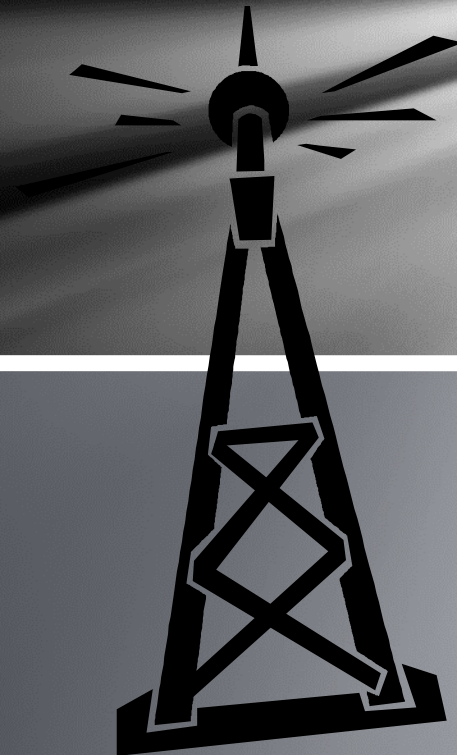


Radio: The Resilient Medium

Chapter 7

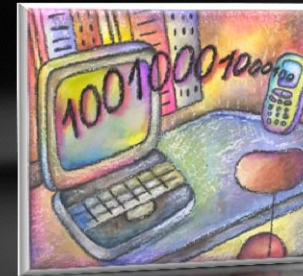
*"Understanding Media in the Digital
Age"*

Comm 336 Mass Media Malaise Course



Radio- Old Yet Modern

- ❑ Radio is the oldest broadcast medium but is also, today, one of the most modern, taking full advantage of the digital revolution
- ❑ In the digital age, radio has enhanced the listening experience with:
 - ❑ Better quality sound
 - ❑ Audio innovations such as podcasts
 - ❑ Digital satellite radio
- ❑ Radio is a somewhat paradoxical medium, in that it is :
 - ❑ A highly concentrated industry- companies own hundreds of stations
 - ❑ At the same time a single individual can use the Internet to become a web broadcaster
- ❑ Radio had its time as a dominant medium, but television also would greatly take away audiences, as it did with motion pictures
- ❑ But radio adapted and continues to have a viable niche among current media
 - ❑ Source for music entertainment
 - ❑ A means by which people receive the latest news
 - ❑ A forum where ideas- important or not- are debated on talk shows



The Internet and Radio



- ❑ Instead of making radio irrelevant, the Internet opened new channels for the oldest broadcast medium
- ❑ Today, we can listen to radio stations from all over the world, at any time, not just those within a limited local or geographic range
- ❑ Satellite radio, paid for by listeners, presents vast format varieties and are free of commercials (many are anyway)
- ❑ Radio programming today can also be listened to (and viewed at some places) through stations' websites
- ❑ Radio has become even more interactive with listeners
- ❑ Radio remains attractive and profitable as an advertising vehicle
- ❑ This has lead to radio becoming one of the most concentrated media industries in terms of a handful of corporations dominating radio in markets across the country

Radio Technology Timeline



- ❑ 1844- Electrical impulses could be used to send a message over wire. The first great conqueror of time and space is the electric dot-and-dash telegraph, using the Morse Code system, puts slight dents on paper to signify letters
- ❑ 1876- Alexander Graham Bell and the telephone deliver long distance voice-to-voice communication
- ❑ 1896- Guglielmo Marconi's wireless telegraph breaks the bonds and limits of wired communication
- ❑ 1906- The radiotelephone enables speech transmission over the radio spectrum or airwaves
- ❑ Early 1920s- Radiotelephone technology is developed and becomes the radio mass medium as America's first radio stations are started
- ❑ Understanding and harnessing the power and potential of electricity was vital in making all of these breakthroughs possible



Radio Becomes a Mass Medium

- ❑ Before radio could become a mass medium, it had to be transformed from a long-range, cumbersome device for maritime, commercial, governmental, and hobby communication
- ❑ It needed to be an easy-to-use system that would bring program content to people in their homes
- ❑ Radio needed these characteristics:
 - ❑ Small size
 - ❑ Low price
 - ❑ Regularly scheduled programs
 - ❑ Clear reception
 - ❑ Money-making capability
- ❑ It didn't take long for it all to come together!



Early Radio: Key Names, Dates, Stations

- ❑ David Sarnoff- at American Marconi Company, he expressed a vision for radio as becoming a “household utility” similar to pianos and phonographs; idea for a “radio music box” that could receive different wavelengths, would have amplifying tubes and a loudspeaking telephone
 - ❑ By 1919 Sarnoff was manager of RCA (Radio Corporation of America)
 - ❑ He would found NBC, the first radio network, in 1926
- ❑ Frank Conrad- Westinghouse engineer who successfully experimented with first radio transmissions over airwaves. Westinghouse soon built a tin “radio shack” in Pittsburgh and in 1920 launched **KDKA**, America’s first and longest running station; several hundred people enjoyed music and news coverage that included results of the 1920 presidential election
- ❑ KDKA was an instant hit, within months dozen of stations went on the air across the U.S.- launched by anyone who wanted to transmit messages- department stores, rich people, car dealers, churches, radio manufacturers
- ❑ Airwaves have limited capacity so there soon was interference
- ❑ This lead to the Radio Act of 1927, with a key principle: airwaves belonged to the people- this gave the new Federal Radio Commission the right to regulate use in the public interest
- ❑ Licensing requirements were set up- frequencies were assigned as specified power levels, specified times
- ❑ FDR’s Depression “fireside chats” helped America get through tough times
- ❑ Edward R. Murrow- iconic CBS radio (and later TV) newsman during World War II



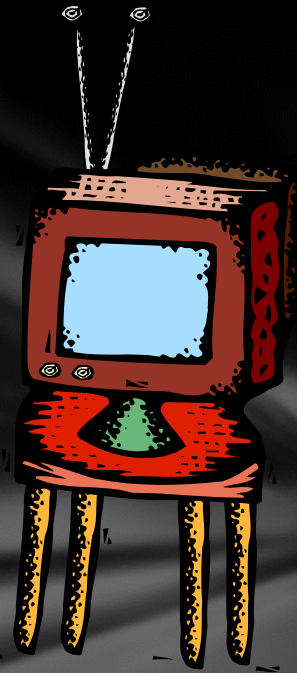
Advertising and Radio's Golden Age



- ❑ American radio opted for advertising-generated revenue- could have instead been government controlled, subscription-based, endowments from rich people, common carrier (AT&T leasing its transmitter first come, first serve)
- ❑ A New York station, WEAJ, was the first to have the business model of leasing time to present advertising promotions
- ❑ Early radio advertising was very polite and restrained- sponsorships had advertisers paying for production of shows in return for being the program's sole advertiser: "Lucky Strikes proudly presents the news with...."
- ❑ Radio proved successful in delivering customers to its advertisers; was very successful as a national advertising vehicle (as magazines were)
- ❑ Network system of towers and antenna enabled same programs and ads to be transmitted and heard coast-to-coast at the same time
- ❑ "The Golden Age of Radio" was from mid-1930s-1950- programming truly had something for everyone (see p. 157)
- ❑ Radio satisfied what would become known as the "uses and gratification" theory- people could actively seek out and enjoy the news, information (including consumer purchases) and entertainment they wanted

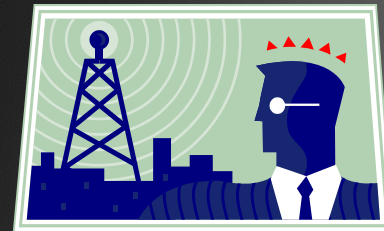
Facing the Challenge of Television

- ❑ Television hurt the U.S. radio industry perhaps even worse than it did motion pictures
- ❑ People could see and hear on TV what they had been hearing on radio: dramas, soap operas, quiz shows, sports
- ❑ But radio did successfully rebound with new content- disk jockeys, continuous music, news and weather reporting, call-in shows
- ❑ Radio, to a large extent, also ceased to be a national medium, instead becoming a medium for providing services to local audiences
- ❑ FM radio's debut in the late 1970s greatly increased the variety and sound quality; more "album-oriented" rock and college stations attracted and kept young audiences
- ❑ AM almost became irrelevant until conservative local and national talk radio and sports shows brought it back in the 1980s and '90s



Radio Today as a Mature Medium

- ❑ America today has more radio stations than ever, some 14,000
- ❑ Studies show 96 percent of the 12+ population listen in an average week
- ❑ Local advertisers, who provide most of a station's revenue, remain convinced that radio works and it helps them generate business from listeners
- ❑ In the U.S., radio gets 16/17 percent of all money spent on media advertising, compared to 26 percent newspapers and TV's 22 percent (not counting cable)
- ❑ Radio remains attractive because the cost to advertise is considerably lower than TV, newspapers and magazines; and the core audience is local consumers
- ❑ Radio stations are set up to make it easy for someone to produce and run ads
- ❑ Radio is also attractive for its diversity of formats (see list p. 168), which attract very specific audiences that can be targeted for and by advertisers and station sales people
- ❑ Today "hyper local" low wattage radio frequencies can more easily be attained from the FCC



Radio's Challenges and Challenges

- ❑ People certainly have lots of ways, other than traditional “terrestrial” radio, to listen to and enjoy music, sports, news and talk: iPods, smart phones, mp3 players, satellite radio, Internet radio, podcasts, Pandora, tablets, computers, etc.
- ❑ No shortage of criticisms of regular radio: from excessive long commercial breaks, limited and bland song playlists, slanted talk show hosts and programs, “fake” local announcers ([voice tracking](#)), news as a format and not a public service, too much media concentration, “corporate” radio, not enough local ownership and voices, too profit driven, too many stations...the criticisms are many
- ❑ But radio's relevance continues- it has proven a versatile and adaptive medium, one that supplies information and entertainment, opinion, and relatively inexpensive local advertising
- ❑ Radio is determined to hold its place in today's evolving media mix, and will continue to evolve as changes continue to occur in technology, audience tastes and interests
- ❑ It will continue to attract people who want to work in a field that is unique, challenging and can be so fun and rewarding!

