

Comment

Function, audiences and publics of contemporary radio: a challenge for researchers

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Contemporary radio is under-studied by academic researchers, while on the contrary it expresses great exigencies of knowledge. Media studies examined deeply radio when it was the mainstream medium, i.e. in the Thirties, especially in the US also for marketing needs of a largely commercial broadcasting system.

In other countries a tradition of media studies was lacking and developed only much later, at the end of the Fifties and beyond. Then media studies chose to study, for understandable social reasons, the mainstream medium that was, at that time, TV. Radio was a side subject for researchers, studied as an ancestor of television or something more primitive, not gifted with a view.

Media studies, with some important exceptions, did not understand the evolution of radio, no more mainstream medium but crucial, together with rock and pop music, to understand youth cultures, largely interactive thanks to the telephone, mobile thanks to the transistor radio set, much before the Internet. A niche medium, strategic for information and metropolitan cultures, strong element of a popular multimedia diet.

Contemporary radio begins to be studied in the Nineties. Books on radio are published again, radio courses are held in universities all over the world, national and international research network are formed as the UK Radio Studies Network, the European Iren, and the American and Australian networks.

Meeting as Bournemouth, Durban, Bordeaux 2001 and 2004, Siena 2001, 2003, 2004, Madison, Melbourne and others gathered radio professionals, students, and docents.

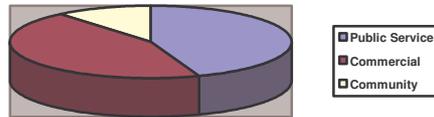
A comprehensive landscape of radio is now appearing. We understand now that there are several social uses of radio in the world. The one which is mostly observed is in developed countries, where as said before there are many radio stations in every area, both national and local, both commercial and public service, both music and talk. In these countries, according to McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), radios are like tribal drums for a conspicuous number of cultural, musical, political, and religious tribes.

Totally different is radio in developing countries, where it is often the mainstream medium. Radio's role in Uganda genocide must not be generalized but it is a marker of a dangerous use of radio against democracy. In developing countries we have some public service radios (in fact, often serving exclusively the leading political faction), commercial stations, and radio stations supported in some way by international non governmental organizations or foreign states for international policy purposes.

Furthermore, radio in post-soviet societies has different social uses, since public service has been identified with the communist regime and a commercial only broadcasting drift is a serious risk.

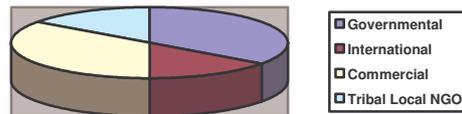
We tried to collect all these data in the following diagrams.

Figure 1: Developed countries



	Genres	Science on radio	Format
<i>Public Service</i>	Talk & Music	***	Schedule
<i>Commercial</i>	Mostly music	*	Clock
<i>Community</i>	Mostly talk	**	Schedule

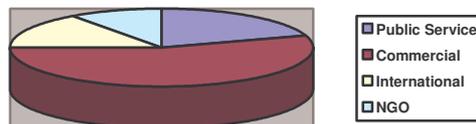
Figure 2: Developing countries



	Genres	Science on radio	Format
<i>Governmental</i>	Mostly talk	**	Schedule
<i>Commercial</i>	Music – Talk	*	Clock - Schedule
<i>International</i>	Mostly talk	***	Schedule
<i>Tribal Local NGO</i>	Mostly talk	***	Schedule

Preventing diseases and popular agricultural programs are included.

Figure 3: Post Communist countries



	Genres	Science on radio	Format
<i>Public Service</i>	Talk & Music	***	Schedule
<i>Commercial</i>	Mostly music	*	Clock
<i>International</i>	Talk & Music	**	Schedule - clock
<i>NGO</i>	Mostly talk	***	Schedule

Each of these three environments requires different formats of science communication through radio broadcasting. To be effective, our work will deal with some questions of which I didn't see many answers in many intervention and that I would like, at the end of my contribution, to point out:

- science news is something dramatically different from science contents;
- science communication is considered as a part of educational?
- educational can be considered popular?

Author

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