



Media Industry and Audiences – Focus on Radio

This Factsheet will consider:

- Who listens to radio.
- How radio audiences are grouped and categorised, and how they are measured.
- The interrelationship between media technologies and patterns of consumption and response.
- The nature and future of the form.

AQA, EDUQAS, OCR?

For the new A/AS Level specifications each of the exam boards includes radio as a media **form** to be studied in relation to **media industries** and **audiences**. Radio products also appear as ‘set texts’ for each exam board, with particular focus on BBC radio programmes.



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vintage_Panasonic_Two-Band_\(FM-AM\)_Transistor_Radio,_Model_RF-800,_9_Transistors,_Made_In_Japan,_Circa_1965_\(14633774476\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vintage_Panasonic_Two-Band_(FM-AM)_Transistor_Radio,_Model_RF-800,_9_Transistors,_Made_In_Japan,_Circa_1965_(14633774476).jpg)

Radio – A Dying Medium?

Prior to the advent - and widespread ownership - of the radio, audiences largely received their news from newspapers and their entertainment courtesy of theatres and music halls. The radio provided both and as such was a firm fixture in most households in the US and UK by the 1930s. It was the first instant medium; allowing audiences to receive news stories ahead of their publication in the national press and to listen live to important announcements, such as Neville Chamberlain’s 1939 “we are at war with Germany” speech. Long before *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, it was radio that produced the first ever soap operas. These began on radio networks in the USA during the 1920s as they sought to attract advertisers to their stations. Soap powder companies like Procter & Gamble were convinced to sponsor short daytime radio serials aimed at housewives (the target audiences for their products) hence the term *soap opera*. Radio soaps were also popular with British audiences and to this day

BBC Radio 4 remains the home of the world’s longest running soap opera (*The Archers* – see case study). Many have cited that radio is a powerful medium due to the intimacy of the relationship between the broadcaster and the audience. Whether it be the voice of a presenter or actor in a play, their words transmit directly into the head of the listener, unfiltered by visual images. Radio drama, it is frequently argued by its legions of fans, is so much better than film or television because “the scenery is better”.

For much of the twentieth century the medium of radio was central to the lives of most people. However, since the boom in television ownership in the late 1950s (16 million homes had a TV set by 1960) many have predicted the decline of the form. As a sound only medium, its lack of moving images puts it at a disadvantage in comparison to other media forms. Furthermore, the growth of new and digital technology has only increased the competition for audiences. Yet, in the face of such competition, radio is enjoying a renaissance. Far from killing off radio, the digital revolution has reinvigorated the medium and enabled both BBC and commercial radio to increase the size of their audiences.

Figures provided by RAJAR (see box) show that in the second quarter of 2017, Radio One’s total audience grew to 9.6 million listeners (compared with 9.1m in the first three months of 2017). Meanwhile, Radio 4 reached its biggest audience since records began in 1999 - with 11.55 million listeners every week. Many commercial radio stations have also seen their listener numbers rise. LBC’s audience also increased, now boasting 2 million listeners a week, while XFM reached its best weekly audience to date with 1.4 million listeners.

RAJAR

Listener figures for radio are measured by RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research Limited). Jointly owned by the BBC and the Radio Centre, RAJAR was established in 1992 to provide a single measurement system for the UK radio industry (collecting data on behalf of over 300 BBC and OFCOM licensed commercial stations). RAJAR measures station listening by time, duration, platform and location and publishes its figures on a quarterly basis.

The listening habits of over 100,000 adults (aged 15+) are logged in diaries over fifty continuous weeks of the year. Listener diaries are filled in on a 15-minute basis for one week’s listening for each audience member. Respondents are drawn from a representative sample of the individual station transmission area and the nation as a whole. Listening is logged via a paper diary or online.

According to RAJAR, “the listening survey has the advantage of not being reliant on specific hardware, and as the methodology is based on an adult’s active recording of what goes into the ears, this approach has been impervious to the development of new listening devices and delivery platforms, continuing to measure listening without disruption.”

172. Media Industry and Audiences – Focus on Radio

Furthermore, say RAJAR, “Radio is mainly a live medium – on-demand/listen-again represents just over 1% of all radio listening hours. This has resulted in RAJAR being able to avoid the complications of consolidating live and on-demand audiences, a challenge that other industry measurement systems have had to contend with.”

The Radio Audience – Who’s Listening?

In 2017, the most listened to station in the UK was Radio 2, with over 15 million weekly listeners; this is in sharp contrast to the early 1990s when the station was struggling to find a distinct identity – as well as an audience.

From the latest figures produced by RAJAR (2017) the top 10 radio stations with the most listeners were as follows:

1. BBC Radio 2 (15.1 m)
2. BBC Radio 4 (11.5m)
3. BBC Radio 1 (9.6m)
4. Heart (9.6m)
5. Capital FM (8.7m)
6. BBC Radio 5 Live (5.5m)
7. Smooth (5.4m)
8. Classic FM (5.3m)
9. KISS (4.3m)
10. Magic (3.4m)



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_Radio_2

These provide a national figure, which shows that the BBC national stations and radio brands like Heart and Kiss dominate the chart. However, it should be noted that the most “popular” stations in each area or region tend to be the designated local radio BBC or commercial service.

On all of these stations the most listened to slots continue to be dominated by Breakfast (6-9am) and Drive time (5-7pm), when audiences are travelling to and from work in their cars.

The demographics for the UK’s radio stations vary enormously. Generally, contemporary music services appeal to a younger audience, with speech based providers appealing to more mature listeners. BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4 traditionally attract a more educated audience with a large share of ABC1 listeners. Recent RAJAR figures also suggest that younger audiences are far more likely to listen to commercial radio than BBC services, although the BBCs share of the audience is still greater than the commercial sector. The BBC Trust’s Service Review (2015) of some of its radio services (below) paints a picture of the typical listener for each station and how it compares to the intended audience.

	Content	Target Audience	Audience Profile
BBC Radio 1	Contemporary music and speech	Teenagers and young people (15-29)	Median age of 30; Slightly more female than male; 58% ABC1; 90% white
BBC Radio 1 Xtra	Contemporary urban music	Teenagers and young people (15-24) particularly, but not exclusively, from ethnic minorities	Median age of 24; slightly more male than female; evenly split between ABC1-C2DE; higher reach among BAME audiences (31%)
BBC Radio 2	Mix of contemporary and non-contemporary popular music and speech	Adults aged 35+	Reach is highest among adults aged 55-64; slightly higher among male, white, ABC1 audiences
BBC Radio 3	Music (classical, jazz, world) and cultural programming	Adults aged 35+	Reach is higher amongst older, white, ABC1 listeners, and people in the south of England
BBC Radio 4	Speech service, offering in-depth news and current affairs and a wide range of drama, readings, comedy, factual and magazine programmes.	All ages seeking “intelligent programmes in many genres that inform, educate and entertain”	Has broad appeal among both male and female audiences; a higher proportion of 55+, ABC1, white listeners
BBC Radio 5	Live news and sports coverage	All ages, keen followers of sport from all ethnic backgrounds and regions of the UK	Heavily skewed towards males (72%); mostly 35+ and ABC1
BBC Radio 6 Music	Popular (and alternative) music from the 1960s to present day	All ages	Reach is higher among 25-44 year olds and among ABC1 listeners; also male and white listeners
BBC Asian Network	Speech and music, with strong emphasis on news and current affairs	British Asians under the age of 35 (but with appeal to anyone with an interest in British Asian issues)	The median age of listener is 33. Reach is highest among 15-34 year old British Asians

Activity: Choose a radio station and identify its target audience. Referring to its schedule (published online or in the 'Radio Times'), list ways in which it attempts to target this audience through its choice of content and appeal of its programmes and presenters. Further research how its distribution and marketing methods are also used to attract audiences.

Radio in the Digital Age

Radio's resurgence in the digital age is due, according to Andrew Harrison, chief executive of the RadioCentre, to radio being a "naturally complementary medium", well suited to an era of digital technology and multi-tasking. Portable digital devices such as mobile phones allow modern audiences to continue listening to the radio long after they leave their house or car. The growth of iTunes and streaming services have not, despite many predictions, spelled the end for traditional radio listening. Former head of BBC radio, Tim Davie, argues that in this context "many listeners value more than ever the personal touch of a good radio presenter." Over 90% of radio listening happens live, with online listening accounting for a small proportion of the audience.

The interactive nature of radio continues to make it popular and relevant to listeners in an age where audiences demand greater interactivity with media texts. While phone voting and mobile apps are now commonplace in television, they are – in contrast to radio's use interactivity - relatively new developments. Radio may be regarded as the first truly interactive medium with its use of phone-ins, music requests and pop quizzes. And long before Twitter, radio disc jockeys had regular followers of their own, such as the late Terry Wogan with his loyal band of TOGS.

Radio has also embraced the digital marketplace, harnessing its power to increase its own listener base. Radio One now has nearly 4 million subscribers to its YouTube channel, cleverly using a visual medium to bring audiences to an audio medium. Ben Cooper, Controller of BBC Radio 1 and 1Xtra, has stated that "Radio 1 has to find new ways of finding new young audiences for the BBC and the best way to predict the future of radio is to invent it yourself." To that end, the station has been at the forefront of 'visual radio' by fully visualising the Official Chart and their popular 'Live Lounges'. The youth-oriented broadcaster has successfully visualised a number of events, such as Zane Lowe's Jay-Z interview, which drew over one million listeners on Radio One's YouTube channel (and watched by fellow rapper Kanye West who, as a result, requested an interview of his own). Other events to pull in big numbers include Greg James's naked Miley Cyrus Wrecking Ball parody, Scott Mills Innuendo Bingo and Chris Stark's Mila Kunis interview that amassed over 12 million views worldwide.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bd/Scott_Mills.jpg/1280px-Scott_Mills.jpg

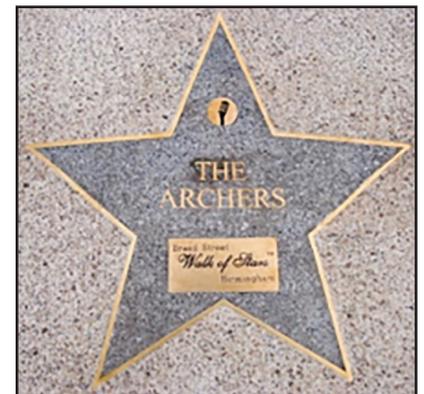
Radio as a form also continues to thrive because the modern, active audience is able to create their own audio experience. James Cridland, managing director of media.info, argues that radio is becoming more personalised. For example, listeners to Capital Xtra are able to press the skip button and go to the next song that the radio station would have played and still hear the DJs. Podcast versions of BBC radio shows, or their highlights, are readily available via the radio station's website. For example, Simon Mayo and Mark Kermode's film review show has grown from just 42 downloads of the original show in 2005 to well over 150,000 downloads ten years on. As with Radio 1, its distribution on YouTube has given it a global audience far in excess of this number.

Radio (or audio) content, being relatively cheap and easy to produce, has allowed many audiences to turn producer and use online platforms to distribute their content. Many communities, universities, schools and hospitals provide their own radio services, in addition to the wealth of podcasts created by enthusiastic amateurs.

Activity: Using Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications Theory, identify the different ways in which audiences use radio/audio content. To what extent do audiences use radio listening to construct and/or reflect their identity?

Case Study: The Archers and its Audience

The Archers is the world's longest running soap opera, broadcast daily on BBC Radio 4 and repeated in an omnibus edition on Sundays. Billed as "a rural drama in a contemporary setting" and originally created to educate farmers, it has been a mainstay of the Radio 4 schedule since 1951. The show boasts a large number of hard core fans and has enjoyed a long relationship with its audience, spawning two fan clubs, hosting



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Birmingham_Walk_of_Stars_The_Archers.jpg

conventions and generating vast mailbags of correspondence. In 2016 the programme hit the headlines for its domestic abuse storyline, which elicited a huge response from its audience. One listener set up a JustGiving page to raise money for the charity Refuge, which raised over a £100,000 in a matter of days. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline also reported a 20% rise in calls.

However, since the programme can now be accessed on the BBC iPlayer or available to download as a podcast the fan community has expanded and flourished online. Vociferous discussions happen through independent fan sites as well as on Facebook and Twitter. Their online discussions allow the audience to critique the show but also to take pleasure in parading and satirising the show (something that audiences do all the time on YouTube and social media). According to Lyn Thomas, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, "the enforced brevity of Twitter has prompted a new kind of Archers online chat, focused mainly on the Sunday omnibus edition, consisting of rapid, witty remarks or parodic images."

One such Twitter site, Ambridge Synthetics, recreates scenes from the drama with Play Mobil figures!

The Future of the Radio Industry

Radio looks set to retain healthy audiences for many years to come. It remains a uniquely flexible medium which audiences can consume in a variety of ways, and engage with while performing other tasks. The rise in the popularity of podcasting and visualising content suggests that traditional radio stations are still able to distribute their programmes to a wide audience. However, as portable devices become more sophisticated, will audiences demand more visual entertainment?

Will commercial radio be able to attract enough advertising revenue? To what extent will audio streaming services and playlists take over the role of the traditional music station? Already there is evidence to suggest that music companies are fashioning songs for playlists, just as the 3 minute edit was fashioned to fit airplay on radio stations. Playlists on streaming services such as Spotify are now considered more important than radio in bringing new music to the mass audience.

Playlists are a way of helping the audience navigate the 40 million or so tracks available. According to George Ergatoudis, former head of music at Radio 1 and 1Xtra, “mainstream audiences generally need more guidance to help them discover new music, or are seeking a ‘lean back’ experience.” However, it should be noted that while Spotify may be shaping the way that music reaches the audience, it is ultimately the listener that has the power to choose what they listen to and how they listen to it, as well as where and when.

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