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**DANIEL GAMBARO**

dgambaro@usp.br

UNIVERSITY OF SÃO PAULO – UNIVERSITY ANHEMBI MORUMBI (BRAZIL)

## HOW THE SÃO PAULO YOUNGSTERS LISTEN TO RADIO?

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses how São Paulo radio stations targeting the young audience (up to 30 years old) are reconfiguring their services and schedules to serve a new audience demand. The introduction of social networks in the dynamics of the shows (especially Twitter and Facebook, and more recently WhatsApp) has added new possibilities of interaction between a highly connected audience – which already used telephone, e-mail and SMS – and the broadcaster. Besides that, the stations started offering more content in their web pages: photo, video, predetermined musical playlists, segmented news, etc. Now, the programmes on dial are also changing, bringing back a kind of show that, for about 20 years, have been generally put aside in favour of a music-driven programming. We can now notice more presence of the radio presenter during the musical programming, including more live interaction to the listeners; fictional productions; talk shows and long interviews; live game shows. Thus, this paper demonstrates how the five main radio stations segmented to young audience in São Paulo (two of them national networks) have made major changes to their content production structure.

### KEYWORDS

Radio; youngsters; internet; radio presenter

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The multiplication of content offering in different media, consequence of the proliferation of communication technologies resulting from the current digital environment, brings up a fundamental question: how does audience behave? If the relevance of this question is of prime importance to digital media, what to say about the “traditional” ones like radio and television? Market data shows a fall in radio penetration among every

segment of listenership since 2004. It seems that this audience is migrating to other media, especially those based on the Internet, since those data match with the growth of broadband connexions<sup>1</sup>. Between 2004 and 2013, the total penetration of radio fell from 90% to 71%.

The behaviour of teenager and young adult segments is an important fact in this account. According to the most recent consolidated data about listenership, today the age group from 15 to 29 years old corresponds to 31% of radio total audience (Grupo de Mídia SP, 2014). In 2004, this same group corresponded to 36% of total, which makes possible to stand that the age group that lost most audience is the teenagers and young adults, reproducing in Brazil a trend verified in other countries, as Rudin notices on United Kingdom (2011, p. 66).

Some broadcasters segmented specially on the mentioned group have been implementing changes on their scheduling, to promote the listeners' loyalty by meeting their new demands. This does not mean, however, that the adopted strategies are efficient or even innovative: it seems that there are more continuities than experiences towards something new. Nonetheless, even such shy strategies are worth analysed, to comprehend how different companies are exploring a market segment so important to medium radio.

They are five main radio stations targeting youngsters in the city of São Paulo, all of them at FM dial, from a total of 66 AM and FM stations (7,5% of all stations): 89 FM Rádio Rock (89.1 MHz), Disney (91.3 MHz), Metropolitana (98.5 MHz), Jovem Pan FM (100.9 MHz) e Mix (106.3 MHz). The summed audience corresponded, in March 2015, to an average share of 13% on the total radio audience measured by Ibope<sup>2</sup>, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., working days. The common element between these five stations is the predominance of musical programming, with limited space to humour shows and newscast.

The first part of this paper describes and analyses the programming of the five stations, to illustrate the strategies adopted by broadcasters to connect to listeners. It is central to this analysis that one of the reasons that motivated such changes are beyond the technological innovations. The trigger was actually the return of 89 FM Radio Rock to the dial in 2012, a broadcaster known for its creativity freedom, introducing a new proposal of radio

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<sup>1</sup> In 2004, the radio penetration was about 90%.

<sup>2</sup> Ibope uses the *recall* methodology. The results are published once a month and is the average of three past month's measurement. Many radio stations do not buy this research for considering the sample and the methodology inaccurate.

programming, inspired by old habits of listenership along with a strong use of digital media. The second part shows the results of an enquiry carried out through web with people from 15 to 30 years old, on their impressions and perspectives regarding radio stations today. As conclusion, takes place a consideration on the importance of the dialogue with the audience and the formation of a young listenership, as the main strategy to maintain the viability of medium radio on its various forms adapted to the digital environment. Since radio is a massive medium, its connexion to everyday life and the habits of consumption are central factors in the audience maintenance while listenership grows old.

### **MUSIC IS (ALMOST) EVERYTHING**

What first calls attention to the five selected stations is the predominance of a *minimum playlist of musical launches*, that is, the sharing by all five of a common musical selection – characteristic of CHR segmentation. There are songs from *rock* and *pop-rock* genres, internationally laboured by major recorders, mostly of British or North-American artists that have Brazil on their concerts agenda<sup>3</sup>.

This first observation reinforces the idea that radio is still a strong arm for record industry, as Dubber points out when commenting (and criticising) the musical selection strategies that not always look for the broad spectrum of segmentation: “(...) the playing (or not playing) of certain pieces of music both constructs audiences and reinforces power relationships between radio and record industries, while it also impacts profoundly upon popular culture” (Dubber, 2013, p. 78). Dubber also remembers that many stations see the reproduction of a limited set of songs as “a way of constructing audiences through a reassuring familiarity rather than through an engagement with active fandom” (Dubber, 2013, p. 75). The same conclusion is made by Warren, when this author says that “radio could be a lot better, more entertaining, less predictable, and far less repetitive if music research were used less and radio programmers (and staff) had more freedom to select material” (Warren, 2013, Chapter 4, ‘Music Rotation’, para. 9). Thus, radio limits the offering of new songs to a pre-selected set of tracks, providing in the musical field something closer to the *agenda setting* of journalism.

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<sup>3</sup> To cite some names common to every station: Imagine Dragons, Coldplay, Muse, The Lumineers and Pharrel, today great music sellers.

As a second observation, we point out the set of songs mixed to the novelties, making evident that they are different on their essences. 89 FM, for example, do not play anything considered *pop* if there is no root on the *pop-rock* segment, like *Madonna* or *One Direction*, and the songs from the 1990's and 2000's prevail on its playlist with little presence of former decades' songs. At the same time, some songs first exclusive to its listeners became available in other stations. The result is a playlist filled up with old hits, dialoguing with older listeners, and some world pop hits of musical groups transiting near rock'n'roll, but that cannot be defined as "rock" by the most purist listener, like *Peter Bjorn and John*. Disney, on the other hand, is the most diversified station, for many times the radio deviates completely from the *pop hit* segment and include on the playlist old songs and national genres, just as *sertanejo*, *axé* and *MPB*. For this reason, we may call Disney as the most eclectic playlist on the dial. Mix and Metropolitana, however, keep faithful to pop and pop-rock, with exception to *Brazilian funk*, a music style that today dominates the most listened stations. Both stations are the closest to the *Top 40* concept there are in São Paulo's dial, along with Jovem Pan<sup>4</sup>.

## THE RETURN OF THE DJ

It sounds strange to announce the "return" of a professional that, in reality, never ceased to be present in radio stations. However, this section's title could not be more appropriated to represent the sensation that arouses by the programming format being again adopted by some stations, which counts on large participation of the presenter among the music. Back to the 1970's and the 1980's the DJ was part of the listeners imaginary as the guy who knew about songs, commanding musical-predominated programming mixed with comments and jokes (Ferraretto, 2001, pp. 51-53). However, mainly because of satellites networks implemented during the 1990's as a form of reducing costs, the presenter lost space: that is, started to speak less on air, many times saying only the song's titles and the hour, especially in stations targeting youngsters (Gambaro & Vicente, 2013, p. 55).

The "novelty" is a renewed presenter personality. Mostly 89 FM and Disney works today with a kind of host that is more present during the programming, that knows the song she plays, make commentaries on air and talks to the listener, in a moderate way. Of course, different from the

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, the terms CHR and Top 40 are used as synonymous. We chose to maintain the two terms because there three stations keep a very restricted playlist, with a high music rotation rate.

initial days of radio DJ, today the broadcaster and not the presenter makes the negotiations on the launch of songs and artists. However, it is the form of conducting the programme that seems to be rescued from the past. As tactics to connect to the listener, prizes distribution and comments on air about the played songs – many times supporting the musical industry – and about daily affairs – sometimes loaded with prejudices from the presenter. We may notice that this host lacks the historical basis and the profound artistic knowledge the old presenter had.

The DJ is fundamental to create identity bounds to the young listener Warren (2013, 'The announcer'), just as the figure of the presenter that cultivates her personality with the audience, a characteristic that, as Ruddin states (2011, p. 63), is a main differential of radio. Unfortunately, this procedure is far from being adopted by all broadcasters. The most negative highlight is Metropolitana and Mix, two stations where the presenter only shouts the name of the song and, sometimes, the hour. At Jovem Pan, when the programming is not an all-talk show, the non-stop musical playlists take dominantes without the interruption of a presenter. The advantage of this strategy is the cost-cutting, but the price paid is the smaller advertising appeal due to a more disperse and rotating audience.

## **HUMOUR AND TALK SHOW**

In a line similar to the renewal of the presenter's personality, some stations have been investing in vibrant shows, presented many times by a team of hosts. Normally, this type of programme is a *morning show*, but in some radios, it occupies the lunchtime or the evening.

The most emblematic case is the one of Jovem Pan that on the earlier morning replicates on the FM station the newscast of its AM branch, targeting the adult audience. Following, when transiting to the younger audience that constructs its main audience, it goes on air *JP Morning Show*, a variety of infotainment show consisted of chat with on-studio guests and soft news. At noon, begins one of the oldest shows of FM radio still on air, *Pânico*. It is a shock-jock programme with phone-in participation of listener, phone pranks, and on-studio interviews with celebrities. At 6 p.m., the station forms again a network with the AM station to a newscast on what predominates the political commentary, once again deviating from the station's main target to amplify, on the FM, the audience of the AM station.

The strategy of segmenting the audience by the time schedule takes better advantage of the audience rating's curve of different targets. Ferraretto

(2014, p. 56) analysed that the adult audience is bigger in the middle morning, while the curve of the youngsters grows during the morning and has peaks in the beginning and the ending of the afternoon, concentrated in shows like *Pânico*. At the same time that the habit of listening to a given programme maintain the loyalty to the programme (something that is being broken by the time shifting of the on demand) it prevents the loyalty to the brand represented by the radio station. A great mistake in programming is “ignoring music and information when research shows personalities may be considered by audience to be the strongest element in the format” (Warren, 2013). To look only to audience curve to offer programmes derail, for example, the listenership engagement on other time schedules.

The other stations are less radical on their choices when compared to Jovem Pan. The morning shows are normally composed of a quick news announcement, mostly soft news, and the humoristic and relaxed tone is many times present – especially on Disney. On 89 FM, the programmes with presenters that make jokes and play with listeners live on phone predominate from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Shows that voice prevails over music, however, are at the end of the afternoon. Mix, Metropolitana and 89 FM present programmes in which presenters mix music and chat with listeners. Mix and Metropolitana have been achieving for years a huge success with programs that the presenters make phone pranks.

This trend shows that the young audience used the station as something more than a musical player. Since its return, 89 FM is increasing more and more the scheduling with programmes anchored by presenters whose main characteristic is humour – a feature already common to many stations at the early evening. Exception made to strategies that focus on a diversified audience – such as Jovem Pan’s – these programmes mix music and talk in a more homogeneous way, producing continuity in the general language of the broadcaster and reinforcing the bounds with the audience.

The direct result of giving more voice to the presenter is a greater listener participation by phone, voice mail via apps like Whatsapp or Viber, Facebook and Twitter messages and, in a smaller scale, e-mail. The time available to listeners’ participation is short, but their mere presence strengthens the identity bond that unites the group of listeners that follow the station (Gambaro & Vicente, 2013, pp. 56-57). It is common popular stations<sup>5</sup> to have their listeners calling in, but on stations targeting youngsters,

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5 In Brazil, the popular segment comprises stations that play national rhythms like *samba*, *sertanejo*, *pagode* and *Brazilian funk*. In general, programming is marked by the listeners’ participation to win gifts or to tell a life history, sometimes just chat with the presenter. Some popular stations have programmes made only with the listeners’ participation, without music.

this practice was something unimaginable 10 to 15 years ago. Today, when the musical playlist is less important in this communication, the phone-in programmes create loyalty with another practice, the distribution of gifts. The main concern we should have is that this produces the need to create material that diverges from the main purpose of the station, the content. We may effectively notice a reduced concern on the quality of the broadcasted information and the guarantee of audience by means of ephemerals, banal actions.

### **THE WEB SHOULD BE THE MENU**

The main strategies to engage the listeners are based on the Web or on the services offered on the net. The webpage of the five analysed stations are configured to offer content that extrapolates what commonly would be known as radio. According to Herreros, this qualifies the stations as *cyber radios*, since the large variety of offered content is autonomous to the others, although under the main brand that is the radio name (Herreros, 2007, p. 35).

However, we may stand that the uses given to webpages are far from the ideal: the majority of the stations offer only photos, links to video and some news, all segmented on the musical field explored by the station. Jovem Pan made the difference by adding video of some of its shows, both live and on demand. By the way, the on-demand content is in general very poor, based on “could news” when it should replicate in a more consistent way the aired content, answering to the listeners’ time shifting promoted by the on demand. According to Dubber, one of the implications of the digital time shifting “is that listening takes on more of a selective, deliberate quality (...) listeners may select from a vast menu and actively choose what is of great interest to them” (Dubber, 2013, p. 52).

Stations make better use of their profiles on social networks, with the distribution of content that can be shared by followers, as well quick promotions they perform with online users. Although this reinforces the stations mark, the adopted procedures does not really engage the listeners to make them true fans of the station, for there is no reason, except the promotions, to keep them returning to the website or the Facebook page.

### **THE LISTENERS’ OPINION**

To understand better how these mentioned changes impact on the audience, an online research was conducted with 174 people from 15 to 30

years old. In spite of the research's format not allowing a statistical formulation of results, due to the sample's size facing the entire studied universe, this investigation permits to obtain some quantitative information on the audience's preferences and expectations.

A 70% out of the total respondents affirm to listen to radio at least once a week, a similar number to those indicated by research institutes as the radio penetration. More than half of this number listen to radio every day or almost every day. The main audience timing is comprised between 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., with predominance of 14 p.m. and 17 p.m.

When asked to qualify the station in order of preference, 45% of the respondents indicated Jovem Pan as 'much listened to', 33% Mix and 31% 89 FM. This information rouses important considerations. First, we should consider that to the Jovem Pan listener the main listening time is lunchtime (when *Pânico* is on air), followed by the time strip of 5 to 8 p.m., which starts with a musical playlist followed by a newscast. Even if Jovem Pan's audience changes to other station during this news programme, every station is broadcasting programmes focusing on information, humour or chats.

There is a predominance of music in the respondents' choices, but the fact they also pointed timings on what interview or news-based programmes are being broadcasted calls attention. We must also take into consideration that there is a huge migration of audience between Jovem Pan and Mix, since the acquired data show that amongst those who prefer Jovem Pan, 57% also like Mix (today, the most listened station of youngster segment and the sixth in the general rank, according to Ibope). Something similar occurs between Mix and Metropolitana. Thus, it is possible to state that such easiness of transferring listeners is due to a lack of personality and huge musical similarity that prevail the creation of bounds with the listeners. When we compare to 89 FM, 50% of those who selected it as the preferred station also liked Jovem Pan, and the most listened timing are the same of those who preferred Jovem Pan. The opposite, however, is not true, for only 35% of Jovem Pan's listeners is shared with 89 FM. This large migration from 89 FM do not repeat to other station. Thus, we conclude that a substantial part of the audience is loyal to the station because of the presenters and the brand they represent.

About how and when they listen to radio, the great majority of respondents does so when in movement (71%), assuming radio as the companion to other activities that requires attention. Only 45% of respondents use to access the website of the station they listen to, mainly to listen do the radio via streaming. Nonetheless, this indicate much more a lack of habit in listening

online than a competitive scenario, because 73% do not look for webradios and only 48% subscribe any kind of music stream service. Other reason is that only 17% think the radio stations make good use of online tools.

## **MUSIC VS. PRESENTER**

There is a predominance of music in the listeners' will. A 39% of respondents stated they find music primarily on the Internet, while 36% chose the radio<sup>6</sup>. This indicates how radio still important to the robust recording companies that can play huge costs for launching and promoting artists. However, it is contradictory how respondents perceive music on radio: only 48% agrees that the stations play more music they like than they don't; only 47% considers sufficient the launch of new music; and 80% signalled the excess of repetition of songs as a problem of radio. A 51% think radio should mix different musical styles.

About the presenters, 44% agree that today the presenters talk too much, while 43% disagree, and 13% are indifferent to this notion. This tie translate better the perception that the station should introduce the presenter as the programme's distinction, but must also be aware that the procedure can sound strange to a listener that is not anymore used to a great presence of voice on air. In addition, a 66% of the respondents indicated through the answers that prefer a station where the presenter that speaks instead of a musical playlist, given that she should be economic on her speech.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The observation of today strategies of radio stations targeting young audiences shows how the impact of the digital environment reconfigures the procedures to engage with the listener. First comes the fact that the stations have to look back to rescue some central characteristics of radio, historically rooted, in spite of all technological advance.

For a long time now, radio is treated as a secondary medium and of support to other industries, the music one. The effects are still clear: if the programming was available only to the discovery of new songs, the MP3 players dethroned radio from this simple task, but for a long time almost exclusive. Radio lost space among the youngster on what was economically determined to be the core function. The critics to the musical form of radio

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<sup>6</sup> A 90% listen to new song on the web, 79% on radio and 77% in movies or TV shows' soundtracks.

remain. Warren emphasises that “the love affair between the radio and the record industries has made music researchers believe that the only music they ever need to research are the hits” (Warren, 2013, chapter 5, ‘now read it again’, para.17). Radio role lost strength both as a way to know new artists, and on its educative function of presenting to the public a greater diversity of cultural production – especially to the forming youngster audience. Besides, similar musical playlists make easier to change channels without paying attention to the advertiser that keeps the station running.

The recovery of a radio personality, with presence of her voice on radio, appears to be the necessary strategy. However, the fact radio is a secondary media must be taken into consideration, for the presenter must talk to a variety of people that consumes radio in different ways. Moreover, the young listener is not used to a great presence of voice on radio, although the presenter is the most important piece to create bounds between listenership and radio station. Three questions emerge when considering this solution as the most plausible. First, the dosage of the voice between songs, breaking the never-ending musical playlist listeners are used to – and desire – without a single piece of information. The presenter must not be only a background voice, but cannot overcome the listeners’ will. Second, the quality of information provided by this professional, that as a minimum must look like a specialist on the matters she talks about, what might increase the costs with payroll. There is a responsible in the hands of the broadcaster. The third point refers to the Web environment, where the users/listeners should find quality alternative content that reinforces their bounds with the station. Additionally, the programming should be provided in a more accessible way to the user that are not tied to the emission time (Dubber, 2013, pp. 52-53). The aired content can be reused in an on demand environment if the programme is capable to be reformatted, what won’t occur with a musical playlist.

Notwithstanding the problems arising from the adopted strategies, it is very important that broadcasters create links with their listeners, especially teenagers and young adults. This is about demonstrating the relevance of radio in a scenario of content-offering excess, in order to promote the creation and the maintenance of an audience that will continue to consume radio along with other media that proliferate in digital versions, even if the future of radio is based on web.

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