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FM Channels in India: Issues and Challenges

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A B S T R A C T

Radio is expected to be the second fastest growing medium of media communication (FICCI-KMPG) with an exponential growth rate of 18% CAGR over FY 2012 to FY 2018. Radio has undoubtedly made a strong hold in the market. Its reach and creativity has made it a favorite among the masses and the advertising world. But among all these good things there are some issues and challenges which are looming over the radio industry, needed to be taken care of immediately for the growth of this medium. This paper will try to comprehend these issues and challenges faced by the audio-visual industry in detail.

Introduction

Indian radio industry is one of the largest broadcasting organizations in the world in terms of language of broadcast, spectrum of Socio economic and cultural diversity it serves (www.allindiaradio.gov.in). Radio has come a long way from where it started in 1923. Inauguration of FM services in 1977 added to it grandeur. Radio together government and private channels caters to a plethora of listeners ranging from various sections of the society. During its journey it has given us some immensely popular voices of broadcasting history like Tabassum, Ameen Siyani, Seema Verma

and many others. Currently All India Radio runs approximately 414 radio station of its own scattered all over India combining with private channels its number rises to approximately 800 radio channels all over the country. In India besides traditional radio stations FM radio is the main crowd puller. FM radio sector is the most significant contemporary development in Indian radio (Kasbekar, 2006). Since Independence radio has proven itself instrumental in building roadmap of development for India. More than 850 million people in developing country are

excluded from a wide range of information and knowledge with rural poor in particular remain isolated from both traditional media and new information and communication technology which would develop their livelihood and development pattern (FAO, 2001) but in case of India the story is little different AIR practically covers ninety percent of population and is graded as one of the biggest tool in disaster management and communication strategies of the government. The rationale for radio is strong on Legal/Constitutional, social, Cultural and developmental grounds. In 2000 radio could be heard in two third of all Indian households in 24 languages and 146 dialects, over some 120 million radio sets (Patil, Dhanraj, 2010).

In remote areas where there is no means of communication, when our sailors sail into sea, our army fighting in the remote areas of country or guarding our borders radio is the only medium of entertainment as well as source of communication. Today radio logically covers all parts of the society, since its inception radio has played a vital role in development of country by taking each and every policy of the government to its citizens and birth of private FM worked as icing on the cake. Radio industry became a lethal combination of creativity and reach catering to every listener with one thing or another. According to a report of FICCI-KMPG radio industry registers a growth of 20% yearly. In 2012 its revenue will grow from 12.7 billion to projected revenue of 27.4 in 2017. In 2014 the revenue of All India Radio alone was 440 Cr (www.allindiaradio.gov.in). Advent of private radio stations have infused new freshness in the programming style of radio industry its peppy radio jockeys, latest songs have worked wonders for the industry. The industry which was once dying its own death slowly and steadily has climbed to the

new ladders of success. Due to its rising potential radio industry has also become a favorite medium for the advertising industry also. Research firm IMARC group expects market to grow at a CAGR of around 17% during 2012 to 2016. It's very much understandable that over the year's radio industry had made a strong hold of itself among its audience. Due to its reach and having a handsome amount of listener's radio together government and private are regarded as a potential carrier of appeals by the manufacturers to its customers.

Though having so many good things in its kitty there are some nooks and corners in the industry which need to be mended. As it's a well said proverb good and bad exists simultaneously. No doubt radio industry has shown an exponential growth over the years and FM has been a strong reason behind it, time is passing by radio industry is somewhere showcasing a stagnant position in its creative approach. Today listeners find nothing new in the programmes of the radio. The sheen is lost. It's not only programming but there are many other creative as well as technical issues and challenges which need to be taken care of.

Major Issues in Fm Channels

Radio industry is growing at a steady pace with lots of potential. In spite of this there are some bits that can create a hindrance in its growth. These are the issues which can be sorted out in a short span of time and can yield good results in return:

Content

In media it is said that content is supreme. If you have a strong content the audience will automatically follow you and this is the area where radio industry lacks. In today's world the channels are not having enough variety

and content to give the customers. A radio channel is mainly regarded as all about music and art. If we talk about Phase I and Phase II nothing has changed much about content it is still about music. On the other hand government allows not come up with some great ideas and content increase the interest of the listeners. Till now radio industry has managed to keep its head out of water but day by day listeners are diverting towards alternatives because technology like web radio and internet streaming provide them with a vast range of choice to opt from. Another problem is excessive advertisement. In the race of making profit the channels have forgot their objectives. Turn on any channel and there will be regular bombardment of advertisements which eventually compels you to tune in some other channel and situation is no different there also, repeated jokes, same old stuff, repeated songs are making the situation worse only. We can also listen to same song on same channels at same time for a couple of days or may be at a difference of ten minutes. There are certain programmes on private channels like “Panky and Ashish” which encourage listeners to provide channels with numbers of their near and dear ones on whom they want to play a prank.

A large number of listeners feel that this is an intrusion of privacy. Programmes like “Buau” on Red FM, “Dand Doud” and “Papluft” on Big FM Kashmir and Gujarat call anyone randomly or on someone’s request and irritates the person to an extent that they reciprocate will abuses which are later beeped.

This is the level of entertainment that we are providing to the listeners. These kinds of programmes may be popular in particular gentry but in larger context they are a big no. Programme writers need to introspect

and come up with something which can cater to a larger audience.

Language

Another immediate issue which industry needs to take care of is language. It is said that when in Rome in Rome be like Romans but still many precautions should be taken while giving anything on air. These day’s channels have molded themselves around a theme and its language also revolves around the same theme. Maximum private channels indulge into the language like “fat gayi”, “Baap ke nahi aap ke zamane ka channel”, “cuss words which are beeped”, “watt lag gayi” and many other. Double meaning dialogues and jokes are a common thing on radio channels and all want to listen. A deep observation indicates that after listening to such language maximum audience gets averted from channel leading to churning of the customers.

Audience

Private FM channels accounts for only 30% listenership in India. This means a larger audience is still not under their reach.

A major cause of this problem is molding of private channel on a certain theme like Radio Meow was having a tagline of Women first channel, Red FM in its each programme something or another for younger generation. Being theme based is good as it gives you one direction in which one has to frame the programmes but on the other hand it also ties your hands in respect of creativity and production of programme for different genre. Bad content, Language issue and government policies are big hurdles in the way of radio industry. Though the introduction of third phase has given a sigh of relief to owners but still there is lot of work that is to be done.

Challenges among FM Channels

Challenges means those points which need time and effort to get on track, same is the case with this industry also there are some matters which need to be solved but need time and effort.

Conclusion

FM channel has gained popularity over the years. The increased number of FM channels and 24 hours service has helped the listener with the variety and efficiency. Not only in numbers and timings but this age old medium has restructured its content as well to suit the modern times. The radio has modified its strategy to woo the listener and instead of broadcasting what they think is right, they put more focus on what the viewer wants. The transformed radio intelligently categorizes the programme and targets its audience knowing that every individual has a particular interest at specific periods of the day. If the challenges and the issues facing Fm channels it will not be difficult FM to become one of the top booming industries of India in coming years.

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