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Radio as a medium of mass communication in today's context
Characteristics of radio
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Modes of transmission: AM, SW and FM
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Radio as Mass Medium

Radio as a medium of mass communication in today's context

Radio is widely used mass communication medium and has a great potentiality in dissemination of information as radio signals cover almost entire population. More than 177 radio stations are there across the country. About 97 percent of the population is reached by the radio.

Radio being a convenient form of entertainment caters to a large audience. With the advent of transistors this medium has reached the common man in urban and rural areas of India, though the utilization of radio is more among rural elites.

It has advantages over the other mass media like television and newspapers in terms of being handy, portable, easily accessible and cheap. It is the most portable of the broadcast media, being accessible at home, in the office, in the car, on the street or beach, virtually everywhere at any time.

Radio is effective not only in informing the people but also in creating awareness regarding many social issues and need for social reformation, developing interest and initiating action.

For example, in creating awareness regarding new policies, developmental projects and programs, new ideas etc. It can help in creating a positive climate for growth and development.

It widens the horizons of the people and enlightens them, thereby gradually changing their outlook towards life. Research has shown that radio is an effective medium for education when it is followed up with group discussion and question- answer session.

In India, radio with its penetration to the rural areas is becoming a powerful medium for advertisers. It gets 3 percent of the national

advertising budget. Radio is still the cheap alternative to television, but is no longer the poor medium in advertising terms.

Because radio listening is so widespread, it has prospered as an advertising medium for reaching local audiences. Moreover, radio serves small highly targeted audiences, which makes it an excellent advertising medium for many kinds of specialized products and services.

As far as commercials are concerned, no one is able to tune out commercials easily as is possible with remote control devices and VCRs. It is thought that radio's ability to attract local advertisers hurts mainly newspapers, since television is less attractive to the small, local advertiser.

As far as audience is concerned radio does not hamper persons mobility. As a vehicle of information for masses it is still the fastest. For instance, it would take less time for a news reporter for radio to arrive on the spot with a microphone and recorder than the same for TV along with a shooting team and equipment.

Another important feature of radio as mass medium is that it caters to a large rural population which has no access to TV and where there is no power supply. In such places, All India Radio's programmes continue to be the only source of information and entertainment. Moreover, AIR broadcasts programmes in 24 languages and 140 dialects.

"Radio should be treated akin to newspapers in view of the fact that it is local, inexpensive, linked to communities, has limited band width and operates through simple technology".

The economics of radio does allow tailoring programme content to the needs of small and diverse audiences. Thus it is economically viable to recast a programme for broadcast to audiences in different sub regional, cultural and linguistic context.

This enhances the value of radio as a medium in networking developmental programmes. Thus, it offers many possibilities in

networking, from locally or regionally coordinated broadcasts and interactive exchange of queries and data.

It can serve as a standalone medium of information dissemination or a support medium for curricular learning, jointly with print material or with fieldwork.

Kapoor, Director General of AIR (1995) said, " Radio is far more interactive and stimulating medium than TV where the viewer is spoon-fed. Radio allows you to think, to use your imagination. That is why nobody ever called it the idiot box".

Characteristics of radio

Radio makes pictures

It is a blind medium but one which can stimulate the imagination so that, as soon as a voice comes out of the loudspeaker, the listener attempts to visualize the source of the sound and to create in the mind's eye the owner of the voice. What pictures are created when the voice carries an emotional content – interviews with witnesses of a bomb blast – the breathless joy of a victorious sports team. Unlike television, where the pictures are limited by the size of the screen, radio's pictures are any size you care to make them. For the writer of radio drama it is easy to involve us in a battle between goblins and giants, or to have our spaceship land on a strange and distant planet. Created by appropriate sound effects and supported by the right music, virtually any situation can be brought to us. As the schoolboy said when asked about television drama, 'I prefer radio, the scenery is so much better.' But is it more accurate?

Radio speaks to millions

Radio is one of the mass media. The very term broadcasting indicates a wide scattering of the output covering every home, village, town, city and country within the range of the transmitter. Its potential for

communication therefore is very great, but the actual effect may be quite small. The difference between potential and actual will depend on matters to which this book is dedicated – programme relevance, editorial excellence and creativity, qualities of ‘likeability’ and persuasiveness, operational competence, technical reliability, and consistency of the received signal. It will also be affected by the size and strength of the competition in its many forms. Broadcasters sometimes forget that people have other things to do – life is not all about listening to radio and watching television.

Radio speaks to the individual

Unlike television, where the viewer is observing something coming out of a box ‘over there’, the sights and sounds of radio are created within us, and can have greater impact and involvement. Radio on headphones happens literally inside your head. Television is, in general, watched by small groups of people and the reaction to a programme is often affected by the reaction between individuals. Radio is much more a personal thing, coming direct to the listener. There are obvious exceptions: communal listening happens in garages, workshops, canteens and shops, and in the rural areas of less developed countries a whole village may gather round the set. However, even here, a radio is an everyday personal item

The speed of radio

Technically uncumbersome, the medium is enormously flexible and is often at its best in the totally immediate ‘live’ situation. No waiting for the presses or the physical distribution of newspapers or magazines. A news report from a correspondent overseas, a listener talking on the phone, a sports result from the local stadium, a concert from the capital – radio is immediate. The recorded programme introduces a timeshift and like a newspaper may quickly become out of date, but the medium itself is essentially live and ‘now’.

Radio has no boundaries

Books and magazines can be stopped at national frontiers but radio is no

respector of territorial limits. Its signals clear mountain barriers and cross deep oceans. Radio can bring together those separated by geography or nationality – it can help to close other distances of culture, learning or status. The programmes of political propagandists or of Christian missionaries can be sent in one country and heard in another. Sometimes met with hostile jamming, sometimes welcomed as a life-sustaining truth, programmes have a liberty independent of lines on a map, obeying only the rules of transmitter power, sunspot activity, channel interference and receiver sensitivity. Even these limitations are overcome for radio on the Internet, which can bring any station to an Internet-enabled PC, laptop or WAP mobile phone, wherever it is. Independent of transmitter power or cable networks, any studio can have a worldwide reach. Crossing political boundaries, radio can bring freedoms to the oppressed and enlightenment to those in darkness.

The transient nature of radio

It is a very ephemeral medium and if the listener is not in time for the news bulletin, it is gone and it's necessary to wait for the next. Unlike the newspaper, which the reader can put down, come back to or pass round, broadcasting imposes a strict discipline of having to be there at the right time. The radio producer must recognize that, while it's possible to store programmes in the archives, they are only short-lived for the listener. This is not to say that they may not be memorable, but memory is fallible and without a written record it is easy to be misquoted or taken out of context. For this reason, it is often advisable for the broadcaster to have some form of audio or written log as a check on what was said, and by whom. In some cases this may be a statutory requirement of a radio station as part of its public accountability. Where this is not so, lawyers have been known to argue that it is better to have no record of what was said – for example, in a public phone-in. Practice would suggest, however, that the keeping of a recording of the transmission is a useful safeguard against allegations of malpractice, particularly from complainants who missed the broadcast and who heard about it second-hand.

Radio as background

Radio allows a more tenuous link with its user than that insisted upon by television or print. The medium is less demanding in that it permits us to do other things at the same time – programmes become an accompaniment to something else. We read with music on, eat to a news magazine, or hang wallpaper while listening to a play. Radio suffers from its own generosity – it is easily interruptible. Television is more complete, taking our whole attention, ‘spoon feeding’ without demanding effort or response, and tending to be compulsive at a far lower level of interest than radio requires of its audience.

Limitations of Radio

Radio has many inherent limitations. It provides one way channel of communication. Therefore, no feedback regarding the messages can be received. Since the listener’s attention is held only by the sound, messages communicated through radio can reach only those people who listen carefully and intelligently.

One has to be very attentive to receive the messages from radio otherwise he misses a part of the message. Radio lacks the pictorial quality provided by television and motion pictures. Moreover, no visuals can be used with radio to support the messages. Radio is not suitable for all types of commercials as some require illustration or demonstration.

Since radio conveys messages through sound only, it demands a habit of skillful listening which generally people lack. Mohanty (1992) rightly pointed out that radio may broadcast a well-developed lesson, but cannot develop a lesson with the audience.

With many people to receive a complete detailed lesson or a programme through radio becomes very taxing or boring as it tends to become monotonous at times.

Rahman (1977) said, “Radio broadcast is evanescent, impermanent and rarely sufficient in itself for the case of illustration intended in educational broadcasting. It cannot be turned to, studied or re-read at leisure”.

Awasthy has aptly said that in radio the artist and his audience are nowhere near each other. In the physical sense they are nonexistent to each other.

Three Modes of transmission: AM, SW and FM

In radio communication systems, information is carried across space using radio waves. At the sending end, the information to be sent is converted by some type of transducer to a time-varying electrical signal called the modulation signal. The modulation signal may be an audio signal representing sound from a microphone, a video signal representing moving images from a video camera, or a digital signal consisting of a sequence of bits representing binary data from a computer. The modulation signal is applied to a radio transmitter. In the transmitter, an electronic oscillator generates an alternating current oscillating at a radio frequency, called the *carrier wave* because it serves to "carry" the information through the air. The information signal is used to modulate the carrier, varying some aspect of the carrier wave, impressing the information on the carrier. Different radio systems use different modulation methods:

AM (amplitude modulation) – in an AM transmitter, the amplitude (strength) of the radio carrier wave is varied by the modulation signal.

FM (frequency modulation) – in an FM transmitter, the frequency of the radio carrier wave is varied by the modulation signal.

SW (Shortwave radio) -is radio transmission using shortwave radio frequencies. There is no official definition of the band, but the range always includes all of the high frequency band (HF), which extends from 3–30 MHz (100 to 10 metres); above the medium frequency band (MF), to the bottom of the VHF band.

Types of radio station

Radio is categorized not so much by what it does as by how it is financed. Each method of funding has a direct result on the programming that a station can afford or is prepared to offer, which again is affected by the degree of competition which it faces. The main types of organizational funding are as follows:

- Public service, funded by a licence fee and run by a national corporation.
 - Commercial station financed by national and local spot advertising or sponsorship, and run as a public company with shareholders.
 - Government station paid for from taxation and run as a government department.
 - Government-owned station, funded largely by commercial advertising, operating under a government appointed board.
 - Public service, funded by government funds or grant-in-aid, run by a publicly accountable board, independent of government.
 - Public service, subscription station, does not take advertising and is funded by individual subscribers and donors.

- Private ownership, funded by personal income of all kinds, e.g. commercial advertising, subscriptions, donations.
- Institutional ownership, e.g. university campus, hospital or factory radio, run and paid for by the organization for the benefit of its students, patients, employees, etc.
 - Radio organization run for specific religious or charitable purposes – sells airtime and raises income through supporter contributions.
- Community ownership, often supported by local advertising and sponsors.
- Restricted Service Licence (RSL) stations, on low power and having a limited lifespan to meet a particular need, e.g. one-month licence to cover a city festival.

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