

THE CHANGING CONSUMPTION NEEDS OF THE RADIO AUDIENCE

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Abstract- *This research study explores the medium of radio and its popularity with the new age audience .The ever changing media landscape and the needs of the audiences which change as well with new innovations and development taking place. In this shifting media environment then where does the traditional media like radio find its place and hold on to its credibility and legacy. The research study was carried out on a sample of 200 respondents comprising youth to understand their radio listening habits and needs from the medium and their media preferences in terms of radio and other sources of entertainment primarily music consumption. The study reveals that the medium of radio faces fierce competition from other sources mainly the online sites which provide a lot of variety to suit individual needs of the audience. There is a stark difference between the mandate of these internet based music sites and radio as internet is mostly individualistic gratification source on the other hand radio is a community oriented medium targeting masses at one time also fostering the social connect between the citizens. The research study analyses the reasons for these change and suggests new strategy and key ideas that can be incorporated by traditional medium like radio for its longevity and survival.*

Key words- *New Media, Gratification, Radio Broadcasting, Podcasts, Participation culture.*

Introduction- The history of media consumption is as old as 1600 century . It has evolved over a period of time with innovations , technical advancements and the needs of its consumers making it popular or depriving it with the arrival of new competitions like telegraph giving way to telephone , arrival of radio its domination until television made its way continued to rule the popularity charts till new media or social media grew popular with its reach and connectivity and instantaneous approach . The consumers too have had their priority change with time, usability and accessibility. As Steven. J. Kirsh in his book Media and Youth a Developmental Perspective states that it's the psychological appeal of media, social acceptance and identity assertiveness which guide media consumptions .

The uses and gratification theory broadly gives answer to the how people satisfy their media needs. The people are no longer passive consumers of media anymore . The new age audience has the power over media consumption and are able to make wise choices when it comes to interpreting and integrating media in their lives . They choose media to satisfy their needs and gratification of their needs. Thus media competes within the environment and with other sources of information and entertainment. Mark Levy and Sven Windahl(1985) have called the audience of the present age as active audience. In communication process active participation of consumers influences their gratifications . Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch have identified one of the main components of uses and gratification theory as many goals of mass media can be derived from the data supplied by individual audience themselves. This means the consumption of audience can largely benefit the media industry to find new patterns and incorporate them in to their communication strategy in order to build on their credibility and popularity amongst its audience.

Radio has been there since as early as 1920s, it became a popular source of entertainment amongst the masses when it was the only source of electronic medium . It reigned supreme. However with the arrival of television radio did become its small sister in terms of popularity especially in India. Again the needs and preferences of people changed from audio to visual entertainment. However the fact remains that radio has thrived and survived . Due to its originality , credibility and mobility. The research focusses on whether radio is losing its loyal listenership and how can it continue to flourish in this extremely fast spaced media world.

Literature Review-

Radio broadcasting is one of the greatest tools in terms of information and entertainment at the disposal of man. It has a universal appeal and is instantaneous.(Tyler T.F 1935 www.jstor.org) Regardless of where the people are located ,which class they belonged to can tune in to radio broadcasts of news, music, dramas and sports broadcasts etc. This is the power of this great medium .

Jeff Cohen, Director of Development of WRN Broadcast, while attending a conference in Hanoi in 2013 on Radio and Social Media stated that maintaining youth audience is essential for survival of radio. A great challenge for media organizations is to judge the needs of young people as today's generation expectations are very different from 10 or 20 years ago. They prefer using internet for social entertainment. It has also changed the way music is listened to. We have to understand that it's really hard to get loyalty from them. (www.mediadigest.com)

Although with the arrival and enormously growing popularity of new media which can on one hand be a good platform for non-hierarchical well informed debates by the people relating to their social structures which is essential in democratic post-modern public sphere as suggested by media scholars like Douglas Kellner(1999) but on the other hand contradicting these positive appraisals of new media that scholars as Ed Herman argue that the power to control new media rests in the hands of a few transnational telecommunications who can have enormous global control which is unimaginable.

The Displacement theory states that viewership or audience rise of one particular media outlet leads to reduction in the amount of time spent on the other therefore this could mean that with the rise of new media the amount of time spent by an individual on existing old media would reduce and ultimately lead to the end of traditional media. (Maxwell McCombs 1972). Although it seems unlikely that the traditional media like television or radio would completely fade away but yes their popularity surely has been affected with the rise of online content or new media as there seems to be easy accessibility and one is not bound by the time of a particular programme or show . The audience can access it or choose to enjoy what pleases them anytime of the day , from anywhere and watch anything they prefer. This is the choice internet has to offer to its consumers.

NicoCarpentier(2013) in her edited book :Audience Transformations: Shifting Audience Positions in Late Modernity writes that the choices of audience is changing because of the novel configurations of user practices and technological capabilities that are altering the way we understand media organisations and interpret as well as how we participate in the society and form social relations.

Thus it's the audience participation and involvement which makes a difference in the choices they make , a sense of involvement gives a medium a new meaning affecting its popularity with the masses as well .

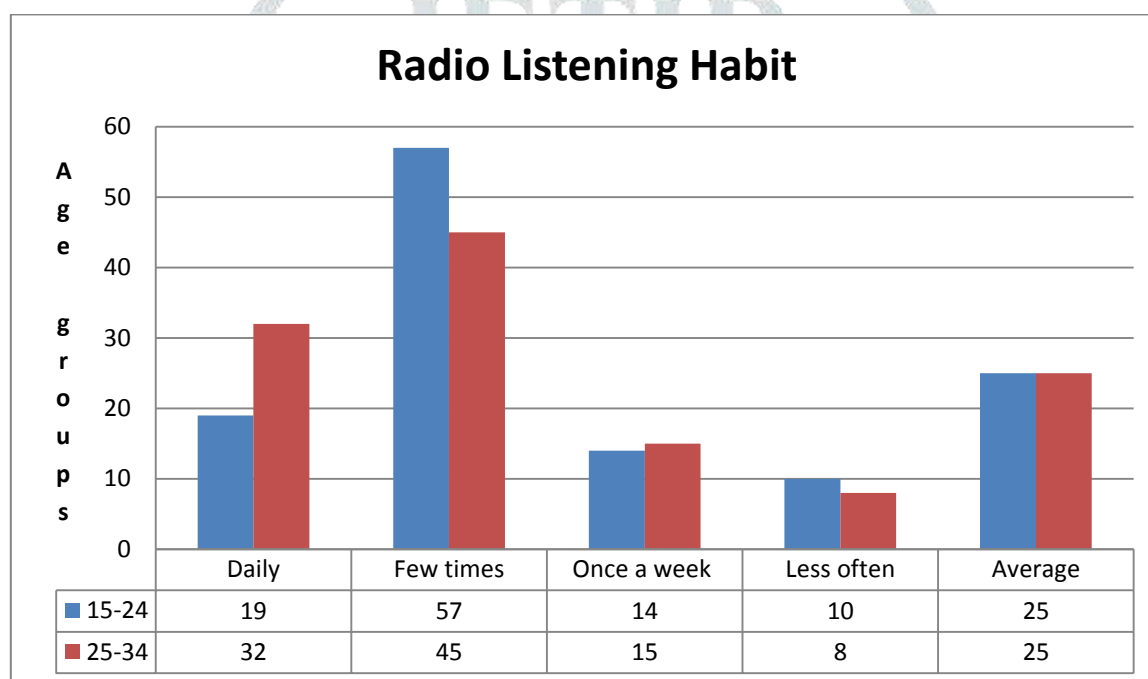
Research Objectives-

1. The research study aims to explore the popularity of radio with the audience in the present age of information.
2. To study the gaps if any between the audience needs and radio content .
3. To study and seek new paradigms that traditional media like radio can create to sustain itself.
4. To study the viability of medium of radio in the present age of competition and digital revolution world-wide.

Methodology-The research involved a qualitative methodology in order to understand the audience and its radio listening habits and needs for specific programmes from the medium. A random sample of 200 respondents was taken in to account on whom a survey was conducted in the form of a questionnaire comprising questions related to their media habits, preferences and needs. The universe of study was Delhi/NCR where more than 12 radio stations are plying which includes both public as well as private operators.

The sampling profile was primarily youth within the age group of 15 years to 35 years. As in India the majority of population is youth therefore it becomes imperative to understand the needs and choices they make and the future of the traditional media. Once the data was collected via the instrument that was the questionnaire it was coded and findings were calculated. Since the questionnaire was an open ended one no scales were used. Simple measures of central tendency like percentage were calculated to seek answers to the research problem. The following are the findings of the audience survey questionnaire.

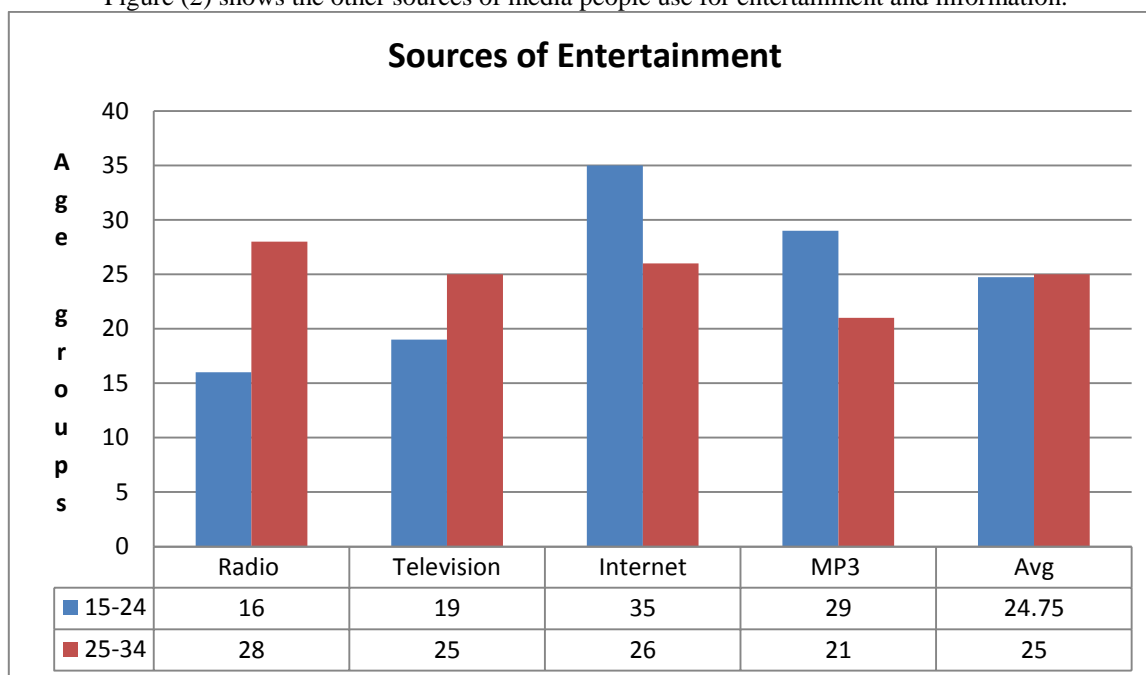
- To understand the radio listening habits of the audience in the current times.



Figure(1) showing the radio listening habits of the audience.

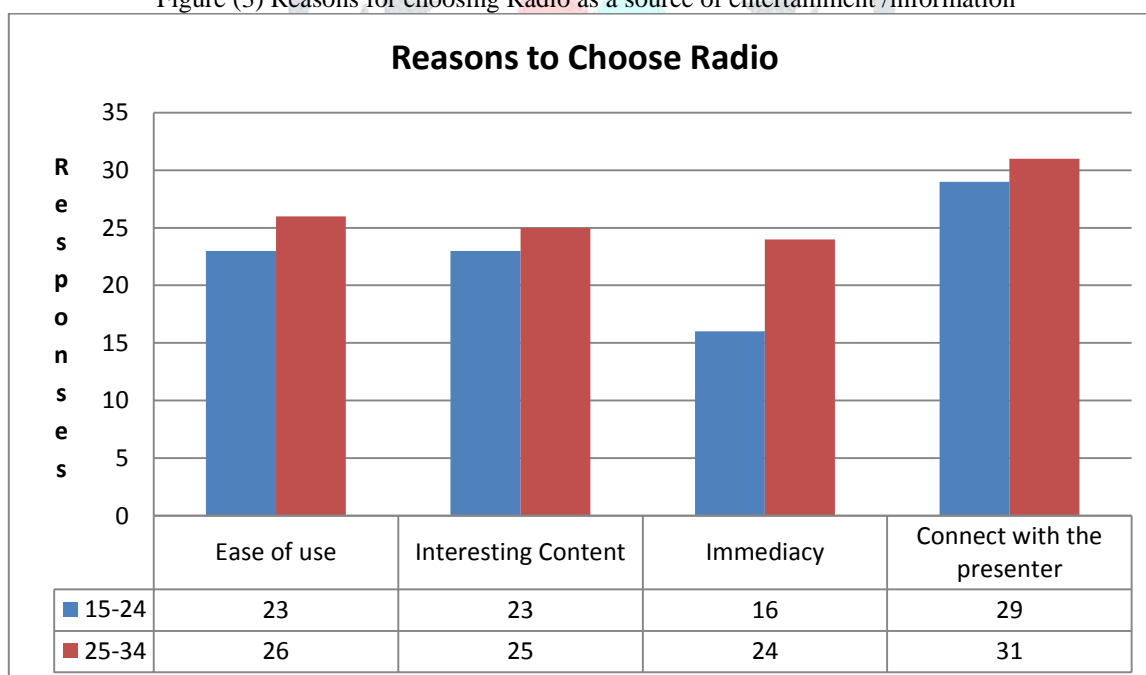
The figure above clearly reflects that the medium of radio is having competition from other sources as the audience is not turning to radio on a daily basis. They do have other sources of gratifying their entertainment needs. Also it shows that inspite of other sources it hasn't lost out to these new subjects in the form of competition and still maintains it hold as more number of respondents tune in a few time a week at least. Although this is primarily due to the online content which people prefer these days however , the advantage of radio is that its an activity that allows you to do other simultaneous activities as well like driving, ironing etc. So invariably the audience becomes a passive listener when the radio is playing in the background.

Figure (2) shows the other sources of media people use for entertainment and information.

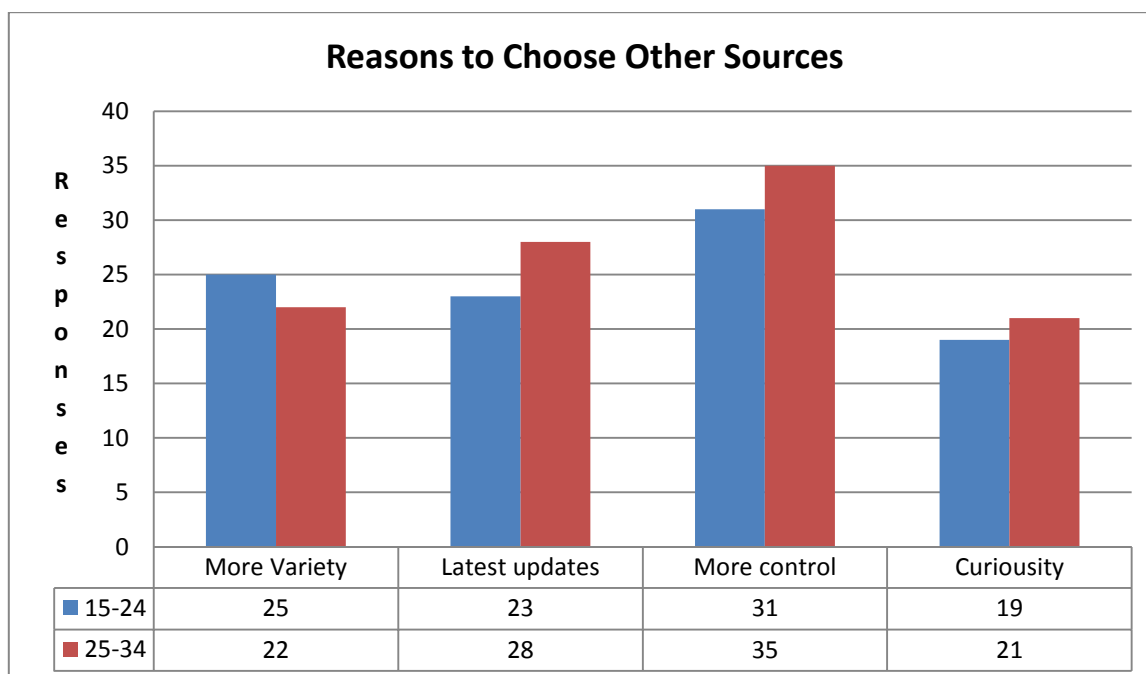


The figure above shows that new media has gained popularity over traditional media like radio and television in terms of entertainment amongst the youth however what is important here is that the age group 15- 24 years old have displayed a particular liking more for the internet based entertainment as compared to the senior age category of respondents who do use internet but also use radio and television in almost equal measures. So there is a challenge here for the medium of radio as out of all the audience gives a lowest position to radio when seeking entertainment or information.

Figure (3) Reasons for choosing Radio as a source of entertainment /information

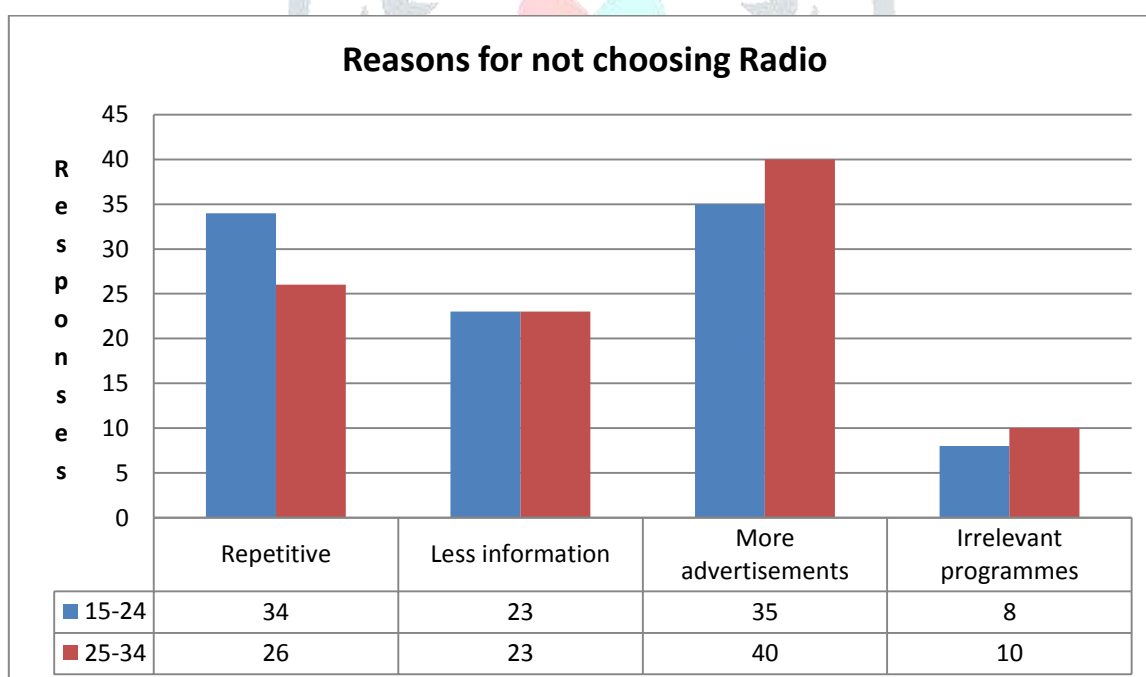


The figure above reflects that there are many reasons to tune in to a radio station most common reason being the connect with the radio jockey/presenter and close to it was the interesting content shared on radio which was missing in their other platforms of entertainment/ information. There also was a sense of immediacy of information on radio any and every where about news, sports or any other significant issue as well as weather updates or traffic updates this surely gave an edge to radio over other sources of information. Most importantly it was the ease of use that made it possible. This is an interesting revelation from the audience that they seek to listen to radio for a number of reasons like those mentioned in the figure-3. The radio presenter or jockey who takes the listener through the programme is an important adjunct between radio and its listeners. In the current age the more interactive the content the more engaging is the medium therefore the presenter needs to involve the audience with their views or opinions and participation in programmes or shows example based on the timing of the show and its theme the audience can be a part of the programme in finding solutions to social issues affecting the common man as in the present era of infotainment when the audience is no longer an ignorant listener or viewer but aware of happenings it becomes important to engage the people especially in a democratic set up.



Figure(4) Reasons to choose other sources of Entertainment/ Information

The figure shows that other sources of entertainment /information gave more variety to the users , they were controllable meaning the user could switch to other sources and choose what he or she prefers. The other sources like new media also created a sense of curiosity in the users to update themselves with the trending stories and happening. . Example of internet based music sites like Spotify have garnered considerable following as it gives a wide variety of choice, more control and most significantly it suits the time and duration of the audience. As its anytime and anywhere source for audience. Thus this gratifies the needs of people more conveniently. Radio reigned supreme once but in the present era of digitization and competition it certainly has to invent new methods to keep its viability intact if not more.



The traditional medium that is radio in the present time seemed a little repetitive with less information to offer to its listeners and had more advertisements being played again and again with sometimes irrelevant programmes. The younger age group that is the 15-24 year old felt so with the other age group of the senior lot felt that advertisement were the reason to turn them away to other sources where they got what they wanted more easily hence this shows that the patience level of respondents was less as more distraction were available in the form of variety. Today the audience is getting fragmented with multiple sources of infotainment easily available especially with smart phones being a possession of millions. That brings in easy connectivity to the world with its quality of immediacy. Some of the programmes on radio might be irrelevant to the audience as there may not be an element of entertainment or that which can hold the attention of the audience thus more programmes on radio which are captivating content wise and relevant to the young generation . It is this part of population which has to be brought under the umbrella of radio as for them newer sources are more luring than radio also the older generation has grown with the medium therefore the old association also plays a role in holding on to the loyalty of its listeners.

Key Findings-

The survey reflected that respondents although enjoyed listening to radio shows not regularly but at least a few times a week which is a good signal for the old medium as its listenership is very much prevalent amongst the youth. And that its popularity had not diminished completely in the wake of multiple sources of entertainment and information. The younger lot of the two age groups that 15 to 24 year olds had changing habits with many of them preferring other sources of entertainment like new media also to update oneself with latest information available on internet which had now become a globally connected platform, gave spurts of news items which become a trend in no time and not knowing them proved that one was not in touch with the latest happenings. Therefore social acceptance was a need with people and for that one had to remain in touch with the trend on the internet.

Radio had its originality, credibility of news and an instant connect with the listeners who kept coming back to it in spite of other distractions. It was easy to tune in to with now the mobiles having features of FM connectivity with its operating systems making them smart phones. The radios now having a tough competition within the industry had to continuously create audience oriented content and give them a sense of involvement with its new and engaging content. This gave radio an edge over others. The older generation still valued this personal medium over other sources however it was the younger generation that needs to be kept hooked on to it.

As Marshall McLuhan had once written in his book *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (1964) that medium is the message therefore it is the medium which has the power to bring to it the audience with its content. The medium needs to be strong enough and devise ways to bring in a sense of participatory behaviour in the audience and close the distance between the medium and its audience. Walter Benjamin (2003) suggested that the radio can reduce the distance between transmitter/producer and the receiver and bring them on the same platform to create content. That is the audience needs to play a more active role in the medium of radio.

Conclusions- The research study suggests that today the audience is no longer a passive audience they are intelligent to make the choices for themselves. The traditional media like radio needs to understand this underlying message and create content that which pulls the audience especially the youth towards it. It needs to involve the audience and that itself is content.

A participatory approach is the need of the hour wherein the audience is more involved, uses radio as a platform for public discourse to find solutions to their problems or problems affecting the larger society. It needs to produce and create programmes which are based on the realities of life for bringing people on board. It has to reinvent its strategies to use other platforms to connect with the masses like social media. So today the presenter is not simply hosting a show but also at the same time creating interesting content on other media to remain connected with the audience. This signifies that the internet can change the relation between radio and its audience.

The use of social networking sites to connect with their audience who used to be invisible, passive and private, are now active and visible, the future will be more about connections and bonds than content itself. Hence the audience is more visible and more audible this can be an advantage for the radio station in order to build its listenership. A connect between listener to listener is now possible with boundaries getting closer or rather diminishing and bonding over a common favourite radio show over the social networking sites help retain the loyalty of these listeners who get a sense of belonging to a common group. It becomes a social capital for radio station and its audience.

The era of Podcasts is here and radio can use to its advantage. Podcasts help listeners tune in at a time convenient to them as these files have programmes which are recorded and uploaded for the audiences. At the same time newer content or which is not available in the regular schedule of show of radio can be created and made available to its audience. Channels like YouTube can be used by the radio for online content. Since there are multiple sources of entertainment and news thus radio as a medium as to explore new paradigms that which is not available to its listeners else where or that which has been created with a marked difference and generate a sense in its listeners that if they do not tune in they might miss out on something especially for the young generation.

Radio thus can reorient its strategies and break in to the sudden domination of new media to its advantage and to bring in new young members within its folds for posterity and radio longevity.

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