

# The radio in search of its audience: towards a diversified and multiplatform listening<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Radio is a mass medium conditioned by technological changes. From its beginnings, it has also been a public communication space that fosters complicity, closeness and personal interaction with its audience, which is now amplified with the possibilities offered by the digital environment. This paper describes a selection of radio initiatives that show the permanent effort of the radio to seek the audience in the old and new communication scenarios. The purpose of this description is to characterize the new radio listening and consumption model.

**Keywords:** Radio. Audience. Experiments. Listening. New models.

## Introduction

The radio is a medium which has never been kept apart from technological changes. The evolution of the ways of production, distribution and reception has been projected through the configuration of the contents and the forms of interaction with the audience since the centenary origins of the medium.

With the emergence of digital technology, and the extension of internet networks in the early 1990s, the radio was again forced to redefine its processes, including its model of listening. As Orihuela points out, “media change when the culture of the audience changes, and although the change is induced by technology, its nature is deeper: it has to do with the new ways by which information is produced, distributed and consumed” (2015, p.22 – Our translation).

In this practice of reinvention, radio has learned that audiences change very rapidly, and that, therefore, their innovation efforts must be aimed at improving the experience of

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the public which are constituted by communities of relationships within digital environment (GARCÍA AVILÉS, MARTÍNEZ-COSTA, 2016, p.268).

The radio has an advantage when playing in this new scenario, since it remains a privileged space of complicity, proximity, and personal interaction with its audience. Before, it was emphasized that the key to the success of the radio was to invest on the contents, but now, this key has changed, since it invests on the search of the audience at the physical and virtual settings in which the audience is. Reaching the audiences, talking to them, establishing a dialogue, narrowing the complicity is the path sought and found by radio which has worked in order to extend to new formulas of conversation, without abandoning its traditional design.

In this context, this article presents a compilation of sound products and/or services that show a permanent effort of the radio to seek the audience in both old and new scenarios, as well as in platforms of communication. The purpose of this description is to characterize a new model of listening and consumption of the radio.

The description is presented in eight topics: 1. Investments on alternative and non-conventional media (Radio for reading; Radio for walking; Radio for carrying); 2. Transmedia content; 3. Visualization of information; 4. Social initiatives; 5. New social platforms of transmission; 6. Brand radio; 7. Reconfiguration of contents through new businesses (Diversification of products in radio business; Opening to other businesses unrelated to radio); 8. Expansion of podcast.

We have applied qualitative methodology, of a descriptive type. We took samples intentionally, according to their intensity, that is, “the components of the sample have been selected deliberately according to the characteristics required for observation, perception and analysis of the main motivations of the research” (FRAGOSO; RECUERO; AMARAL, 2011, p.67 – Our translation).

Ultimately, we propose a table, which synthesizes the characteristics of the traditional model of radio communication, and the convergent, digital model. The new model of listening and radio consumption is characterized by the strategic combination of traditional models with new possibilities of digital convergence.

### **Investments on alternative and non-conventional media**

Radio listening from a traditional computer is not always the solution found when it is desired to talk to audiences, at where they are. There are several experiments, even some unconventional ones, which confirm this. It is a new scenario in charge of boosting the radio for greater interactivity with the listeners, and promoting a change in the radio model, as Cebrián Herreros (2007) mentions.

## Radio for reading

One of the first internet radio experiments in Brazil took place in the state of Ceará, with *Rádio Rui - Uirapuru de Itapipoca* - known as a “mute” internet radio, because it transmitted no sound, only text. In 1992/1993, Brazilian researchers used a list on the web to develop a series of text messages, such as radio programming. The creator of the “radio station” was the researcher and professor of Electrical Engineering Antonio Mauro Barbosa de Oliveira. However, without the possibility of transmitting audio, since the network did not have multimedia tools, he anticipated some ideas that were used some time later on the internet. The slogan of the station was “*Rádio Rui Uirapuru de Itapipoca, The New Leader of the World*” (BUFARAH, 2005).

The messages began to be sent every Friday in the afternoon, between January 1992 and January 1993. There were 55 “broadcasts”, and each new written program was enhanced by more followers. Although he was neither a professional nor a researcher in Communication, Antonio Mauro created characters/presenters to facilitate the appreciation/recognition of users/readers towards/with the program. At the opening of one of the “programs” of the station, the “announcer” said: “*Rádio Rui* is the only radio that does not speak ... but it is heard”.

### Figure 1 – A part of the programming of *Rádio Rui*

**ATENÇÃO, 5,4,3,2... NO AR !**

ALÔ GALERA JOVEM, pessoal da melhor idade (engana que eu gosto) e a turma endividada no cartão (agora peguei pesado com ou ouvintes da Aldeota).

NO AR a sua, a minha, a deles... a RUI, a única rádio que não fala... mas é ouvida!

Vamos arrebentar logo a boca do balão com o pedido da Raquel Barros, a super diretora da TV UNIÃO, a TV da juventude que deu SHOW de BOLA na transmissão de Brasil X Argentina, inauguração do PV. A mulher é louca por música baiana. Solta ai um AÊ, AÊ, AÊ, ...mas sem presssssssssssssa !

Source: <https://amauroboliveira.wordpress.com>.

## Radio for walking

The Brazilian *Rádio Pedal* – “Information in Motion” was established in June 2011, in the city of Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais. It is a three-wheeled vehicle equipped with a speaker installed on the back. In that structure, the students of the public school *Escola Municipal Hugo Pinheiro Soares* record the messages and transmit them from a studio. *Rádio Pedal* circulates through the streets of Concordia neighborhood playing music, telling news from the school and the community, while it is followed by students

and residents. During the class intervals, the radio is also broadcast. The school develops a project called Radioschool Workshop, which created the *Rádio Pedal*. The structure of the studio is complete: a table with four channels, computer, amplifier, three microphones, five portable recorders (LEMOS, 2015).

**Figure 2 – *Rádio Pedal***



Source: Lemos (2015).

## Radio for carrying

With the slogan “A mule, a cart, an FM transmitter, microphones, and a lot of road ahead”, the Spanish experimentation *Larradio* started with an expedition which went from May to June of 2013. The radio station was itinerant, and crossed the mountains of Andalusia on a mule to tell the stories of the town. Alejandro Pérez, born in the province of Jaén, studied Journalism and Economics in Madrid, and decided to do a series of programs and reports with people who did not have access to media.

During the trips, Alejandro used to stay in each town for two or three days, identified the people to interview and elaborated his reports. Later, he would set up his technical equipment – the portable studio, the transmitter, the antenna, etc. – and with a megaphone, he would walk around the town to announce what time the program began and at what frequency, as it was different in each town. The programs were broadcast live in each locality, with a 6w station and a dipole antenna. The produced material is currently available on the web. A year later, he planned a more ambitious trip in Andalusia, from Jaén to Cadiz, with the Andalusian filmmaker José Manuel Alguacil, who documented the journalist’s adventure. In order to achieve that, they proposed a collective financing through the crowding platform *Goteo*, and collected € 5,500, more than what was initially planned.

Figure 3 – Homepage of Larreadio



Source: <http://larreadio.com>.

## Transmedia content

The term transmedia can be understood as a narrative technique that consists of telling a story through multiple platforms and formats, using the resources of each medium to develop and expand the story, and including the participation and contribution of users (MARTÍNEZ- COSTA, 2015). Vicente, Rojas and Vicente (2015-2016, p.13) emphasize that the narrative convergences are the renewal of radio content.

An example is the popular *TV Globo*'s soap opera called “*Êta mundo bom!*”, whose story takes place between 1940-1950, known also as the golden years of radio. In the plot, the characters listened to a radio soap opera called “*Herança de Ódio*”. As a transmedia strategy, *TV Globo* decided to produce and broadcast the radio soap opera for a real audience, through *Rádio Globo*. Since then, and three times a week, the Brazilian population would follow on the radio the plot of “*Herança de Ódio*” which fascinated the characters of “*Êta Mundo Bom!*”. The radio station was also available on the group's website, both in audio and video formats. It should be noted that each of the three platforms (TV, radio and internet) have employed a different marketing model.

**Figure 4** – *Herança de Ódio* broadcasting page



Source: <http://gshow.globo.com/webseries/radionovela-heranca-de-odio/playlists/0/radionovela-heranca-de-odio.html>.

Another similar example of television fiction which has been transformed into sound product is the online radio program *Morning Glory*, which emerged in Spain, in 2013 season, as a spin-off or program derived from the television series called “*Ciega a Citas*”, broadcast through channel *Cuatro*. Its protagonist works in a radio station, and attends to a sentimental office. This is detonating for the radio version of an hour daily program, which has been constructed as an independent magazine, with its own contents and professionals. It has been on the web for two seasons and, although its contents are a promotional window of the fiction content of Mediaset group, it is a transmedia experience that gives results, is spread in social networks, and aspires to compete with the morning shows of specialized stations.

**Figure 5** – *Morning Glory* in channel *Cuatro*

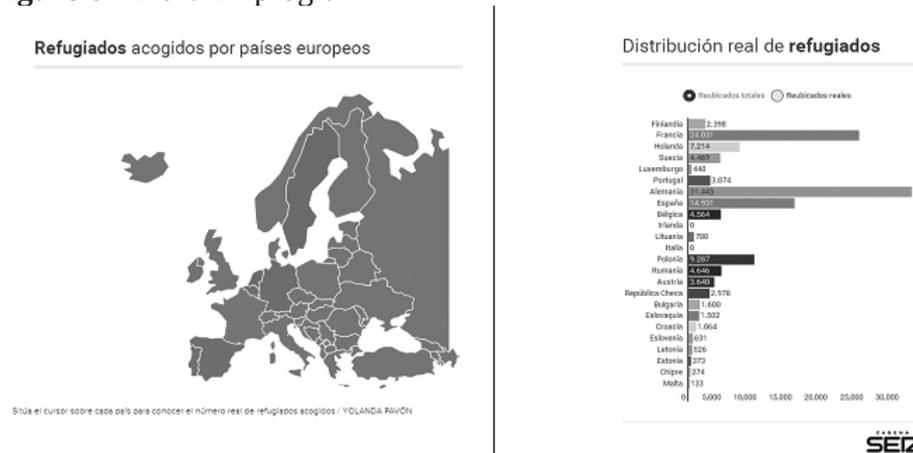


Source: [http://www.cuatro.com/ciegaacitas/Morning-Glory-programa-ficticio-hecho\\_0\\_1758225537.html](http://www.cuatro.com/ciegaacitas/Morning-Glory-programa-ficticio-hecho_0_1758225537.html).

## Information visualization

The radio also makes efforts to use other media languages, and to offer added content for new audiences on new platforms. For instance and as Jarvis points out, the complementary use of data, which is “a new and crucial opportunity for the media” that find in them the opportunity to collect, analyze and present the context of current information (2015, p.80-81). For example, considering the refugee crisis in Europe, the Spanish program *Hora 14* of *Cadena SER* offered data coverage after 5 months of the agreements signed by the European Union to address that situation. What the antenna could only expose in a synthetic and very simplified way, the interactive charts and maps completed the information with original developments. On other occasions, the resulting charts and tables were also accompanied by the compilation of sounds of available files from the stations.

Figure 6 – *Hora 14* program



Source: [http://cadenaser.com/programa/hora\\_14](http://cadenaser.com/programa/hora_14).

Another example is one of the largest Brazilian radio networks, *Rede Jovem Pan*, which is now experimenting in the visual field. The station broadcasts the news program *Jornal da Manhã*, from Monday to Saturday, from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m., and the innovation lays on adding visual content to audio news. The format of the news is the same, but the listener can access the images through mobile devices, tablets, computers etc. The station works with the concept of “radio with image”, and also plans to add videos and visual interaction with audiences. In addition to *Jornal da Manhã*, the radio plans to bring images to all products of programming. The physical structure of the station has been modified, and the journalism studio gained an area only for video production.

**Figure 7** – New studio of *Rádio Jovem Pan*

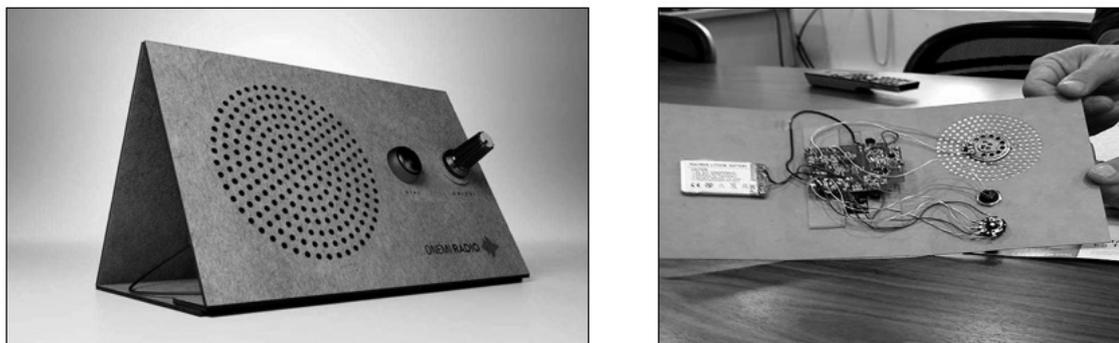


Source: <http://tudoradio.com/noticias/ver/14620-exclusivo-apos-reformas-nos-estudios-fm-e-news-jovem-pan-modifica-estrutura-para-videos-on-line>.

### Social initiatives

The radio has been present in emergencies situations specially when bringing affected communities into contact. It is one of the vocations of radio, the provision of services with the aim of supporting the populations in their daily life (ZUCULOTO, 2012). In Chile, for instance, a country that concentrates 30% of the world seismic energy, the radio plays a fundamental role when other media cannot reach the population. Thus, the National Emergency Office of Chile (ONEMI – acronym in Spanish) manufactured a solar radio receiver that is part of an emergency kit of Chilean families. The radio is a cardboard whose receiver catches FM transmissions, and can be stored, easily distributed among the population, and with energy guaranteed by a solar paper with which it is manufactured.

**Figure 8** – Cardboard box radio for emergencies in Chile



Source: <https://lagalenasur.wordpress.com/2016/05/20/la-increible-radio-de-carton-para-emergencias-disenada-por-onemi-chile>.

## New broadcast social platforms

In addition to traditional radio-listening equipment, broadcasts on the internet, and applications on smartphones, the radio has found new transmission platforms in spaces originally intended for interpersonal communication or social networks. As Peñafiel-Saiz (2002, p.30 – Our translation) points out, there are more transcendent changes in the field of technologies, such as “the extraordinary mutation of languages”.

In Brazil, the reporter Marcos Wor has created a radio that only exists within a WhatsApp group, the *Rádio Voice*. When each participant in the group requests the execution of a song, Marcos makes comments on the request, and sends the music to everyone. Thus, the “listeners” download and listen to the music. To warn that the program is going to start, the announcer changes the status of the radio group to “on air”, and when it changes, it returns to the “off” position. Currently, the *Rádio Voice* has three programs: *Manhã Notícia*, *Tarde Sertaneja* and *Flash Back*. To participate in the program, anyone can send a message to + 55-17-99121-8387.

Figure 9 – Profile of *Rádio Voice* on Facebook



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/radiovoicewhatsapp/timeline>.

Journalism students from *Faculdade Cearense* in Brazil have also created a radio broadcast in WhatsApp, called “*Rádio Zap*”. There was a traditional radio at the college that transmitted during the intervals of the classes. However, due to a reformation, and the boxes of sound have been moved. The students decided to create short radio programs, up to two minutes, for intervals of classes, broadcast through WhatsApp. The proposal was to combine humor to a more informal language, besides being a space of experimentation for the students. These are new social practices related to a new environment, as Fernández (2008) emphasizes.

**Figure 10** – Pictures of *Rádio Zap*

Source: <http://www.somosvos.com.br/programa-intervalo-e-radio-zap-a-radio-que-e-transmitida-pelo-whatsapp>.

Facebook has also become a platform for radio broadcast. A radio on that social network made for female audience was the idea of the Brazilian businessman Vladimir Batalha, who created in 2012 *Rádio Ella FM* to offer company to women. The content is entirely dedicated to women, with nine programs about many different topics, such as technology, games, financial life, investments, and personal finances. The programming does not have a fixed airtime, but works throughout podcasts. The Facebook page warns its followers every time a new program is ready.

**Figure 11** – Facebook page of *Rádio Ella FM*

Source: <http://exame.abril.com.br/tecnologia/noticias/radio-feminina-ella-fm-estreia-no-facebook>.

Facebook has also been the path found by *Relevant Radio*, a broadcaster of the American Catholic Church, aimed at reaching young people. In addition to the profile with content on the social network, the radio uses Facebook to broadcast mass, a rather unusual strategy. During an interview to Rome Reports portal, the station's director, Father Francis Hoffman, said: "Where do we find young listeners? On social networks, that's where we come to them. If we go out on the streets, we can see what they have on their hands; a mobile phone. We are already there". The social networks of the station have between 12 and 15 million unique visitors each week, and 85% are under 35 years old.

Figure 12 – Facebook page of *Relevant Radio*



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Relevantradio>.

## Brand radio

It is possible to point out the configuration of a new radio environment in the corporate sphere, such as stations designed for specific companies, constituting what is known as brand radio. The brand radio – or corporate radio – “can be understood as a tailor-made station for a particular company, following the precepts of its organizational culture” (PRATA; MARTINS, 2017, p.2 – Our translation).

A Brazilian example is *Luiza Radio*, a station of *Magazine Luiza Company*, one of the largest of its type in Brazil, with almost 740 stores and eight distribution centers among 16 states, selling furniture, home appliances, electronics, gifts, toys, computers, etc. In 2005, the company created specific communication channels: *Rádio Luiza*, *TV Luiza* and *Portal Luiza*. The radio works 24 hours a day, through software developed by *Shasta Company*, according to the specific characteristics of *Magazine Luiza*. The public of the radio are the employees of the company, and the programming has been done to provide not only entertainment, but also news and institutional information. Still, the programming is not the same for the whole country, as they vary from one region to another. In total, the radio sends programming to almost 800 points, reaching about 30.000 people, with more than 23.000 listeners in the stores, and more than five thousand in the distribution centers. The software developed by *Shasta* is updated, whenever it is needed. In stores and distribution centers, *Rádio Luiza* does not have a website, just an icon of *Magazine Luiza* website, and when activated, it transmits the content of the station.

Figure 13 – Table of *Rádio Luiza* transmission



Source: Table provided by the production staff.

Another example is a Brazilian radio station which transmits content to the users/drivers/passengers of a highway. *CCR FM*, also known as *CCR NovaDutra FM*, or *FM NovaDutra*, is a station which operates exclusively on the *Presidente Dutra* highway, connecting the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in a 402-kilometer journey. The radio is run by *NovaDutra* highway concessionaire, which won the bidding to operate the radio when it took administrative control of *Dutra*. The radio operates on the FM 107.5 MHz frequency on the entire length of the road, and its programming is specialized in guiding drivers in transit (KISCHINHEVSKY, 2014). The advertising campaign is structured around the concept “The only road that talks to you”.

Figure 14 – Release banner of *Rádio CCR FM*



Source: Kischinhevsky (2014).

## Reconfiguration of content through new business

The issue of business models on the radio has been a recent discussion. Orofino (2011) explains that the term business model was first used in 1975, and has gained prominence since the 1990s, as a result of dot com companies, e-commerce and knowledge economy. Due to the expansion of the internet and the migration of advertising, “radio has experimented new modes of production and business models in digital environments” (PESSOA; PRATA; AVELAR, 2017, p.161 – Our translation). Thus, new business models have been boosting radio, and the diversification of products seems to be the path found by many broadcasters to have sustainability when facing uncertainty. We can point to at least two ways of product diversification: within the business itself, and the opening to possibilities unrelated to the radio.

## Diversification of products in the radio business

*Rádio Pelo Mundo* began as a small proposal, in August 2004, when three professionals from the city of Belo Horizonte decided to join forces and create *Webradio Pelo Mundo* (PRATA; MARTINS, 2011). The station was a great success. However, in order to ensure its sustainability, the company became an agency of digital content production, which has already operated in six segments: 1. Production and transmission of *Rádio Pelo Mundo*; 2. Creation and production of corporate TVs; 3. Creation and production of corporate radios; 4. Planning, creation, production and development in digital environments, focusing on the internet and alternative digital media; 5. Creation and production of content for mobile phones; 6. Production of digital content.

Figure 15 – *Rádio Pelo Mundo*’s homepage



Source: <http://www.pelomundo.com.br>.

## The opening to other businesses unrelated to the radio

Considering its audience, the strength of one of the most important and powerful stations in Brazil, *Rádio Itatiaia*, lays on the programs of sports, and more specifically, soccer. In 2014, the station created *Itatiaia Rádio Bar*, a bar with its brand, which accommodates 250 people, aiming at gathering soccer lovers. From their tables, the public can reach part of the historical collection of *Itatiaia*, remember the most important goals of their football team and listen to interviews and relevant news. The bar offers events such as concerts, stand-ups, conferences, round tables on various topics, programs for female audience and courses, among other activities. At the bar, the audience can also watch the soccer matches on the city's largest LED display. *Itatiaia Rádio Bar* is always crowded, and it is interesting how a triangulation among the broadcasters, the bar and the public is done, having soccer as the central element of the content.

**Figure 16** – Pictures of *Itatiaia Rádio Bar*



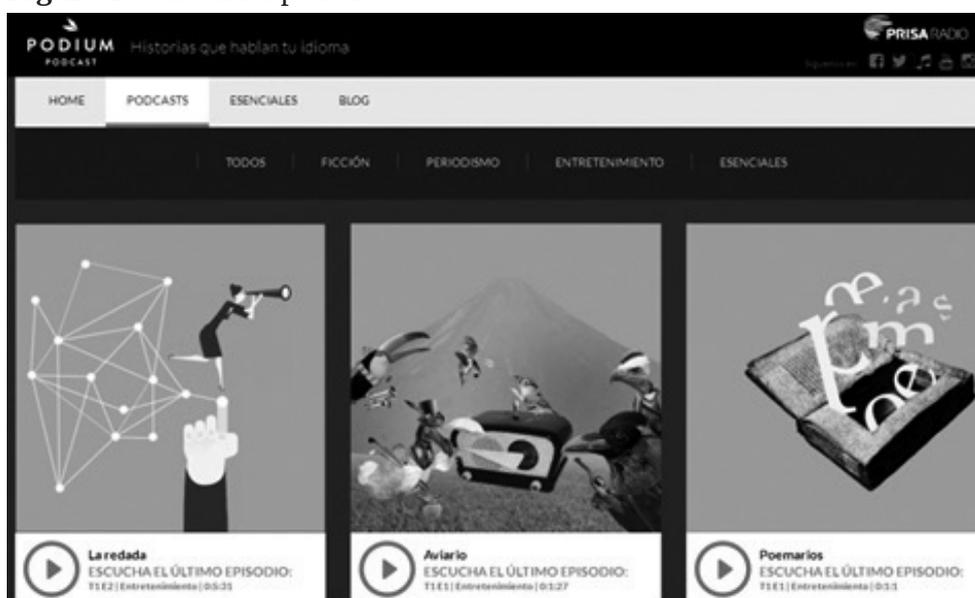
Source: <http://www.itatiaiaradiobar.com.br>.

## Podcast expansion

Podcasts have been clearly pointed out as one of the trends regarding the development of new digital radio content. Several authors consider the year 2016 as the year of the podcast, as consumption has increased at international level. After the success of the first season of *Serial* in the United States, communication groups such as *The New York Times* have decided to invest in the development of podcasts, following examples from other newspapers, such as *The Guardian* and *The Wall Street Journal*, focused on attracting income and listeners. However, unlike others who are only experienced with a particular program offering, *The New York Times* has opted for a new podcast-based audio business unit, and to have an audio team who works to launch both news and opinion columns in the format of podcasts.

Similarly in Spain, traditional broadcasters have begun to be interested in developing podcasts. In 2016, *Prisa Radio* officially presented *Podium* podcast, a lively and flexible network with *à la carte* sound offer which adapts to the needs of each listener, providing content of *Prisa Radio*'s own production from stations in Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Argentina and Spain. Those products have been designed exclusively for the internet, with new radio sound narratives which invest on quality. Grouped according to four thematic lines – Fiction, Journalism, Entertainment and Essentials – it includes an offer of almost twenty sound proposals. The developments of those initiatives are welcome, since they allow us to learn about new models of listening and audio consumption, considering the diversity of platforms.

Figure 17 – *Podium* podcast



Source: <http://www.podiumpodcast.com>.

## Conclusion

As it was already pointed out, “the goal of any communication process is to reach the receiver, since otherwise, it would be a sterile effort of transmission and a waste of energy which would be lost in the air” (MARTINEZ-COSTA; UNZETA, 2005, p.161 – Our translation). Therefore, the cases compiled have demonstrated that radio remains active in that goal, by reinventing the ways through which it approaches to its audience, and finds in the new languages and supports new ways to build and consolidate their communities of listeners and users.

Ortiz-Sobrino (2017, p.3 – Our translation) mentions a new scenario of radio programming, which takes into account “both the consumption from the traditional audience of generalist radio, as well as that from digital natives, millennials and adults with skills and digital literacy, which demands another form of listening and specific content”. Thus, it is possible to point out that this new scenario is complex and multifaceted, but it is focused on new ways of listening and consumption, that is, audiences are the central axis of the configuration of radio as a medium.

As a conclusion, we also point out that this resulting new model of radio listening and consumption is characterized by the combination of traditional models with the new possibilities of digital convergence. Each model is assorted by keywords, which indicate its characteristics and the demarcation of its spaces of action, as it is possible to systematize in the following table:

**Tabla 1 – Models of radio communication**

<b>Tradicional model of radio communication</b>	<b>Convergent and digital model of radio communication</b>
Public	Community
Massive	Personalized
Passive	Active
Receiver	Distributor / Producer
Vertical	Horizontal
Linear / Synchronous	Nonlinear / Diachronic
Continuity	Fragmentation
Proximity	Engagement
Synthetic	Expanded
Only audio	Multimedia
Closed	Open
Standardized	Experimental

Source: Own production – 2016.

We have, therefore, a radio whose characteristics were centered on passive audio receivers of standardized and vertical programming, which becomes a convergent and digital model formed by an audience who is committed to an open, multimedia and experimental programming which produces and distributes information actively. They are the new audiences of a new radio.

The success of radio, as Bertolt Brecht pointed out in his prophetic Radio Theory (1932), continues to focus on the communication and complicity which it establishes with his audience, now diversified throughout multi-platforms of this digital stage.

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