

Dying or Changing: The Challenge of the HK Radio Industry

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As radio shifts from analog to digital, the Hong Kong Radio Industry faces a challenge that they have not prepared for. To say the least, they have been running on deficit. In addition, it seems that they had become outdated, falling behind in terms of technology and exhibiting a lack of awareness about how online social media interaction between disk jockeys and listeners could attract more attention and increase their listener base. Significantly, Hong Kong radio is notable for not having archival systems for their sound recordings and radio content that could provide public and educational access after live radio sessions, and that might have helped maintain, if not increase their audiences who are increasingly used to accessing radio on demand via streaming services. This highlights the urgent need to set up a system for preserving Hong Kong's precious recordings. Using ethnographic approach, the researcher adopted a qualitative method where they observed and interacted with the study's participants in their real-life environment. Moreover, the paper applied a usability in a user-centered service design to help them analyze the problem, which includes the relevant domain, audience, process, goal, and context. Using an ethnographic study within a usability project enables researchers to thoroughly analyze the design problem and notice all associated issues to come up with a better solution. This paper focused on the radio industry in Hong Kong, particularly addressing crucial issues and questions that have been understudied in existing academic research.

Keywords: Radio, Hong Kong, archiving, ethnography, Community radio, new technology

Introduction

How many people still listen to radio shows? There is no easy answer. The golden era of the radio industry ended a long time ago because people were no longer willing to stay home and listen to their favourite shows with their families. The Hong

Kong Communications Authority (HKCA) Report shows that the daily listening rate of radio is 31.4 per cent from 2014 to 2015, in comparison with 40.7 per cent in 2007. While the radio listening frequency between three and six days per week is 26.3 per cent from 2014 to 2015, in

comparison with 25.9 per cent in 2007, the radio listening frequency of once a month has dropped by almost 10 per cent, to 42.3 per cent between 2014 and 2015, which is in stark contrast to 32 per cent in 2007.

The report¹ shows that the percentage of daily listening ratio has dropped, but that of monthly listening ratio has notably increased, indicating that the audiences have become less interested in tuning into radio stations on a daily basis (HK CA 2015, p.10-15).

Radio used to play an important part in people's lives because when people went home after work, listening to radio shows was key entertainment at a time when television was less affordable. Nowadays, radio stations are challenged as they compete for audiences as listeners are faced with a wide range of media and entertainment options such as TV stations, movies, the Internet, and online social media. One result of this is that advertisement revenue has gone down. According to Perez in South China Morning Post (27 January 2017), advertising expenditure in Hong Kong reached HKD39.8 billion in 2016, down from HKD45.9 billion in 2015, and the record points out that the traditional media categories of television, paid newspapers, magazines, radio and outdoor display reduced advertising last year, which makes it necessary to develop new financial models to sustain radio stations. Is the radio industry dying or is it just changing?

Some Hong Kong-based journalists with a special interest in radio, say yes, it is dying, such as Tim Hamlett of the Hong Kong Free Press, and John Patkin of the South China Morning Post) (T. Hamlett and J. Patkin, personal communication, October 23, 2016), but others, like Morgan Betz of the US-based Montgomery County Community College and Brian Soscia of US-radio 93.7 WSTW, say no (M. Betz and B. Soscia, personal communication, August 10, 2014).

It seems that there is cause for optimism in the US but not in Hong Kong, and I will discuss that difference later. The questionable future of Hong Kong radio makes this study time-sensitive. Radio has been a very important aspect of human history and cultural studies, and by undertaking this research at this time, allows the researcher to conduct primary research with key players from the Hong Kong radio scene and explore how and why the Hong Kong radio industry is suffering; as well as consider similarities and differences between Hong Kong radio industry's changes and their counterparts in other countries.

The urgency of this study is emphasized when we consider that recently, three digital radio stations in Hong Kong have returned their licenses to the government. Therefore, only three analog radio stations and one digital radio station, RTHK, remain in the Hong Kong radio market.

However, radio stations in Hong Kong have had a long history, and they thrived a long time ago, when listening to radio was a major

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https://www.coms-auth.hk/annual_report/1516/pdf/en/full.pdf

part of people's lives. The aim of this study is to fully examine its history in the context of recent trends in the local and international radio markets. One objective is to create an archive that will be valuable for future researchers.

History of the Radio Industry

There are currently three analog radio companies in Hong Kong radio industry: Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), Commercial Radio, and Metro Radio. Commercial Radio operates three channels: two Cantonese channels on the FM band (881 and 903), and one English one on the AM band (864). Metro Radio, established in 1991, is newer than RTHK and Commercial Radio.

Metro Radio also owns three channels, which are Metro Finance (FM104), Metro Showbiz (FM99.7), and Metro Plus (AM 1044). Finally, RTHK, established in 1928, the only non-profit station and the oldest radio station in Hong Kong, owns seven channels: three English channels, three Cantonese channels, and one AM channel (621) that broadcasts in Mandarin. Moreover, there are four digital broadcast radio services. Besides RTHK, three out of four digital radio licenses were returned to the government this year. They include those of the Digital Broadcasting Corporation (DBC), Phoenix U Radio, and Metro Radio.

The Changing Media Environment

Hong Kong has been rapidly re-fashioning its identity for two decades after British rule ended, even though the official discourse

stated that there would not be significant changes at least for 50 years.

The changes are especially noticeable in the political arena and people can see this via the news reported using both TV and radio platforms. Political changes and reportage are not only happening in the radio industry, but also across the whole media industry.

The people of Hong Kong have been concerned about the freedom of speech and freedom of the press for many years, and of being more closely tied with Mainland China. The perception is that these ties are certain to impact freedom of the media in Hong Kong, especially for news and talk shows in relation to political reporting. Arguably, self-censorship is becoming more noticeable in relation to some news and topics that are considered highly sensitive or related to Mainland China and Taiwan issues (Lee & Chan, 2003, p. 8).

According to Lee (2014), Hong Kong retained press freedom after the return to the Mainland China; however, as the pressure from China has increased, and for example, as China explicitly stressed its principle that the media in Hong Kong cannot support Taiwan independence. Another area where Hong Kong media is self-censoring concerns any perceived verbal attacks on Chinese national leaders. Lee also discusses the pressure felt by many broadcast-owners who have other businesses and are interested in having business in Mainland China.

Some of the media owners even have a formal political titles in

the mainland, such as membership of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, all of which means that they are especially aware that China has eyes on Hong Kong media already and that they are careful not to bite the hand that feeds them. One of the examples Hung and Song (2018) gives is of the Digital Broadcasting Corporation Hong Kong Limited (DBC), and the Hong Kong government's issuing of licenses to DBC in March 2011 (p. 75).

However, under Albert Cheng's charge, DBC became a political controversy. He was a famous political talk-show host in Hong Kong and has criticized the government frequently. In late 2012, four of the eight original major investors of DBC stopped investing and refused to sell out their stocks to other owners. The purpose of this action was that they wanted the government to take back the license through bankruptcy.

According to Lee (2014), the investors said that they just could not see a future for DBC because it kept losing money. However, Albert Cheng said that the move was for political reasons, specifically because of pressure on the investors from China's Central Liaison Office, and he left the station at the end (p. 240). Evidence for this claim seems to be there when you look at the programming strategy, "when Cheng was in charge of DBC, the first of the seven channels of DBC was named, if translated literally from Chinese, 'Loud Voice Channel' (Lee, 2014, p. 240)." The planned daily programming on the channel included Storm in the Teacup hosted

by Albert Cheng himself in the morning and Wind of Freedom No. 10 hosted by Ng Chi Sum and pro-democracy politician Cheng Ka Foo in the early evening time slot (Lee, 2014, p. 240). Cheng wanted to hire another famous critical talk show host, Li Wei Ling, but the investors disagreed due to the growing controversy surrounding the station. They, as investors and businessmen, felt that it was not a smart move to criticize the government and be against the motherland (Cheng, 2015, p. 3).

The End of the Digital Radio

Besides analog and digital radio, satellite radio is not an option for the Hong Kong market because there is no dedicated satellite service in Hong Kong.

By comparison, in other parts of the world, satellite radio has been part of the market for long. Furthermore, people have readily accepted satellite service because, according to Lin (2010), the satellite radio system wants to attract more people to use their service by differentiating their content and formats from those of the terrestrial radio stations. It is an on-demand device, through which the listener can program content and formats anytime anywhere, and the consumer can decide how and where to receive the satellite radio service whether in the home and office, or on mobile via the internet. Enhanced by technology, the satellite radio receivers not only can listen to radio shows, they even can do the plug-and-play features, MP3 player function, the capabilities to search, store, retrieve, display,

organize, and schedule song list, play list, music information (much like DVR player), the mechanisms to transmit audio programs, text (e.g., stock market ticker), graphic (e.g., GPS and weather map), and video images (or short burst of video streams).

Moreover, studies show that the consumers are willing to adapt the satellite radio system because of the technology fluidity. According to Murphy (2006), digital broadcasting was mature enough for the radio market in Hong Kong because it could provide many channels, CD quality sound, improved reception, and even multimedia options. However, to receive digital broadcasts, the listener had to pay HKD 500 to get a digital receiver. This cost has contributed to the failure of these stations, as, according to Tsang (2016), it is far from ideal for the consumer to spend HKD 1,000 in order to listen to a new station. As a result, there is no mass market.

Second, the rise of Internet radio eliminates any advantages that digital broadcasting may offer. Internet radio does not cost a lot of money as it does not require, say, the construction of radio transmitting towers for broadcasting. According to Leung (2015), the internet radio gives the radio industry a new hope because it is the low entry cost, less government control, and user-friendly; therefore, some of the famous talk shows choose the internet radio as their platform.

In mid-2014, about a dozen Internet radio stations suddenly blossomed from one person to well-established stations with better

facilities and more hosts. In addition, the radio market in Hong Kong is already dominated by the three existing stations. When Donald Tsang Yam-kuen was the chief executive in Hong Kong, he pushed for the digital broadcasting project for what Tsang calls a “special reason” (Lau, 2017, p. 4): he starts negotiating with Bill Wong Chobau, a major shareholder of the Digital Broadcasting Corporation Hong Kong Limited (formerly known as the Wave Media Limited), over a penthouse flat in Shenzhen, where he plans to retire. As a result, “Tsang was charged with two counts of misconduct in public office, becoming the most senior public official in Hong Kong to be arrested” (Lau, 2017, p. 4). However, when Leung Chun-ying became the chief executive, he did not show any interest in digital broadcasting (Tsang, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, in contrast to the support available in other countries, according to the Japan upgrades radio station. (n.d.), says that when Japan government wants to upgrade their radio stations, and they set-up the PNG, which was the main financiers. At the end, they provided K1.368 million as counterpart funding to the radio stations.

The Hong Kong government has not given much support, particularly to the digital radio market.

According to Ng (2016), Peter Kwai Wai, a senior teaching fellow at City University’s Department of Media and Communication, states “The market is dying. If the government believes DAB is the right direction we should head

toward, it should give more input to make the market sustainable, and not just introduce it because it sounds trendy” (p.2). Kwan also believes that the Hong Kong government should follow countries such as Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Britain by setting a deadline to switch all radio services from analogue to digital.

Moreover, according to Murphy (2006), he interviewed RTHK Assistant Director of Broadcasting Tai Keen-man says that it has been running digital tests since 1998, and they were even digitally broadcasted during the WTO conference last December. “Now it really depends on permission from the authorities. From the outside, the issue is public funding,” he says. “From a technical standpoint, it’s not a problems. We can practically do it overnight” (Murphy, 2006, p. 3). As for Commercial Radio and Metro, one source says: “When we approached them, they just didn’t express interest. They are spending as little money as possible.” (Murphy, 2006, p. 3).

Situating within existing literature and primary research

Hugh Chignell’s *Key Concepts in Radio Studies* (2009), is a key reference text that covers basic concepts about the radio industry, from radio production and show genres to the more complicated topics such as radio and propaganda development, and explains topics that some readers might not be familiar with, for example, micro radio and politics.

The Chignell’s book tells the story of the radio industry both past

and present. While this book seems to discuss topics case by case, all are related to current issues in the industry. Therefore, it is a good reference for radio scholars because it provides grounded theory with global examples. Some of the sections definitely help situate the radio industry in Hong Kong in a global context. Chignell (2009) offers an evocative example of why people love to listen to radio stations. If, when two people listen to the same piece of music, one is listening to a radio station, and the other is listening to an MP3, they will have different experiences because the radio listener thinks the sound is better in some ways compared to pre-recorded music.

There are a couple of reasons why people feel differently about listening to the same music on different platforms.

First, with radio, the playlist was chosen by someone else and not by the listener.

Second, most radio music is live, which can provide the listener a sense of copresence with others.

Third, usually, when music plays, the DJ introduces the song skillfully, adding meaning or significance to the listeners’ understanding and experience of it.

Finally, radio stations and their audiences have a constructed identity often surrounded by youth, which the co-listening experience reinforces.

Chignell (2009) also explains why radio music is so dominant. First, the music industry rose during the 1960s, when radio music had become increasingly special in the USA, when the emergence of rock

and roll created a youth culture influenced by iconic figures such as Elvis Presley and James Dean. Therefore, radio stations noticed that trend and later developed the top 40 format to play hit songs all day long, which attracted a teenaged audience. Since the 1960s, it has led to the growth of music formats, so in response to competition, stations refined their music choices to target specific audiences, for example, listeners who like hot AC, hip-hop, or, blues and soul.

The impact of Hong Kong market size and DJs' skills

In an interview, veteran Hong Kong radio disk jockey, Brian Leung Siu Fai, indicated that there is a significant gap in the market because Hong Kong does not have a dedicated music channel (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016). He noted that even though some of the stations described themselves as music stations, they did not actually play music all the time or focus solely on Cantopop.

A more detailed analysis during this interview revealed that he would not refer to the new disk jockeys as DJs. To him, they were only hosts because they did not exhibit the skills necessary to carry the shows and deliver the songs 'properly' in the way professional DJs do. This lack of skills is evident via an analysis of their shows, specifically the shows' lack of structure or context, even to the extent that the disk jockeys do not apparently know or discuss the background of the songs that they play. Most importantly, they did not display musical knowledge, but

rather engaged in seemingly meaningless talk most of the time, which makes their shows boring.

The most important detail he mentioned was that some current-affairs programming attracted some young listeners and that those young people should know more about such matters (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

One reason that the radio industry in Hong Kong has a different story from that of the US is the size of its market, which is so small, leading to the assumption that radio stations cannot have many different formats, each attracting a smaller group of listeners, in such as a small market and still be viable.

However, according to Murphy (2016), given its population size, Hong Kong could have more radio stations. This is because, in the region, there are over 30 stations in Taipei and around 80 in Bangkok.

While new licenses have been allocated in response to demand in those countries, Metro Radio received the last radio license from the Hong Kong government in 1991.

A representative of Hong Kong Institution of Engineer (HKIE) and expert on telecommunications, Eric Spain, said that the idea of having more local services on frequencies that escaped interference from FM services on a territory-wide basis was suggested, but that the space on the band was used up. Therefore, only one area has the potential to expand, the station in Kowloon, Shatin and Tuen Mun. However, the colonial government did not like the idea because it felt that it would be hard to monitor these radio stations

(Murphy, 2016, p. 2). Although this happened during the colonial era, Spain (2016) indicated that he sensed that nothing had subsequently changed.

Music radio: the importance of speech and demographics

Some people wonder why music radio has been so popular, and people are still willing to tune in to music shows on the radio.

In his book, Chignell (2009) assesses why music and radio fit so well together and how such a combination differs from speech. He applied semiology, the study of signs, to explain his theory. He quotes Crisell's study: "speech as radio's 'primary code' radio's 'raw material,' of speech, to convey a meaning that makes it so important" (Chignell, 2009, p. 35).

However, film and television are different because visual images can be the dominant code. Crisell noticed that music is difficult to examine in semiotic terms because people cannot see any images, unlike words and pictures. It exists on the radio as an object, which we can absorb into our mood. In a way, it is a sense, which is why listening to music is much easier to compared to speech because people need to put an effort to interpret its meaning. Crisell describes music as highly "radiogenic," noting that it shows that the successful partnership between music and radio has been crucial to the formation of modern popular culture. However, radio music is not just about the music; it is the framing of music by speech, which is the key to its success. When DJs and presenters use speech to

deliver ideas to raw material like music, they create a much more meaningful experience for the radio listener. If music and radio are good partnership, with good music and speech attracting more listeners, then what do we learn when we apply this understanding to Hong Kong? Is the reason why radio in Hong Kong is facing the hardship because the music industry in Hong Kong has not been doing well since 1990s?

Though the government is willing to release more radio licenses and the community program is working well, it does not follow that they will help the industry tremendously, because the radio industry still faces many challenges. For example, listeners have changed the way they listen to music. They can listen to music from iTunes and Spotify, for instance. Hence, they no longer have to turn the radio on and listen to music. However, of greater importance is the fact that the music industry in Hong Kong has a history of not doing well.

According to Chow (2007), when record sales in the music industry dropped drastically, record companies became more conservative. Instead of trying different strategies, they chose to invest in top-ranking artists and to limit distribution resources for the less famous ones. Chow (2007) also mentions that the music industry relied heavily on four 'heavenly kings', the famous singers from the 1990s (Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Aaron Kwok, and Leon Lai), whose fans were aging and no longer keen on pop music. Hence, the sales of their albums declined. In the late

1990s, when the heavenly kings could no longer guarantee sales, no one was able to succeed them in terms of commercial value. Most of the rising stars have failed to make significant sales, so their careers will not thrive in the long run. That is bad news for new artists and talent and it has had a huge effect on the radio industry because, relatively speaking, listeners are not interested in Cantopop anymore. Therefore, they do not listen to local radio stations because those stations only play Cantopop. Local record companies do not invest money in new artists and talent; therefore, there are fewer new songs to promote. It has not always been this way. The radio industry in Hong Kong used to be very important, like radio in other countries. I listened the radio drama every night or listened the new song through the radio. Sometimes, listening to the radio station I felt the DJ was only talking to me. However, as the music industry in Hong Kong has changed the way to promote their music, and the radio industry has to compete with other social media, listeners have changed their listening habits.

Brian Leung Siu Fai Leung said that there were some connections between the Hong Kong radio industry and the music industry because radio was used to plug new songs and introduce new artists to listeners, while the record company considered radio to be a major promotional tool before 2000s (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016). However, listeners can now listen to new songs and artists through new media (for instance, iTunes, Spotify, and other

networks). As a result, radio stations are less important and influential. Leung even noticed that the music selection was getting older, with some stations playing 1980s and 1970s music (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016). This might be related to the average age of listeners, which were getting somewhat older (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

According to Kwong (2016), who cites James Wong's (Wong Jim) PhD thesis, "The Rise and Decline of Canto-pop: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music (1949-1997)," during the early 1970s to late 1990s was the heyday for Canto-pop because it was a by-product of Hong Kong's economic take-off.

Moreover, the reason people loved those songs are because they reminded the good old days of Hong Kong. Wong Jim also mentioned the Canto-pop declined in the late 1990s because of a lack of creative talent, as exemplified by the retirement of Sam Hui and the decease of Danny Chan Pak-Keung, Wong Kar-Kui (frontman of the band, Beyond) and Roman Tam. Kwong interviews Andes Yue, a DJ at Commercial Radio and host of "Vinyl Record Series," and the play list of his show cover the 1970s to late 1990s. Kwong asked him why he chose that period, and Yue said that "the more mature listeners and will drive more local and international audiences who tune in via the station's website." (Kwong, 2016, pp. 2-3).

It was clear why the stations were still playing "You're My Everything" (from the 1970s) when many listeners grew up listening

to '90s music. He said that one of the reasons was that radio stations, including their management, were getting older. They knew the problems of the radio industry, but were not willing to change or take a risk and this was exacerbated because some of their technological knowledge was outdated. For example, RTHK still uses the MiniDisc (MD) rather than the MP3 format to play songs when the disk jockey does not have CD versions of them and is highly resistant to changing this (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

Community expression and a sense of intimacy

Beyond music, Chignell (2009) discussed radio as a tool to unite the community. Quoting Douglas's (1999) book, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, he argued that when radio was more important than television in the USA, it played to people's imaginations because it brought America together as a nation during the 1930s and 1940s.

It also diminished the country's ethnic, racial, geographic, and gender divisions. Douglas said that radio shows held much power over the American audience and were transmitted to different communities even though it conveyed nonvisual messages. As listeners filled in the gaps without any images, radio cast a much greater spell over its audience. Later they learned what it meant to be an American, a teenager, or a man.

In the USA, community radio stations have operated for many years, and they work well. Previously, non-commercial stations were solely

licensed to educational institutions such as high schools, colleges, and universities. According to Hamilton (2013), apart from college radio, Lewis Hill founded KPFA in San Francisco in 1941. He became the first community broadcaster in the USA. By 1971, the number of community broadcasters had increased steadily. Hill's vision was the promotion of cultural diversity and pluralistic cultural expression and contribution to a lasting understanding between individuals of all nations, races, creeds, and colors.

In an interview radio DJ and gay activist, Brian Leung Siu Fai relayed to this author (2016) the importance of community radio stations, indicating that, if the government permitted the operation of community radio stations, it might help the radio industry because such stations did not require the investment of large amounts of money. All they needed to do was set up a small studio and some economical gear and focus on one specific topic, for instance, talk radio, religion, or even different genres of music (1980s, 1990s, Hot AC, Hip-Hop, and the Top 40). Later, they could hire a professional and institute radio DJ programming, and that could even fare well in their stations (personal communication, November 30, 2016).

Recently, RTHK has reimagined the community radio concept. They called it the Community Involvement Broadcasting Service (CIBS) and it allows different people from the community to host radio shows. These hosts can be from somewhere

in the wet market or a next-door neighbor. Hence, the topics entail chit-chat or are informational. The show only broadcasts on the digital radio platform. It is an ideal case study for examining how well such programming is faring. In the next section in Chignell's book, he quotes, "Hendy (2000) studies that radio claims the intimacy and friendliness which may, ironically, contribute to the listener's 'sense of alienation' in modern genres, but certainly includes the experience of listening to radio drama and to the companionable chat of the radio DJ" (Chignell, 2009, p. 85).

There are four elements that contribute to this sense of intimacy. First, most radio listeners are individual acts, and second, some radio shows and radio dramas invite the listener to work with their imagination to inhabit the inner world. Third, even though a radio broadcast involves multiple people, the interaction is more like person to person. Finally, the radio persona usually presents an ordinary and friendly person.

Radio formats: lack of variety in the Hong Kong market

Chignell (2009) also mentioned how important format was in the USA. The radio format emerged in the USA during the 1950s; before the 1950s, radio stations had offered mixed programming, which included music, drama, news, comedy, sports, and so on, and this was the case with local radio stations.

Facing competition such as television and newly established stations, the only solution was to play hit records from the record

charts, and the top 40 format quickly dominated in the USA. Later on, different formats emerged to target specific listeners such as contemporary hit radio (CHR), adult contemporary (AC), country, jazz, gospel, and news, talk, and various ethnically based stations.

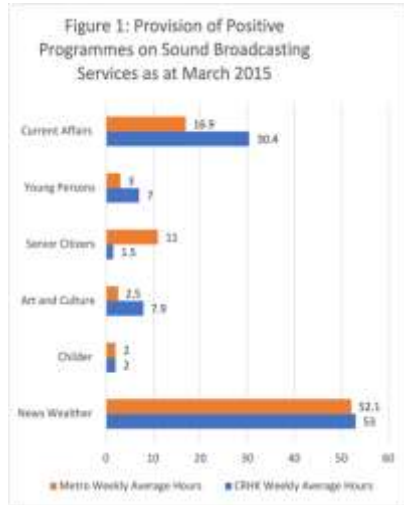
Why did the stations need to pick the formats? It shows how the format reflects the number of listeners will tune in to the radio station, which is a business matter because they can sell more advertising. By creating a definite and recognizable program character listeners can tune in with a reasonable expectation of getting what they wanted and knowing when they could expect it.

Even though Hong Kong is such a small market, we do have three radio stations with 13 channels. However, their formats are all similar, which is more talk and less music. They also provide a quick rundown of current affairs. The analog radio stations in Hong Kong: RTHK, Commercial Radio, and Metro Radio, have been in the market for a long time. All sound broadcasting services are required to broadcast at least 28.5 hours of positive programs per week, and all sound broadcasting licensees, including DAB licensees, are required to broadcast one minute of Announcements in Public Interest (APIs) every hour and not more than five minutes of publicity material for the authority each week on each service channel (Communications Authority, n.d., p. 21-22).

Below, Figure 1 shows that both Commercial Radio and Metro

Radio must broadcast for a certain number of hours regarding specific topics or programs.

FIGURE 1: Provision of Positive Programmes on Sound Broadcasting Services as at (HKCA, March 2015)



For instance, current affairs are assigned 30.4 per cent of programming hours for CRHK and 16.9 per cent of programming hours for Metro. This type of programming ranks second, coming after news and weather (53 per cent for CRHK and 52.1 per cent for Metro) (Communications Authority, n.d., p. 23-24).

It is clear that, when we limit ourselves to stations in Hong Kong, the proportions of time devoted to broadcasting current affairs and the news and weather are very high compared to those devoted to subjects such as young persons (7 per cent for CRHK and 3 per cent for Metro) and arts and culture (7.9 per cent for CRHK and 2.5 per cent for Metro) (Communications Authority, n.d., p. 24). It is very difficult to attract more young

people to listen to the radio when a low percentage of their programming targets this group; in turn, young people will turn to other media in which they are more interested. Does radio in Hong Kong focus excessively on current affairs? Is this to the detriment and neglect other subject areas that listeners want to tune into?

Research by Mooney (2010) found that, from 1997 to 2003, the percentage of the U.S. population listening to commercial radio fell by 9 per cent in the average metropolitan area, while the average Internet penetration rate rose from about 30 per cent to 60 per cent from 1998 to 2003. The reason for this growth was that the Internet brought new listening options to the market, namely MP3 players and Internet radio. Mooney (2010) primarily focused on the decline in radio listening and explored programming content, audience composition, and public policy, estimating the effects of various changes in demographics, technological factors, and the radio industry on the trends in total market radio listening.

Save our Sounds

In sum I must answer the key question: Why is it important for me to study Hong Kong's radio industry? Firstly, because the history of radio in Hong Kong has not been studied thoroughly. When I started researching for this proposal, relevant information was hard to find, and that is why I began communicating directly with primary sources, some of which have been quoted above. Although few

scholars had focused on the radio industry in Hong Kong, Ma (2014), writing in *Ming Pao Daily*, drew attention to the important historical role the radio station, Commercial Radio Hong Kong (CRHK), played in colonial Hong Kong. George Ho Ho-Chi founded CRHK in 1959. During the 1960s, the Leftist riots occurred. The 1970s saw the blossoming of the economy, the 1980s the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the 1990s Hong Kong's transfer back to Mainland China from the United Kingdom. Throughout this period, CRHK played an important role, providing positive promotion, documentation, and establishing a platform between citizens and the government in its capacity as a private sector broadcasting company. This has been understudied despite the fact that there are publicly available radio recordings of these events.

Interviewing key figures before they pass way

Ma (2014) says that, under British rule, broadcasting companies would save all meeting records and journals. From time to time, it would open them up to the public for research purposes or even donate them to libraries.

Therefore, people could learn more about its history. One can only hope that, today, George Ho wrote journals or the CRHK saves meeting records completely because they are of high cultural value. Ma (2014) also mentions that George Ho studied at the University of California, Berkeley, but Ho had Asian old-school character traits such as humility and aversion to showing off so this was

not commonly known. There is a danger; therefore, that humility may be expressed in important records not having been kept.

This leads to another reason why it is urgent that research into Hong Kong radio takes place soon: it should be undertaken while key people are still alive and available for interviews and while their estates may still hold ephemera that can be accessed, and documented, for research purposes.

Developing an archive of key radio recordings and ephemera

Brian Leung drew attention to the fact that there is no complete research, nor a complete archive regarding the radio industry in Hong Kong (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

We might have some materials on the beginning of radio history and on the recent changes in the radio environment.

However, the middle of Hong Kong's radio history is lost. For example, today it is difficult to find the interview of the famous band, The Beyond. He hopes that someone used an old, analog camera to record them while they were being interviewed at the radio station and still has a copy of that interview.

That is the type of artefact that this research might unearth and preserve. He indicated that some stations allow listener access to such shows if they are willing to pay. RTHK only keeps its shows online for a year after their initial recording, then disposes of them for good.

Every station has their own library; however, it really depends on

the librarian, programmer, and disk jockey whether the show is saved, or not and what metadata is stored with it.

There is no overarching policy and no simple way for the public or scholars to access this material. He understood there was no way to keep every show because of the huge associated storage needed, but notes that it is important to hold on to some of them, for instance, those that cover special events and topics.

This encapsulates another reason for conducting this research: radio shows constitute an important part of our history and culture.

In support of this theory, Leung points out that some academic institutions, such as Hong Kong University, had been enthusiastic about documenting certain shows that fell under specific categories, and he wished that more academic institutions would do the same to protect our culture and values (F. Leung, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

Radio as cultural heritage: the international standard

There are two main purposes to preserve the radio content: to keep them as examples of our cultural heritage and for educational purposes.

There are already archive systems in the US and Latin America for sound recordings and radio broadcasting. Ehrick (2016) noted that Latin America was a culturally rich region, as well as being politically complex, in the 1950s, and the radio airwaves assumed a very important role in documenting this

era, as important as the television, which took center stage in the US.

At the beginning, the archive system focused on their musical heritage, like the collection and digitization of phonographic recordings in Brazil and Mexico. Later, they expanded the archive of radio, and this project combined with the government and private sector efforts to preserve those sound files, resulting in an archive that is considered one of the oldest and largest sound archives in Latin America.

Another article from VanCour published in *Journal Of Radio & Audio Media* (2016) states that in 2000, the United States' Congress passed the landmark National Recording Preservation Act, creating the National Recording Preservation Board (NRPB) with a mission to implement a comprehensive national sound recording preservation program and increase accessibility of sound recording for educational purposes. Twelve years later, the NRPB developed the plans and tools to collect and preserve radio broadcast content, and the radio broadcasts reported that it made up a significant portion of the nation's recorded cultural history. Moreover, while many libraries and archives have acquired collections of historical radio broadcast recording, there have been a systematic effort to document and preserve the entire range of extant broadcasts in private and public collections. Another example from La Placa (2016) states that the Northwestern University Radio Archive Project (NURAP) collection consists of approximately 10,000 16" Instantaneous Electrical

Transcription discs ranging in date from the mid-1920s through the late 1950s, and it was gifted by NBC Chicago owned WMAQ and WNBQ (WMAQ-TV) to NURAP in 1964 through a partnership initiated by Judith Waller, Chicago's "first lady of radio. The gift of the NURAP collection was intended to further Waller's efforts to establish radio recordings as educational resources for Northwestern University students and faculty, as well as visiting researchers from other institution.

However, the material was shuffled out of order and inaccessible to student, faculty, and researchers for 40 years. Later, it was rediscovered by some university staff members, and they noticed that it was an extraordinarily valuable research and teaching tool. A group of Northwestern University scholars with expertise in sound studies, radio history, and media archiving, developed a preservation and access strategy for the institutional support in the winter of 2015. These examples show that there are some

tools and access methods out there. If we can study their ways to protect these materials, we can develop a huge and rich audio collection for students and scholars alike in sound studies, radio history, and cultural study.

Conclusion

The future of Hong Kong's radio stations is unknown, as we do not know they can best change and develop in light of the exponential amount of new digital media that they compete with every day. This study, with its historical overview, comparative international studies and sets of recommendations, will help to prevent Hong Kong's radio stations from dying out by suggesting solutions to change the industry. Also, it will help to document the radio industry and create archive systems. Even though Hong Kong is a small market, we still need radio stations that have different kind of shows for our people, radio shows and stations that belong to Hong Kong and reflect and serve our people.

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