

On-Air and Online: Social Media and Local Radio Production in the UK

Abstract

Digitalisation and the emergence of online media in particular have led to intense debates about its effects on what is now often called “traditional media” including broadcast media such as radio. Our paper investigates how radio stations’ expansion into online space has transformed radio production. Focusing on the relationship between station and listeners, it discusses the social media practices of radio producers and explores whether these new digital tools contribute to a shift towards a more participatory production culture. The paper draws on data from a multi-method case study investigation of local British radio stations that combined programme analysis, expert interviews and web analysis. The study highlighted a shared belief among producers in the importance and value of social media for achieving audience loyalty and engagement. Nevertheless – not least due to a lack of additional resources – their use of social media is mainly an extension of traditional journalistic and promotional techniques. Its potential for listener involvement in the production process is not met and exchanges with the audiences remain in the digital realm without impact on the on-air listener experience.

Zusammenfassung

Digitalisierung, im Besonderen die Entstehung und schnelle Expansion von Online-Medien haben eine intensive Debatte über die Auswirkungen auf sogenannte „traditionelle Medien“, den Hörfunk eingeschlossen, angeregt. Unser Artikel untersucht die Veränderungen für Radiosender, die mit der Ausweitung ihrer Aktivitäten in den digitalen Raum einhergehen. Im Besonderen konzentriert sich die Untersuchung auf Social Media Aktivitäten von Radio-MacherInnen und ihren Einfluss auf die Beziehung zwischen HörerInnen und Sender. Unsere Ausführungen beruhen auf einer multi-medialen Studie von Britischen Lokalsendern, die ausgewählte Fallstudien mittels Programmanalyse, Experteninterviews und Web Analyse untersuchte. Die Studie zeigte, dass Radio-MacherInnen Social Media einen hohen Stellenwert einräumen, vor allem wegen des Potentials für eine stärkere Hörerbindung und Community-Bildung. In der Nutzung von Social Media im Produzentenalltag zeigte sich jedoch lediglich eine

Übertragung traditioneller journalistischer Methoden und Werbemaßnahmen – nicht zuletzt bedingt durch die gegenwärtige Sektor-typische Ressourcenknappheit. Das Potential für eine größere Beteiligung des Publikums am Radioprogramm erfüllt sich bislang nicht und die Interaktion mit HörerInnen begrenzt sich auf den Online-Raum ohne Einfluss auf das On-Air Hörerlebnis im Britischen Lokalradio.

1 Introduction

Digitalisation and the emergence of online media in particular have led to intense debates about its effects on what is now often called “traditional media” including broadcast media such as radio. There is substantial evidence that digitalisation has led to changes in audience behaviour. The rapid progression of digitalisation, the emergence of new media and mobile devices to access and consume media texts, and the related expansion of radio stations from airwaves into the online space facilitate non-linear and personalised audience consumption patterns. Audiences now have the opportunity to be more active in their selection of the radio programmes they listen to; they can access a greater range of radio stations online and create their own listening schedules using on-demand and catch-up services. Despite the resulting audience fragmentation and consequent predictions of a slow extinction of “traditional media”, listener figures for radio have remained stable over the last years (see RAJAR/Ipsos MORI/RSMB 2015a), demonstrating that radio continues to play a central role in people’s lives. But does digitalisation also lead to greater democratisation of radio production and not only of access? In other words, have audiences become more involved in the production of radio content or does editorial control for radio content firmly remain with broadcasters?

This question has a long tradition in debates about the form and function of radio broadcasting. In 1932, Brecht called for radio to become “two-sided” rather than “one-sided”, to be altered from a “distribution apparatus” into a “communications apparatus” that should “let the listener speak as well as hear” by involving them in the transmission side of radio (2000 [1932]: 42). While not providing much detail on how such involvement would look in practice, Brecht argues that it would bring listeners together, building relationships rather than isolating the audience. This hope is shared by contemporary digital optimists who claim that new opportunities for non-professional and amateur media production in the digital media environment blur the lines between audiences and producers of media texts, thus changing the structures and practices of media production (see for example Keen 2008, Bruns 2008). This article investigates such claims in the context of local radio broadcasting. Based on a case study investigation of local British radio stations, it discusses to what degree the extension of radio into the online world, and the use of social media in particular, contributes to two-way relationship between radio producers and audiences and helps to connect audiences with a particular local identity.

The observations presented here are based on data gathered in an internationally comparative research project that studied local and regional broadcasting in Germany, the UK and the USA (see Steinmetz et al. 2014). The project examined how broadcasters manage the transition into the digital era of media production and consumption. The study investigated opportunities and challenges that arise for local and regional broadcasters in the new digital and multiplatform media environment and asked how well and in what way these broadcasters respond to the changed media landscape with regard to economic, organisational and programming models and trends in the context of their local identity. As to the production of media content, we were particularly interested in regional and local content which has a special significance for radio as a medium, the inclusion of social media activities in programming and whether this leads towards the development of what we called “programming 2.0” or “journalism 2.0” implying a tendency towards new participatory and collaborative forms of content production, changes in gatekeeper function and increased interaction with audiences. In order to answer these questions, the study used a quantitative and qualitative method mix that combined programme analysis, interviews with media producers and web analysis assessing organisational structures, programming and online activities of a sample of local and regional broadcasters.¹⁾

This article draws on the data gathered among case studies of local British radio broadcasters, which are introduced in further detail below. Contributing to the growing field of media production studies, we discuss how UK radio producers perceive and make use of extension of the aural space of radio into the online world. Following a brief overview of the British radio industry and its historical development, the article introduces the case studies of our research. It then continues to discuss the results of our analysis with a focus on the relationship between social media and radio production practice, discussing its role for (1) audience involvement in content production, (2) journalistic practice, as well as (3) station-audience loyalty and locality.

2 Local Radio in the UK

In order to contextualise the findings presented in this article, this section provides some historical and systemic context of the British radio landscape.²⁾ The history of broadcasting in the UK goes back to the 1920s when the BBC (British Broadcast Company, later British Broadcasting Corporation) was set up as a radio broadcasting organisation. Although being a public broadcaster and its Trust being appointed by the Queen on advice from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the BBC has remained independent from political control. It is self-regulated and funded by a licence fee (Rundfunkgebühr). BBC radio has stations with different programming profiles and on various levels of locality. Today it broadcasts on ten nation-wide radio stations,

1) For a detailed discussion of this study, its research design and findings, see Steinmetz et al. (2014).

2) For a more detailed account of the emergence of BBC radio and commercial radio especially in the context of technological developments, see Lax (2012).

six regional stations as well as 40 local stations. All BBC stations offer public service programming following “its mission is to enrich people’s lives with programmes that inform, educate and entertain”³⁾.

For a long time, BBC radio was the only source of radio content in the UK.⁴⁾ In the 1960s pirate radio stations began to broadcast from offshore locations, providing pop and rock music that met a demand the BBC did not cater for.⁵⁾ In response to the popularity of these stations, the BBC expanded their programming, established new stations and included pop music. The pirate stations had demonstrated a demand for alternatives to BBC radio and a number of commercial/private local radio stations were launched in the 1970s, with some stringent public service obligations. These obligations were relaxed over the years – often limited to the provision of news programming – and, with the passage of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, local commercial radio expanded dramatically. Stations are now numbered in the hundreds with commercial organisations such as Bauer and Global dominating the market. Commercial radio is licensed and regulated by Ofcom, the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communication industries. This regulatory body was established under the 2003 Communications Act with national offices that seek to take into account views and interest of all nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

In addition to the BBC and commercial stations, Ofcom also licenses community radio stations, the third type of radio broadcasters in the UK. Community radio is a more recent category of local radio station in the UK and was established by the 2003 Communications Act. It is ultra-local, often serving specific geographical areas or particular ethnic, religious or interest groups in one city, usually with a broadcasting radius of 5 km. Community radio stations operate on a non-profit basis and are mainly run by volunteers. They are intended to benefit their community, forging direct links with their audiences, providing locally produced content and offering training opportunities.

According to Ofcom, there are currently over 300 local commercial radio stations and over 200 community radio stations broadcasting in the UK (Ofcom 2014). Thus, in total there are today around 550 local or regional radio stations in the UK, combining public service, commercial and community broadcasting models. These attract a significant share of radio listening, a share which has changed little over the past five years other than a slight decline in local commercial station listening. Figures provided by Rajar, the official body in charge of measuring radio audiences in the UK, show local commercial stations having a weekly reach (percentage of listeners tuning in for at least 15 mins each week) around 50 per cent, while the BBC local stations have a reach of 17% and BBC radio overall has a reach of 65% (RAJAR/Ipsos MORI/RSMB 2015b).

3) BBC, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/purpose/what.shtml>

4) Commercial stations broadcasting from abroad, such as Radio Normandy and Radio Luxembourg, were available to some, not all, British listeners from the 1930s onward. They offered some limited competition to the BBC (see Street 2006).

5) For further discussion of UK pirate radio see for example Chapman (1992).

3 Case Studies

To gain more comprehensive data on the production practices of local radio content, the nature of its programming and their relation to the online space, a multi-method approach combining production and textual research was chosen for the research presented here. Survey questionnaires sent to the stations gathered information on their organisational structure, economic conditions. Interviews with radio producers and journalists and visits to the radio stations provided an insight into their digital practices, whilst content analysis of the programming they produced aimed at identifying the impact of digital content and its incorporation into the radio programme itself. Finally, an analysis of web content, in particular of the broadcasters' websites and their social media activities, was carried out to identify current practices and links between online and on-air content.

Case studies were selected from each of the different types of local broadcasters, that is, public service (BBC), commercial and community radio. The case studies were intended to present successful examples of radio practice. They were selected based on high listener numbers/large market share, and a potential for innovative programme structures and web content including recognition through industry awards. The economic situation for local commercial radio stations in general tends to be challenging, hence this is not a criterion that informed the selection. The case studies included BBC Radio Cumbria, Rugby FM (commercial), and Gaydio (community). Two other stations were included in the programme content analysis: The Bay (a large commercial local station) and Resonance FM (a community radio station). Unfortunately, although initially agreeing to take part in the research, neither station responded to repeated reminders to return the survey, nor to requests for interviews. These stations further informed the results of the programme content analysis discussed here but they do not contribute data about producers, organisational structures and web activities. Below we have included a brief profile of each station that was informed by the survey questionnaires as well as the interviews with radio professionals. They also provide examples for the typical features of public service, commercial and community radio.

3.1 *BBC Radio Cumbria*⁶⁾

BBC Radio Cumbria is one of 40 local BBC radio stations. It is based in Carlisle and covers the geographical county of Cumbria in North West England catering for a population of over 400,000 in its coverage area. The station was founded in its present form in 1982, but its origins go back to the earliest days of BBC local radio when the BBC established a local radio station in Carlisle, the county town of Cumbria, in 1973.

Rajar audience figures show that the station has 115,000 listeners tuning in at least once per week – that is, a weekly reach of 29 percent of its population – and a total listening share of 15 percent in its area. These are among the highest figures for BBC local

6) Interviews were conducted with Graham Moss, Assistant Editor, Nell Gordon, Social Media Producer, and Mark Robertson, Multimedia Journalism Trainer.

radio, and significantly higher than the BBC local radio average of 16 percent reach and 7,7 per cent share respectively (RAJAR/Ipsos MORI/RSMB 2012). In common with most BBC local radio stations, the average age of the audience is mid-50s and the station's "remit is to be a speech based public service broadcaster for Cumbria" (Interview with Graham Moss, Assistant Editor). Thus, programming consists of a mix of pop music and speech. All daytime and evening programming is locally produced and thus emphasises the station's local geographical remit.

The station is funded from the BBC's £3bn annual income from the licence fee. In 2011 the BBC announced a proposal to cut the funding for local radio by 20 percent, implying that more programming, such as afternoon programmes, would no longer be locally produced but would be shared across BBC local radio. Public opposition resulted in that proposal being scaled back, but there remains an intention to cut budgets. With licence fee funding, the station does not take advertising, and its public service remit means that there is more speech than its commercial radio counterparts. Like other BBC local stations, its remit is broad, with the emphasis on local coverage: it is not, therefore, a 'themed' station covering just sport or culture, for example, but all of these topics feature in its programming.

3.2 *Rugby FM*⁷⁾

Rugby FM is a commercial station owned by the Quidem radio group, which in 2009 acquired a number of stations known as Touch FM including Rugby FM. The group comprises five stations which broadcast in Warwickshire and parts of Oxfordshire in the English Midlands. There is much networking of content amongst the group, with presenters and shows being pre-recorded and broadcast across the group, and on Quidem's acquisition, some studios were closed and 'co-located' with others in the group. Thus, although audience figures are recorded separately, production, advertising and managerial roles are not station-specific but shared across the group.

Rugby FM covers the small town of Rugby itself and the surrounding semi-rural population. Its weekly reach is 25,000 listeners of the 72,000 adult population in its coverage area, which equates to 35 percent. Its audience share is 13 percent in its coverage area, and these reach and share figures place Rugby FM amongst the higher rating stations of those with relatively small coverage areas in the UK. The Touch FM group as a whole reaches 14 percent of its total 991,000 population, and takes an audience share of 5.8 percent (Rajar 2012). Its peak audience time is during the 'breakfast' show, when its audience share is 20 percent.

The station first went on air in August 2002 and its primary target audience is 25–54 years old. In common with much commercial radio, the main programming consists of pop music, interspersed with presenter talk. Half of the programming is locally produced and the rest is shared across the group's stations. Outside of the peak audience time, much of the programming is pre-recorded, with automation employed in

7) Interviews took place with Ben Day, Head of Sponsorship Promotions and Interactive, Quidem radio group, and Oliver Gallant, presenter.

the programme transmission. News programming covers mainly national news provided by Sky News, with some local news inserts produced at the group's Honiley base. In 2012 the station won the Arqiva Commercial Radio Marketing Award for an event it arranged in Stratford-upon-Avon, the "Pride of Stratford awards ceremony" that involved the use of a Twitter wall. According to Ben Day (Head of Sponsorship Promotions and Interactive), the award "enhanced our reputation within the local community", bringing new commercial business to the group and increasing audiences and revenues compared to the previous year.

3.3 *Gaydio*⁸⁾

Gaydio is a community radio station operating in Manchester in the North West of England since 2010. As outlined above, community radio is a relatively new sector in the UK, but there are now around 200 such stations. They are run as not-for-profit enterprises and they must incorporate an element of "social gain" in their station's profile. This is usually addressed by targeting under-represented social groups as the audience. In *Gaydio*'s case, the target audience is "people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT)".

Like all community stations, it covers a small geographical area (a 5km radius) and so does not compete in any meaningful way with the larger commercial stations. Under the regulator Ofcom's rules, some community stations are allowed to carry advertising, while others are not (depending upon what other stations operate in the locality). *Gaydio* does carry advertising, but under the regulations this revenue must not exceed 50 percent of its total income.

Unusually for a community station, its programming balance is quite similar to a commercial station, with a heavy reliance on music and rather less speech. There are four paid employees but, as with all community stations, volunteers assist in producing programming and in some cases presenting programmes. All programming is locally produced. Community radio audiences are not measured by the main industry audience body, Rajar, as they are not commercial enterprises, and so little audience data exists. However, *Gaydio* believes that its prime listening time is between 5 and 8 pm. As well as transmitting on FM in central Manchester, it streams from its website and is also available on the UK Radioplayer site. A dedicated app is available for smartphones.

4 Local Radio Production and Social Media

In the remainder of this article, we discuss how local radio broadcasters have responded to the emergence of digital media based on the investigation of the case studies introduced above. In particular, we were interested in activities surrounding social media in order to understand the role of these new tools and platforms for radio pro-

8) It was not possible to arrange an interview with this station, although it did return a completed questionnaire.

duction. Due to their interactive nature and great popularity, social media could offer the opportunity to open up the relationship between radio producers and listeners and enable audience participation and interaction. Below we outline our findings with regard to practices concerning audience involvement in content production and relationship building with listeners especially in a local context.

4.1 Part of the Job: Social Media and Radio Production

As most media organisations, all sample stations have a web presence⁹⁾, stream their programmes online, provide smartphone apps and use social media sites, especially Facebook and Twitter. Their webpages provide schedules, details of presenters and programmes and links to Facebook and Twitter sites that are frequently updated. Radio producers and journalists were expected to prepare social media content in addition to their other work tasks. Creating content for social media and websites adds more work to the already busy schedules of radio producers. Such a set-up creates two particular challenges for content production. Firstly, it increases the workload and generates severe time pressure due to the fast-paced nature of online media as has been observed in cultural labour studies about journalism and digital technology. It further requires a different skill set compared to producing for radio as scholarship in online journalism has highlighted (see for example Paterson and Domingo 2008, Matheson 2004, Deuze 2003). In addition, there is a risk that web content is inconsistent even contradictory or at least chaotic if produced by multiple staff members, thus requiring some degree of coordination and shared ground rules.

Responses to these challenges differ in their organisational structure but the management of social media activities has clearly become another everyday feature of radio production. BBC Radio Cumbria introduced a dedicated Social Media Producer, Nell Gordon, to oversee and coordinate the online activity of other staff on a temporary basis. At Rugby FM, the takeover by the Touch FM group brought a change in attitude leading to an intensification of social media use. The sense that use of social media will simply become part of a broadcaster's role, of "what reporters just do" on a daily basis, is shared across the industry. Overall, the management of social media content has not only intensified but also professionalised in recent years. Staff at all case study stations receive training to produce content for the web and for social media as part of their job including an emphasis on "giving something extra" to the audience, trying to engage them and not only asking for feedback and information, and coordinating schedules of who is going to be posting at what times.¹⁰⁾

9) In contrast to the other stations and in accordance with the BBC's website structure, BBC Radio Cumbria does not have its own website but operates as a part of the main BBC Cumbria website that also covers local television, local news, events and traffic.

10) However, there are also problematic side effects concerning workload and work-life balance. There are no resources available to bring in new staff to take care of the stations' social media needs and while interviewees emphasised that using social media would simply become part of the broadcast staff's job, it was also recognised that this raised questions about when and for how long staff would be producing content as social media communication does not end with the radio programme.

As yet, there is little quantitative empirical evidence of usage of social media content by radio audiences, or of the impact of that usage. Nevertheless, in comparison with the station website, Facebook is perceived by broadcasters to be much more engaging, and of course more interactive. The interviewees acknowledged the organisational and economic challenges of this development, but they also highlighted its value for the station-audience relationship that goes beyond programming through the direct interaction with listeners, turning radio from listening into a conversation. Below, we explore to what degree this optimistic perception materialised in the journalistic practices radio producers employ and the content they create.

4.2 Online but not On-Air: Social Media and Radio Content

One of the key debates surrounding the new opportunities of participatory online media concerns the degree to which they impact on the content produced by traditional media. User generated content, citizen journalism and DIY media production are predicted to transform our media landscape and popular amateur YouTube channels and blogs seem to confirm such claims. However, our investigation of local radio programmes showed very little if any integration of social media content in the aired programmes. It became apparent that radio producers use social media mainly as an extension of their traditional journalistic practices and as a marketing platform despite their positive evaluation of social media's potential for station-listener interaction. On-air interaction and two-way communication, that is, the sharing of radio space with listeners, occurs mainly in the form of more traditional means of participation including phone calls, text messages and email.

The analysis of radio content showed that although all stations have a presence on Facebook and Twitter, these social media sites were referred to hardly at all by programme presenters. In the case of stations that carried advertising (Rugby FM, The Bay, Gaydio) the dominant reference was by far to the station website. This, presumably, is because all of these websites carry a significant amount of advertising. The BBC station almost never referred to its website since its website doesn't really exist as a separate entity but as part of the local BBC presence. Instead, the more traditional ways of interacting with the station were invited, such as text messaging, email or the telephone.

User generated content (UGC) did not feature much in the stations' online and on-air activity. Although the distinction is not clear cut, the use of content actually produced by the audience was limited to the upload of photographs onto the stations' Facebook sites. Usually, this was when there was breaking news – flooding was an example given. In this case, a discussion on Facebook could be augmented by listener's photograph, before a radio journalist arrived at the scene.

Few stations used forms of audience participation in their radio programming. BBC Radio Cumbria was the most consistent user of this content: it had a number of telephone callers on air, usually as interviewees; in other cases, comments were read

out from listeners' text messages or emails. Given that much of the commercial stations' programming was pre-recorded, there is little scope for genuine participation by the audience, and so use of audience feedback in any form was less prevalent at these stations. At Resonance FM, only a few such events were noted, and a small number also at Rugby FM. This variation can be further explained by the fact that the BBC station is relatively well staffed, and so can receive the more traditional telephone calls, emails and texts made to the station. None of this feedback came via social media, however, but from what might be called "Web 1.0" technologies instead (phone, text, email). Despite interviewees at some of the stations telling us that Facebook comments were read out on air, this appears to happen very infrequently – and not at all in our analysis – and it would seem that most Facebook activity by the stations and presenters remains within the domain of Facebook itself.

4.3 Consistency rather than Innovation: Journalistic Practice

So far, social media use has not increased the contribution audiences make to the actual radio content. Nevertheless, it has become an important and common tool for production practice as highlighted above. The study showed that Facebook, and more often Twitter, were used to find sources, interviewees and occasionally news stories. At times, it helped to reach high profile guests without having to go through agents and PR staff, or at other times Facebook and Twitter posters were invited to be interviewed. Occasionally, the first time a journalist might hear of a potential news story would be on Twitter. However, all interviewees stressed that this did not represent a dramatic change in the nature of journalism. For example, Mark Robertson, Multimedia Journalism Trainer for the BBC, said:

... news organisations can use it to their advantage to find stories, but then it becomes traditional news and news reeling at that point.... Web 2.0 isn't particularly setting an agenda in most newsrooms. It's being used to broadcast out stories or look for people, or just in general help boost to a different audience again.

While commercial radio stations, particularly smaller ones, have cut back on newsroom staff and rely on pre-recordings, Oliver Gallant from Rugby FM believes that Facebook, last but not least due to the fact that it is free to use, offers some sort of substitute. He gives an example of where, although he was at home and not in the studio, he heard about a car crash in his home town:

The great thing was I could go in, I could take the photo, I could put it straight onto Facebook, and then people could start giving their witness accounts from the local area on Facebook, just like in the old days where you'd have someone live on the radio talking about it. But they still feel that you're there.

4.4 Beyond the Broadcast: Engaging Audiences and Enhancing Locality

As illustrated by the example above, social media can expand the radio space by involving audiences beyond the broadcast itself. Of course, online activities also serve as

free promotional tools by drawing attention to particular programmes and events at the stations. Yet, overall, the sense was that social media would strengthen the station's relationship with the audience. Nell Gordon from BBC Radio Cumbria summed up the view of all interviewees:

...people will see us not just as a radio station and that it's the whole thing of what we're trying to create... I suppose that they feel more in touch with what we're doing. They can influence more what we're doing, talk directly to us, which they can still do with the radio by phoning in programmes. It just kind of feels more organic and it's more kind of constant.

Interviewees talked of the "community" created by social media, as listeners could "talk to each other" in a way that was not possible before and bring audiences and presenters closer together. This was in contrast with phone-in programmes, for example, where listeners' comments and responses were steered by presenters.

All interviewees believed that social media, Facebook in particular but also Twitter, were enabling the station to reach a new audience and, likewise, those interacting with the station were often people who would not before have interacted by text or phone. So, although the average age of listeners was mid-50s, data from Facebook suggested that contributors were younger. There was also a belief that some, at least, of the Facebook participants probably did not listen to the station at all! However, there is also a recognition that this new way of interacting with the audience only engages those who are already users of social media. As Oliver Gallant remarked, the notable absence from social media was, usually, the older segment of its audience: "So there's definitely a part of our audience that we're not getting to because they're not online." For a commercial company like Rugby FM, however, with a target audience below 45, this may not be an overriding concern.

When discussing this community-building potential of social media, the interviewees further expressed the view that social media also helped to enhance a station's locality. Local radio and local newspapers traditionally served people's strong interest in their local areas, and social media extended that reach. Thus, BBC Radio Cumbria's social media presence reached "people who are concerned about their local area, but may not realise that that's what local radio actually deals with a lot of the time" (Robertson). The use of Facebook can give a sense of the station being present in local communities by virtue of the pictures and comments being posted.

With a tendency in commercial radio for stations to become less local, and more grouped and networked, this can to some extent reclaim localness for a station. The Touch FM group, the owner of Rugby FM, shares presenters across its stations which means for example that, following her or his show, the breakfast presenter on one station will then, in the same studio, pre-record the afternoon show for another station that might be located 40km away. By looking at the Facebook content she or he can then talk about events and discussions happening in that locality without actually being there. Presenter Gallant explained: "it would be incomprehensible to do that type of networking without Facebook, and the people listening to that are getting a local show.

We're talking about local events and it enhances that output." To some extent, the interviewees believe this can compensate for decisions taken to close local studios and co-locate at a single base.

In summary, the interviewees believe that social media enables them to create closer ties to their listeners, to reach a new younger audience and to enhance the localness of their station. Social media can also help to compensate for a lack of resources in staffing but its impact on the broadcast programmes remains minimal. Involvement in social media adds to radio producers' workload blurring the boundaries between work and leisure but it does not revolutionise journalistic practice. Rather, social media are being integrated in traditional off-line research and promotional practices with little impact of interaction with audiences on the content radio producers create.

5 Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that radio stations take online media, and social media in particular, very seriously. Facebook especially is valued for its perceived enhancement of the relationship between the station and its audience; meanwhile Twitter is useful as a promotional tool for the station and as an aid to newsgathering. Our interviews demonstrated that social media has evolved from a specialist tool, or platform, to a role that is now mainstream and part of a journalist's day to day routine. All organisations had moved from a position of having one or two social media specialists to now requiring all staff to engage with it, while responsibility for its use and monitoring usually lies a little way up the management hierarchy. Key aspects of its use by journalists are finding sources of stories and identifying potential interviewees or participants. It can save time that would otherwise mean desk research and searching of archives. However, engagement with social media is definitely regarded as a two-way relationship – a journalist cannot solicit help from participants in programme making without also contributing to the relationship, and this means participating themselves in discussions about stories, often after the story has gone out on air when it might once have been regarded as 'dead'. This is an extra burden on journalists' time revoking whatever time and effort might be saved in the newsgathering process.

What is clear though is that Twitter and Facebook, in their different ways, are extensively used by growing numbers of the audience, and that radio stations see barriers being lowered and a more open relationship emerging between station and audience. The more enthusiastic users of social media at the radio stations were gaining large numbers of followers, and it could help in making the station feel more local to social media users despite a scarcity of production resources. The comparison with a community's "attachment" to a local newspaper was made on a number of occasions. However, programme makers recognised that the Facebook and Twitter users with whom they were all interacting were not "typical" of the station's audience. Certain groups, perhaps older or poorer members of the station's audience, were not included in these

discussions. There was an acceptance that using social media would mean addressing only a section of the station's audience, and that section was believed to be more "media-savvy", younger and possibly wealthier than the overall audience profile. While social media participants are not representative of the audience as a whole, it is possible that journalists and station staff who increasingly value the feedback and sources of information and stories they gain from social media could derive a distorted impression of the wider response to their stations' programmes.

Overall, the use of social media communication is limited and follows traditional journalistic practices rather than leading to the development of a "journalism 2.0" approach. There is little integration between a radio station's programmes and its social media activity and very modest indication that social media content is being used in the stations' programming itself. Some radio stations, particularly BBC Radio Cumbria, continue to encourage listener participation by more traditional means, and use this rather more than other stations, reading out texts and emails for example. No radio stations in our analysis made on-air use of social media contributions, such as reading out Facebook messages. In fact, the online space and the listening space of radio remain fairly separate with the former serving as a promotional and research tool for the latter. In this respect, Brecht's hope for establishing radio as a "two-sided communications apparatus" may be met by the *potential* of social media but so far it has not materialised in *practice*. While further research is needed into whether and in what way audiences would like to be more involved in the production of the radio they listen to, one barrier for a more participatory use of social media by radio producers that emerged in the study is scarcity of production resources as economic pressure intensifies at most stations and workloads are increasing. In this regard, radio's potential contribution to the public sphere through the use of social media tools is neglected in favour of economic interests.

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