
INTEGRATION OF NEWS BROADCAST IN COMMERCIAL FM CHANNELS: A RADIO REVOLUTION

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Abstract. In this new era of modernization and rapid change in the trends and techniques, the radio industry is bringing about many changes in terms of its programming, content and broadcasting. The radio channels are striving to come up with a new version of radio in all possible horizons. With the popularity of the famous RJs, it is also essential for the radio channels to deliver authentic and reliable views and news to its listeners to maintain the credibility and sustainability in the radio market. The current news and worldly affairs have been the most important broadcasting content only on the public radio and considered to be an inseparable element of radio broadcasting. Listeners eagerly wait for the time to get updated and gain knowledge about various social and political issues.

This paper focuses on the how the news broadcasting is now integrated in the private FM radio channels as well and has brought a revolution in the commercial radio broadcast in India. There is a major shift in the paradigm of the radio broadcasting content as well as the programming due to the new rules and laws that allows and permit the private FM radio channels to officially announce the current news on radio.

Keywords: Commercial Radio Channels, News, Broadcasting, Content and Programming and Revolution.

Introduction: FM radio is poised for a remarkable growth in India. In the age global village FM radio stations are owned and controlled by the market forces. The growth and development of FM radio contains three phases in India. In Phase III of FM licensing, smaller towns and cities are opened up for FM radio. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India has permitted the FM radio stations to rebroadcast news from All India Radio, Doordarshan, authorized TV news channels, United News of India, Press Trust of India and any other authorized news agency without any substantive change in the content as long as they do so without any changes or additions. The Supreme Court of India directed the Government of India to change the rules and allow FM stations to broadcast news reports which benefited the people.

On July 25, 2011, a minor change was made under Phase III policy guidelines for FM to allow broadcast of FM radio news bulletins of AIR without any addition or modification.

The Government of India announced phase-III of FM in July 2011 which permitted Information pertaining to sporting events, traffic and weather, coverage of cultural events, festivals, coverage of topics pertaining to examinations, results, admissions, career counseling, employment opportunities, public announcements pertaining to civic amenities like electricity, water supply, natural calamities, health alerts etc as provided by the local administration will be treated as non-news and current affairs broadcast and have therefore been permitted.

As the FM radio stations are primarily considered as a source of Entertainment the challenge then lies how primarily an entertainment channel can mix information while retaining their identity.

The private operators were allowed to own more than one channel, but not more than 40 percent of the total channels in a city, subject to a minimum of three different operators in the city. Networking of channels was permissible within a private FM broadcaster's own network across the country instead of in C and D category cities of a region allowed.

During the third National Community Radio Sammelan on February 10, 2013, the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry said that community radio stations would not be allowed to broadcast news for some time to come. As a stopgap measure, they could be permitted to re-transmit unedited AIR news.

The commercial radio channels in India witnessed a paradigm shift in relation to the broadcast of news that was restricted until 2003 when a PIL was filed by an NGO named Common Cause seeking directions from the Centre on the possibility of allowing private radio stations and community radios to broadcast news as it was only allowed to AIR by the Government of India to broadcast the news bulletins in exactly the same format. It also argued that radio is a more accessible medium for the masses and therefore it should be legalized for the private radio channels to broadcast the news. The petition said "It is submitted that the right to freedom of speech and expression also includes the right to information, which encompasses diverse interpretations of news and current affairs." It also said "India is perhaps the only democratic country in the world where the dissemination of news and current affairs programmes on the radio remains a monopoly of the government-owned broadcaster. No other democratic country has similar curbs. None of the USA's 14,000-plus radio stations, the 2,000-odd stations in Spain or 1,000-plus stations each in Italy, France, Greece and Australia are barred from airing news and cultural affairs." Prashant Panday, Chief executive at Entertainment Network India Ltd (ENIL), which operates Radio Mirchi 98.3 FM shared "We have been saying forever that radio is being needlessly singled out on news. Radio companies are responsible media companies. We go through enormous security checks and give massive entry fees to the government. There is absolutely no reason to deny us the right to do news". Moreover, chief operating officer at Sun group-owned 93.5 Red FM, Nisha Narayanan said that radio is a very powerful medium and because of the restrictions on news, it is not looked upon as a very serious medium. In addition, Harshad Jain, chief executive officer of radio and entertainment at HT Media that runs Fever 104 FM and Radio Nasha said that it will be a welcome move if news is allowed on private radio.

On July 25, 2011, the government has made a small concession, under Phase III policy guidelines for FM, allowed radio stations to carry news from state-owned broadcaster that is All India Radio. That means the radio channels have to carry the AIR feeds in an exact same format that does not provide any liberty to the private radio channels for further modification. On this the director of Radio Company anonymously mentioned, "Honestly, it is of no use to us as the AIR style of news does not really go with our contemporary and funky radio stations. We have been waiting for news to open up for six years."

The senior advocate Ashok Panda, appearing for Centre told that broadcasting of news by these stations/channels may pose a possible security risk as there is no mechanism to monitor the contents of news bulletin of every such station. As these stations/channels are run mainly by NGO/other small organization and private operators, several anti-national/radical elements within the country can misuse it for propagating their own agenda. On the other hand, Advocate Jayant Bhushan of Common Cause NGO said that government could not control flow of information and its decision was unconstitutional and violate of right to freedom of speech and expression. He said, "How could Centre grant licenses to radio station if it was not able to monitor them and there is no pre-censorship of news in TV and the government is allowed to cancel license in case of any violation. It is very good safeguard and the same policy should be made for radio also. Government cannot have monopoly over radio news and it is raising excuse of national security to have monopoly."

Radio is an inevitable part of the common people of India. Most of the country's population depends on radio for entertainment and information because it is the cheapest and portable media and therefore people rely on radio for most updates, current affairs and particularly 'news'. In the current scenario,

private radio channels are striving hard for attaining liberty from the Government of India to broadcast News in the format they wish to and bring about a revolution in the Indian radio industry.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the modification in content of radio programming after the introduction of news in private FM channels of Delhi.
2. To study the role of Radio Jockeys in scripting and delivering news content on entertainment platform.

Methodology: To meet the objectives, a research study was designed to generate data on the subject using qualitative method of data collection.

Interviews of radio programming heads/producers and Radio Jockeys were conducted to find out the how the news content is incorporated in the private FM broadcasting.

Selection of FM Staff: Programming heads/ producers and popular radio jockeys of private FM channels in Delhi were selected.

Period of Study: From January to February 2018

Findings: The result of the discussions with the RJs, producers and Programming Head are explained as follows:

Era in Private FM Channels after Phase III: On discussing with the different RJs about the difference in the broadcasting styles in content creation after Phase III it was found that the term News is still cannot be used in the private FM broadcasting as mentioned by RJ Rahul Makin of Fever 104 FM. This means the quotes like “an encounter has happened in J&K and 5 people were killed” cannot be broadcasted by the private FM channels at all. The RJs can only update about the local issues like traffic, pollution or anything that is a matter of concern to the local listener and any other information in which the listener might be interested like hike in petrol rates or budget but not like news related to politics, cast, religion or any public or private personality or brand. RJ Rahul Makin said that the channels can talk about the impact of any event on the society in a very subtle way. RJ Divya from Radio City 91.1 FM added that “If something major happens or some event occurs that affects the general public in common like budget, demonetization or crime then private radio stations only broadcast their light take on it. As they still cannot broadcast the news in the real sense so they take out views out of news and find an indirect way by not mentioning any specific names to comment on it. Whether it should be dealt seriously or in a humor package depends on the situation and delivery.”

Abbas, producer of RJ Raunac of Red 93.5 FM shared that they would present the news of India winning a cricket match is by talking to the father of the cricketer which is absolutely indirect take on a particular news. Also, RJ Heena of Red 93.5 FM said that if any news which can create problem to anyone they avoid taking it.

The Regional Programming Head of Fever 104 FM, Sharat Bhattatiripad mentioned, “We stay away from broadcasting news and majorly focus on entertainment, we are clear about that space and bucket and we are more into social change and how we can use radio for social change. We focus more on soft news and do not get into hard news.”

- **Benefits of News to the Private Radio Industry:** The benefit of the permission the FM radio stations to rebroadcast news from All India Radio are very limited as told by Sharat, that news is a very strong part of the set of requirements of radio towards its listeners as listeners wants to know what is happening all around the world. Therefore whatever news is allowed to broadcast is good but it becomes total editorial call that which issue to take up on air and what not.”
RJ Divya mentioned that people listen to the radio while they are on the go, while travelling, driving or in metro so people are listening to radio that keeps them updated and people wants to know what is happening exactly right now. And radio is a medium of entertainment, information and awareness.

Similarly, RJ Heena told that people do not have time to read the newspaper and watch Television so they listen to radio for current updates and especially the morning shows are dedicated to take up some issue with the RJ's view on it."

- **Presentation of different types of news on FM radio:** The presentation of news on private FM channels is very critical. It can be presented in the form of Parody, radio Drama, discussion with the listeners, through campaigns etc. RJ Divya said that the different news means different set of audience and its emotions like women safety, nursery admissions, or anything that affects the listeners directly and largely are presented by private FM channels using different methods and treatments. However, the best way to bring about these kinds or different kinds of views or news is by listener's participation on air with the RJ. The RJs brings up the issue as a topic and discuss it with the listeners so that there is interaction and discussion. For example, PADMAD promotions made everyone to talk about PAD and the RJs bring up shows on it and awareness also happens after which comes the entertainment part. In case of political leaders making a funny remark, which is not expected out of them then this kind of issues are taken up lightly on the radio so that nobody takes offense of it and the RJ should not sound like he/she is making a remark on anybody. So different subjects are handled with different treatment and audience remains the same.

According to Abbas, "You diverge information, education and entertainment on radio so if we do not cover news then the two most important part are missed and only entertainment leaves behind, which the audience is not expecting from any responsible radio channel. And people appreciate listening to a reliable medium which is also entertaining them while delivering serious messages also in informal way."

- **Criteria of Selection of News/ Current Issues to Be Broadcasted:** The criteria of selection of news or current issues that needs to be broadcasted by the private FM channels involves an editorial team in every FM radio station at the unit level who are responsible for the content to be aired like radio editors that take up call on what kind of music will go on air, the kind of talk the RJ should speak on air and the kind of issue to choose to be relevant to the city.

For FM radio channels the basic criteria is something that it local and affects people's Information Quotient (IQ), Entertainment Quotient (EQ) and lastly entertainment. According to Jatin, producer in Fever 104 FM, "We choose the news as a listener and what the listener would like to listen on radio and talk about positives of the society and how we can contribute to build a positive society." Sharat Bhattatiripat shared any news that falls into the bracket of social change, they feel should be brought about, does not falls primarily in the news bracket. It is more often that the news which falls in the category of feature in newspaper should be taken up and the issues based on listenership programs should be given the required importance."

It was mentioned by RJ Heena that the variation like parody is developed by using different news then developing a song based on the issues which becomes entertaining as well as informative. And for sensitive issues they do not make funny content for it and run very serious promos on air with a mellow downed tone.

- **Content Development And Program Designing Of News Broadcast:** Earlier it used to be only the producer for content development and program designing of everything including news to be said by the RJ on Air but in today's context when there is a lot of repetition of the same content in the same station there is need for more than one brain to sit together so that there are more ideas that come up. And therefore, as per RJ Divya the content is decided by the producer and the RJ for better brainstorming. However, if there is any sensitive issue then the programming head will decide the final outline of the content.

Abbas told that Private radio stations would like to broadcast the content that the people would like to listen on Air and it also depends on the personality of the RJ. Radio Jockeys like RJ Raunac who can funny, humorous, entertaining, informative, and sentimental can handle any type of content as compared to an RJ whose is not very versatile and focuses on one genre. Likewise, RJ Heena shared they have a prep sheet and producers does the research that how many news items are there and prepares a list and then the whole team that includes the programming head, producer, content developer/editor and the RJ sits together and scrutinize the news that can be aired without any obligation.

- **Duration of the News Broadcast in Private Radio:** It was found that there is no set or fixed time duration of the news broadcast in private radio station. It depends on the issue how much important and critical it is and also the kind of show like in morning (8am to 10am) and evening (5pm to 7pm) shows the current happening are a must to be discussed as compared to an afternoon or a night show. It depends on how important the issue is and then it is decided whether the FM channel have to run that particular issue for one, two or more days or if it is light news they may cover it in one or two links in a day.

Jatin explained that only 2-3 minutes are given per link to an RJ and it is expected that the RJ should deliver the large message in minimal words with a greater impact. Hence, 8 to 10 minutes per hour in a day is dedicated. There is no set duration as it is not a news bulletin and on an average an RJ talks only 4 times in an hour so the RJ can talk about the issue in 2 of his/her links and in other 2 he/she can talk about some entertainment or fun factor.

- **Limitation of news broadcast in Private FM Channels:** The FM radio channels are not allowed to touch upon politics as a subject at all this is their biggest limitations. Moreover, RJ Divya said, "The FM modernization happened with 24 hours broadcast which was primarily for the purpose of entertainment at easy cost. Now-a-days, when radio is running 24*7 the new content is required always which means news. However, we are not supposed to make any political remark like what is been practiced by the TV news channels and newspapers. The private radio station will let you know what is happening only in an indirect or informal way and then it is the listeners who decide that what take they want to take. And we find different ways to present the news everyday innovatively." Radio Jockey does not take community's name in a communal clash which may add fuel to the clash or any brand name like Maggie was banned but the FM radio stations could not take its name like other media channels. Ideally, they cannot take name of religion, cast, sex, politics, people or brands. Apart from this, radio is free to announce anything that can entertain the listeners.

- **Challenges to Deliver News on an Entertaining Platform Like FM Radio:** The challenges that an entertaining media like radio faces to deliver news are many like developing content out of News that should be indirect in all sense. According to Abbas, producer of RJ Raunac at 93.5 Red FM, it is very challenging because in news format the event is described or narrated as it is but on radio it cannot be said or done like other media platforms. "It is indeed very challenging as you cannot take names or alter the information and still tell the correct news in an entertaining package. Moreover, the content should not hurt anybody's sentiments" said RJ Heena.

The basic factor is the how easily and without political inference the news is delivered to the listeners which can be done by various methods like through shows, RJ Links, Parody, jingle, character designing, drama, discussion with the audience etc.

On the contrary, Jatin said, "It is not at all challenging. It is just that you have to observe your daily surroundings morning to evening and when you stay in an atmosphere like that you can easily develop the content for the broadcast." Sharat Bhattatiripat had a total different viewpoint because Fever 104 talks more about social change and not news. According to the listener's research, apart from the entertainment listeners love to listen to something which is positive in nature, having a feel good factor and a constructive change that is being brought about in the city. Hence, any kind of movement or program with which the listeners resonate well is taken up. by Fever 104, especially when certain intervention or change is required by the listeners.

- **Challenges Faced By Radio Channels In News Broadcast:** The FM Radio Channels face major challenge in broadcasting news as it is the channel's responsibility whatever is broadcasted on Air by their channel even when most of the content is in an entertaining way. All radio stations are under a check by Government agency. Therefore, anytime or anyway if an RJ makes a remark that is unacceptable it can be monitored and then the channel may have to face the consequences. The channels are cautious that nothing should be broadcasted primarily on politics openly and certain words that are refrained from using like quota, cast etc. not to be said by the any of their RJs.

All the radio professionals are taught before they get into the industry and radio companies are always very strict in dealing with the RJs and the Producers regarding the content. Abbas said that because it is the Red FM channel's policy that the RJs, programming head or the producers or the content creators cannot use the names of people or brands and they have to adhere to it. For channels it is a matter of great challenge that the RJ should not say anything that could hurt

someone, mentioned Jatin, producer from Red 93.5 FM. It was stressed by Sharat Bhattatiripat that on Fever 104 FM the news content is very minimal because of the restriction by the Government.

Conclusion: Although private FM channels are not fully permitted to broadcast news, still they find different innovative ways to cover major instances and happenings of the local, national or international surroundings. Radio Jockeys along with their producers and programming heads strive hard everyday to develop content that covers all the local, national or international current information that has complete relevance to its listeners. Hence, private FM channels are keeping the promise of responsible and reliable media in its true sense. In the future of private radio industry, there will be a separate radio channel which will only be dedicated to news or broadcast news 24*7.

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