

Media & the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan

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Foundation for Wireless Telegraphy

- 1860: James Clark-Maxwell & Electromagnetic Waves in the Ether
- 1888-1892: Heinrich Hertz & Hertzian Waves
- 1890s: The Development of the Coherer
 - Eduoard Branly
 - Oliver Lodge

***"...none of these scientists had a clear conception of using Hertzian waves for regular wireless communication." (Czitrom, 63)

Guglielmo Marconi

- 1892: William Crookes noted the potential for "aetheric telegraphy" in Hertz and Lodge's studies of "ethereal vibrations"
- Inspired Marconi-->Develop Wireless Telegraphy through Hertzian Waves
- Results in 1895
- Patented Projects
- Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Company

Birth of Radio

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hursvj69An8>

The Telegraph and Government

- The first wireless telegraph was sent across the Atlantic in 1902 by Britain's Marconi
 - Sparked a race for Americans to follow suit
- Military is rushing to perfect syntony
- Amateur use creates a need for government regulation
 - 1904, Roosevelt makes a three-way division of authority (Department of Labor and Commerce, War Department and Navy)
 - Radio Act of 1912, divides wireless spectrum between ship, coastal, amateur and government frequencies
- WWI leads the government to take over all wireless stations
 - Create Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in order to expand radio's commercial use, and in alliance with GE, Western Electric and AT&T, bought out American Marconi (controlled by the British)

The Spread of the 'radio mania'

- The 'radio mania' started on the early 1920's with the first regular broadcasting done by station KDKA.
- "[...] caused the thought to come to me that the efforts that were then being made to develop radio-telephony as a confidential means of communication were wrong, and that instead its field was really one of wide publicity; in fact, the only means of instantaneous collective communication ever devised."

- Harry P. Davis

The Spread of the 'radio mania'

- The amateur station began gaining power.
- By the end of 1922, 570 broadcasting licenses were given.
 - 231 to Radio and electrical manufacturers.
 - 70 to Newspapers.
 - 65 to Educational institutions.
 - 30 to Department stores.
- Spread in three categories:
 - Radio set sellers.
 - Free advertisers and goodwill seekers.
 - Religious and educational institutions.

"In radio it is not the substance of communication without wires, but the fact of it that it enthralls. It is a sport, in which your wits, learning, and resourcefulness are matched against the endless perversity of the elements. Its not a matter, as you may suppose, of buying a set and thereafter tuning in upon what your fancy dictates."

- Radio fan, 1929.

Attempts for regulation.

Various ideas for regulate broadcasting were discussed:

- David Sarnoff from RCA proposed the creation of six "super powered broadcast stations" that will feed the whole country.
- AT&T wanted to make broadcasting a service exclusive to the Bell system.
- The plan that finally emerged was that the advertisers who wanted to use broadcasting had to pay a toll.

Current Model

Developed by AT&T:

- Charged Sponsors/Advertisers for Radio time/Access to studios.
- Linked local "affiliates" into a nation wide "network" via the phone lines.
- AT&T used control of phone lines to sideline/exclude Competition.

Weak Governmental Control

- Dept of Commerce allows the break and sale of individual wavelengths - turning the public airwaves into private property.
- FRC (Federal Radio Commission) formed to interpret vague policy language - shows favoritism to commercial broadcasters.

Reasons for Popularity/Influence

- Manufacturers start creating permanent "furniture-like" radios.
- Sense ratios exploited through audible isolation while removing ability for discourse.
- Like books/newspapers invaded individual homes and literally "spoke" to people.
- Provided illiterate consumers access to news and information.
- Instantaneous access to news and events.
- Professionalism of radio personalities/programs.

Content Creation

- Like early books and newspapers lack of original content was an issue.
- Broadcasters recruited the sponsors themselves to create content.
- Depression opened up availability to professional actors and actresses.



Some Results of Radio's Success

- Despite the blatant product placement the model was enormously successful. By 1930 40% of American families owned a radio.
- Radio considered the "fourth dimension of advertising" which, "...allowed business men to invade psychic space previously unavailable" (F. Arnold, NBC)
- FCC formed in 1934 to limit control of radio's influence and combat criticism of FRC favoritism toward commercial broadcasters.
- By 1937 CBS and NBC controlled 88% of total wattage in the United States.

Censorship

- Corporations, which heavily relied on public opinion, owned broadcasting stations, and this made it difficult to air offensive or controversial content
- Stations often edited scripts or altogether canceled programs if it didn't abide with their policy of promoting "public confidence and faith"
- Educational institutions influenced the development of early radio, but they were losing most of their licenses by the 1930s
- The National Committee on Education by Radio fought for laws that would give 15% of all radio channels to educational institutions, but commercial broadcasting stations successfully opposed this action

Commercial Radio

- In the 1930s, certain programs made commercial radio an integral part of American life
- Variety shows
 - The master of ceremonies would lead the show and was easily identified by a sponsor's product
- Music
 - Unlike the 1920s when music was playing on most stations, music shows declined during the 30s
 - However the radio made a huge impact on American music by widely commercializing certain types of music
- Soap Opera
 - Target audience: women at home
 - The plot was usually about a strong character who gave advice to indecisive friends and family

Commercial Radio cont.

- News
 - One major problem was whether APs should provide news to radio stations
 - A compromise was reached through the Press-Radio Bureau, in which the press would give stations a brief update containing fewer than thirty words in exchange for a pledge from the networks to stop gathering news
 - Ultimately the agreement failed as new and independent news agencies sold news to independent stations
- "Commercial broadcasting wedded the advertiser's message to older popular cultural forms made historically specific for the new home environment of radio."

-Czitrom

Discussion Question:

Around the time that radio was becoming popular, journalism was becoming more objective. Is there a relation between the rise of radio, a subjective source, and journalism's move towards objectivity?

Discussion Question:

"[T]he air is full of experiments that are being tried in order to find the answer to the question, 'What constitutes the universal program?'" (81)
In regard to the above quote, why are RSGs an important element to consider when analyzing radio through the prism of Social Constructivism?