions.

Listening is thought to provide a lot of benefits, the dominant one being bringing actors and institutions into clearer relationships with each other,²⁰ where each party is ready to consciously give attention to the substance of an argument, thought, or viewpoint. This mode of listening, where judgment and aversions are suspended and openness is embraced, ensures that rationality prevails and the communication actors can then become aware of the perspectives of an issue to offer solutions that will be mutually beneficial.²¹

We submit that conversations yield better results if all parties are ready to listen to the different perspectives of an issue and find common ground. This is even more important in public discourse when conversations usually center on issues of public interest which can potentially lead to social change. If people are not ready to listen to one another, it is unlikely that we will arrive at well-considered solutions that include opposing and alternative viewpoints that reveal potential gaps that need to be fixed beforehand. It will be voices and, possibly, no solutions or solutions that never meet the majority's needs or expectations. The listening theory, therefore, provides a framework for public discourse engagements.

Based on this, we argue that to arrive at useful conclusions and decisions that yield positive social change, leaders at all levels must listen without aversions and put aside preconceived notions or biases when dealing with subordinates. Since the marker of listening can be ambiguous, it is also suggested that an assessment of whether listening has occurred in public discourses should center on how the different sides of an argument are given space and how they reflect in objective and rational decision-making.

Online Media and Listening

A lot of attention has been given to how online media is giving a 'voice' to the masses while overlooking other forms of online engagement including the emergent disciplines of online attention (listening).²² She maintains that listening is a 'significant practice of intimacy, con-

20 O'donnell, Penny, Justine Lloyd, and Tanja Dreher. 'Listening, pathbuilding and continuations: A research agenda for the analysis of listening.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 423-439.

21 Bickford, Susan. *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

22 Crawford, Kate, 'These foolish things: On intimacy and insignificance in mobile media.' In Goggin, Gerard and Larissa Hjorth, (Eds.) *Mobile Technologies*. Routledge, 2009a, pp. 252-265.

nection, obligation, and participation online'²³ and therefore needs to be given the needed attention. Crawford contends that 'lurking', which is often used to describe the activity of being present in public online spaces but not prominently speaking up²⁴ has failed to present the nuances that exist with the degrees of online attention (listening) and submits that at the individual, corporate, and political levels, various degrees of attention (listening) occur online resulting in different qualities of listening.

It is based on this argument that in our previous work,²⁵ we probed the relationship between listening and lurking and proposed seven types of lurking that occur on social media which are motivation-based and are a demonstration of the practice of online attention, intimacy, connection, obligation and participation. Similarly, Crawford proposed three modes of online listening: background listening, reciprocal listening, and delegated listening which are adopted by individuals depending on whether they are representing themselves or acting on behalf of an organization.

Crawford²⁶ looks at background listening in the light of how radio audiences interact with radio content - tuning in and tuning out. With online media, the individual scans through posts without focusing on any particular one. This she likens to the radio, 'where commentary and conversations continue as a backdrop throughout the day, with only a few moments requiring concentrated attention'.²⁷ With social media, regular internet access could mean that messages from social media platforms could pop up anytime there is a post or update; however, the user may not be necessarily interested in reading the messages. So just like radio, the social media user 'tunes out', although the messages keep popping up.

Additionally, there is the case where the user deliberately accesses their account to read messages, a behavior Crawford compares to "tuning in"—just as when someone purposely tunes in to a radio station to listen to specific programs. Background listening, therefore, occurs in three modes: 1) where the user simply does not pay attention to messages because they are not interested in reading them; 2) where the user scans through the messages and does not particularly pay attention to any; and 3) where a user reads the messages but does not respond to them. These modes of paying attention in online spaces (listening) do not offer any feedback which could lead to decision-making.

Crawford's reciprocal listening is likened to how some individuals who have social media profiles constantly respond to posts of followers or give an indication that posts are being

23 Crawford, Kate. 'Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009b): 525-535.

24 Crawford, Kate, 'These foolish things: On intimacy and insignificance in mobile media.' In Goggin, Gerard and Larissa Hjorth, (Eds.) *Mobile Technologies*. Routledge, 2009a, pp. 252-265.

25 Adjin-Tettey, Theodora Dame and Anthea Garman. 'Lurking as a mode of listening in social media: motivations-based typologies.' *Digital Transformation and Society* 2.1 (2023): 11-26.

26 Crawford, Kate, 'These foolish things: On intimacy and insignificance in mobile media.' In Goggin, Gerard and Larissa Hjorth, (Eds.) *Mobile Technologies*. Routledge, 2009a, pp. 252-265.

27 Crawford, Kate. 'Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009b): 525-535.

seen. Although this brings about a sense that followers are being taken seriously or posts are being recognized, this form of listening, Crawford suggests, is not used in corporations or by people who have given others the responsibility to listen on their behalf. She contends that if politicians do not personally write the messages but delegate the activities of posting and responding to posts from followers to staffers, it can neither be recognized as a conversation nor engagement with a community of users (i.e., reciprocal listening) and can also be considered deceptive. To Crawford, reciprocal listening only occurs when the profile user personally responds to posts.

Delegated listening is another mode of listening that occurs online, where users outsource their online activities to others. Crawford holds the view that politicians and corporate entities employ this mode of listening quite often. In this manner or mode of listening, there is someone responsible for reading posts and perhaps responding to posts, but it is done impersonally as another person is given the responsibility to do that on behalf of the account/profile owner. Feedback on posts provided to followers is also done by representatives of individuals or organizations. Crawford²⁸ has characterized this as suggesting 'something akin to ventriloquism – a pretense of presence, or a consultation puppet-show'.

Although Crawford²⁹ does not consider delegated listening a perfect example of listening and views it as a mere public relations tactic, we hold the view that delegated listening offers a fertile avenue to get to know what people are saying about an individual or organization. This is because the act of placing the responsibility on someone to look out for what people are posting or saying, providing followers with feedback, and taking feedback from followers to the organization to act on is evidence of a good attempt to listen. Delegated listening offers some form of engagement with followers which makes them feel that they are being listened to or acknowledged. We are therefore confident that delegated listening could work well as much as reciprocal listening does if intentionally utilized.

Journalism and Listening

In the context of journalism, listening can be regarded as representativeness of the needs of diverse societal groupings in media coverage to bring about social change beyond giving a voice. Husband³⁰ postulates that there are two kinds of listening related to media content production - receptivity and recognition. However, Tanja Dreher³¹ contends that although 'media recognition' is essential, it is not enough to contribute to ensuring various constituents of the media are represented. She suggests that recognition directs attention to 'communicative justice on attention and response as well as on access to material resources' where

28 Crawford, Kate, 'These foolish things: On intimacy and insignificance in mobile media.' In Goggin, Gerard and Larissa Hjorth, (Eds.) *Mobile Technologies*. Routledge, 2009a, pp. 252-265.

29 Crawford, Kate. 'Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009b): 525-535.

30 Husband, Charles. 'The right to be understood: Conceiving the multi-ethnic public sphere.' *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 9.2 (1996): 205-215.

31 Dreher, Tanja. 'Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 445-458.

justice goes beyond the amount of airtime, or ‘access to the means of production’.³²

Listening in the media demands that media practitioners (especially those who make editorial decisions) strategically ensure that different voices (perspectives) of an issue are heard. Beyond that, they have to create room for the representativeness of different facets of society, be it the marginalized, vulnerable, and minority groups. In all of these, Dreher stresses that recognition should be woven around ‘the esteem, value, and attention given to social and cultural difference as questions of justice’.³³ Husband³⁴ believes that there has been a one-sided way of looking at representativeness in the light of having the right to produce, disseminate, and consume media content without looking at how media content meets the actual needs of constituents of media organizations. This stance makes it imperative for media organizations to clearly define the target group(s) they serve and factor them or somehow involve them in editorial decisions to serve them appropriately.

This may look like a daunting or impossible task but Dreher³⁵ suggests an instructive approach where media productions are ‘power sensitive and responsive to the inequalities and conflicts that shape speaking and listening relationships.’ Listening in the media (‘Listening across difference’) is essentially about ensuring that media productions reflect the needs of the communities that media organizations serve. This is opposed to media organizations initiating stories and asking community members for their reactions. The American Press Institute’s (API) report on the ‘culture of listening’ in the media designates listening as media producers regarding audiences as ‘constituents, not consumers’.³⁶

Media organizations that listen are expected to ask for the ideas, insights, and feedback of their constituents and factor them into content production. By so doing, media organizations set agendas that emanate from what their publics want and effectively bring about social change. Media organizations, therefore, become more accountable to the constituents they serve, and the organizations, in turn, get support from their constituents. Listening in the media is done by looking out for the information needs of target audiences and getting feedback and views from those who feel alienated or are usually overlooked in news or media coverage.

As a way of assessing themselves and making sure they are listening, the report recommends that media organizations conduct staff audits to ensure there are a variety of backgrounds and perspectives in terms of sources and ascertain whether they reflect the representativeness of the community they serve; nurture a relationship with audiences and critical constituents

32 Dreher, Tanja. ‘Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice.’ *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 445-458.

33 Dreher, Tanja. ‘Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice.’ *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 445-458.

34 Husband, Charles. ‘Between listening and understanding.’ *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 441-443.

35 Dreher, Tanja. ‘Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice.’ *Continuum* 23.4 (2009): 445-458.

36 Goins, Cole. ‘How a Culture of Listening Strengthens Reporting and Relationships.’, 4 September 2018, <https://americanpressinstitute.org/how-a-culture-of-listening-strengthens-reporting-and-relationships/>

of the organization; and liaise with community influencers to help newsrooms find areas where news coverage may be lacking. By building cordial relationships with constituents, it becomes easy to get information that will direct content production and get valuable feedback on content produced.

From this, listening in the media entails recognizing any form of inequalities that exist in society as well as marginalized groups, be it social, political, or cultural, and giving them a voice or providing an avenue for them to tell their stories. It is about who is speaking and who is listening. The question to ask when assessing whether media organizations are listening, therefore, is: Who has been given the voice to be listened to?

Morgan³⁷ says that the critical questions to ask when putting content in the media are Who cares about this issue, and why? What do they want to know? If they wanted to make a change, what information would they need? She believes that these questions when answered objectively result in better reporting, build stronger ties with audiences, and make organizations accountable to their constituents because audiences identify with and are interested in content projected in the media. Since journalists' efforts to listen may not be in the best interest of a group or community that the organization seeks to serve,³⁸ journalists must let communities talk about what they want rather than forcing them to talk about issues they may not be interested in. This could take the form of inviting opinion leaders to be part of editorial meetings.

The American Press Institute also suggests that journalists can identify already-existing spaces or create new spaces where they can listen. Spaces, where conversations are already ongoing including online communities such as social media platforms, events and places (including markets, church, and gaming centers) Informal gatherings in coffee shops and restaurants are also fertile grounds for getting people in their comfort zone to share what is important to them, which can be factored in news content production. Journalists can, as well, create spaces including digital platforms, and invite conversations.

The Listening Post Collective Playbook also encourages journalists to get community leaders to share what they are hearing from residents concerning their needs and priorities with them. This form of listening is undoubtedly a viable way of ensuring that media organizations attend to the needs of the communities in which they find themselves. This must be encouraged because a media organization whose motive is to inform, educate, entertain, provide a voice for the constituents it serves, and ultimately effect social change cannot fully realize these objectives until it knows what its targets want by way of information, education, and entertainment. The organization cannot also adequately be the mouthpiece of its constituents if it is not acquainted with their needs.

37 Morgan, Fiona. 'Listen to people who care.' 2 March 2016, <https://medium.com/free-press/listen-to-people-who-care-6d6008dfaf40>

38 Goins, Cole. 'How a Culture of Listening Strengthens Reporting and Relationships.', 4 September 2018, <https://americanpressinstitute.org/how-a-culture-of-listening-strengthens-reporting-and-relationships/>

Bringing it all Together

Applying the listening theory to a real-life (journalism) scenario, we mention the television show, *The Big Debate*, a South African television debate series aired on the South African Broadcasting Corporations' television station, which highlighted contemporary socio-political issues to be debated. The concept took the form of a typical 'town hall debate'. There was a moderator, key guests, and studio guests who were not restricted in expressing their opinions on matters that were debated. Because the nature of topics discussed centered on issues that affect people's day-to-day lives, such as racism, poverty, discrimination, social services, and security, a lot of the time, the debates got heated to the extent that some guests abandoned the debates and walked out. This unwillingness to listen to others who have a different stance on an issue and holding on to views that may not necessarily be absolute could lead to a cycle of actions that does not benefit society generally. This is because, as argued earlier, people who do not listen are not able to suspend their aversions and open themselves up to be challenged to arrive at the most valuable decisions.

When the listening theory is applied to political discourse, politicians will be willing to 'listen out' to those they do not share political ideologies with, in recognition of the fact that value must be placed on other people's opinions as they may offer valuable input to the cause that is being pursued. They will thus avoid being overly defensive and sticking to only their convictions, even though those ideas may not be the best options. Through listening, there will be a conscious effort to find a middle ground on issues of public interest. Besides, during policy decision-making processes, there will be a conscious attempt to listen to those for whom decisions are made to arrive at policies that will receive the buy-in of most (if not all) constituents of society.

Furthermore, the watchdog role of the media makes it imperative for practitioners to be listeners. When journalism is practised to fulfill its civic duty and watchdog role, and listening is viewed as having a socio-political purpose, journalists will intentionally play their role to ensure that every aspect of their constituents' well-being is brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities so they can take appropriate action for social change to be realized.

Although there is the view that delegated listening cannot be well-thought-out as 'ideal' listening because individuals and corporations who 'own' social media profiles do not engage followers directly, we contend that that stance is not wholly valid. This is because whoever is given the responsibility of managing a social media profile on behalf of an individual or an organization, often, cannot arbitrarily make decisions about what to post and how to respond to posts. That individual will have to constantly get the involvement of the profile user or account holder. For this reason, the inputs of the profile user become core to what is put up and what is not, and even how to respond to posts. We argue that when decisions concerning the management of the account are made in consultation with an account holder, it signifies that the account holder values the relationship with followers.

In every organization, it is individuals who act on behalf of the organizations in specific capacities, according to the organization's standards and norms. The one acting on behalf of the

organization responds to issues based on how the organization wants to handle them. If an organization appoints someone whose duty is to manage the company's social media profile, be it as a primary duty or an added responsibility, it means the value is placed on recognition and by extension listening.

This paper takes the stance that delegated listening will occur when the organization or user outsources every decision about the account as Crawford describes in the case of organizations or individuals that hire the services of agents or professional micro bloggers to craft online presence for them. These individuals and entities, although they want to have an online presence, do not want to assume the responsibility of creating and managing accounts. They do not bother themselves with responding to posts or making posts. All those decisions are 'delegated' to others. One cannot delegate and at the same time be central to decision-making and activities on the social media profile or page.

Therefore, the nuanced stance we hold slightly contrary to Crawford's explanation for delegated listening is that if an organization or individual falls on an agency or someone to take up the responsibility of managing their social media presence, that can be considered delegated listening. However, if the individual is central to every action on the account, gets updated on what followers are saying regularly, and uses feedback from posts to make decisions, it means there is a form of recognition occurring that needs to be delineated properly from the total outsourcing of the management of profiles.

Personal accounts can be traced to individuals. Because of that users are likely to be mindful of how they react to posts, in order not to destroy their reputation. Public figures (whose image in the public domain is very important to them) will therefore have to act with a lot of restraint and consideration if they decide to manage their account. To avert mistakes that a public figure may be thrown into, which can affect their reputation, it is advisable to let someone be at the interface with agreed terms of engagement with followers. For this reason, it cannot be expressly concluded that a politician or celebrity account holder who makes another person (staffer) be at the interface of attending to post is not listening.

The social media manager is likely not to be emotionally attached to the account and will be more dispassionate about issues and find a civil way of engaging in acceptable public discourse as espoused by Susan Bickford. By making another person the interface between the account or the profile owner and online followers, the social media manager serves as a 'shock absorber' and makes sure the tone of content posted and feedback on posts are acceptable. In this case, the account holder is always aware of what is happening on their page because their is in constant touch with the account manager. The account holder is regularly updated on what followers are posting and is involved in decisions about content to be posted. The account manager, mindful of the reputation management role that has been handed them, will most likely ensure there is civility in their public discourse on behalf of the account holder.

On delegated listening in organizations, as stated elsewhere in this piece, organizations always have people acting on their behalf. So, it is only standard that an organization gives social media management responsibility to an individual or agency. If the agency or individual is

required to regularly update management with information from followers for decision-making and provide feedback to followers based on management decisions, it is maintained that that organization is listening. This cannot be categorized as reciprocal listening, and neither can it fit adequately as delegated listening because the account holder plays a significant role in how the account is managed. Given the apparent nuances, it is argued that it is crucial to distinguish between two types of listening: one that is given to a third party but frequently needs updates, feedback, and inputs, and another that doesn't require any kind of input from the account owner or manager.

Interface Listening Proposed

It is argued that listening occurs when decisions about what gets posted and how to respond to posts are made in consultation with the organization or individual account holder, and when it has been purposefully decided that someone should listen on behalf of an organization or individual (e.g., Celebrity or politician). If Crawford³⁹ says some form of listening occurs in the above scenario but it cannot be categorized as reciprocal listening in definite terms, then there should be a more definite term for that form of listening other than delegated listening. The argument here is that, per Crawford's description of delegated listening, two qualities of listening can occur: (1) where decisions about account management are solely in the hands of an account manager and (2) where there is the involvement of the account holder in the management of the account. So, broadly categorizing both modes as delegated listening could be problematic. Although it may not be regarded as reciprocal listening, the second mode (2) as stated above can neither be regarded as delegated listening.

A more adequate term to describe the mode where there is the involvement of the account holder in the management of the account is thus proposed: interface listening. Delegated listening should hence be used to refer to the listening mode that is outsourced and does not require the regular input of the account holder. Corporations or perhaps individuals outsource the creation and management of accounts totally and do not have an interest in being in the mix of management of the account. Interface listening occurs when the account holder/owner is interested in what happens on the account, obtains and uses feedback from followers for decision-making, and is involved in decisions about the content of posts and when to post (although they do not personally post).

Concluding Thoughts

Listening can serve as an essential catalyst for positive social change by promoting understanding, empowerment, collaboration, and accountability among society's many voices and perspectives on various platforms and levels when intentionally and consciously employed as a developmental tool. It creates space for deliberate debate, educated choice-making, and collective action to build more just, equitable, and inclusive communities.

39 Crawford, Kate. 'Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media.' *Continuum* 23.4 (2009b): 525-535.

This chapter's discussion offers a framework for participating in public debates in which people exchange ideas and listen to one another's viewpoints to reach a practical and meaningful social change. It also sets the foundation for exploring various research agendas. Among the relevant issues, researchers can explore public engagements both in the media and in the physical space; how listening occurs in such spaces and their consequences; and how governments create listening spaces to listen to citizenry and whether that goes into decision-making and policy-making. In the context of journalism, studies can be conducted on how journalists are creating listening spaces and whether their constituents feel listened to. In terms of social media, studies on non-active participatory practices that occur can be studied and theorized as well.

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