

Nature of Morning Slot Programmes on FM Channels: A Comparative Study of Tomato FM, Radio Mirchi and Radio City in Kolhapur City

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Abstract

This research paper analyses the morning slot programmes on three FM radio stations in Kolhapur – Tomato FM (94.3 MHz), Radio Mirchi (98.3 MHz) and Radio City (95 MHz) to understand the nature of these programmes as well as to uncover the similarities and differences between them and the use of particular strategies to garner audience loyalty. The radio jockey speech, the interaction between the radio jockey and the audience and the interaction between the Radio Jockey and guests called for exclusive bites are recorded and analysed. The analysis is done by studying a few particular features of these broadcasts such as the themes and topics taken up, the socio-political issues covered or avoided, the short interviews and bites, the content of the RJ-audience interaction, the attitude of the RJs when talking to the audience-phone callers, the use of theme songs, tag-lines, etc.

Key Words: FM Radio, RJ speech, Kolhapur, phone-in callers, socio-political issues, Tomato FM, Radio Mirchi, Radio City

According to the AZ Research's Radio Listener's Research Report for 2017, more than 64% of people listen to FM radio every day (Exchange4media Staff). This survey also found that more than the Sec C consumers, Sec A and B consumers listen to FM radio channels and that 71% of the audience exhibits strong loyalty by tuning in to the same channel on the same time ("FM Radio Listenership Trends"). So, FM is not just gaining in popularity but individual FM channels are also garnering loyal listeners too. What gives the FM channels their individuality and character is their Radio Jockeys (RJs). RJs keep the listeners hooked up to their channels through their distinctive speech as much as through entertaining them through music, jokes, anecdotes and local news. Examples such as that of RJ Balaji

(who through his movement¹ "ChennaiMicro" mobilised help, rescue and food on a very massive scale for the people affected by the Chennai floods in 2015) (IANS) and of RJ Malishka (Ghoge) (who through her parody song that made fun of the condition of Mumbai city's roads and traffic jams made the BMC furious and herself a celebrity) bring out the power that RJs wield. To the contrary, what the RJ says is often seen by many as 'inane chatter' and an 'acoustical department store' (Pavarala and Malik 12).

Given so disparate opinions about the RJ speech, it is most timely to investigate in detail the RJ speech and shed light on the kind of themes handled, the strategies used to establish a rapport with the audience and the attitude taken towards government policies and wider power structures by these channels

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in general and the RJs in particular. However, RJ speech has not garnered much critical attention in India.

The present research paper is an attempt at analysing three FM radio stations in Kolhapur – Tomato FM (94.3 MHz), Radio Mirchi (98.3 MHz) and Radio City (95 MHz). The focus is exclusively on the morning Programmes. The radio jockey speech, the interaction between the radio jockey and the audience during the morning slot is recorded and analysed in order to understand the nature of these shows and also to locate the similarities and differences between them. The analysis is done by studying a few particular features of these broadcasts such as the themes and topics taken up, the socio-political issues covered or avoided, the short interviews and bites, the content of the RJ-audience interaction, the attitude of the RJs when talking to the audience-phone callers, the use of theme song, etc.

Research Methodology:

FM Channels selected: Three FM radio stations in Kolhapur were selected for the study:

1. Tomato FM (94.3 MHz),
2. Radio Mirchi (98.3 MHz) and
3. Radio City (95 MHz).

Period of recording: The three FM channels were recorded for a period of three and a half months (105 days) from April to 15th of July 2018.

Programmes recorded: The morning slot of the FM broadcasting was selected for the study given the popularity of these

programmes across the three FM channels. These timings were as given below:

Radio Mirchi and Radio City: 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Tomato FM: 8 a.m. to 12 noon

Thus the three channels were closely observed and selectively recorded for four hours daily for 105 days, that is, for 1260 hours (105*3*4) in all.

RJs studied:

Radio Mirchi: RJ Manish

Radio City: RJ Sharad

Tomato FM: RJ Sneha and RJ Bolbachchan

Research Findings:

1. The nature of the morning slot programmes:

Tomato FM: This channel's morning programme is called "*Namaskar Mandali*". It selects a current public issue or problem and covers it over all the four hours of that day's programme. An attempt is made to cover all the aspects of the issue by welcoming audience's views as well as calling in some experts, activists and government officers and very rarely some political leader. The difference of the programme is that there are two Radio Jockeys running the programme – one (RJ Sneha) based in the studio and one (RJ Bolbachchan) roaming around the city and providing live updates and details as well as bites from the citizens that are in some way related to the issue under discussion. The purpose of the programme is to bring the problem to the notice of the officers/policy makers as well as to raise the awareness of the general public. The programme reflects a sincere attempt on the part of the RJs to create

awareness and change the public attitude towards the problem or issue.

Radio Mirchi: The morning programme is called '*What's up Kolhapur*'. Unlike the Tomato Fm channel, Mirchi doesn't devote the whole morning slot of four hours just to one issue. A number of current issues or other topics are mixed in the various segments occupying the four hours' morning slot. The focus is much on financial updates of various kinds. Through the interviews and bites, much advertising of the concerned institution or firm is done.

Radio City: The morning programme doesn't have any name. Like the Mirchi channel, a host of issues and topics are covered in the four hour morning programme and the focus of the RJ is on including promos and advertisements of new products, shops and eateries, etc., through his own speech too. The RJ asks interesting question in each programme and motivates the audience to share their views and experiences on the question. The question though inspired by some prominent current news, is focused on something very different, for example, after Cricketer AB de Villiers' early retirement sighting the reason of giving chance to younger talents, RJ Sharad asked 'from which other fields you feel seniors should retire to make place for new people?' (24 May 2018).

2. Themes and topics covered:

The observed data revealed that a few themes and topics are more popular among the RJs and there are some differences between them in their selection of the topics.

Tomato FM: Tomato FM preferred to take up current public problems, especially the local current problems and issues, hygiene

related issues, weather forecast, reading out current news in short, information on government policies and decisions, sports, festivals and guidance on government policies and schemes. Not so prominent issues but mundane problems of the public are also covered, such as the condition of the playgrounds in the city, insufficient water supply, condition of the city bus pick-up shades, etc.

Radio Mirchi: Radio Mirchi also touched the current issues, especially the local issues, which have become glaringly prominent. There is a difference from Tomato FM as issues not in the limelight are rarely touched. The focus is not on covering the issue from all the angles nor is an attempt made to take follow up on the issue/status of the problem over a period of time. The special feature of the RJ is to run a quiz where very simple questions are asked and the listeners call-in to give the answers. Daily horoscope/predictions based on zodiac signs form an important part of the morning slot on Radio Mirchi. Similarly, promos, advertisements of new releases of films, songs, etc., also drew much time. Sports and entertainment news, local news, market updates, educational guidance, environmental issues, social media, weather updates were also popular. The basic nature of the programme remains call-in.

Radio City: On Radio City channel, promos and advertisements, entertainment and sports news, music and social media updates, activities in film and television industries, were as prominent as local current news, information on government decisions and policies, environmental awareness, information on newest technological advances and personal guidance. The programme is more open to opinions of the audience on the

topics covered. A difference of the programme is the daily question the RJ asks the audience and invites the audience to phone-in their views and opinions on it. This is also a call-in programme.

3. Socio-political issues covered: From the above discussion we can see that current problems and local issues form an important part of the content on these programmes. Hence it is crucial to scrutinise the kind of issues that these channels actually handle. Some important issues are discussed below, so as to bring out the similarities and differences between the programmes and to understand the approach and attitude of the RJs of handling the social and political issues. The purpose is not in any way to provide an exclusive summary of all the episodes of these programmes on each of the channels.

Tomato FM: As each programme takes up one issue daily, many social issues are covered ranging from illegal sale of narcotics, cellphone addiction, increasing criminal incidents, Indian education system and the reforms needed, illegal sale of tobacco in the vicinity of schools and colleges, changing nature of parenting, child labour issues, etc. Each of the issue was discussed from various angles and RJ Bolbachchan collected opinions and information from the audience by moving around the town. For example, when the programme was on child labour issue, an actual bite from a child working in brick making was taken (11 June 2018).

These social issues seem selected by the RJs on basis of their experience and knowledge of the town and not prompted only by their being in the limelight at the time or by major events of the day.

Rarely a political event or issue is taken up. No major attempt is made to challenge the existing power structures. The RJs prefer not to enter controversies and to touch political subjects. They may question the government employees and officers, but stepping on politicians' toes is totally avoided. One exception was the question asked by the RJs (12 April 2018) – “Do politicians ignore encroachments with an eye to the vote bank?”. RJ Bolbachchan's style is to end the programme by putting his opinions on the issue under discussion into a sarcastic, ironic or satirical verse. This time he uses a scathingly sarcastic verse sure to hurt the politicians:

खटक्यावर बोट , मत पडल झटक्यात
कुठलीही समस्या सुटली फटक्यात
एक गट्टा मतदानाने सीट आपली पक्की ,
मग बेकायदा असुदेकी , काम चालतंय नक्की
[Press the button hard, the vote is cast
Whatever the problem, it's a thing of the past
My 'purchased mass vote' assures easy
victory
Be it illegal, what's that to me?]
[Our translation]

Commenting on political matters or questioning directly the political powers is carefully avoided normally on the programme, however, this time the target being the whole political class in general and not any party or individual or ideology in particular, the RJ seems to have dared to voice his disapproval thus.

Radio Mirchi: On Radio Mirchi too political issues are steered clear of but a few social issues are taken up, for example, the supreme court's decision regarding live-in relationships, anti-tobacco awareness, plastic ban, care against the spread of Dengue,

Panchaganga river pollution, facilities at Ambabai temple, Shivaji Bridge issue, etc. These are largely prompted by some major government decision or court order or some social event.

Radio City: Usual issues like garbage issue, bridge repairs, problems in the parking places, Rankala lake pollution, and condition of the city roads featured in the programme. Some not so common problems and issues were also handled, such as, the illegal sale of bio waste, vagrant street dog issue, uncivilised behaviour of youths at public gardens, rude behaviour of rickshawalas, the status of the film industry in Kolhapur, etc. The RJ was very conscious about avoiding political controversies. When a caller's answer seemed to take political colours, he deflated the answer completely by using humour. To his question (prompted by AB de de Villiers' early retirement) 'from which other fields you feel seniors should retire to make place for new people?' (24 May 2018), a caller said he wants to see this happening in politics as many old people are still not ready to give a chance to the young people in their party. Immediately the RJ changed the drift by asking light-heartedly if the caller wants to contest any election.

Overall, it seems all the FM channels are open to discuss the social issues more than political issues. The focus is more on dissemination information on major government policies and schemes such as the introduction of E-Way bill (Tomato), plastic ban (Tomato and Mirchi), new changes in Test Cricket by ICC (Mirchi), Jan-Van-Yojana (Radio City), Aadhar card and income tax returns (Mirchi), new RTO rules (Mirchi), etc.

4. Short Interviews and Bites: Most of the channels insert bites and short interviews in

some segments of the morning programme in accordance with the subject that is being discussed. These bites could be of people from entertainment industry, or of subject experts, or government officials and local politicians, etc.

Tomato FM: This channel had bites from government officials and local politicians, subject experts, other RJs and rarely scientists. When the discussion was on increasing criminal incidents, an expert on rehabilitation of criminals was called in. On the programme on water pollution and ETP plant, environment expert's interview was run. Similarly, experts from business, finance, insurance experts were roped in when the programme was on E-way bill and need of insurance. While discussing the Indian education system, another RJ was called. Dr. Anil Kakodkar's bite was used when discussing the life of the scientists and Indian nuclear energy status, and a bite obtained from a Member of the Legislative Assembly was run when discussing the issue of pollution of the river Panchaganga.

Radio Mirchi: This channel frequently provided short interviews and bites of sportspersons, film actors and actresses, special achievers from society (Ladies of Harley), extraordinary people (Lady Basketball referee Sehal Bendake), as well as legal experts, career guidance experts, local politicians (Mayor, Minister), local body officers (Kolhapur Municipal Corporation officers, head of the traffic department, President of Western Maharashtra Temple Trust), editors, other RJs, etc. The proportion of such bites and interviews is more than the phone calls received from the listeners. The RJ seems more interested in understanding the government or officer's perspective than

understanding the public's opinion. Focus was also on creating awareness and providing information or guidance to the listeners. Often giving information is combined with advertising or promoting a specific institute, for example, the expert called for career guidance automatically promotes his own institute.

Radio City: This channel invited Government officers (Sthai Samiti Sabhapati, President of District Heritage Committee, Health officer, officers from the University), social workers, people from different public sectors, celebrities, singers, actors, subject experts, people who have done something exceptional, journalists, etc. The government officials are often called to elaborate new initiatives of the government and a few times to talk and explain some problem. Through journalists and experts, some problem is brought to the notice of the government, for example, to talk on the illegal sale of bio-waste journalist Ramakant Nalawade who had thrown light on the issue for the first time. Regarding the controversial decision taken by local officers to fine the mutton shops Rs. 500/- for every vagrant street dog near their shops, health officer Dilip Patil's bite to explain the decision was used. A difference of the channel was observed in the attempt made to give publicity to the efforts done by a few people to bring some change in the society, for example, a citizen named Subhash Patil (on 29 May 2018) who used 'phete' received in functions and lying unused or wasted to make cloth bags from them and distributed them for free. Jan Van Yojana's officer Vinita Vyas (25 May 2018) provided information on how ladies from forty-one villages are trained to prepare cloth bags which are then used in tiger reserves and bird sanctuaries. Deputy

Registrar V. N. Shinde's interview on attempts of the university to make the campus green using local species was broadcast on 11 June 2018. These bites and interviews reflect attempts to bring to light good social work. It both publicises such attempts and provides encouragement and good example to follow to the listeners.

5. Interaction with the phone-in callers: All three channels welcome call from the listeners. However, there are differences in the way the RJs try to establish a rapport with the callers. There is also a difference between the kind of listeners who call the channels which helps a lot to identify the reach and appeal of the channels.

Tomato FM: The two RJs' focus is less on creating close relationship with the caller than on treating them as responsible citizens and getting their inputs on the topic under discussion. They treat all callers alike. However, the calls are received a long time after the programme is on air. By this time, many segments are over in which the RJs have already discussed the issue to a great length. Experts' interviews or bites are given more time than that given to the phone-in callers (most often 30-40 seconds). However, the RJs are quite attentive to the callers and often take up the caller's opinion or point. The callers are from the city as well as from the adjoining suburban and rural areas. Youth and middle age people make more calls and most of these are men. Callers are chiefly from the middle class, lower- middle class and working class. Educated and not so well educated callers are observed. All these callers are asked for inputs, information, views and opinions on local problems, current issues, social concerns and important government decisions and policies.

Radio Mirchi: The RJ tries to develop a good rapport with the callers and motivates them to talk more by asking further questions. He tries to identify himself with the callers by using similar speech features and lexical terms from that particular dialect. The focus is on creating close personal bond with the caller and making him/her comfortable. The RJ predominantly seeks their personal likes and dislikes on particular sport or match or player or on some personal matter. Rarely are the callers asked to give opinions and views on political or even public issues. In the quiz segment, he extols the callers' attempt at answer even if the answer to very simple question is incorrect. The callers are mainly city dwellers, youths and educated middle class, in fact, largely are students. Nearly every caller is a male.

Radio City: The RJ on the channel is the warmest with the callers, gives more time to the callers and listens very attentively to them. He tries to offer his comments after each call or tries to summarise the call most of the times. He asks interesting questions like the following:

1. "Who would you like to make 'April cool'?"
2. "Which problems do you think should be washed away in this monsoon rain?"
3. "People are too much stressed nowadays. What will you suggest to them so as to unwind from the stress?"

He asks the listeners to phone-in their views and opinions on some issues as well as their personal like and dislikes. The RJ also sends in some surprise gifts to the callers on learning from the call about the callers' birthday or anniversary occasions.

He also likes to motivate the people to bring in change or conserve the environment. On

the International Environment Day, he had asked the listeners to send in snaps of buildings constructed without cutting a problematic tree.

The listeners are from all age groups, from the city as well as from towns like Ichalkaranji and nearby villages. The callers are mostly educated. Women callers are quite frequent on the channel. The callers are students, housewives, workers, even school-going children.

6. Intended Impact: Each channel through the morning programme seemed to be striving for some specific impact and the aim was often different for each channel.

Tomato FM: The main objective seems to be awareness creation amongst the listeners. The RJs draw attention of both the public and the officers towards a particular problem or issue. It often brings to the notice the deficiencies of the local government but also criticises the general insensitivity, negligence of the citizens and their irresponsible behaviour. The aim of the bites of experts also is to influence the mindset of the listeners and to make them more responsible citizens.

Radio Mirchi: The RJ seems more keen to convey the government point of view on the selected issues and less inclined to listen to the public's opinions on them. Very few attempts are made to influence the listeners' thinking on social and political issues (barring a few occasions like the programme on World NoTobacco day, Environment Day, etc). The focus is more on understanding the personal likes of the listeners and on developing close relations with the callers.

Radio City: Views of both – the public and the officers – are given space. Equal efforts

seem to be made to understand the view points of both the sides. Focus is on awareness creation, motivating the listeners towards good social deeds and promoting positive examples of such deeds.

Conclusion:

Each channel even if following a similar pattern of the morning programme and similar components like phone-in calls, expert bites and interviews, interesting question and quiz format, has acquired a loyal listener base by using some strategies which differentiate them from each other. The RJs seem quite clear about the targeted audience and their expectations.

RJ Bolbachchan and RJ Sneha are more concerned with creating social awareness. RJ Manish and RJ Sharad of Radio Mirchi and Radio City respectively, are more interested in establishing close bonds with the audience. This is also reflected in the use made of social media by the three channels. RJ Sharad and RJ Manish ask the listeners to follow them on twitter, facebook and also to send them feedback on social media. These requests are made at the end of almost every segment. No such request is made by RJs on Tomato FM their exclusive feedback mode is the telephone. Similarly for getting information, actual observations and fieldwork is preferred by Tomato FM. On the other hand, RJ Manish calls himself the “search engine of Kolhapur” and locates the social media trends to talk on in the programme.

The nature of each programme is also reflected in their theme song and tag line:

Tomato FM:

प्रॉब्लेम तुमचा असो काही , प्लॅटफॉर्म हा कामी येई

नमस्कार ss नमस्कार मंडळी .

बिनधास्त बोलायचं टेन्शन नाय , इथं कुणाचं प्रेशर नाय

नमस्कार ss नमस्कार मंडळी .

[Whatever your problem, this platform can help

Speak up bravely without tension, here there is no burden

Hello ... hello folks!)

[Our Translation]

Radio City:

भावा ...

शरदच्या शो मध्ये वाजव ढोल ,

पण खरं मुद्याचं बोल, मुद्याचं बोल

[Bro...

In Sharad’s show, drum up your point

just see that it is relevant]

[Our Translation]

Radio Mirchi’s morning programme doesn’t have a theme song. However, the title – “What’s up Kolhapur?” and the tag line “RJ Manish – the search engine of Kolhapur” give a clear idea of what to expect in the programme.

All the channels make use of entertainment, music and humour to a large extent, yet want to be socially relevant. To make the programme more socially relevant, Tomato FM’s RJ Bolbachchan uses the strategy of moving around the city and collecting information and bites from citizens. The other two channels- Radio Mirchi and Radio City just adopt call-in nature for the programmes. The extent to which they go on this track of social relevance is of course different. The

most popular (and the easiest) strategy is to gather and discuss listeners' opinions on social concerns. All the channels employ it. Another strategy is to avoid questions even with slightest political colour and steer clear of controversies. When some political issue is raised unexpectedly, they try to change the topic or to deflate the discussion and bring it quickly to the safe grounds. One more way to sound socially relevant is to question the local authorities and government officers. Mild criticism of local bodies and policies is frequent in the morning shows, however, there is almost no cross-questioning when the officer or the politician is actually face-to-face or on the call. A shared feature is the lack

of any effort to question or demand answers from those in power and to challenge the status quo. The RJs just listen to the officers and politicians when they explain the government's point of view or when they make some claims but never cross-question them or challenge them to answer the listener's questions. In fact, the listeners never get to question directly the officers/policy makers and never even get the answers indirectly through the RJs too.

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