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Radio and the Web: BBC Radio as a new model of radio communication

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Abstract:

The internet has placed traditional radio in a new environment with regard to the production and management of different audio contents. Communication structure was altered and it's still developing, reason which we should try to understand the implications of this change while talking about procedures, content presentation and consequences. This study suggests an exhaustive online Portuguese radio talk analysis and a comparison with what may consist in an alternative version, the BBC Radio website. The conclusions reflect the advantages that BBC structure brings to media scenario, although insufficient, while verifying that many opportunities are given to listeners to step on the public sphere, that connection is not always well succeeded.

Keywords: radio; Internet; BBC; comparison

Introduction

This study aims at improving the understanding the modern communication paradigm and the challenges brought by radio technology and, more important, its presence in the web. When we started to study online radio talk stations, on its different manifestations and capacities, solely on a singular analysis of the oldest electronic instrument that history recalls. Without forgetting the past, web radio guidelines bring out new manifestations of social expression and recent concerns, which are a result of a rapid formats emergence and audio technologies.

Radio imposed through time as one of the most important means of communication and information, because it showed news first and could be listened without any cost and while doing other things.

The structure was altered and it is still developing, which is why we should try to understand the implications of this change while analyzing procedures, content presentation and consequences. Computers have had an outstanding influence in human relations. Clearly, the technological overgrowth combined with the communication process, allows and sustains the modifications that we see in human interaction, supported by technological mediation, from which Internet is the overriding engine.

Therefore, it is important to understand how radio websites are suitable for Internet's impact and technique possibilities. This approach relates to Internet's self-development and the web radio, as a new media that is capable of producing new ways on using information and communication science field reconstruction.

Thus, may we say that, Portuguese radio talk online radios are formatted? And are Portuguese radio stations really taking advantage of Internet facilities and outcomes? Could British BBC model represent advantages compared to Portuguese radio stations? What are they? (And prime inconvenient?). This study proposes an exhaustive online analysis of Portuguese radio talk (Rádio Clube Português, TSF, Antena 1 and Rádio Renascença) and a comparison with what may represent an alternative version, the BBC Radio website. The

conclusions reflect the advantages that the structure brings to media scenario, although insufficient, while verifying that many opportunities are given to listeners to step on the public sphere, and that connection is not always well succeeded.

Throughout an exhaustive analysis about individual characteristics of each radio, all the way through an evaluation of major services, programs, interaction and profile levels, we defined a comparative approach of Portuguese online radio talk and with international BBC Radio, which results in a combination of traditional broadcasting elements, with complementary contents that we may find on a web radio. Once we have this data, we can try to present the similarities and differences between each other.

On technologic brave new world there is a permanent come across between the unlimited number of worlds and possible circumstances. This is, in part, its sumptuousness and also its biggest threat, while looking at information processes, and formulas increasingly pluralists, multidimensional and instantaneous. The events are unique, ignoring time and space information. The media information changes our perception, by breaking down frontiers that used to separate communities, altering the rhythm of information circulation. However, let's not make the assumption that radio didn't bring anything new to media scenario, because it was precisely audio invasion (and then visual) that changed forever the way of making news.

Radio and Information Society

The conceptualization of Habermas's public sphere (1962) brings a new angle approach. We are fundamentally talking about the new communication paradigm that entails a "democratic" model between medium, message, receiver and sender. Canavilhas (p. 1) proposes a public sphere concept "(...) as a social life instance that implies the public exercise of rationality around collective issues or a domain of social life associated to public sphere formation." It is exactly public opinions – or should we say published opinions – in media with visibility maintain other circulating opinions and the discussion on the sphere that surround it.

There is a negative side putting our hopes on technological shift. It's not going to be radio salvation just as we know it today. In all technologies rooting process, there are different degrees of acceptance, or maybe a social deficit, when different social division is exposed to technology. If there is a strong preservation of public space and the alternative, it makes sense to talk about communication process, message exchange, proposal debate and a search for solutions that please everyone.

Beyond cultural diverse, radio gives a quick answer to its consumers. It is not a medium so centralize as television. And, today, with the help of new technologies and interactivity that already exists between sender and receiver, radio isn't just sound. It is already possible to reflect on what we ear or to respond to what we disagree. According to Rui de Melo (2011: 65-67),

"Information Society expression refers to a social and economic development mode where the acquisition, storage, processing, appreciation, transmission, distribution and information dissemination (...) have a central role in economic activity, in wealth creation, citizen quality of life definition and its cultural practices (...)

We aim, as a first hypothesis, a development crises in Information Society that lies on a weak convergence among contents and means; It verifies an attempt to gain time, especially in Europe, with the mass not so present. Europe was, for many years, the stage for mass media, where contents were directed to everyone. News were simpler so that they could be understood by big masses. As a consequence the consecutive lost for accuracy and deepening facts. Cádima (1999: 92) points out some changes:

"Transition to IS (according to G7): large global network band interaction; Transcultural formation and education; Support libraries, museums, electronic art galleries; Environment management, natural resources, health; Public administration interconnection; Multimedia global inventory execution about projects and studies to promote and develop Global Information Society."

Nowadays, the changes are obvious for the consequences that technologies and Information Society bring. It's disturbing that a legitimacy crisis is killing the significance and institutions functions. But power becomes empty and its space is fulfilled by major economic groups, also known as oligopolies. To Parra (2009: 8) it is "understood as a cyberspace where exists a new work distribution, where unique occupations appear and classic ones disappear, innovating market niche emergence" and it becomes necessary a creation and fomentation of actors and active civil agents with the purpose of interaction in communicational scenario. Such digital system as computers and telecommunications are innovations that origin structural amends, either in economical and cultural plan, or in the same system that radio is evolved. Globalization is also an important part of Information Society that assigns to new technologies new propagation levels.

In this scenario radio brings a new debate and a new eye over to under construction cyberspace, projecting a interactive communication between sender and receiver. There is always danger promoting ways of exclusion in society. That exclusion is hidden, but can cause a ditch to what is already known as info-rich and info-poor. Marginalized class, without balanced and equal access to information, determined by its social level or demographic factors.

With this democratization of knowledge we can assist to the appearance of new alphabets, formation, short out distances between the ones that are closer or farther from information. New technologies come to rescue individual means – cell phone, email, homepage – and the construction of mediation field integrated with interactive network system.

Besides in newsrooms it seems that is emerging a new professional: the multimedia journalist. It establishes the professional capacity for communicating and to work n diversity with other media with the same amount of information. It doesn't make sense to think that this type of journalist exclusively records audio, or captures image or writes a text. Media convergence and the possibility to have text, image and sound it's not only desirable but inevitable.

"La información de un medio en lugar de restarle público puede incrementarlo. Quien haya seguido la síntesis de la información en un medio puede ir a outro para ampliarla; Quien haya seguido el testimonio oral en la radio puede acudir a la televisión para ver el testimonio totalmente audiovisual." (Cebrián Herreros, 2001: 247)

Cebrián Herreros (2001: 247) believes that this is an ultimatum to the profession. And it is in this platform where all media come together and blend with each other and all try to dominate and adjust the message. Communication media drop off content production rituals that meet the demands that this model requires.

"Old media involved a human creator who manually assembled textual, visual, and/or audio elements into a particular composition or sequence. (...) New media, in contrast, is characterized by variability. (...) And rather than being created completely by human author, these versions are often in part automatically assembled by a computer. (...) The logic of new media thus corresponds to the postindustrial logic of "production on demand" and "just in time" delivery logics that were themselves made possible by the use of computers and computer networks at all stages of manufacturing and distribution." (Manovich, 2002: 36)

This new journalist is burdened with new responsibilities. It's demanded new teaching skills to these future professionals where technological domain and adjustment capacities are put to test.

Radio's presence on the Internet: "old media" modifications and new resources

Radio is surrounded by new tactics. If on one hand there is a big internal transformation, there is also a large dependence of technique and innovating procedures. But radio still has strong points that made it the maximum example of mass media. Transformation is clear:

"No se trata tanto de radio por Internet sino de una información sonora acompañada de otros elementos paralelos escritos y visuales con capacidad de enlaces, de navegación, de ruptura del sincronismo para dejar libertad al usuario temporal y espacialmente para que acuda cuando quiera." (Cebrián Herreros, 2001: 21)

Obviously these new resources also extend to other fields. Sound quality has improved and even image as an aggregated value to multimedia radio. And, finally, proximal and immediate relation between audiences and radio is infinite and universal, relegating language, geography or time zone.

To combat growing competitiveness radio transforms and is developing strategies to become stronger, such as technical renovation, brought by informatics and digitalization. These modifications allow reducing production costs, management and content distribution to a new radio competitiveness. Wilkinson, Grant and Fisher (2009, p. 3) take on this concept as something more than simple integration of traditional media and Internet:

“(…) convergent journalism presumes that multiple distribution media are available for any story, including variety of print, broadcast, online, and emerging media that include cellular telephones, message boards, etc. Convergent journalism is thus focused on the story, giving reporters, photographers and editors the capability of communicating the news in the manner that best fits that story.”

These technical skills are opening doors to radio's presence on the Internet, allowing automation, agility and profitability.

New contents: the radio that is seen and heard

Internet has forced to rethink radio: how it reaches its audience to step out programs immobility that was confined. Donow and Miles (*cit. in* Martínez-Costa and Moreno Moreno, 2004: 338) confirm this idea, “lo que está claro es que la radio en la Red es un concepto que trasciende el concepto de radio tradicional.”

The cases of big companies like BBC News show a changing spirit in relation to traditional media. The network, in 2005, announced a challenge to readers to send photos and videos, to what is known today as citizen journalism. Palácios and Munhoz (*cit. in* Barboza, 2007: 78) claim that BBC website “reported later that they received almost 1000 photos sent by telephone and 20 videos.”

According to Portuguese Statistics Institute, about the application of new technologies in families, in Portugal it is estimated that over a quarter of cell phone users (28,4%) already sent photos or videos, 11,6% receive information about news services and 10,3 % transferred photos or video files directly from cell phone to websites, without using a computer.

Designing new contents and planning not only broadcasting, but also screening new digital supports that force traditional radio broadcasters to adopt a new working and management profile, to ease online convergence specially if “one of the potentials of journalism on the Internet is the use of hyperlinks, offering different levels of reading to the text. However this potential may also be an obstacle, as it implies/forces a non-linear reading which goes against a tradition of four millennia deeply rooted in our culture.” (Canavilhas, 2006: 1)

Internet radio is crossing an interesting visual path, that is still experimental, but that we cannot ignore. The sound landscapes, now visible on the screen, show the listeners/user a new radio feature that once was occult and mysterious. Indeed, in Internet the user experiences a total freedom. And it's the interface and website interactivity that are going to engage the user and invite him to assume an active role in terms of content production.

Contents appear different of conventional radio, behind a new multimedia structure and stimulating the visitor's comeback. The page presentation doesn't confine only to programs. This platform includes journalist presentation, hobbies, news and sound archives. The follow up news is by the minute and always with constant update.

“The website tends to promote radio, allowing direct listening and archives consult (...) the follow up is made by the minute and the space between the event and its publication is the necessary time to write about it, testifying that in Internet there is not periodicity. The idea is seasoning the immediacy with a proper language suitable to be read, a more immediate job than in radio.” (Cordeiro, 2005: 7)

It seems that there isn't still a tangible formula while constructing news websites, because each medium has different products and specific target audiences. One thing is certain: one critic aspect when studying any subject connected to the Web is its homepage, for its unique characteristics and because it is the front door that receives the user. To think in information presentation requires "una nueva concépcion del diseño que va mucho más allá de la estética y debe, sobre todo, facilitar al lector la navegación." (Concha, 2009: 3). Online pages have to respect criteria, especially usability.

Analysis and Comparative Study with BBC Website

The comparison between Portuguese news radios (Rádio Clube Português, TSF, Antena 1 and Rádio Renascença) with international BBC Radio results of a combination of traditional broadcasting elements, with complementary contents that we may find on a online radio. The effort has been made to suit these two vertices and the comparison that will follow. BBC Radio is able to differentiate with an appealing and interactive agenda, with links to programs in a simple and easy access. The negative point is that majority news are sent to BBC News page, which force the user to leave the original page.

Let us see the main differences that we found between BBC and Portuguese news radios represented in chart 1.

	BBC	Portuguese News Radios
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Appealing /Interactive</i> - <i>Full access to radio interior</i> - <i>Programs/ Podcasts/ Gallery/ Journalist</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Every radio has a positive rating on this area.</i> - <i>Local and online broadcasting</i> - <i>Programs Agenda</i>
Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Morning, Afternoon and Evening.</i> - <i>Hypertext construction</i> - <i>Areas/Sections</i> - <i>News Headlines with own space</i> - <i>Images/ External and Internal Links</i> - <i>Most heard / Most comments</i> - <i>Negative point: collision with BBC News website</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Main programs</i> - <i>Rádio Clube Português only shows highlighted programs and one single news piece.</i> - <i>Headlines and last updates</i> - <i>Inefficiency on weakly subjects.</i>
Sound of the Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Updates</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Updates</i>
Archive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Large and diverse</i> - <i>Famous Voices</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>No famous Voices</i> - <i>TSF is the only radio to present a longevity in sound search</i> - <i>Low levels of archive</i>
Search bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Search bar in every page</i> - <i>Negative point: collision with BBC News website</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Usefull (there is a lack of listed links).</i>
Multimedia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Photo Gallery</i> - <i>Videos only on Homepage</i> - <i>Concern with directing its contents to specific audiences</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Weak Photo gallery (Rádio Clube Português and Antena 1)</i> - <i>Videos on the Homepage</i>
Webcam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Uses Webcam</i> - <i>Shows approximation to the listener</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Only used by Rádio Clube Português</i>

Chart 1: Traditional Broadcasting and Complementary Contents

BBC makes a clear division about its mission and goals specifically becoming a model that takes advantage of recording audio and knows how to impose in a scenario so competitive. Radio's imaginary knocks down barriers and opens its studio doors. It was also clear that during this comparison the investments made in services

production were not large. If, for one hand, it's an innovating online station with an attractive design and a diverse content display, the same doesn't happen for specific information services.

	BBC	Rádios Nacionais de Informação
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Service production - Low investment in promotion tools - Strong bet in contents and updates instead of links or service promotion - Absence of public utility services and games - Ticket line services and weather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TSF takes advantage of audio elements and iconography - Game's presence in TSF - Utility services and ticket line only in TSF - Weather
Technology and RSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PDA, MMS/SMS - All programs share the same number in their page - In the lead concerning mobile technologies and interactive services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PDA present only in TSF and Rádio Renascença - TSF is better in MMS/SMS services - Easy access and updates by the minute
Contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only general contacts are available in the homepage - Telephones, direct email and SMS/MMS number are easy to find. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Every station use the same number for everything
Sports Chart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's present on news radios and sport's radio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always present except in Rádio Clube Português
Social Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the end of every page there are links to main virtual communities - Opinion open space - Journalists use Facebook and Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links at the end of every page - Only Rádio Renascença doesn't use Facebook
Tv Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is very attached to BBC prime website - Causes some confusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The only station to offer TV programming is Antena 1 because is associated to a Tv Network
Subscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subscription by email offers a lot of advantages - Allows to involve and share information - Access to links and podcasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subscription with last headlines - Present in all portuguese radios
World Map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No translation

Chart 2: Internal and/or Corporate Production

Mobile technologies are number one, because it's obvious that radio is partner of these innovations and can gain if it keeps investing on this field. The negative point is in the confusion that is generated when navigating in various pages from the same economic group that aren't necessarily radio contents.

	BBC	Rádios Nacionais de Informação
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Privileged mean that helps to know a lit bit more about the station - Feed discussions and debates among the listeners - Helps publicizing image and other feeds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the mirror of radios - Only Rádio Clube Português doesn't use it
Programs Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emails of every program - Telephone and SMS/MMS number available - General station email 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote interaction - Rádio Renascença and Rádio Clube Português don't show any direct contact, only a brief description of the program - Station Email and low levels of interaction
Surveys and Chats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visible in a small amount - Sharing Music tastes - Absence of Forums and Chats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only present in Rádio Clube Português and Rádio Renascença - The other choose Forums
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's possible to comment on every show - They have a site to receive complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's possible to comment on every show

Comments		- Main tool to get to know listener's opinion
Podcasts	- Assiduos presence	- Always present as a sign of competition with other media

Chart 3: Interactive Services

BBC Radio seems to privilege tasks that involve the listener and make him closer. Up with general station telephones, there is also the email. A general email may be fundamental to who wants to be in contact with the station and obtain a quick answer to its doubts in personalized system.

Conclusion

The study focused on the modifications of an old medium that are notorious: radio still invites to a constant dialogue in its different interventions, giving visibility to opinions that influence and have power when people expose their own experiences. Technologies cannot be denied and new paths are been traced. More than listen, we have radio's physical presence through its front door: the website.

During this investigation, we realized that this stage is clearly interactive, with journey hesitations, but that will translate in a new drawing in global scale, with the implementation of a new broadcasting system and radio content reception.

From the analysis to the main online Portuguese news radios characteristics, we saw that although they give opportunities to listeners to participate in public sphere, that connection is not always well succeeded. These radios, that already have had time to adjust, still insist in making the same mistakes they had made before, creating black holes in communication space.

Radio Clube Português, a Portuguese radio station was always a step back from the others. With a low interactive index, its page reclaims for innovating concepts, for a service offer variety and a professional content processing. BBC Radio model showed notorious advantages. Simpler, it is linear exposing news and has large architecture that displays everything without wearing out the eye. A renewed website that feeds the relation with the listener, similar to traditional radio, by making us feel in contact with the station.

If it isn't impossible to look at the Internet as a threat, radio's traditional activities are no longer seen as news on time, research, listening and top hits source. The Internet showed that is able to effectively compete with radio, because it has potential to correspond to prime social use. More than to be afraid it is important that radio knows how to position in this digital environment of strong interaction and be able to take opportunities that may not be repeated, creating, above all, survival conditions.

The human voice is still the only affective bond, in a radio concept to attached and concentrated in playlist, with no explanations and no intimacy. The main conclusion is that radio in Internet loses its identity, because of all that is lost in translation and by presenting very similar to thousands of other media websites. The human voice, that is intimate, emerges from this scenario, however, as the only identifying radio element that allows radio on the web a partial reencounter with its lost identity.

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