Unique Characteristics Of The Radio As A Channel Of Mass Media

In this essay I will be exploring the unique characteristics of radio as an exclusively auditory medium by referencing to both radio theory and practice. I will also be researching both the positive and negative aspects of radio as a auditory medium. The Italian Guglielmo Marconi was the first ever person to send and receive radio signals in 1895. To prove this, Crisell(2002) stated that “Guglielmo Marconi, is just regarded as ‘the father of radio’ because it was he who brought together so many of these discoveries and inventions.”

Radio is one of the mass media due to its power to spread across so many households, cities and countries. Radio is a blind medium that causes the listeners to visualise who is speaking. It is said that “Radio is your most visual medium”(Glass, 2016). This implies that even though there is only a voice to be heard, the mind is working in so many ways to create a picture for the listener and make it more interesting for them. Also, radio’s pictures are any size you want to make them unlike Television which gives the audience a picture and that is the picture they have throughout. McLeish(2005) proved that “the sights and sounds of radio are created within us, and can have greater impact and involvement” which highlights that radio is created in the mind and due to this it causes the audience to have a greater involvement with the medium. It was known that radio is the theatre of the mind and Allen(n.d) said that radio is the theatre of the intelligent people and that television is the theatre of those who aren’t as intelligent. Radio is considered as a personal medium and the broadcasters should be speaking to the audience as singular. McLeish(2005) states that “radio is an everyday personal item” meaning that radio should only be directed at one person when the presenter is speaking. Local Radio also deals with advertisements of smaller companies and benefits them as well as the audiences located around the area of the radio show. If advertisements that aren’t relating to the listeners are put on the show then this can cause a drop of audience and they can easily lose interest in the programme.

However, there are some negatives in relation to radio as a auditory medium. The main negative towards radio is that many people use it as background noise, like being in the car, the house or even in a shop. McLeish(2005) states that radio is less demanding and allows the audience to get on with their day to day lives. However, this could also be taken as a positive as it allows a more flexible link with its user compared to Tv or print. Another negative is that radio lacks space in that a newspaper could have 30-40 columns of news and a 10 minute radio bulletin is equivalent to a possible column and a half in a newspaper. This highlights that when a radio programme can only have a minimum amount of time spent on each topic as it will take up their whole show if longer than usual. Also, if the listener misses something that was said on the radio it is difficult to rewind and re-listen to what they missed. This could be a huge negative towards radio as in Tv it is easy to rewatch/listen to something and the same with print, but radio lacks this if listening in the car or house. Even though radio is known for being less demanding, McLeish(2005) states that “Broadcasters sometimes forget that people have other things to do” which isn’t exactly radio’s fault but more of the broadcasters fault. Fleming(2009) reveals that “In theory more radio stations and different platforms of delivery should provide a variety of different kinds of radio, but in practice the majority of stations have a similar format that is dominated by music, and many people are unaware that some stations broadcast a range of

programmes including soaps, drama and comedy". This implies that radio is being dominated by the same type of stations instead of letting the other, more unique stations come through and be listened to. It also highlights that there should be more stations with different platforms and different ideas that the audience can listen to as that is what radio theory is supposed to be about. Programmes that can interest different people and will always have a person for that show.

Back when radio first began, each show that was made was made for a specific reason or group. Crisell(2002) states that "programmes for the young date from the very beginning of radio: Children's Hour originated in Birmingham in 1922". This highlights that everyone was listening to radio, from the elderly to the young, but now the percentage of young people listening to radio on the regular. Sanchez(2017) stated that young people are now turning to streaming over traditional radio and that it's usually done on Spotify or Apple Music. Radio programmes in today's day and age like the BBC "offers a portfolio of services aimed at offering listeners the highest quality programmes, whatever their interest or mood"(BBC, n.d). This highlights that the BBC have different shows for all of their listeners such as; BBC radio 1 specialises in modern popular music and chart music and BBC radio 4 specialises in the news, drama, comedy, science and history. Majority of radio programmes allow audience interaction with the broadcasters. The BBC take part in phone-ins and live competitions, which Tv can't do. Capital FM also involve the audience in their programmes by having competitions that involve giving free concert tickets away or even a holiday. These interactions with the audience are live and quick which brings people together and makes the audience feel a connection with the broadcasters. Capital FM also have many concerts that they do, such as; Capital's summertime ball, Capital's Jingle Bell Ball(CapitalFM, n.d), which brings people together and allows a huge audience interaction. Capital FM is a music based radio programme, but is also well known for the competition aspects of it as listeners just have to text the show and are in with a chance of winning massive things. The show also broadcasts on the news and just general topics that are happening at that moment of time. Each radio programme should have a specific audience they are targeting. An example of radio shows targeting a specific audience is 'Dave n Sue'. These are both fictional characters that every BBC local radio presenter should be targeting at all times as the presenters will need to know who the centre of their target audience is (Self,2005). Self(2005) also mentions that LBC broadcasts specifically to 'Amanda'. Audience figures should give the broadcasters an insight into what the listeners want on the show and what they wouldn't like to listen to or tune into.

Overall, radio as an exclusively auditory medium is effective through theory and practice, both positively and negatively. Radio causes the listeners to create pictures in their minds and that it is much more visual in comparison to Television. Chantlet and Stewart(2003) state that "You are using the most powerful tools you possess: immediacy and imagery". This sums up what radio is about and that it has an instant involvement with the listeners. Radio should be speaking to one listener, even though there are many listeners across the city or country. Radio should have a personal feel to it and should only be addressing one person throughout. Radio is remarked as a more personal medium through the audience as it allows them to feel at ease due to them being able to create their own picture of what is being said/presented to them. It also uses the mind more in comparison to television and that it is based off of human interests and imagination. However, radio can be used as just background noise in a car or even in a household. Which is a complete turn around from when radio first started out. The amount of people listening to live speech radio is decreasing over the years and music based radio programmes are the more dominant types in the UK. An example of radio being used just for

background noise is in shops, café’s or even in big supermarkets. Audience interaction is a main factor in producing a radio show. Many radio programmes in the UK have phone-ins which can give an insight into what kind of audience each show has listening. Concerts are also arranged for some radio shows which bring people together who all listen and tune into the same show. Advertisements through radio are massive. Many smaller/local programmes include advertisements from local businesses or even popular/bigger companies such as PPI or Virgin Media. These advertisements that are put on each show are in relation to their audience as no one wants to listen to something they don’t want to and this would just cause a drop in listeners for the show.