# UNIT – 1 INTRODUCTION TO AUDIO MEDIA

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

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1.3 Characteristics and features of audio media, impact and reach
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## 1.1 **Learning Objectives**

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Define the basic features of the audio media ie. Radio
- Describe the impact and reach of the audio media
- Explain the fundamental difference in the characteristics of radio, television and print media.

## 1.2 Introduction

By now, you must be familiar with the term Mass Communication. The channels required for Mass Communication are known as mass media.

Mass media can be broadly divided into print media and electronic media. Conventional electronic media can be broadly segmented into the twin categories of radio and television.

Radio is a medium which you can only hear, while television is a medium which you can hear as well as see. That is why radio is called an audio medium while television is known an audio-visual medium.

In this unit, you will become familiar with the audio-medium, that is, radio. You will understand the basic difference in the characteristics between radio, television and the print media. You will also get an idea about the impact and reach of radio in our country.

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## 1.3 Characteristics and features of audio media, impact and reach

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We hope, after going through this unit, you will be able to have a clear concept of the audio-medium as well as how the medium works. Lets begin by understanding what “Audio“ means.

### What is "Audio"?

Audio means "of sound" or "of the reproduction of sound". Specifically, it refers to the range of frequencies detectable by the human ear — approximately 20Hz to 20kHz. It's not a bad idea to memorise those numbers — 20Hz is the lowest-pitched (bassiest) sound we can hear, 20kHz is the highest pitch we can hear.

**Characteristics of radio**

Radio, in terms of its reach and also in terms of the fact that it has existed in our country for several years now is an important medium of mass communication. The emergence of television and its extraordinary power often stands to overshadow the influence of radio. But inspite of the TV's might, radio has proved itself to be a remarkably resilient medium and even in this new age, dominated by TV, it retains its significance though it is not fully appreciated by many. For most people, though, radio has become more of an entertainment medium, accessed for music.

Radio has an all-pervading presence in our lives and reaches out to almost every person in society. Many of us use the mobile-radio alarm to wake us up in the morning; we listen to the radio at home, while driving and also at work. Radio helps reproduce the rhythms of the day: from the chirpy breakfast team to the calmer, laidback tone of evening programmes. Radio is a very immediate form of mass media: we can get updates on breaking news stories; and we listen for updates in the weather forecast and the latest road traffic reports while driving home.

Being a more intimate and personal medium of communication than either print or television, radio's contribution to the structure of modern public life is particularly notable.

Radio establishes a very close relationship with its audience because it is a very conversational medium. As you all know that news composed for radio is much simpler than printed news since radio serves to be an audio media only. The close relationship with the listeners is generated through radio features, like talkback radio, which enables to gain maximum feedback. In radio, since the focus is auditory, therefore the voice of the announcer is successful in forming close relationship with the listeners

**Talkback radio:** Also known as **talk radio,** it is a radio format containing discussions about topical issues. Most shows are regularly hosted by a single individual, and often feature interviews with a number of different guests. Talk radio typically includes an element of listener participation, usually by broadcasting live conversations between the host and listeners who "call in" (usually via telephone) to the show. In the same way, experts on a subject can be called into the show by calling her/him up from the radio station.

and hence it serves to be an informal media. Unlike television, the identity of a radio programme is embodied in the identity of its announcer and not in its celebrities.

Moreover, radio is by far the most portable means of mass communication and it remains one of the world's most chosen media for entertainment and information. Radio is also known as a blind medium because there are no visuals and it relies only on sound to reach to its audience.

In many countries the radio broadcast is on, round the clock. In India, listeners can get AIR on the FM channel late at night and early in the morning. Radio is an all pervasive media. It is not only meant for people staying at home but also for those who are driving or travelling by a long distance bus or train. The availability of the battery operated transistor enables anyone to carry a radio set anywhere anytime.

Many people depend on the radio to stay updated on the latest happenings in the region or elsewhere.

Radio as a medium of Mass Communication possesses some interesting features, advantages and disadvantages. Let us discuss these aspects:

**Features:**

i) Radio is the earliest form of electronic media. It is therefore the most credible means of mass communication among the masses.

ii) It has large audiences. Radio's reach is the highest among all media. Radio in India has a reach of around 91.79% of the geographical area serving 99.14% of the people.
iii) It has a totally undifferentiated audience composition.
iv) Low unit cost to the customer. Radio is the cheapest of all media. A radio transistor is much cheaper than a television set or other tools of communication.
v) It is portable. People can carry it anywhere and everywhere.
vi) It does not require a direct source of power supply. It can run on dry cells.
vii) It is immediate. Radio programming takes much lesser time than programming for television or preparing a newspaper.

**Advantages:**

i) Radio is tangible. One can get the feeling that the radio is on.
ii) Without straining our eyes, we can hear everything. Radio has only one element i.e. audio.
iii) We can get it anywhere in any language we would like to receive.
iv) Immediacy is also an important advantage of radio. It is the fastest and cheapest form of mass media.
v) Radio is termed as the intimate medium. Intimacy is one of its great advantages.
vi) There is no need for the listener to be literate like it is in the case of the newspaper.

**Disadvantages:**

i) No visual provision as it is only an audio medium. It needs concentration of the listener.
ii) Programmes cannot be preserved like newspapers.
iii) Technical faults may cause major disadvantages for the medium.

**Impact of Radio:**

Radio is a very pervasive medium. The radio is one of the important elements in the development of mass media. The emergence of radio took place in the early 1920's and for the first time it was possible to reach a large number of people at the same time. Radio at first was used in World War I where it served only to transmit important messages to and from specific points. It was after the war that radio began to be used for non-military purposes.

Radio has proved its worth and utility both as an informational channel and a catalyst for socio-economic development. It provides healthy entertainment through its various light and humorous programmes. Extension research and other field surveys have revealed great importance of radio as a credible promoter of a suitable conditions for development and progress. Its contribution in the form of transmitting useful and timely information, motivation and suggestions for rural development is widely acknowledged. Radio plays an important role in building a favourable climate for social change or transformation and people can be involved in the process.

Radio still remains the main source of news and entertainment in rural areas. This position is likely to continue for many years for obvious reasons like cost-considerations, non availability of electricity (rather frequent power cuts) and the prevailing high rate of illiteracy. A large number of underprivileged people, in rural areas as well as in the towns still stick to radio.

Right from its inception, radio has been an important source of education and development for the society. It has a long history of broadcasting programmes related to social and civic problems, agriculture, health, family planning and nutrition and on formal and non-formal education.

Since radio broadcasts frequent news bulletins and popular talk shows, it is a continuous source of information. Its ability to get a message across urgently is one of its great characteristics. It can be vital in a difficult situation when there is a need for urgent communication, or when someone is trying to counter an argument by an opponent or trying to correct false or misleading information.

**Reach**

In 1927, with the growth of private radio clubs broadcasting through the sound waves started in India. In 1936, All India Radio began formal broadcasting as a government organisation, with the objectives of information, education and entertainment of the people.

In 1947 when India attained independence, there were a total of 6 stations of AIR and a complement of 18 transmitters in the country. The area coverage was mere 2.5% and that of the population was 11%. After 1947, expansion of the radio network took place in a faster pace.

The Five Year Plans, since 1952, gave a new impetus to the growth of broadcasting. This resulted in a phenomenal expansion of the radio network in the fifty years after independence: from 6 stations at the dawn of Independence to around 200 stations at the close of the millennium. At present, AIR has a network of 229 broadcasting centres with 148 medium frequency (MW), 54 high frequency (SW) and 168 FM transmitters. The area coverage is 91.79%, and that of the population is .99.14%. In home services AIR broadcasts programmes in as many as 24 Languages and

146 dialects while in External Services it covers 27 languages including 17 national and 10 foreign languages.

Over the years, AIR has managed to achieve almost hundred per cent coverage in the following states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chatisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Orissa, Pondicherry, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal.

According to the National Readership Survey (NRS), which is calculated as the number of listeners above 15 years of age who listen to radio at least once a week, the total Indian population counts to 157 million or 23.7 percent of the total population. However, the number is higher in the higher sections of the society and the younger generation.

The urban people listening to FM radio are less (just 41.6%) in number. 29% people living in urban areas listen to FM radio at least once a week. This figure counts to 61.4% in the top eight metros of the country. However in the small towns less than 31% people have access to FM radio. In 16 of the 19 towns where licenses have been granted for FM Radio stations, only 60.5 per cent homes and 14.5% people listen to FM programmes.

**ACTIVITY - A**

**1.** Conduct a survey among rural masses to compare the popularity of television and radio. Ask them why they prefer a particular medium and what they use it for- information, entertainment, etc. Make a note of the findings.

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**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What are the various advantages and disadvantages of radio as a means of communication?

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2. When did All India Radio begin formal broadcasting as a government organisation?

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3. How many stations did AIR have in 1947?

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4. What is the number of AIR stations at the close of the millennium?

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5. How many languages does the External Services of AIR cover at present?

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## 1.4 Audio media vs print media vs audio-visual media

Unlike the press, both radio and television get through to the illiterate sections of the population, those who are just literates in the sense that they only know to write their names and in many ways those in the lower end of the socio-economic strata. One need not be educated or even be a literate to listen to a radio programme or view a television programme. Here are some basic differences between radio, television and print media:

1) Television is the most persuasive medium as it combines all the elements namely, sight, sound and motion. The visual experience of watching television is more dynamic and meaningful due to the movement and sound associated with it. Hence, television has greater credibility and believability than other mass media like radio, which only has the element of sound and print media like newspapers which have can only be read.

2) Radio is a personal and portable medium. Because of its portability, radio can be accessed more conveniently than television. Since most radio sets are battery operated, people can carry it and listen to it anywhere, at home, in buses, in the kitchen, in the farm, at the construction site, etc. On the other hand, television sets are bigger and bulkier. They cannot be carried from one place to another easily. Moreover, television sets mostly run on electricity because of which they have to be put at a fixed place. Print media like newspapers are also portable and can be carried anywhere and everywhere.

3) Compared to television, a radio set is much cheaper and so can be afforded by the poorer sections of the society. Today, a radio set can be bought for as low as seventy rupees while the cheapest television set comes for not less than one thousand rupees. The poor, very often, cannot afford the newspapers and even if they can, newspapers are not easily available in the remote interiors.

4) Television is an expensive medium. The cost involved in producing a television programme is much higher than a radio programme. This is because the technology and process involved in the production of a television programme is expensive, elaborate and complicated. Compared to television, radio is relatively cheaper per person reached and demands much less sophistication in programming and production. The technology required to produce a radio programme needs much less maintenance and it is within the capability of developing countries. Expensive technology is again required in producing and printing a newspaper.

5) Production of a television programme is more time-consuming than production of a radio programme. A television programme requires shooting relevant images to complement the accompanying audio narration. But in a radio programme, images are created in the minds of the listeners with the help of sound only. As a result, it is easy for a radio programme to get ‘on air’ quickly. Of the three media, print media takes the maximum production time. Therefore, a newspaper can be published only once a day, while there can be many programmes produced ‘live’ or otherwise in the electronic media; both television and radio.

6) Television is a glamorous medium. By the nature of the medium itself, the programmes made for television are more entertainment-oriented. Television programmes cater mostly to the affluent sections of the society since television in India still remains an urban phenomenon. Radio on the other hand, because of its cheap cost, is a huge hit among the poor rural masses of the country. As a result most of the radio programmes cater to the rural masses airing informational and instructional programmes mainly related to agriculture, family planning, health and hygiene, etc. However, FM radio in recent years has made a deep impact in the urban centres of the country. But it is also a fact that FM radio is more entertainment-oriented. Print media was, in its initial days, considered to be a means of information to the masses but the commercialization of the medium has made it a tool of both information and entertainment (infotainment).

7) Because of the conversational nature of radio programmes, it is considered to be a more intimate and friendly medium. It addresses individuals. Television is more impersonal. It addresses groups of people. Newspaper language is formal and detailed.

8) Radio programming is highly specialized. Radio broadcast can be localized to each community, so as to cover local news events and thus appeal to local audiences. Television is a mass medium, and generally each network affiliate offers something for everyone- sports for men, soap operas for housewives and cartoons for children. Print media can operate at the national, regional or local level, catering to an entire nation, a specific region or belt or a small community at the local level.

**9)** One can listen to the radio while doing so many other things at the same time, like cooking, shaving, driving, etc. It is therefore called

a lean back medium. It is not the same with either TV or newspaper. Television, on the other hand requires more attention on the part of the viewer. One has to be present in front of the television screen to receive the message shown on television effectively. Newspaper reading needs active participation-attention and concentration

**10)** Viewers or listeners of television and radio have no control over programmes. They have to watch or listen to programmes at the time they are broadcast. Newspapers can be stored easily and read at will.

Thus it can be concluded that the electronic media like television and radio and the print media like newspapers have certain intrinsic differences. Despite its many disadvantages, each medium has its own role and purpose.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS B**

1. Radio's popularity cannot diminish with the boom in the television industry. Comment.

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**ACTIVITY B**

1. Given below is a list of messages on various themes and their intended beneficiaries. Decide which mass media to use to convey the same and justify your choice (in some cases you may choose more than one medium).

| | THEME | BENEFICIARIES |
|---|---|---|
| a. | Farming technology | Rural Farmers |
| b. | Health and Hygiene | Women |
| c. | Commercial for saris | Women |
| d. | Computer ad | Students |
| e. | New economic policy | All citizens |
| f. | How AIDS spreads | All |
| g. | NREG scheme of govt. | Rural masses |

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## 1.5 Let us sum up

In this unit, we discussed about:

- Radio is a medium which you can only hear, while television is a medium which you can hear as well as see. That is why radio is called an audio medium while television is known an audio-visual medium.
- Radio is the most immediate and well dispersed form of communication and represents the easiest way to reach an audience.
- There are basic differences in characteristics between radio, television and the print media.
- Radio has proved its worth and utility both as an informational channel and a catalyst for socio-economic development.
- Radio still remains the main source of news and entertainment in rural areas and this position is likely to continue for many years for obvious reasons like cost-considerations, unavailability of electricity and high rate of illiteracy. A large number of underprivileged people in rural areas still stick to radio.
- AIR today has a network of 229 broadcasting centres with 148 medium frequency (MW), 54 high frequency (SW) and 168 FM transmitters. The coverage is 91.79% of the area, serving 99.14% of the people in the largest democracy of the world. AIR covers 24 Languages and 146 dialects in home services. In External Services, it covers 27 languages; 17 national and 10 foreign languages.

## 1.6 Answers to check your progress

A)

1. Advantages of radio:

i. Radio is tangible. One can get the feeling that the radio is on.
ii. Without straining our eyes, we can hear everything. Radio has only element i.e. audio.
iii. It is a portable medium, we can carry it easily.
iv. We can get it anywhere in any language we would like to receive.
v. Immediacy is also an important advantage of radio. It is the fastest and cheapest form of mass media.
vi. Radio is termed as the intimate medium. Intimacy is one of its great advantages.
vii. There is no language and literacy problem with this medium. Also there is no problem on the electricity front.

**Disadvantages of radio:**

i. No visual provision as it is only an audio medium. It needs concentration of the listener.
ii. Programmes cannot be preserved like newspapers.
iii. Technical faults may cause major disadvantages for the medium.

2. All India Radio began formal broadcasting as a government organization from 1936.

3. In 1947 AIR had 6 stations.

4. At the close of the millennium the number of AIR stations is 200.

5. The External Services of AIR covers 27 languages at present. Out of these 17 are national and 10 are foreign languages.

B)

1) Radio's popularity cannot diminish with the onslaught on television for various reasons. First of all, radio is a more personal and portable medium. Because of its portability, radio can be accessed more conveniently than television. Since most radio sets are battery operated, people can carry it and listen to it anywhere, at home, in buses, in the kitchen, in the farm etc. On the other hand, television sets are bigger and bulkier. They cannot be carried from one place to another easily. Moreover, television sets mostly run on electricity because of which they have to be put at a fixed place. Compared to television, a radio set is much cheaper and so can be afforded by the poorer sections of the society. Today, a radio set can be bought for as low as seventy rupees while the cheapest television set comes for not less than one thousand rupees. Because of the conversational nature of radio programmes, it is considered to be a more intimate and friendly medium. It addressed individuals. Television is more impersonal. It addresses groups of people.

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## 1.7 Further readings

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- Mass Communication in India: Keval J Kumar
- Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication: V S Gupta and V B Agarwalla
- Mass Communication Today: Subir Ghosh
- Basic Audio Visual Media: Shipra Kundra
- This is All India Radio: U L Baruah


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## 1.8 Possible Questions

1. Discuss the salient features of radio as a means of mass communication.
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of radio?