

**A review of multimedia formats and social media use for  
traditional radio broadcasting in Ireland**

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A research Paper submitted to the University of Dublin,  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science Interactive Digital Media

2016

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Susan Gill, for her support and encouragement in writing this Research Paper, and throughout the year in introducing me to media theory. I would also like to thank Dr. Tom Clonan, who took time out of a busy Seanad election campaign to listen to my half-formed ideas and offer advice. I would like to thank my mother, Emer Mullen, for her proof-reading skills, and the care she gave me during a busy time for me. Sincere thanks are also due to John Augusta of the Trinity Security team, who always allowed students to work as late as possible in the course building.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and the argument for studying the visual elements of radio**

In February 2016, Ireland's national public service broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) launched a new logo for its radio station 2fm, which was part of an ongoing rebranding strategy that began with schedule changes in 2014. The head of the station, Dan Healy, stated that the changes being brought into effect were part of an effort to keep up with trends towards the “visualisation of radio” (Slattery, 2016). Healy did not mean that 2fm were planning to begin broadcasting images or videos via radio networks, but that the station is currently adapting its practices to include more visual content across the platforms which it uses. Apart from Healy directly citing best practice by the BBC, this echoes what Jonathan Kern of the USA's NPR (2008) insisted eight years previously, that:

Radio journalists who have spent decades learning how to ‘report with their ears’ are now thinking about the best graphs, documents, photographs, video, or Web links to flesh out their reports.

(p. 313)

If radio is traditionally characterised as an “invisible medium”, (Edmond, 2015, p. 1569) what then, is the process of the visualisation of radio, and how does it fit in with other discussions surrounding transmedia and digital media practices?

Discussions surrounding the changing nature of radio over the last two decades has mainly focussed on the shift from listeners tuning in via FM to Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB), and later the shift from accessing content via radio waves by any means to tuning in online, accessing radio-on-demand, downloading podcasts, and using other digital distribution platforms. Edmond (2015) argues that in the past three years, audiences have been experiencing radio through or alongside more visual media, such as theatre, cinema, live music

performances, mobile applications and social media platforms, online videos, maps, tweets, blogs, forums, essays, photographs and interactive websites (p.1567). If this is the case, then it is necessary to re-evaluate the characteristics which define radio as a medium once again. Do audiences consider radio transmission to make content radio, does the format need to be entirely audio, and is a radio station now more of a media brand concept than a physical space or organisationally-owned equipment from which broadcasters operate?

This aim of this research paper is to synthesise literature regarding the concepts of transmedia, convergence culture, interactivity and participation, and to assess how these concepts might apply to radio generally, but more specifically to traditional Irish radio broadcasters. Irish audiences seem to interact with a large number of different media, and devote a lot of their time to the media which they do engage with; Google (2015) reported that 70% of the population, and 97% of the population aged 15-24 years old own smartphones, and the latest Joint National Listenership Research (JNLR) figures, (Ipsos MRBI, 2016) while showing a slight decline, still place daily radio listening by Irish adults overall at 83% and those in the 15-34 age group at 76%. The average amount of time which Irish people spend listening to the radio every weekday is placed at 4 hours<sup>1</sup>, which would be considered anti-social for smartphone usage. In fact, Facebook released figures this year stating that its users globally spend an average of 50 minutes per day using its applications; Facebook, Messenger and Instagram, which is a 10 minute increase from last year (Constine, 2016). While this figure may seem high for social media, and is seen as a sign of an increase in social media addiction, it still remains less than a quarter of the time listeners spend with radio daily. Neither figure gives any indication of how much time listeners spend engaging with accounts which are

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<sup>1</sup> There is of course the likelihood that the average amount of time spent listening to the radio each day is being skewed somewhat by members of the public who are able to have the radio on “in the background” throughout their entire day, while engaging in other activities, while other members of the public may listen in for far less time.



associated to radio stations while they are using social media. An attempt to address the question of the level of audience social media engagement will be made in Chapter Three.

It is certainly of concern to Irish broadcasters, whose advertising revenue relies on national listenership figures, that fewer adults under 35 listen to radio than from the older cohort, while smartphone usage is particularly high. This is the reason why 2fm, a station whose target audience is under-35s, is trying to adapt itself to satisfy the changing media consumption habits of that age group. Therefore, this paper will examine what media scholars and broadcast professionals consider to be the trends in media consumption, and apply this to the Irish radio context.

Jenkins (2016) repeatedly refers to radio as a medium which supported and encouraged participatory practises prior to the “networked era”, and others remark on both the perceived intimacy, and the forum for public discussion offered, which seem unique to radio out of the linear broadcast media. In a time when audiences are aware that the same programme could be listened to by almost anyone in the world, at a different time from them, and with Web 2.0 believe that they have access to the means of cultural production, it is necessary to examine how stations interact with the same new technologies to appeal to their audiences.

This paper will examine three main characteristics of Irish radio today in order to understand the format and the broadcasters’ positions as a whole: the convergence of different types of media; the changing nature of audience participation and production control; the traditional idea of radio being a blind medium, and the imagery which is now associated with broadcast items online. Due to limitations of time and resources, it is not a comprehensive study of all radio stations of Ireland, but the main stations which will be discussed were chosen as somewhat representative of characteristically different types of stations. RTÉ Radio 1 and 2fm are national public service broadcast stations, with the former being aimed at listeners over 35,

and the latter aimed at under-35s. Newstalk is a national commercial news station. FM104 is a local commercial entertainment station broadcasting in the greater Dublin area. If there seems to be, at times, more emphasis on RTÉ stations than on the others mentioned, this is due to the facts that 19 of the 20 shows with the top listenership belong to the broadcaster, (Martin, 2016) and RTÉ make more of their policies available to the public due to their public funding source.

However before doing that, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the history of the ownership of the means of radio broadcasting. Barnard (2000) and Jenkins (2013, 2016) both agree that the initial main producers of radio were amateurs; scout troops, schools, church groups and technology enthusiasts. The history of radio and some of the Irish historical events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century are closely intertwined, with Guglielmo Marconi having completed much of his work on long-distance transmission and telegraph systems in North Antrim, and later testifying in the R.M.S. Titanic court case, which directly influenced the introduction of the Radio Act of 1912. This mandated that seagoing vessels continuously monitor distress frequencies, and also required amateur radio operators to be licensed. Amateur operators were also prohibited from transmitting over the main commercial and military wavelengths (Wireless History Foundation, 2012). On the one hand, the use of radio for saving lives was lauded quite strongly, but on the other, a precedent was set internationally for the restriction of radio broadcasting. A Marconi operator also assisted Joseph Mary Plunkett and James Connolly in transmitting a declaration of the Irish Republic in Morse code during the 1916 Rising, which is seen as the first radio broadcast in Ireland (Independent Broadcasters of Ireland, 2016). The commemoration of the centenary of that broadcast will be discussed in Chapter Four, but for now let the historical event serve as one of several examples of radio's links with Irish history.

For his part, Jenkins appears to admire the early phase of radio, and points to the work of Bertolt Brecht in the 1930s, believing that there was a possibility that radio could undergo a

transformation from a technology supporting distributed broadcast to passive audiences, to a medium of collective participation, or a conversation (2013, p. 178). As stated above, Jenkins and Barnard both mention the amateurs who owned radios at the beginning, and Barnard points out that it became easier for the manufacturers of radio transmitters to produce radio broadcasts, which eventually led to more of a monopoly. This was followed by a process of institutions like the BBC, and NPR being established and taking control in the 1920's, with the moral rhetoric that "only culturally 'responsible' institutions could be trusted with such a powerful medium" (p. 11). In Ireland, RTÉ was the public service broadcast institution which was created to serve a similar purpose to those of the institutions which he mentions. Barnard refers to this lobbying as due to a paternalistic idea of a service which should be provided by an appointed class of professionals, and should appeal to an assumed consensus of taste and interest.

The main cultural problem with the institutionally-dominated era of radio is the idea of "gatekeeping", which Barnard refers to at several points in his book; there is very little room for alternative culture when chasing an assumed consensus. He also points out that due to the financing structure of the BBC, it went from being a relayer of information, education and entertainment, to being a producer of all three (p. 31). It could certainly be argued that a similar cultural monopoly was achieved in Ireland with RTÉ, with the broadcaster controlling most of the available radio and television stations for a long time, creating much of the programmes for its emissions, and organising the national orchestra.

This monolithic broadcast landscape was later challenged from the 1970s onwards due to the prevalence of commercial and pirate radio. With regards to commercial radio, Barnard presents a critical argument which is not entirely dissimilar to that which he wrote regarding public service broadcasting. That is, because a station is reliant on its ad revenue, this encourages programming which is assumed to appeal to the greatest possible number of listeners, which

leads to a marginalisation of less popular tastes (p. 51). In both cases, there is an assumption being made about the interests of the masses, however a slight difference must be highlighted between the two. In the case of public service broadcasting, Barnard's line of argument surrounding paternalistic ideology implies that the consensus which appeals to the audience is morally conservative, and would reinforce what listeners *should* want to hear, whereas commercial radio would be more populist in its programming; i.e. giving the listeners what they *want* to hear, which may be widely accepted, but not necessarily by institutions with a hand in shaping and maintaining a nation's moral status quo. In this case, any subversive content is more likely to be directed against the state, rather than against any ideals which are in the interest of consumerism.

Many, including Jenkins, van den Bulck and Hermans, (in Gazi et al., 2011) and Kern believe that new digital technologies have made it easier and cheaper for more people to broadcast audio or make the "radio format" (Jenkins, 2013) available through podcasting, from different parts of the world, and that this has both helped and hindered traditional broadcasting. The key aspect of podcasting is that anyone now almost anyone can create their own audio production, and depending on whether a person does or does not have interest in the survival of traditionally gatekeeping media, they will frame this statement as optimistic or pessimistic. Van den Bulck and Hermans acknowledge the benefits of this for small local stations who are trying to engage with their communities. Jenkins believes that the rise of podcasting signifies a return of "radiolike content" (p. 188) to a more participatory medium, as it had existed in the days of the amateur broadcasters in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For NPR's Jonathan Kern, however, podcasting presents both challenges and opportunities. Challenges both in the form of competing with more content creators and in ensuring that repackaged audio content signifies its timestamp accordingly to avoid any inaccuracies which may occur through a listener accessing older content on an evolving news story in which the facts become outdated. One of the possible

opportunities is reaching more listeners through making content as “searchable” as possible so that the media brand can retain or increase its audience.

Pirate radio of the mid- to late- 20<sup>th</sup> Century occupied a strong place in Irish and British culture for many years, which affected the public service institutions greatly when trying to attract younger audiences. The popularity of the illicit stations, which were funded through the American model of spot advertisements lasting 30 seconds or longer, and sponsorship, is what Barnard and others charting the history of radio insist led to not only the deregulation of radio and the growth of local and commercial stations, but also to the adoption of popular practices aimed at younger audiences, such as Top 40 chart shows on BBC Radio 1.

RTÉ also took similar action in relation to attracting younger listeners from their pirate competition. During the launch of the 2fm rebrand which was mentioned above, Dan Healy referred to when RTÉ Radio 2, as it was known then, first broadcast in 1979, as the moment when RTÉ began to “repatriate” listeners back from pirate stations again. He believes that 2fm, and the radio industry as a whole, is facing a similar dilemma as it was then, citing emigration and music market trends rather than informational and media consumption trends more generally. “We may be at that 1979 moment again,” he stated. His assertions are likely to be somewhat in line with the overall institutional outlook of RTÉ, which would mean that they believe that “we have to repatriate the audience again”. It is certainly highly unlikely that the Irish people would decide to stop using the Internet and social media and return to sourcing all of their information from radio, or one producer of radio, but this paper will examine the ways in which Irish radio stations are adapting themselves in order to attract interest in their respective brands across different media, and attempt to indicate whether these brands will survive as separate broadcast, publishing or content-creating entities, or simply merge with social media’s own publishing.

## Chapter Two: Radio's place in media

As mentioned in the Introduction, the idea of radio entering a more visual era is somewhat oxymoronic, and so needs to be examined within the context of media trends more generally. It would be difficult to do so and avoid discussing Henry Jenkins' theories on media convergence (2006) or Marshall McLuhan's concepts of media effects, in relation to this shift. The term convergence has been deployed by so many different theorists that it has perhaps become decontextualized, which Jenkins points out in later works (2013, 2016). Jenkins explains convergence as the following:

[...] the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.

(2006, p. 2)

Traditional Irish radio stations and their presenters, journalists and DJs have for years been producing branded content which they distribute through a variety of platforms in order to try and reach their audiences, including radio, websites and the images and videos which can be presented on them, podcasts and social media. Quotes from a notable interview or radio debate appearing afterwards in a newspaper article, or on a news site, or audio clips being reused during a television news broadcast, are also in line with Jenkins' definition of convergence, with the same content reappearing in a different medium.

There are two main issues with using convergence theory to examine "visual radio". The first is that the concept becomes more complicated when we try to apply it to material which straddles the line between promotion of a station, and information or entertainment. The second is that much of Jenkins's writing proposes and promotes the ideas of passive consumers changing the power structure in media production through their participation, and the collective

creative contribution of communities with shared interests, in which all members have equal access and control. The radio stations that this paper is discussing are mass communication broadcasters who hold an unequal share of the power in relation to their audiences, and therefore much of what Jenkins writes regarding participation does not apply to the stations in a straightforward manner.

This chapter will discuss several ways in which Irish radio stations have promoted themselves, or been involved in the flow of content across multiple media platforms, outside of social media. The aim of this is to contextualise the study of social media engagement and multimedia production within the wider activities of stations marketing themselves and trying to reach their audiences. The following chapter will examine the problem of media production power and controlled audience participation.

We return now to Jenkins's definition of convergence and the concept of cooperation between multiple media industries. For radio stations which are part of a larger media organisation like the BBC, or RTÉ in the Irish context, there is a significant amount of cooperation between radio, television and online platforms, as while each programme and station has its own, more targeted audience, they belong to a larger network. As a result, the same interview can be "repackaged" for television segments, online videos, and audio clips. On the other hand, journalists, researchers, presenters, and producers could work across different shows, with different teams.

One example of this is how, in an article for *The Irish Times*, (Freyne, 2016) radio and television presenter Ryan Tubridy described a sort of rivalry between his morning radio show team and that of *The Late Late Show*<sup>2</sup>, and the producer of his radio show agreed with Freyne

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<sup>2</sup> "The radio team call *The Late Late Show* Shelbyville, says Tubridy; it's a reference to Springfield's rival town on *The Simpsons*. 'Though maybe they're Shelbyville.'" (Freyne, 2016).

that Tubridy's performance was different on a Friday, before his evening hosting of the weekly television show. Sometimes if there is a large degree of strong social media reaction to an item on *The Late Late Show*, Tubridy conducts a follow-up interview on his radio show the following week. One example of this is when there was a large amount of verbal abuse on social media directed at a child who had appeared on *The Late Late Toy Show*, and Tubridy interviewed the father of the girl the following week on his radio show. The story was then summarised on RTÉ's digital news site, RTÉ Ten (2015). In this case, a news item was created from spontaneous audience reaction to one production output, and then covered at different points in time across a spectrum of media platforms, which all belong to the same organisation.

Different teams can also collaborate across multiple media formats on RTÉ's coverage of a larger event as a whole. Examples of this are events such as the 2016 General Election, and the 2015 National Ploughing Championships, where different shows have been co-located in the same studio, covering the same event, but preparing different content about the same information which suits that medium's target audience, or different aspects of the event for different media. For the vote count of the General Election, RTÉ Radio One coverage was dedicated to giving a view of the political picture nationwide, but there were Twitter accounts set up for each constituency, to give voters from those areas the most relevant information as quickly as possible.

An example of a different station collaborating with other media industries is Newstalk's broadcast of the NPR show *TED Radio Hour* (NPR, 2016). TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) talks began in 1984 with a four-day conference. The organisation later began to host talks on innovation more regularly, and in 2007 started hosting videos of their talks on YouTube, with supporting materials on their own website. Due to the success of these videos, they improved their video production, and now host over 2,200 talks on their website. *TED*



*Radio Hour* bases its show around a talk, but contains audio clips of the talks, edited with music and supplementary interviews, along with narration from the show's host, Guy Raz. What began as a live audience experience became popularised through online video hosting, and now has a radio counterpart which can be accessed through either live broadcast transmission, or podcast streaming or downloading.

Even prior to the advent of the mass consumption of online media, stations had a presence on other media platforms. They advertised themselves in local newspapers, and on Out of Home media points such as buses, which Barnard (2000) believes are crucial to building and maintaining a station's listenership. In this regard, he insists that "radio stations also require a tangible visual identity" (p. 207). That said; promotional materials do not necessarily create part of a news story which the station or show is trying to tell, or a form of entertainment being conveyed to audiences, rather they may only convey an idea of what the radio's brand is. Below are contrasting uses of Out of Home media used to promote two different Irish stations: FM104 and Newstalk. In both cases the stations are aiming to reinforce a brand image, however Newstalk's poster recalls a current affairs story in order to do so, and in so doing appears to elaborate on the narrative surrounding the story.



Figure 1: FM104 promotional graphics on roadshow vehicle and brand ambassador cars (Irish Times, 2016).



Figure 2: Newstalk General Election coverage billboard (Newstalk.com, 2016)

The image used in the Newstalk poster was not staged for promotional purposes, but is cropped from a photograph taken by Lorenzo Meloni in Syria (Magnum Photos, 2012). The girl pictured is a thirteen-year-old Kurdish refugee who was sheltering in a veterinary laboratory, having fled a different region of the country which was embroiled in violent conflict that had begun during the Arab Spring. The suggestion of the “*Céad Míle Fáilte*<sup>3</sup>” slogan is to query whether Ireland is a welcoming nation, as our tourism and political rhetoric insists, when at the time of the billboards appearance, Ireland had taken in fewer than twenty refugees of the millions flooding Europe. While the #RealityCheck slogan is an assurance to potential listeners that Newstalk is the station which they can rely on to query such rhetoric, the image used is participating in the dissemination of informative material.

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<sup>3</sup> An Irish language idiom meaning “a hundred thousand welcomes”.

Barnard also highlights that radio roadshow units, like the FM104 “RoadHog” pictured in Figure 1, which are studios on trailers that are deployed to popular events or locations, are used with the aim of building a “point of association” (p. 210) for listeners. The show is produced and broadcast, and therefore creating and distributing content in the station’s usual manner, however the visual presence of the physical studio in a public place, the participation of the public in the creation of the show which tends to be encouraged, and the audible and visible production of the content transforms what is a radio broadcast to a distant listener into a live performance for those present. In contrast to visual advertisements for radio, roadshows combine the primary function of the station with its marketing activities, so that it is neither wholly one nor the other. Acknowledging that the two may not necessarily be mutually exclusive is a key point to bear in mind when examining multimedia and social media content produced by radio stations.

This research paper is primarily concerned with Irish radio stations’ use of audio-visual, textual, and visual media online, which are largely published, (and if not published, then still possibly shared) on Web 2.0 platforms. This is in spite of a direct contrast which Allen (2008) highlights as existing between broadcast media and Web 2.0, which he insists is a repeated rhetoric utilised by those who stand to gain from the economics of Web 2.0 in order to present it as democratic by comparison. It is interesting to note that he dates convergence back to the 1990s, and attributes it specifically to the Internet, whereas Jenkins does not explicitly restrict the concept to online media. He presents the argument that although relations between audiences and producers or broadcasters in the traditional media “create a kind of hegemony” in which the producers come to choose for their audiences, it would be wrong to accept that the Internet and shifts towards convergence represent a digital utopia of communication. His definition of convergence is as follows:

Convergence is best thought of as a reorganisation of the economic structures and social practices for the provision and consumption of a broad range of communication and information services enabled by technological advances that lead to the digitisation of data, and its circulation at ever-increasing speeds over computer-based networks involving direct connections through telecommunications links.

(Allen, 2008)

While both Allen and Jenkins appear to see media convergence as an opportunity for a more open means of communication between different people, Allen is more pessimistic about the success, or progress of this process through Web 2.0 than Jenkins and his colleagues appear to be. Jenkins (2016) makes the point that technologies are not inherently participatory, but can enable participatory cultures or communities to connect to each other over distances. However, Allen's main issue with Web 2.0 appears to be with the neo-liberal economic exploitation of it, rather than with the concept of collocating user-generated data and computer-generated data dynamically on the same webpage. One of his critiques is that Web 2.0 was heralded as the harbinger of a new era of open, democratic media exchanges, but that the reality is that similar power struggles and structures exist within Web 2.0 as in other media. Political change, he argues, cannot occur in an Internet vacuum. Another of his main points is that the advertising benefits of serving up ads to users which search engines like Google represent a model that is in total opposition to that of traditional media and telecommunications companies, so the trajectory of the two appears more confrontational than convergent to him.

If this is the case, then it would be understandable if Irish broadcasters have in the past been reluctant to engage with Web 2.0 applications in a meaningful or creative way, as to do so would be enabling the migration of their audiences over to a new medium. However, as consumers have continued to flock to the Web, and the numbers of smartphone users has grown enormously in Ireland, producers have had to follow where their audiences were going.

Jenkins has a more neutral outlook of networked technologies, and highlights cases where communities have used the possibilities of those technologies to reach each other from a distance and encourage more collective creativity.

In relation to radio, as Allen highlights that the power balance is closer to that of media organisations it stands to reason that he believes that media-savvy operators are benefitting from the uses of Web 2.0, which radio broadcasters could be. If we are to attempt to examine the use of social media and multimedia platforms like YouTube, by Irish radio broadcasters, then it is necessary to acknowledge that this is a broadcast medium interacting with Web 2.0. The balance of power within this particular point of media convergence may not be entirely clear-cut, but control does appear to be more in the hands of the media owners rather than jointly shared by producers and audiences. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three, where the concept of participatory culture will be examined in relation to the practice of encouraging and allowing audience participation in radio shows. For the purposes of this chapter, the differences of opinion between Jenkins and Allen serve more to highlight that they both still seem to agree that the Internet, particularly since Web 2.0, is attracting audiences that previously depended on broadcasters more heavily as a sources of information.

Marshall McLuhan, on the other hand, having died prior to the introduction of Web 2.0, does not discuss how social media related to the radio. However, his son Eric, who compiled and published his last, posthumous book, wrote an article as part of a journal issue on “McLuhan in the Era of Convergence Culture” (2011). Along with the other authors of the journal, the younger McLuhan attempts to apply his father’s older theory to digital convergence culture, sometimes using older notes that had previously been unpublished. Marshall McLuhan had used radio to explain the process of new technologies changing the way in which people

predominantly share information. Logan (2011) applies McLuhan's media tetrad of enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval and reversal to television and YouTube.

Radio had enhanced the ability to spread news and music through its use of sound, and in so doing reduced the prominence of print and the visual. However, it retrieved the use of the spoken word, which had been prevalent prior to the printing press, and then its reversal occurred when the television became prominent. Logan argues for television having undergone a similar journey, and then having "flipped into YouTube" (p. 44). It is difficult to place other social media into this same framework, as most will have multiple types of media displayed in a feed at any one time, as would be the same case for any radio station sites which feature multimedia content frequently. There certainly is a returned popularity in reading, through the typed word. Logan argues that digital media is obsolescing television, due to its interactivity and the two-way flow of information which is possible. However, earlier in his article he had iterated that "obsolescence never meant the end of anything, it's just the beginning" (p. 44). He points there to the fact that book sales increased around the time McLuhan had stated that print was being obsolesced by television and radio, but what mattered was that the principal means of accessing information and communicating had changed.

Certainly, with JNLR figures like the most recent ones mentioned in the first chapter, radio has not died in Ireland, but likewise with such a large number of people reported to be accessing the Internet, social media, and smartphones regularly, it appears that digital media may soon be the primary source of information for the majority of Irish people, if it is not already. This is where there may be a split by labour types and industries; if a person works with a computer primarily, then they are likely to have regular access to online sources of information, and if their activities allow them to listen to the radio all day, then they are more likely to obtain information from that source. Chapters Three and Four will discuss the phenomenon of the

“second screen” in relation to television viewing habits, and how it could relate to the participation in greater discussion by audience members, as well as the senses which are engaged by the activity. For now, let it suffice to say that working with a computer does not necessarily negate a consumer from being a background radio listener as well, nor would those audience members working without a computer necessarily go without internet access for the entire day with the prevalence of smartphone ownership as high as it is.

Another aspect of McLuhan’s media theory to be considered in relation to radio stations’ use of social and multi- media is the concept of hot and cold media, depending on the level of engagement required by the consumer. McLuhan argues that cinema is a cold medium, largely requiring only passive entertainment. Radio on the other hand, with the effort required by the listener to create a picture in their head, he classifies as hot. Arguably, Web 2.0 applications could present hot or cold content, depending on what the user decided to use it for; watching a video, surfing the net, reading, composing an email, tweet, comment or status. If a fan of a radio station or show is accessing social media to enter a competition or engage in debate occurring around a broadcast item, then this interaction could be described as “hot”. Simply viewing other promotional material, like performances by visiting artists, or live video footage from inside the broadcast studio, might be considered a colder medium, but the decision of whether to watch or not; to like or not to like; share or not; comment or not; move on from the content onto another item entirely, is an active experience for the consumer.

It is clear that Irish radio is undergoing changes, in line with other media, in response to the popularity of the Internet, and the convergence of modes towards the Web as a source of data delivery, but that radio still holds a prominent position among consumers. The interactions between television and the Internet may have been clearer to see than those of radio, due to the

similarity in the senses engaged by both, but Irish radio has not seen its end yet, and may not do so for some time.

Having laid down a theoretical foundation in this chapter, the next chapter will discuss the nature of the Irish audience's participation in radio broadcasts, whether they truly get to "join the conversation" projected by a transmission, and whether they have the opportunity to take part in semi-public online discourse over which the broadcaster has much, if any, opportunity to intervene in or control this conversation. The chapter after that will discuss the senses involved in interacting with an Irish radio station via a radio, their website or mobile application, or social media.



## Chapter Three: Audience Participation

As the previous chapter discussed the question of convergence, this chapter will focus on one of the ways in which Irish radio listeners can engage with and participate in a programme; by contacting the station and making their views known about an item of discussion, or about the station as a whole. The process for audience members to do this has changed over the years: from writing or telephoning in, to texting or emailing, and now tweeting to shows, commenting on statuses, sending private social media messages, and snapchatting. This chapter aims to show that it is not only the means of contacting the station which have changed over the years, but also the balance of power and the amount of broadcaster control over the publicity of the remarks, opinions and contributions of their audiences. If a radio broadcaster is either trying to serve the public by catering to an assumed consensus, or to appeal to the greatest number of listeners, then it could be reasonable to assume that it would be in the broadcaster's interest to pay attention to what listeners express as their opinions, and adjust their output accordingly. However, it seems more likely that broadcasters only take action when a large number of their audiences express the same opinion, and they are interested in collecting user-generated content as a means of benchmarking their own success in capturing their audiences' attentions. Another aspect which will be examined is the phenomenon of "second-screening", which is normally applied to television viewing, but the means of further engagement with programming described for that concept are useful for radio as well. This concept will be introduced in this chapter, but continued in further detail in the following chapter.

The earliest form of radio listeners "talking back", as it were, to broadcasters took place through letter-writing in the 1920s and 30s. Broadcasters could mention that they had received letters from listeners, mention specific writers or letters directly, or even read out letters on air. A study

undertaken by Simmons (2009) found that listeners perceived this exchange to be a form of interactivity between themselves and the broadcaster, regardless of the time which had lapsed between their penning of the letter, and its acknowledgement on air. She lists that some of the motivations for listeners to write in to broadcasters were: to correct errors which had been made in broadcasts, to submit content for inclusion in programmes, and to either praise or criticise broadcasters. She also notes that stations used the letters being sent to them to gauge popularity and the geographical reach of shows, and therefore some shows began to encourage their listeners to write to them more. Aside from the fact that she argues that interactivity is not necessarily bound to high response speed or technology, it is interesting that she notes similar motivations for getting in contact with stations to what we might expect from audiences responding today, and that she highlights a gap between the listeners' perception of a sort of two-way communication and the motivations of stations in encouraging their contact.

Vox pops<sup>4</sup> are another example of audience participation which Irish radio shows use frequently to try and convey a sense of representing the public. Loviglio (2005) describes the origins of this format from the American show of the same name in the 1930s, and describes how this "man-in-the-street" (p. 42) format was part of a range of programmes based on audience participation which "accelerated the process by which the new mass audience of radio came to stand in for the nation in general and 'the people' in particular" (p. 38). Questions asked of members of the public can include anything that might be up for public debate. A similar effect could later be achieved through presenters encouraging audience members to text in, however the fact that the presenter ends up reading out an audience member's contribution lessens the sense that audience members are having their say, due to the delivery through the polished voice of the presenter rather than the man-in-the-street's own voice.

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<sup>4</sup> An interview with a member of the public canvassed for their opinion, typically in the street (Oxford Reference, 2006).

From the 1970s onwards, audience interaction also included “phone-ins”. Barnard suggests that two of radio’s most appealing characteristics are its capacity for spontaneity and its potential for listener interaction, which are both demonstrated through listener phone-ins for talk radio.

Talk radio facilitates an intriguing dynamic: audience members can feel part of a community, participate in it, and yet do so anonymously and without obligation. Callers can divulge their most confidential secrets, vent their frustrations, and launch venomous personal attacks without the responsibility of owning up to them.

(Owen, 1998 cited in Barnard, 2000, p. 156)

Similar observations have been made regarding users’ behaviour on web forums and social media activity as to what Owen refers to regarding the participatory discussion and venting of talk radio. As Irish radio stations continue to broadcast talk radio programmes today, while those other outlets exist, it is worth discussing their popularity. The latest JNLR figures list the RTÉ phone-in show *Liveline* as the second-most listened-to show in the country, with an average daily listenership of 391,000 (Martin, 2016).

Another citation which Barnard uses in relation to talk radio is a quote from the Australian-born, Britain-based broadcaster Brian Hayes, in which the phone-in show host asserts that this radio format is the pinnacle of a real partnership between radio producers and their audiences. Barnard regards Hayes’ remarks as disingenuous, and argues that he presents himself falsely as an ambassador for the audience in the midst of the “them and us” relationship between broadcaster and listener, when Hayes most frequently argued with the callers, rather than for them. Barnard highlights this as an unequally power-balanced relationship, wherein members of the public put themselves at risk of contradiction and humiliation. While he concedes that there is a degree of “listener empowerment” (p. 159), it only occurs within rules and parameters which are largely unspoken, and the presenter has the control over the content, direction and flow of the conversation. He also insists that there is an inherent inequality in the presentation of the voices of the presenter and listener; in that the former’s is recorded to a high technical quality, and the latter’s is delivered over the much less reliably-transmitted telephone line. It is

his assertion that this characteristic emphasises, rather than eliminates, the divide between the broadcaster and their audience. This seems somewhat in contradiction to what Loviglio writes regarding the importance placed on the common man by audience participation formats, however it is the contrast in the “unpolished” quality of the man-in-the-street’s voice to which he attributes much of the formats’ appeal.

Talk radio is not the only radio format to include live listener phone calls; many shows feature on-air quizzes, music requests and competitions. Loviglio also attributes many of these formats’ origins to the USA’s *Vox Pop*. One example of this in the Irish context is FM104’s morning show *Strawberry Alarm Clock*, which includes a daily segment called *Kidz in the Car* (FM104, n.d.) which features children who are being driven to school in the morning. The presenters ask the child some details about their school and their parents, and then have a “competition” with the child wherein the child will win a prize if the presenter does not guess what they are thinking. This type of listener engagement seems to be generally regarded as more promotional activity by the station than a participation in a discussion about a public issue. This same logic could be applied to competitions which take place on social media, particularly those which require liking or following a page, or sharing a post so that it is seen within the user’s own reach of social media influence, and possibly raise brand awareness to people who do not already follow the page.

Having discussed some of the past means of audience interaction with radio stations, and the power-balance issues prevalent with them, we turn to focus directly on social media and user-generated content platforms like YouTube.

To public broadcasters, social media initially appeared to have Janus-faced qualities: while some were suspicious of any medium that defined citizens as media professionals, others regarded the new platforms as like-minded allies in their focus on user engagement

(van Dijck and Poell, 2014, p. 150)

Van Dijck and Poell argue that most social platforms lacked a distinct business model in their infancy, and showed little in the way of signs of commercial exploitation apart from small elements like banner ads, and so were mainly viewed as a way for friends to connect and as facilitators of engagement and creative produsage.

In some ways, the method of stations now encouraging listeners to tweet to shows' accounts, comment on Facebook statuses, or complete polls on one of the social media sites, or indeed the stations own website, does not greatly differ from when they were encouraging contacting them via letter or SMS. That is, anything that the presenter ends up reading out is still delivered with through the presenter's voice and not the audience member's own voice. However, the difference with using social media to pose questions to the audience is that all of the user contributions to a discussion can be viewed by the public, and not just the ones which the show's producers intended to broadcast to fit within a broadcaster's programme's narrative. However, this does not mean that a station's listeners now hold equal power to them. If the previous chapter's discussion of convergence drew any strict conclusions on Web 2.0 applications, it is that they are not as democratic as they insist they are.

Jenkins et al. (2016) highlight that more and more institutions and organisations are embracing the rhetoric of participation, but assert that it remains clear that not all forms of participation are equally meaningful or empowering; "Different configurations of culture invite or enable different degrees of participation". In this, and in Jenkins et al. (2013) it is highlighted that media organisations, as well as other commercial entities, have noticed the creative practices of fans in response to the creative output of media companies, and Web 2.0 companies are directly capitalising on people's participation, while other organisations are appropriating that coproduction for their own means. Certainly a radio station would have a greater degree of control over a discussion on its own Facebook page or on a Twitter thread that it began than one of their audience members would have, because it has the power to delete its own Facebook

post if it wishes, or block users from posting on their page temporarily. However, because an offended audience member could easily take any evidence of a deleted thread and post it to a different page, or send it to a content aggregator or online news outlet which focuses on social media reactions, it is important that stations do not over-flex their muscles in this regard. If they were to be seen as unduly erasing what is, in effect, a means of public discourse, then they would not only be undoing their work to try and promote themselves as interested in their fan's opinions, but could gain a reputation for manipulating the voice of the public, or acting as a dictator in this culturally "democratic" space.

Returning to van Dijck and Poell, they do not only argue that broadcasters have an interest in social media and user-generated content platforms like YouTube for the opportunities they present for increased audience engagement, but also for the creative produsage which they enable. Bruns (2007) defines produsage as "the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement". However, this application of produsage to radio broadcasting, even by public service broadcasters, may not fit entirely with Bruns's core principals of the concept, which are: Open participation and communal evaluation; Fluid hierarchy and ad hoc meritocracy; Unfinished artefacts and continuing process; Common property and individual rewards. The main conflicting principle is that which relates to fluid hierarchy, because this is a power balance based on the assumption that although the skills of the producers involved "are not equal, they have an equal ability to make a worthy contribution to the project". This is not possible in a discussion which has been started by a page run by an administrator or content creator who is acting on behalf of an organisation with thousands of followers, and involving individuals' input. The concept of common property and individual rewards is also in conflict with this type of interaction, because even a public service broadcaster can gain revenue from showcasing content created by one of its audience members, who may not reap an equitable reward from their endeavour.

One of the most common ways in which this happens now is with the creation and circulation of memes in response to broadcaster content, which is then appropriated by the broadcaster in order to promote their brand. When there is visual material to work with, fans can create memes which add their own take on an event which was in the public eye. A famous contemporary Irish example of this is the television news bulletin by RTÉ reporter Teresa Mannion during winter Storm Desmond on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 from the Galway coast which led to video clips and memes of the broadcast going viral (Lillington, 2015 and Ruxton, 2015). As a result of this Mannion was later interviewed on *The Ray Darcy Show* on RTÉ Radio 1 and *The Late Late Show* on television. It does seem that radio presenters are automatically at a disadvantage in this regard and are so less likely to go viral, due to their audio format. This may well be one of the contributing factors in the rise of the “visual era” of radio.

There are a couple of different ways in which radio stations attempt to create a visual point of association for themselves in the digital landscape, and cultivate their web presence: creating and maintaining an up-to-date website, being active on any social media or user-generated content platforms which are relevant to their listeners, sparking the kind of conversation discussed above, creating visual content for any of these platforms, and inviting their listeners to do so. RTÉ’s guidelines to all employees and contractors regarding social media output (2013) encourage the use of social media to promote the organisation’s content, but also stress that ‘social media guidelines do not exist in isolation’ (p.3) they equate publishing on social to doing so via traditional or mainstream media, by insisting that media content should be scrutinised for the same legal issues as any traditional media. Therefore RTÉ expects that its employees and contractors, in engaging with social media will: understand the legal guidance documents they are directed to, be “authentic, truthful and respectful”, “avoid disputes” and “use common sense” (p. 7). RTÉ also urges caution in retweeting or sharing external posts verbatim or without comment, lest this should be perceived as an endorsement by RTÉ of the

content of the message<sup>5</sup>. However, this document, in being a set of guidelines, functions more to caution the employees and contractors of RTÉ against bad practise, rather than indicating a social media strategy for readers to follow in order to create ideal content, so other than encouraging linking to content published by RTÉ wherever feasible, and discouraging linking to external content (p. 10), this document provides no further clues as to the RTÉ method of engaging positively with its audience via social media.

One example of encouraging listeners to contribute visual content can be illustrated through the below Figure, taken from the Facebook page of RTÉ 2fm's Rick O'Shea show, which also demonstrates a spread of activity across several different media. On air, the presenter encouraged his listeners to participate in a visual discussion about where they were listening in from. The listeners then took photos and added any doodles or text they wanted, and sent them to the show's Snapchat account. The show then took screenshots of the Snapchats sent to them and posted the photos it wanted to showcase on Facebook, and listeners would be able to view all of the photos which the show decided to share there.

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<sup>5</sup> Van Dijck and Poell cite similar guidelines in this respect being issued by the BBC (p. 153).



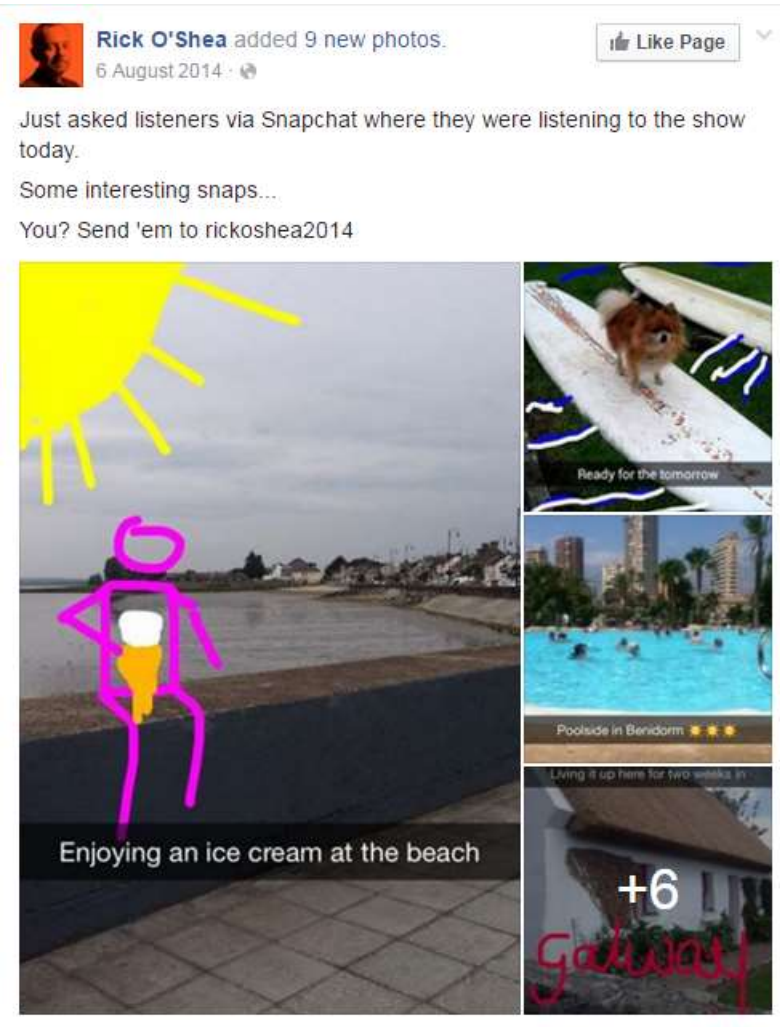


Figure 3: Facebook post by the Rick O'Shea show on 2fm featuring listeners' Snapchat submissions. Post text is as follows: "Just asked listeners via Snapchat where they were listening to the show today. Some interesting snaps... You? Send 'em to rickoshea2014" (O'Shea, 2014)

This series of interactions can be likened to the letter-writing from radio fans in the 1930s, in that it provides a representation of the geographical reach of the station's listenership, and promotes the image that the show has listeners. Fans of the show can see that there are other people listening in from the locations shown in the post, and encouraged to participate themselves, even if they did not hear the initial call for submissions during the broadcast. The audience member does, however, have to trust that these are genuine Snapchat submissions by other listeners, because they cannot view any of the original submissions in their own contexts, as their sent through the private medium and then captured and reproduced. The *Rick O'Shea*

show could not even show the images exactly as they were originally sent to them, as Snapchat does not allow for the repeated viewing of images.

Another way of encouraging listeners to take part in a discussion mediated by the station is to hold a poll. This allows a member of the audience to receive immediate feedback regarding how many other people agree or disagree with them, and again, highlight the size of a station's audience. However, this was done in the past through stations' own media sites, and yielded fairly low engagement (e.g. Newstalk, 2015). With the recent introduction of a polling feature on Twitter (Sherman, 2015) and polls already available on Facebook, stations are able to attract more participation in a poll than from their own site. The downside of this, of course, is that Twitter or Facebook, a Web 2.0 entity, gains access to this consumer data through the station's use of the poll.

The types of interaction between audience and broadcaster as described above could be likened more to co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2013) than to produsage, due to the fact that the consumer of the entertainment product is participating in the creation of the content which they are then consuming via Facebook, and the consumer's enjoyment of the content they are interacted with is increased through their participation in this production and in having their personalised message delivered back to them. This can be even more evident when listeners engage in citizen journalism for the purpose of assisting a show which they enjoy.

Another term for describing the role of the audience member in interactions such as these is "prosumer" (Benkler, 2006, Bruns, 2008, as cited in Moe, Poell and van Dijck, 2016, p. 100). This is used to describe passive audience members who are becoming more engaged and participatory through the use of social media while watching television.

Having briefly highlighted some examples of social media engagement by radio stations with their listeners, and how this can be part of both the content output of a station, as well as its

promotional activities, it is time to turn to the concept of “second-screen” media usage, and how it relates to radio. Engaging with social media while watching television has been referred to as using a second screen due to the fact that the individual is simultaneously watching video on a television set, or something comparable, and engaging in social media discussions about what they are watching. This viewing habit can be facilitated by calls to participation in the programme, and largely occurs during live television viewing, rather than time-shifted viewing. This same concept could be applied when listeners engage in social media discussion about a live radio broadcast, however in many cases the screen being used for social media engagement is the only screen, or a separate tab in a browser which is playing digital radio. This concept will be further explored in the next chapter, but to conclude this chapter, it is clear that listeners do engage with radio stations via social media, and so it should be recognised that a screen is involved for many audience members as part of their listening experience or habits.

## Chapter Four: The “blindness” of radio

Radio is a medium which, since its creation, has largely been characterised by the fact that it is perceived aurally, and does not include visuals. Edmond (2015) gives a brief summary of those qualities which radio was known for throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: blindness, invisibility, ephemerality, exploration, intimacy, immediacy, interactivity, information, conversation. Radio as a medium was shaped by having to overcome its “visual lack” (Arnheim, 1936, in Edmond, 2015, p. 1565). However, Levinson (2011) argues that humans tend to prize and yearn for that which our dominant media does not do, and therefore “in an age of radio, we sought the visual, and supplied it in our mind’s eye” (p. 72). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, when we have divested radio of much of what we had previously considered to be its defining characteristics, what does radio become if we no longer have to create the visual with our mind’s eye, but have it supplied for use by broadcasters in the form of text, images and even video? Gazi et al. (2011) voice concerns regarding the implications of the cultural shift from the sound to the image, and about how this new technological environment may effect content.

The previous chapter introduced the application of the concept of the “second-screen” in relation to radio. Pittman and Tefertiller (2015) argue that while the co-viewing of television is traditionally defined as individuals in the same household watching together, Twitter makes a similar practice possible among people who enjoy the same content, across a geographical distance. They call this co-connected viewing, and they write that the practise is “reconfiguring viewing as a social ritual, where viewing becomes a shared event.” As Edmond highlights that radio also used to create a similar social ritual, it follows that the same principal can be applied to radio shows which enable similar Twitter practices. This could be referred to as co-connected listening, or the term could be expanded to include all media, as co-connected consumption.

When audience members interact with a radio show in this manner through their smartphone, they are engaging in a more tactile experience also, through the act of “dragging” text up or down with their thumb, and with some smartphones receiving a kind of physical feedback from a light vibration while typing.

Kim (2016) in justifying a study of cross-platform media use behaviour of people in Korea, cites Nielsen viewership figures from 2013 which showed that the average American watches over 5 hours per day watching video, via television sets, home computers, DVDs, DVR, game consoles, and mobile devices. Neither the Americans’ nor the Koreans’ viewing habits are directly indicative of the viewing habits of the Irish people who, as previously mentioned, listen to the radio for an average of 4 hours per day. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that audio-visual content is, if it cannot be as easily ubiquitous as radio, certainly highly prevalent, and overtook radio years ago as the shared audience activity of households (Edmond, 2015). However, with both television and radio now being subject to time-shifted consumption, and the prevalence of laptop computers and mobile devices enabling just as much individual consumption of audio-visual content as Edmond attributes to radio with its replacement as primary medium by the television, we know that Digital has taken over. Radio’s image is more important than ever to remain relevant to audiences which will increasingly include adults with no memory of culture before smartphones and social media.

This could account for the practice of recording videos of radio studios during broadcast which 2fm’s Dan Healy refers to, as mentioned in the Introduction, in order to further increase what Barnard calls a visual point of association, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Lee-Wright (2010) mentions that the BBC operates channels on the leading video sharing site YouTube and by 2010 had brokered distribution deals with two of the biggest social networking sites of the time, Facebook and Bebo. To Lee-Wright, the motivations behind this move are clear: “not only are the more accessible stories made available to a wider, younger audience, but - it is

hoped - the BBC News brand is made more desirable.” In six years, the social media and video-sharing landscapes have changed somewhat; Bebo is gone, and if a station were aiming to engage audiences under the age of twenty they would need to have a presence on Instagram or Snapchat. YouTube faces competition from Vimeo and integrated Facebook video, which is now the only way to sponsor a video content post on the social media site. However, the BBC have continued to cultivate a large YouTube presence, with over 3 million subscribers and over 815 million total views on 2,835 videos as of May 2016 (YouTube, 2016a).

It should be noted that Irish radio stations have been slower to adopt a YouTube presence than the BBC was, with Radio 1 creating its channel in 2006, and Irish stations setting their own up between 2007 and 2009. In the case of FM104, many of their individual presenters have their own YouTube channels which use the station branding, instead of aggregating all of their content into one channel with separate playlists, as other stations do. The below table is a sample of Irish radio stations’ YouTube figures. Those featured were chosen for the reasons laid out in the Introduction.

<b>Station Name</b>	<b>Year Joined</b>	<b>Videos</b>	<b>Total Views</b>	<b>Subscribers</b>
<b>RTÉ Radio 1<sup>6</sup></b>	2009	730	5,073,520	4,505
<b>2fm<sup>7</sup></b>	2008	868	7,398,869	7,405
<b>NewsTalk<sup>8</sup></b>	2008	2,350	3,562,104	2,259
<b>FM104<sup>9</sup></b>	2007	182	969,406	968

*Table 1: YouTube figures for radio station channels, collected on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2016.*

There does not seem to be a direct correlation between the video output of the Irish radio stations listed and the total views which their channels have accrued, however it is notable that

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<sup>6</sup> YouTube, 2016b.

<sup>7</sup> YouTube, 2016c.

<sup>8</sup> YouTube, 2016d.

<sup>9</sup> YouTube, 2016e.

the national station which is aimed at listeners under 35 years of age had the largest number of both views and subscribers.

Moe, Poell and van Dijck (2016) mention a growing distrust which public service broadcasters like the BBC, and its Swedish counterpart Sveriges Television (SVT) have for YouTube, and highlight that the BBC strategy for videos hosted on the platform is now to limit their duration to a maximum of 5 minutes, that they should be “snippets” which attract audiences towards their own platform, and they must be clearly branded and linked back to public channels for at least a year after their original broadcast. They apply the same principle with regards to audio-visual content streamed or hosted on Twitter and Facebook (pp. 153-154). This appears to be largely in line with what Irish broadcasters have adopted as well. The use of live video streaming is becoming more prevalent as well, through mobile applications which enable this, such as Periscope.

Kern (2008) of the USA’s NPR advises readers in his guide to audio reporting that a radio journalist’s toolkit now often includes a digital camera, as well as an audio recorder and a notepad, and reporters will often take photographs. With Mojocon, the mobile journalism conference held in Dublin for the past 2 years, having experienced sell-out success so far, it seems that many journalists, including radio journalists, in Ireland see a benefit to carrying kit which enables them to create multimedia content for many stories they work on.

Kern also stresses the need for audio content which is digitally available to be searchable. While this may not immediately seem associated with visual content, it must be noted that audio waves themselves are not searchable via Google and other search engines, and so providing a textual transcript online with any shows or audio clips improves the possibility of being found by a member of the public who may not have discovered the content otherwise.

The use of images and graphs in order to aid in the telling of the story is also advised by Kern. With the rise in the availability of metadata, and a shortage of people who are able to discern meaning from that data, the popularity of data journalism looks set to increase in the coming years. While radio is an excellent medium for describing the details of a story, it would be difficult to convey multiple numerical figures to a listener purely through audio. Due to this, graphs and infographics are likely to become essential visual elements of radio stations' regular coverage at some point.

Returning to the first recognised Irish broadcast during the 1916 Rebellion mentioned in the first chapter; the Independent Broadcasters of Ireland, along with RTÉ, commissioned the creation of a multimedia website to celebrate the centenary of this broadcast (2016). The site includes audio of the morse code used for the broadcast, along with the visual representation of the code in the form of dots and dashes, small amounts of text detailing the historical context and timeline of the events of the broadcast, as well as historical images and newspaper clippings which transition diagonally into their portion of the browser window, and a stylised animation of the General Post Office building during the fighting made to look like a wireless radio receiver.



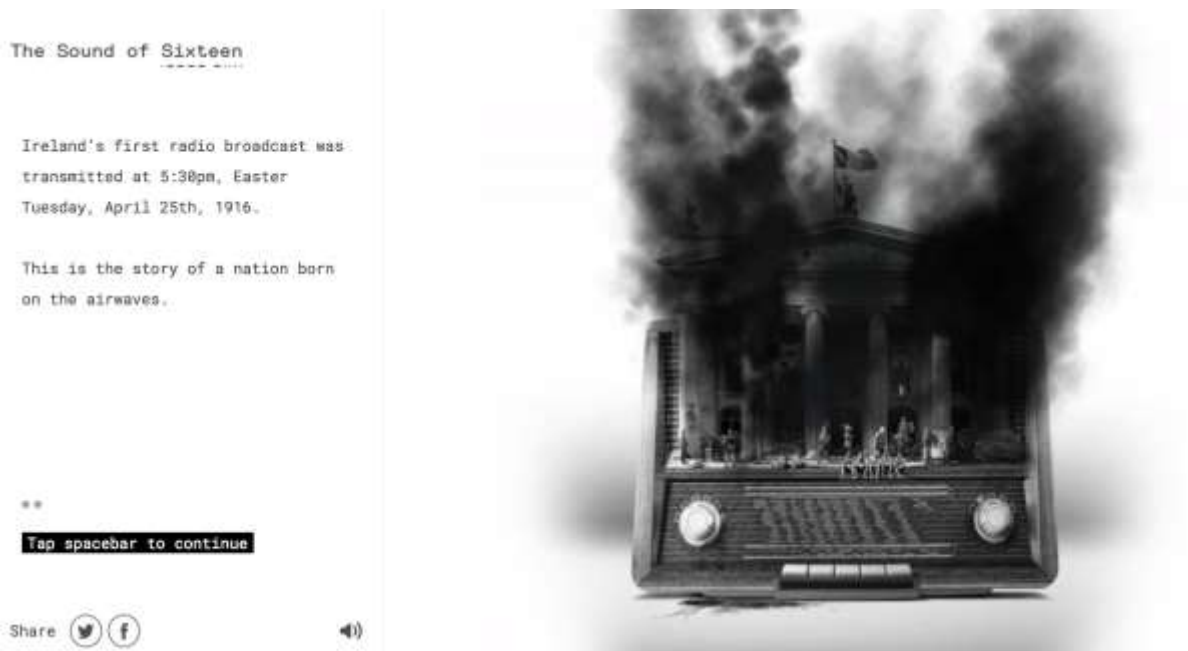


Figure 4: Screenshot of *The Sound of Sixteen* website. *Broadsheet* (2016)

The website went live shortly in advance of the centenary, and then every major radio station across the country broadcast the 80-second feature of the Morse code transmission to mark the occasion at 5:30pm on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, which is reportedly exactly one hundred years from the initial broadcast. The site required user interaction; in order to load more text, users needed to tap their space bar to “transmit” the code, which triggered the audio feedback of the corresponding Morse signal’s sound. It is interesting to note that the radio broadcast included battle sounds to create atmosphere, which the website does not. In this instance, radio is not highlighted the medium which only lacks the visual, but the one which has the ability to spark the imagination through its own means.

This project truly told the story of the centenary of the first broadcast across both radio and the Web, with a strong emphasis on the visual elements of the storytelling. At the end of the experience, site visitors can choose to restart the story, share to social media or exit the site. Clicking the social media buttons integrated into the site loads a pre-filled Facebook post or tweet, rather than linking to an account. While the site automatically writes the user’s message

for them, it encourages the user to share and discuss the item, rather than simply follow a new content producer.

This transmedia narrative, which spanned radio and the Internet, and used audio and visual elements, while encouraging its audience to engage with the topic of discussion through social media, could be seen as an example of how live listening and time-shift interaction can both exist, and of just how many visual and interactive elements could be associated with the blind medium in the future. It can also be seen as an assertion by the industry that 100 years, on, radio has not disappeared yet, and will not in the foreseeable future.

## Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was neither to argue that radio is an invisible medium which is disappearing due to its unpopularity, nor was it its aim to argue that the golden age of radio has returned. The aim was to highlight a shift in the attitudes of broadcasters, who are responding to indications of what will enhance their appeal to their potential audiences. The main shifts which were identified were towards greater engagement with social media, and greater employment of visual and audiovisual material, in order to appeal to a younger audience.

Radio broadcasters in Ireland no longer blast their output one-way to a largely passive audience whose interests they try to shape more than they try to understand. They are making their output available to “prosumers” who have plenty of choice when it comes to the audio content they play in the background during their days, but the majority still choose to tune in to radio in some capacity. However, this is changing among the younger generations of Irish people, with a steep decline in radio listenership among people under 35.

One of Kim’s (2016) conclusions drawn from the findings of the survey which was undertaken is that the lower the level of education an individual has attained, the more likely they are to rely on traditional media for information. According to the Central Statistics Office, (2016) 47.6% of Ireland’s population aged 25-34 have attained some degree of 3<sup>rd</sup> level education. This is well above the European Union national average of 36.3%, placing young Irish people as the fourth most-educated population under 35 in Europe. It remains to be seen whether the efforts of stations aimed at younger listeners really can “repatriate” them from the Internet.

This paper is notably theoretical in its approach, and relies on singular examples from the Irish radio context to back up arguments. Going forward, if further research were to be undertaken in this area, it would undoubtedly be useful to undertake quantitative analysis across a broader

range of stations and social media and multimedia outputs. It would also likely be useful to interview broadcasters who are working in the industry currently, to ask how they view the role of these media in shaping their content production.

This paper has highlighted the convergence of media in some respects, but also warned against assumptions that networked communications are automatically open and democratic. To conclude; it appears that the Irish radio industry is entering a more visual era of radio, through textual, visual and audio-visual content. We will end with a brief examination of the quote from Brian Hayes mentioned previously in Chapter Two, decontextualised somewhat from the argument which Barnard was critiquing him for:

Never again will the voice of the public be irrelevant to the mainstream of broadcasting. The days of the listener merely providing an occasional bit of raw material to be reconstructed to fit a producer's plan are over. It is not that the public has taken over, but that radio has reached a maturity which forges a real partnership with its voice.

(as cited in Barnard, 2000, pp 158-159)

If audiences should have learned anything from the assertions of media owners over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, it is never to take such assertions at face value. However, if they enjoy being entertained by broadcasters, then radio remains a vibrant and changeable medium, which invites greater audience participation than many others.

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