

Radio – the challenging News-Medium

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RADIO AND COMMUNICATION

Summary

In my paper I will present the essential definitions and classifications of the concept of radio communication.

I will show some essential challenges for the communicators on the one side and for the recipients on the other side.

Finally I will show how the radio as audio-communication channel/ medium is using its instrument which is the spoken language and how it responds to the demands of the recipients. It is considered that the remembrance is the main challenge for recipients, which I will be examining thoroughly.

Introduction

Nowadays we are confronted with the immense density of information and media technologies, which has an impact on our consuming behavior, and our senses and cognition. Our senses and cognition are effected through audio and visual, written and pictured forms for example of infotainment, newstainment and docutainment .

There are several ways of getting information:

- Newspapers and magazines,
- Television, radio, internet, and last but not least
- SMS

The greater the variety of information channels, the greater the challenge to select the way of getting information.

Graph. 1 Statistics on radio-usage in Switzerland, Bakom
(Does the radio vanish? for the media-stage – not even the competition of the Internet and other technologies.)

The radio-communication is based on the audio technique. The challenge of the audio technique is two-sided: the communicators have to catch the attention of the audience, and the recipients have to keep focusing on the spoken word.

Therefore the main requirement for the communicators of the radio-news it is to complete the task of providing the information to the recipient and to secure the “remembrance” effect. The study-results of the effects on the remembrance-ability of the radio-audition I am about to present are based on Andreas Kindels presentations of 60 explorations from the USA, Germany, Great Britain, Kenya, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark¹. Kindel made himself numerous experiments for exploring the effects of recipient- media- and situation-factors on the memory-ability of radio-hearers. His work was written between 1994 and 1997 at the university of Saarland in Germany.

Essential Definitions and Elements of Communication

Media-sciences define several concepts of communication.

Lasswell explained the process of communication and the effects of media in simple words²:

“WHO says WHAT in WHICH channel TO WHOM with WHAT EFFECT?”

Lasswell further separated the communication-science in following branches:

- Communication-Research
- Media-content-analysis
- Media-comparison
- Research of audition
- Research of media-effects

In the further writing I will concentrate on the research of media effects. There are three basic points of view in the research of media effects:

- The physiological,
- The psychological and
- The socio-psychological research phases, which had an influence on the different media-effect-theories.

For my overview of the radio-communication I have used the knowledge of psychological and socio-psychological theories. They are relevant for the explanation of the different stages of the news selection: i.e. attention, pre-knowledge, attitudes, feelings, motivation, hearing-ability, recall-strategies.

The following short definitions³ explain the mentioned factors of Lasswell’s formula.

Communicator: Is a person or a group of people, who chooses messages, produces, and spreads these messages. Communicator has the intention of declaring something by shaping, selecting and controlling this process. Communicators are therefore called gatekeepers.

Message: Is everything what the communicator is sending through a medium to the recipient. Its meaning is transmitted by symbols and signals, which are producing or stimulating psychological and social processes of the recipient. A medium is a material transporter of these meanings, symbols and signals.

¹ Kindel 1998:69

² Lasswell 1995:93 cited in Kindel 1998: 13.

³ Steinmann Mathias: Vorlesung „Einführung in die Rezeptionsforschung“. Universität Bern.

Recipient: Is a human being who receives the news, demander or user of the information, and the partner of communicators. Some scientist make the difference between recipients who “decode” a message in connection with “understanding” and the others who just receive that message⁴.

Media-effect-models

The research of radio-communication is embedded in the research of media-effects. Therefore, the radio is allocated to the science of mass-communication based on the following four media-effect models - I will not critically analyze these different models:

- media-oriented
- recipients-oriented
- bimodal
- trimodal

Media-oriented

From the beginning of the last century till the 1930ies the so called “Bullet Theory” dominated the media-sciences, the question was: “What do media do with people?” Remembrance is depending on the media-producers. Recipients are passive and without importance.⁵

Recipients-oriented

In the early 1940 this model was a response on the media-oriented theories. The central question is “What do people do with the media?”. This model considers different skills of the audience. According to the recipients-oriented model the recipients are actively, intentionally deciding how big the influence of mass-media is.⁶

Bimodal-model is a combination of media- and recipients-factors.

After the phase of the so called “almighty” media and “almighty” recipients in the 1950ies and 1960 (at this time there was the introduction of the television) there was the tendency to combine media- and recipient-factors. Their central questions: “ Who remembers of which news and why?” and “How does the process of remembrance and understanding work?”.⁷

And finally, there are the **trimodal** models, which are similar to the bimodal concept⁸.

The trimodal effect-model integrates the influence of recipient-factors, like interest, previous knowledge, age, of media-factors like contents and presentation-form. The new supplements are the so called situation-factors and the surrounding, like for example presence of third persons and additional activities.

This way the studies I will later shortly present are explaining the selective memory-process of radio-audience.

⁴ Kindel 1998:20

⁵ Kindel:25-26.

⁶ Kindel 1998:28-29

⁷ Kindel 1998:31

⁸ Merten 1977:458-459 cited in Kindel 1998:33.

Radio – the challenging media

As I already mentioned, nowadays radio is the most accessible information channel in the world. According to one classic definition⁹ radio as a mass medium is transferring only acoustics and signals, it is connected to time and fix-broadcasting-dates, radio is brief (every information-sequence is broadcasted one time), radio can be independent of spaces, it can potentially be received from everyone at the same time.

What is further making radio interesting for me is, that the imagination of spoken language is often abstract – it is not easy to “imagine” in pictures. That’s why it can be said, that radio is rather a concentrating media – as far as the recipient is motivated to consume information broadcasted on the radio.

Once I read in a cultural magazine that contrary to the television, radio makes much deeper reflexion possible. That is making radio a part of culture¹⁰.

In this work I am presenting language on the radio – as a challenge for communicators – their task is to catch the audience with the language, which is one of the numerous instruments. On the other side I am presenting remembrance as a challenge for the recipients.

Radio-language

There is also a theory that the spoken word has a longer during effect, then motioned pictures. The selection of the acoustics-material is much more analytical and oriented to item-criteria – than this is the case with picture-choice. It said that the thought (spoken) word is even not conceivable in pictures. That’s probably why listening news and information on radio is an act of concentration, rather than an act of distraction → Listening to the radio is a so called “abstraction in the reflexion”¹¹.

Since the 1950ies there was a claim in german-speaking countries to do something against the incomprehensibility of news-texts¹². It was claimed to

- less syntactic complexity
- more redundancy
- less abstraction
- less professional slang
- slower speech

Further special code for the radio-broadcast is the so called “prosody”¹³: For example the pitch and the speed of the voice or the intonation and the rhythm.

Writing for hearing existed already in the middle ages - what is left today is, the speaker has to have personal and speaking-performance-skills and sometimes also acting skills.

The basic rule of writing for the audience is to create a pronounceable message for the communicator in order to transmit it the most understandable way to the audience - not to produce as many information as possible in the shortest period of time.¹⁴

⁹ Silberman 1982: 381-385 cited in Kindel 1998: 19

¹⁰ Dieter Bachmann, „du“-Zeitschrift, Heft Nr. 6, Juni 1994:11

¹¹ Dieter Bachmann. In: „du“-Zeitschrift, Heft Nr. 6, Juni 1994: 11

¹² Schwitalla 1993:12

¹³ Kindel 1998:109

¹⁴ Wachtel 1997:23

Remembrance of radio-news

In the radio-auditors-research I am taking connection to the tested persons has to repeat what they have heard on the radio a short time before the interview. Concerning that test, there is a difference between “understanding-, memory- and reproduction-ability”.¹⁵

To remember means, ability to repeat minimum one word, that is according to a news-information.

The research of the memory and recall ability of the radio-audition is not based on the understanding of the heard radio-news (because with this model it is not possible to measure that component.)

To ameliorate the remembrance it is necessary to activate the 3 elements: **media-factors**, as well as **situation-** and **recipient-factors**. The recipient-factors are also called the secondary factors because they first activate one of the selection factors. Selection is explaining what the recipient remembers. Here are some of these factors and assumptions¹⁶:

- **Attention:** The bigger the attention, the bigger the repetition of the heard news. There is also a supporting effect of the vivacity of the radio-speaker, the original tones or the choice of issues.
- **Previous knowledge:** The bigger the recipient’s basic-knowledge, the bigger the remembrance results.
- **Attitudes:** The reception of radio-news is dependent of the pro- and contra-attitudes. The recipients pay more attention to news about controversial or prominent personalities. This is ameliorating the process of remembrance.
- **Motivation:** The bigger the motivation and the interest, the bigger the remembrance.
- **Feelings:** The bigger the emotions (measured as higher blood-pressure or fast pulse) the more intensive the news-supply/ the use of news – but there are no big effects on the remembrance.
- **Hearing-skills:** Older people and many young adolescents have limited hearing-skills. This is restricting the remembrance.
- **Recall-strategies:** the tested recipients with a strategy during the radio-broadcast are keeping more information than recipients without any strategies. A good strategy is for example the orientation – ordered from the beginning to the end of a radio-broadcast.

According to the studies, all these factors are not equally important for the process of remembrance. The conclusion of these different experiments and assumptions, here are some of the conclusions¹⁷:

1. Remembrance or recall of radio-news is dependent of the **items**, but also of the **position** of the news-information: it seems to be much easier to remember the first news-information.
2. Speaking about different items is also positively influencing the recall and the remembrance. The broadcasting should be supported by commentaries, repetition and previews like teaser and bumper.
3. Formal media factors like Original tones (“o-tones”), headlines and sound-elements are not directly and strongly influencing the remembrance. From the recipients point of view, remembering the news depends much more of the interest, motivation and

¹⁵ Kindel 1998:21

¹⁶ Kindel 1998:66-68

¹⁷ Kindel 1998: 74-136

previous knowledge. The experiments shows that people with a higher education are more recalling the radio-news.

4. Finally there are some indications that the daytime, the activities, like driving car or relaxing in the sofa, and the background-acoustics are influencing the process of remembrance. But here are further explorations necessary.

Conclusion

As a matter of fact, being informed has become a challenge for the news-recipient.

And among of the numerous density of information-channels there is still an impact and a challenge of the radio today.

The reason why I have chosen the radio is that it has indeed survived the introduction of television and later the multi-media technologies. Invented in the early 20ies of the last century, it has started with short audio messages for military information purposes.

Throughout the time the radio has not very much changed the technique, but it has broaden the audience. Radio has become a mass-media and it has maintained the role of information provider. The radio-broadcasting today is even the most accessible information channel in the world. And it even can be used as a “weapon” against misunderstanding and disinformation.

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