

Studio Tamani's coverage and its contributions to the peace process in Mali

An explorative study on the characteristics of Studio Tamani's news and dialogue formats and its potential contributions to change of knowledge, perceptions and further impacts

CONCLUSION

This research consists of four different studies, which provide four different perspectives on the main research question: How and to what extent have the programs of Studio Tamani contributed to the peace process in Mali?

On the one hand, this multi-level approach allowed the research to test existing hypotheses on the effects of Studio Tamani programs. On the other hand, the research was done in an explorative way in order to find new effects which have not been thought of so far when it comes to the effects of radio programs on the audience in general and on the actors in the peace process.

Methods

Concerning methods, this research project worked with a new approach in two ways:

First, it combines two well-elaborated methods of empirical media research in a way that has not been used in studies on media in conflict or post-conflict environments: content analysis of news and dialogue programs, and interviews with listeners and experts. The content analysis preceded the interviews, so that the findings from the content analysis could be used when designing the questionnaire for the audience and expert interviews.

Second, special attention was given to the selection of a treatment and a control group. As often in evaluative studies which try to measure the effect of mass media, there is the problem of "self-selection"¹: The listeners of a certain program select their programs intentionally, based on their individual expectations and needs; thus media use is by no means randomly spread in a population. Therefore listeners of a program cannot simply be considered as treatment group and compared to non-listeners, who would then function as control group, because the two groups quite likely differ in relevant characteristics, such as educational level, socio-cultural and socio-economic background, or media preferences. Any differences that would be detected between the two groups could then be

¹ Of course the easiest way to avoid the problem of self-selection would be to carry out a baseline study and repeat the study after some exposure to a media program. However, no baseline study was carried out before the Studio Tamani programs started to be broadcasted, as is often the case with such kinds of media programs.

an effect of the media program, but they could just as well be related to the different nature of the two groups. Or, in other words, differences between listeners and non-listeners could be cause or effect of the differing media use.

In order to overcome this problem, the members of the treatment group and the control group were selected with the aim to have both groups represent the same random spectrum within the general population. Specifically, the treatment group consisted on the one hand of listeners of Studio Tamani programs, but also of people who know Studio Tamani, who could therefore listen to Studio Tamani programs, but who chose not to. This treatment group is then compared to a control group which is made up of people who don't know Studio Tamani at all, but who show the same diversity concerning educational level, economic level, etc. Selecting people from the same geographic location and similar socio-economic classes ensured that the groups are most similar, and any differences towards issues related to the perception and knowledge of the conflict could thus be attributed to the influence of Studio Tamani programs.

Findings

The content analysis comparing the news program of Studio Tamani with those of ORTM and Radio Klédu shows that the news program of Studio Tamani deals with the conflict and related issues, such as violent acts all over the country related to the conflict, significantly more often. This service is appreciated by the listeners, as the interviews show. The news paying great attention to the conflict are not seen as sensational reporting, as could be the case in a western context. This comprehensive coverage of the conflict has the effect that listeners to Studio Tamani news tend to see themselves better informed on the conflict than people in the control group.

Thus the **first effect** of Studio Tamani news is: Studio Tamani reports more on the conflict, which leaves the listeners better informed on the conflict than people who listen to other radio stations.

While Studio Tamani does report more on the conflict, there is relatively little difference between the radio stations when it comes to the information on causes and solutions of the conflict. Consequently, members of the treatment group generally show little difference to members of the control group when it comes to knowledge of causes for and solutions to the conflict.

However, a difference can be detected when it comes to the political interest of members of the treatment group and the control group: Members of the treatment group show a significantly higher interest in politics than those of the control group. ((*NEW: To what extent this is a cause for listening to Studio Tamani rather than a result from listening to Studio Tamani cannot be determined once and for all. See the remarks on the problem of self-selection above. However, the composition of the control and the treatment groups show nearly identical structures concerning all sociodemographic and economic variables. Thus the groups can be seen as comparable, and no obvious difference concerning political interest should be assumed.*)) Thus it can be assumed that listening to Studio Tamani increases the interest in politics and thereby strengthens one of the preconditions for citizens to actively participate in the political process.

This **second finding** comes as somewhat of a surprise, because such an effect has hardly been mentioned when discussing media effects in peace processes. It can be seen as a typical effect of independent, professional journalism, which does not promote certain views or party perspectives, but attempts to foster a general knowledge of the conflict, without favoring single messages or viewpoints.

A **third effect** is that listening to Studio Tamani programs more often leads to discussions about the conflict among listeners; however, this is only true for discussions within the family and with friends. Listening to Studio Tamani does not lead to discussions beyond this social sphere more often than listening to other stations. This can be explained by the fact that discussions with the family or among friends can be held by everybody, while discussions in public places, or other ensuing activities like participation in a manifestation, are restricted by factors such as gender, or by the fact that there is or isn't a manifestation to participate in. Thus the possible influence by listening to Studio Tamani could be marginalized by these overwhelming factors. However, concerning discussions on the level of family and close-friend discussions, an effect in terms of ensuing action can be detected.

A **fourth effect** which can be attributed to listening to Studio Tamani is the preference for dialogue as a solution to the Malian conflict. To discuss this finding, one needs to take a closer look at the program "Grand Dialogue". The content and discourse analysis of this program tried to find out whether the quality of the dialogue improved over time, as was assumed in the evaluation's hypothesis. Quality was measured by looking at the way the participants of the dialogue referred to each other within the discussion. The analysis shows that there is no change over time in this respect. However, the analysis also showed that over time, more and more parties were represented in the program. This was especially true for the period before the ending of the peace negotiations in Algier and the following implementation period. It can be assumed that the involvement of all the parties confirmed listeners of Studio Tamani that a dialogue between the government and the conflict parties is possible and could be a solution to the conflict.

In contrast to the assumption of the evaluation, the content analysis shows no indication that the parties would have converged over time (for example because they had learned how to find common grounds over time). This confirms the finding described below that the Grand Dialogue is probably less about the convergence of positions, and more about presenting each party's perspective to a large audience.

The interviews with the selected participants of the Grand Dialogue and selected experts stressed the significance of the program and of Studio Tamani in general for the peace process in Mali. The interviewees agreed that the Grand Dialogue was less about a dialogue in the sense of an exchange of ideas and views, and more about a platform to present the various views. It could be said that the Grand Dialogue is an extension to the news programs in the sense that it provides in-depth background information to the relatively (in comparison to ORTM and Klédu) short news pieces presented in the news program.

In order to fulfil this function, the Grand Dialogue needs to be clearly structured and lead by a strong moderator, who ensures that each participant gets the opportunity to express his view. This leads to a discourse format where the word always travels between the moderator and the participant, and never directly between the participants. While this may seem rather static to a Western audience, it is greatly appreciated by most interviewees, as this makes sure that rules of politeness are respected, and that all views get a chance to be expressed.

The assumption that an effect of the dialogue would be the development of compromises in the studio, which would then play a role in the peace negotiations, could thus not be confirmed, with the exception of one minor incident. However, according to the experts, this should not be the goal of the Grand Dialogue to begin with. Rather, the Grand Dialogue should inform the public about existing ideas and views.

Another important aspect of the Grand Dialogue is the fact that representatives of conflicting parties actually meet around one table. This can contribute to the creation of trust between the parties, which can be seen as a first step to a cooperation outside the studio of Studio Tamani. For the audience, these physical encounters of conflicting parties in the studio prove that a dialogue is possible; the Grand Dialogue thus functions as role-model situation for what should take place in everyday life, and it confirms the assumption in the audience that the dialogue should be sought in order to find a solution to the conflict. This effect has, to our knowledge, never been identified as a positive effect of a media program. It should, simple as it may seem, not be underestimated, as was stressed several times by experts.

Overall, the analysis of the News Program and the Grand Dialogue, together with the audience interviews and the interviews with selected participants of the Grand Dialogue and with experts confirmed some assumptions on the effects of Studio Tamani. At the same time, it should be noted that some of the hypothesis formulated in advance, for example on the change of quality over time, could not be validated. Also, the hypothesis that the population acquires the necessary knowledge to make better decisions, or that the program allows the government to better understand the political views and preferences of the population and thus adapts its decisions to the will of the people (Hypothesis 1 and 2) could not be verified. In hindsight, and also looked at from a media effects theory point of view, these effects seem to be too ambitious in the first place. The same is true for the assumptions that Studio Tamani would manage to create a “commitment to peace” and a “culture of peace” (Hypothesis 3 and 4). These appear to be long-term objectives; to expect such immediate effects from a journalistic program contradicts the general view in media effects theory.

However, the analysis and the interviews did show that Studio Tamani programs provide more and more comprehensive information on the conflict, which again leads to a higher level of knowledge among its audience. And with this higher level of knowledge, the audience of Studio Tamani is more likely to discuss the conflict in their immediate social surroundings. These can be seen as realistic goals for a media program, and as important contributions to a constructive peace process. However, the further consequences of these effects remain open. Whether or not a peaceful solution is possible depends on a lot more factors than just better information and more discussions in the population – factors which are often beyond the influence of the general population.

Based on the four studies, this evaluation project comes to the final conclusion that the programs of Studio Tamani are unique for the context of Mali, and that they have a positive influence on the audience concerning the peace process. Studio Tamani thus renders a valuable service to the public discourse in Mali, which not only affects the audience and the peace process, but not least also the other media in Mali, for whom Studio Tamani with its independence and professionalism serves as a kind of journalistic role-model.