UNIT 8: RADIO NEWS – BASIC FEATURES

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives
8.2 Introduction
8.3 Basic features of radio news
8.4 Different types of news bulletins
8.5 Radio features and current features programmes
8.6 Let us Sum up
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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the basic features of radio news
- explain the elements of a radio news story
- describe the various types and formats of radio programming
- discuss the difference between radio news and radio features and current affairs programmes

8.2 INTRODUCTION

Despite the onslaught of television and new media, radio is still a popular tool of mass communication among the people and will always remain so. In the last seven units we have already discussed in detail about the audio-visual medium, i.e., radio. We have talked about the history and evolution of radio, recent trends and about All India Radio, India's largest radio network.

In this unit we will introduce you to the basics of radio news, its characteristic features, types, and significance.

So, let us begin the unit with an introduction to radio news and its basic features.

8.3 BASIC FEATURES OF RADIO NEWS

Radio is a powerful media for news. Radio news is the same as television news but it is transmitted through the medium of the radio. It is solely based on the audio aspect rather than the visual aspect. Through the radio the latest news, speeches, interviews etc. can be easily transmitted in an effective manner. **Sound bites** are captured through various reporters and played back through the radio.

Because the radio is portable and cheap, it has the maximum reach among the masses. Radio news occurs more frequently than the news in other mass media because of its simplicity as a medium. Therefore, it remains the first choice among the people for news.

The radio because of its immediacy factor is a very important medium for news. Being the oldest channel for mass communication, radio enjoys immense credibility among the masses. The intimate nature of the medium along with its portability also contributes to its importance in news dissemination.

All news stations such as those owned and operated by AIR offer far more than just news. Typical features are stock market and other business reports, sports reports, traffic and weather information, and a community billboard.

News bulletins are broadcast by AIR almost every hour of the day in English and various regional languages through different news bulletins. Apart from the regular national, regional and external service bulletins, specialized news, sports news, state and development news, slow-speed bulletins in English, Hindi and Urdu, a weekly bulletin of human interest stories, constitute the other important bulletins of AIR covered by its correspondents. On the days when the Parliament is in session, daily commentaries in English and Hindi review the day's proceedings in the two Houses.

Normally, the major bulletins are of ten to fifteen minutes' duration while others are of only five minutes' duration. There is also news headline. They present summaries of news stories in order of importance and interest

value. Human interest stories and sports news generally round off the major bulletins. AIR news bulletins are formal in language, structure and presentation.

Basic features of radio news are as follows:

- It is **immediate**. Radio gives speedy and comprehensive coverage to news. Because there are more news bulletins in radio than in other mass media, the radio correspondents and reporters have to be on their feet all the time. They have to act immediately and get hold of the latest events and happenings in the surroundings. Because radio news is immediate, it leaves hardly any time for details in radio news. Therefore, it is essential for reporters working for radio to find the kernel and make it their first sentence
- Radio news is **conversational.** An ideal radio news script reads like as if you are telling a story to a friend. It is very different from a print media news item which is very formal.
- Radio is an **aural medium** and so radio news needs some amount of imagination on the part of the listener. Unlike the television news where pictures speak a thousand words, radio news uses only 'sound' to give information. Radio news, therefore, needs to make up for the absence of visuals. But vivid description does not necessarily mean long winding details. On the contrary, in radio news it is necessary to use the key-word near the beginning and keep the others for later use.
- Radio, therefore, uses the **inverted pyramid style of news** writing. In this style of news writing, the journalist top-loads the essential and the most interesting elements of his or her story, with supporting information following in order of diminishing importance. This structure enables the listeners to quit listening at any point and still come away with the essence of a story. It allows the people to enter into a topic to the depth that their curiosity takes them, and without the imposition of details or nuances that they would consider irrelevant.

- Radio news always has a **background** to make it complete. This is because the radio has to make up for the absence of visuals.
- Radio news **compares and contrasts issues** to show them as unusual or different.
- It is necessary to **interpret** the story for the listener. Otherwise it may become dull. In the radio, news is not just facts, but also the result of the facts.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Write true or false:

a. Radio is based more on the visual aspect. **T/ F)**

b. Radio has the maximum reach among the masses because it is portable and cheap. **(T/ F)**

c. Immediacy is an important feature of radio news. (**(T/ F)**

d. Radio uses the pyramid style of news writing. **(T/ F)**

Q.2. What is the normal duration of a radio news bulletin?

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Q.3. In radio news why is it important to interpret the story for the listener?

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ACTIVITY 8.1

1. Carefully listen to a news bulletin on All India Radio. What are the things that you notice regarding the format, language and delivery?

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2. Talk to a radio reporter and get a copy of the radio news script. Compare the stories with the news stories that appear in newspapers.

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8.4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEWS PROGRAMMES

Radio news can be presented in a number of ways.

There are mainly **three types** of format for radio news

1. **Headline News Cast :** This is a type of news programme whose duration is very short as it is a small bulletin where the major news headlines are read out. It is very important because people get it at different times every half an hour. The sentences in this type of bulletin are very short.
2. **Minor News Bulletins :** Minor news bulletins are broadcast at peak hours of the day. In India, the evening time from 6 PM to 10 PM is called the peak hours of the day. This is also an opportunity for the organisations to direct these bulletins towards the target groups. However, individual person's peak hours may be different depending on the person's age, profession, background etc.
3. **Major News Bulletins :** This is the news programme of 10 to 15 minutes duration. It covers the details of the news items which break throughout the day. It is also broadcast at peak hours. In these bulletins the headlines are followed by the details. The headlines should be limited. At the end of the bulletin, the newsreader repeats the headlines. Here the major events of the day of the country or the world are the headlines of the day. Sometimes these bulletins are called the *integrated bulletins.* In these bulletins, there should be voice dispatch, soundbites etc. Major news bulletins are converted into integrated bulletins because the soundbites of the reporters or others make it very interesting.

In addition to the above hard news formats for radio news, there are some other formats of the radio news programmes. They are employed very often in radio these days.

They are:

1) **News Magazine:** A news magazine is the longest of all news programmes. It normally ranges from 20 to 30 minutes in duration. It can be noted that in a news magazine, it is not only the news but also the views of the personal who is involved in the preparation of the programme is reflected. A news magazine has different varieties - for 10 minutes it is the news, and the remaining 20 minutes are filled up with news discussion or analysis programmes. Sometimes experts from the field are consulted about the subject matter. BBC has a programme, 'Asia Today', which is an example of a news magazine programme.

2) **Panel Discussion:** In this news programme, two or three persons are invited to the studio for discussion on any particular news, event or issue. The discussions are normally moderated by an anchor or a compere. Experts discuss the happenings of the period of last one week or so. It is an in-house programme.

3) **News Reels:** It is a programme of generally 15 minutes' duration. It deals with spot reports, comments, interviews and extracts from speeches. News reels usually require skilled editing and well-written link narrations as it is a much more complex format than news bulletin. It is also more expensive.

4) **News Flash or Breaking News:** News Flash is associated with extremely urgent and important information which cannot wait. Examples of news flash can be ; major disaster like earthquakes, Tsunami, accidents, sudden death of a very important person, fall of a government, incidents like attack on the World Trade Center of New York, communal clashes, war, declaration of war possibly involving our country or any other nation.

5) **Voice Report:** This is a studio-based programme in which the reporter's voice with his story, background and eyewitness give an account of an event. All the facts are gathered, opinions are sought and a balanced summary is prepared. The editing for this kind of programme has to be tight and the copy has to be written in a very compelling and crisp style.

6) **Illustrated Voice Report:** This is another type of news programme in radio. In this programme, the voices of the participants, statements, sounds of the occasion are inserted in the spoken story. This type of programme is usually used for public meetings etc.

7) **News Interview :** News Interviews are programmes which get a news report through a broadcast interview. It is an on line interview programme in which direct questions are asked to the interviewee. No frills or unnecessary questions are asked since this programme is tightly edited to get the relevant information only. It requires a precise planning for the execution of news interviews. The style is taut and serious. The announcements before and after the news interview have to be carefully planned.



Taut: concise and controlled

8) **Actuality:** Actualities are news programme in which an extract from a speech is inserted into an item. This type of programme is located in the 'field' with a lot of ambient sound. Location noises (fire engines, bulldozer, construction activities, rioting) can be heard in these programmes which lend a feeling of the actual or natural surroundings. As a result, the programme appears to be less manipulated and, therefore, more credible.

9) **Remote Feeds or Phone - ins:** Telephone inputs form the basis of this kind of news programme. Quality of the programme needs to be checked in technical terms because an unclear telephone line will result in a bad programme. This type of programme adds to immediacy and lends credibility to the report

10) **Audience Opinion:** In this type of programme opinion from the masses are sought. This kind of news programme has one basic

advantage - that is it has more voices and actuality feed back involving the community. It is not monotonous for the listeners who get to hear multiple voices and opinions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4. What are the three important formats of news in radio?

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Q.5. Write short notes on:

a. News magazine

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b. Panel Discussion

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c. News Reel

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d. Illustrated Voice Report

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e. Actuality

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8.5 RADIO FEATURES AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

8.5.1 RADIO FEATURES/DOCUMENTARIES

In newspapers, the word 'features' usually covers all editorial content apart from news, sports news, and reports of sporting fixtures. Reviews, horoscopes, TV listings, advice columns, gardening tips and so on, as well as backgrounders, analytical articles, think pieces, profiles, celebrity interviews are all included in this category. In broadcasting, however, the term 'feature' often means a human interest or 'soft news' story, or a documentary.

A radio feature is a documented programme on a single theme or subject, composed and presented in a radio-dramatic form. Feature has also been defined as 'creative interpretation of reality'. In a feature, a theme or an idea is projected with an imaginative mixture of music, poetry, narration 'effects', dramatisation and actuality in such a way that creates an impact on the listener's mind.

A radio feature or documentary is a story that is longer than a standard news story and it is written in a different style.In the feature, as opposed to hard news, instead of giving the crux of the story in the first line itself, the listener is led into the story first and the intended facts are revealed only later.

A radio documentary covers a particular topic in some depth, mixing commentary and sound pictures. It is usually factual, informational in character, and sometimes educational in intent. It blends together the elements of talk and drama to tell the story of events, sketch the biography of great leaders, or merely offers an interpretation of the world around us. It also teaches us about people and cultures unfamiliar to us, and at times look into different social, political, economic and cultural problems. Indeed, any subject can

be the ingredient of a radio feature. Radio features are non-fictional in subject matter, yet some radio features resemble radio drama in many ways. Others are more straightforward. But in each case they are of much greater length than that of an ordinary news report.

A radio documentary makes use of a narrator whose voice is interspersed with voices of real people or/and actors. To this are added appropriate background effects and music to bring the documentary to life.

The documentary form serves as an indicator of a radio station's commitment to news apart from functioning as a barometer of social, political, and economic dynamics. For All India Radio, radio feature or documentary is placed as an important programme format Radio feature or documentary is an important ingredient of AIR's programmes and it figures in its general programmes as well as in the programmes for specific groups. Radio features, which incorporate numerous audio formats in a single programme, e.g., narration, music, drama, interviews, poetry, sound effects etc, are highly popular among the listeners of AIR.

Some of the feature programmes produced by AIR have received awards at international level, the best being the programme 'Lali and the Lions of Gir', by Melville De Mellow, which got the Italia Prize in 1964.

In all radio programmes the use of actuality enhances the impact and credibility of the programme. **Audio actuality**, which is pre-recorded sound, is used in radio features. For instance, a radio reporter may do a feature on consumer protection and record an interview with a consumer activist about the implementation of the Consumer Protection Act. He may then select a 20-second portion of the interview in the feature. Again, uses of live actuality or sound effects are regarded as typical of a radio programme. Some of the typically Indian sound effects like spinning wheel, Persian wheel, typical kitchen noises are used in the radio programmes.

8.5.2 RADIO CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

News, features, and current affairs programmes constitute the three major pillars of AIR's programme composition. Current affairs programmes include programmes like talks, discussions, interviews that are arranged on some current or contemporary issue or event. They provide a forum for all shades of opinion on outstanding national and international issues. Current affairs programmes also include popular formats like quiz shows and opinion polls etc.

AIR has been regularly broadcasting various kinds of current affairs programmes that have helped increase the awareness levels of the general masses not only about happenings taking place in the country but also in the distant foreign lands.

AIR has a wide variety of current affairs programmes meant for its different groups of audiences. AIR ensures that there is some or the other information-based programme for all sections of its listeners.

Broadcasting of talks and discussions by a radio station is undertaken according to a plan drawn up after a lot of deliberation and consultation with the subject matter experts. This plan is called the **talk schedule.** This is prepared on a quarterly basis and, besides talks, it comprises interviews, discussions, symposia etc. However, in case of topicality and some other relevant and valuable materials being made available, it may not be possible to adhere to a talk schedule drawn up some weeks in advance.

Current affairs programmes are an important means of education and information. Programmes for the rural listeners are broadcast from almost all AIR Stations in different languages and also in local dialects to provide educational and informational support to agriculture and rural development programmes.

All AIR stations broadcast special programmes directed at housewives and working women. Apart from being informational

and educational in nature, they are also entertaining. The programmes includes topics like health, family welfare, household chores, nutrition and the problems of working women.

Sports form a very important part of AIR's programme content. Sports programmes on AIR are very popular with the listeners. Important international, national, regional and local level sports events are given due coverage through running commentaries and radio reports. Apart from two 5-minute daily news bulletins, AIR also broadcasts two half-hour sports magazine programmes.

Recent innovations in broadcasting include interactive broadcasts like the Phone-in-Programme and Voice Mail, apart from people's forum programmes.

Phone-in-Programmes are programmes during the broadcast of which people call up the broadcasting station on a given telephone number and ask questions. The experts at the broadcasting station reply to their queries immediately.

Voice Mail is another service facility, where people can telephone and record their requests, complaints, suggestions and appreciation, etc. These messages are later retrieved and played back in a special Voice Mail programme with suitable replies to their queries.

SMS and email: This is the age of technology. Mobile phone service and internet service are now popular among the common people. Therefore, SMS and e-mail services are most important facilities to make the programmes more interesting and lively.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.6. What is a radio feature?

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Q.7. What is audio actuality?

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Q.8. News, ... and.....programmes constitute the three major pillars of AIR's programme composition.

Q.9. Which programmes can be included under the current affairs category?

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Q.10. What is a talk schedule?

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Q.11. Explain the terms:

a. Phone-in-programme

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b. Voice mail

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ACTIVITY 8.2

1. Prepare a programme proposal for a radio talk on Women Empowerment in Assam. Make a list of people you will include as talking heads in your programme.

2. Create a 5 minute radio documentary on Child Labour.



8.6 LET US SUM UP

- Radio is a powerful medium for news.
- Radio news is considered to be a vitally important aspect of most radio stations' formats.
- News on radio ranges from in-depth coverage round the clock to brief hourly summaries, to no news coverage at all on some stations.
- News bulletins are broadcast by AIR almost every hour of the day in English and various regional languages through 254 bulletins.
- Basic features of radio news are that it has immediacy; it is conversational, concise, complete, interpretative, current and correct.
- Radio news can be presented in a number of ways. From hard news, breaking news to remote feeds, there are many presentation possibilities as far as radio news is concerned.
- News, features, and current affairs programmes constitute the three major pillars of AIR's programme composition
- A radio feature or documentary is a story that is longer than a standard news story and written in a different style.
- Current affairs programmes are the programmes like talks, discussions, interviews that are arranged on some current or contemporary issues or events. They provide a forum for all shades of opinion on outstanding national and international issues.



8.7 FURTHER READING

1. Aggarwal, Vir Bala, Gupta, V.S (2002) Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication. New Delhi : Concept Publishing Company
2. Kumar, Keval J (2012) Mass Communication in India. Mumbai : Jaico Publishing House

3. Ghosh, Subir (1991) Mass Media India : In the Indian context . Profile Publishers

4. Kundra, Shipra (2005) Basic Audio-Visual Media. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q.No 1 :

a) False

b) True

c) True

d) False

Ans to Q.No 2 : Normally, the major bulletins are of ten to fifteen minutes' duration while others are of only five minutes' duration.

Ans to Q.No 3 : It is necessary to interpret the story for the listener so that it does not become dull. In radio, the news is not just facts, but also the result of the facts.

Ans to Q.No 4 : Headline newscast, Minor news bulletin and Major News Bulletin.

Ans to Q.No 5 :

a) **News Magazine:** A news magazine is the longest of all news programmes. It normally ranges from 20 to 30 minutes in duration. In a news magazine, not only the news but also the views of the personality who is involved in the preparation of the programme is also reflected. For 10 minutes it is the news, and the remaining 20 minutes are filled up with news discussion or analysis programmes. Sometimes experts from the field are consulted about the subject matter.

b) **Panel Discussion:** In this news programme, two or three persons are invited to the studio for discussion about any particular news, event or issue. The discussions are normally moderated by an anchor or a compere. Experts come and discuss some event of current relevance.

c) News Reel: It is a programme of generally 15 minutes' duration. It deals with spot reports, comments, interviews and extracts from speeches. News reels usually require skilled editing and well-written link narrations as it is a much more complex format than news bulletin. It is also more expensive.

d) **Illustrated Voice Reports:** This is another type of news programme in radio. In this programme, the voices of the participants, statements, sounds of the occasion are inserted in the spoken story. This type of programme is usually used for public meetings etc.

e) **Actualities:** Actualities are news programmes in which an extract from a speech is inserted into an item. This type of programme is located in the 'field' with a lot of ambient sound. Location noises (fire engines, bulldozer, construction activity, rioting, etc) can be heard in these programmes which lend a feeling of the actual or natural surroundings. As a result, the programme appears to be less manipulated and therefore more credible.

Ans to Q.No 6 : A radio feature is a documented programme on a single theme or subject, composed and presented in a radio-dramatic form. In a feature a theme or an idea is projected with an imaginative mixture of music, poetry, narration 'effects', dramatisation and actuality in such a way which creates an impact on listener's mind.

Ans to Q.No 7 : Audio actuality is a pre-recorded sound bite, used in radio features. In all radio programmes the use of actuality enhances the impact and credibility of the programme. For instance, a radio reporter may do a feature on consumer protection and record an interview with a consumer activist about the implementation of the Consumer Protection Act. He may then select a 20-second portion of the interview in the feature. This interview adds credibility to the programme and gives it an extra edge.

Ans to Q.No 8 : Features and Current affairs

Ans to Q.No 9 : Current affairs programmes include programmes like talks, discussions, interviews that are arranged on some current or

contemporary issue or event. Current affairs programmes also include popular formats like quiz shows and opinion polls etc.

Ans to Q.No 10 : In a radio station the broadcasting of talks and discussions is undertaken according to a plan drawn up after a lot of deliberation and consultation with the subject matter experts. This plan is called the talk schedule.

Ans to Q No 11 :

a) Phone-in-Programmes are programmes during the broadcast of which people call up the broadcasting station on a given telephone number and ask questions. The experts at the broadcasting station reply to their queries immediately.

b) Voice Mail is a service facility, where people can telephone and record their requests, complaints, suggestions and appreciation, etc. These messages are later retrieved and played back in a special Voice Mail programme with suitable replies to their queries.



8.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What is the scope of radio news in India?

Q.2. Write short notes on:

a. Radio documentary

b. Radio Interview

c. Actuality

d. Talk show

e. Flash News

3. How is radio news different from newspaper news?

Q.4. Discuss the various news and current affairs programmes on AIR.