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THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE ROMANIAN RADIO MARKET

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Abstract:

The permanent changing of the listening habits of the population and the rapid technological evolution represent a real challenge for the Romanian public radio. That is the reason why the editorial management of the public broadcaster should find the proper strategy to keep up with the transformations constantly taking place in the domestic radio market. Adapting to the New Media paradigm is a vital matter to any radio station, including the public one. Therefore the modern ways of reaching more audience should be a priority for the management of the public broadcaster, especially when the dynamics of the radio market are often spectacular and rather unpredictable. That is why the editorial strategy of the public radio must focus on the constant improvement of both the editorial offer and the means of transmission. The "battle" for rating and market share can be won only by constant adjusting and readjusting the policy of the radio station and by permanently improving the structure and the content of the radio programs.

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The editorial policy of a public radio station is necessary to be (re)designed in order to adapt the strategy to the new social climate that inevitably generates profound mutations also at the level of general reception of radio products, without neglecting its mission of public broadcaster and without altering its fundamental functions required by law. The significant behavioral, cultural, and psychological changes that have been taking place in the contemporary Romanian society and the unprecedented technological evolution on a worldwide scale are two of the most important factors that must be taken into consideration when devising the strategy for modernizing or restructuring the program grid of a radio station, as well as all the radio programs included. As Mainali, Chapagain and Subba emphasize, the strategy of a station "should define its approach, policy, processes, and norms and standards while carrying out most common production functions, (...) its approach, policy, processes, and norms and standards while carrying out most style of presentation" (Mainali et. Al, 2009) which, taken together, represent the style of a radio. They conclude that "the editorial policy of a radio can define its approach, actions, behaviors and radios norms with regard to different kinds of programs, and at different contexts, and with different objects" (Mainali et. Al, 2009).

So the strategy of a public radio station must rely mostly on the main features that derive from its status of public broadcaster, but without disregarding the editorial means used by the private competitors. This doesn't mean that, due to some legal and ethical rigours that might be considered rather restrictive and intransigent, the public radio is to be considered prone to immobility and consequently unable to detach from the inertial "orbit" that it seems tempted to stay on. Therefore the main objective of a manager or a director of programming from a public radio station should be the constant improvement of radio programs (structure, content, journalistic discourse/presentation/"package"), a permanent editorial rejuvenation through a flexible standard program grid and a judicious appointment of radio journalists to each and every program included in that grid.

The statistical data and the rating figures provided by the accredited institutions show that the public broadcaster (under this title we will include all the stations of Radio România, both national and regional) has the capacity to adapt to the new media environment and its certain requirements without giving up on maintaining its essential characteristics that have established it in the general acceptance as a serious and reliable radio station, a trustworthy source of information, a competent medium of education and a constant supplier of tasteful entertainment.

The impressive ratings achieved in the last years could create the sensation that the public radio is in a too good position to necessitate further adjustments. That would be a false impression that could lead to a relaxed and complacent attitude that represents the sure path to disaster in a more and more dynamic radio market with a rather unpredictable evolution.

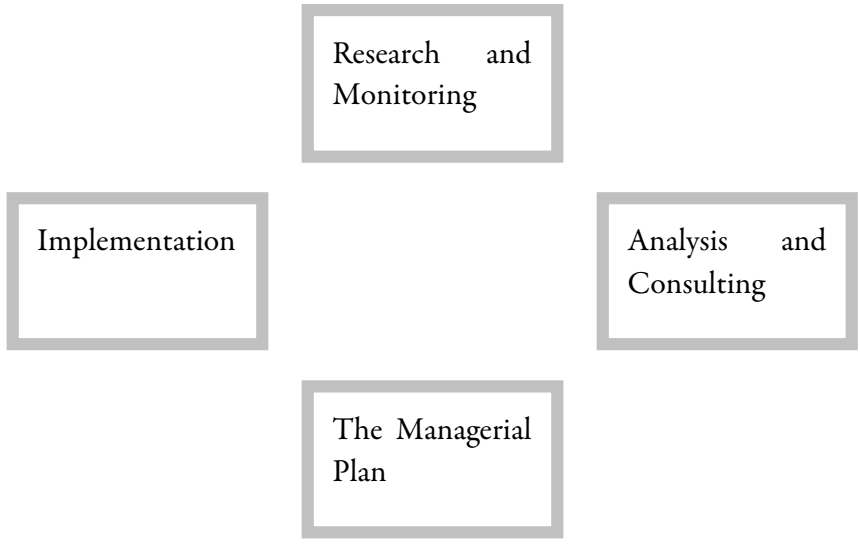
The inertial effect is a permanent threat that can be experienced not only in the managerial acts, but also in the editorial activity itself, a situation that can lead to a flattening or even a qualitative decrease of the radio programs. The complacency is a clear and present danger for a radio station that arrogantly hides itself behind the rating figures that places it, at a certain moment of time, in the

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flattering position of market leader (by adding up the rating figures of all the stations belonging to the Romanian Radio Broadcast Corporation – SRR), but which cannot have any guaranties of permanence in that respect during a reasonable period of time. As large segments of audience (especially the elderly listeners who are accustomed to certain kind of programs and ways of realization/presentation and who can have difficulties in adapting to the newer concepts regarding radio journalism products) listen to a certain radio station mainly as a result of an inertial reflex, the managerial strategy of a public station must take into account the prospect of naturally losing much of this audience and must find alternative ways of attracting new listeners, especially by online expansion through all the platforms available.

Thereupon an efficient editorial plan should be designed in order to deliver a coherent strategy for increasing the audience indices, without compromising the quality of the programs, gaining and/or maintaining the position of market leader, improving the professional standards and building a recognizable sound and an unequivocal identity worthy of a national brand. The managerial planning should operate as a guidebook, an instrument and a stimulant for the team that carries it into effect and works efficiently to achieve a well determined goal. It is a continuous process that starts from research and monitoring, goes to analysis, consulting, designing the editorial plan and implementing it, then back to the monitoring and gathering information phase, collecting and analyzing the feedback data, a *perpetuum mobile* depicted in the following diagram:

The Cycle of Managerial Planning



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The public radio broadcaster faces a dynamic and competitive direct or indirect competition, according to the characteristics of the media channel and the geographical and thematic coverage. The TV stations and the written press (print or online) are to be considered indirect and quasi-harmless competitors for a radio station after the stabilization of the audience from the point of view of the favorite media channel and according to the complementarity or "cohabitation" relation between the existing media channels, online included. Taking into consideration the fact that, in general, the TV stations have built a settled audience which, in a certain favorable context, listen to the radio, too, even though occasionally, and the traditional newspapers can't keep up with the radio stations in terms of transmitting information fast, the public radio should focus mainly on its direct competition: the private radios.

Although frequently invoked, the idea that the public radio, national or regional, is not in a direct competition with the commercial radios, the mere fact that all the players present on the market fight for acquiring an increasingly larger fraction from the same pool of listeners, *nota bene*, a constantly decreasing common pool of listeners, should be enough to confute such a preconception, a clearly comfortable judgment which can only generate complacency and superficiality when it comes to fulfilling the tasks. Moreover, we must not forget that, in order to fulfill its essential objectives (inform and educate the audience), the public broadcaster must reach as many listeners as possible, so "the battle" with the other competitors is a fact that can't be disregarded. No matter how valuable the radio products are, in the opinion of those who realize them, they are absolutely useless in the absence of a significant number of listeners. A conclusion from which should start any editorial strategy that intents not only to exist on paper, but also to generate positive and quantifiable results.

The continuous changing of listening habits leads to redefining the ways of reaching the target groups of a radio station and so the identification of the behavioral, psychological and technological valves through which can take place a profound and measurable permeation of the obstacles between emitter and receptor, technologically and semiotically speaking, becomes a vital target for any director of programming and their staff. At the same time with the terrestrial transmission, the public radio must focus on the elements of New Media and the alternative means of reaching those segments of public that mostly ignore now the programs of the public broadcaster. All these ways of reaching the audience must be regarded as complementary and interdependent when developing a multitask strategy that aim to extensively penetrate "the fortress" behind which are to be found the listeners that the public radio wants to attract and who retreated themselves into the virtual space, "barricaded" behind the new digital platforms. It is a permanent "siege", a continuous "battle" with the private radios that the public broadcaster must undertake in order to gain more market share.

Regarding the musical policy and the radio format chosen, the competitive radio environment is marked in Romania by the collision between the two most important radio formats today, Adult Contemporary (AC) and Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR), with all their well sedimented characteristics, other formats (such as Adult Album Alternative or AAA/ Triple-A) reaching unsignificant ratings, as we can clearly notice from the data delivered by Asociația pentru

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Radio Audiență – Association for Radio Audience (A.R.A.) for the period August 29 – December 18, 2016, a report which reveals the current tendencies of the Romanian radio audience : (paginademedia.ro, 2016)

	NATIONAL	Autumn 2016	Autumn 2015	Difference
1	Kiss FM	2.155.100	2.105.300	49.800
2	Romania Actualități	2.025.600	1.990.000	35.600
3	Radio ZU	1.960.600	1.752.200	208.400
4	Europa FM	1.381.700	1.509.900	-128.200
5	Pro FM	965.600	1.454.300	-488.700
6	Magic FM	700.600	772.100	-71.500
7	Antena Satelor	699.400	701.200	-1.800
8	Radio 21	563.000	568.800	-5.800
9	Digi FM	485.300		
10	Radio România Craiova	403.400	418.400	-15.000
11	Radio România Iași	395.900	401.800	-5.900
12	Rock FM	290.700	264.100	26.600
13	Național FM	251.800	253.200	-1.400
14	Radio România Cultural	208.000	176.000	32.000
15	Radio România Timisoara	191.400	203.200	-11.800
16	Radio România Reșița	190.500	163.000	27.500
17	Radio România Cluj	134.300	99.500	34.800
18	Radio România Târgu Mureș	116.000	134.300	-18.300
19	București FM	98.100	80.600	17.500
20	Radio România Constanța	36.500	49.000	-12.500

In conclusion, the public radio must design a coherent editorial strategy in order to expand its market share and reach those categories of listeners that at the moment are not part of its hardcore audience and that now listen only sporadically to Radio România stations. These segmnents of listeners can be turned into permanent audience only by diversifying and modernizing both the editorial offer and the means of transmission.

For expanding the number of regular listeners (P1) it is necessary the editorial management of the public broadcaster to conceive a strategy capable of attracting the non-regular listeners (P2, P3). Such a strategy requires structural measures and ways of improving the programs, as well as the

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implementation of new radio products in order to dismantle the theory according to which the public radio has a dated sound and is stiffened in mentalities and habits from long bygone days.

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