

Chapter 9

With a Little Help from My Friends: The Irish Radio Industry's Strategic Appropriation of Facebook for Commercial Growth

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ABSTRACT

Ireland has faced significant economic hardship since 2008, with the Irish radio industry suffering as advertising revenues evaporated. The difficult economic circumstances have forced radio station management to devise new and cost effective ways of generating much-needed income. The answer has come in the form of Facebook, the leading Social Network Site (SNS) in Ireland. Using Ireland as a case study, this chapter looks at how radio station management are utilising the social network strategically in a bid to enhance their audiences and revenues. Radio station management consider Facebook to be an invaluable promotional tool which is very easily integrated into radio programming and gives radio a digital online presence, reaching far greater audiences than possible through broadcasting. Some radio stations are showing ambition and are realising the marketing potential that Facebook and other SNSs hold. However, key changes in practice, technology and human resources are required to maximise the profit-making possibilities offered by Facebook.

INTRODUCTION

The Irish radio industry has undergone significant change in recent years due to the challenges posed by the economic recession and the pervasion of digital media. Irish radio stations are fighting for the attentions of modern audiences who have high demands placed on their time and attention from digital and social media. Through smartphones, individuals have the entire globe at their fingertips and this presents threats and opportunities to an older medium like radio.

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With a Little Help from My Friends

This chapter explores how the radio industry in Ireland is incorporating the Facebook phenomenon into the traditional broadcasting business model. This ongoing development has involved modifications to radio production practices, an alteration of technology needs and additional human resources in the form of dedicated digital media managers. Management at some radio stations, particularly the youth oriented stations, are enjoying some success in using their significant social media followings to promote their commercial partners and gain revenue from these services. This chapter demonstrates that a dedicated and aggressive social media strategy can have a positive influence on audience ratings. Furthermore, the stations that are having the most success in exploiting social media for commercial gain are primarily the youth-targeted radio stations.

The main aim of this chapter is to assess the commercial impact of SNSs on Irish radio stations. First, it seeks to assess the importance of Facebook and other SNSs as conduits for communication between radio audiences and radio stations. Second, it attempts to assess how radio stations are using Facebook and other SNSs to engage with their audiences. The third objective is to gauge how SNSs are being used by radio stations for commercial gain. The hypotheses are two fold: first, that radio audiences and radio producers are spending increasing amounts of time interacting with one another on SNSs; and second that radio station management are successfully using SNSs to strategically build a strong online audience which can be sold to advertisers and sponsors, thus creating a new revenue stream to help grow their businesses.

BACKGROUND

The radio industry in Ireland has faced huge challenges since 2008 due to the economic recession that has gripped the country. The Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI) is an organisation representing the interests of the thirty-four independently-owned commercial radio stations in Ireland. In 2013 IBI Chairman John Purcell revealed that revenue within the radio industry was down some forty percent compared to pre-recession figures (Purcell, 2013, np). It was in the context of these desperate economic times, that innovative minds within the industry spotted the potential to be gained from appropriating SNSs into the radio broadcaster's remit and set about exploiting the power of digital media for economic gain.

Independent commercial radio stations in Ireland are privately owned and operated enterprises which rely on commercial revenue via advertising, sponsorship and investment income. Although the four public service radio stations that are owned and operated by *Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)* are largely supported by the television licence fee, independent stations do not receive any direct pecuniary input from the government and thus have been under severe financial pressure. *RTÉ's* radio stations meanwhile have enjoyed the safety net provided by public funding, coupled with advertising and sponsorship revenue from the commercial market where they compete with independent radio stations.

Despite the initial threat to radio posed by digital media – namely that audiences would switch off radio in favour of online podcasts and digital streaming services – radio continues to survive, if not thrive, thanks to the emergence of one of the most pervasive of digital media, SNSs (colloquially known as social media). This is due to a number of factors. First, radio is a highly flexible and adaptable medium capable of adjusting to changes in the mediascape. Moreover, it faced down the arrival of television in the 1960s and the internet in the late 1990s, both of which, many predicted, would signal the end of

With a Little Help from My Friends

radio. Instead of posing a threat to radio, SNSs have instead offered a significant opportunity, which the Irish radio industry has largely taken advantage of. This convergence of an old medium (radio) with new media (SNSs) is a significant phenomenon and has helped radio maintain its viability.

Despite having battled through over eight years of economic recession the industry has maintained its high standards of output and Irish audiences continue to listen in strong numbers with 83% of the adult population tuning in to live radio each day (Ipsos/MRBI, 2015a).

Social Network Sites (SNSs), also known as ‘social networking media’ or ‘social media’ are websites and web applications that allow users to connect and network with virtually millions of people around the world while also allowing individuals to participate in smaller networks of friends and online communities (Morris 2010, p. 13). SNSs continue to grow exponentially in popularity representing, “one of the fastest uptakes of a communication technology since the web was developed in the early 1990s” (Stefanone et al., 2010, p. 511). This makes the study of SNSs timely and relevant in modern media and communications academic studies.

Ellison et al. (2007) write, “Social network sites (SNSs)...allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others” (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1). This offers a clear and succinct description of what SNSs do, however one of the most comprehensive attempts to define and outline the phenomenon of SNSs was made by Boyd and Ellison (2007) who define them as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

It is important to note that authors Boyd & Ellison (2007) make a key distinction between ‘Social Network Sites’ and ‘Social Networking Sites’, preferring the former to describe the computer-mediated movement in question, despite the latter existing commonly in public discourse and both terms being used interchangeably. The authors employ ‘network’ over ‘networking’ for two reasons:

... emphasis and scope. ‘Networking’ emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

This is supported by evidence that suggests that SNSs are used to support existing offline friendships or connections rather than make new ones (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007; Dunbar, 2012). Dunbar argues that one of the reasons SNSs have flourished can be directly attributed to “the fact that they allow us to keep up with friends without seeing them face-to-face” (Dunbar, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, the fact that SNS users are not seeking out new connections but rather interacting with their existing network of contacts renders ‘social network sites’ a more apt term; this despite the prolific use of ‘social networking sites’ as a term in modern nomenclature. The author will thus adopt the term ‘social network site’ henceforth except when quoting other authors directly.

With a Little Help from My Friends

Methodology

Using the Irish radio industry as a case study, this research is based on qualitative interviews with N=10 radio industry professionals across four different radio stations. The radio stations were chosen for the diversity in programming and the geographic spread of the stations' broadcast areas. *RTÉ 2fm*, one of the four radio stations owned and operated by the state broadcaster RTÉ, broadcasts nationally to the 20-44 year old demographic. *Beat 102103* is one of three regional radio stations in Ireland targeting youth audiences and broadcasts to 15-35 year olds in the south-east of the country. *Spin South West* is also a regional station, which broadcasts to listeners aged 15-35 years in the south-west of Ireland. *Radio Kerry* is a regional radio station broadcasting to all adults in county Kerry, a rural county in the southwest corner of Ireland. Interviews were conducted during the month of July 2013.

Irish radio stations are engaging with audiences via a number of SNSs, and while this chapter discusses how Irish radio stations are using SNSs generally to promote growth, the research has focused on the use of Facebook primarily. Twitter is also commonly used by Irish radio stations but from an early stage the author decided to focus on Facebook for a number of reasons. First, preliminary research showed that Facebook offered the audience a much deeper participatory experience than Twitter. Second, the same preliminary research also showed that radio stations had significantly more audience members engaging through Facebook than Twitter. Third, Facebook is the most popular social network in Ireland with 59% of the population owning a Facebook account according to Ipsos/MRBI (2015b).

This research employed the inductive strategy of using newly sourced empirical data to develop original theory. This concept, known as grounded theory is the "discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 2). Therefore the findings were used to inform the research and develop sound theory.

A multi-method approach was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for this research. The use of multiple methods allowed for a rich collection of information to be gathered and for the triangulation of data, which strengthened the veracity of the findings. The main source of qualitative data comprised of semi-structured interviews with industry professionals at the four Irish radio stations listed above. The working practices of the radio presenters and producers of three programmes were recorded by use of direct observation during the programmes' broadcast, namely *Kerry Today* on *Radio Kerry*, *Beat Breakfast* in *Beat 102103* and *Tubridy* on *RTÉ 2fm*. Finally, the content and activity on the Facebook pages of the stations in question were recorded and analysed. This textual analysis involved the recording by method of screen grabs, the entire content contained on one day of Facebook page posts from three of the radio stations involved (*Beat 102103*, *RTÉ 2fm* and *Radio Kerry*). This was repeated on four separate dates between July 2013 and August 2014. This material was then analysed and detailed records of the content made including types of posts, response from audience and number of likes, shares and comments made by the audience.

Three members of the *Tubridy* programme were interviewed: the programme presenter, the Producer-in-Charge and one of the researchers. Two staff members from *Beat 102103* were interviewed, the *Beat Breakfast* Producer and the station's Chief Executive Officer. At *Spin South West* the Assistant CEO/Programme Controller was interviewed. Four *Radio Kerry* staff members were interviewed: the General Manager, the Sales & Marketing Manager, the News/Current Affairs Editor and the Digital Media Manager. To protect the anonymities of those involved all names have been withheld and interviewees

With a Little Help from My Friends

will be referred to by their respective job titles. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analysed to identify consistent themes in their responses. These were then compared horizontally against field notes and observations to develop critical themes.

SOCIAL NETWORK SITES: A STRATEGY OF INTERACTION

This chapter investigates the use of Facebook as a conduit for communication and interaction between radio stations and their audiences. In order for this relationship to exist interaction is required from both parties. For their part audiences need to be active, meaning they need to visit radio station Facebook pages and engage with content through emoji reactions, shares or comments. Radio producers need to make efforts to draw the audience in by regularly posting stimulating or engaging material that will appeal to their target cohort.

Active/Interactive Audience

Before looking at how radio stations are using Facebook as a marketing tool, it is important to first understand how the radio audience comes to use Facebook to interact with radio stations. Recent research shows that the Irish public are using Facebook regularly and are spending significant portions of their days on the popular social medium (Ipsos/MRBI, 2015b). Furthermore, radio producers have noticed this shift and have established a presence for their brand on Facebook and are encouraging interaction by posting content that appeals to the audience's desire for information and entertainment (McMahon 2015).

McMahon's (2015) study found that audiences visit radio station Facebook pages seeking three main types of content

1. Additional information,
2. Entertainment, and
3. Opportunities to learn about and enter competitions.

These findings are in line with those of other authors analysing the motivations of Facebook use particularly the motives of seeking out information and entertainment (Park et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008). McMahon (2015) found that audiences also want to exercise their agency by interacting and participating in the on-air and online discussions.

The evidence from the current research proposes that radio audiences operate in a cycle of broadcast and social media consumption which, if nurtured and encouraged, contributes to the building of their loyalty (Enli & Ihlebaek, 2011; McMahon, 2015). The cycle operates as follows. At the outset

1. The audience are regular listeners of a radio programme.
2. The audience visits the programme's Facebook page for an enhanced experience with more information, a wider variety of entertainment and the opportunities to enter competitions and win prizes.
3. At the third and final stage, the audience remains on the radio station's Facebook page for the opportunity to participate and contribute to the online discussions and debates.

With a Little Help from My Friends

As a result of an informative, entertaining and perhaps rewarding experience on-air and online, the audience returns to consume the on-air and online content again in the future, thus completing the cycle. As with any media product, the challenge for producers is to consistently stimulate and engage the audience, which is achieved by continually delivering quality content that is fresh and interesting, and that satiates the audience's wants.

Enli & Ihlebaek (2011) argue that audiences who are afforded the opportunities to participate in television programmes experience deeper engagement, which builds the audience's loyalty. This is precisely what the managers and producers at the commercial radio stations stated was their motivation behind using Facebook: to engage audiences in the expectation that they will return as radio listeners. Aside from the financial return achieved through improved ratings there are other ancillary benefits also. According to Chaputula et al. (2013), mass media organisations that use SNSs benefit not only through increased audiences but also constructive feedback that helps the organisation improve its product.

Social Media Strategies

The present research found that social media fits into an overall audience and revenue growth strategy for some of the radio stations involved. This strategy is made up of a four-step process which is orchestrated by radio station management and executed by presenters and producers. The process runs as follows: radio stations interact with their audience via Facebook to improve their online presence, which will create more opportunities. To promote the station, and to help increase audience interaction, which will ultimately increase listenership and create new revenue streams. Each step of the process is now discussed in detail.

Step 1: Increase Online Presence.

Digital media are a mainstay of modern society, becoming more and more prevalent as technology allows increased connectivity through mobile communication devices such as smartphones and tablets. "In the present-day radio landscape", argue Stark and Weichselbaum (2013), "one might not be wrong in declaring that a traditional radio station without a website of its own comes close to resembling radio without sound" (p. 186). This is an astute metaphor but could now be updated to read that a traditional radio station without a website and strong social media presence of its own comes close to resembling radio without sound. SNSs are the latest software to open new and exciting communication and connection opportunities, and the radio industry in Ireland has learned that it must have a strong online presence if it is to remain in the audience's daily consciousness. There are a host of new opportunities open to radio producers through simple-to-use online tools such as Facebook, which can enhance the overall entertainment package offered to the radio audience.

The CEO of *Spin South West* states that people are increasingly using Facebook to communicate and especially those within the station's key demographic, the 15-34 year old cohort. As CEO, she understands the importance of her station being present on Facebook, "we have to be there because that's where our listeners are". She further points out that being on Facebook is similar to her station being present at nightclubs and other places where young people gather in large numbers; it allows the station to get noticed and promotes the station's brand.

With a Little Help from My Friends

Beat 102103's CEO also posits that an online presence is absolutely essential "because we are a youth station and social media is so huge for our audience". She stresses the importance of all presenters and deejays being connected to the audience via social media, asserting that if the station is doing something on-air they have to be supplementing that item online, "we have to make sure it's part of what we do". Radio stations like *Beat 102103* have to embrace social media more than other companies, she believes, because the station has to be where their audience is and *Beat*'s audience is on Facebook: "they're all engaging with Facebook so it's really important that we're there" asserts the CEO.

Although *Radio Kerry*'s target audience is an older demographic than that of *Beat 102103* and *Spin South West*, the General Manager (GM) understands that her station needs to be online and active on Facebook if the station wants to reach listeners. "It's part of our listeners' world and if we want to engage with them then we have to be in their space, we have to be in their zone" according to the GM. She believes that any radio station would be foolish to ignore Facebook such is its prevalence in modern society and the strength of its relationship with modern audiences. Facebook is therefore a very useful way for stations to have a presence where audiences are spending increasing amounts of time.

The Producer-in-Charge of the *Tubridy* programme on *RTÉ 2fm* values the opportunities offered by Facebook as it provides a more vibrant, interactive and meaningful online presence compared to a radio station's website. He acknowledges that prior to the arrival of social media, a website was a radio station's only online platform and he believes the traditional website is becoming somewhat redundant today as a result of SNSs. According to the researcher on the *Tubridy* programme, having an online presence is also very useful for engaging those who cannot listen to the radio programme when it airs for whatever reason, but still want to follow the show and be involved. The *Tubridy* researcher goes on to explain how SNSs also allow her and her team to bring visual components into the radio show, thus enhancing the experience for the audience. In the case of the *Tubridy* programme, this usually comes in the form of photos or images often of the presenter in the office, in studio, with studio guests, or on an outside broadcast, thus giving the audience greater familiarity with the programme.

The presenter of the *Tubridy* programme agrees and certainly sees an advantage of being able to "bring a visual element to an aural product" by posting photos, videos and other audio visual multi-media on their Facebook page. Through such material, the production team are able to give listeners a better understanding of what the presenter is talking about on the programme or what the person he is interviewing actually looks like.

The increased online presence afforded by Facebook allows radio stations to reach new audiences and helps make the radio product more attractive. This raises the next function of Facebook for radio stations: its value as an effective promotional tool.

Step 2: Promote the Station.

According to marketing executives at *Beat 102103*, *Spin South West*, *RTÉ 2fm* and *Radio Kerry*, Facebook is an extremely useful tool for promoting the station online. The strategy being that Facebook content could drive online audiences back to the on-air product or the station's website, both of which are direct revenue generators for the stations.

Initially when radio stations started using SNSs in 2008, Facebook had imposed severe restrictions on radio stations running sponsored promotions on their Facebook pages. Recently however Facebook has softened their stance and at the time of writing (December 2015) management at *Beat 102103* had started selling integrated Facebook exposure as part of enhanced marketing packages for their clients.

With a Little Help from My Friends

This is a significant development in terms of the opportunities it presents for radio stations to exploit their massive followings on Facebook. In December 2015, *Beat 102103* had more than 470,000 followers on Facebook and growing by the day. When compared to the number of daily on-air listeners, which stood at 95,000 at the time of writing, it is clear just how much more pervasive Facebook can be, as five times more people are following *Beat 102103* on Facebook than are listening to the station's radio broadcasts (Ipsos/MRBI 2015a). This is further evidence that SNSs have significant potential as digital marketing tools, not only for radio stations, but for all commercial enterprises.

According to *Beat 102103*'s CEO, Facebook is an extension of the station's brand. "If we do something on-air, we always want to see how we can make more people aware of it". The CEO hopes that Facebook posts can be shared throughout their followers' social networks and make others aware of what *Beat 102103* do, thus courting new listeners to the station.

Building brand recognition was identified as an important factor by management at *Radio Kerry* and *Beat 102103*. Branding can be reinforced by a strong Facebook presence. A radio station's brand can be pushed to the forefront of people's minds if the content is engaging and achieves a strong reach via Facebook. A popular post that goes viral could result in a listener identifying *Radio Kerry* or *Beat 102103* as their preferred station at the time a listenership survey is being conducted, thus boosting the stations listenership figures.

Spin South West's Facebook page is highly reflective of their brand and is used very much as a promotional tool to encourage people to listen to the radio station or to visit the website. For example, if the station is running a competition to win concert tickets, they will always require that the audience listen on-air for instructions on how to enter. This allows the station to encourage more listeners to sample the station's on-air product and perhaps become regular listeners.

Step 3: Increase Interaction.

The third step of the social media strategy employed by radio stations is to generate increased interaction between the audience and station producers on Facebook. Modern Irish radio listeners want to engage in two-way communication with media producers and are demanding increased agency over the radio programmes they consume (McMahon 2013). This empowers the audience and makes them media users, rather than passive media consumers. Facebook fills this need by offering the audience increased interaction opportunities including the prospect of contributing content themselves.

Until only recently text messaging was the preferred method of audience interaction but Facebook offers a much more diverse range of options for the audience to communicate with a radio station. This includes audience members sharing photos, videos, images and links with a radio station and its followers. *Spin South West*'s CEO sees Facebook as,

... a way to connect with our audience, it's a way to gauge what our audience is doing, thinking about and how they feel about issues, music and what's going on in their lives and it's a direct communication with them.

Radio Kerry's News Editor believes that Facebook offers the audience more communication options and helps the producer to "get conversation from listeners" especially those who have outgrown the other forms of audience interaction such as telephone, text or email, or those who simply find it a less formal method of communication. *Radio Kerry* management feel that the more communication channels open to the audience, the better.

With a Little Help from My Friends

The *Tubridy* team feel that Facebook is an excellent resource that provides a wealth of information about the audience including their opinions on matters, what their likes and dislikes are, and what they want to talk about, which in turn informs the team as to what they should be covering in the show.

The Head of Music at *Beat 102013* argues that Facebook is another way of “attracting interaction from the audience” and agrees that the social network is a useful tool to gauge how people feel about what is going on. The creation of content for the *Beat Breakfast* programme forms an important part of the interactivity between station and audience. Facebook provides the audience with a platform to contribute that content, be that written text, an image, a video, a photo or any multi-media content they may want to share with others. According to Enli & Ihlebaek (2013), when an individual’s material or contribution is included in a programme, they feel involved and this further engages them to continue to follow the programme to find out how they have influenced the outcome of the show, thus building loyalty. Engagement with audiences through Facebook is therefore viewed by industry management as part of a cohesive strategy to build listenership.

Step 4: Increase Listenership.

All independent radio stations in Ireland are commercial organisations and as such are focused on monetary profit. Traditionally this is achieved by growing a station’s audience, which in turn allows a station to increase advertising and sponsorship rates. Therefore any tool or strategy that can increase listenership is naturally likely to be exploited for maximum return. From this perspective, radio stations see Facebook as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Spin South West has been consistently growing its Facebook audience and has one of the highest followings of all the radio stations in Ireland. The station has also experienced steady growth in listeners over the last number of years. The CEO uses Facebook because it makes people aware of the *Spin South West* brand in the hope that it may help recruit new listeners and maintain existing ones. However, she is hesitant to draw a direct correlation between the number of Facebook followers and listener ratings without evidence to support it and believes there are other factors at play. She describes Facebook as “a really important tool to drive people to listen to the radio and essentially sell advertising, because that’s the basis of commercial radio”.

The CEO of *Beat 102103* believes there is a correlation between Facebook engagement and listener numbers. She encourages the station’s staff to use Facebook to engage the audience and “drive them back to listen on-air”. She believes that Facebook has helped the station grow its listenership because of the staff’s effective use of the social network. She points out that the station has seen consistent audience growth since 2004 and argues that the station would have become stagnant and probably lost listeners had they not embraced technology, including SNSs, from an early stage. Furthermore because of the rapid rate at which technology is evolving, she believes that some radio stations will fall behind if they choose not to keep up with technology and embrace SNSs. The CEO continues by stating that *Beat 102103* is growing its listener base primarily because the management are listening to what the audience want to hear on the radio; and the station is using Facebook to gather this information.

In addition to the assertion that Facebook helps grow listener ratings *Beat 102103*’s CEO has also realised the marketing potential of the popular SNS. By 2015 *Beat 102103* had employed three dedicated social media managers while the marketing department had not only incorporated social media exposure into sales and marketing strategies for clients on a larger scale but also developed dedicated social media sponsorship packages. These new sponsorship packages involve the integration of the client’s

With a Little Help from My Friends

branding and key messages into all social media output and on-air programming. The management of *Beat 102103* foresees significant financial opportunities in social media marketing due to the ability of SNSs to reach beyond the relatively limited on-air audience and communicate using a wider variety of multi-media messages. With the *Beat 102103* Facebook page boasting nearly half a million followers in late 2015, the station has the opportunity to reach one in nine adults in Ireland.

Radio Kerry's Marketing and Events Manager believes that a station has to reach out beyond the regular listeners if it wants to expand its listenership. If a station is promoting itself on the radio only, then the station is promoting itself to people who are already listening. The station is not reaching the non-listeners, and this is the advantage of using Facebook. It presents the opportunity to promote the station to those who might not necessarily be listening on a regular basis, but who are on Facebook and may come across a station's posts. Facebook offers the opportunity to be spontaneous and engaging to grab a user's attention and give them a reason to listen to *Radio Kerry*. Facebook therefore offers radio stations the opportunity to reach out to potential new listeners and draw them in.

Radio Kerry management are hesitant to state for certain that Facebook helps the station gain listeners due to the lack of evidence to support the theory but they do believe that Facebook is of benefit to the station because it is proven to engage Kerry people. Even if it only helps to maintain the existing audience, *Radio Kerry* management believe using Facebook is beneficial. The station's GM recognises that Facebook is more often used by younger audiences. However, she feels that connecting with younger audiences today will help establish their loyalty for the future when their tastes mature and *Radio Kerry's* output is more inline with their preferred programming.

The *Radio Kerry* GM reiterates the point made above that a radio station's bottom line is "to keep your listenership up, so the more ways you can tell people about it and engage with them the better". The argument is that Facebook helps attract potential new listeners who would not normally interact with the station via traditional methods or be aware of what is available on-air. Therefore, in terms of promotion, the GM believes that by

... teasing people, hooking them, be it towards a programme piece or a competition, Facebook can be very useful for informing people of what is on-air and hopefully appealing to their tastes or interests.

The Producer-in-Charge of *RTE 2fm's Tubridy* programme does not see increasing listenership as a primary function of Facebook for his programme. Nor does he believe that the social network can help increase listenership because there is no evidence to suggest it does. The *Tubridy* presenter agrees with his Producer-in-Charge declaring, "No, is the simple answer, I don't think it's actually going to garner more listeners". He believes the only way to gain more listeners is by having a quality radio show, not by having a good Facebook page. He argues that producers should "focus on the core product of broadcasting" as a means of increasing listeners.

The *RTÉ 2fm* staff members interviewed therefore have opposing viewpoints to their counterparts working in commercial radio and are reticent to draw any positive correlation between Facebook engagement and listenership figures. This may be due to the fact that *RTÉ* relies less on audience ratings to support its business model due to the public funding it receives through the television licence fee. This allows *RTÉ 2fm* to be less reliant on advertising revenue compared to commercial radio stations. It is clear from the interviews that Facebook and other SNSs hold significant present and future value for independent commercial radio stations but limited value for the state owned *RTÉ 2fm*.

With a Little Help from My Friends

Irish radio stations were found to be incorporating social media strategies into their wider marketing plans. The youth targeted radio station *Beat 102103* is the most dynamic and forward-thinking of the stations studied and is leading the way in terms of employing SNSs for maximum benefit. Further research is required to determine whether a direct correlation exists between increased Facebook interactions and increased radio listenership.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Changes in Radio Production

Along with the addition of Facebook to the radio producer's remit, there have also been a number of changes to how radio is produced. Producers now have to incorporate social media management into their daily routine meaning new practices have been incorporated, new technology has been introduced, and in some cases ancillary human resources have been added.

In radio production, the terms producer and presenter are often used interchangeably. In most instances a programme presenter is also the programme producer or co-producer. In some cases, when the budget allows, the roles of presenter and producer are separated and other positions may even exist in the team. Most often however, the presenter is also the producer and thus the term producer will be used hereafter to denote the role of the person primarily responsible for the programme's output.

Practice

Radio producers have had to alter their production practices to incorporate social media into their programmes. Producers have to constantly manage the station/programme Facebook page to ensure they are making the most of the technology. Because audiences interact with Facebook pages outside of programme transmission hours, management of social media content must continue before, during, and after each programme is aired.

Before a programme begins, the producer routinely checks the station Facebook page to review the posts other producers have published recently. This allows the producer to avoid duplication of information and bombardment of the audience with too many posts. The producer can also get an idea of what has proved popular or unpopular and generally get a feel for what is happening online at that time. Producers also regularly monitor their competitors' Facebook pages to see what content other stations are posting. The producer will often publish a post at the start of his/her programme to signal that a new programme is starting, to preview what is coming up on that programme and to encourage participation from the audience.

The *Beat Breakfast* producer will often post a *meme* (a humorous image with accompanying text) to incite a reaction from the audience. Common subject matter relates to being fatigued in the morning or a commentary regarding the general excitement felt on Fridays. These sorts of posts instil feelings of being part of an affective community of people who are all experiencing a similar feeling or emotion and thus makes the audience more engaged with the Facebook page and the radio station. Such content was found to be particularly popular amongst Facebook users as such posts would regularly receive high counts of emoji reactions, comments and shares.

With a Little Help from My Friends

A radio producer must manage a number of tasks that relate specifically to audience participation. During the programme's transmission the producer regularly monitors Facebook on one of the studio's computer monitors. S/he keeps the Facebook page open at all times to pick up on useful comments from the audience, react if something is proving popular and moderate any inappropriate comments that may be posted by the public.

The producer must also manage the flow of contributions from other communication channels including phone, text message, email and any other SNSs the station may use. These demands relate solely to the management of audience participation which is only a part of the producers remit. The producer must also continue to provide a quality on-air product to the audience, producing and presenting continuous content over several hours of broadcast. The remit of a radio producer is therefore ever-expanding due to the demands placed by SNSs. Producers often require further technological tools to carry out their duties effectively in the age of digital audience participation.

Technology

Radio stations and their producers have also had to make technological changes to adapt to social media use. Because Facebook is accessible via virtually any web browser, radio stations have not required upgrades in software or hardware to access and manage their Facebook accounts. Some producers however, have recognised that additional technology has been required in-studio to manage Facebook and other SNSs.

The most common in-studio set-up includes two computer monitors for the producer with one dedicated almost exclusively to the broadcast management system: the software used to arrange and play-out audio including ad breaks, music, sound clips, et cetera. The other computer monitor is used for researching and browsing the internet, monitoring and managing SNSs, sending/receiving email, managing incoming text messages, editing and reading word documents, communicating with colleagues via the intranet, and any other computer-based tasks the producer may need to carry out during the course of their broadcast.

This has put a great deal of pressure on the two monitors available to the producer and has led in some instances to the addition of a laptop into the studio. Such is the case at *Radio Kerry* where, during the *Kerry Today* programme, the producer now uses a laptop dedicated to Facebook and Twitter. This extra piece of hardware – only introduced into the studio in the spring of 2013 – allows the producer to constantly monitor the two social media accounts, publish posts, make comments, and read comments made by the audience.

Additional computers or monitors may not always be required, however, and some producers are finding that in fact mobile communication devices such as smartphones can be used to very good effect to manage social media. For example the *Beat Breakfast* Producer manages the station's Twitter account via his company-issued smartphone. Using a smartphone allows him more flexibility to supervise various communication channels without having a supplementary computer in studio. This is an example of a radio producer being adaptable and negates the need for additional computers, which can be costly and occupy valuable space in-studio.

In an effort to provide the audience with a deeper media experience beyond the aural radio broadcast, producers are increasingly using their mobile devices to capture images and videos and then post this content on Facebook. These images and videos provide in-studio and behind-the-scenes access to reveal to the audience more about the producers/presenters and their personalities.

With a Little Help from My Friends

Smartphones are also highly useful for producers when working on outside broadcasts. In such scenarios, producers are able to post images and other content relating to the outside broadcast in real time and offer an insight for the audience member who may be listening on-air or following online via social media.

Human Resources

The expansion of social media use by radio stations has saddled production personnel with added responsibilities and duties. Producers interviewed expressed their concerns at the time and energy required to manage numerous SNSs effectively. However they agree that it is a burden that must be adopted in order to maintain a competitive edge. This added workload, coupled with staff cut-backs during the economic downturn, has put considerable pressure on producers to do more with fewer resources.

Station managers appreciate the importance of Facebook but also accept that the SNS is a time-consuming and thus costly tool to manage. This raises an important dilemma for radio professionals: considering the value of Facebook, should stations be hiring dedicated social media managers to get the most out of SNSs or let existing staff manage it as best they can?

In some circumstances, notably *Spin South West*, *Beat 102103* and *Radio Kerry*, management have come to the realisation that bespoke staffing resources are required in order to maximise the potential of SNSs and vie with the competition in this fast-changing industry. These stations have hired dedicated social media/digital content managers, who are trained and experienced in their field, and are finding this to be a sound investment. Conversely at *RTÉ*, such a move has not been prioritised and the *Tubridy* programme's researcher has all social media responsibilities as part of her remit, despite the fact that her skills and training are in radio production. By hiring a social media/digital content manager, not only are the producers relieved of much of the burden of social media management, but those stations are now able to have a staff member apply dedicated time, energy and specific skills into improving the online content for the station. This represents a significant investment for struggling radio stations, but clearly station management are coming to appreciate that such recruitment and investment are necessary steps forward.

Spin South West's CEO affirms that she "could not afford not to employ someone" to manage the online content particularly social media as it is so important to the station's output and identity. At the time of interview (June 2013) *Spin South West* had just recently hired a Digital Media Manager. The individual is a university graduate with a master's degree in digital communications and is charged with driving content through SNSs and maintaining a vibrant and cutting edge presence across all of *Spin South West's* online platforms.

This investment of scarce resources reiterates *Spin's South West* management's appreciation of the significance Facebook and other social media can have as a promotional tool for the station. The station's CEO sees digital marketing as the future and explains that advertising expenditure on digital media is growing significantly and is now higher in Ireland than on-air advertising. The management's strategy is to sell more website advertising because their research shows that 50% of *Spin South West's* web traffic comes from Facebook.

The management at *Radio Kerry* feel that SNSs along with other online digital platforms such as the station's website is important enough that someone should be employed full-time to manage it but agrees that it comes down to resources. The main issue is that Facebook does not actually make any money directly for the station so it is difficult to justify the expenditure. At the time of interview (June 2013) *Radio*

With a Little Help from My Friends

Kerry had only recently hired an online content editor on a trial basis to assess the effectiveness of such an appointment. The Online Content Editor's role includes managing web content, uploading podcasts, running SNS analytics and managing social media content in conjunction with programme producers and marketing staff. The trial was a success and the editor continues to work at *Radio Kerry* in 2015, thus clearly justifying the cost of his salary through the effectiveness of his digital media management.

A further interview in 2015 with the *Beat 102103* CEO revealed that the station now has three dedicated Social Media Managers. In addition the marketing department was not only incorporating social media exposure into sales and marketing strategies for clients on a larger scale but also selling dedicated social media marketing packages to its clients. This represents another significant step forwards in terms of the use of SNSs for marketing purposes and is an example of *Beat 102103*'s innovation and aggressive strategy to exploit commercial opportunities.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As there is a clear dearth of research into the use of SNSs by radio stations – not only in Ireland but globally – more research is needed in this area. Several industry professionals interviewed as part of this project argue that an effective and sustained social media strategy can have a positive affect on listener ratings. Although there are some signs that suggest this may be true, further in-depth research on a much wider scale and over a sustained period of time is required to advance this argument. Expanding this research to examine the use of SNSs in the UK radio industry and other larger European media markets would also be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

The appropriation of SNSs by the radio industry in Ireland continues to expand rapidly with each station seeking an edge over the competition. These are changing times for radio as a medium that has changed relatively little over the last number of decades is quickly adapting to the digital age. As SNSs continue to become more pervasive, it is the responsibility of marketers to look at the opportunities rather than the threats provided by these digital phenomena. In some instances the commercial opportunities and potential presented by Facebook have been realised and some radio stations have formulated social media strategies to harness the power of the social network.

Radio has been able to converge almost seamlessly with SNSs because it is such a flexible and adaptable medium that has embraced the opportunities available. Radio stations have altered production practices, installed new technological hardware and invested in skilled staff to execute their social media strategies. Management at progressive, innovative radio stations have turned Facebook into a powerful marketing tool. Furthermore, because of the far superior reach of the Facebook pages compared to radio listenership, selling Facebook exposure could soon become more lucrative than selling airtime. What is not in question is the importance being placed on social media strategies, which involve investing in dedicated and skilled digital media staff. Ignoring the opportunities provided by SNSs may soon become detrimental to radio stations in Ireland.

With a Little Help from My Friends**REFERENCES**

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