



Is radio relevant in the 21st century?

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The radio survived in the era of television. Will it be in a position to take on the internet?

Enamoured of television, media-watchers in the 1940s and '50s confidently prophesied the imminent death of radio. The medium, they said, couldn't match the thrill of seeing moving pictures in the comfort of the living room.

The advent of rock-and-roll, embodying the rebellion of an entire generation of youth against the conservatism of the preceding decades, left a bigger following for radio than before and proved the predictions of the doomsayers wrong. In the decades since, radio has emerged as the ultimate survivor, adapting itself to the tastes of the newer generations of listeners and absorbing newer technologies. In the 1980s and '90s, it saw off threats posed by personal video recorders and digital compact discs through a greater emphasis on listener-driven programmes. By the late '90s and early 2000s, radio stations were reinventing themselves to cater to niche audiences: There were stations dedicated to specific genres of content — talk radio, punk rock stations, even stations that played music by a single band 24 hours a day — anticipating the emergence of Spotify and iTunes by a decade or more. Hence, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of radio's death are greatly exaggerated.

Broadcast radio today reaches a staggering 99% of the Indian population. Rural India relies on it overwhelmingly for information. It also remains the most inexpensive and portable medium: A radio set can be purchased at ₹50, which makes it cheaper than a mobile

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phone or a television. Audio programmes easily surmount barriers linked to literacy — allowing even the unlettered to comprehend and absorb news and information. The cost of content production is lower than that incurred on producing visuals — typically one-fifth to one-tenth of the latter. This allows cheaper broadcasting in a bewildering variety of languages, dialects and creative forms.

The technology, having existed for more than 100 years, is not rocket science either. It is now, in fact, possible for even laypersons to design and manufacture broadcast transmitters and receivers. It is not without reason that radio has been the medium of choice for activists and people's movements. Further, listening to the morning news on radio remains one of most widely reported habits across the globe. The accessibility of radio and the economy of the medium have led to a proliferation of local radio stations that can cater to niche populations in limited geographies.

Vocabulary:

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Prophesied: profetizaron

See off: ver con desdén

Staggering: sorprendente

Thrill: emoción

Threats: amenazas

Surmount: supercar

Embodying: encarnando

Cater: atender

Bewildering: desconcertante

Doomsayers: catastrofistas

Broadcast: transmitir