
UNIT 27 THE RADIO

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27.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will look at the radio:

- its development, and
- its characteristics and efficiency as a medium of communication.

After reading this unit you will be able to identify the formats available for informative radio programmes. You will also recognize the characteristics of good radio programmes.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

It is a common misconception that ever since television became available to everyone, the medium of the radio has become obsolete. Yet the reach of radio, and the cost of radio, have ensured that it continues to be an important medium of communication. In this unit we shall see some examples of this.

We shall very briefly refer to the history and the workings of the radio. Finally, we shall discuss the format of some information based programmes on the radio, such as radio features and radio drama.

The radio is an intimate medium. A favourite dictum of broadcasters is that 'In radio, we have an audience of one'. The listener is made to feel that he or she is 'eavesdropping' on a private conversation, or something else that is interesting to

listen to. In this way the listener becomes included into a community of 'friends', the broadcasters. The language used, the tone, the information load of a radio programme, must all be appropriate to this intimate, conversational character of the radio.

27.2 THE REACH OF RADIO, AND ITS LOW COST; COMMUNITY RADIO

The radio is something you find everywhere. Perhaps you may think that the radio has become less significant with the arrival of television, but consider the following two factors:

The 'reach' factor:

- radio programmes, in India, cover over 91% of the geographical area while TV reaches only 88% of the area.

The 'cost' factor:

- a radio set costs between one hundred rupees (for the smaller, hand-held transistor) and four thousand or more rupees (for the high-end, world receivers). Television starts at over a thousand rupees for a set and can cost over a lakh for the more sophisticated version.
- radio programmes are very much cheaper to produce than television programmes.

The 'reach' factor and the 'cost' factor mentioned above show that the radio can be an important and effective medium for communication. There are actual examples of its use to show that the radio is indeed an important medium of communication.

Here is an example of the reach of radio. When our armed forces move about or are stationed in the high-altitude areas, the radio helps them keep in touch with the other parts of the country, entertaining them with songs and other programmes, and providing them with information.

Another example is from a recent catastrophic occurrence. On December 26, 2004, the South Asian region, including the Andaman Islands and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu, experienced a tsunami – one of the worst natural disasters in human history. People died, property was lost and many people went missing. The All India Radio set up an emergency helpline to assist families to establish contact with their lost ones. The family could get in touch with the AIR and send a message to the lost members of the family through radio. These messages were broadcast at frequent intervals in the affected areas, which also included places in Sri Lanka.

Given below is the text of an Internet message about this AIR helpline.

Tsunami has created havoc in the coastal states of India and various parts of South Asia on 26-12-2004. It has caused widespread devastation and loss of life.

All India Radio has started this Internet HELPLINE to provide the latest information and assistance to the public about this earthquake. Messages received are being broadcast from AIR Stations. Responses to the messages are also being broadcast and made available on this site.

The public can send their messages through E-mail at : helpline@air.org.in

Thus we have here an example of how the medium has been used in an emergency situation.

27.2.1 How the Radio has a Greater Reach than the Television

How is it that the radio has a greater reach than the television? This is because radio frequencies are received in geographically-difficult areas like high-altitude areas and remote areas like deserts and the Polar Regions. Television signals, on the other hand, are affected by mountainous terrain and by weather conditions.

The radio is an exciting medium for the spread of information and entertainment. It is exciting because it is not very expensive to set up a radio station.

AIR (All India Radio) today has a network of 214 broadcasting centres with

- 143 medium frequency (MW) transmitters,
- 54 high frequency (SW) transmitters and
- 139 FM (frequency modulated) transmitters.

The coverage is 91.37% of the area of the country, serving 99.13% of the people in the largest democracy of the world.

AIR covers 24 languages and 146 dialects in home services.

In the External services, it covers 27 languages; 17 national, and 10 foreign languages.

AIR did not always have the reach and coverage it has today. Sound broadcasting started in India in 1927 with the proliferation of private radio clubs. The operations of All India Radio began formally in 1936, as a government organization. When India attained Independence in 1947, AIR had a network of six stations and a complement of 18 transmitters. The coverage was 2.5% of the area of the country and just 11% of the population. A rapid expansion of the network took place after Independence.

But AIR is a national service planned, developed and operated by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting under the Government of India. Its stated objectives are to inform, educate and entertain the masses. The need has been felt for an additional layer of locally-relevant and community-run radio stations.

27.2.2 Community Radio

The rise of 'local radio' (FM stations, University Radio and Community Radio) is a recent development that shows how the radio can constantly reinvent itself to adapt itself to the new communicative needs of society. This has become possible through advances in the technology of broadcasting, i.e. FM radio. A technological advisor to the government says: "On FM, the bandwidth permits a very large number of low-powered radio transmitters. There could be up to 5000 FM stations, or as many as there are tehsils (district sub-divisions) in India."

In the mid-nineties, a Supreme Court judgment laid down that "airwaves are public property" and suggested that public property could not be treated as a government monopoly. Educationalists and voluntary organizations from across the country, particularly South India, were looking forward eagerly for the government to open the airwaves for broadcast by non-profit groups. UNESCO, as part of a commitment to encouraging the free-flow of information, has been supporting the initiatives of community radio development in India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In fact, the medium has been well utilized by local populations within a smaller area

to 'narrowcast' programmes of interest to these populations. For example, in Sri Lanka, a community radio station in Kotmale helps villagers to find information on the Internet. The villagers ask for information via phone or by post; the radio station finds the answers on the Internet and broadcasts them. This helps villagers, too, to get access to the "information superhighway". The Kotmale community radio station, which began in May 1999, is now being studied as an innovative experiment in development communication. "We've had people coming running to the station saying their cow had gone astray, and other listeners help to locate them," says a member of this community radio station.

Nepal's Radio Sagarmatha, run by a body of environmental journalists, has attracted attention globally for its unique style of operation, and for promoting a news-based and "green" message. All this shows us how the radio is affordable and effective as a communicative medium.

✓ Check Your Progress 1

1. How many radio stations did AIR begin with, and how many does it have today?

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2. What do we mean by the 'reach' factor and the 'cost' factor of radio? Give examples.

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3. What is 'narrowcasting'? Give examples.

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27.3 HISTORY

On December 12, 1901, Guglielmo Marconi managed to transmit across the Atlantic the letter 'S' using Morse code. It was a historic moment for the world of communication. The moment was special because what this signalled was that soon voice could also be transmitted across space without having to depend on wires. The event was preceded by work which Marconi had done for almost a decade in the field of electromagnetic transmission.

By 1906 music was being transmitted across longer distances. By 1909 the first commercial radio station had come up and ten years later the first stations were firmly established in the United States. Soon private radio stations and Universities and of course governments made use of this new medium which was affordable and which had a tremendous reach.

Activity

How is the letter 'S' represented in Morse code? Find out from an encyclopaedia, the Internet, or from a friend.

27.4 WORKING

How does the radio work?

Though Marconi invented the radio way back in 1901, the radio set that we have today is a far cry from what the original apparatus was. For a start, the equipment was very bulky and slow. In the early 1900s work in electromagnetic theory was still at a beginning stage and so it took years before voice and later music could be broadcast over air.

Quite simply, radio works because electromagnetic waves are able to pass through the air. Sound is converted into such electromagnetic signals which are then sent out – broadcast – from stations and received in special boxes which are tuned to a specific frequency and which reconvert the sound signal into voice again.

✓ Check Your Progress 2

4. What was the first radio signal that was broadcast?

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5. When did the first commercial radio station come up?

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6. Fill in the blanks:

Radio works because a transmitter converts sound into _____ signals. These _____ waves are converted back into _____ again in the receiver.

27.5 PROGRAMMES: RADIO FEATURES AND RADIO DRAMA

A random assessment of programmes on the radio will reveal that there are broadly two areas that radio programmes disseminate: information and entertainment.

Information based programmes are of four kinds, namely:

- i) radio features,
- ii) radio talks,
- iii) radio interviews, and
- iv) radio drama.

Entertainment spans a wider range from music shows to interactive phone-in quizzes. Radio stations in India and across the world encourage public participation.

Entertainment programmes on the radio are often music based. Their content depends on a variety of factors ranging from the age of the listeners to the policies of the government. Entertainment programmes are not discussed in this unit.

In the following pages we will look at two kinds of informative radio programmes: radio features and radio drama.

27.5.1 Radio Features

Radio features may be fifteen to forty-five minutes long. In this kind of programme the aim is to introduce and present a topic of current interest, about which there is a fair amount of knowledge, gained through research. For example, it is possible to have a twenty-minute radio feature on 'Human Cloning'. The presenter introduces the idea of cloning, and interviews people who are involved in the process of human cloning. (Cloning is a process by which a plant or animal is produced from a single cell of a parent plant or animal, and so has exactly the same qualities as the parent.) This radio feature would also stress both the benefits and the limitations of such research, and may choose to raise questions for the audience.

Radio features or talks tend to become boring if three points are not constantly kept in mind by the presenter. These points are:

- i. *simplicity, clarity, accuracy;*
- ii. *concreteness;*
- iii. *a conversational style.*

27.5.1.1 Simplicity, Clarity, Accuracy

The radio is a simple and direct medium. The presenter should, as far as possible, use short sentences. These should preferably be in an "active" form rather than in

the “passive.” Say “Many people have opposed this idea” rather than “This idea has been opposed by many people” or “This idea has evoked much opposition”. Simple language makes the talk on radio of immediate significance for the listener.

Simplicity in style is supported by clarity in the organization of the radio feature. The flow of the radio feature should be logical, with the argument developing systematically and supported with examples.

While clarity of thought is necessary, clarity of speech is imperative! It is of utmost importance that the presenter has a clear voice and expresses emotions well with the voice.

Simplicity also paves the way for accuracy. Information must be exact and accurate. Any redundant and superfluous information must be immediately taken out of a good radio feature.

27.5.1.2 Concreteness

This second quality of a good radio feature helps the listener to immediately and clearly understand what is being spoken about or discussed. What this means is that concrete examples must be presented wherever possible, in preference to abstract generalizations. So, the generalization “Many people have opposed this idea” could be immediately supported with “300 residents of this town have signed a petition requesting the authorities to reconsider this decision. These residents include the famous singer ...” The words used must “create a picture” in the listener’s mind.

The presenter must avoid overloading the listener with information; this can be done if the presenter takes the trouble to sort out and connect the information up with some concrete experience. For example, why is the idea (which we mentioned above) being opposed? How will it affect babies, school children, older people, housewives, office goers ...? To take another example, rather than present a piece of history (such as India’s freedom struggle) as a series of events arranged according to their dates, the presenter may try interview people of various ages in a family, and ask them how old they were when a particular event happened. All this means that the presenter has to take the trouble to first understand the ideas in the feature very well, and find ways of conveying this understanding to the listener.

27.5.1.3 A Conversational Style

A good radio feature, or for that matter any good radio programme, must motivate the listener to continue to listen. And this is mostly made possible by winning the confidence of the listener. Use a friendly style rather than formal language. Exploit the quality of the medium (its immediacy and one-to-oneness), and keep the feature conversational in nature, even though the listener is many, many kilometers away.

When a radio feature includes interviews or is primarily in the interview mode, then the presenter should take care to see that the interviewee’s views are highlighted. The questions asked should be so well structured that at the end of the interview, the listener has a clear idea of the interview, its focus, and its emergent point of view. Radio interviews do not have to be formal and this is what most successful FM stations have to teach us. They take short interviews, focusing on one aspect of a subject or a person and make it as friendly as possible.

✓ Check Your Progress 3

27.5.2 Radio Drama

Radio dramas are good entertainment and are especially effective in the dissemination of information. There are many advantages that radio dramas have which make them the ideal vehicle for conveying information/awareness that may otherwise tend to be boring. For example, the importance of polio vaccines may be brought about through a short, ten line radio drama rather than through a four line announcement. How does this happen?

Radio dramas make use of the quality of this medium optimally. Radio is a one-to-one medium. Although it reaches a mass audience, this audience is spread out; it is in homes, cars and shops, and the listener is an individual, not a part of a mass audience like a cinema audience. For a listener, when s/he listens to the radio, it may appear that the presenter is talking only to her/him.

In a radio drama this quality is further strengthened by making the listener believe that s/he is eavesdropping on something interesting. These two words “eavesdropping” and “interesting” are important. We listen in when we are a witness to something either directly or inadvertently. To make us want to continue listening in there should be something that draws our attention. Radio drama works on this principle and helps the listener “witness” something that the producer wants her or him to know.

Here is a sample of a radio drama, based on a story found in 'A Book of Anecdotes' by Daniel George (Hulton Press 1958).

Read the story silently. Read the drama aloud, if possible, together with friends, with each of you taking on a part.

27.5.2.1 The Story

This is an anecdote about the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, written in the nineteenth century.

“... he was sitting in the coffee-room of a hotel, and heard his name coupled with a coroner’s inquest, by a gentleman who was reading a newspaper to a friend. He asked to see the paper, which was handed to him with the remark that it was very extraordinary that Coleridge, the poet, should have hanged himself just after the success of his play (the tragedy Remorse); but he was always a strange mad fellow. ‘Indeed, sir’, said Coleridge, it is a most extraordinary thing that he should have hanged himself, be the subject of an inquest, and yet that he should at this moment be speaking to you.’ The astonished stranger hoped he had said nothing to hurt his feelings, and was made easy on that point. The newspaper related that a gentleman in black had been cut down from a tree in Hyde Park, without money or papers in his pocket, his shirt being marked ‘S.T. Coleridge’; and Coleridge was at no loss to understand how this might have happened, since he seldom traveled without losing a shirt or two.”

27.5.2.2 The Radio Script

“Listen now to a short conversation. The story in this conversation is true. But the conversation itself is imaginary.

The scene is a coffee-house in England more than a hundred and fifty years ago. A gentleman enters the coffee-house and sits at a table.

“A pot of hot coffee, please”, he says to the boy.

There are already two other men in the room, sitting at another table. One of them is reading a newspaper. The man who has just arrived is not personally known in this place and no one recognizes him. He seems to be glad of this and settles down to a long spell of meditation. But the other men in the room start a conversation and he is compelled to listen to it. Let us also listen along with him.

A: Poets are mad people.

B: A very sane thing to say, I’m sure. But why do you say it at this particular moment?

A: The thought occurred to me at this particular moment.

B: Well, well. It occurs to me that you are mad too.

A: What do you mean?

B: Why do you talk about poets when you are reading a newspaper?

A: Why shouldn’t I talk about them?

B: Because you’re reading a newspaper and not poetry.

A: But the news is about a poet.

B: Impossible. How can the news be about a poet?

A: Why not? Who should it be about, then?

B: About politicians.

A: But why?

B: Because politicians are the people who make news.

A: The people who make news! I thought they were the people who make speeches.

B: And what do poets make?

A: You know what they make.

B: I know they make verses and verses are worse things than speeches.

A: But the poet I'm reading about in this paper has made some news although he will never make any more.

B: How do you know he won't?

A: Because he is dead.

B: I'm sorry to hear that. But what is the news about him?

A: That he is dead.

B: What news is there in that? We will all be dead sooner or later.

A: Agreed. But not all of us will kill ourselves as he has done.

B: Has he killed himself? Your story is getting interesting. Who was he?

A: His name was Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Coleridge (to himself): Samuel Taylor Coleridge! Killed himself!

B: Mr. Coleridge? I can't believe it!

A: Believe it or not, here is the news. Listen.

'A poet commits suicide. It is reported that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a well-known writer and poet, committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree on Friday night.'

B: On Friday night! On Friday night he had every reason in the world to live. His latest play was performed in London on Friday night and all the world praised it. And you say he has gone and killed himself. He must have been mad.

Coleridge: Yes. You're right. He must've been really mad. May I join the company, gentlemen? I should like to hear more about this piece of news.

A: You're very welcome, sir.

Coleridge: Thank you. Please read on.

A: 'The police discovered his body, dressed all in black, early on Saturday morning. There was no money in his pockets; nor were there any papers.'

B: Then how did they find out who he was?

Coleridge: Perhaps there was someone among the policemen who had met him.

B: That is very unlikely. How can policemen find time to meet poets? What does the paper say?

A: 'The only clue the police could find for identifying the body was the name S.T. Coleridge marked on the poet's shirt.'

B: So he is dead then. This is surprising. This man wrote some of the sanest things I have ever read. And now it turns out that he was mad enough to kill himself. It does upset me.

Coleridge: And it will upset you all the more when you hear the rest of the news.

A: The rest of the news? What is that?

Coleridge: That this poet S. T. Coleridge is at this moment sitting with you in this coffee house.

A, B: Goodness gracious me! Heaven help us!

B: A ghost in broad day light! But where is he, sir?

A: What do you mean?

Coleridge: I may be mad in a way, but I am not dead.

B: Do you mean that you are Mr. Coleridge?

Coleridge: If I am not Mr. Coleridge, I am no one.

B: We are very sorry sir. We hope we have not said anything that has hurt your feelings. But how do you explain this strange report in the newspaper?

Coleridge: It is very simple, gentlemen. I lost one of my shirts before the world lost this poor man who has hanged himself.

27.6 LET US SUM UP

- The radio has kept its importance even after the arrival of television.
- The 'reach' factor and the 'cost' factor of radio give it an advantage over television. Radio frequencies are received in geographically-difficult areas like high-altitude areas and remote areas like deserts and the Polar Regions. Television signals, on the other hand, are affected by mountainous terrain and by weather conditions.
- Radio in India covers over 91% of the geographical area. Our armed forces in high-altitude areas keep in touch with the radio.
- During catastrophic occurrences, radio can help families to establish contact with their lost ones.
- It is not very expensive to set up a radio station. Radio programmes are cheaper to produce than television programmes. A radio set costs less than a television set.
- AIR (All India Radio) today has a network of 214 broadcasting centres. A rapid expansion of the network took place after Independence.
- But there is a need for additional, locally-relevant and community-run radio stations.
- 'Local radio' (FM stations, University Radio and Community Radio) is a recent development that shows how radio can adapt itself to the communicative needs of society. The medium is used by local populations within a smaller area to 'narrowcast' programmes of interest to these populations.
- December 12, 1901 was a historic moment for the world of communication: Marconi transmitted the letter 'S' across the Atlantic using Morse code.
- By 1909 the first commercial radio station had come up.
- Radio works by converting sound into electromagnetic signals which are broadcast from stations and received in special boxes tuned to a specific frequency which reconvert the signal into voice.

- There are broadly two kinds of radio programmes: information and entertainment. Information programmes are of four kinds, radio features, radio talks, radio interviews, and radio drama.
- Radio features or talks must have three qualities:
 - iv. *simplicity, clarity, accuracy;*
 - v. *concreteness;*
 - vi. *a conversational style.*
- In a radio drama the listener must feel that s/he is “eavesdropping on something interesting”.

27.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. AIR or All India Radio began with a network of six radio stations when India attained Independence in 1947. Today AIR has a network of 214 broadcasting centres.
2. The radio programmes of AIR in India cover over 91% of the geographical area while TV reaches only 88% of the area. The radio has a greater reach than television because radio frequencies are received in areas geographically difficult to reach, like high-altitude areas, and remote areas like deserts and the Polar Regions. Television signals are affected by mountainous terrain and by weather conditions.

When our armed forces move about or are stationed in the high-altitude areas, the radio helps them keep in touch with the other parts of the country, entertaining them with songs and providing them with information. Another example is from a recent catastrophic occurrence: the Tsunami on December 26, 2004. The South Asian region, including the Andaman Islands and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu, experienced one of the worst natural disasters in human history. People died, property was lost and many people went missing.

The All India Radio set up an emergency helpline to help families to contact their lost family members. The family could get in touch with the AIR and send a message to the through radio. These messages were broadcast at frequent intervals in the affected areas.

It is not very expensive to set up a radio station, and radio programmes are very much cheaper to produce than television programmes. Moreover, a radio set costs between one hundred rupees (for the smaller, hand-held transistor) and four thousand or more rupees (for the high-end, world receivers). Television starts at over a thousand rupees for a set and can cost over a lakh for the more sophisticated version.

3. ‘Narrowcasting’ is the complement of ‘broadcasting’. The rise of ‘local radio’ (FM stations, University Radio and Community Radio) is a recent development. Locally-relevant and community-run radio stations have become possible through advances in the technology of broadcasting, i.e. FM radio. It is said that there could be up to 5000 FM stations, or as many as there are tehsils (district sub-divisions) in India.

Local populations within a smaller area can ‘narrowcast’ programmes of interest

to these populations. For example, in Sri Lanka, a community radio station in Kotmale helps villagers to find information on the Internet. The villagers ask for information via phone or by post; the radio station finds the answers on the Internet and broadcasts them. This helps villagers, too, to get access to the “information superhighway”. The Kotmale community radio station is now being studied as an innovative experiment in development communication. Even small problems like a cow going astray are mentioned on the radio, and listeners have helped to locate the cow!

Check Your Progress 2

4. The first radio signal to be broadcast was the letter ‘S’ in Morse code, sent across the Atlantic ocean.
5. The first commercial radio station had come up by 1909.
6. electromagnetic, electromagnetic, sound
7. Radio programmes are of two main kinds, information and entertainment. Information programmes are of four kinds, namely: radio features, radio talks, radio interviews, and radio drama. Entertainment programmes range from music shows to interactive phone-in quizzes. Radio stations in India and across the world encourage public participation.

Check Your Progress 3

8. Three points must be kept in mind for a good radio feature or talk. These points are:

simplicity, clarity, accuracy;

concreteness;

a conversational style.

Simplicity of language means we must use short sentences, preferably be in an “active” form rather than in the “passive”. We can say “Many people have opposed this idea” rather than “This idea has been opposed by many people” or “This idea has evoked much opposition”. Simple language and simplicity in style is supported by clarity in the organization of the radio feature. Clarity of speech is imperative! It is important that the presenter has a clear voice and expresses emotions well with the voice. Information must be exact and accurate, and any repetitive or “extra” information must be left out.

Concrete examples must be presented wherever possible, in preference to abstract generalizations. We must avoid overloading the listener with information; the presenter must take the trouble to sort out and connect the information up with some concrete experience.

The speech style we use should be friendly rather than formal. This uses the quality of the medium (its immediacy and one-to-oneness), and keeps the feature conversational.