
THE INTERNATIONAL
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
COMMUNICATION

EDITED BY

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Radio News

Douglas Ferguson

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Timely information delivered over radio waves dates back to the earliest stations and before (→ Radio; Radio: Social History; News). Lee de Forest reported the election night results via radio in 1916 and the first licensed US station to report election returns was KDKA in 1920. By 1924, radio broadcasts became a major influence on → public opinion because they could report live events. Radio news in the UK first gained attention during the General Strike of 1926, which briefly halted newspaper publication.

Radio → newscasts, however, did not appear in the US until the 1930s, relegating emergency and event coverage to the wireless medium. By 1933, the wire services that supplied news to most newspapers decided to withhold news wire stories from radio, until radio newscasters agreed to limit their reporting to twice per day, at times (9.30 a.m. and 9 p.m., for just five minutes) that protected the newspapers (→ News Agencies, History of). By 1935 competing wire services began to supply US radio stations and the newspaper–radio war was over by 1939 (Culbert 1976).

Unlike the US and the UK, radio in many other countries was controlled by the government. In Germany, for example, Hans Fritzsche began offering news broadcasts on behalf of the von Papen regime's Wireless News Service in 1932, which fell under the control of Joseph Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry in 1933. During the Nuremberg tribunal at the close of World War II, Fritzsche was prosecuted for distorting the news in the 1930s and 1940s (→ Propaganda in World War II).

Research interest in US radio news began in 1940 during the campaign between Franklin Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie. Surveys conducted by → Paul Lazarsfeld suggested that most voters considered radio superior to newspapers for political news. His studies also noted that reinforcement was the main effect of radio coverage, with listeners' predispositions supported by their choice of candidate speaking on the radio. Radio began a long broadcast tradition of reporting the horse race aspects of political contests (→ Elections and Media, History of).

World War II greatly expanded the importance of radio news, making reputations for future television commentators Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, and others. In the UK people began to equate hearing something on the BBC as knowing the truth, according to an observation by George Orwell in 1944. After the arrival of television in the late 1940s, radio news became a supplementary service, still focusing on live events and breaking news. Until the → Internet era began, newspapers and television enjoyed a long era of news dominance (→ Newspaper Journalism; Broadcast Journalism).

Academic journals that regularly report on radio news are *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (originally *JQ*), *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* (*JOBEM*), and *Journal of Radio Studies* (*JRS*). The latter journal has focused more on history and international studies than on US radio news, with only seven articles on radio news in its first 14 years of publication. *JQ* has emphasized newspaper journalism and television news, with 15 articles with the words “radio” and “news” in the title since the 1970s.

JOBEM focuses almost entirely on television news, with only three articles specifically on radio news in the past two decades.

The three dominant *areas of radio news research* are ownership/competition, listenership, and news director perceptions. Research on ownership starts with the notion that large corporations are inherently inferior when it comes to serving local audiences (→ Ownership in the Media). In the US, the → Federal Communications Commission (FCC) dictates that stations operate in the public interest, serving local audiences (→ Radio Broadcasting, Regulation of). Radio news is generally considered a linchpin of local service. Most recent studies about the demise of localism focus on Clear Channel and its dominant position in the United States (over 1,200 stations). *Listenership studies* typically provide a descriptive profile of the audiences for radio news (→ Audience Research). Most provide a snapshot of a particular point in time, while the rest attempt to study trends. Often such research emulates newspaper readership studies. Surveys of radio news directors have assessed trends and the present status of radio news, including newsroom profitability, salaries, staff diversity, careers, and internships.

Some observers take a dim view of the *future of radio news*, as television and online sources have overshadowed radio (→ Television News; Online Media). Radio talk shows have supplanted regular newscasts, particularly on the AM stations in the US. Radio stations facing economic difficulties found it easier to fill time with local and syndicated talk shows rather than maintain full-fledged news departments. The blurring of lines between radio news reporting and talk radio commentary has been a concern for many years. National Public Radio is apparently the only US source of radio news with a long-term prospect, although it has endured periodic threats from legislators who object to its political leanings. The → BBC World Service, → Deutsche Welle, → Voice of America, Radio Netherlands, and Radio Australia are also options for those who want news from the radio.

SEE ALSO: ► Audience Research ► BBC World Service ► Broadcast Journalism ► Deutsche Welle ► Elections and Media, History of ► Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ► Internet ► Lazarsfeld, Paul F. ► News ► News Agencies, History of ► Newscast ► Newspaper Journalism ► Online Media ► Ownership in the Media ► Propaganda in World War II ► Public Opinion ► Radio ► Radio Broadcasting, Regulation of ► Radio: Social History ► Television News ► Voice of America

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